

# NOODLING AROUND THE TOP OF **NEW ZEALAND'S NORTH ISLAND**

## **TA Tranche 1**

Or some of it

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## **An enforced break**

The price for being  
stubborn      Page 22

## **Back on Track**

Not quite as long as  
we had expected...  
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**When a  
'planned-for'  
long walk...**

doesn't quite go to  
'plan'.

## TA on TA

TA on TA (Trish and Andrew on the Te Araroa) was going to be the moniker for our entire time in New Zealand; a full two months on the one track.. But it didn't turn out that way. We did start Te Araroa but we came off at mileage point 87 kilometres, had a break, got back on at mileage point 222 (ish) kilometres and came back off again at mileage point 330 (ish) kilometres. After this we did tiny bits and pieces of the Trail in the course of our exploring, but apart from completing the Queen Charlotte Track on the South Island there was no concerted effort to continue the TA as a single entity. The reasons for this are varied and most will not be discussed in the two documents that make up the diary notes of our 2022-2023 New Zealand trip. However there was one other major factor influencing our departure from the Trail, and that was the weather. We are used to being mucked around by the weather but not like this. We got off



trail just before ex Cyclone Hale delivered Auckland's greatest daily recorded amount of rainfall. The disaster that unfolded with flooding, displacement and road closures continued and the poor North Island was hit within weeks with a second ex

Cyclone. Ex cyclone Gabrielle did more damage than ex cyclone Hale had. By the time we left New Zealand the poor North Island had not dried out, and won't be back to 'normal' for a very long time. Fortunately, we had decided to move south, so missed the carnage. But getting there proved an exercise in lateral thinking, and the circumstances unfortunately meant we could not take the cheapest option.

Before our departure from the North Island we had seen a bit, walked a lot, learnt a lot, noted how poor some of the country actually is, and been dismayed at the lack of 'bush' in the Northland region. The transit through Auckland was brief and our visit to Wellington only a filler before we could catch a ferry across the Cook Strait.

## Preparing for flight: QLD, Australia

27th December 2022. After dropping our interstate visitors back at the Gold Coast Airport after our Christmas break at O'Reillys (Lamington National Park), we wound our way through traffic back to Coomera, taking the coast road up to Stewart Road at Tugan, before resuming the M1 above the 'car park' (it was no longer a car park, and whilst busy with all the Christmas traffic, was flowing smoothly).

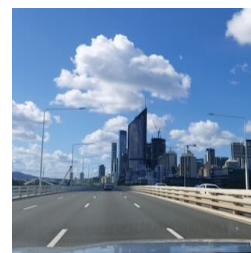
Back at boat we dropped off extra/spare fresh food to friends on another boat, dropped the curtains to block out the light (and hopefully some heat) in the living area, put the dehumidifier on, and flushed the engines.

After grabbing our pre packed gear, and hoping in the rush we hadn't forgotten anything, we finally headed for the airport!

\* \* \* \* \*

We got to the Ibis Hotel at Brisbane Airport with relative ease- via Brisbane City to avoid the toll road. However, after dropping our luggage off, I hit the

'directions' on the mobile phone to the wrong Thrifty, and instead of heading a few hundred meters away to drop the car off, we started back towards the city! The mistake was corrected after a bit of a panic, and fortunately a way found off the road where we could turn around. Back at hotel we watched some cricket and news on television before heading down to a packed restaurant for dinner. About an hour later I got my order for Caesar Salad with chicken...except I had to send it back for the chicken *and* the poached egg! Given my history at this establishment, my luck has clearly not changed.



A couple of YouTube videos rounded out the evening. We were in bed before 2130

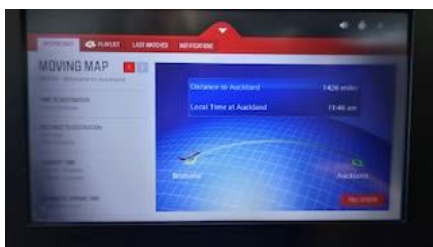
## New Zealand:North Island Across 'The Ditch'

28th December 2022. The alarm was on for 0500. Initially the idea had been go downstairs for a light breakfast at 0530, before heading with our gear to the foyer for a 0645 pickup by the bus to the International Terminal. But we took longer than expected to get ready - there was no light breakfast before the bus.

Checking in to our flight was easy. Loading the bags in to the system took a while however, even with help...something to do with the unusual shape of the outer cover with our packs inside meant the automatic machine wasn't happy. I just hoped they would make it to the right plane (thoughts of lost luggage from Whitehorse to Calgary in Canada earlier in the year came flooding back).

The Qantas Lounge was full and we were relegated to two bar seats - but breakfast, when we finally got it, was good.

On the plane we had seats 6E and 6F, behind the bulkhead. There was no gluten free meal listed for me, which is a bit strange, because that was the only food change I can actually state on my frequent flyer account...although usually



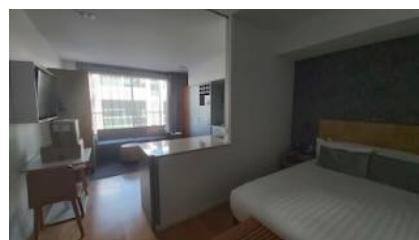
when they do provide a gluten free meal, it has other allergens in it and I can't eat it anyway.. I didn't bother with entertainment during the flight, instead just reading the book (a Clive Cusler et al) I had picked up at the airport.

Overall it was a pretty smooth flight. We took a little while though to get through biosecurity at Auckland...and the delay was because an officer was checking our tent. On the plus side the officer said it was very clean, on the minus the delay may have been the reason we missed our shuttle. The

biosecurity officer did give us 'high fives' for starting TA.

The flight landed at 1520. We finally got outside to the shuttle pick-up area at 1620. Apparently we had just missed one shuttle, according to another passenger waiting - but it had been full. Two other shuttles turned up but they were booked for private/single use. When a third shuttle turned up it wasn't going to the city. Andrew was a bit grumpy by this time... we had a booking but had been waiting over 1.25 hours; the company providing this service states they will meet the planes! We eventually got shuffled into a taxi - at the shuttle company's expense, of course.

Checking in to the Adina in Auckland was, fortunately, very smooth. As it was now after 1800 we decided to go out for dinner (although at this time we didn't



realise how close the Countdown supermarket (Woolworths) was). Dinner was at an Indian restaurant just around the corner, where I found to my dismay there was only one meal available to me: it was the plainest butter chicken that I have ever eaten. We popped into Countdown on the way back for breakfast provisions.

Back in the hotel we sorted out pre ordered dehydrated food (which had been waiting for us), and then watched some Youtube TA hikers. We went to bed at 2230.

## Posting mail!

29th December 2022. I was up at 0630...which is 0330 in QLD! Breakfast was scrambled eggs, salmon and feta cheese at 0830. We left the apartment just after 0900.

Our first aim was a shop at Countdown for a heap of Mushashi bars for our lunches...we have found these give us the most calories for the weight,



although they are a little heavy. Admittedly New Zealand probably has different muesli bar options to Australia but we didn't have time to try them out. From the supermarket we headed straight to a post office to send some of our food on..sort of. We knew there was a NZ Post outlet near Britomart. We asked a cleaner, he directed us one way. We asked a bus driver and he directed us another. We asked a bank employee, and he directed us to the first target. So, we finally ended up at a convenience store. The NZ Post office booth inside the store was closed; staff on holiday until 7th January! Brilliant for them - not useful for us. Frustrated, we headed back to base. Back in the room we rang to see if the Auckland City NZ Post depot was open. Thankfully it was. It was a longer walk to get there, and up a hill.... three weeks of no exercise hadn't done me any favours..

Just after ringing to check on Post Office hours I rang the tour company I had booked to get us to Cape Reinga to the start of the TA. The lass on the other end of the phone asked what size our packs

were....I was a bit confused at this question. But the reason was pertinent; we had to babysit them on our laps. This was a bit of a shock, only because I hadn't thought about it. Given that, I told the lass on the phone we would think about it, and then rang and left a message and email with the Kaitia i-Site (Info Centre) to see if they could provide any other contacts for our trip to the trail head on the 4th January.

And then we headed out again, walking back to the city to send our food parcel to Kerikeri, and on the way back checking out the bus depot we would be leaving from on the 2nd January.

Back at base lunch was cold meat, cheese and lettuce sandwiches. It was whilst I was packing my pack that I realised we had no gas....so we walked back into the city for the third time in the day.

Had we forgotten anything else? We didn't think so, but when we got back to base we realised that now we had the gas, we had no lighter! I ended up picking up a lighter when I went to pick up dinner from the supermarket. (lamb shanks, and frozen vegies).

Having had no response from the Info Centre after a couple of hours, I rang again. They gave me two names for a possible shuttle to Cape Reinga. One fellow didn't answer his phone and I left a message- he didn't ring back. The other one was too busy. After working out the base of our packs would fit on our laps (just) I emailed the tour company back and left them a message...I would contact them tomorrow and confirm, and pay for, our spot on the bus

We finished the evening watching Youtube videos and went to bed at 2330.

## The power of the mind!

30th December 2022. I had originally woken up at 0700 this morning, which would be reasonable except it is still 0400 in QLD and I am not sure if the body had acclimatised to the local time zone...so I decided to try to get a bit more sleep. After a short snooze I got up at 0800 and headed for the shower.

The shower was gorgeous and just as I was thinking I should put some outer clothes on just in case housekeeping turn up, there was a knock on the door. Housekeeping had turned up at 0900 yesterday. It was now 0820. Andrew was in no position to answer the door so the easiest thing I could grab that would give me any decency was the TA dress. It is actually a t-shirt but because I had ordered a large, and I don't think there are male and female styles yet, it becomes a short dress on me. It is merino wool and made in NZ, thickish so too warm to leave on, and I changed out of it immediately after I had given housekeeping our rubbish, and grabbed from them some fresh towels, and, of course, more hot chocolate.

My plan this morning had been to follow an AllTrails walk to the end of the Westhaven Marina and back again. Whomever had recorded it had started the walk a few hundred meters from where we are staying, so I had a good idea how far we were going to be walking. As it was we changed the route, very slightly, by going into a couple of shops, and managed, according to the semi accurate phone in my pocket, about 10km. The AllTrails walk was 7.6km.

We had had a latish breakfast (around 1000); so the plan was to go for the walk, and maybe enjoy an ice-cream, before getting back to base for sandwiches for lunch as per yesterday. As the time moved on however, I changed that idea to maybe lunch at one of the restaurants on the waterfront. However the only restaurant that had allowed for gluten free didn't impress Andrew, and after me baulking at a restaurant that was going to charge \$45 for a pizza, we ended up with Plan A. An ice-cream sundae and indulgent smoothie later we headed back to base - after picking up groceries for lunch at Countdown.

It was a beautiful and busy day. There were a lot of people out on the streets and an enormous line for the ferries (a good hundred meters or more long). One of the cruise ships was still in harbour and I expect that had a lot to do with inflated numbers at the ferry terminal. There were others however, and quite a few people had large



suitcases waiting in line for the start of their holiday, heading to one of the many islands in the Hauraki Gulf. There was even one dachshund-patiently waiting in line with its master.

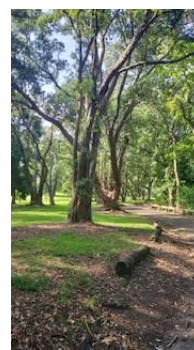
In the afternoon we enjoyed two English politics Youtube videos, and two for Te Araroa, before I headed back to Countdown to get supplies for dinner. We ended up with a roast chook and coleslaw, with gluten free salted caramel pudding and custard for desert. Evening television viewing included the movie 'Apollo 13' and cricket: NZ vs Pakistan. Spare time in the day was filled in with reading, diary notes and yoga.

### *Starting the TA! ..'sort of'.*

31st December 2022. When I had decided we would do a walk around The Domain today, I knew that part of the trail was along a short section of the TA. However road and track works in the park diverted us off the marked AllTrails route, and this meant that the part of the TA Trail we actually walked along was very short! Of course we had to get to The Domain before we started so by the time we got to The

Domain, walked around it...ish...and back again we had done over 6.5 km. Even with the diversions we didn't manage to stick to the AllTrails path precisely, the blue dot not perfectly positioned (perhaps I needed to calibrate it?) had us missing a couple of tracks and the track past Parnell Station turned into a swamp so we backtracked to keep our feet dry.

We were initially disappointed at first to see that the predominant birds here are blackbirds, Indian miners (Common myna), and sparrows, until we discovered the memorial monument celebrating the centenary of the Acclimatisation Society which was based at the area around The Domain. We also saw two (pacific black?) ducks mucking around a pond but the spot of the day was a tui!





We had started the day with breakfast in The Yard (the hotel's restaurant) using two of the three food vouchers we had been given when we checked in.



Back at base we finished off the lunch rations, saw half of the movie 'Gladiator', packed our extra kit up to see if we can carry both our packs and the other stuff to the bus stop on the 2nd Jan, and thought about starting Te Araroa on the 4th in the rain! Current predictions are for 25.6mm!

Dinner was left over coleslaw and chicken. I went to bed around 2130. Andrew went to bed around 2230 after doing the dishes.



## A new year: 2023

1st January 2023. I opened my eyes at 0705. It was grey outside. My first thought was....'tomorrow at this time we would be in town waiting for a bus.'

I had woken at one minute past midnight and heard the fireworks...but none were visible from our balcony. At that time it also sounded like someone was playing a concert outside somewhere. I was too tired to appreciate it.

We had gone for another walk this morning - around town and into Albert Park and through the historic streets of Auckland. There had been no particular destination in mind, I just wanted us to keep walking.

The predicted rain for Kaitia for the 4th Jan has gone up to 33.3mm! And 18.6mm for the 5th!

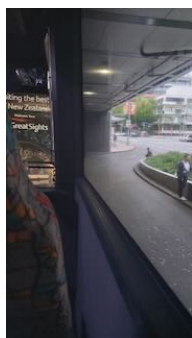
## Heading North

2nd January 2023.. We had an early start. The alarm had been on for 0445. I had woken at 0438 and tried for the extra seven minutes snooze but didn't manage it. The alarm was probably earlier than we needed it but better to be safe than sorry. Andrew managed a quick shower, I had had one last night, and after a breakfast of cereal and yoghurt, and rinsing the dishes, we loaded up our gear and hobbled out of the hotel at 0553.

The backpacks weren't an issue, even with the food in them, it was the awkwardness of the other luggage that was a fiddle, each of us having the pack outer filled with a mixture of clothes, sundries and food for the next tranche. It took several stops to get to the bus stop, but not as long as I had expected and what took 30 minutes when we were unimpeded a few days ago, only took around 35 minutes today. This meant we were at the bus terminal under Sky City at 0620...the office didn't even open until 0700.

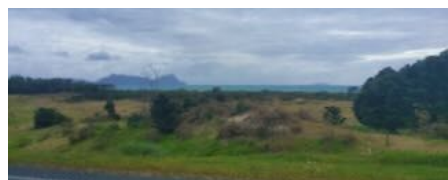


The bus, when we left on time at 0730 (after the toilet warning at 0722 (the bus driver quoting 'go now or forever hold your peace' - at least until Whangarei)) was almost full - a mixture of tourists, locals and hikers; some extras picked up and dropped off on the way.



The sky was grey with panus clouds indicating potential rain. At 0749 it started to drizzle. Andrew wasn't particularly worried about all this - he mostly slept until Warkworth.

The rain was on and off during the entire trip-to Kerikeri, both outside *and inside* the bus. There was a leak through one of the air conditioning outlets and several seats on the port side of the



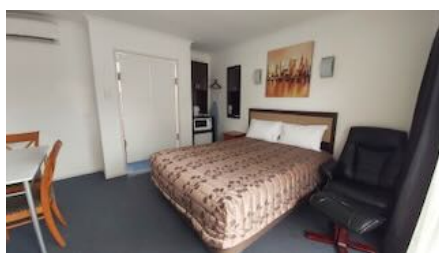
vehicle had water dripping down on them from above. Fortunately there were enough spare places at the right time to shuffle passengers to dry seats. The bus trip went mostly to plan. We had to change busses at Kerikeri but the wait wasn't too long, although the departure to Kaitaia was delayed a few minutes because we had to retrieve the drivers' grandson from the playground. Roadworks at the Keo Bridge didn't slow us down, but had we been on the other side of the bridge coming the other way we would have had a different story - the queue to get across the bridge from that side went for kilometres!

The bus to Kerikeri had wifi and two drivers, one of which didn't have his seat belt on until the kids got on at Whangarei (and he was coughing all the way!) The bus to Kaitaia had no wifi, more leg room, less seats and less people, the majority of whom were TA walkers, but none staying at the same hotel as us. The Germans we chatted to were probably older than me but younger than Andrew, and also here for two months. A pair of women were probably mid twenties and had similar sized packs to us. There was one minimalist...probably late twenties, and one mid twenties chap with no pack (maybe a non-walker). The other passenger, an obvious non-walker, was a local from north of Kaitaia on the main road, who got dropped off at her front driveway. Why not, I thought. We have done it before (convincing a bus driver to drop us off where the Bibbulmun Track in WA crosses the road between Walpole and Denmark). In the end we got delivered to our hotel door as well. When we got dropped off at the i-Site at Kaitaia the establishment looked closed. Andrew mentioned to the bus driver that we had hoped the i-Site would be open so we could find out where our hotel was. 'Where are you staying?' the driver asked. The Orana, we said. Get in, she said, I will drop you off. In the end she dropped us all off within good proximity of our accommodation; us immediately outside our hotel, others got off at the same spot for the hotel across the road, and

others to be dropped off at the backpackers (the older couple, ironically)

\* \* \* \* \*

Trust us to land in a country town on a public holiday! What this meant was that the restaurant associated with the hotel was closed, and practically nothing in town was open for dinner, not even the tavern! Yes there was the odd 'greasy joe's' of various ilks...Turkish, Chinese etc but nothing vaguely enticing. Several Thai and



Indian cafes were clearly not trading today either. So, after walking all the way up the main street and back again to check out the shops, we headed out of the main shopping area of town, north in the opposite direction, to the PakNSave.

For dinner we bought two frozen meals and we grabbed cereal and yoghurt for breakfast for the next two mornings. As shops should be open tomorrow we should be able to have our lunch and dinner out.

We settled into our small room for the afternoon. An unexpected visit occurred when the occupant from next door walked in, and the siren from the fire station nearby had our attention, until we worked out it was a drill (it sounded like an air raid siren).

Checking the weather forecast: the predicted rain for Wednesday 4th January was now at 41.4mm.

Birds: black backed gulls, red billed gulls, Paradise Shell-ducks, lapwings, pukeko, kingfisher, sparrows, several un-defined birds of prey, magpie, Common myna, starling, white-faced heron, shearwaters?, varied oystercatchers

## Zero Day!

3rd January 2023. Can you have a zero day if you haven't actually started the trail?

There was a faint murmur of a television and talking through the hotel walls when I woke at 0700 but I suppose I cant complain; I was watching Zorro until 2345 last night. My back was stiff and sore this morning. Yes, I could blame the red wine that gives me a grumpy back these days, but I really had only had about two sips of that (to toast the start of our TA trek) so that was unlikely the major cause of my discomfort. The combination of the awkward carrying of goods yesterday morning, sitting on a bus for the best part of seven hours, and propping up on a bed to watch the tv last night, probably had much more to do with my my back pain than anything else.

Black out curtains are necessary here so you can't be seen behind the not quite fit for purpose sheers, but as the doors to the bathroom are swing doors and also block out most of the light from the bathroom window, turning the light switch on is necessary to see much before you get dressed. But at 0710 this was a bit awkward: Andrew was still asleep and I didn't want to wake him.

Rain predictions for tomorrow for Kaitaia varied throughout the day and at one point it was back to 47.6mm! windy.com's graphics had more. Windy's graphics for the top near the Cape also had close to 50mm but the majority in the first half of the day, the 1300 tranche when we were to start walking, was only showing a predicted 4.6mm, and after that rainfall totals dropped off during daylight hours.

I should have pinched a mint tea bag from our previous accommodation... this morning my morning cuppa was relegated to some clingy decaf coffee that I had commandeered from the breakfast room yesterday.

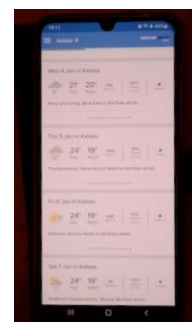


When Andrew got up we had breakfast on the front porch, watching other travellers get picked up for their Cape Reinga trek. After waiting until hotel staff had completed servicing the room we wandered into town, arriving outside the pharmacy that houses NZ Post at 0930. We had to wait until 1000 before the doors opened and we were confronted with the info that the NZ Outlet was closed, a barrier across the postal corner of the premises. Andrew managed to sweet talk a pharmacy lass into selling us a Size 5 box...we may not be able to send our gear to Kerikeri today but at least we could gather it neatly for storage with our food at the hotel. We briefly said hello to the two the German hikers we had seen yesterday and given the coming weather, they had decided to head to Ahipara today and do the 90 Mile Beach in reverse.

The rest of the morning was spent thus: a wander up to the i-Site to register our 90 Mile Beach walk, then back along main street to see who was open for dinner, before a brief spell in our room before walking in the opposite direction to the McDonald's near the PakNSave for lunch. (of course I had no chips and no bun). A brief visit into the PakNSave got me a notepad before we walked back in the wind. The rain on the local radar hadn't hit the top of the north island yet, but there was an enormous amount of it heading our way!

We spent the afternoon watching cricket, and tennis, and Youtube before dinner at Beachcombers. I was seriously thinking about a steak but went with the gem-fish instead. It is ages since I have had fresh fish. We didn't have desert.

After dinner we headed back to the cricket. Because I was recording my diary notes as a draft text, the phone whinged that the text was too long to do any more grammar checks. The evening was spent packing up.





## TA on TA: Tranche 1

### *Cape Reinga to Twilight Camp - officially 12 km*

4th January 2023. Day 1

I don't know exactly what time we got to camp but it would have been close to 1700 - if not just slightly after. There were two campers already here, D&J. D is an international visitor but J is a local (kiwi). In fact we had been following J's footsteps the entire way today, after his sister, whom we met at Cape Reinga, said to look out for him.

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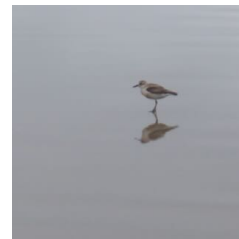
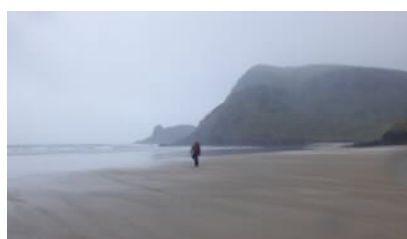
The rain radar, when the alarm went off this morning, indicated the majority of the rain (around 70mm, I think) had gone through overnight and was south of us - but it was still drizzling and I couldn't see the hill behind KFC across the road because of the water in the air. We finalised our packing and dropped our boxes to the hotel reception for storage.



We were picked up by the tour company at 0900. Because of the strong easterlies battering the coast, some stops on the normal day tour itinerary were not visited - which meant we got to the Cape earlier than we had expected. It was still raining outside so we had lunch on the bus before heading out into the weather; the fog so thick we initially took the wrong turn, heading back into the south end of the car park rather than toward the Lighthouse! Not a good start and I hoped it wasn't an omen.

The TA exits the track to the left before you get to the lighthouse but like all TAers there is a must-do photo by the sign. We couldn't actually see the lighthouse from the track exit. In fact, we couldn't see the lighthouse until we got to around 30 meters from it!

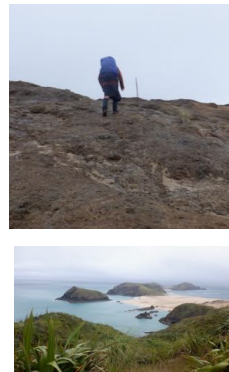
With loaded packs, and in this weather, we obviously looked like we had something serious in mind, and there were several well wishes on the track to the lighthouse -including a couple who had walked the TA - giving us words of encouragement.



The going was slow, and wet, and to be frank not very inspiring in the conditions - I made sure I looked back as often as I remembered but it wasn't a day for dilly-dallying about and admiring the scenery. It was a day to get to camp, get the tent up and hunker out of the rain.

There was a picnic shelter at camp and we at first 'foofed' around here sorting ourselves out, eating dinner and discussing where we were going to put up our tent. I had one spot in mind, Andrew had another and, In the end we put the tent in a third position, between two existing sleeping areas (one a tent, one a tarp).

As we were having dinner a bike turned up - around 2000. Really! Q aimed to do the entire 90 Mile Beach and then head back to Kaitaia before tomorrow evening! He was young. And clearly fitter and more



adventurous than we will ever be. I headed off to bed to write-up the day's notes. Andrew stayed up a bit longer. As Andrew was coming to bed another hiker turned up.

Bird list: pied shag, variable oystercatcher, yellow hammerheads, double banded plover, black fronted terns, white faced herons., shearwater (?), gannets and welcome swallows nesting at the camp shelter. We also saw ghost crabs



### *Twilight Camp to Maunganui Bluff - officially 26 km*

5th January 2023 - Day 2

J had already left and according to D, the guy who came in late last night was leaving as we were stirring at 0630. Q left camp at 0800. D stayed on - planning a morning sidewalk to Cape Scott (which incidentally, given his fitness and our slowness, had him passing us later in the morning).

We left camp at 0825. Today we started the 90 Mile Beach, but not immediately. The first few kilometres today were over the headland, and the ups were a doozy. And then there was the





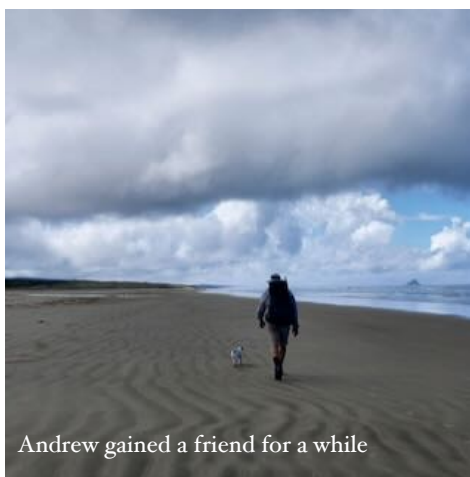
down to the beach! After forgetting yesterday's number of stairs, I didn't even bother counting today's; it would have been in the hundreds!. Then just when you think you have finished with the hard stuff, the track tests you - throwing in a bit of up again before the last descent. I think it was close to the steepest, and longest, stair descent I've ever done.

We passed four fishermen going up this last set of stairs - so they could access the small bay around the point. Given what they were carrying (fishing rods and large esky) and the terrain -

they are beyond keen! But I suppose, one must go where the fish are...

We took a break where the fishermen had left their 4wds, at the end of the beach; but we were being eaten by the mosquitos so we didn't stop long. It started raining just before we descended onto the beach proper to start the long walk.

Not long into the beach walk Andrew did this morning's community service by returning a winch handle to its owner - or rather to the vehicle. The car and trailer were by the base of the dunes, the owner was clearly on his boat but out of sight of the shore - the winch handle was spotted at risk of being washed out to sea. We weren't the only ones on the beach today; cars roared by at what seemed like incredible speeds - but it was probably only 80 km per hour.



Andrew gained a friend for a while





A fly-by of white-faced herons had me smiling.

Just before we stopped for lunch we chatted with a fisherman. He had a rather large snapper at the back of his ute. He didn't want it - He was on Day 1 of a long weekend and intended to spend the weekend 'fishing.' If he

took this fish he would have enough food and wouldn't need to continue. He clearly didn't know how to cope with 'nothing to do'. He offered us the fish. Clearly we didn't take it (it was half the size of our packs!) - I hope he found someone to take it - the poor thing was beyond being put back into the water.

On the break after lunch a passing bike stopped to say hello. He was doing a section of the bike version of the TA. The condition of my feet last night, after getting soaked, was horrendous but had looked better this morning. None the less they had started to deteriorate and I was starting to get blisters. At this point it was manageable but not expected. The cyclist explained he had had three friends (all experienced hikers) pull out of the walk at Hukatere because of blisters. We are used to beach walking - I knew it was a shoe problem. We had 9.5 kilometres to go before tonight's camp.

Constant pressure on the bottom of my feet increased the pressure on my toes (there is no room to put absorbent liners in the shoes I am wearing) and my feet were getting sorer. A ute stopped (with an Aussie driving) and offered us a lift - Andrew said 'no' even after he had stated to me only a few minutes before that there was 'no shame in catching a hitch' - there was now 6.5 km to go until camp. The mob who had given us a lift to the top raced past us with 3 kilometres to go. At 2.5 km to go a young English couple on bikes stopped for a chat. They were heading in the same direction, they were just doing it a lot faster than we were. Expecting to see them at the upcoming campsite, we waved farewell as they rode ahead. Across the back of his bike was a sign 'Just married.' Hang on, we've seen these two before!

A lot of New Zealand's roads are windy and narrow - even some of the major roads. Our bus trip from Auckland to Kerikeri (and then to Kaitaia) had been, at times, a slow and windy affair. In the drizzle we had noted two cyclists as the bus passed by them, slowly making their way uphill - with the same 'Just Married' sign on the back of one of them!

Our last stop today was about 1 kilometre from camp. By this time my feet were not very happy at all, particularly the toes on my left foot. You can imagine that emotionally I was not happy either; metaphorically kicking myself for being stubborn. Andrew made more running repairs to the blister pads and patches on my feet.

We finally got to camp around 1820 - fortunately because there is little to indicate where the camp is from the beach. We were exhausted. My feet were extremely painful and all both of us wanted to do was stop and lay down. But we needed to get the tent up and the overnight gear set up inside it.

Not long after this Laura & Lee (the lovely English cyclists) came over with a packet of chocolate chip cookies to share! Andrew was delighted. Given I don't eat wheat all I could do was imagine just how good they would taste. It was a lovely gesture and we spent the next hour or so chatting about plans

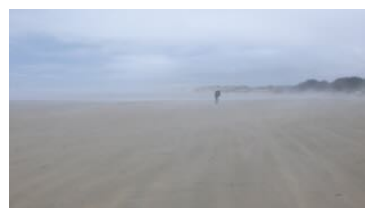
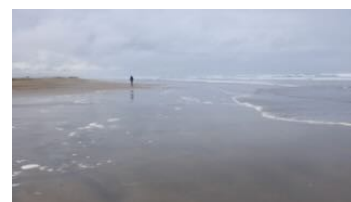


and experiences. This lovely couple also brought over their portable camp chairs - for us - they figured we would appreciate a break from sitting on the ground. This meant we could give both our backs and our feet a rest. What lovely considerate souls! I ended up breaking the party up just before it got dark, for whilst I was really enjoying their company, my body was failing. We needed rest. My feet needed rest, and technically we needed dinner. We did however, only have the energy for cheese and salami sticks (washed down with a couple of nurofen) when we retreated inside the tent. We were in bed around 2100.

### *Maungaunui Head to Hukatere - officially 30km*

6th January 2023 - Day 3. The only problem with the first section of the TA is that there are only a couple of campgrounds that you are encouraged to stay at. Walkers are asked not to stay in the dunes along the beach (although quite a few people do). This means that on Day 2 and Day 3 you are walking very long distances (for us) on a terrain you are not yet used to (or in my case in boots that were possibly not quite fit for purpose - we were okay with the terrain - beach walking is our usual exercise).

It had started to rain at 2300 last night, and overnight was windier than we had expected. Not expecting the wind we hadn't put the guy lines on the tent and I woke to find a tag had pulled out of a peg - which meant my almost dry socks and shoes were now very wet socks and shoes-again- not a good start to the day. And not a good start for my feet.



Last night L&L had invited us over for a coffee this morning but they weren't yet awake when we left camp around 0830. They later passed us about the 15 kilometre mark.

Just after L&L passed us, two other cyclists passed us - from Aus/Melb. Having L&L indicate they were on their way, we hailed the cyclists for a chat. It was another hard day for me, and longer than yesterday, and although my feet had rested overnight and felt a little better in the morning, by the time we got to camp, after 1800, they were again agonisingly sore. The more I walked on them, the grumpier I got; if I had not been so stubborn in trying to avoid Keen boots I wouldn't have this problem! There are a lot of complaints about 90 Mile Beach and blisters but we have done over 120 km beach walking with practically none - I knew it wasn't the terrain - it was the boots. And I knew if I had been wearing the right ones this part of the track would be a dawdle.

There were other campers at



Hukatere when we arrived, most of them walkers, either billeted in the small individual rooms or cabins. A couple in the shared kitchen made us a cuppa - which was a gorgeous gesture. We had booked a campsite, but when I spoke to the owner I said I would be happy with a room if she had one. The cabins and their-like were all taken but a room at the lodge was available. It was of course the most expensive option.

And also the most unsocial. The Lodge is built in the ilk of a 1920's (ish) shearers quarters; bedrooms all open onto a long verandah and the living/kitchen/bathroom area is shared at the end. There were no others staying at the lodge overnight but the hostess expected a couple for the double room tomorrow. The room with two single beds was also made up and she asked if we would be happy with this; I suspect to save her work redoing the double bed the next day. Single beds were fine with us but I suspect they hadn't been slept in for a while. The room smelt musty and I got a couple of little nips on the legs overnight. Andrew got quite a few more nips (in







correspondence later the hostess explained how the beds are made up which should eliminate the presence of bites - but nonetheless, with the must I suggested she needed to air the room out a little more often). And she clearly had bed bugs. The downside of taking the lodge was that we

seemed a bit snobby and didn't socialise. The upside was we got the place to ourselves and spread the tent, and anything else wet (which was quite a few items), out on the verandah to dry overnight.

My sore feet did me no favours. I had taken my jewellery off and left it on the kitchen bench when I headed for a shower. But I still had my spectacles on when I got to the shared bathroom facilities. There was no shelf in the shower cubicle so I carefully put the glasses on the ground out of the way. And promptly forgot about them. I only remembered when I had got dressed and discovered I had a broken pair of spectacles. I had stepped on them and hadn't felt a thing - my feet were that sore!

The hostess has a singing dog but the horses around the property are apparently wild, and although there are signs to close the gate I suspect there are gaps in the fence. We watched the horses for a time through the kitchen window.

The kitchen is large and has everything you could possibly need. The lounge area is also large and comfortable, and after a refreshing shower it was nice to sit on sheepskin covered couches and watch the light fade across the Tasman Sea.

### *Huketere to Ngape (Waipapakauri) - officially 17 km*

7th January 2023. Day 4. It was a latish start, but we only had 17 km to go today - which was very short compared with the past two days. We were on the beach at 1010.

The alarm had been on for 0700. My feet felt much better but not perfect, and more tape was needed to minimise discomfort. None the less, had there been an option for a lift today I would



have taken it, and there were a couple of possibilities that had we asked for a lift I am sure the locals would have obliged. But we didn't. We did chat to people with 4wds on the beach but grabbing a lift didn't seem appropriate to just ingratiate into the conversation.



We got to the Ngapae Holiday Park around 1600, hobbling past the cafe when Andrew asked if I wanted to stop for an ice-cream. No, I thought, we would settle in and have a nice shower and then perhaps walk back. By the time we had sorted ourselves out the cafe had closed - but there was no nice shower. There was no hot water! I had suffered through a cold shower and put on my clean underclothes only to discover a fastener on my bikini top had broken. That I fixed up, temporarily at least, with dental floss.

Andrew had tried to get the water warm for his shower but to no avail. I called in the gentleman who had logged us in (who had nearly given our room to another set of hikers). He tried for 15 minutes to get the water going - it became tepid. Andrew tried for a shower again. The water went cold. The man came back and got the water a bit warm again but by this time Andrew had given up. And I hate to think how much water was wasted! The staff member checked the gas bottle around the back of the unit but came back none the wiser. I can't call in the plumber now, he said. We will make it up to you tomorrow, he said (at this point we had considered staying a second night). Why can't you call the plumber, I asked. Is it because it is a Saturday? No, he replied. It is because he is drunk!

Great. We had our dinner in the communal kitchen but we didn't want to stay here any longer than we had to (apparently the disabled public shower has good hot water and good pressure). And Andrew had made the call to stop walking for a while to give my feet a rest (which reluctantly, was the right one). We now had to find a way to get back to Kaitia.

We explained our predicament to the gentleman who had logged us in and he suggested we get to know the locals. One of them was bound to be going into town tomorrow. We didn't quite know how to do this, and so after dinner spent 1.5 hours or so trying to get hold of someone who might be able to give us a lift.

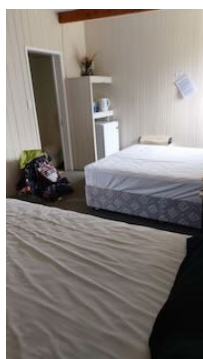
Wifi was touchy, even sitting next to the building it was coming from, so we reneged to our own Aussie roaming. It still didn't help much. I got an email out to someone who could potentially help but a text wouldn't go.

After an hour and a half we were getting disillusioned. We didn't know what to do - until V turned up. He's part of the management team of this park and was here to check that all was okay. He offered to take us to Kaitia tonight - but we had no accommodation booked so he said he would drive us across tomorrow morning.

I sent an email across to the request I had made an hour earlier stating we no longer needed the lift tomorrow (I hadn't heard back from him anyway). We booked a room in Kaitaia and I cancelled my very first Facebook post (which I had desperately reverted to but because this was my first post to the Trail Angels Group it had to be checked and moderated so was sitting in limbo. I doubt anyone was going to check for moderation on a Saturday night anyway).

We got back to the room having forgotten to book the bus to Kerikeri, or another night in Kaitaia, and additional nights needed in Kerikeri before we could get back to schedule. Priorities from now on were to get my feet well, get new shoes, and get new glasses!

We spent the rest of the evening sitting in the un-bed-clothed room listening to music and admiring the bed bug bites we had picked up last night.



As for today's walk - to be perfectly honest I didn't take too much notice of the

surrounds, because although my feet started with minimal pain after a good rest - they weren't completely pain free, and I was more concerned about getting to camp than I was about stopping to admire the scenery.



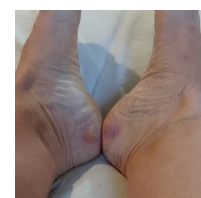
Birds: unknown raptors, black backed gull (various ages), Caspian tern, white fronted tern, pied stilts, varied oystercatcher, house sparrow, Common myna, chooks, unidentified little brown birds in the dunes

### *Waipapkauri to Kaitaia*

7th January 2023. The alarm went off as planned at 0700. I hadn't had a good night. Surprisingly the bed was reasonably comfortable but my left foot has issues above the normal with an almost itching-come-stinging near the tape band at the left little toe. We hadn't wanted to risk bed bugs on our quilts so had both opted for our silk inner lining so I hope I was protected from nibbles. But I didn't want to remove the tape on my feet without asking Andrew, and besides if it got stuck on my foot I might need his help with the knife.

I did remove the tape when he was awake but I had expected to have to soak one section of white tape under the non-hot water to help ease it off the top of a blister (where it had slipped). (See my Tassie Trail diary write up to see what happens when you rip off hard tape without soaking).

The left big toe is still bigger than its counterpart, the heel blisters are still large and puffy, and all my toes are in various states of tenderness.



The room has a kettle and coffee but no tea (body wash was in the tea slots) but it meant that we could boil the kettle and rehydrate breakfast. There are no seats in the room so we sat on the bed (there is one plastic chair outside but we weren't dressed yet) Andrew had his first dehydrated yoghurt. I had Apple Rice.



## An enforced break

When we originally started looking at walking TA in 2020 the idea was that we would stop at Kerikeri, take a break, hire a car and explore a bit of the surrounding area for a few days.

When I got around to replanning the trip for this year, I didn't include the car touring break,, conscious of the season and the potential difficulty in getting accommodation, so I booked our accommodation to secure it over the summer season. But stubbornness has come back to bite me and in trying to avoid a boot brand because I really didn't want to support a brand who would not admit their faults, I have injured myself and we find ourselves with an extended break after all.

## Kaitaia

8th Jan 2023. In one sense I can hold my head up reasonably high...I made it further than three local experienced hikers who, according to the local cyclist a couple of days ago, gave up at Hukatere Lodge with blisters. But, my love-hate affair with Keens and my

stubbornness to avoid them, has probably been the cause of the current frustrations. And walking fifty plus km on deteriorating feet was not necessarily the smartest move; I am old enough to know better.

However, Andrew had more sense than me, and unlike last time I tried to carry on with a painful injury (shin splints- see Tasmanian Trail write-up) there would be no taxi I could call to pick me up: a 2wd not recommended for beach driving although the surface was good and quite a few 2wd's joined the usual 4wds along the sandy road. And from what I can gather most locals probably would have given me a lift if we had asked.

We were picked up from our room at the Ngapae Holiday Park this morning at 0900 by a gorgeous couple (A&V - who I guess, given our conversation, are local tribal/community leaders/elders), and dropped off at our hotel at Kaitaia at around 0930. We were prepared to just drop bags off at Reception given the early hour, but we got a room early (for an extra fee) and after a cat cuddle in the driveway (what a great feeling that was), hobbled upstairs (well Andrew walked...I hobbled), to a much bigger room than we had expected.

We sat on the two single beds in front of the TV and spent the rest of the morning looking for accommodation in Kerikeri, relaxing, listening to Youtube, and watching the cricket on television.

It wasn't exactly the cheapest option but I had put out a request last night to the accommodation provider we had booked for the nights of the 16th, 17th, and 18th January in Kerikeri to see if they had any room for the now earlier required dates as well. As it was there were a couple of days she could help with, which left us with the nights of the 11th and 12th to find a room. We ended up at a hotel room in the Kerikeri Holiday Park for the 11th and 12th. I had initially approached this establishment as an option for our original

Kerikeri scheduled accommodation, but where we had booked (Wharepuke Subtropical Accommodation) was a bit fancier, and a bit away from the hustle and bustle of town. Wharepuke also initially suggested that if had we not planned all that way in advance and if we couldn't find accommodation, we could camp in their paddock. That's what I call service. That's why they got the gig.

For lunch Andrew couldn't resist the aroma of KFC next door and the deal he got eventually fed us for dinner as well. It wasn't the healthiest (and I pulled the skin off) but it was a change to mushashi bars that we had had on track.

At 1210 an air raid siren went off....well that's what it sounded like. It was the same noise we had heard last time we were in Kaitaia, and given it was Sunday we guess it was just another drill.

In the afternoon we booked a car for our Kerikeri break, rinsed the silk sleeping bag liners, as well as some hiking clothes, including, our very sorry-looking socks.

We also watched YouTube and television into the evening. I kept off my feet as much as I could.

I had put the washed clothes outside on the balcony draped over a couple of chairs to dry - they finished drying in front of a fan overnight.

\* \* \* \* \*



9th Jan 2023. It was a grey morning.

Where I could see blue sky, it was edged with slightly pink clouds. According to Weather Watch we are expecting 3.6ish mm rain today.

I woke and got up at 0615. With a stiff back! There are no seats in the 'tv room'...just single beds. I suppose that isn't entirely true, the seats belong to the table (in the 'kitchen' but it is all one room) and I had been using them on the balcony yesterday to drape wet clothes over.

The room we will transfer into tonight isn't any better., and much much smaller..although there is one Eams-like chair.

There wasn't much to do this morning except wait for breakfast...which we had ordered for 0830...and pack up. The tops of my feet (two toes) are looking worse than the blisters feel on the bottom. The place to look for new shoes is apparently Hunting and Fishing...which is up near PakNSave and I don't want to walk that far today if I can help it. Tomorrow is going to be wet and I don't want to walk that far in the rain, but according to their global website they only have a couple of models of hiking shoes anyway and they aren't the ones I would prefer. I have sent an email to them to see if some of what they stock has both a wide and high foot (the Lowes don't, I have a pair of those at home) and expect to get a response this morning. But I think the best thing to do would be just to ring Macpac in Auckland and see if they can get a pair of Keens up to me quickly....otherwise we may have to drive to Auckland to pick them up...according to Google that is likely to be a six hour plus round trip.



Andrew got up around 0730. Breakfast was delivered on time although the stuff on the trays

was mixed up. After a YouTube catchup of TA walkers, and packing up, we walked, (I hobbled) over to our hotel across the road.

Of course this was 1000. Rooms aren't traditionally ready until 1400 so we stored our luggage and Andrew walked, and I limped, up the road. Over a cuppa at a cafe I called Macpac Auckland. The lass didn't know if they had the pair I wanted in stock and asked me to call back in 15 minutes. I ended up calling back some time later, got the boss who told me the best option was to order on-line. What a painful process that turned out to be! By the time I had reset my password and fiddled with options, I was at one point ordering three pairs! Eventually I managed to order, pay and address the order (for one pair). After this rigmarole we sat down for a drink at the library, discussed options for car touring for the coming week, grabbed lunch at an Asian restaurant, and hobbled back to the hotel. It was now around 1400. I had only walked around 4km. My feet were tired. The iffy toes slightly throbbing.

But the worse pain was the wind burn on my lips, which at one stage Andrew tells me, were bleeding.

I got straight onto the bed and put my feet up. Andrew brought all our gear in.

The afternoon was spent watching tv, YouTube and reading. Dinner was an allocated dehydrated dinner (as, according to our scheduled meal planning, we were still officially on the trail).

\* \* \* \* \*

10th January 2023 We opened the blinds to the room just before 0900. We knew the cleaning staff would be around soon so thought we had better get presentable. We had been awake since around 0630 and had filled the morning in with Youtube mostly. The blister I had accidentally cut yesterday behind the left big toenail last night was still weeping, the lips still hurting, although not as much, and the bottom of my feet still an overall low-thudding tired. I am so looking forward to the nemesis boots turning up so I can put a shock absorbent insert in the bottom of them!

For breakfast we had one of our dehydrated meals although breakfast this morning was originally going to be a town meal. The restaurant here is finally open tonight and I am looking forward to the lamb shank on the menu.

Despite doing nothing I found myself exhausted and had an hour's snooze late morning. Andrew mentioned I was snoring....

Spare time during the day was spent catching up on any issues that had come through via email. One was from Computershare Registry. - who have wiped out my bank account details and are not reading my emails. They are contacting me when I said not to contact me, and I am now wondering if the correspondence (via snail mail) is a scam - fortunately I have not filled anything out.



I went to book a place for dinner in the restaurant at this hotel and the receptionist had already done it. The hotel may not be the smartest, but the staff are wonderfully attentive!

The morning's light drizzle turned into slightly heavier drizzle early afternoon. I had been sitting on the chairs out the front of the room but the heavier rain was enough to send me inside for a lovely warm and powerful shower: such a contrast to our Ngapae experience.

Andrew spent the later morning reading and watching tv.

Dinner at the restaurant was terrific. Not only was the food good, the company was also; we chatted to a couple of retired Brits travelling around New Zealand on a motorbike. Back in the room after dinner we watched a NZ South Island wildlife documentary on the Otago Peninsula. After this we turned to watch the Aus Open tennis and packed our boxes (mostly). We went to bed around 2200.

## To Kerikeri

11th January 2022. The alarm was on for 0700. Andrew stumbled into the shower. I had had one yesterday afternoon, so snoozed for a few more minutes. Breakfast was our spare dehydrated food.

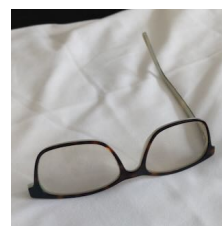
The inside blister on my left foot is almost flat. The inside blister on the right foot still voluminous - although it was getting smaller.

It took us 20 minutes to walk to the Te Ahu centre (where the bus departs from); 0850 to 0910. Threatening rain and blue skies.



The rain stayed off, fortunately, until we got into the bus, providing a light drizzle around 30 minutes after the start of the journey, and then there were patches of solid drizzle from just before 1100.

It rained on and off from then on, and we arrived at Kerikeri at 1200. After a quick toilet break at the bus stop (in the library) we headed for the optometrists. Of course it started to rain at this time and, of course, we got wet..



There happened to be a spectacle frame that was very similar to the mangled and broken frame in my possession, and the sizing almost perfect for an easy swap for my lenses. Almost. A little shaving had to be done but I walked out with new frames sitting nicely on my ears and nose. And \$255 poorer of course!



The hobble to the hotel room wasn't far away, and after patting Jay the ex drug dog labrador. we briefly settled into our room. It had everything we needed; except pots!

The lack of pots was sorted on the way back out to Countdown. As well as a reluctant cat



cuddle with a tame stray.

A Hunting and Fishing store was across the road and whilst my feet felt ok we thought we would have a quick look. On the website Hunting and Fishing only have two brands of shoes. They don't have Merrels listed and they don't have Keens. I was yet to receive a response to my earlier query re high and wide boots, yet here on the shelf was the brand and make of shoe that I wanted! A response could have saved me a lot of stress; instead I am now waiting for a pair of boots that haven't been dispatched yet! What do I do now. We left them on the shelf.

We got back to the room around 1600. My big left toe was throbbing

The sun was out and it was too hot to sit on the back balcony, but the skies soon greyed up and the rain came down in regular solid showers over the evening, which also meant conditions still weren't ideal for sitting on the balcony.

The television was on from 1700.

Dinner was roast chook and packaged salad with a mouse desert.

\* \* \* \* \*

12 January 2023. Andrew's snoring is less than it was but is still there occasionally and it woke me up around 0400. A few tugs of the sheet and I managed to get that to stop but next door had either the radio and/or television going. Not essentially loud, but loud enough to be a distraction. I eventually got back to sleep for a short while, getting up at 0630.

There was mainly blue sky outside and I took breakfast (cereal, blackberries and yoghurt) on the balcony.

At 0755 a pigeon rumbled in the background and the local puss was strolling the driveways.

The bottom of my feet were quite sore. We had only walked 5.73km yesterday (according to the phone) but it had been not only carrying a full pack (kitted up as if we were going to be climbing Raetea) but our box of other stuff as well, each box each quite heavy (Andrew had the bigger and heavier box). He slung his over his shoulder (in the pack luggage cover) and swapped regularly. I had mine slung diagonally taking in a shoulder and my neck, adjusting constantly, sometimes from side to side and then mainly just using the strap for backup and holding the package with both arms, at various angles out in front of me. The result is that I have one particularly sore shoulder this morning. By 0800 I had performed some yoga movements on it and given it a dose of voltaren cream.

*When things seem easy; they invariably aren't!*

We picked up a hire car this morning, thanks to T for giving us a lift to the airport to do so. The first place we drove to was Hunting and Fishing, having made the decision to pick a pair of the Keens there even though a pair was on order from down south.....except that we had obviously had our mind elsewhere when we saw them yesterday because whilst Hunting and Fishing had the right model shoe - they had it in men's sizes only. The staff tried to extoll the fact I would fit into a smaller men's size. I couldn't

afford the wear-in period; I knew if I got the right size female boot they would fit like a glove and there would be no wear-in needed. I walked out of the shop disappointed - mainly in myself for not being observant yesterday.

Next we headed north. It was a beautiful day and I wanted to actually see Cape Reinga, although having traversed the main roads as bus passengers the scenery wasn't all new to us. We headed out of town at 1230 for what we knew was going to be a long trip. Our first stop was for a cuppa an Monganui. Apparently the fish and chips are famous here - serving freshly caught local fish from an establishment on the water's edge. However, we had our lunch with us so a late morning cuppa was had at this stop only (there were mormons preaching underneath the cafe window).



It was a long trip, but it was a dry trip - we could actually see that the paddocks had cows, sheep, goats and horses in them, rather than focussing on raindrops as we had last time we were here.

When we got to Cape Reinga the car park was full. The Harrisons bus was waiting for its passengers and we had a chat to the driver who had dropped us off a week before.

Our lunch was at 1500 at Tapotupotu Beach and we started to make our way back to Kerikeri not long after this. We did take one detour - which gave us a chance to see more coastal vistas.

Dinner was leftovers. The evening entertainment was watching Miss Congeniality II.

Birds: swamp harriers were everywhere, wild (escaped?) turkeys, Common myna, pukekos, ducks, magpie, sparrow, red footed gull, pipits?



This is what our original photo should have looked like!





13 January 2023. Friday! The weather outside when we woke up this morning was not conducive to sitting on the balcony for breakfast. It was grey. It was raining. And it was getting progressively worse. The verandah over the balcony is not wide enough to keep the tables and chairs dry.

We were moving out this morning and by the time we left, rain was coming down in sheets. It would have been great to just drive from one accommodation place to the next but as the next accommodation place had been booked out last night I knew the room wouldn't be ready at a few minutes past 1000. So we headed for a drive to Paihia instead, the rain seeming to lighten off with each passing minute and we got a lovely moody view over the bay from the back of the Waitangi Golf Club. We checked out the location of our Paihia hotel for when we walk there but didn't stick around too long: the carpark was only for 60 minutes so a relaxing lunch wasn't on the cards here, and my Archers sandals were rubbing the top of my left foot. Great, just one other injury I have to get over before mid next week!

We ended up at the cafe at the Opuia marina for an early lunch. I had a 'Pacific Island inspired' french toast (rum bananas, oranges and gluten free toast) which was very sweet and was probably the reason I flaked out in the afternoon. Andrew had a disappointing fish and chips...but he didn't say anything so no repatriations could be made.

The chandlery was across the car park from the cafe and we stuck our noses in for a look-see. Andrew got a waterproof case for his phone. The large waterproof case on sale wasn't big enough for my phone, even after taking the 10 minutes or so to try to slide it in. I asked the staff if Brascos was the NZ equivalent of Whitworths. Nope they said, it is the NZ equivalent of RTM. Apparently RTM have recently bought the Brascos franchise.

We made our way back to Kerikeri via a sports shoe store where I bought some Assics. I had 'uhmmed' and 'ahhed' about bringing the ones I use for city walking at home across The Ditch. I didn't and I should have. Of course these weren't bought from an outlet and cost twice as much as the last pair.

By this time the rain had eased off, it was close to normal checkin time and we turned up at our base for the next six nights. We get a driveway to ourselves and a jungle pathway.

Settling in Andrew watched youtube for a few hours. I read a bit and then had a snooze. We headed out to get shopping after 1700. Just as we were getting back



in the car in the Countdown carpark it started to drizzle. Just as we got back in our cabin the rain came down a bit harder, albeit for a brief period.

In the cabin I wondered if the morning would bring birdlife to the garden around us. Not long after this a silvereye flitted through. Other small birds were heard in the garden plus, possibly, a pigeon, but these were not seen.

I had been getting progressively nervous about my boot order. I tried to ring customer service today many times but they were not answering. It is five days since my order. It is less than a week before we are due to head out again. If we have to drive to Auckland to pick up a pair of boots it is a 600km round trip! I had stated that if I hadn't heard from Macpac by 1600 then I would ring the closest outlet to us, see if they had my size and put a pair on hold. Before I got around to this an email came through. My boots have been packed...but not picked up.....I am still contemplating ringing a store tomorrow morning.

Breakfast had been salmon and fetta scrambled eggs with avocado. Lunch was out. Dinner was mince and vegies.

Birds. It had been a dull day. On our drive we had seen variable oystercatchers, red legged gulls, lapwings, pukekos, pipit?, magpie and Common mynas, a house sparrow, a small flock of whiteface heron, and unidentified ducks

### *Tane Mahuta*

14th January 2023. The first thing I did this morning was ring Macpac. I rang the next closest store to where we were; after having had no response from the closest store I was getting desperate. Yes, they did have the boots I wanted, Yes, they did have the size I wanted. And yes they would put a pair aside for me until Tuesday, on the chance that the post didn't come through and that we would have to drive a six hour round trip to get them.

That issue put aside we went for a drive. I got Andrew to head across to Tane Mahuta. Yes, this is a tourist thing, and no, despite advertising it is not the biggest Kauri around but it is one of those 'touro' things you tick off. I had already visited Tane Mahuta - thirty years ago - and given the tree is over a thousand years old, I was not expecting to see any change.



We took a couple of detours before we got there however. The first was at a little town named Rawene on the Hokianga Harbour. I had, as usual found the track in AllTrails, a very short wetland walk I thought might be interesting. When we got there I was a bit shocked to see it so neglected. There really isn't a car park for this walk, and some plastic mesh that had been placed on some of the boardwalk, I assume, to stop a slipping hazard in a gathering area, was bent back and had become a tripping hazard in itself. I had wondered what another tourist meant when he warned me to be careful and not trip up. I gather this little track was started as a community project. I suspect, although it got funding for a few interps boards (which were quite interesting) that not much has been spent on it



since. To get here we had briefly driven past Rawene main street - it looked busy and touristy; too busy for us - we didn't stick around. Instead we continued west to the head of the Hokianga Harbour. It wasn't planned but we followed the directions given by the brown lookout sign to the right of the road up ahead, and we turned up the bitumen to the car park. Here large interps signs told the story of Kupe, the famous navigator who supposedly discovered and/or led migration parties to New Zealand. The boards also told of the European history of this area, the marriage between a European man and a Maori lass, and the years they spent guiding ships into this shallow harbour. There were a few walks from here but the track to the site of the old signal station was only a few hundred meters long. It would also provide a lovely view.

It was a popular spot; the carpark was full and lots of people were walking both to and from the carpark. As we started the slight descent toward the historic sight I caught sight of one individual in particular. He caught sight of me and after a millisecond where both



our minds computed we were actually looking at the

person we thought we were looking at, hugs were suddenly had in greeting. This was D, whom we had met on the first night of the TA. He wasn't supposed to be here, and clearly neither were we. A few minutes chat got us both up to speed.

We parted ways and Andrew and I continued to the point, returned to the car and then headed south toward the famous tree.



Of course it started to rain just as we got to Tane Mahuta. The picnic tables next to the car park were either occupied or out in the open. We didn't want to eat lunch in the rain, we would admire the tree and move on.

Both the entrance and exit to the short walk to Tane Mahuta now has a boot scrubbing and spraying terminal. There was one organised tour group at the site - with a Maori guide - who pronounced 'Kauri' differently to anything I'd heard before. This became a pattern in New Zealand - it depended not only on your nationality but also on your local origin as to how you





pronounced  
p l a c e  
names.

'Tour over  
we drove  
s o u t h ,  
ending up on  
t h e  
Dargaville  
R i v e r  
foreshore for  
lunch.

It was  
Saturday.  
Main Street  
wasn't very  
busy and it  
was full of 'not so affluent'  
people. A young man  
walked past us with close  
to the biggest dog I have  
even seen. When he  
walked back again he  
asked if we would like a  
pat. Yes please, but I was  
afraid to ask because of  
the dog's size. 'Cosco' is  
b e i n g  
socialised. I  
am just  
happy he  
w a s  
socialised  
enough not  
to bite. My  
head would  
fit in his  
mouth!



### *Waitangi Treaty Grounds- tour and hangi*

15th January 2023. Andrew  
was particularly interested in  
visiting the Waitangi Treaty  
Grounds so for today's  
interpretive adventure, we  
booked entry, a tour, and a  
hangi dinner. The plan was to  
arrive early afternoon so prior  
to lunch we chose a short  
walk to a local waterfall.



We hadn't booked a specific time for the Waitangi  
guided tour so we picked up the first one available  
when we finally got there around 1300 - which was  
within about five minutes of our arrival. The spiel is  
probably standard, although each tour guide brings  
their own experience and history to the role. For  
instance, we had a tour guide (although relatively  
young) who had had the privilege of being out on the  
waka taua for ceremonial occasions. He was however  
a little raw, and in Andrew's opinion a bit arrogant, his  
tone occasionally a bit condescending and obtusive  
when asked a question he couldn't answer. We were  
disappointed to note that no flags were on the flagpole  
and we believe the excuse given by the guide was  
rubbish. Part of the tour/entry fee is a performance. I  
have been to one of these before and they are  
entertaining, even if the creation of some of the songs  
and or dances were for less than festive occasions. In  
the time between the tour and dinner we visited two of  
the museum spaces on the grounds. There was a lot  
of information, none of it particularly happy, although  
some of it was about very inspiring individuals.

The Hangi we were  
disappointed to find,  
whilst cooked in the  
ground, was actually in a  
formed concrete pit, not in  
a hole in earth. This may  
have contributed to a very  
smokey meal. Dessert  
wasn't cooked this way  
and I couldn't have any



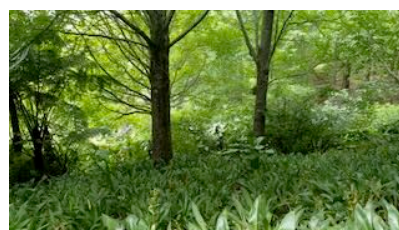
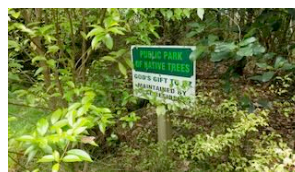


anyway; it was sticky date pudding! I did pinch a bit of custard though.

### *Local Walks.*

16th January 2023. My feet were still recovering so I suggested a local drive to look around and maybe tick off a couple of short walks that I found in AllTrails. The first one was of ruins of an historic house. Except the only thing we think it was retained for was the fact the family of its original owner wanted to remind the locals of the religious owner. Northland is extremely redneck and influenced by Christian cult religions. I suspect there are a few other cults in there as well, as there is also a large Chinese, Thai and Indian population.

The second walk was around a garden that a local had gifted to the community. There was nothing especially special about this block - the walk was shaded and dogs were allowed. It had just been someone's personal arboretum at one point.



### *Day trip to Whangarei*

17th January 2023. Just as we left Kerikeri, shortly after 0800, we received an email from Customer Care at Macpac. Your package is out for delivery from Macpac NZ. Great. We were on our way south. Firstly, to Ngunguru to drop off food for the next hiking tranche, and secondly, if necessary, to Auckland to pick up boots.

What do we do now? Do we assume all is well and wait for the boots to turn up today. Or given NZ Posts reputation do we assume they may not get delivered today and drive all the way to Auckland so we can guarantee that I have something comfortable to walk in when we leave on the 19th?

In the end we dropped off our food and made our way to a cafe in Whangarei to think about it. Andrew came up with a plan; we would hope the boots got delivered





today and if not, we would extend the car hire and drive into Auckland tomorrow if we needed to. Decision made we made a loop of the Hakea Walk around the river front at Whangarei and then headed off to Marsden Point for lunch at the marina. On the way down SH1 we passed a broken down NZ Post truck. What was the bet that my boots were on that truck!



On the way back from lunch the broken down truck was still there. My anxiety should have been decreasing - instead it was increasing. All worked out in the end. The boots were delivered on this day. We could return the car tomorrow.



\* \* \* \* \*

### *Preparing to leave again.*

18th January 2023. We didn't do much today; the main task was to return the car. Whilst we had gotten a lift to pick up the car our circumstances were entirely different now. I for one didn't really have any blisters left - not any that were worrying me on my toes anyway. Secondly, if we couldn't walk the 6.5 kilometres back to our accommodation we had no right to head off back on Trail tomorrow. The walk back into town was not entirely exciting, although we did stop for a late morning cuppa at a cafe along the way,. We had lunch in town, at the bagel place that I had dismissed a few days ago precisely for what it was, although I hadn't seen at the time that they advertised gluten free bagels - as well as gluten free and nitrate free other bakery items.



Wharepuke Subtropical Gardens. Entry by donation.



## Back on Track Kerikeri to Paihia

19th January 2023. One would think that upon getting back into walking it would be sensible to build up the mileage a bit at a time....but we started with 24km (twice as far as our first walk on this Trail)...talk about pushing it!

The alarm was on for 0630, and after a breakfast of cereal, strawberries and yoghurt, we left the cottage at Wharepuka at 0740.

After walking through park and the suburbs we found ourselves at Te Wairo Rd at 0900 and took our first break. We left again at 0910.

We had several breaks during the day. One was opposite where the trail markers lead you into the bush. The Trail notes talk about using GPS to make sure you know where you are. I didn't think I had the mental fortitude to deal with that. We were half way through the day and I was getting tired. Besides, the track on the App actually went up the road! Had I had more energy perhaps we would have gone bush bashing: we probably missed the prettiest part of today's track!

Today's landscape was very much like the Tasmanian Trail: flattened logging coups interspersed with small sections of bush (and a section labelled 'semi-fertile wetlands' whatever that means).

The cairn and plaque representing the opening of the first section of Te Araroa is on the main road near the Mount Bledisloe gate. The trail is supposed to get close to this spot via the Bledisloe Gate 'Pity it was the first section of the trail that we missed! Instead we were on the road and walked right up to the cairn. We had lunch at the 'cairn' (which unfortunately, looked like a pile of skulls from a distance), before heading down hill towards Paihia, detouring briefly to a lookout, then past some insistent and loud cows, the Golf Course, the Waitangi Treaty Grounds (with the flags on the flag poles today), and on to our hotel after a brief rest along the beach. A 'trace' of rain was due at 1400 or 1500 and we felt a couple of drops as we were resting just outside town. That spurred us on to get to our hotel but there was no rain after that.

We got to Paihia at 1500.

23 plus km is a tough test for rested feet and new boots, and a few iffy spots were patched, along with the consumption of medicinal anti-inflammatories and a rubbing of anti-inflammatory cream. We had a couple of hours rest before heading out to get dinner and breakfast supplies...dinner was lamb rosemary sausages and salad, and breakfast supplies were for salmon omelettes.





By the time I got back from shopping my phone had suggested I had walked over 24km

The room was small but practical, although I had to call reception for more soap for the shower. We washed our shirts and hung other slightly smelly clothes out the window to air. Yoga stretches were done out on the deck in a communal seating area.

The bird list for today: Swamp harrier, Californian quail, tui, grey fantails, magpie, sparrows, Common mynas, red-billed gull, Black shag? Pied shag, silvereye

## *Paihia to Russel Outback Eco Lodge*

20th January 2023. The alarm was on for 0630. We left the hotel at 0820, and after shopping for another tube of anti-inflammatory cream, started walking out of town at 0825. High tide was at 0706 but a local suggested we would get wet to calf-height if we walked around the headland at the start of the Paihia to Opua Walkway now...so we followed the road route instead, over the top of the headland. Up and up. And up. We joined the track for the following headland and followed it all the way to Opua, a slight detour over a narrow bridge because of the boardwalk construction works.

After a cold drink and ice-cream we got the vehicle ferry across the waterway to Okiato. I hadn't seen the prices for foot traffic before we got aboard. It was \$2 each and the lass wanted coins. The most I had in coins was \$2.50. I thought I had a \$5 dollar note but not in the wad with my credit cards. After getting off ferry we trudged to top of







the hill..where a plaque proclaimed this land for Okiaro Russell was deemed NZ's first capital. I took my shoes off for a bit of a foot rest before continuing on. Apparently there is nicer walk than the road walk but it takes a few km longer. We stuck to the road.

For lunch we stopped at the fuel stop at the corner of Auks Road and the Russell Whakapara Road, taking a break in the shade, There was one main stop along this windy undulating road before we got to our accommodation at 1500.

Quirky. After a quick wash of the shirts we headed down to deck chairs above



duck pond but I didn't last long...those type of chairs have never really been comfortable for me. I turned into bed instead, snoozing for an hour.

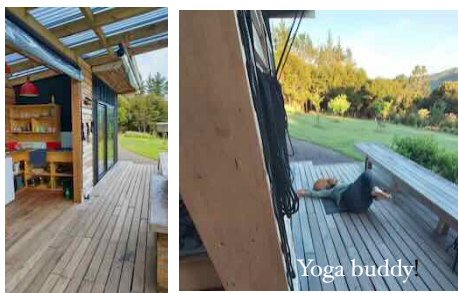
The hostess turned up to say hello around 1700 with Orca and Mitty. Orca went with mum but we gained a cat for the evening.

Mitty left us at 1945.. but was back at 2100 when we had gone to bed. He didn't want to come in the room but I figured he probably had a curfew anyway.

The hostess had indicated we may be able to hear kiwi from our accommodation. I certainly heard some unusual noises overnight that sort of matched the kiwi recorded sounds on Merlin.

Birds: Pukeko, swamp harrier, Indian runner ducks, sparrows, Common mynas, red billed gulls, pied stilts, variable oyster catchers, dead?, kingfisher, parratoids (probably kakariki)? Gannet, yellowhammer, Californian quail, blackbird, rock pigeon





### *Russell Outback to The Farm*

21st January.2023. The alarm was on at 0630. We waddled out of the bedroom around 0700; to be greeted with a cat cuddle.

Breakfast was easy - we had organised dehydrated food. I had a yoga assistant, although I didn't get a farewell mew. I think because I had left him on the mat by himself he was probably a bit miffed. Andrew got a farewell mew around 0800.

We walked away from the accommodation at 0825, the same time as yesterday. Our first break was a little longer than we expected as I finally dealt with the remaining blister



from the 90 Mile Beach tranche.....all the below toe blisters are now splitting and dried loose skin is falling off. The blister on the inside of the right foot however had been getting spongier but over the past couple of days has filled out again. In the last km before the break this had started to hurt.

So a needle was extracted, wiped down, and inserted into the bubble and a clear fluid was encouraged out. When the bubble was significantly smaller a 'Compeed' patch was put over the wound and we continued. What this did was alleviate another niggle on the other side of the foot...except I did end up with a hot spot in the afternoon.

Technically we followed the same road today most of the way, but at mileage mark 267.5 ish of the main trail, the main traffic heads up Kempthorne Road as a continuation of the bitumen, and the extension of the Russell-Whakapara Road turns to the right and becomes gravel into the Ngaiotonga Scenic Reserve. As the directions along this road are to the Kauri Forest and there is a Closed sign under it, we didn't expect much traffic. In fact we only saw two vehicles along this track; one a ute stopping periodically to pick up timber (we assume for firewood), and the second a Bidfoods delivery truck...we were not expecting that!

Lunch was had around 1200. At the 271 km mark (ish) of the official track the 'up' bit of the road peaked, and the rest of the day's walking was





‘downhill,’ with some views given at gaps in the vegetation.

We were back on the bitumen and main traffic thoroughfare mileage marker 278 ish kilometres and arrived at The Farm around 1400.

We were expecting to camp. But they had few bed options: a shared dorm for \$35 per head (a campsite was \$25 per head), a cabin with a shared outside shower for \$80 or an ensuited cabin for \$100. We took the latter. It had last been used by a honeymoon couple and the bed was in need of repair...I didn't exactly ask where the bolt was broken but as long as it was ‘Macgyvered’ and

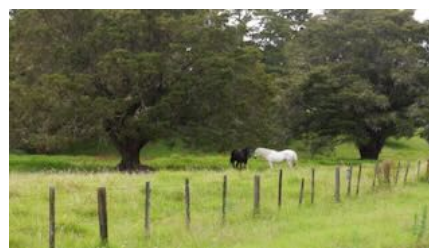
didn't fall apart whilst we were using it, I didn't care. The room is old, has no toilet paper roll holder, no soap holder and a possibly a tyluxed shower, and apart from a hand towel no towels were provided...so we had to use our hiking towels. But it was also dry roof over our heads...at least in the main area. We discovered when a small amount of rain came down that not only were my boots under a leak in the verandah roof, so were my orthotics...just as my feet we getting better!

### *The Farm to Oakura Bay*

22 January 2023. It wasn't a long walk. And not a particularly taxing walk, although there was some uphill. And then some downhill into town.

We left The Farm at our usual 0835, having not really been social this morning. We were in the homestead kitchen area just after 0700, but no-one else was. A couple arrived around 0745 but weren't very talkative: he didn't really get my quip about being on the wrong side of the table for breakfast (facing the sun which had now emerged from behind the clouds) and started talking about how they had been meant to have gone fishing at 0530 this morning, and I think her only comment was a response to another of my quips about wine glasses for breakfast! The host emerged at about 0750 and after a quick few words with him I retreated back to our room, where Andrew was already, to finish packing up our gear.

It was all road walking today, some







up, some down, and some flat, and at sea level. The landscape consisted of bucolic farmland, slithers of dark bush, rivers occasionally running alongside, and at one point the road had mangroves and high tide on either side.

As per usual there were abandoned cars in the paddocks but today's prominent feature was abandoned buildings! Old, broken and such a sad, sad, sight.

Litter was again strewn along the road today, items that would have been discarded out car windows. Because the road was windy, and well used, we spent the walk criss-crossing from one side of the bitumen to the other so we could be seen by passing vehicles. About half waived.

The walk down to Oakura Bay from the main road is downhill...and our initial reaction to this was , 'cripes we have to get back up this hill tomorrow.'

The place where we stopped is a local business which has one spot for tents (a tent) on a terrace above the house. We had seen this on a blog we had been following but I had enquired about staying here earlier than that. His other accommodation options are very old (and very tired) caravans. We took a caravan which was closer to the toilet. There is a camping area and hotel in this area but it was a km or so further on.



Upon reaching town and before getting to our accommodation, we had stopped to get a cold drink at the first little store we came to, but after dropping our gear off we headed back to the only other store around. Apparently we were lucky it was open, and the burger, with gluten free bread, was quite good. And it had grated carrots! (I will have to have a look at a globe - have we just found the southernmost burger carrot line?)

After walking back to base we both had a quick refreshing shower. Andrew sat outside with the few flies. I had a snooze until 1630.

At about 1730 we got our first rain shower. It was heavy enough to drop the curtains on the side of the outside sitting area at the caravan.

Birds. Red billed gull, lapwing, Common myna, sparrow, kingfisher...bigger, kelp gull, white-faced heron, gold finch, magpie, swallow, yellow hammer, purple swamp hen/pukeko, fantail

We made dinner at around 1830. After being told we had wifi we spent some time on that.



## *Oakua to Free Camp*

### *St Helena Ridge Track*

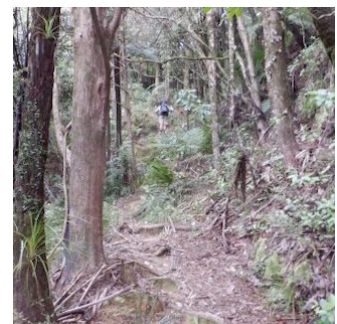
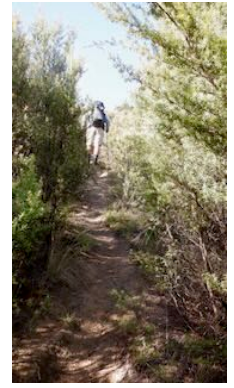
22nd January 2022. A challenging day - for all sorts of reasons. The St Helena Ridge Track blurb in the notes suggests it is an easy track that is constantly up and has some scrambling. I admit we hadn't had a really tough 'up' yet on this walk - the Rataea Forest section was skipped because of my blisters, but the up bits on this track were very steep. Whilst we weren't on our hands and knees, I wouldn't have wanted to do this track in the wet, the foot spots in the steepest sections small divets where others have gone before. Not all steep sections were unmanageable - and some of the track zig zags up the slopes. These zig zagging sections are perfectly doable - and a tom-tit up one of these section flitted around within arms length to give us encouragement. Another tomtit (or was it the same one) twitted around us toward the end of the track.

We had been given a lift to the start of the track, for which I was grateful at the time but more than grateful at the end of the day.

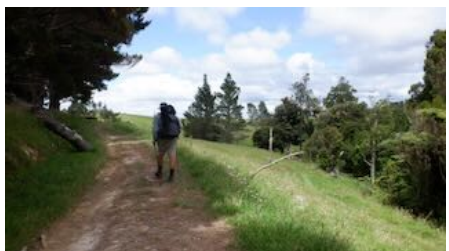


From our accommodation to the start of the track is windy road walking, and up. Had we not got the lift we would have been exhausted before we started the St Helena Ridge Track. We were exhausted when we got to the free camp with just the bit that we did. It didn't help that mentally our first challenge was to get across the first fence and the step to the stile is impossibly high off the ground (even for Andrew), an extra challenge when you are both carrying a lot of weight, and the post designed to be held on to to assist you travel across the fence is being held on by one nail! Fortunately at this location there was a gate across the track. The gate was closed but not locked but we only found this out after mentally stressing ourselves with the stile! The ups after this really knocked us out.

We were at camp early and it was at this point I wished I had packed some playing cards - we could have used them to fill in the time.







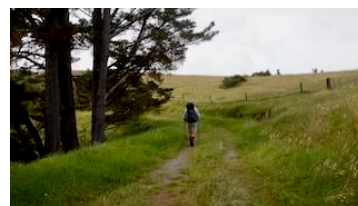
Instead, after pitching the tent and setting up camp, we tried to recover laying on the grass under the shade.

### *Free camp to Whananaki*

24 January 2023. As usual the alarm was on for 0630 but it was 0720 by time I had pulled all my gear out of the tent. Despite going to bed extra early I hadn't had a great sleep. Granted for the first three hours whilst it was still light outside last night I snoozed on and off - to the longest evening chorus I have ever heard. I then had to do a midnight piddle run so my subconscious woke me (there was also some ground rustling overnight which was a bit disconcerting), and what really made the time disjointed was the fact I let a bit too much air out of the mattress and found myself sleeping on a lump under the tent.

It was 0840 by the time we left camp, 0855 when we got to the shoe cleaning station, and 0910 when we turned into Kaiikanui Road. It should have been a

straight forward run to follow the roads to Whananaki (it was mainly downhill after all) but upon going to grab my phone to take a photo of a group of cream coloured cows converging toward us in their paddock (in contrast to the black ones doing the same thing almost a week ago near Waitangi) I discovered it wasn't there! So I trundled back up the hill to find it. The white cows that I had tried for my phone for were ignored when I finally got back to Andrew at 1200; just when it started to rain.





I had found the phone - but not where I had expected to. I was looking for it on the road. I flagged down one car coming down the road to ask if they had seen a phone on the road - they hadn't. Then, when I was just about back to the last spot I know I had used it (where we had sat down for a break) I came across a ute with two workers in it. I asked if they had seen a phone - they hadn't but one of their colleagues had rung them and mentioned they had picked up a phone. It was placed on top of a letter box - back down the hill from where we were currently. Ten points for picking up the phone and trying to do something useful with it - zero points for putting it where I was never going to be looking!.

Eventually the rain stopped. Wet, a little frustrated, and a bit tired we found ourselves at the Opuawhanga Hall and used its small porch as shelter for lunch. Just as we were about to leave at 1300 the rain started again. We waited ten minutes to see if it would stop, but it didn't, so we put our rain gear on again and continued.

As was becoming a regular activity, we zig zagged along the windy road to ensure the safest path and avoid the trucks hurtling past. The road however started to get windier, and thinner, and it reminded me of the last road into New Norfolk in Tassie, also having a drop off on one side and a steep bank on the other. The rain stopped. And then started, this time heavier. We took a couple of breaks and at one point Andrew mentioned 'there goes our ride.' I am reluctant to put my fingers out to pick up a hitch but apparently this vehicle slowed down and looked back. In the end, after another bout of rain and we had become drowned rats, a local stopped (in the middle of the road) got out and asked us if we wanted a lift. Yes Please! So a big thank you to \*W who drove us into Whananaki. We had the offer of showing us the beach but I think Andrew was just looking to put his feet up. He hadn't had a particularly good day. I had mentioned in an email to the Holiday Park that we would need a tent site but a hotel room was free so we took it. On the advice of the Ws we had pizza for dinner (mine was a gf pita bread base) and watched Our Big Blue Backyard about NZ's wildlife. We have seen a couple of these documentaries and they are quite interesting. I now know about the Pacific Gyre.

Birds spotted today: pipit, swamp harrier, pukeko, red billed gull, yellow hammer, black-backed gull, turkey, sparrow, swallow, Common myna, black? Duck, black bird, thrush



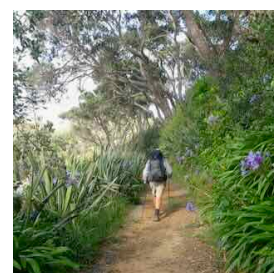
*Whananaki to Ngunguru*

25 January 2023. We didn't set an alarm but I was up earlier than Andrew. As usual. I am still getting used to it being fairly dark outside at 0530. We finally left the Holiday Park about our usual time at 0830 (ish) and headed across the "longest footbridge in the Southern Hemisphere." Or so they say.



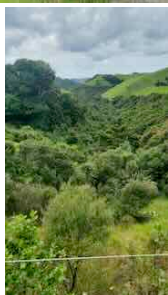
We hadn't checked the tides and whilst there was a bit of beach at the edge of the estuary it looked like the water was close to the

rocks at the point so we took the road diversion rather than the beach walk to get to the Whananaki Walkway. The Walkway is listed as 7km long and two hours in duration, and travels along through a bit of bush and across paddock. It was quite a pleasant walk. The diversion to the Capitaine Bougainville Memorial was a slight disappointment; whilst it was a tragedy for the loss of life in the wreck in 1975, I thought I was going to a memorial for an entirely different Bougainville! And the walk to the memorial was downhill...not uphill... so getting back to track was a bit of a slog.



As Andrew has had enough of long walks with heavy packs for now (especially on roads), I didn't know how I was going to convince him to walk the 26 (plus three ish) km to our bed and breakfast accommodation tonight. Fortunately M, our hostess for tonight's Bed and Breakfast accommodation, came to the rescue...she would pick us up once we got to Sandy Bay. This meant our walk today was a pleasant 9 km or so. Reception at Sandy Bay was dodgy when we arrived so I wasn't sure my first text had got through...I sent two texts to two different people and got no response from either of them (one of which gave me an instant response last week). This may have been due to atmospheric conditions, the easterly wind getting stronger and colder as the afternoon progressed. A second text did get through however and we were back at our bed for the next two nights mid afternoon. We spent the afternoon hand washing clothes and discussing what we were going to do for the next four weeks.

I had arranged to have dinner here as well and discussions and laughter ended eventually around 2100 when we retreated downstairs. The hostess is a boatie (ex yachty), so we have a lot in common.



Birds for the day: pipits (lots of them on the Whananaki Coastal Walkway so we were quite entertained, including one giving itself a long dust bath on the track), white-faced heron, magpie, Common myna, Caspian tern, variable oystercatcher, black backed gull, red billed gull, kingfisher, yellowhammer, sparrows, swallows, thrush?, blackbird, pacific black ducks (local name?), domestic ducks, stilts, pukeko, skuas black?, tui (who entertained us with a song for a while), eastern rosella, fantail, paradise shell duck

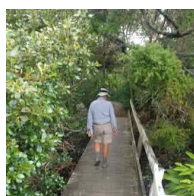


### *Ngunguru*

26th January 2023. Technically we did walk a bit of the TA today...it just wasn't much...



Today was an allocated rest day. After a relaxing breakfast with our hostess we spent the morning trying to get ourselves a 'kinder' adventure down south. Given it was peak holiday and tourist season I knew I was pushing it but I was aiming for a walking package along either the Queen Charlotte Track or the Able Tasman Coastal Track, both of which are well populated and pedestrian walkways. You can organise these walks yourself but I didn't have the time, or the inclination at this point, to do so. Several good looking options were booked (including one where your evening accommodation after the day's walking is on a motor boat), so I gave up searching the web and ringing and just emailed a couple of companies. Within a couple of hours we had two options. Both without guides but to some extent that suits us better anyway - there



is no necessity to keep up to others if we walk by ourselves.. The Able Tasman is shorter and is the more popular walk. The Queen Charlotte is longer (we had to ask ourselves whether we wanted a couple of 20 plus days?), but it is still part of the TA. We would only be carrying day packs.. our gear would be transported by water taxi.....

We discussed these over lunch in downtown Ngunguru, at the Salt Cafe. Andrew asked me my preference. I thought I would like to continue the TA so we would do the Queen Charlotte. On the way back to our accommodation I got thinking. There was only one possible combination of three consecutive days on the Queen Charlotte before we flew home, but there were four possible dates given for the Able Tasman. One start date was a couple of days away and we wouldn't get there in time, one start date clashed with the Queen Charlotte option but the two remaining dates were options if we wanted to walk the Able Tasman as well as the Queen Charlotte. And, who knows, if the timing was right and connections worked out we could always come back to the North Island and look at doing the Whanganui River paddle as well!

So the afternoon was spent confirming the bookings, and dates, and organising transport down to the South Island. With a long weekend organising a car to get us from Whangarei to Auckland and then Auckland to Wellington was impossible. We managed a bus trip to Auckland and a flight to Wellington!

As per last night we had dinner upstairs with the hostess. We went to bed around 2200.





## Whangarei

### *Ngunguru to Whangarei. Wet and miserable.*

27th January 2023. According to our original schedule we were resting today. Which, if the original schedule was being followed, was perfect. There was a lot of rain expected. But we were no longer following the original schedule and as we had to get to Whangarei to continue our journey, rather than walk out of here to continue the walk tomorrow, we took the offer from our hostess of a ride into town.

So after breakfast we bundled our gear into her car and we all headed out into the pouring rain. When we got to the airport there was no one there..well almost no one, and it took a couple of attempts at contacting the car rental mob before we could pick up our hire car; the first call was answered but I was met with silence. The second call just rang and rang, and I left a message on the third call. When the car did turn up we got soaked heading from the

terminal building to the car, a matter of only a few meters away.

Our first and priority task today was to retrieve our food package from Camp Waipu Cove. What an interesting bit of logistics that had been.



Several days ago I had rung the campground, to see if I had to book a campsite, and more importantly to see if i could send a food package there. I had assumed the lass on the other end of the phone was booking me in. Apparently that didn't happen and whilst they got my food order, they didn't have a reservation for us: just as well we didn't need it. So we drove down today in the rain, past an overturned car on SH1, picked the food parcel up, and had a morning cuppa at Waipu, before heading back to Whangarei to send the contents back home.

I had originally thought that the most central post office in Whangarei might be the biggest, but we found that establishment was only going to be accessible by foot, and the parking in town metered and not close. We ended up at the NZ Post Kensington Branch and through a comedy of errors, and some good humour (and some whiteout), we managed with the help of NZ Post staff, to finally move the parcels of food on. Now we not only had to get the backpacks to Auckland...but we still had boxes to deal with in Auckland as well.

It was early afternoon by the time we got to our hotel and I stumbled up the road in full wet weather gear in the rain to get food provisions for breakfast and dinner : I must have looked a treat - Countdown was only a few hundred meters away.

The afternoon was spent on logistics for South Island, and watching on television,



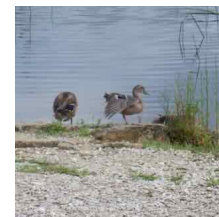
the unfolding disaster that was Auckland. We got a lot of rain in Whangarei but it was only 'a drop in the ocean' compared with Auckland: Auckland got its wettest day on record, and a significant chunk of the city was underwater! A state of emergency had been declared and the airport closed! Yikes - what did that mean for us?



\* \* \* \* \*

28th January 2023. Rain was expected today, but in the afternoon, so I pushed for a morning excursion. It wasn't exactly early when we left the hotel but it was after midday when we got back.

Our first excursion was a walk around the Waro Conservation Area and the lake next door. The feature of the conservation area is the rippled limestone. The walk is through slightly damp track, some of which is on old horse tramway banks. The area was mined for limestone, (that was used in concrete production), and then for a short time, mined for coal.



Between our first walk and our very short second we went for a drive, finding ourselves on some of the roads we would have been walking down had we not been rescued from Sandy Bay on the 25th. We pulled the pin after 15.25 kilometres (6.25 km on bitumen and 9 km on dirt road) at the Old Coach Road. Whilst the track in looked fine (there were a couple of driveways down there I think) the sign board at the beginning of the track indicated '4wd only' for other than cycling or walking. A Yaris is not a 4wd. It wasn't worth the risk.



The very short second walk was to the viewing platform at Tahake Falls, closer to Whangarei. There is a longer loop walk here but given it was drizzling, the water under the bridge was gushing through at an enormous pace, *and* the note that the bridge should not be crossed when the river is





in flood, we thought it prudent not to risk being caught on the wrong side of the river. There is a foot disinfecting station to enter the tracks to the falls.



It was supposed to rain in the afternoon so once we got back to base we had no plans of going out and I washed both my shirts...apart from the drizzle near the falls it didn't rain. We watched movies all afternoon and organised food needed with accommodation providers for meals on the Queen Charlotte Track



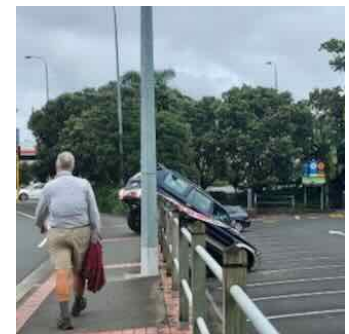
#### Bird list

Pukeko, white-faced heron, sparrow, magpie, teal?, grebe?, wild chooks, yellow hammer, pipit

\* \* \* \* \*

29th January 2023.

Back to time restricted eating. If only for today. We were catching up with A&S for brunch this morning at 1030. So it was a good opportunity to try and get ourselves back into an eating regime. Andrew avoided any grumbling stomach by sleeping in. I got up around 0630. We had a lovely time talking boats, specifically Leopard 48s, and it was after 1300 when we got back to base. The weather forecast had been for a little rain. Fortunately that meant only a few drops.



\* \* \* \* \*

30th January 2023. Heavy rain was expected overnight, and it was. It woke both of us up at 0300. We dozed on and off after that. I got up around 0730. Andrew an hour later.

It was around 0900 when we left base. It was drizzling. In fact we expected it to drizzle most of the day, [windy.com](http://windy.com) predicting a couple of hours



of near zero rain in the middle of the day. I had a look at AllTrails and found three very short walks in close proximity that could be completed in the supposed rain free period. But what were we going to do until then?

An indoor activity was in order to fill in the time. Whangarei has a well known art gallery (that looks like a caravanserai) but I suggested to Andrew we head back to Dargaville. When we had briefly visited the town a few weeks ago I had



noticed the sign for the museum, which given the late hour that we arrived, we had no time to visit.

The museum has a series of galleries dedicated to the area and its history,

including a gallery for marine history.

This included displays regarding the local area and Kauri logging but also fishing, many ship displays and histories, as well as well-known local captains. Of course there was also information and a video about the Rainbow Warrior and outside is the masts of the actual Vessel.

By the time we left the museum it was around 1300 and we were pleasantly surprised to find a couple of options open for lunch in town. We passed the bakery and sushi shop over for a Thai restaurant.

By the time we had finished lunch it was still raining with no prospect for a walk. So we went for a drive down to Puoto Point instead.

Wildlife seen today: Dead possums on the road, live rabbit, a live wild cat, swamp harriers, lapwing, sparrows, Common mynas, pukeko, yellow hammer, white-faced heron,



Aucklands weather - the area is still in trouble!



## Auckland

31 January 2023. At 1550 we exited the double-deck bus at the Intercity Bus terminal under the Sky Tower at Hobson Street, Auckland. Not far past 1600 we were in our room working out what we had to do to organise the next part of our trip.

I hadn't slept well, not at least until I pulled a thicker pillow out of the cupboard at around 0200. I finally got up around 0700, Andrew emerged a little while later and after a shower and doing last night's dishes we left the room at Whangarei, running down the steps to the car into the drizzle.

As we got to the airport to drop off the hire car there were two cars sitting opposite the terminal doors...and one of them was a taxi. Perfect! I thought. Well, not quite. This one was booked. This one also had 'Auckland' written down the side. It turns out this taxi was waiting for the pilot who was going to arrive, with his plane, in about 15 minutes. We had discussed ringing a taxi whilst on the way to drop off the car but we didn't, so I rang the number the current taxi gave me. And waited. And waited.

In the end, thirty minutes after I was told a car wouldn't be long, I rang the number again. Because the company takes your number when you make the booking, the system picks up who the caller is and you are notified the time of the service to the location, and when you expect the taxi. Except that the important gaps weren't filled in and so I got the explanation of 'the service from' a short delay, 'to', a short delay, 'will be departing soon'. Apparently the driver tried to text us to let us know where he was, but he didn't put the 'plus' in front of the number and he didn't get through.

We picked up another passenger, a day visitor, and dropped her off at the BP before we got delivered to the Arts Centre at the Town Basin. Breakfast was in the cafe Makaba where we chatted to a Swiss couple who have been visiting NZ since 1984. We made sure we were at the bus stop the allotted 15 minutes prior to the scheduled departure time but we needn't have worried...the bus was late.

Due to road closures we ended up on a detour past Waipu Cove, the sea state looking even worse than it did a few days ago.



The detour included some very windy roads, and the bus driver made a special announcement to make sure we didn't worry if we looked out the window and found ourselves on the wrong side of the road - she had to do that to get around the corners!

As expected by windy.com's forecast it wasn't raining when we got to Auckland and the walk to the hotel was dry.



Before 1800 my phone got a state of emergency warning text!



For a long time during the evening I suspected it was windy outside but for a long time despite the rain radar we didn't notice the rain... there were however splashes in puddles on the pavement below us by the time we went to bed



The evening was spent discussing bag options for our upcoming walks and watching the end of the movie A Few Good Men.

Birds, swamp harrier, lapwing, Canadian geese, sparrow, emu!, shell duck, red billed gull

1st February 2023. I woke up, and got up at around 0645. The only noise obvious at that time was with a hum from the extraction fan in the bathroom. We had had the door closed overnight because of the noise but it didn't do much. The first noise I heard outside before my ears attuned to the day was a siren. And then a bit of traffic. I couldn't really hear the wind although looking out the window there was clearly a bit of it: the tops of the two large trees in the street below swinging back and forth. The rain seemed to have stopped... there were no puddles that I could see with rain drops splashing in them. Auckland had had 71mm overnight apparently a month's worth of rain in the last 24 hours.

\* \* \* \*

It was around 2230 when the brothel that was our hotel room was finally in some sort of order and we could have a final cuppa before retiring for the night. We weren't completely packed, there was still some wet-ish hand washing and I was expecting that tomorrow morning would either bring a trip to the laundrette (conveniently right next door) or I would be shoving the wet clothes in the pack liner to be brought out at the other end. But all in all, final packing in the morning would be easy, quick and painless before a taxi was scheduled to pick us up at 0930.

We were ditching the boxes. Whilst we had travelled with one or two boxes on the buses, the amount of extras we had gained and the awkwardness of packing the boxes into the pack covers along with the packs made them impractical. We had paid for extra luggage and today we had acquired extra bags.

Of course it had taken us 7km of walking to do this. Some 'umming' and 'ahhing'. A retreat back to base to reassess and then more 'umming' and 'ahhing'. The fact was we needed something easy to transport our evening clothes along the two walks



we were about to do. Whilst we had almost worked out we could almost shuffle our day gear (overnight packs) our night gear and stuff for storage with the baggage we had, it would be messy. We had headed off to The Warehouse for a cheap duffel but it was a small store and didn't stock what was on the website. The adventure stores in Central Auckland, of which there are quite a few, had much more expensive bags (albeit from recycled material), but we weren't prepared to spend that much. By accident we found Rebel Sport, the duffels ranging from \$60 to \$80. After assessing our options we were heading back to Rebel when a small store in the corridor caught our eye. For the price of one of the cheaper duffels at Rebel we could get two 50l ish duffels at this stall. True, the quality wasn't going to be great, but they would do.

The duffels made it easier for travel but more importantly made it easier and neater to organise our night clothes for the upcoming walks. The stipulation for one walk is no more than 20kg. The stipulation for the other is no more than 10kg. The 10kg walk actually lends you duffels for their

trip....but they were the second walk;- we needed a solution 10 days earlier.

This exercise took us, and our brains, all day. The 7 plus km we walked was interspersed with a late morning coffee at Starbucks... chosen because of the free wifi not the coffee, but Andrew was pleasantly surprised (After the North American Starbucks experience he never wanted to enter another Starbucks establishment again). And lunch at *Ima* early afternoon, a surprise and delightful discovery in Fort Street. We weren't expecting quite an indulgent lunch as we were going out for dinner, but I was glad we had found this unassuming middle eastern eatery.



Dinner was with J&B, a delightful couple whom we had met on the top of Mt Larcom (my obsession), in Gladstone, QLD, Australia; 21 months ago! We had a great time. They are much younger than us, and a bit more robust and adventurous, and it was a great evening of stories. We walked to the restaurant to catch up with them, and back again, making our total mileage for the day over 12km.

Aucklands old buildings look great lit up at night (the Roman styled Church we passed had real presence). But the city has less welcoming sights at night as well; like any major city, the homeless become prominent on the streets when the sun goes down.

Birds: pigeons on the city streets, sparrows, red billed gull, black backed gull





## Wellington

2nd February 2023. Bloody Ed Sheeran! We had originally stayed in Whangarei to avoid high hotel rates in Auckland because of the Auckland Day long weekend, the next weekend we had discovered when booking nights when we were still going to be on Trail was also expensive and I couldn't find a hotel in Auckland left that was under \$360 per night. Doing a Google search I had worked out this was because of Ed Sheeran. Having now planned our travel through to Wellington a week later we found we had a double whammy.. Trying to find city accomodation in Wellington for the next few nights I found the same problem....nothing left at lower prices. I thought it was due to the Waitangi Long Weekend...but it appears Ed Sheeran is here tonight as well. No wonder we are paying top dollar for a slightly shabby room.

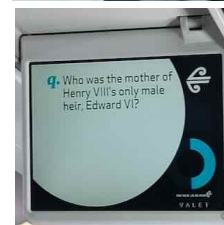
Supposedly our room in Wellington is renovated but

the walls aren't painted, the door to the balcony is welded shut, and the fridge is pitifully small, and not fit for purpose (the milk fell over and flooded the kitchen)

Our actual trip to Wellington had been reasonably smooth. The taxi that had turned up at our Auckland hotel to take us to the domestic airport was driven by a woman with a wonderful sense of humour.



The 1200 flight lifted off at 1217. We landed before 1300. We were in our hotel after a taxi ride (in hindsight we could have taken the much cheaper bus) by 1400.



After a cuppa and hanging the still slightly damp clothes up in the bathroom we headed out.

The main reason for heading out for a walk was to get food supplies for at least dinner and breakfast. But we ended up doing the touro thing and taking a ride on the cable car. The cafe at the top of the cable car had a good view but not much in the way of food, so a cuppa and cake was all we consumed. We did stick our nose into







the Cable Car Museum before heading back down. The main area has a good history of the cable car and an old car on display.

### *On An Island*

3rd February 2023. Andrew made the comment yesterday that the hustle and bustle of Wellington put Auckland to shame. It is the capital after all, and indeed I watched from our room above, the hordes going to work in the morning, and when i went out to get supplies for dinner, the cafes were full of people for Friday night drinks, and the small New World supermarket full of shoppers.

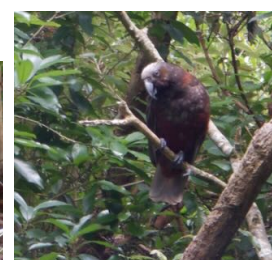
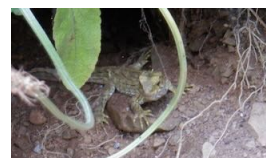
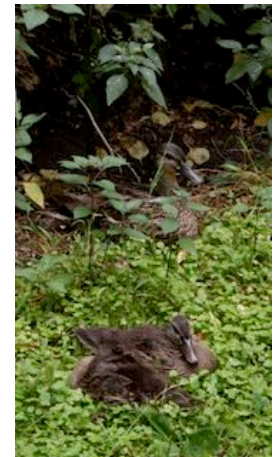
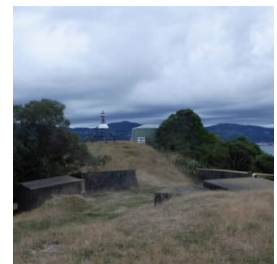
We had spent our time today with a visit to Matiu/ Somes Island, an island in the harbour that has in its time been a Moari pa, quarantine station (for both people and animals), a gun emplacement location (WWII), and a place of

internment for POW's and illegal aliens.

It is also home to a lighthouse that has guided ships into the harbour since 1899.

We were lucky with the ferry; the website is not optimised for mobiles (I am not the only one who had trouble with this) and by the time we left the hotel, diverted via Countdown for lunch provisions (further away than New World) and found the ferry on the dock, the service was leaving in 5 minutes. This meant we had 5 minutes to go to the Ferry Office to get tickets and get back to the boat. It all worked out, and around 35 minutes later the ferry pulled up to the Matiu/Somes Island's wharf. There were only two pickup options, 1335 or 1530. We took the former. The island isn't that big and apparently a couple of hours is the usual time spent there....

The island is a conservation island; all the mammalian predators have been removed, and in order to protect the remaining wildlife and flora visitors are required to go through a biosecurity check. I was expecting to be personally searched but we were instructed to search ourselves and our bags by ourselves. The three groups of things we were looking out for







were. Insects (Argentinian ant), soil (seeds) and rodents (standard rats, mice and the Norway rat). I didn't find any in my bag. Before leaving the biosecurity shed we were required to scrub our boots and stamp chemicals on our shoes.

When we got back to Wellington we went for a walk along the waterfront, admiring some dolphins that other tourists were pointing out, and made a quick visit to the I-Site (to work out where our bus tomorrow was leaving from) before heading back to base. I had scheduled tonight's job for me to repack (almost) my gear onto the pack so I could carry it on my back and have the duffel over my shoulders. This meant we could walk to the ferry terminal on Monday. The hotel is not that far from the BlueBridge Ferry but about three kilometres from the InterIslander, which is the service we were booked on. The service was scheduled to leave at 0845. And then it wasn't!

When I checked our emails early afternoon I found there had been a change. Several days ago whilst watching the news we discovered that, in not so wonderful weather, one of the InterIslander ferries lost engine power in the Cook Strait. It was lucky it didn't drift into shore. When they named the ship I was only vaguely concerned. Yes. it was the same boat we were booked on to...but surely they could sort the problem out by the time we needed to travel. Yes, the **Kaitaki** was actually back on the water today, but she wasn't taking passengers. According to the InterIslander website she won't be taking passengers for the next couple of weeks. So the company has rescheduled its passengers to other services. I had chosen the 0845 sailing because the later one was sold out. The one after that again was going to get us into Picton around 1900. I deliberately didn't choose the early service

because it was just too early to be comfortable. That however was the service we had been rescheduled on. I still started rearranging my gear to configure it down to two neat bags...at that time in the morning - I was not walking to the terminal to be there before 0515!

Mostly organised I managed an afternoon snooze before a short walk to a supermarket to get dinner. The evening was spent watching mind-numbing tv.

Birds..black winged gull, red crowned kakariki, spotted shag, variable oystercatcher, fantail, rock pigeon, red billed gull, sparrow, pacific black duck (local equivalent), black shag, little unidentifiables. No New Zealand falcons... apparently they don't nest here - they just feed/prey on the local birds!

We also saw geckos/ slinks, and wetta.

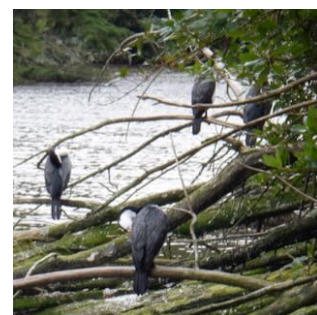
### *Zealandia.*

4th February 2023. We had been recommended to go to *Zealandia* by B&J. Whereas they had just walked around the premises we decided to take a tour. And because nobody else booked the time-slot we had chosen (1030) we got the guide all to ourselves. C was a great guide. A Uni student in clearly the biological sciences given her enthusiasm for the task; she was a wealth of information.

The tour goes for two hours and we saw the majority of the birds listed on the 'may be seen' flyer handed to you when you turn up, including one species that is around but not often seen.

After lunch at the cafe we headed out again, vaguely looking for the remaining species on the list. We had a great day but the day tours were the only ones available to us; The twilight and night tours were booked out until after we left Wellington.

*Zealandia* is the only fully fenced urban sanctuary in New Zealand, and management has





the long-term aim of returning it to pre man habitat. It encompasses the original damned water supply catchment for



Wellington..I didn't ask how pure they were going to get in their aims, or if they were going to drain the dams!

There is a free shuttle up from i-Site but the free shuttles back stop at 1415. We got the free shuttle down to the cable car and paid for a trip down the hill.

On the way back to base we popped into Countdown for dinner supplies...tonight it was patties and salad

We also went sock shopping. I was looking

for another pair of toed socks because I thought I had lost one (probably in the mess trying to repack at some point). The obvious adventure stores said, 'Sorry, don't stock them try Gordons'. 'No sorry, but try Gordons'. 'No Sorry, but'...yes, I know. Try Gordons!

When we got to Gordons the response was. Ah we found some of those weeks ago... try the Board Shop for woman's sizes. The socks they found were under-socks for skiers -but they were toed so I bought them for back up with the idea of wearing them under normal socks

Just before getting back to the room we booked at taxi for Monday morning's exceptionally early start.

We spent the evening again watching television.

Birds: black winged gull, saddleback, white head, kaka, robin, rifleman, stitchbird, bellbird, Californian qual, brown teal, pied shag, black shag?, sparrow, blackbird, kereru, rock pigeon, tui, red billed gull, grebe, pacific black(local equivalent) ? Silvereye





## Te Papa

5th February 2023. I had originally chosen today for us to visit Te Papa (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa) because rain was predicted, whereas yesterday was deemed clear and a better day for walking outside. Looking at the forecast today however the rain was only due to fall at 1700 onwards. None the less we left the hotel at 1005 and headed toward Te Papa, stopping briefly to admire the (fibreglass) wakas in the lake on the way over.

There are six levels in the Te Papa building, each encompassing gallery and/or function space (there are no galleries on Level 1). The main cafe is on Level 1 and it got our patronage twice, at breaks between large exhibition spaces.

The giant facade to the Gallipoli exhibition dominates the foyer on Level 2 (and a great advertisement for the skill of the Wetta Workshop). We started in the nature gallery but by the time we came out of that space there was a queue to get into the Gallipoli gallery. Andrew is not one for queues so it was at this point yet to be seen

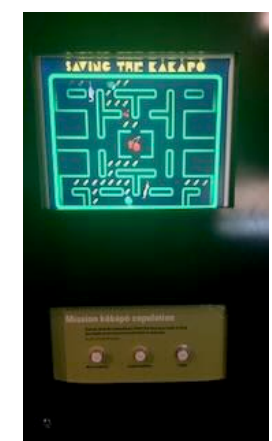
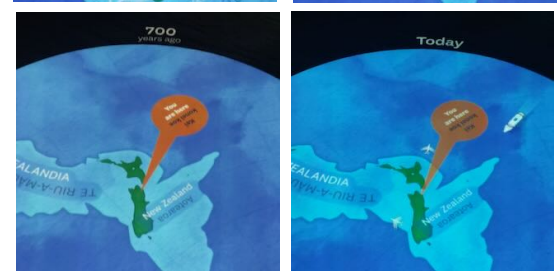
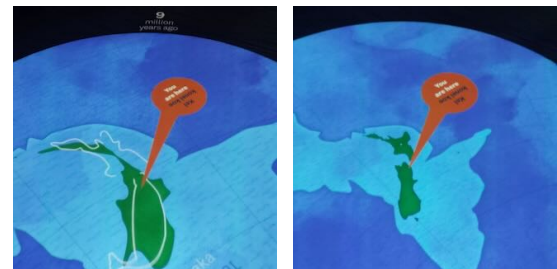
whether he would visit it -it was supposed to be an award winning space but war is not my scene and whilst looking at the interps from an interps point of view would be interesting, I have had my fill of war since heading overseas to see where my grandfather fought. I would say I am now allergic to it.

The overall interpretation across the museum I found of mixed quality. To me it is somewhat disappointing to see the production of interps has moved with the times - galleries filled with a cacophony of distractions and noises - which is

exceptionally bad for those with hearing problems or anxiety. There were however more features for show (not tell) at some sites, with some clever and good techniques for giving you e x t r a information.

You could tell the older interps boards though, whilst most had the interps at a reasonable height, a lot of text was too small (even when there was room to ramp up the text size with one or two points; clearly the interps staff were going for a trend of white space - not clear information.

I liked the ability to admire the old style museum cases and the press buttons on a panel to get more information. I didn't like the individual films either on repeat, or if a button was pressed (eg: Mission Kakapo Copulation) the



resultant films were either too loud or too soft (the noise drowned out by screaming/ chatting children or adults). Whilst I am a lot less anxious about attending museums these days (less sugar in the system therefore less likely to become anxious) a space with lots of activity and noise is not conducive to education.

After lunch we headed to the gallery and area housing the pacific exploration and modern waka stories, and stories of stolen buildings and land. I skimmed through the stories of the other Pacific Island tribes in Aoteroa although some of the interps was interestingly done. By this time Andrew, who usually only lasts a couple of hours in museums, was getting to the point he had had enough, and to be honest, my brain was feeling a bit full, so the modern multicultural migration stories were not explored.

I was back at base at 1530 after doing a quick shop for dinner. Andrew was back at base about 15 minutes earlier

The evening television viewing was 'Griff's Canadian Adventure Episode 5' and he was in Saskatchewan....what a gentle reminisce about last years trip.



An interesting question - with some dubious facts. I didn't look too closely at this exhibit but I suspect you could press a button to have your say.

Poor old Phar Lap. The remains of his body separated into at least three places: Wellington, Melbourne and Canberra

