

# NEW ZEALAND



February 12 – March 2, 2007

*Jan and Martin Oakes*

## February 10<sup>th</sup> ~ Preparations.

We seem to have been running for weeks getting ready for this vacation.

Multiple trips to the pharmacy.

"You will have to get special prescriptions from your doctor if you want extra tablets."

I don't think so. Jan makes a call to our supplemental insurance provider, AARP, who kindly tells us the pharmacy simply has to make a phone call and ask for authorization. Back to Walgreen's who professed to not know this.

Spring clothes are not yet in Freeport stores, so off we go to Rockford where Jan finds a swim suit and light weight coat with hood.



It is cold but we are ready to fly.

Little did we know, the swim suit is not to be long with us... It got left in a drawer somewhere in NZ, and along with those red cut offs...

We have quite a challenge with our clothes selection since this trip will take us to a glacier and tropical beach.

I have some new toys. A hand held computer on which I am writing this journal and a mini digital camcorder.

The parrot has gone to JD's pet store where he has been vacationing for many years. The counter clerk laughs when Jan brings in his treats, a tin of walnuts and cashews. A well fed bird.

Windsor, our Siamese, is sitting quietly on an air vent, but as usual when it is time for him to go to the pet lodge, he disappears behind the bed. Jan and I pull out the bed so that I can unceremoniously grab him. We have never fathomed out how he knows, but he does.

It is beastly cold. The coldest temperatures in ten years.

Crisis strikes. The new pond heater has failed. We check with Farm and Fleet, but there are none to be had in Freeport or surrounding towns. I call Natural Waters, the pond shop, but of course they are closed for the season. No one wants to mess with ponds in these temperatures. "Larry, what's the name of our pond guy." But he does not remember. A few minutes later, Larry calls back. He had phoned the pond shop and this time got an answer. Yes they have heaters and yes they will be there for a while. In comes Jan. "I know the name of the pond guy." Well by now, so do I. After a quick drive, and cold hands, the fish are warm again, so no frozen fillets for supper tonight.

Our wild birds are feeding well as are the squirrels. We need corn and bird seed.

At last it is time to pack.

We nervously listen to the weather forecast and breath a sigh of relief; no significant snow.

Monday, Larry is driving us 40 miles to Rockford to catch the bus to Chicago.

## **Feb 11<sup>th</sup> ~ One day to go.**

At 5:00pm we turn on the local news only to find that we are on a winter snow advisory. Where did that creep up on us! Should we go down to Chicago tonight and stay at a motel. I check the bus schedule. It is already too late. The last bus leaves at 7:00pm.

Now I am up tight. Larry kindly agrees to pick us up earlier in the morning.

Neither of us sleep well.

For reasons we do not understand, some kind angel has been plowing our driveway in the wee hours. I poke my nose between the blinds. There he is. I wish I knew who to thank.

## **Feb 12<sup>th</sup> ~ Departure.**

We rise before the alarm clock.

Larry arrives promptly a little before 6:30am. We load and leave.

Jan looks out the rear window. "Martin, why are the lights on the outside of the garage?"

"Because someone turned on the switch by the front door." We back track.

The snow fall was more than in Rockford, a good six inches. However the ploughs have done a good job and apart from the idiots trying to reach heaven early, the driving is not too bad.

The 8:00am bus departs on time and I snooze to O'Hare Airport.

The airport is a zoo. We have electronic tickets and I printed boarding passes on the computer at home. I do not understand what we are supposed to do. There is no one at the counter to check our bags. Eventually someone takes our boarding passes and holds them under a sensor. Up pops our name on the screen. At least something knows us. Our helper waives us to another machine which spits out two sticky labels reading LAX. What next? We are waived to an X-ray machine which is busy swallowing bags. "Goodbye. Hope to see you in Los Angeles."

If we had not been tutored ahead of time, the next hurdle would have been impossible. We had packed all our medications, liquids and gels like toothpaste in zip-lock plastic bags. These had to be removed from our carry-on bags and placed in plastic tubs. Off with shoes, off with coat, empty pockets, all into separate tubs. After passing through X-ray there is no space so everything piles up. No place to stop and put shoes or coat on, and no one to tell us what to do. Whoever dreamed up this fiasco should be ....!!!! We survive....

I am hungry. We decide to try a sit down restaurant. There is not much choice, but we each order a smoked turkey sandwich. It came with a king sized bun, filling a dinner plate. The lettuce was dark green outer leaves which I usually throw away and French fries which needed splints to dip in ketchup. An over-priced mistake.

We nervously watch the departure board as our take off time keeps moving forward. The flight is fully booked, and of course we had our share of greedy people with over sized bags. We finally take off two hours late, but had allowed for a long lay over in LA, so should have plenty of time to make our NZ connection.

Snacks can be purchased on board, so I opt for a chicken salad and am agreeably pleased. Nice chicken pieces and fresh salad.

In LA we wait for our luggage which never arrives. Great, what do we do now, cancel the trip? I eventually find an office dealing with luggage problems. There sit our suitcases which evidently arrived on an earlier flight.

We ask which terminal we need to transfer to. The directions don't sound convincing, so I find a help desk. Wrong terminal. We can either walk to terminal 2 or take the free shuttle bus 'A'. We watch the shuttle pull out just as we arrived at the pick up point and wait fifteen minutes for another.

We take an elevator to floor 'T' and walk the length of the building to Air New Zealand check in. A charming young lady services us. She tells us we have two seats in the middle of a row of four. That is bad. The plane is full. We had requested an aisle seat. She leaves us to see what could be done and returns to tell us she made a mistake. The row is only three seats wide, so we do have an aisle seat.

At security we again place our medications still in their plastic bags in a tub. The X-ray operator takes exception to that, stops the machine and dumps everything out. We learn that we have committed two crimes. We mixed dry products with wet ones and have bags which are too large. We are penitent and promise not to make those mistakes again. Bare foot, we waddle clutching loose goods from the security area. No chairs close by, so we keep lumbering until we find one.

A salad won't keep me going so we buy two small hamburgers.

The plane to New Zealand is new. We take off 45min late.

The flight is long and largely uneventful if you don't count turbulence, which promptly started as soon as the cabin crew started serving dinner. The cabin staff are all men, no stewardesses on board. Quite unusual.

Neither Jan or I watch a movie. My E-books keep me amused.

Air travel is a pain!

We touch down in Auckland at 6:45am local time, clear passport control and immigration, have our baggage X-rayed again and exit.

## Feb 14 – Arrival

We lost a day crossing the International Dateline, so today is Valentines Day.

Our driver is waiting for us outside security waving a card with our name. Only one other person for the same tour was on our flight, Diane.

We arrive at Sky City Hotel after a 30 minute drive at about 8:00am. We did not expect to get a room at that time but were disappointed when told our earliest check in would be 3:00pm.

We sat in a corner of the lobby and sorted our medications which were all mixed up thanks to security. Wash face, shave and clean teeth. That's better, almost human again.

What shall we do? Let's walk. Look right, look left, look right again. Now cross. Cars actually stop for pedestrians. How polite!

Although Auckland is a sprawling city of 1.4 million, the city center is quite small. In one and half hours we walked from Sky City down Queen Street, the main up-market shopping area to the docks. Along the water front, past multi-million super yachts and expensive condos. Turning inland we circle back up a steep hill to Sky City. There we watch a girl make a controlled jump on a wire from the 110th floor. A bit like a bungee without the bounce. There goes \$195NZ or \$140US.

Jan's feet are hurting and we both need a coke, so we find a café in the atrium.

"No sir, your room is not ready."

We have a city tour booked to depart at 12:30pm so we had better eat. We had read that there are lots of fine restaurants around Sky City, which may be true, but there were not many decent snack bars. We settle on a lamb burger which turned out to be thinly sliced lamb from a rotisserie, anyway it was palatable.

Everywhere we go we get compliments on our NZ map sweatshirts.

At 12:30 we find a small group on the same APT tour as ourselves, waiting in the foyer for the City Tour, which does not come. After 20min the bus and driver arrive. He apologizes. His previous tour lost someone who they had to hunt for. Did we know that we had a second tour of our choice after the City Tour? It turned out that none of us knew that and when we heard what we had supposedly selected, were generally not interested. Although just a messenger, the driver called APT and re-arranged our "choices" which I thought was very nice.

We learnt that the Victoria market was not as good as Sydney or Melbourne. Average temperatures range from 14-24oC.

The two lane Harbour Bridge was completed in 1959 and within a few years could not handle the volume of traffic. A Japanese company was awarded a contract to widen it to four lanes by adding pre-assembled sections. So instead of being called the coat hanger, which it resembles, it is now known as the 'Nippon clip-on', and handles 175,000 vehicles a day. It spans the narrow point of Waitamata Harbour which means sparkling water.

New Zealand roads need a lot of maintenance so drivers pay 5c/liter road tax.

With proximity to water, one family in six owns or has access to a boat.

The Queen Mary 2 will dock on Saturday. Auckland is struggling to handle 60 cruise ships a year.

In my opinion, many of the store fronts needed a paint job. The appearance and selection of goods is inferior to that of other big cities.

There are 48 volcanoes within the city limits that have erupted in the past and Auckland expects a major eruption within the next two centuries. Several of the cones contain monitoring equipment as a precaution.

The views from Mount Eden are spectacular.

Our driver drops us off at the pier. Sixteen of us embark a 50ft sailing yacht. We motor out and around the harbour. Our 'Captain' asks for volunteers to raise the two sails whilst Raven, another lady crew member, serves coffee, tea, hot chocolate and cup cakes. Some of the guests take turns steering the sloop. Under the bridge in bright sun. I know why it is called 'Sparkling Water.' A very nice afternoon.

We walk back to the Sky Hotel where an APT representative is handing out badges and information. We introduce ourselves to Glenys who is of Chinese decent. Later we learn that her parents spoke little English when she was born, so they named her after the midwife. We receive our instructions and check into a nice room on a floor above the casino.

Tonight we have reservations, made over the internet, at the Orbit revolving restaurant on the 110th floor of the tower. We ascend in a speedy elevator with glass insert in the floor. Disconcerting. Exiting at the observation level, we spend some time admiring the city and taking pictures. We descend one floor to a bar for a drink and then down again to the Orbit. I had made reservations some weeks ago for Valentines Day dinner and paid a deposit.

The Chinese waitress is a little hard to understand.

I order a New Zealand Merlot, which being high in tannin, resembled a Cabernet. Jan's rosé is likewise high in tannin. I wonder if that is typical of NZ wines.

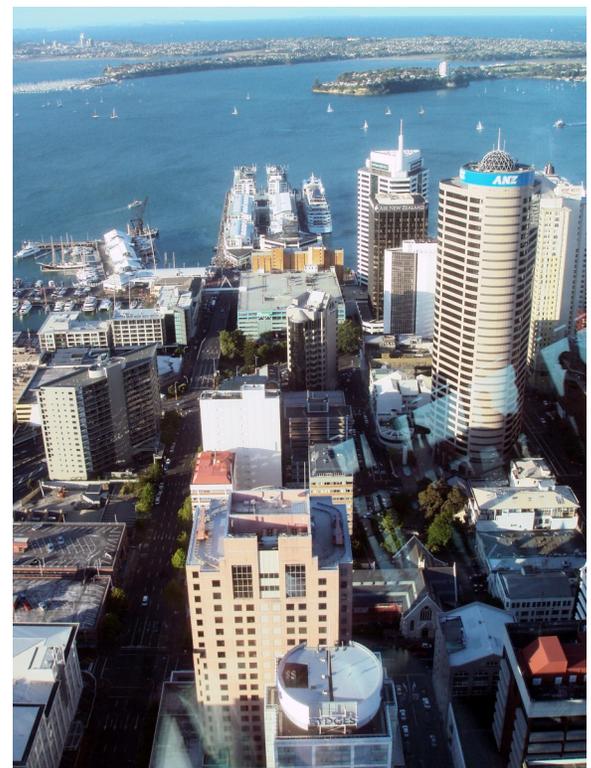
It is a set menu, and we are served at a brisk pace. Garlic potato soup, scallops, mushroom risotto, lamb or snapper & shrimp and desert. The desert is three separate items on a single tray which we share. I guess that is romantic. We finish with complimentary 'bubbles.' A very nice meal.

The restaurant moves. The kitchen and rest rooms do not. I am amused as several people go hunting for the latter, which are no longer where they remembered.

We turn in.



Sky Tower dominates downtown Auckland.



Looking down from the 100th floor.



Downtown Auckland from Mt. Eden.



Nippon Clip-on.

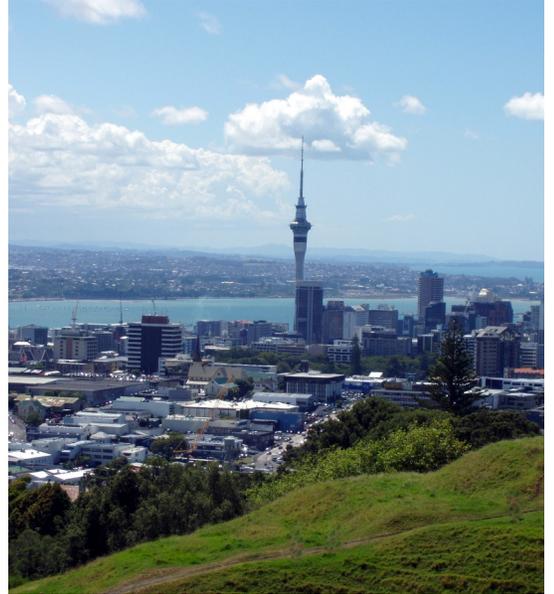


Million dollar yachts and comparable condos.



Life jackets anyone?

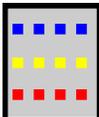




Waterfront.



# Northland



Feb 15 ~ Thu, Auckland to Pahia.  
Feb 16 ~ Fri, Pahia to Cape Reinga & back.  
Feb 17 ~ Sat, Pahia to Auckland.

## **Feb 15<sup>th</sup> – Kauri & Waitangi**

Glenys Shum our tour director whose home is in Dunedin, introduces Brian Piper, our driver, who lives in Auckland.

New Zealand law requires we all wear seat belts. Traffic drives on the left.

We depart for Northland and the Bay of Islands at 8:30am.

There are 28 people on this leg of the tour. Two couples from Australia, one from Holland, a bunch from England, two from Canada and us, the only 'Americans.' We learn later that this is a "freedom of choice" tour which means that people will join and leave the tour at various stops. It also means that we will all be taking different sight seeing side trips. This must be a nightmare for Glenys!

We have unusually good weather which continues for the next several days. Temperatures of 78-86°F, bright sunshine, blue sky and few clouds.

Crossing Harbour Bridge at a crawl we look down on the West Haven Marina, and follow highway 1 then west on Rt.12 to Matakoho.

The first town, Orewa resembles South Padre Island.

The countryside has small steep hills, interlocking to create a saw tooth, covered in grass and trees. The road winds around and sometimes over them. We cross several one lane bridges which seems strange for a major highway.

Most towns have a population fewer than 1000 persons, which we quickly pass through.

Tall trees stand isolated in fields; Norfolk Pines with their striking triangular symmetry and sparse branches. Others have fences around them to keep cattle away.

This is cattle country. The hills have been farmed for so many years that the cows have worn horizontal paths around the sides creating the appearance of an open book viewed edge on.

We stop for road works. Not only is a stop sign displayed, but a cone is placed in front of the coach.

In Matakoho we visit the Kauri Museum. A guide boards the bus and we experience our first taste of Maori linguistics. "Kia Ora," means 'good morning.' We are told to reply in kind and learn that means 'we agree.' So, like the English language, many words depend upon the context in which they are used.

Kauri is the hardest of the softwoods; fine grained, straight, dense and very slow growing. Prized for shipbuilding, it made excellent masts and spars. The forests were greatly reduced. Today it is an offense to cut one down. The oldest remaining are more than 1000 years old. Gum from the tree is hard. It has been used to make varnish, linoleum and gum boots but today is mostly carved into jewelry.

Running out of Kauri wood, carvers turned to digging up logs which have been buried in swamps for 10,000 to several million years. When properly dried in the sun, it is indistinguishable from new wood.

Forestry is an important industry, but when trees are felled they must be replanted. Nearly 1/3 of NZ is locked in preservation.

We climb a ridge and glimpse the Tasman sea, then at Dargaville turn east on Rt 14.

It is believed that New Zealand was colonized from Tahiti, with whom they share a similar language. Maori had no written language. The first missionaries created one using just 14 letters from the English language to capture all the phonetics.

At Omapero beach, (Rolling stones) we are introduced to the favorite NZ ice cream, Hoky Poky, a concoction of vanilla, honey and toffee.

At the Waipoua Kauri Forest we take a short board walk to see the giant "Tane Mahuta" (Lord of the Forest).

On to Hokianga Harbour and the Waitangi Reserve where a treaty was signed between the Maori and British in 1840. Unfortunately the two versions differ in a few critical words, which to this day leads to contention. These are sacred grounds with beautiful gardens, Meeting House and a huge War Canoe, launched once a year by 84 men. Several Maori Chiefs were taken to England where they received an education before returning to NZ.

We look forward to staying two nights at the Pacific Resort in Paihia.

Norfolk Island Pine plentiful in Northland.



Workshop with vintage wood working machinery for Kauri.



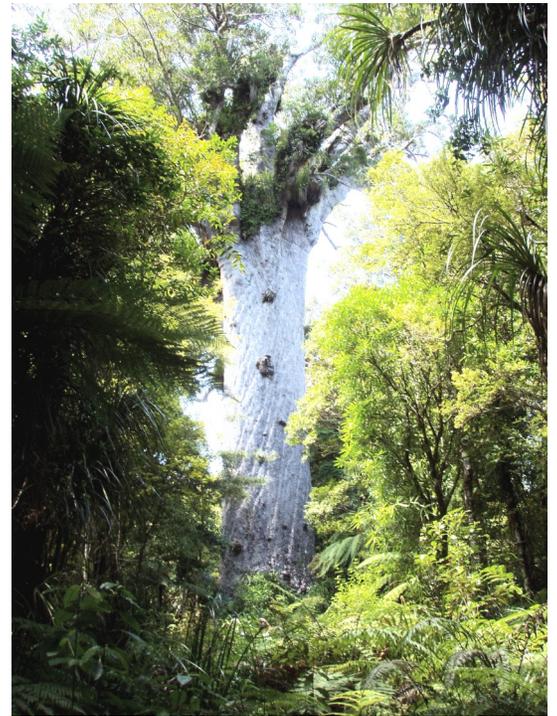
Kauri log and chip off the old block.



Bowls turned from Kauri wood and its gum.



Antique Furniture from Kauri wood.



Tane Mahuta.

Rain Forest.



Gum (amber) collection.

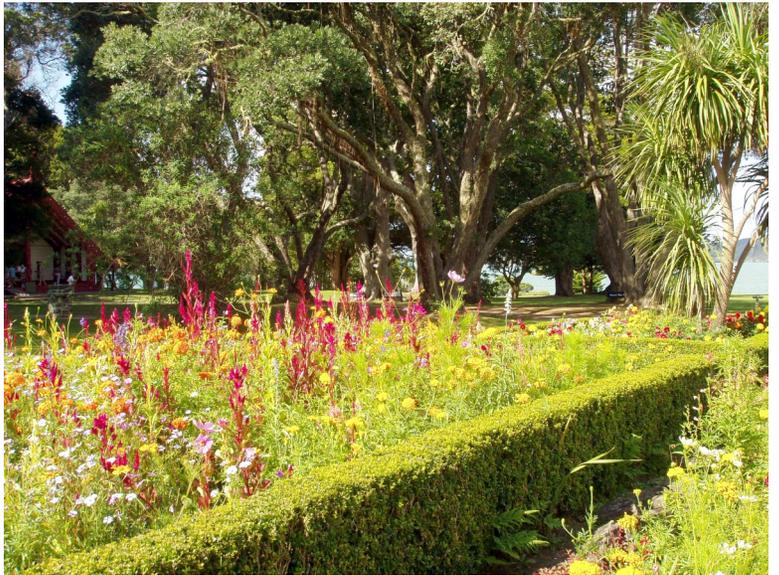


Hokianga Harbour (West Coast).





Entrance to Waitangi Treaty Grounds.



The Meeting House,  
Waitangi.



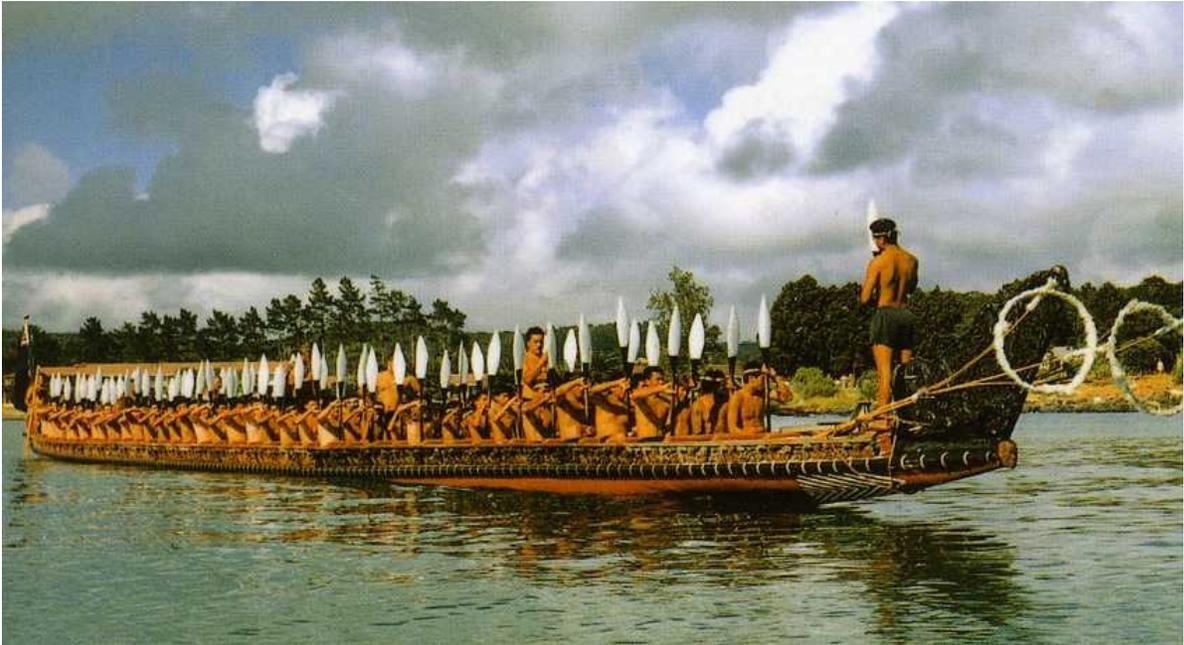
Take off those shoes.



Ancestral Carving.



Ngatokimatawhaorua, the long canoe carved from three Kauri trees.





Doubtless Sound.



Cable Beach.



Matai Bay.



Houhora Heads.



Taupo Bay.



### Ancient Kauri Kingdom, Awanui.

Kauri forests grew more than 30-50,000 years ago. Wood was buried under peat swamps before the onset of the last Ice Age. Radio carbon dating establishes the age.

This log has been carved internally with a staircase.

Staircase.



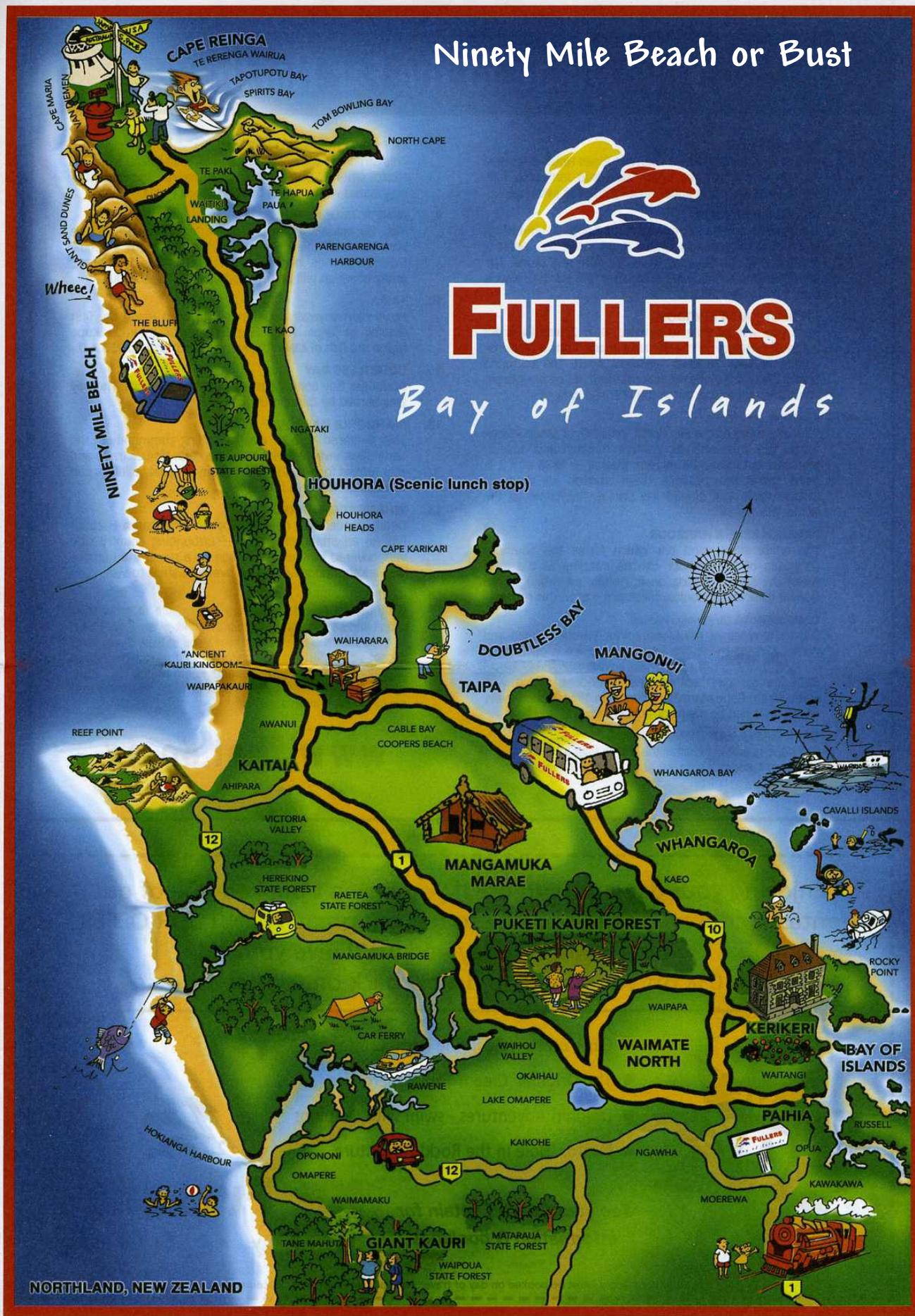
Logs drying.

Ninety Mile Beach or Bust



# FULLERS

Bay of Islands



NORTHLAND, NEW ZEALAND

## Feb 16<sup>th</sup> ~ Cape Reinga & 90 Mile Beach

The Duke of Marlborough pub in Russell holds, the number one liquor license in NZ.

Cannibals had their last feast in 1819. 1/3 population is connected to forestry.

Along the roadside and between fields are wind breaks. Bamboo or arborvitae are allowed to grow very high perhaps 100ft, then using a chain saw, lopped off at 70ft, giving them a flat top. The hedges grow very dense providing shelter for Avocado and Kiwi Fruit.

Power poles have aluminum bands around them to prevent possum from reaching the lines.

Brian observes a squashed possum and announces with glee "Possum pizza."

Highway 10 takes us to the Kerikeri Plateau. At Matouri Bay we turn to follow the coastal road.

Our coach is new, with only 24 kilometers on it. However the windshield has been hit by a stone which left a large impact crater. "Gets replaced tonight" announces Brian.

A canoe is a Waka, but so is any means of transport. So we are in a Waka coach.

Many non native species of plants and animals have been introduced, some deliberately, some by accident. Many with negative consequences, often because they have no natural enemies.

There is only one native species of palm. Broom is not native. Rats, deer and possum were introduced by early settlers. Many species of New Zealand's indigenous birds are flightless, and have no defense against predators.

The coach startles a Harrier Hawk. When we see a Swamp Hen, Brian tells us "You cook those for five hours with a stone, then throw away the hen and eat the stone. They are tough."

Domestic turkey have gone wild. We pass a group. Fishermen are allowed nine snapper/person/boat/day.

At Doubtless we look up at the twin domed peaks of St Peter and St Paul on either side of Mangonui harbor. On to Coopers Beach and Cable Beach.

A crop duster is top dressing grassland. I find it incredible that it is economic to fertilize and irrigate grass.

Brian is intent on educating us.

General Sales Tax (GST) is 12.5%

Maori mythology recounts the landing of seven canoes a thousand years ago. This is the basis for the existence of seven major tribes, however there are hundreds of sub-groups. As a result of inter-marriage, there are no full blooded Maori left, though many we see have Polynesian features, physique and skin color.

Lunch at Houhora is barley beef, lamb sausage and fixings overlooking the bay.

There are lots of concrete cisterns perched on hill tops to collect rainwater for drinking.

Huge golden sand dunes rise like mountains near Waitiki Landing.

The Three Kings Islands show as bumps on the horizon.

We are near Cape Reinga, the most northerly point in NZ. The gravel road is rough. A bridge washed out here a couple of weeks back, and the road has been re-graded. At last the cape. A steep path leads down to the lighthouse, which tourists follow like ants.

Brian is going to drive back down ninety mile beach. A misnomer because it is only 64 miles long. The only way onto the beach is to drive down a sandy stream bed. Since water is flowing, it has the potential to form quicksand. Brian assures us he has 48 shovels on board.

Part way down the stream bed we stop and watch 'Sand boarders', (like snow boarding) slide down the sand dune. Oops, one comes too fast and takes out a spectator.

We turn on the beach of honey colored sand. Brian skillfully maneuvers around treacherous shimmering pools, gulls, and the occasional fishing pole. There is a serious fishing contest for snapper in progress. The first prize is \$58,000. A judge tells us a 5kg fish is winning.

Near Waipapakauri we leave the beach and stop at Awanui for afternoon tea in the Ancient Kauri Kingdom Café. Inside, a huge Kauri log has been carved internally to create a staircase. We make some purchases.

Almost all town names are Maori.

On our return to Paihia we take a dinner cruise. The boat comfortably seats 24 on benches around the railing, facing inward. Small tables are lowered from the roof in front of us, making it very convenient to chat with our neighbors. We take turns to introduce ourselves. The trip is a short one up a river to the Haruru waterfalls. It is getting dark. Not much to see.

Two people who opted for the Dolphin Cruise, saw none.



Houhora Heads



Waitiki Landing.



Cape Reinga.



Cape Reinga.





No, we are not stuck!

Boogy Boarding.



90 Mile Beach.



Splash!



Well, there's sand and water and water and...

Some of the architecture on route back to Pahia.

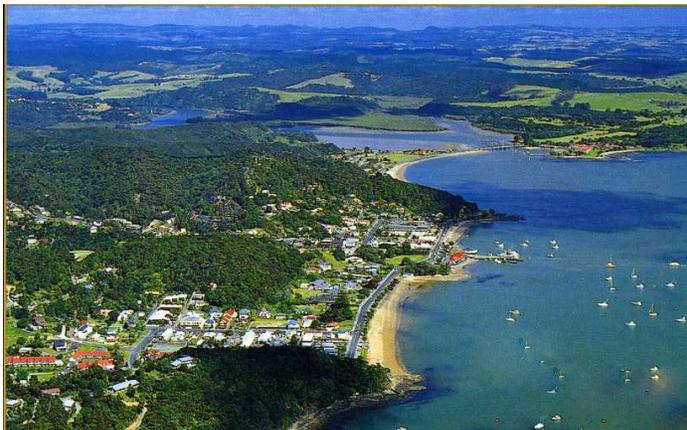




Pacific Resort.



Haruru Falls.



Pahia.



## Feb 17<sup>th</sup> ~ Bay of Islands

We could have walked, but instead take a 3min bus ride to the pier. The catamaran, Tiger 5, must seat 300. All the outside seats are taken. I don't say anything to Jan, but this is a closed compartment. If there were a problem there are only two tiny doors to exit, the windows are sealed.

Our crossing to Russell at 22 knots, is just 6min but 1½ hr by road from Paihia. Russell was known in the 1800's as the hell hole of the South Pacific. After a short pause to load and unload passengers, we continue between Waewaetora and Urupukapuka Islands past Cape Brett and its lighthouse. Captain Cook landed here in 1759.

The ride gets bumpy round the hole in the rock and cathedral cave, both created by wave action over millennia. A girl comes around asking if anyone is getting sick. Sitting in the middle of the boat we are close to the neutral point with little motion.

The islands and water are beautiful and protected. There are one or two buildings but no more permanent homes are permitted.

We have a one hour stop for lunch, pie and chips, on Urupukapuka island at Otehei Bay then return to Paihia and board the coach for our return to Auckland.

Mid-afternoon we stop at the port of Whangarei pronounced Fongerei (Cherrished Harbour) which is a center for timber export to Japan and South Korea. It is also used by serious sailors who hunker down here for three months during hurricane season.

New Zealand has large off-shore oil deposits which together with imported crude is refined at Marsh Point.

Many gardens are filled with blue and white Agapanthus.

The Queen Mary II is docked in Auckland but leaves this evening for Sydney.

6 people leave the tour and 15 join.

The foyer at Sky City is packed with people celebrating Chinese New Year. It is the year of the pig, a good year to have children. All the pillars are decked with blossoms and Chinese lanterns.

The group dinner is a sea food buffet in the Observatory Restaurant at the top of Sky Tower, not as posh as the Orbit where we ate before, but still very nice.

We turn in early and miss the QM II's fireworks.





The Dock House.



I look grim....

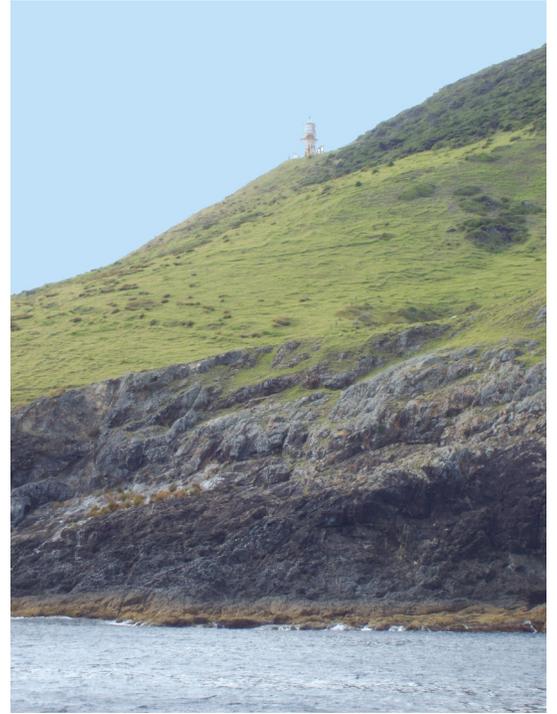
Tapeka Point.



Bay of Islands.



Robertson Island.



Cape Brett.







Sky Tower from coach crossing Harbour Bridge.



One Tree Hill from Mt. Eden.



Orewa.



QM II from Sky Tower.



One Tree Hill.

# Central North Island



Feb 18 ~ Sun, Auckland to Rotorua.  
Feb 19 ~ Rotorua Experience.

## Feb 18<sup>th</sup> ~ Waitomo & Rotorua

We have no time to play the casino, besides, we are afraid we might win a car. One is awarded each week. Brian points out a passing BMW. The number plate reads "WIN SKY CITY".

Before leaving Auckland our bus takes us to the top of Mount Eden for a better view of the city. Auckland is built on a series of volcanoes, like One Tree Hill, a prominent landmark. The Field is comprised of monogenetic volcanoes which means it is unlikely any of the existing volcanoes will erupt again. The next eruption will probably occur in a new location.

16% of the population is Maori. Black is the national color.

The farms are small, 300-400 acres with 250-300 head of cattle for milking. Fields are lined with hay bundled in shrink wrap where it ferments. The cattle are confined in small fields with adjacent pasture left open to re-grow grass.

Homes are small with tin or tile roofs.

Morning coffee is in Huntley and lunch in Otorohanga. Two steak and onion pies, a chocolate éclair with fresh cream to die for and a coke, cost a modest \$9.80 NZ, about \$8.50 US.

It is Sunday and most stores are closed, but we stroll around town. All the side walks are covered and baskets of impatiens hang from the roof. A greengrocer is open so we check on prices. Fruit is about 70% of US prices, milk and eggs the same.

The Waitomo Glowworm Caves were first explored in 1887 by local Maori Chief Tane Tinorau accompanied by an English surveyor Fred Mace. The entrance is dimly lit and I hold Jan's hand. No photography is allowed. Although the caves are extensive, only a portion is open to the public. Our guide points out various rock features. Unlike some caves we have visited the stalagmites and stalactites lack color. Formed over 30 million years ago there are two levels to the caves. The upper level is dry and includes the entrance, and formations known as the Catacombs, the Pipe Organ and the Banquet Chamber. The lower level consists of stream passages and the Cathedral, which has unusual acoustics. We sing "Happy Birthday Mr. Glowworm..."

We clamber into a boat. A guide, standing at the stern, grasps an overhead cable and pulls us hand over hand into a darkened cave. As our eyes adjust, thousands of tiny lights appear on the roof like stars.

Glowworms, also known as fungus gnats, spend most of their life in their "glowworm" larval stage and glow with the help of the chemical luciferin. The larvae build a mucus structure around themselves, which sticks to the cave walls. Dangling from this sac are several tendrils of sticky silk, each almost a meter in length. The glowworms attract small insects to their threads who find the greenish glow almost irresistible. When a moth or cricket gets caught in the thread, the vibrations alert the larvae, who immediately reels in its line and devours its prey.

The ride, a few hundred feet, emerges into daylight in a steeply banked stream.

We pass a group of men playing lawn bowls on a grass square. Brian jokes, "That a holding pen for the undertaker."

Our coach retraces part of route 3, turns east to Cambridge and on to Rotorua (meaning second lake), population 60,000, elevation 1000ft. Here the Pacific and Indian tectonic plates collide producing a geothermal area which our hotel, the Park Heritage overlooks. We are greeted with warm moist towels. A nice touch. The air has a slight smell of hydrogen sulphide.

Wahine (maidens) lead us into the Pohutu Cultural Theatre for the hangi (feast), a buffet, cooked Maori style in a pit of heated stones. Afterward, the show features traditional Maori song, dance and chants. Girls twirl Poi. Men demonstrate the use of weapons.

Our room is hot, the air conditioning does not work. I tangle with the night manager and at 9:45pm we change rooms. It is 11:45pm and a siren is wailing.

"Its either a fire drill or someone playing with the emergency button."

Now someone is hammering on the door.

"Get out, *now!*"

"Jan, grab the passports, tickets and money."

I slip on shorts and grab a belt, but there is no time to thread it, so I scamper down three flights of stairs holding the shorts up.

There are a few hundred people milling around in the parking lot in various states of undress. Two fire trucks are ready for duty.

"Perhaps our first room overheated."

After about 40min we are allowed to return to our room. I have seen all the bare flesh I want for one evening!

Later we learn that someone was smoking in a non-smoking room, which triggered the alarm.



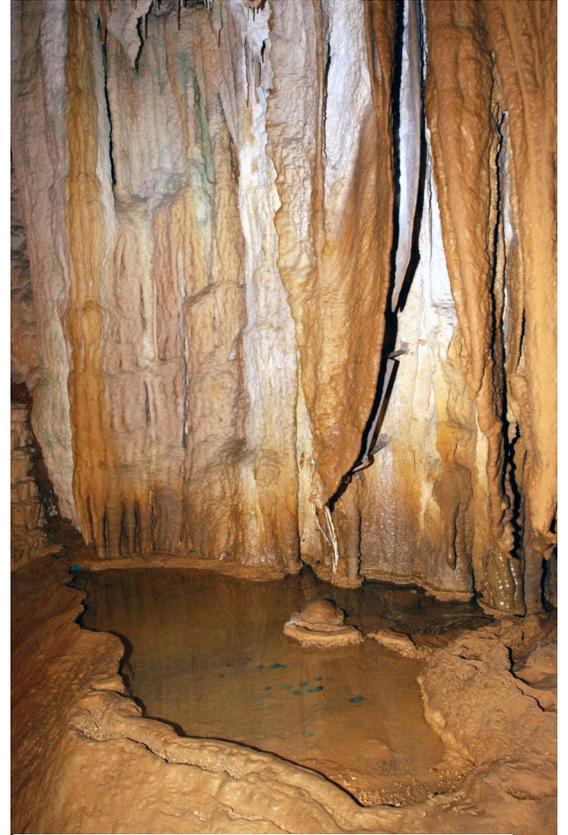
Matouri Bay.



Native Forest.



Glow Worm larvae hanging from roof.



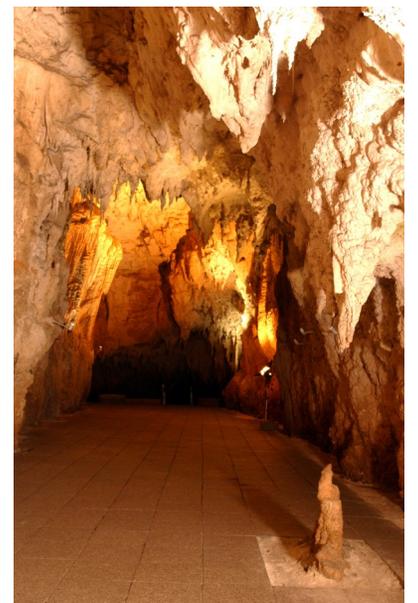
Stalagmite forming.



Pulling boat through cave.



Exit.



Cathedral Cave.

## Feb 19<sup>th</sup> ~ Rotorua

This is the first hotel with 110v electricity, so after charging, my shaver sounds like a happy honey bee.

Brian brags that the New Zealand Black Caps beat the Ozzies at cricket, and offers grief counseling to our loan tourist from Sydney.

Te Puia, a park, preserves and presents aspects of Maori craft and culture.

We admire the ancestral carving on *Rotowhio Marae* (meeting house) and take our shoes off to enter. The images are stylized with Abalone shell for eyes. It is considered disrespectful to carve a real person. Craftsmen train for three years at *Te Wananga Whakairo*, the Carving School. Their products help pay for the sites upkeep. *Te Rito*, the baby flax, is a weaving school dedicated to preserving the ancient craft of basket making. Our guide shows us how to strip a Lilly leaf with a mussel shell, to reveal fibers then in a few seconds rolls it into a rope. She asks two of our group to tug on it, but it is strong and does not break. Being nocturnal, the Kiwi house is darkened; we don't see much.

All around us steam erupts from fissures in the rock in Whakarewarewa Geothermal Valley. The Prince of Wales geyser performs. Mud boils and we stare into a blue pool.

The Agrodome is a huge shed with stage and seats. From the third row we are introduced to 19 breeds of sheep and a demonstration of shearing. The top shearing record is >700 sheep in 9hr. Wool fetches \$2.50-3.00/kilo.

Our morning is complete at Rainbow Springs a nature park featuring California Redwoods, Silver Fern, albino trout and a better Kiwi exhibit.

The coach drops us off in Rotorua for lunch. After walking around we settle on pie and beer in a pub and carry out desert from the pastry shop next door. At 2:30pm the coach takes us back to the hotel. We change and swim in the warmest pool we have ever been in. It must be heated from the geothermal layer.

An excellent sea food buffet completes our day.



Pohutu Cultural Theatre.



Dancing with Poi.

New Zealand Maori Arts & Crafts Institute  
**TE WHAKAREWAREWATANGAOTEOPETAUAAWAHIAO**  
 ( The gathering place for the war parties of Wahiao )



Carving School.



Geysers.



Blue Pool & Park Heritage.



Boiling mud.



Making rope.





Agradome.

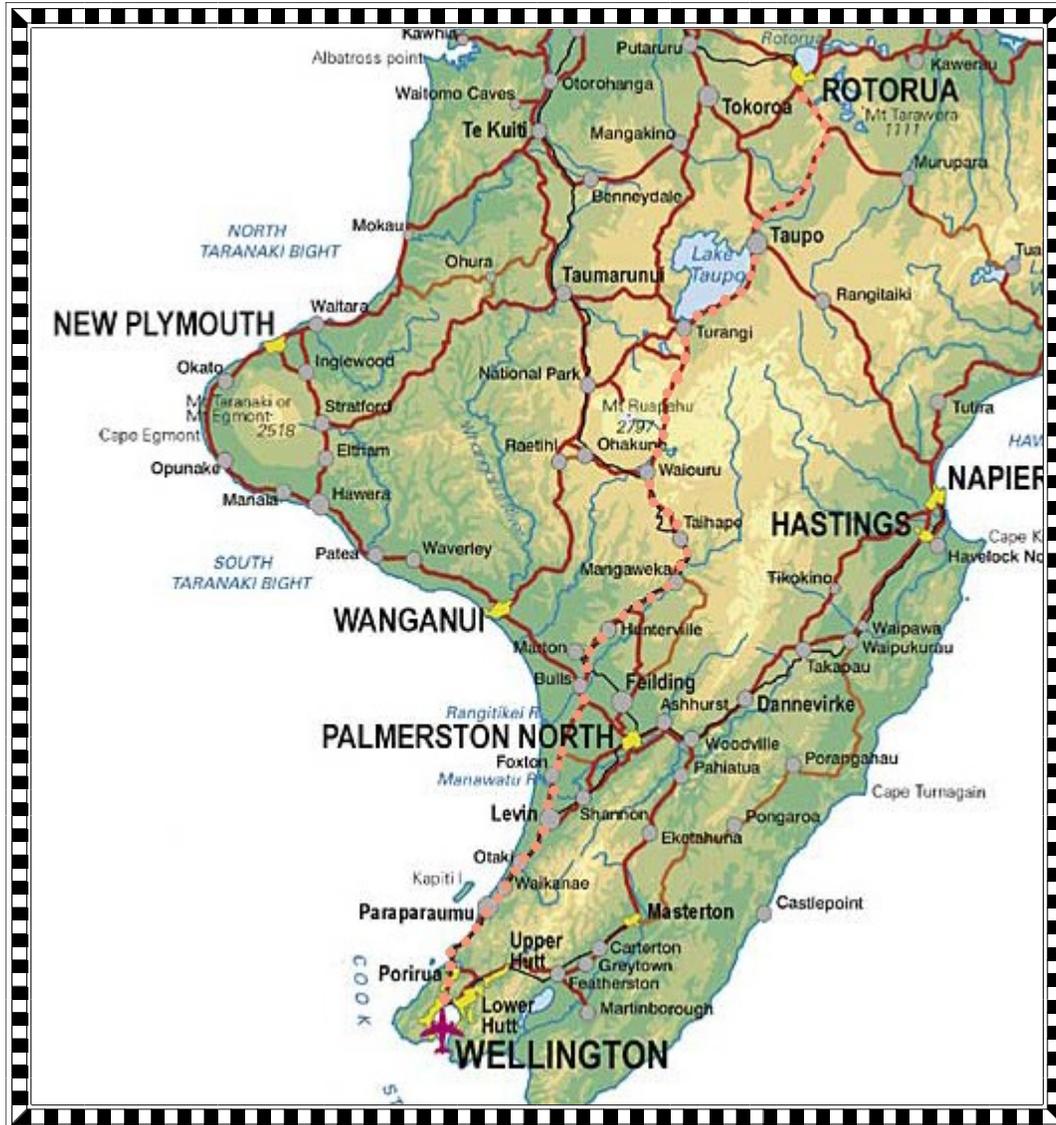


Breeding Trout.



Huka Falls.

# Lower North Island.



Feb 20 ~ Tue, Rotorua to Wellington.

## Feb 20<sup>th</sup> ~ Wellington

As we leave, clouds of steam billows from behind the hotel and crosses the road. We are driving the Thermal Explorer Highway, through mist.

In a front seat, it is our turn to introduce ourselves using the drivers microphone.

Traveling south on a plateau, the roads are curved, not winding, undulating, not hilly. We pass a section of forest which has been clear-cut. A sharp craggy brown contrast to the adjacent soft green trees. The lower branches have been removed to produce knot free timber.

The Waireki thermal power plant harnesses volcanic energy.

The Waikato River is the longest in New Zealand. It's Huka Falls discharge a huge volume of water into a narrow gorge.

Taupo, fed by snow melt, is the largest crater lake in the world. Thought to be inactive, gas bubbles were detected, so it has been reclassified as active, stage one. Stage five would be eruption in progress.

Morning break in Turangi, 10:50am. As usual we take a numbered flag when we order coffee, and wait for it to be delivered to our table. It is pleasantly warm on the outside patio overlooking the lake. We encounter our first pay toilet, a *Super Loo*.

A steady stream of logging trucks pass us. Each a truck pulling a trailer. All the red wood logs cut to exactly the same length for packing. What happens to the end cuts I wonder? These are bound for Japan or Korea. Too good for chop sticks.

This is Earthquake Gully. Our road is cut into the side of the crater following the edge of the lake. A pair of Black Swans swim gracefully while a Cormorant dries its wings.

To our right, south and west, rise a range of cloud capped mountains.

Tongariro National Park is one of twenty three "World Heritage" parks. Only the base of Mt. Ngauruhoe shows and there is snow on Mt. Ruapehu, very unusual. We are traversing a high flat desert plain, closed by snow in winter.

On Mt Ruapehu to our right is a crater lake whose retaining lip has been weakened and is going to collapse. Authorities are preparing for a 'lahar' or tidal wave by raising the road level and digging channels to divert the water.

In Taihape we lunch at the Soul Food Café. It reminds me of an English café from the 1950's. The mixture of tables, chairs, sofa along one wall and coffee table must have been recovered from peoples homes. Nothing matches.

Traditional Maori body decoration used knives to incise the flesh into which was rubbed cinders. This painful practice has been replaced by complex needle tattoos maintaining the traditional patterns. A lady sports a full arm tattoo.

Continuing south we pass through Hunterville named after the Hunterway dog, then on to the little town of Bulls. They have a play on names. A sign announces that this place is *Very Stop-a-Bull*, the Police Station is *Const-a-bull*, the antique store *Collect-a-Bull* and so on.

Brian must stop at a Weigh Station where an Officer checks the bus and his drivers license.  
Gas is \$143.9/L.

New Zealand is emphasizing renewable energy. In the foot hills to our left sprouts a huge wind farm.

Now we are traveling parallel to the sea shore. A sign announces Peka Peka Beach which Brian insinuates must be nude.

The capital was Auckland from 1840-1865, then politics surrounding a gold rush on the South Island resulted in its move to Wellington with a population now of only 350,000. Wellington has more sun than Auckland, but not quite enough rain. As we approach the city, the hillsides between subdivisions, too steep to build on, are covered in broom, bright yellow, in bloom.

We won't have much time here. "Let's walk." We do a quick city tour. A crazy bunch of tourists are racing war canoes in the harbor. Cars actually stop to let pedestrians cross the road. I wish we had more time here.

We dress for the buffet dinner on the 17<sup>th</sup> floor. One of our party greets me as "Janet". I have switched name tags.

"Darn, I forgot to use the coupon for a free drink." But not next time.



Taihape.



Soul Food Café.



Mt. Ruapehu.



Wellington.





Parliament, the Beehive.



Peka Peka Beach.

## **Feb 21<sup>st</sup> ~ Blenheim.**

NZ has a mixed member proportional parliament of 120 MP's. Helen Clark is in her third term as Prime Minister.

There are no sky scrapers in Wellington. The tallest buildings range from 15 to 20 floors. It is a very windy city.

The view of the city from atop Mt. Victoria is spectacular. A short walking tour takes us across the University campus and on to Te Papa Tongarewa, the Museum of New Zealand. The Parliament Building is known as the *Beehive*.

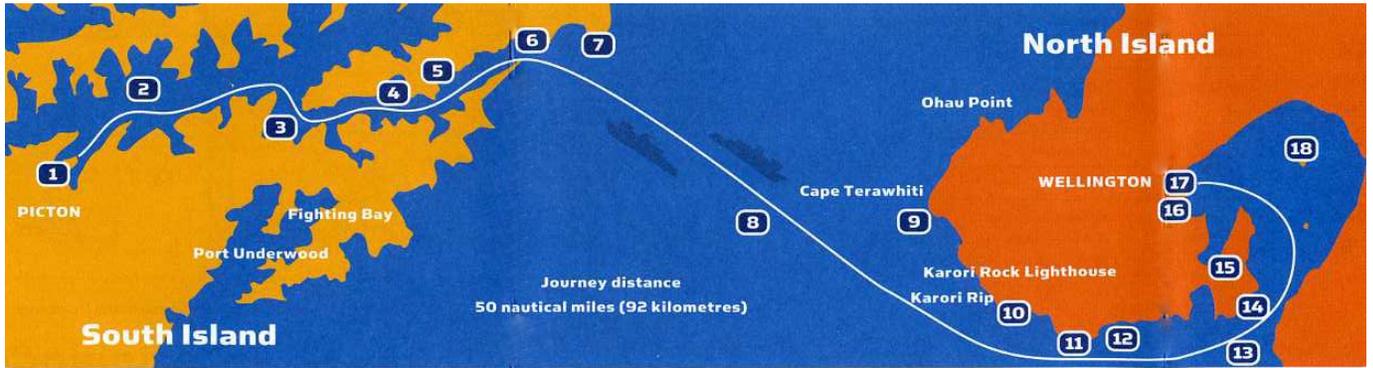
Today we cross Marlborough Sound from Wellington on the North Island to Picton on the South. We wait to board our ferry, the *Aratere*, then walk a long covered gang plank. Brian has driven our bus on board in company with a number of trucks and cars. A little light rain chases us off the deck and inside. The seats are comfortable, like airline seats. I explore. The spacious *Aratere* is equipped with multiple decks, TV room, a small movie theater, snack bar and shop where I promptly left my glasses. It can handle 369 passengers, but I guess is only half full. The upper deck has glass walls to screen the seats from wind.

We sail past low hills, the Miramar Peninsula, Red Rocks, Sinclair Head and out into the Cook Strait. This can become a rough stretch of water, but our three hour 50 mile crossing is unusually calm. Later, Brian says it was boring. Upon reaching the South Island we follow the Tory Channel between craggy hills into Queen Charlotte Sound and berth at Picton just after 5:00pm.

Our hotel has overbooked so we divide into two groups. The first stays in Picton, we go on to Blenheim.

After check-in we walk around the town square where begonias are growing in full sun, then down main street. It is warm. Air conditioning is a fan in the closet.

Dinner is waited. Pumpkin soup, lamb, vegetables and pavlova.



Crossing Marlborough Sound.



Aratere.





Pencarrow Head.



Miramar Peninsula.



Marlborough Sounds.



Tory Channel.



Picton.



Picton.

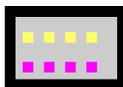


Blenheim.



Viaduct on route to Christchurch.

# Upper South Island.



Feb 22 ~ Thu, Blenheim to Christchurch.  
Feb 23 ~ Fri, Christchurch to Franz Josef.

## **Feb 22<sup>nd</sup> ~ Christchurch.**

There were three mid-level earthquakes in Auckland last night. The first in ten years. I reckon they were due to the weight of our luggage.

Population of the South Island is 900k.

We say goodbye to Blenheim at 8:30am and cross an unusual two tiered bridge. Train tracks on the upper level; a single lane road below.

The dry honey gold hills contrast with dark green evergreens. A large heard of deer are grazing in a field.

We are following the Kaikoura Coast, rugged and rocky. The road winds just a few tens of feet above the sea shore. Steep cliffs rise to our right. It is dull, misty and drizzling. We wind through a couple of narrow tunnels. The sea is very calm. Lazy seals sit on rocks. The beach is dark grey grit and small pebbles. Kelp washes back and forth between the rocks.

This is a Crayfishing area, (NZ Rock Lobster).

We head towards North Canterbury. The terrain has changed and the sky is clearing. The cloud formations are unusual. Uprturned brush strokes, an arch or waves. We have sun again. We are entering an alluvial plain. The landscape is a patchwork of pasture dotted with small towns.

A short stop in Cheviot.

The north and south island are drifting apart on separate tectonic plates.

At Tormore is the worlds smallest railway station. Nothing more than a shed.

The population of Christchurch is 380k. It has one mayor and council compared to 4 councils and 3 local governments in Auckland, so is more efficient. Unlike Auckland, it has plenty of land, so the traffic OK.

We cross Waimakariri river, which is almost dry. A braided river fed by alpine rain.

It can be very hot, 100°F in summer and quite cold in winter. Known as the 'Garden city.' Many houses are small, gardens minute, but lots of flowers with detached single stall garages. Even the older mansions have small but magnificent gardens.

We check into the centrally located Copthorne and rescue our cases while the porters are still sorting the others.

Turning east out of the lobby we walk a couple of blocks to Cathedral Square, then south to the Avon. An outside bistro is appropriate for lunch. All the restaurants seem to serve such large meals. We settle for a BLT, which comes open face with fries, so is not exactly small.

We walk south to the park crossing the Avon where a punt moves lazily by. Back through the Botanic Garden and a beautiful Rose Garden.

"Is this the way back to town?" I ask. It seems a long way. We walk about three miles.

Time for dirty washing and Email.

I order a drink in the hotel bar and get the worst gin and tonic of my life. "No sir, I did not use soda."

To my surprise, our washing is dry.

A nice waited dinner, fillet steak, wine and bed.

Christchurch, Garden City.



Gardens opposite Copthorne Central Hotel.



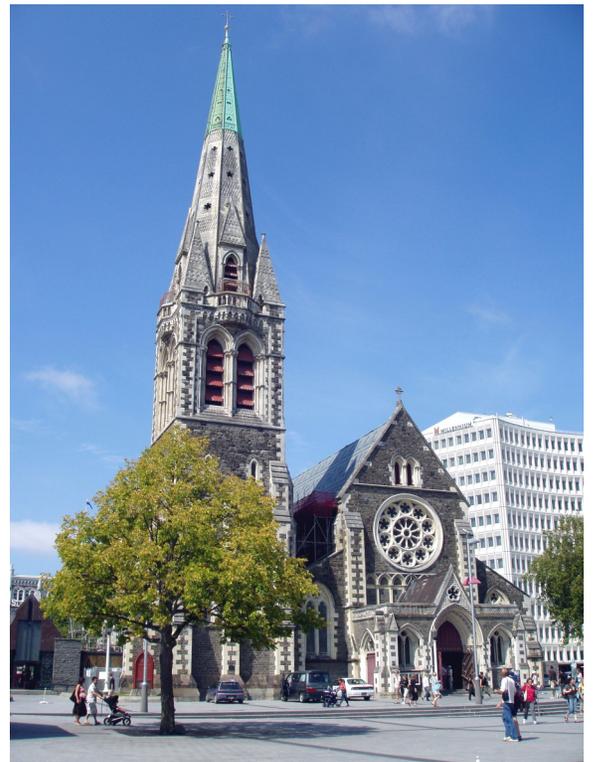
Lunch anyone?



Punting on the Avon.



Bridge of Remembrance.



Cathedral.

## **Feb 23<sup>rd</sup> ~ Franz Joseph.**

This our first wet morning. We have been asked to leave one bag behind. The bus is full.

A short ride to the train station. "Please follow Tony." We enter carriage "J". Our party fills it.

We roll at 8:15am, the carriages are new, the train is long and full. We must be traveling at 70mph. These suburbs are not pretty. Light industry and chemical plants. We are crossing the Canterbury Plains. We blink and pass through Sheffield. Rising now the ground suddenly drops away and we cross the Waimakarari river bed. There are 16 tunnels and 4 viaducts. We look down from a viaduct into a deep gorge filled with mist. The train pulls into Arthur's Pass at 10:30am. The highest of three alpine passes.

The bus crosses a viaduct which isolates the road from rock slides. Shed like canopies transfer water over the top of the road. Down a 16% grade, through temperate rain forest. Clouds dip below the mountain tops, into the gorge ahead of us. The steep sides are green with fir trees.

We reach the sea in bright sunshine. The road is straight and flat, following the shore, separated from the sea by a few hundred yards of grass land. The coach crosses a one lane bridge over the Arahura River sharing it with train tracks. The sea is calm and green with a single white line of breaking surf.

In Hokitika we tour a jade factory and make the mandatory purchases.

To our right, is a kettle lake, formed at the end of the last ice age, 18,000yrs ago. The weight of ice created a depression which filled with water.

The ascent of Mt. Hercules is steep and winding. In Franz Joseph, named after the emperor of Austria, we drop off the folks who are taking a helicopter flight to the top of the glacier. Brian drives us close to the foot of the glacier for a Kodak moment. The walk is a brisk 30min round trip. I wonder how many identical pictures have been taken from this spot, looking at the base?

Despite global warming, the glacier has more ice in it today, than in recent history.

"Please wait in the bus while I get your keys." Nice room, one large bed, one twin, with a spectacular view of snow capped mountains.

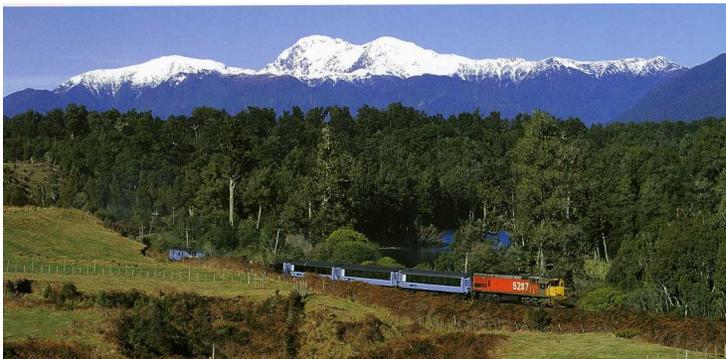
Another waited dinner, though we were encouraged to dine quickly.



Train to Arthurs Pass.



Jan, Glenys, Martin.





Arthurs Pass.



Taramakau River.



Descending the Western Slopes of the Southern Alps towards Hokitika.



Hokitika.

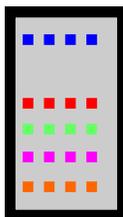
Along the West Coast.



Franz Josef Glacier.



# Lower South Island.



Feb 24 ~ Sat, Franz Josef to Queenstown.  
Feb 25 ~ Sun, Queenstown.  
Feb 26 ~ Mon, Queenstown, Milford Sound, to Te Anau.  
Feb 27 ~ Tue, Te Anau to Dunedin.  
Feb 28 ~ Wed, Dunedin to Twizel.  
Feb 29 ~ Thu, Twizel, Mt. Cook to Christchurch.

## **Feb 24<sup>th</sup> ~ Queenstown.**

The sun lights up the snow capped mountain tops. Ferns cling to the near vertical cliffs. Everything is crystal clear. There is absolutely no air pollution. Franz Joseph is unusual as a glacier being surrounded by a temperate rain forest.

Brian warns us the next turn will be interesting; a sharp 180° which can only be negotiated by crossing to the wrong side of the road.

We pass quickly through the town of Fox Glacier, and over a one lane bridge crossing the Fox River. Brian has an issue with camper vans.

Someone says "Ah" to a dead Possum. Brian likens Possum to Al Qaeda; terrorists of the woods. He says the DOC should send a letter of commendation for taking one out. Yellow lines dividing the highway don't count! Possum, introduced in the 1800's, are estimated to number 60 million, and have no predators.

Brian tells us stories about Panthers believed to be over grown domestic moggies. Parts of NZ have still not been explored, so although officially classified as extinct, it is theoretically possible for a colony of Moa to exist in say Fiordland. Moa were 9ft tall flightless birds hunted to extinction by the Maori for food.

The Tasman Sea continues to be unusually calm. We catch glimpses of golden sandy beaches, isolated bays and rocky outcrops.

The wreckage of the Stroberg shows at low tide in Ship Creek.

There are many isolated dead trees which have died as a result of Possum chewing on them.

The town of Bruce Bay has the distinction of being the most isolated in NZ. The west winds howl across the Tasman Sea and shape the trees, giving them a buzz cut.

The rivers are low in water, but run fast. Full of waves jumping over mounds of rounded rocks.

At a salmon farm we stop for morning coffee.

Lake Moeraki is calm and grey.

At the Haast River, in the National Park, we join a jet boat. These were designed about 50 years ago to run at 70km/hr in 3in water, powered by two Chevy engines. The boats were so successful that they are shipped all over the world for military purposes and were used in Vietnam.

The Haast has pools of water, connected by shallow, boulder lined channels. After rain or snow melt its level can rise several meters in a few hours.

24 to a boat we put on yellow life jackets and sit near the stern. The boat rises to plane and moves rapidly up stream between mountains. Our comedian Captain makes a few sharp maneuvers, then stops to count us. We move fast on the Haast!

"Are you up to spins?" We are. "Put your cameras away. Close the windows and hold on."

Accompanied by squeals, we make several rapid circles. The pivot point is just behind the driver. Seated near the back as we are, we pull a couple of G's. After an hour of play we rejoin the coach.

The road crosses the Haast River gorge, filled with boulders the size of automobiles which have washed down the river bed.

The average rainfall on the west coast is 3m. Climbing to 550m, Haast is the most southern alpine pass. The grade steep at 10%. We rapidly transition from rain forest to bleak alpine meadow.

For lunch, steak pie, fries and beer.

We skirt Lake Wanaka, 28mi long and 1100ft deep, which is 100ft below sea level. Followed by Lake Hawea, 24mi long, in Mt. Aspiring National Park.

No clouds, pale blue sky and deep blue water.

At Albertown we cross the Kanuka river, which handles a huge volume of water.

We are running parallel to the Crown Range. Half the bus is asleep. So many vineyards, won't there be a glut of wine?

Lake Dunstan, at the 45th parallel, is half way between the equator and south pole. Created for a hydro plant.

Our afternoon stop is at the Orchard in Cromwell. In the mid 1800's there were gold mines here worked by Chinese miners.

We follow the gorge cut by the Kuaru. This road is prone to rock slides triggered by earthquakes.

Lake Hayes sports a sailing yacht.

Queenstown's population is 15k and with the surrounding townships 35k Queenstown is more expensive than other places in NZ because everything is trucked in.

We pull into the Copthorne with a view of Lake Wakatipu. The hotel is built on the side of a hill; we descend to our room. The key reads 3426, so we get off at level 3 .... Wrong! We are on level 4 so I conclude the leading 3 must refer to a wing number. Once again our room is at the end of a long series of corridors. The furthest possible point from the lift (elevator.)

We line up on the wharf outside the casino.

Our dinner cruise is on the TSS Earnslaw, a modest steam driven, twin screw steamer built in 1912. (Older than the Titanic.) She is designed as a passenger ferry with ample inboard seating. We watch the stokers fuel the coal fired boilers, then sit outside a while, but retreat from the cool wind. It is dusk. We cruise about 40min down and across the lake to a beautiful old homestead, the Walter Peak High Country Farm.

White fronted with red peaked roof. This was a working farm but now mostly caters to tourists.

A hundred or so of us are seated around old carved tables, with linen table cloths and more cutlery than I know how to use.

Our meal is part waited and part buffet. After, we adjourn to a farm building and watch a sheep shearing display complete with the customary patter followed by a dog trial. I think the sheep were trained.

As we cruised back in the dark, the passengers sat around singing nostalgic songs, accompanied by a piano player. I remembered the words from my youth. All very 'English.'

Haast River.





View from Franz Josef Glacier Hotel.



On route to Queenstown.



Lake Wakatipu.



Queenstown.



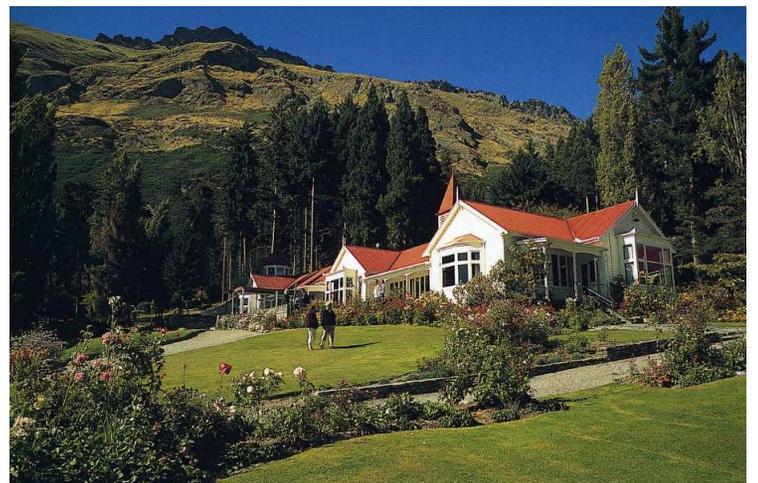
Lake Wakatipu.



The Remarkables (Mountains).



TSS Earnslaw.



Walter Peak High Country Farm.

## **Feb 25<sup>th</sup> ~ Shotover.**

This morning we board a red London double decker bus for a three hour excursion. Our driver and narrator is from Yorkshire. As we drive beside Lake Wakatipu, the Remarkables (mountains) loom above the far shore. The lake is 52 miles long and 1000ft deep.

At the Kawaru Bridge over the Shotover, we watch bungy jumpers. 350 a day at \$150 a jump. Bungy was invented here.

We pass up a wine tasting and cheese tray in favor of morning cappuccino in the Gibbston Valley Winery.

I have noticed that every heavy vehicle has a gauge on a rear tire, which I assumed to be for measuring pressure. Apparently, it is in fact a mileage meter by which the vehicle pays road tax.

Arrowtown has but one purpose, to please tourists. We make some nice purchases.

Since we also have an afternoon excursion, departing from the Copthorne, we have lunch in the hotel bar, overlooking the lake. "May I suggest you split the BLT," good advice.

We ask the young lady concierge to recommend a restaurant for this evening. "Try, the Wai, on the water front by the wharf." She books us in for 8:00pm.

A group of rafters paddle frantically through the Shotover rapids.

New Zealand, and in particular the Queenstown region, is home to extreme sports. We have booked a jet boat ride, a real one. A wild bronco, not like yesterdays tame pony. Fitted out with rain slickers and life jackets, we take our place in a 24 seater boat. The sign says 'If you have a medical condition, tell your driver.' Propelled by two large Buick engines, it can travel fully loaded at 85 kph in 4in of water, and we do.

This cowboy must be crazy, passing rocks with inches to spare and running streams too small and shallow to be possible. He circles an arm in the air. We know what is next. The boat pivots, leaves the water and slaps back down drenching us with spray. The ladies squeal.

We shed our protective gear and buy pictures of ourselves for the scrap book. Apparently there was an on board video camera, I did not see it, and can only guess where it was hidden. We buy that too. Suckers!

The shuttle bus stops at the Copthorne but we stay on and ride into town. Let's find the Wai. It is on the wharf where we embarked the Earnslaw.

We walk back through Queenstown, which looks like a sea side resort. We think it is the most interesting of the towns we have visited so far. There is so much to do. We could have enjoyed more time.

"Jan, I need a map and directions." A ten minute walk all up hill. Some rest.

At 7:20pm we commence our walk to the Wai. We take a different route. Instead of walking down town, we turn and follow a board walk around the lake. Here there are lots of bars and outdoor cafes.

Being early at the Wai, we sit in the bar. I get a decent gin and tonic.

Our table is at a window by the door and looks across the lake to the peaks our waitress calls Cecil and Walter. I don't think so...

It must be windy, the lake has white caps.

This is not a large restaurant, just 16 tables. We order a Gibbston Valley Chardonay 2004 at \$58. After all, we were there today. This is going to be expensive!

A few hardy folks eat outside.

This is the most interesting sunset we have seen. Lumpy grey clouds with a pink belly. Dusk is of long duration and it is not completely dark until after 9:00pm.

All our food is unusual but excellent. Jan orders lamb Wellington. My spring bean soup is a broth with lightly cooked green peas, baby lima beans and scallops in an enormous dish. I order Marlin, which comes with calamari and small pieces of Italian sausage. Also what is called tomato salad, but is cooked. Very strange.

On our walk back up hill to the Copthorne we sing "I'm tired and I wanna go home..."

No air conditioning so we open windows.



Copthorne Lakefront.



Shotover River.



Kawaru Bridge.



Bungee.



Rubber rafts.



Tour bus.



Gibston Valley Winery.



Arrowtown.





## **Feb 26<sup>th</sup> ~ Milford Sound.**

A car rental agency names itself 'Rent a Dent.' New Zealanders have a dry humor.

A short ride to the lake shore for a group photo. Some people don't herd well. Finally the photographer has us all in view. We squint in the low morning sun. Click.

The Remarkables are the only mountain range in the world to run N-S.

March 1 is considered the 1st day of autumn, but the long range forecast is calling for an Indian Summer.

We follow the Franklin arm of Wakitipu which means the 'Hollow of the Giant'.

Five Rivers is the community furthest from the sea.

A windmill turbine farm is being erected on the top of the hills. Each has blades 300ft in diameter. There will eventually be over 100.

Deer are classified as a noxious pest. In the 1950's commercial culling used an alpine helicopter, pilot and shooter. Then deer fetched \$2000 and a team could shoot 100/day. At one time there were 400 helicopters flying. Venison is sold to Germany, the Antlers to Asia. Today the venison market is depressed, and most meat comes from commercial herds.

This is a Tussock conservation area which is a large tuft of fancy grass.

We have an unremarkable lunch in Te Anau.

We leave the town and skirt Lake Te Anau the 2nd largest lake in NZ. Across the water a promontory hides in cloud.

1/3 NZ is in conservation. We enter Fiordland National Park. Milford sound is a fiord. This is home to native beach trees.

A stop for photos at Mirror Lake. Clouds reflect in the clear deep water; the surface disturbed only by coots. After another stop at Knobb Flats we continue on a winding road through dense forest to Milford Sound. A deep gorge appears to our right, the Upper Holyford Valley. We descend into it. Here the rainfall is 27-29ft

Homer tunnel is single lane for coaches so we wait at a red light for 15min.

A Kea is begging a tourist for treats. They have no fear.

We exit from the tunnel into the fiord of Milford Sound and wind down through cloud shrouded peaks. A short walk brings us to the Chasm; a huge gouge in the rock cut by a fast flowing stream. A beautiful fern and moss covered setting. Waterfalls emerge from the rocks at various levels and tumble down the mountain side like silver ropes.

Down, down. Good brakes.

We board the 'Lady of the Sound' and head for the upper, open deck. The iron seat is cold.

Dozens of waterfalls cascade into Milford Sound, but only two are permanent. The others dry up after a drought, defined as nine days without rain. We pass Ladybone Falls.

Bare scars on the slopes mark tree avalanches. Mitre Peak is the tallest mountain rising directly from the sea.

Rain chases us inside. Jackie is soaked.

In the sound the tide is 2m.

Juvenile fur seals relax on a rock. These young males have been chased away by their mothers. If they stayed the dominant male bull would kill them. Actually these are sea lions, not seals and have ears.

We cruise past a waterfall higher than Niagara Falls and stop at the Underwater Observatory, 3m below the surface.

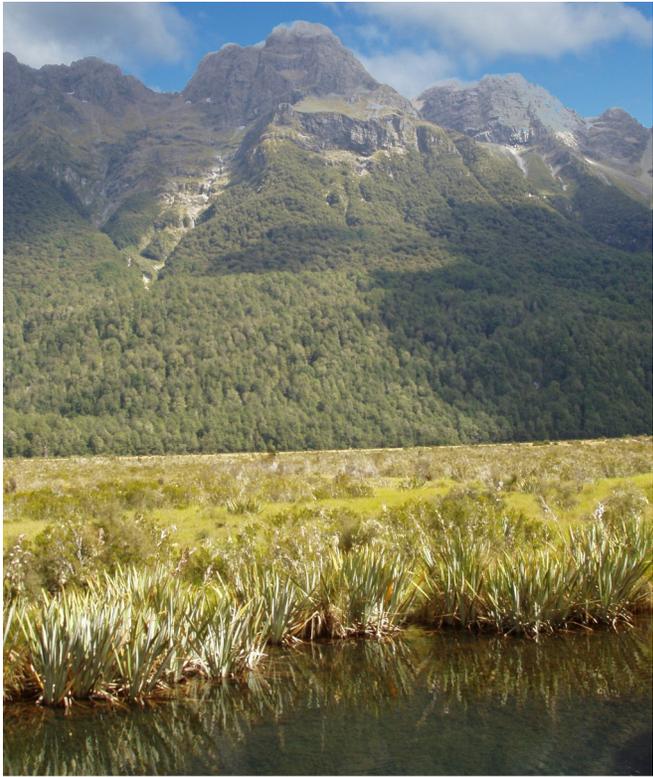
At 5:00pm we start our 2hr coach ride to Te Anau. The Village Inn, our hotel, is laid out like a village square. Store fronts above, doors to the rooms below. A nice large room; two queen beds. We make dinner reservations on arrival.

Venison.



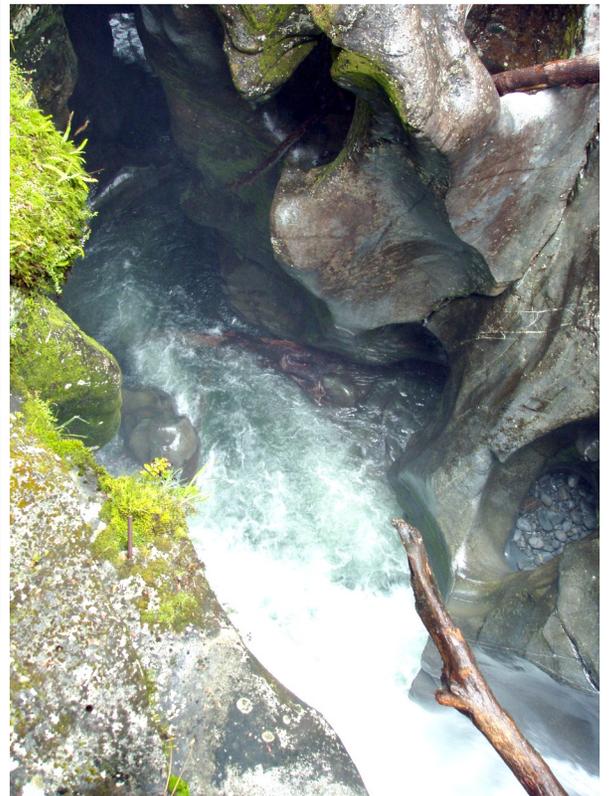


Mirror Lake.



Knobb Flats.





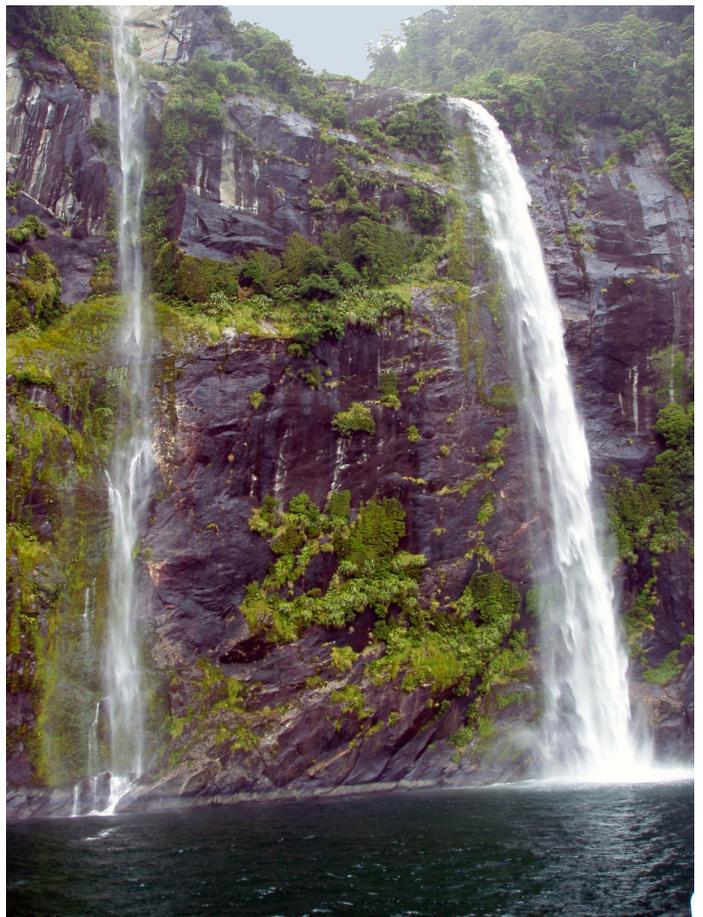
The Chasm.



Route in Milford Sound.



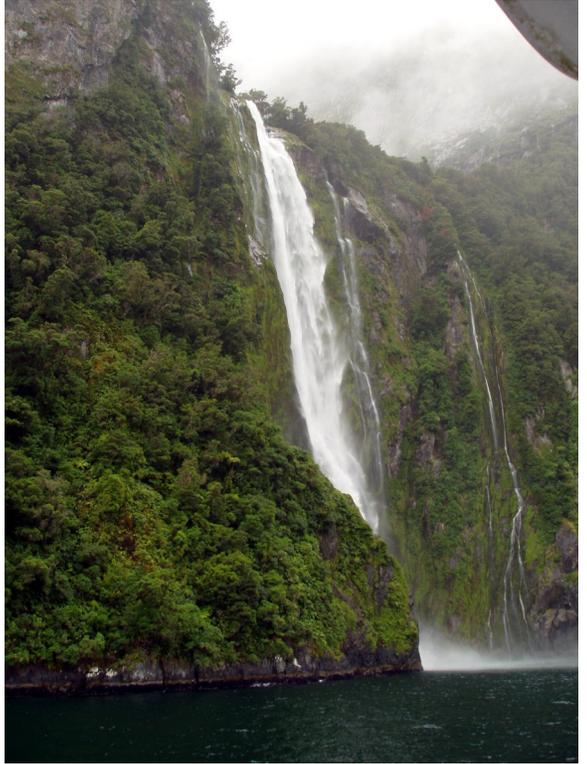
Mitre Peak.

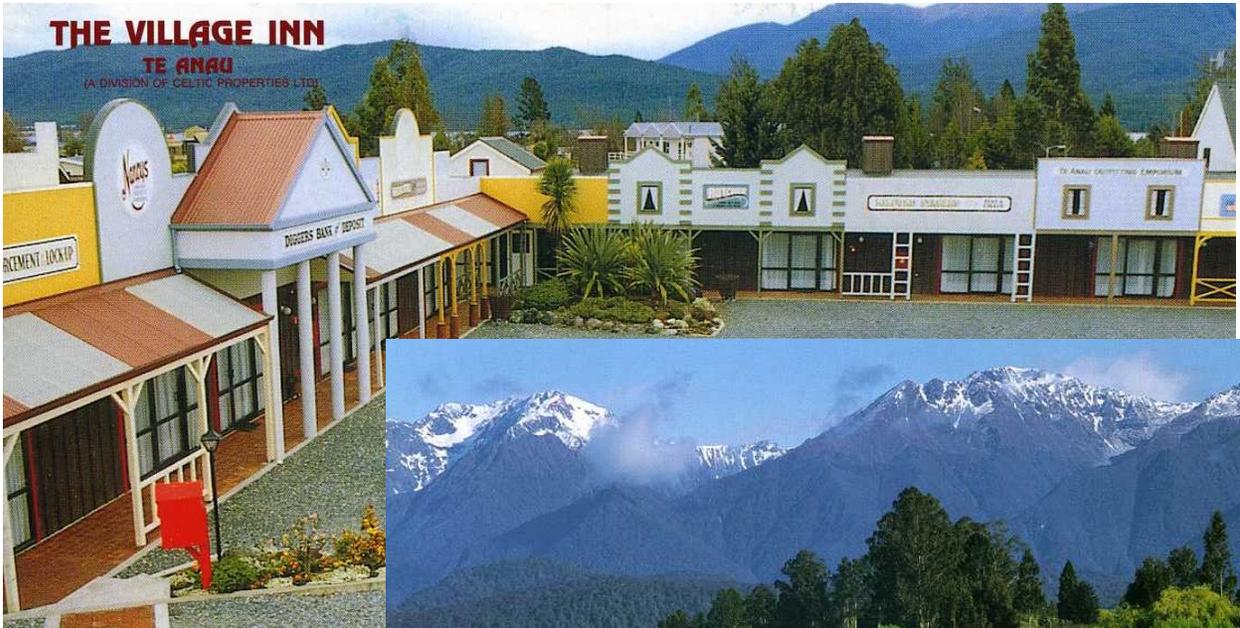






Fur Seals.





Lake Te Anau.



## Feb 27<sup>th</sup> ~ Dunedin.

It is not daylight until 7:00am. This morning we rotate to the first seat behind our driver; a superb view. I have just been attacked by a falling travel bag. No concussion!

We cross a flat grassy plain with the Murray Hills to our right. The sun is chased away by threatening clouds. We pull into Gore for morning break. It is about 50°F.

"Do you fancy a scone?"

"Yes, but without raisins."

"Do you need butter?"

We both reach into a basket and make a selection. The numbered flag sitting on our tray ensures we get our chocolate and cappuccino.

"Jan, is your scone sweet?"

"No, it has minced ham and baked onion." Oh well.....

We drive through *Clinton* and *Gore* on the *Presidential Highway*.

Brian tells us there is a shortage off women in Gore, "So ladies don't pass up the scruffy guy on the side walk, he might be a cattle millionaire."

There is a kink in the road in Milltown. The central road was supposed to be straight, but two road works foremen did not get along, and working from opposite ends, failed to agree on the route.

We learn about Dunedin, population 120k. The summer temperatures are 10-25°C and winter 4-10oC. It has <800mm rain and little snow, only 1-2 days. The Mayor is Chinese. It is a University town and has beautiful beaches

At the Dunedin City Hotel we are a lucky one. Our room is ready, so we freshen up and cross the street to the Croque O Dile Café. An unconventional menu challenges us. I have 'Monsieu' which as everyone knows is ham & cheese on french bread.

A short ride to the train station modeled after Scottish architecture. We board for the Taieri Gorge. Nice new rolling stock, but I'm playing footsie under the table with Margaret.

We share the first few miles with the National Rail System then after a couple of tunnels join the Taieri Gorge railroad. Construction commenced in 1879 and opened in 1891. The railway played a roll in the development of the Central Otago region, providing transport for livestock.

The route follows the river gorge passing through tunnels and crossing the river on viaducts. We return the same route.



Gore, on the road to Dunedin.

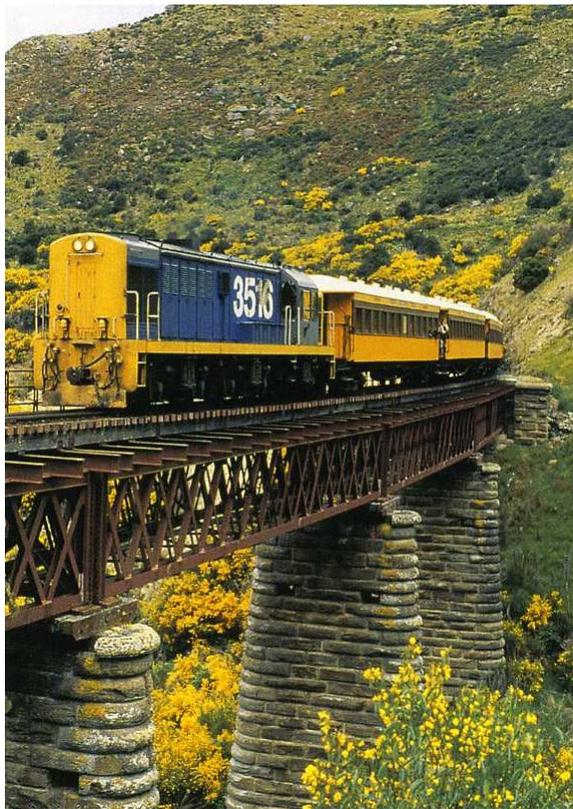




Taieri Gorge Railway.



Railway Station in Dunedin.





Taieri Gorge.



Baldwin Street, Dunedin, the steepest in the world at 1 in 2.86.



Main Building, University Campus.



Town Hall, Dunedin, on the Octagon.



The Octagon.

## **Feb 28<sup>th</sup> ~ Twizle.**

The minimum wage is \$11NZ=\$7.70US

We drive around Dunedin looking at the architecture and pause at Baldwin Street, which claims to be the steepest in the world with a gradient of 1:3.

Glenys leads us on a walking tour of the University of Otago campus, then on to the Octagon, a 'square' in the city center, surrounded by a smart shopping district.

Our coach skirts a bay. The tide is out. We climb out of Dunedin.

"Look, there is a farmer on a three wheel bike," his dog is running sheep. This is for real.

We have left the cloud and cold behind and now enjoy a blue sky.

At Shag Point we follow the coast. The sea is sparkling. A gentle surf washes the beach.

Our lunch stop overlooks the Moeraki Boulders. According to Maori tradition, the boulders are gourds and calabashes, washed from the great voyaging canoe Araiteuru when it was wrecked upon landfall in New Zealand some 1000 years ago. The boulders formed over a period of 4 million years in softer mudstone which has eroded away leaving the harder boulders behind.

All the street names in Hampton are English.

The first shipment of frozen lamb came from this area in the late 1800's. To our right, on a hill, is a stone monument to frozen lamb!

A single scoop of ice cream in Oamaru would be a double elsewhere.

The eastern end of the Waitaki Valley is fertile. It usually has plentiful rain, however, it has been dry here for nine weeks and the locals are getting worried. Again it seems strange to see meadow land irrigated just to grow grass.

We did not have enough time to visit the Cadbury's chocolate factory in Dunedin, so Glenys passes a huge bar around the coach for us to sample.

Passing through Kurow, Brian announces it is the home of the Captain of the All Blacks, Ritchie McCaw. "Out of respect, a minutes silence please."

The transition from pastoral to mountain scenery is where the rainfall drops to only 10in/yr.

80% of NZ electricity comes from three hydro stations in this region of the Waitaki River in Mackenzie country. The mountains are weathered and more rounded.

Glaciers crush rock into sub-microscopic particles which wash into the lake and remain in suspension. This gives the lake its bright blue green color.

Ottemeta was built to house workers on the hydro scheme, and was supposed to be demolished when it was complete, but people stayed on. This is a desolate place in winter.

Oamaru has a most extreme climate and is a center for gliding championships.

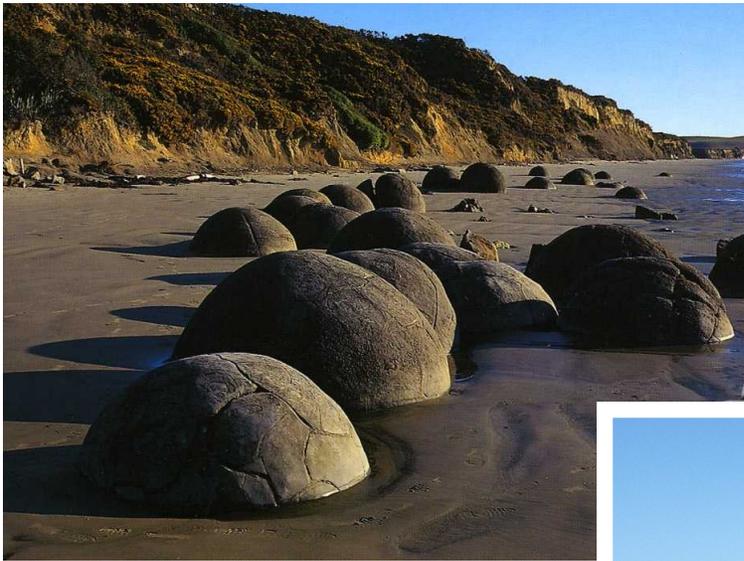
Irrigation has dramatically changed farming in this arid region. We pass the mother of all sprinklers, almost 1km long.

The lodge in Twizel is very nice, but there is only one small store, a couple of houses and another small hotel. Twizel is just a bump in the road.

Brian tells us someone 'up there' must be smiling on us. It is rare for Mt. Cook to be so clearly visible.

Tomorrow we drive back to Christchurch and some of our group leave the tour, so this is our last night together. Glenys and Brian treat us to a drink before dinner.

I get instructions on how to find and use the Southern Cross to locate the South Pole from the barman. We walk away from the hotel. The sky is clear. "Jan, we came all this way to see five stars in square."



The Boulders on Moeraki Beach.



Lake Pukaki.



Outside our hotel in Twizle, the Mackenzie Country Inn, looms Mount Cook.





Aoraki/Mount Cook, the tallest mountain in New Zealand, 12,349 ft.



Southern Alps.

## **Mar 1<sup>st</sup> ~ Christchurch.**

The day started misty, but by the time we started rolling at 8:30am, the mountains were back in sight, and the sun is again shining brightly. We skirt the Ben Ohau range. Almost 30 mi away, snow covered Mt. Cook looms in front of us, the highest mountain in NZ.

Lake Pukaki, used for hydro storage, is way down exposing mud flats. The hills are devoid of vegetation. Mt. Aoraki looms adjacent to Mt. Cook. Cloud rolls down its side, caused by a Catabatic wind. The airflow is chilled as it crosses ice, becoming more dense, and therefore falls.

Winding back to the main road, we stop to let a farmer with six dogs herd lamb chops across the road.

Across Lake Pukaki, we have our last good view of Mt. Cook. Mt. John has the best observatory in the Southern Hemisphere. There is no air or light pollution.

By Lake Tekapo is the Church of the Good Shepherd. Perhaps the smallest and most photographed in NZ. Close by, a statue of a Border Collie. Without working dogs, it would be impossible to farm McKenzie Country. A good working dog is worth \$3-4,000.

Rabbits infest McKenzie Country. Someone introduced RCV virus, which is illegal. The rabbit population was decimated. Locals probably know who did it. The authorities don't, and consider it an act of Bio terrorism. However the rabbit population has recovered and poison carrots laced with 1080 are dropped from crop dusters. The damage is so bad that some areas will never be farmed again. Rabbits are not much of a problem elsewhere. Weasels and stoats are also a problem.

A helicopter is spraying a field.

Richard Pierce flew a monoplane six months before the Wright Brothers, but never received credit for his accomplishment because he crashed.

Lunch in Geraldine, just another bump in the road.

The forecast for Christchurch is 71°F.

Our journey from Auckland to Christchurch has been 5,326km plus the excursion to Cape Reinga. In total about 3,400 miles.

Traveling through South Canterbury, we are back into rich farmland and cross the Rakaia River, the longest two lane bridge in NZ.

The S. Island was created by glaciation, the N. Island by volcanic action.

Christchurch is known as the 'Garden City' and won world recognition. In the suburbs the homes are tiny, as are the lots I would guess ten to an acre.

The remaining group have dinner in the Copthorne.

We ask for an extension on our room, since we will not be taken to the airport until 6:45pm, but are denied. We explain that we will be on a tour all day.

"You can use the toilet in the foyer or go to a public gym down the street."

"Yuck!"

We pay for a second night even though we will not be staying.

Lake Tekapo.





Church of the Good Shepherd on Lake Tekapo.



Memorial to all Sheep Dogs.



## **Mar 2<sup>nd</sup> ~ Last day in Christchurch.**

Today there are 23 of us remaining on a four part tour. A small bus takes us to each site where we are dropped by an impatient driver.

Our first stop is at the Antarctic Research Exhibition. We have about an hour and thirty five minutes to tour, so we hurry through. Seeing the blue penguins fed was interesting, though they don't live in the Antarctic. Experiencing an arctic blizzard is an event I can pass up. Quite a bit to read and several films, but we are finished in an hour. The entrance fee \$30NZ, is pretty steep, but included in our package.

Our next stop at Willow Bank, a wildlife park, also \$30, was much more interesting and better value. We follow winding paths through woodland, taking bridges over streams. Most of the birds and animals are waiting for a hand out. A deer nudges one of our group and a goat is standing on a tree trunk, his head over the fence, waiting to be petted. A Sebastopol goose is having a bad hair day and blocks our path.

The gondola ride to the top of Mt. Cavendish, 1500ft above sea level, had spectacular views of the Canterbury Plains and Littleton Harbour, but was too rushed, and our bus driver left without six of us. I suspect this is a common event. The staff at the desk directed us to take bus #28 back into town. It arrived within a few minutes.

We thought we were going to miss out on the last excursion, a tram ride round Christchurch, but our fellow travelers left word, and the lady ticket agent was expecting us.

The tram follows an oval route through the University campus with its nice old buildings, crosses the Avon, into the modern city center. A sharp turn takes us through a shopping plaza with side walk cafés, back to Cathedral Square.

It is with difficulty that we find a bank which can exchange our NZ dollars for South Pacific Francs, needed in Tahiti.

Back at the hotel we are glad to have a place to clean up and change. At \$170NZ that is the most expensive 4hr we have ever had in a hotel.

Our driver, waiting for us in the lobby, takes us into the airport by the back door, and kindly walks us to a special counter for those, like us, who have connecting international flights. What a zoo, forty sets of bags in front of us and no movement. This is going to take hours; but it doesn't. Like a locomotive, the line starts rolling and we are through in 35min, time enough for dinner.

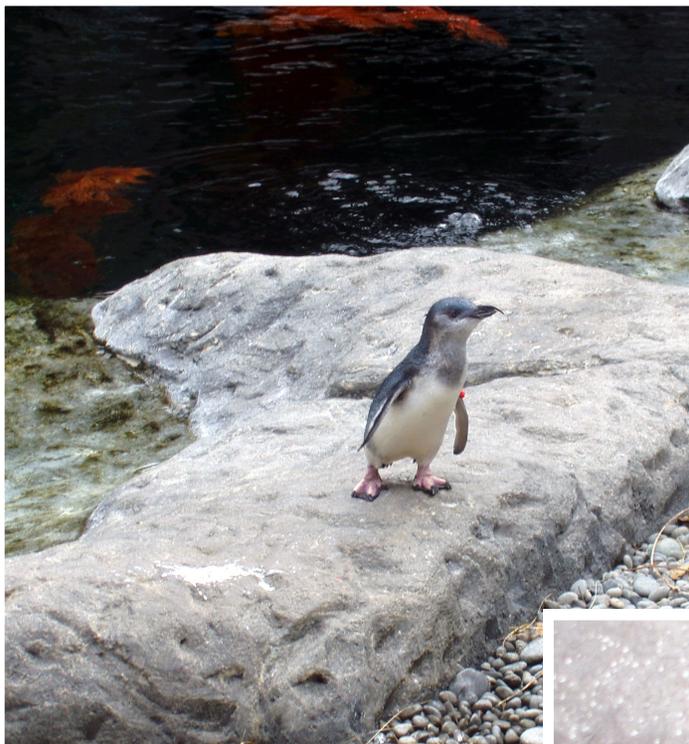
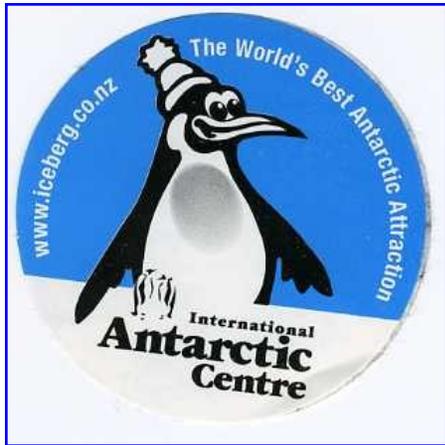
Security is a breeze. What a pleasure! Although the 737 is a little battle scarred, the flight is smooth and arrives 10min early in Auckland. A nice bonus since we think we have under an hour to change terminals and make our connection. The inter-terminal bus must have been waiting for us. It is a long way between terminals, just as well we did not walk. The machines dispensing departure tax stickers require a credit card with PIN#, which we don't have, so we trek upstairs to the Bank of NZ and take the opportunity to buy more SPF. Exit protocol goes OK. We need not have hurried, the flight is leaving an hour later than we thought.

Jan's burger was an incredible creation topped with the usual, plus beetroot, fried egg and rashers of bacon. The ultimate!

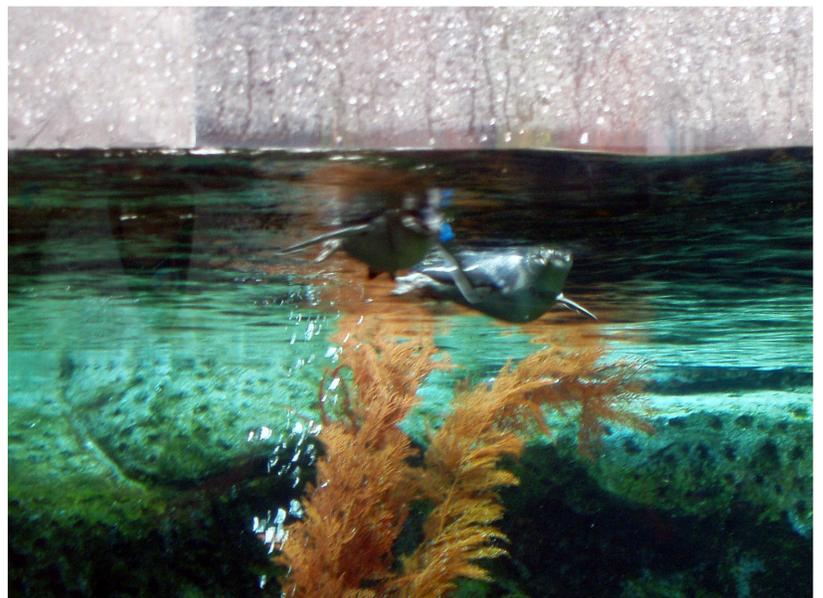
Thinking there would be no food served until morning, I buy a sandwich to take on board. Not necessary, we had a full meal and wine. Admittedly it was a lamb 'something', but it was palatable.

From here on it will be hot. In retrospect I should have had better information about the weather in New Zealand. We were told the South Island would be cold, and I assumed the time spent in an alpine zone would require warm sweaters. This was not the case, we should not have brought thick sweaters.

We gain a day and arrive in Tahiti before we left...



Blue Penguins.



Some of Jan's friends at Willowbank.



Bad hair day!





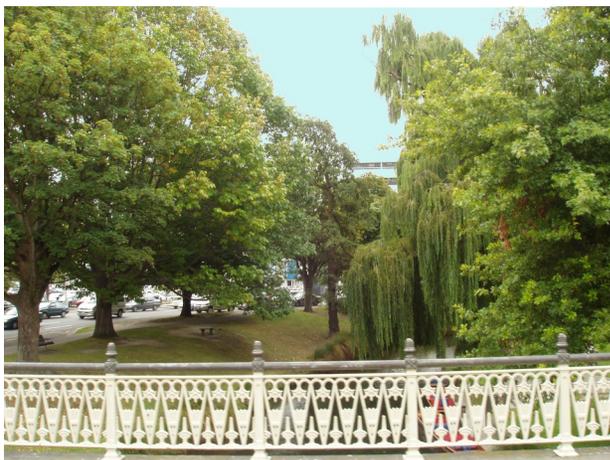
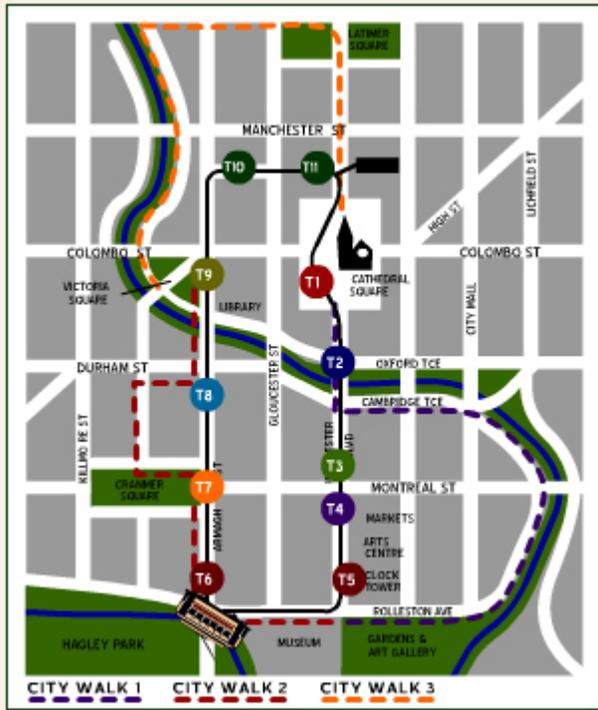
Christchurch Gondola to the top of Mt. Cavendish (1500ft), with views of Canterbury Plains, Lyttelton Harbour and the Pacific Ocean.



Views from Mt. Cavendish.



Christchurch City Tram.



Architecture we saw from the Tram.

## **Bathrooms.**

It never ceases to amaze me how many variations there are when it comes to bathroom faucet, shower and drain.

In Auckland the shower over the tub had a half sheet of glass adjacent to the shower head, instead of a curtain, which was fine, except that the water control, located mid-wall, squirted a jet of water past the glass onto the floor.

The toilet flush is usually two buttons on top of the tank at chest level, but could be one button located anywhere on a wall.

Drain stoppers are mostly the old rubber plug and chain. Franz Joseph had a modern round bowl. A metal stopper pushed down to latch, and down again to drain.

The strangest sink was at the classy Hermitage near Mt Cook. A flat granite ledge tilted back towards the wall. Water flowed from a faucet, onto the ledge and into a trough at the back. No bowl or edges, just gravity.

In Moorea, the shower was a tiled spot with a floor drain next to the tub, without a curtain.

The water pressure in Bora Bora was dangerously high, as was the temperature and to confuse, the faucet on the sink turned counter clockwise.