

SAUNTERING AROUND THE TOP OF **NEW ZEALAND'S SOUTH ISLAND**

Queen Charlotte Track

Technically still the TA
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Able Tasman Coastal Track

A Great Walk
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TranzAlpine

The famous train trip!
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South to Sunnier Skies

And less weight on our
backs!



Heading South... to Sunnier Skies...

The decision to abandon the TA (permanently for one of us, possibly only temporarily for the other (yet to be decided)) and head south was made with fortuitous timing. The start of our trip had been affected on and off by rain, but from late January to mid February the North Island was hit by excessive amounts of water and unpredictable weather, with many localities being declared Disaster Zones. The South Island however managed to miss most of the tempest and we had a great time. The sun was out (most of the time), the wind manageable (most of the time), and I ticked off three New Zealand experiences that have been on the list for a long while. We still got a lot of walking in... and one train trip!



A day in Picton: almost

6th February 2023. 24 hours in Picton. Almost. The alarm was on, in our Wellington Hotel, for 0400 and in theory it was just a case of getting dressed and heading downstairs. I was ready at 0405. Andrew however dragged his heels and it was 0415 by the time we got to the foyer.

It was still dark outside but there was movement, although the fellow who sauntered past with the hoody was perhaps someone I would not wish to engage with at this time of the morning. A car drove past every few minutes and on a corner spotted obliquely out the foyer windows, I saw a taxi. But he didn't turn. Perhaps he is going around the block, the direction of traffic immediately in front of the hotel was one way. But no, I never saw that taxi again. Then another taxi was spotted around 0428. The security chap on reception was surprised our pre ordered taxi had not arrived; apparently they are usually very early. At 0434 I got the reception lad to order another one, but there was no immediate acceptance. At just after 0435 our taxi arrived. It seems this morning was very busy! I couldn't imagine why! Perhaps the Ferry cancellation?

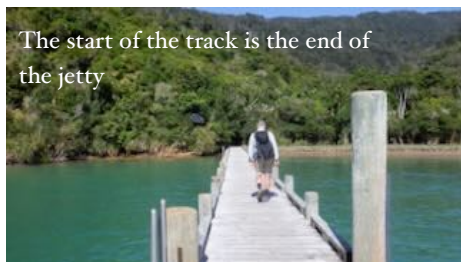
We were at the InterIslander Ferry terminal at 0445. And logged in at 0450. The gates for passengers were due to open at 0515...they were a bit late, and according to D from Sydney, who I spent most of the trip talking to, (after we had had a big breakfast in the dining area), the ship didn't depart on time either. Actually I felt a bit guilty. Because we had had breakfast on board we hadn't got a window seat in the main area. Andrew was happy to read a book and miss the scenery. I had done this trip before, albeit thirty years ago, so I had seen it. D however had not been here before and so by engaging him he wasn't seeing, or admiring, the view outside (the Marlborough Sounds when we got to them, not the Cook Strait). He was however travelling on his own, something he said he would never do again, so I guess he was a bit lonely and very happy to just talk to someone.

Despite the short delay at departure, we disembarked at around the expected time of 0930, after a very smooth trip (with little rolling). We had made our way to the hotel and dumped our gear by 1030; the room was ready which was lovely; we had expected just to store our bags.

A short walk up and down Picton's main streets revealed the only obvious cafe that was open on this public holiday (Waitangi Day) was brimming with people, and so we headed back to our room rather than engage with the masses. Andrew boiled the kettle for a cuppa whilst I went off to find gluten free wraps for the upcoming hike, as one of the accommodation places didn't stock gf options for lunch.

Our short wander around town had bagged us a set of playing cards for \$5. I had refused to pay more on the North Island





The start of the track is the end of the jetty



Queen Charlotte Track

Picton to Tawa Cove Cabins

15.74km

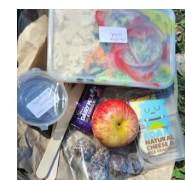
7th February 2023. The further south you go the later the sun comes up. I was up at 0530...the glow outside the door from lights not the sun. I spent the next hour with some yoga moves, and reading the news. I let Andrew sleep as I had managed an afternoon snooze yesterday after our extraordinarily early morning; he hadn't. He emerged from bed at 0620.

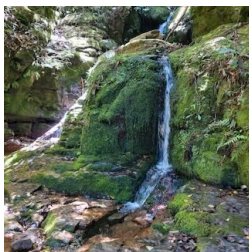
We were picked up from our hotel at 0850 and were briefed and on the water taxi, the 'Cougar Line,' around 0930. After a few stops (and spotting a

seal) we were finally dropped off at Ship Cove just after 1030. The idea had been to visit the waterfall behind the monument, mentioned in the track notes, as a warm up for our legs, but as the track was closed we started out on our Queen Charlotte Track odyssey at 1055.

According to the notes, the first 3km section of track was expected to take one hour. We took 55 minutes and made the lookout just as a guided group was leaving. The second 3km was supposed to take 45 minutes and we took 50 minutes, but we had stopped to admire fantails, and a cicada, by the edge of the track.

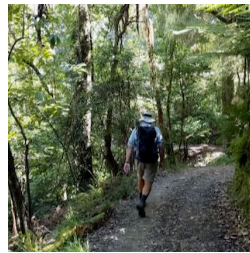
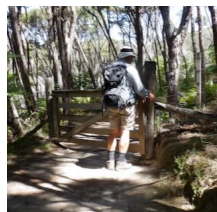
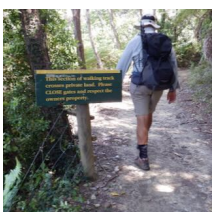
The campground where we had lunch was occupied by a noisy guided group when we arrived, and they stayed for most of our short lunch break. We enjoyed five minutes of peace before continuing our walk, and passing another guided group, (the group we had passed at the first lookout); at a picnic area with two tables adjacent a toilet; which was so smelly it apparently 'wasn't survivable,' according to two of the walkers.





I didn't bother using the toilet here, waiting until the next one; 6km later at Tawa Saddle.

From Tawa Saddle it is 6km to Furneaux Lodge (the usual lodge stop on this walk) but we turned off earlier to Tawa Cove Cabins. The path and elevation had been pleasantly manageable up



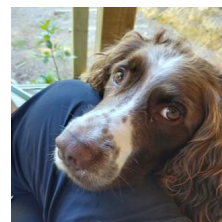
until this turn off, but the drop to the cabins was steep, and a shock to Andrew; to the point by the time we got to the bottom he was convinced he was taking a boat to Ferneaux in the morning, rather than walk the steep track back uphill.

The hosts D&P are lovely, as is O the dog.

We had Cabin 1, which has a view out to the Cove from the front balcony. Andrew stayed in cabin whilst I checked out the jetty. There is an outdoor spa if you wanted it, and kayaks are available for a paddle. The water is lovely and clear and a swim is also possible; I just wanted a rest, and returned to the cabin after admiring the view; managing to disturb a little black shag on the way.

The evening was spent watching the movie 'Mercury Rising' (I wasn't expecting television in this location)

The accommodations here are great little; flat pack style, cabins from Czechoslovakia. In Cabin 1 the picture over the bed is of a ship going through rough seas - the last time I saw this print was at the sailing club at Gladstone.



The only bird identified along the track today was the bell bird; the majority of noise along the track had been insects.



Tawa Cove to Endeavour Heights Homestay

22.34km

8th February 2023. We left the cabins at 0810. We were back on the main track after a steepish uphill effort at 0825. We were making good time and ventured a small detour before we got to Furneaux Lodge. The sign had indicated this detour was to 'Rimu Lookout'. I thought we were walking up to a view. I got an old tree instead. Admittedly it



was a pretty impressive old tree (over 1000 years old), but definitely not what I was expecting.

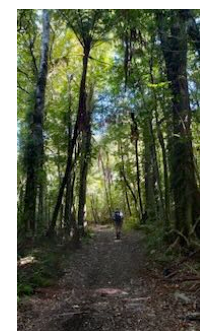
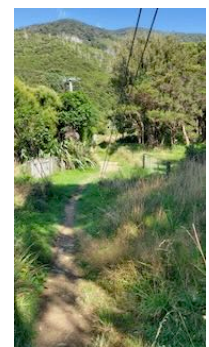
We pulled into Furneaux at 0955. Two other walking groups were on the grounds next to the Lodge eating area, preparing themselves for the walk ahead. One walker made a quip about how far we had come as we were using our poles - I think she thought we had just come from a cabin. Her jaw dropped when I mentioned we had walked several kilometres already.



Whilst these groups might have been about to start walking, for us however, it was time for a coffee break. We would have added 'cake' to our purchase but there was nothing of that sort for sale at the bar; we raided our lunch provisions instead.



We left Furneaux at 1025. Late morning was remembered for bellbird serenades along the track... and one curious weka.





The suggested stop for lunch on the itinerary is a cleared area below a couple of houses overlooking the Sound. We thought this a bit too exposed so kept walking, eventually having lunch at a bend in amongst the shade.



The normal accommodation booked for this leg is Punga Cove Resort. Unfortunately the resort was fully booked so we ended up at a bed and breakfast



instead. Which meant a further walk. And once past the resort and through the bush track you end on a very steep push up the driveway. The room we were given was one of two (the occupants of the second room turned up a few hours later) underneath the main house. The rooms are ensuited; the kitchen is shared. The balcony is wide and the balcony chairs comfortable. Our shoes were off and our feet up and resting at 1515.



My phone indicates that we had walked over 20km by the time we got to our accommodation, but we hadn't finished yet. Because the homestay has a set menu and it is basically only pizza for dinner (and I don't eat wheat) we retreated to the Punga Cove Resort for dinner. This has been a common alternative up until now, but the Resort has recently changed its policy so only guests can dine in their restaurant. Given my issues with wheat and the absence of any alternatives they let us in on a technicality. I was very grateful. The venison was superb. My feet however didn't necessarily appreciate the further two kilometres walked to get there and back.



Off to dinner



Endeavour Heights Homestay to Portage Hotel

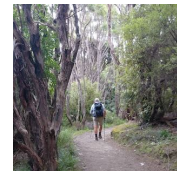
28.66km

9th February 2023. There were grey skies when I got up at 0530 and we listened to a very tinny dawn chorus as I was doing yoga. The dawn chorus had ceased by 0630.

The sky stayed mostly grey most of day but the sun was dominating toward late afternoon.

Our hot breakfast was delivered at 0700. We left at 0745. It took us 10 minutes to get to the stile into Punga Cove Resort (the one we had gone over to get to dinner last night), and then until 0815 to rejoin the Queen Charlotte Track proper.

We got to Portage at 1545, including breaks which wasn't bad for the 28 plus km my







phone states that we walked. Andrew was quite a bit past his comfort zone, although the volume and amount of grumbles was pleasantly controlled.

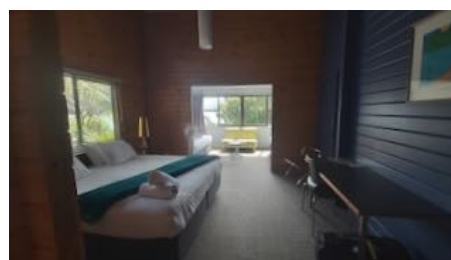


During the day we had seen, and been entertained by, wekas, grey warblers, bellbirds, swallows, sparrows, black backed gulls, red-billed gulls, and a tui. We had also heard an oyster catcher.

The dinner menu had starters, mains, (and) deserts. But no prices. Was it a buffet? We were too tired to ask and we weren't told. We had mains and a glass of wine. And put it onto the room account. We don't know what the food cost us.



Back in our room, with wifi we caught up with weather and, had our usual entertaining dose of UK politics.



Portage to Picton

26.34km (total, included going out to dinner).

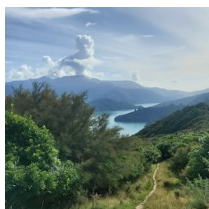
10th February 2023 Giant ferns dominated today. They weren't along all 25 kilometres that we walked along the track, but they were dominant in quite a few sections, towering over us as we passed underneath, reminding us of just how small we actually are.

The alarm, as usual, was on for 0600. By the time we snoozed a bit before getting ourselves out of bed and organised, it was 0700 when we finally made breakfast.

A table full of lunch bags was next to the reception desk when we entered the main building but by the time we left breakfast to finish packing up there were only three bags left; two of which were ours

As we wandered toward the storage shed to deposit the transit bag we discovered that the hotel offers a lift back to the track. It is only 700 meters back to the Queen Charlotte but it is a steepish uphill effort. We were however a couple of seconds too late to organise a lift unless we wanted to wait for quite a while. The lifts only run





every quarter hour and the next two were booked by a tour leader just as we got back to reception. Even if they had managed to run three runs in the space of two we would have been waiting at least 25 minutes. It was quicker to walk. It took us ten minutes to get back uphill to the start of today's track section.

At about two kilometres into the Track two grey fantails entranced us, flitting around inside arms length. It was a lovely little chat and one almost landed on Andrew's arm.

We were at the 'hilltop' within an hour, which was on time. There is a second 'up' on today's leg although as far as the base track goes, not as steep as the first. Unless, of course, you want to go to Onahau Lookout!

We met a young couple at the bottom of Onahau Lookout track who showed us a video of the top. It was definitely worth the climb they said. The sign states the distance is 900m and the time 30



minutes. What it doesn't tell you is whether this is one way or return. The climb took us 20 minutes to get up (it was a hard slog) and just over 10 minutes to get down again. After reading the interps we took our first break here for around 20 minutes. This 'exercise/excursion' had taken an hour out of our time. I had counted on a speed of 3 kilometres per hour to make the return water taxi today, but I knew not all sections of today's track would be that slow. We had also started the track 30 minutes earlier than my calculations so things weren't looking too bad. However, if you compare the Cougar Line's estimation of time (our water taxi), the tour company's estimation of





time, and the DOC estimation of time you will get a bit confused; they don't all line up. So for a little while we didn't quite know where we were in the scheme of things. We made an estimation when we got to Maho Saddle (there is nothing there but a notice about poisoning pine trees and to be careful walking off track in strong winds lest you get hit by a falling branch, and a toilet-which is the cleanest we have come across yet).

Because of our detour and the uncertainty of the remaining distance we didn't take the recommended diversion to Mistletoe Bay. The notes

state the track to the bay is quite steep (and the detour track longer than the main track as we had checked on the map last night) so we thought it prudent to stick to the main track for timing.

We had lunch on side of the track at the TA 1777km mark, because I suddenly lost energy rather quickly, and wasn't going to emotionally make it to the next seat - which was an unknown distance ahead. At this point we were 6 kilometres from Davies Bay. According to one set of notes it was a 35 minute walk from Davies Bay to the pick-up point. We made Davies Bay at 1400. We had until 1530 to make the taxi. We had time to have a good break. I did suggest to Andrew a twenty minute break could be comfortably had but we were refreshed and back on the track in ten.

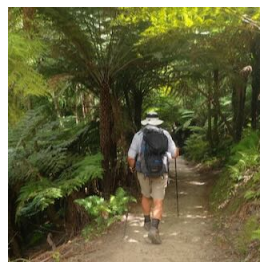
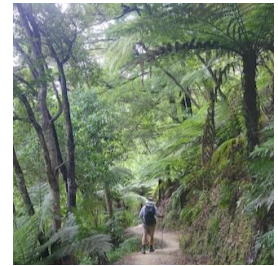
The last section of the Track was giant ferns and beech trees. And absolutely lovely. There were filtered views of the Sound through dappled leaves. A pair of grey fantails caught our attention and we stopped to admire them flitting within a couple of meters, but they didn't get as close as the fantails at the start of today's walk.

The bird highlight today was however probably the pied shags. Andrew had noticed movement in a branch of a beech tree near the water's edge. One pied shag had quite a long piece of flaccid vegetation in his beak.



When we looked closer this individual was doing a sort of dance and presented it to another shag. We assume it was a courtship dance. Focussing around this display we noticed more, two nests in the adjacent branches, and each had a shag sitting on top. I would never have suspected shags would nest in beeches. But then again, the only beeches I have seen are in Tasmania and Queensland and not near the coast.

There were lots of people milling at the waiting point for the water taxis; a drinks caravan doing a roaring trade. We chatted here to a Scottish couple who had passed us several times on track over the past few days. The majority of those waiting left on the larger Beachcomber Ferry. We were booked on the Cougar Line. The official time on the docket is 1600 but the tour company suggests you get there at 1530 as the taxi will leave when everybody is on board. An earlier Cougar taxi had taken some walkers back to Picton. There were nine booked on our run: us, the Scottish couple, two women from Canberra, and three others, two of whom the skipper discovered had gone back on the earlier ferry, and one was still on the track by the time we left at 1600...we needn't have been worried about making 1530 after all!



Back at Picton we managed a lift from the tour company to our hotel (an old style Rooming Lodge) after they had dropped off the Canberrans at their accommodation, and we spent the next couple of hours relaxing (including enjoying a nice hot shower). It was just before 1900 when we ventured out into the street again. Dinner was indulgent at Oxleys Tavern; three courses and a glass of wine to celebrate the walk. The live music here wasn't bad either. Back in the room we watched television for the rest of the evening.



Bird list: Pied shag, little black shag, fantails, weka, gannet, petrel-type birds, red billed gull, and something not seen but heard booming in the bushes.



Playing Tourist

Picton to Nelson to Murchison

11th February 2023. At about 1730 Andrew asked me. 'So what are limits on our rules on hitchhikers?'. I took a moment to respond. I wasn't thinking general hitch hiking. I was thinking TAers. And, following on from that, given that we had crossed the TA when we on the bus trip into Nelson, there wouldn't be any TAers on this road, or this side of the Island for that matter, that we would run into.

None the less, within 20 or so minutes of that question we had picked up two hitch hikers (T from England and C from North America), both taking a break from the TA. One wanted Reefton, one didn't care. Both were happy with a lift to Murchison.

* * * *

The alarm this morning had been on for 0700, but I had been up from before 0600. By the time we had sorted and consolidated our gear into something packable/cartable, and left the hotel, it was just before 0900.

We stopped at Le Cafe for breakfast but service was slower than we are used to (we had been warned about this) and we had had two hot drinks each by the time our food came. Here there was yet again a different definition betweenAmericano and Long Black. It was about 0950 when our food was put in front of us.

Having eaten we picked up our gear and headed toward the bus stop...which apparently, according to the information we had, was near the InterIslander Ferry Terminal. Just next to the terminal is the museum for the Edwin Fox. We hadn't been to this museum before...the poor old boat has an interesting history, and the museum well worth a visit. We managed to have a quick chat to the Scottish couple again, whose ferry booking had been moved, for the second time.

When a bus stop is not a bus stop!

The 'Bus Stop' at the Ferry Terminal is not actually where you get the Intercity Bus to Nelson. Apparently the 'Bus Stop' is for busses for the Bluebridge Ferry only. I chased an incoming Intercity Bus to the InterIslander Ferry terminal doors to work out where it actually left from!

Our bus left at around 1300...(there was a customer missing), and stopped at Blenheim to pick up more



passengers, (with more customers missing), and then Havelock, before getting to Nelson.

The taxi I had ordered for a pickup from the bus stop in Nelson was late....which didn't necessarily bode well. He eventually turned up and we were dropped at the airport to pick up our hire car at 1530.

That process fortunately went smoothly and after visiting an ATM, and grabbing some food, we headed out of town around 1650.

After dropping our two hitchhikers on the main road in Murchison we headed to our pre booked hotel. It was basic and the key to the door of the room universal (I know this because I accidentally opened and entered the wrong room). Dinner was the roast special at one of the Hotels on the main road. The evening was spent, as usual, watching Youtube videos and working out what we wanted to do for the next few days.



Australia has Easter Billies; New Zealand has Easter Kiwis!

Murchison to Westport.

12th February 2023. Last night we had found a brochure in the hotel foyer regarding a half day tour to some natural flames (essentially an area where natural gas exuded from the ground and a miner (in all his wisdom) had lit it). I sent an email enquiry as to the possibility of a trip today but we hadn't heard from them by 0830 so we left town, heading toward Westport. We took a couple of stops for photos along the way, as well as a walk on part of the Lyell Walkway - visiting the cemetery only but missing the longer walk to the mining site of this historic mining town. At the junction of the Lyell Walkway with the Old Ghost Road we were entertained by a South Island New Zealand Robin, and a German tourist trying to take photos of it.



When we got finally into Westport, after visiting the I-Site, we headed to the New World to get supplies for lunch, which we ate at the riverside reserve. Then we headed north; to Denniston.

The i-Site in town had given us a few ideas for short visits from Westport. The trip to the old coal mining tramway breakhead at Denniston was interesting; a mass of interps boards giving a comprehensive view of the life of the settlement and the people who lived there. There is apparently more interps boards further up the road, and I believe a museum, which has in the past run tours. I also got the impression that a current coal mine





is operating on the plateau just inland from this area. We didn't check this out, neither did we check out the coal mining museum at the back of the i-Site. Instead, after our on-site coal mining history lesson we headed back through town and out to Cape Foulwind, before venturing a little further down the coast to the seal colony.



Cape Foulwind



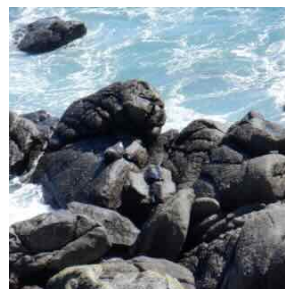
Cape Foulwind

Dinner was fresh fish and microwave vegies. Afternoon mushes were provided by the local ginger cat. Andrew went to bed around 2030.

Birdlist for the day: weka, plover, godwits?, white-faced herons, pukeko, pipits, swamp harriers, sparrows, Common mynas, black winged gull, red legged gull, tomtit, South Island robin



Seal Colony



Karamea /Market Cross-

And a rare sighting

13th February 2023. We left Westport around 0830, wishing farewell to the host, and felines Moose (our lovely ginger) and Lottie (who I was introduced to in the reception area this morning). The idea was to drive to Karamea, go for a walk before lunch and then undertake a second walk in the afternoon. The drive took longer than expected so it was close to 1100 by the time we got to town. We popped into the info centre at Market Cross to discover the landform we had come to see was closed (and had been for a few days). A discussion over a cuppa ensued as to what we wanted to do. We ended up in the Opara Basin anyway. It was around 1300 when we had lunch at the picnic tables at the carpark; undercover, and surrounded by some great interps boards about the natural and human history of the area. The Opara Arch, which was why we were spurred to come up here, was closed but the loop via the Moura Gate Arch was open, and a popular walk. The vegetation was lovely, the arch lovely, although photographs needed to be managed not to include other visitors (and I would have got more creative

shots had I walked over to where the other visitors were).

We had several bird encounters on the trail (robins, tomtits and fantails) but the bird spot o the day was a Whio (blue duck)!

Other birds during the course of the day included weka, pukeko, harriers, starlings, swallows sparrows, a tui, and a bellbird

We decided we would stay in the area this night and managed to book a self contained unit on the edge of Market Cross. It was however only available for one night. Chisney was this establishment's Ginger. Ginger cats are definitely our go to cat in New Zealand (my yoga buddy on the North Island was a ginger).

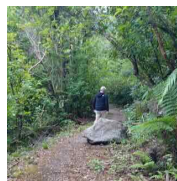


Whio!



Karamea and Market Cross

14th February 2023. I was looking for a walk with a bit of length today but equally something not too taxing. I found the Fenian Trail, the old bridge track up to the gold mining works. If you don't want to go that far there is a small loop that takes in three caves just after the trail goes from a wide manageable track to, according to comments from AllTrails users, a rough scrubby track. The caves sounded like a bit of fun but with an 80 meter tunnel to go through without a torch (a torch is a must) we weren't going to risk it. AllTrails users didn't have wonderful things to say about the caves loop either. We had another commercial walk booked and paid for; I didn't want to pull out with an injured ankle - or worse. Perhaps if today's date was after the 20th, when we would have completed our upcoming walk.... A sign at the start of the track solidified our decision not to proceed to



the caves, although who brings hard hats on holiday?

So we walked to Maloneys Bluff and turned around. There wasn't really any view at the Bluff, just the sound of the river below. The track up was steady and easy in gradient but one



had to constantly look where one was putting one's feet. As there was just thick vegetation on the slope below as well as the hill above there was no view to distract the concentration.

Ferns and beech dominated the species here and because it was overcast some sections of the path under thick sections of rainforest were quite dark.

Bird calls were occasional and sometimes not identified. We were entertained by the antics of robins, flycatchers and a tomtit playing in the vegetation - as usual, all just out of arm's reach.

Back at Market Cross we had lunch in the middle of the market place before heading for the Zig Zag Track. The aim was the viewpoint but this



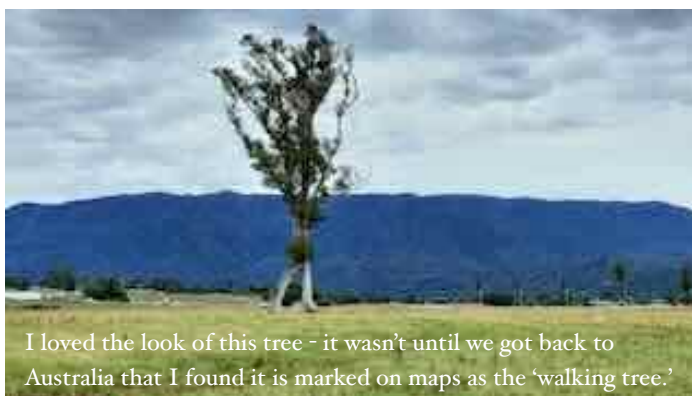
poorly maintained track had a warning before we started. See photo. I guess we are not casual walkers and if they had wanted to close the track, I guess they would have changed the warning notice words. As promised



the track zigzagged up the hill to a junction...the sign to the lookout out old and obscured. Beyond the lookout was the original cemetery, a sign of which all that really remains, the ravages of time having turned the little graveyard behind it to an overgrown mess.

I didn't realise until halfway up this track that Andrew was feeling a bit flat, and as such he didn't appreciate the view as much as I did. I was thinking that this may have been due to the handmade pie he had yesterday but given I went to sleep for a couple of hours feeling knocked out when we checked into the Karamea. Hotel (there was no room where we stayed last night so we had to change overnight premises) that perhaps the bread at lunch had something to do with this....often bread really knocks me out beyond comfort..it cant be good for the system.

Birds...pukekos (often at watering troughs), wekas, black winged gulls, starlings, a kingfisher, white faced heron, harrier



I loved the look of this tree - it wasn't until we got back to Australia that I found it is marked on maps as the 'walking tree.'



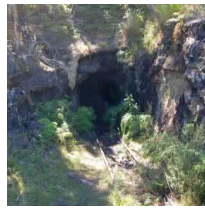
Charming Creek Walkway; a Short Great Walk



Karamea to Reefton!

15th February 2023. I didn't know where Reefton was until we picked up the hitchhikers a few days ago, yet none the less we found ourselves, completely un-expectantly, staying in this quaint historic city for the night.

How did we get here?



Well...

Andrew didn't wake up as early as I had hoped and by the time we left the hotel, went on a wild goose chase to photograph a road sign for the protection of bitterns, picked up some muesli bars for lunch from the small supermarket in Market Cross, and headed out of town, it was after 1000!

Because of this delay (I had hoped to be at the start of today's walk much earlier) I was expecting not to go the full length of the planned adventure.

However, we were on the track around 1100 and we made it back to the car around four hours later; breaks included a stop for lunch at the shelter at the Watsons Mill site, a chat to two walkers, and a chat to four DOC staff at two different locations along the trail (today was the day they were doing their annual rust prevention painting of some of the relics, and there was a bit of track maintenance and tree clean up to deal with near the tunnel and bridge over the Gorge).

The Charming Creek Walkway is a DOC *Great Short Walk* but it is not all accessible due to three land slips that happened a couple of years ago. Because of the





damage, and size and location of debris, staff are sceptical whether the southern part of the walkway will ever be accessible again, which is a pity because according to one staff member, the blocked off area includes the gorge which he thinks is the nicest part of the walk.

The current walk is 11km return, passes through a coal mining site (last operated in the 1980s), two timber milling sites (each stopped operating at different times) and finishes at the turn around site of the Mangatini Falls. It is not a giant waterfall but it is pretty, and apparently after a good rain the water sprays to the other side of the gorge where the rail lines are (which is where you are standing).

The easy trail follows the old tramway, originally put in by Watsons Mill, extended by Mumms mill and then again by the coal miner until the road became more practical for commodity transport.



* * * * *

Getting back to Westport we were expecting the ladies at the i-Site to book a hotel for us as they had last time. But there was nothing suitable left in town (a pity because I was hoping for another mush with Moose!). The closest suitable accommodation was an hour away. (Andrew wasn't prepared for a dorm at the backpackers). I suppose we cant complain, we didn't start looking until after 1600!

So we found ourselves in Reefton discussing the lack of hotel options for the coming weeks where we expected to be, and realising that perhaps we had better start looking at what we are doing after our next walk.

We spent an inordinate amount of time this evening trying to find a car for after our next walk. There was nothing available from either Nelson when we got back from the next walk, nor Christchurch, even if we flew straight there. We did have to eventually get to Christchurch...but given the lack of hire cars, the question now, was how. Bus or Train?

In the end after scrambling our brain with all sorts of numbers, we booked a bus to Greymouth (two days after we finished our next walk) and the Tranz Alpine to Christchurch, two days before our flight out of Auckland. We were exhausted after all this; the booking for the flight from Christchurch to Auckland would have to wait....

Birds..weka, robin, pukeko, fantail, tomtit, swallows, black backed-gull, red billed gull, swamp harrier, starlings, shelduck, pipits, Canada geese, bellbird



Reefton to Nelson

16th February 2023. As usual (most of the time) I was awake and rearing to go before Andrew. We technically didn't have to rush this morning but my body clock at the moment is set for an early start. Whilst Andrew was getting himself ready to leave I admired the portrait mural on the wall opposite the Dawson Hotel (the building in between had been demolished) that depicted the reverse of a photograph of the early 1900s. Reefton started as a gold mining town (hence the name, I suppose) but we didn't visit any museums to get any further information.

A walk around town had us admiring the oldest and only remaining train engine of its kind, and choosing a coffee shop that had no decaf, so we moved on. We had travelled the main roads back to Murchison before so we took an alternate for part of the journey, rolling along next to Browns Creek. A stop at Murchison wasn't as fruitful as it could have been: the coffee shop was very packed and had no gluten free stuff anyway. Instead we stopped at the Rhubarbe Cafe in Wakefield for lunch, where a spinach omelette was just the ticket. We ignored the memorial to physicist Ernest Rutherford in Brightwater, before finding our hotel, dropping off our gear, going shopping, returning the hire car to the airport, double checking the dam for bitterns, getting a taxi back to the hotel, and settling in for the evening. And packing our gear into the appropriate bags for tomorrow. Dinner was fish and salad

It wasn't a very practical or adventurous day...just a journey from A to B



Able Tasman Coastal Track

Totaranui to Wanui

18.7km

17th February 2023. At about 0430 I suddenly realised we would soon need to pay the remainder of the fee for our next walk. I had no idea why that popped into my head; it clearly wasn't relevant for the next few days ahead.

This was frustrating because I was not supposed to be awake. The alarm was due to go off at 0530 and I still wanted some sleep. I did get a short doze after this but I was up before the alarm.

Technically we didn't have much to do. Just close the bags, get dressed, have breakfast, drop our spare bags off at reception, and wait for our lift. We did manage to book our flights to Auckland and the needed Christchurch airport accommodation

We weren't the only ones standing out the front of the hotel for a 0715 pickup. The other candidates flew in from Australia two days ago but had to truncate their Able Tasman Coastal Track

experience from a 4 day to 3 day adventure because although the flight landed safely after the (ex)cyclonic weather Auckland had had, and they had made it safely to Nelson, their baggage was stuck in Auckland's international terminal.

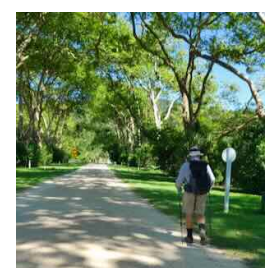
The tour bus was almost full when we got aboard with M&A and we chatted all the way to the water taxi base at Marahau. Because of road redirections we didn't get to the base in time for a proper briefing, instead only having time to grab our lunch and get on the water taxi..which was at that point out of the water on a trolley attached to a tractor! It was a wacky way to travel, but totally practical when from there you are backed into the water!

There were only four tourists to start with on this taxi,

(us plus a couple of Tasmanians, and the skipper of course) but a stop at a beach to the south soon had us in an almost full boat. Apparently we stopped at all but one of the regular stops around the coast, picking up and/or dropping off people and bags, until we finally got to where we were to start walking.

It was close to 1100 when we jumped off the back of the water taxi, without our boots on, and into the water. By the time we had gone to the toilet, put our shoes and socks back on, and had a nibble to eat it was 1120.

We started off today's walk up a tree lined avenue, turning onto the track marked with a large orange triangle, past a swamp to one side and passing an historic house on the other. The path was popular, and wide,





a n d
vegetation
varied but
the track was
m o s t l y
covered with
shade.



Giant ferns
dominated
some places,
stringy barks
dominated
others. There
were areas
dominated
by beech

forest, and
there were areas with
wetter vegetation species
and areas with dryer
vegetation species.

We had lunch at Anapai
Bay, the first beach we
came to, although we
hadn't yet been walking an
hour. Our other breaks
were Mutton Cove, for a
foot taping, and
W h a r i w h a r i n g i
Campground, where we
sat under the shade of the
hut verandah to enjoy a



small chocolate
bar.

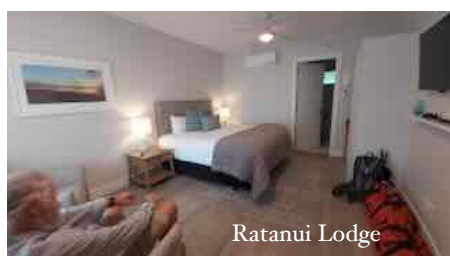
We were never
going to have time
to get to Separation
Point; a detour
recommended in
our itinerary.
According to one
set of notes we had
there was just
enough time to get
to the bus.
Conflicting DOC
signs along the
track seemed to
indicate different
'time splits'
however so
perhaps we could
have tried. We
made it to the end
of the track at
Wanui where the
bus arrived a few
minutes later to
take us to Ratanui
Lodge. The room
was fancy, and
i n c l u d e d
bathrobes. Dinner
was Indulgent



Birds spotted
today: tui, bellbird, kereru, weka,
pukeko, oystercatchers, black
winged gulls, sheareaters/prions?,
white-faced heron



The gateway to the northern end of the Able Tasman Coastal Walk



Ratanui Lodge

Totaranui to Arawoa

11.71km

18th February 2023.
The alarm wasn't on this morning but I got up before 0600.

Unfortunately I woke Andrew up. Breakfast wasn't being served until 0800 anyway so there was no rush. Our driver wasn't picking us up until around 0930 and the planned itinerary was for a departure at Totaranui (after driving back there) for after 1100 after our bags had been handed to a water taxi. Our guide managed to get the bags onto an earlier taxi but there was no rush... there was an inlet crossing with an earliest time of 1344...the average time to get there was two hours.

So after looking at the interps in the DOC office (old boards and newspaper articles were interesting; blocked history was frustrating) and having a morning snack of a small chocolate bar, we finally walked away from Totaranui at 1120, exactly the time we started yesterday.

We took the small detour to Skinner Point Lookout before making our way up the hill and down again to Goat Beach. The sign for the picnic area prominent but no obvious way to get up to it (there was an indicator pole so maybe we should have gone to one side but it all looked pretty overgrown, and the leaning pine (probably the subject of the nearby 'falling trees' sign) may have been an indication that the old picnic area was worth avoiding). Instead we took the shade under the next available tree overhanging the top of the



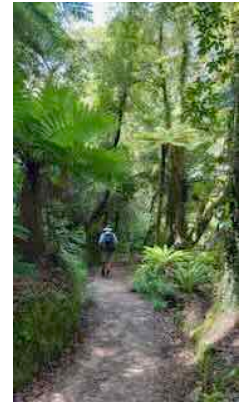


beach, settling ourselves on a washed up log for lunch. A week ago we visited in the



hope of something but he left disappointed after circling us a couple of times.

There had been a notification about timing the tide and rounding the rocks at the



end of this beach and I had assumed we had to wait for the tide to drop. But on checking the map we discovered that the official track actually goes off the beach up the hill, so no waiting around the point required. So, after a nice break, and a stacked sandwich, we headed south, along the beach and up the rocks (maybe that's what the message was referring to?). The track was noticeably narrower here, and an old slip didn't help. Ambient noise was mainly insects but a kereru did visit us just overhead with its signature flapping noise. We got to the inlet crossing section just after the earliest crossing time, taking the track that had been suggested to the other walkers rather than the official track on the map, and then losing specific direction around the spit past small runabouts that were high and dry. The first water crossing had been almost up to my waist.





We got talking here to a Kiwi who recently undertook the Grampians walk in Victoria, and is due to do the Larapinta in June.



The walk along the populated beach was pleasant, a note on the exit boardwalk reminding



walkers to look out for ATVs (what?) and the lead into the Lodge was a welcoming avenue of

trees. We were checking in at reception at around 1500.



The first priority was a shower and to get out of the sweaty and saline clothing (which was rinsed and put out to dry on the balcony) but we didn't get back to the cafe for a cuppa. We



spent a sedate afternoon around the room, Andrew using up his wifi allocation and then reading on the back balcony, me checking a few things on the AT app before having an afternoon snooze.

Our dinner reservation was at 1900. The main meal came out extraordinarily quickly, the dessert took an extraordinarily long time, so much so that the thought of an evening wander down to the wetland was put off because it was going to be too dark to see anything. We got back to the room and had a game of cards before Andrew went to bed and I wrote up the diary notes. Andrew was in bed at 2145. I was in bed at 2210.

Birds...weka, kereru, tui, sparrow, black backed gull, variable oyster catcher, red billed gull, little black shag, pied shag, paradise duck, pukeko,

Arawoa to Anchorage

24.85km

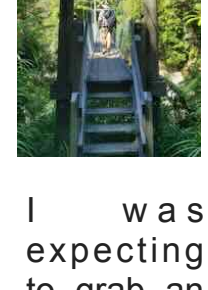
19th Feb 2023. We had hoped for an early start today, getting to the restaurant for breakfast just after 0700. We sat in the same table as last night, next to the Tasmanians. The squashed fly that I had noticed last night was still on the corner column.

A continental breakfast was included and we had to pay an \$8 upgrade if we wanted something fancier. I went for the big breakfast minus the potato cake and swapping the bread to gf. The waiter came out to say the sausages weren't gluten free. What? I started to send him back to check why not but in the end suggested he just swap the sausages for an extra poached egg. One coffee is included and I hesitated to order a cappuccino...I got a late...with no chocolate!

Lunch was picked up at reception as we settled our bill. I handed the potato chips back but as the mandarin was the only piece of fruit provided we held onto it. Only one sandwich for me today (I had been given two on the first day). The quantity of that was probably about right..but Andrew got a

very long roll.

We finally got started at 0820, and we were back on the official track passing the wetland at 0825. There was a lot of up today. The hills weren't as high as Day 1 but there were several of them, they were steeper and the hostess of the BnB we stayed in suggested there was more elevation gain today. Some of the views were just lovely.



I was expecting to grab an email

address of one of the Tassie girls so I could send her a couple of photos but we all got separated into different taxis on the way back.... Anchorage was a madhouse when we got there...or a well oiled machine ,depending on which way you look at it.



The pick up was for 1600. There were two kayak taxis already there. A much larger ferry had



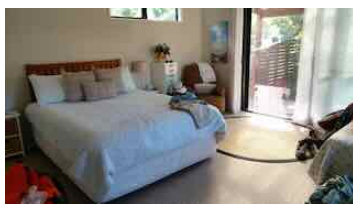
tuned up around 1530 and taken off 2/3 of the population from the beach. Four Able Tasman Taxis turned up at 1545 and it was a case of fitting the listed passengers in one of the available boats. A, who had been picked up with us from Nelson was only doing 3 days of the walk and he got shuffled off, singularly, into one boat. We got directed in the chaos to another, and the Tassie girls were just coming

down the beach into the waiting fray as we settled into our ride. The trip back to Marahau was smooth, the sea conditions good, with enough wind for a couple of yachts to have their sails up but not enough to be uncomfortable on the water. Because of the low tide the boat drove directly onto the tractor waiting for it at Marahau beach and we were driven to the kayaking base. The idea is that you

get off at the base with which you are familiar but had we done that (and got off at the Taxi base), we would have been getting off at the second stop and have further to walk to tonight's accommodation, and we both had sand grains in our shoes that were annoying and causing us abrasions. We got off at the kayak base, behind the tavern we had been booked in for dinner, and made our way to the BnB. This meant we missed saying goodbye to the others..they were pleasant chatting companions.



We were welcomed to the BnB by D and settled, and I had had a shower, by 1700.



Birdlist. Pied stilts, marsh crake, red billed gull, black winged gull, variable oyster catchers, white faced heron, pied shag, sparrows, swallows, tui, fantail, (may have heard the rifleman), weka, shearwater (fluttering)

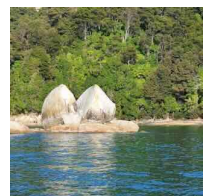
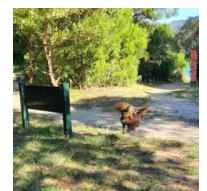
Anchorage to Marahau

21.72km

20th February 2023. Our first task this morning was to walk back to the taxi base. We could have actually stayed at Anchorage yesterday, but it would have been in glamping tents (not necessarily an issue) but more importantly it would have meant a cold shower; a situation Andrew was not too impressed with if he had a choice. Apparently according to one tourist who stayed there, the shower didn't feel so cold if you went for a dip in the sea first! So, given the choice, and our decision, it meant there were more logistics needed to get to and from the track yesterday afternoon and this morning. We got loaded back on a boat on a trailer and waited until we were delivered to the water. Because the conditions were good, the skipper took us around to check out Split Apple Rock first - apparently it is world famous!

As per our last disembarkation from a water taxi, we took our shoes off in anticipation of a wet jump, but it turned out we didn't need to, which meant now we had to remove the sand from our feet and put our shoes back on. I walked into the DOC hut to look at the interps and got told off for having my shoes on (I had missed the sign to take them off).

Before joining the track back to Marahau we took the loop to Pitt Head, walking to each of the two lookouts - which weren't that



extensive. We had morning tea at a picnic table at Te Pukatea Bay.

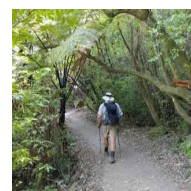
The track to Marahau from Anchorage starts out as an exposed drier walkway, which we felt on this hot day, but the upside to this is the glorious views.

Once the track was back into vegetation there were various opportunities to divert off it, mainly for beaches and campsites along the way. We thought we would try one lookout diversion for lunch, but so did several others, and the



track terminated in boulders not an wooden open structure..

Our afternoon tea was perfect however, on a seat made for just the two of us along the track, and with our own entertainment; a





persistent weka who really did want to pinch some of our food.

We made it back to the taxi base on time, even after our stop at the Cafe at the end of the track for a snack, but the driver was missing a group of kayakers. She finally found them but it meant our return to Nelson was later than expected. We were dropped off to our hotel around 1800. After some well earned showers (in a much smaller room than we had stayed in a few nights ago), and dinner at Smugglers (through the back gate of the hotel complex) we spent the evening watching television -including an interesting documentary on sharks.

Bird list...rail, white-faced heron, flittering shearwater, gannet, sparrow, kereru, tui, pied shag, shelduck, weka, pukeko, grey warbler, fantail, black winged gull, red billed gull



Gateway to the southern end of the ATCT.



Playing Tourist Again

Nelson to... Nelson

21st February 2023. The blinds were closed and there was no light coming in. The alarm wasn't on so consequently we slept in. It didn't matter. The only time we needed to worry about today was the leaving time of 1000.

Our only job this morning was to pack our bags so we could carry them from The Beachcomber Hotel to the Tahuna Beach Holiday Park, 500 or so meters away. Like twice before we hobbled with our packs on our back and the duffel bags at our sides, me over the shoulder, Andrew holding by hand, swapping sides when muscles got tired. We had one break in the middle of this trip...at a coffee cafe, and Andrew's first coffee of the day.

Andrew was reasonably happy. My decaf cap was a late at best...but with no chocolate or cinnamon; there really is no consistency in New Zealand as to what coffee is what!

Of course because we left The Beachcomber on time, the room at the holiday park was not ready so we left our gear

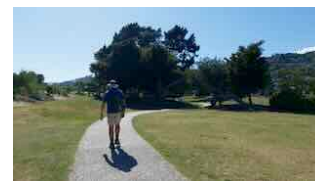
at reception and headed off toward town on a food shopping run.

We had been told where the bus stop was, but came across the sign for a walkway into town. 5 km. Easy for us. And flat. But could I convince Andrew... it was two locals walking past who encouraged the walk, stating it was nice... and there was a cafe on the way!

The walk was pleasant, with coastal views, interps boards, history, a chat to a Morton Island resident, and a cuppa. The cafe however, turned out to be a high class restaurant...I think they were disappointed when we didn't stay for lunch.

After getting to town, getting food supplies and organising some stamps to be sent back to Australia for a collector I know, we headed back to our accommodation. This time however we took the bus.

We got off the bus with a young lass who had just done the Able Tasman Coastal Track and was about to get back on the TA. She was also staying at the same holiday park - but she was camping. We had booked a cabin and after logging in we started to sort out our clothes. It was here I discovered that my sandals (the only pair I own) were missing. Thinking back I realised I hadn't packed them and I rang The Beachcomber Hotel. Nothing had been put in lost property so I guess that a member of the cleaning staff had commandeered them; there can be no other explanation; the bags have been in reception next to the receptionists at



this holiday park since we had dropped them there in the morning. The Beachcomber didn't own up to the loss so I guess I am going to have to replace the sandals when I get back.

This afternoon's main priority was to decant the tent of anything biological so we can get it back through biosecurity when we land in Brisbane. It wasn't a big job - there was not much vegetation in it - the main thing I had to clean out of it was dead mosquitos!. Gear cleaned up and repacked we had smoked salmon salad for dinner and watched American Gangster on television, going to bed at 2330.



Nelson to Greymouth

22 February 2023. The alarm was on for 0500. We didn't have much to do but Andrew usually takes around an hour and a half when he is casually getting ready so I wanted to give us enough time to wake up.

I had booked a taxi at 0645 to pick us up with a specific instruction that the taxi couldn't be late as we needed to be at the bus depot at 0700. We were at the waiting area at 0635. At 0645 there was no taxi. At 0650 there was no taxi. By this time I was getting stressed. There is only one bus to Greymouth and it doesn't go every day of the week and there are limited places as Intercity has to juggle passengers getting picked up and dropped off along the way and to destinations beyond. The holiday park has a direct line to the taxi company. So I rang it. I asked to



Speak to the operator. According to her information the taxi driver was two kilometres away....did that mean two minutes.....

The taxi turned up at around 0655. We got to the bus depot at 0701. Most bus passengers were already there and the bus was over half full. We did get a seat together fortunately. I was just happy to get on the bus at this point but what I had been hoping to do was get to the depot early enough to get the front seat. We had got the front seat from Picton to Nelson and it gives a great view of where the bus is going.

The bus took its first break at Murchison - at the cafe we had stopped before that had no gluten free goodies. I ordered a hot chocolate and grabbed a couple of chocolate bars to keep me going. We also had muesli bars with us.

Pancake Rocks is a popular tourist destination at Paikiri and the bus driver had indicated that if we were quick we might have time to check them out when we stopped. It is a very short walk but it was raining and we, like half the rest of our bus, and the occupants of a

second bus, and all the other tourists in the area, crammed into the cafe to order lunch. As is standard in remote locations in New Zealand, trying to find good food that hasn't got wheat in it is a struggle, and we didn't have the time to wait to be fussy. Andrew was happy with his pie and sausage roll. I was relegated to a gluten free brownie. Not the healthiest lunch around.

We arrived at Greymouth to a large number of people wanting to get on the bus. We got off and made our way into the i-Site. I had been hoping they could help us with some day trips given there were no cars available to hire, but the only half day trips they were happy to organise were two owned by the same company that was running the I-Site. Given the excursions were expensive, I wasn't willing to spend a lot of money to get a ride back up to Paikiri. I did however book us into a half day trip south to Hokitika.

It had been raining on and off all day and continued as we walked to the hotel. We were soaked upon arrival and the manager/owner waived us off into our room saying we could pay later. I don't think he was being particularly considerate so we could get comfortable and dry quickly; it was just he was in the middle of eating his lunch and didn't want the hassle. Fortunately the rain had stopped by the time we headed back out to buy supplies for tonight's dinner and tomorrow's breakfast.

Greymouth

23rd February 2023. This morning started with a bit of drama...over a 'stolen' heater. There was a knock on the door just before 0900. It was the proprietor, whose first word was 'help'. Thinking it was an emergency I ran after him down the verandah. He pointed to one of the rooms and said 'heater gone'. I was unsure as to what he was talking about, thinking there was electrical fault maybe, or circuit breaker issue, but that didn't make sense as they were individual units...he then led me into the office and handed

me the receiver on the phone....

I was to be interpreter (the proprietor's English is very minimal, bordering on terrible and non-existent). Andrew followed me down the path to see how we could help - but we still had no idea of the issue. We finally worked out that the heater was missing from Room 1. The fellow on the other end of the phone was the gentleman who had stayed in Room 1 last night. He claimed he didn't have the heater. The proprietor, looking very pained, claimed it was there yesterday. The tourist, with an English accent, said he was around an hour down the road and was willing to turn around but we wouldn't find anything...he had no reason to steal the heater. In the end the proprietor let it go, disappointed, the tourist could continue with his holiday and I was left thinking this is the reverse of my sandals situation!

We trundled toward town around 0930 and after strolling around the streets noting the buildings of mixed age and condition (some with broken windows, plants growing in cracks, and others empty and abandoned),

and popping into an art gallery, we finally popped into a coffee house for a cuppa. Andrew ordered a hot chocolate and he definitely made the right choice. It looked fabulous. Whilst my decaf was the strongest decaf I have had in New Zealand, it was barely a flat white, and had no topping (chocolate or cinnamon)!

By the time we emerged the freezing wind had lost some strength, there was more blue sky and the sun was showing itself. I needed a book to read. Andrew has a lagging underfoot issue which means he wouldn't be doing anything more than easy walking today so the afternoon was slated for relaxing in room. I had finished the three books I had picked up since leaving boat. The second hand book store had a lot of local New Zealand and West Coast titles. I settled on a 20 year volume of New Zealand history.

Our next move was a quick shop at Countdown for lunch provisions, before we headed back to base, arriving at around 1215; where the TV went on for the background music of Te Matatini.

In the afternoon I headed out for a walk. There were two short walks within easy reach of our hotel and I chose King Park. I made the valley lookout in 25 minutes - I think. I couldn't see Cobden so I guessed I was at the fourth

lookout, despite the fact I had only seen



three 'views' on the way up. There was also a track leading further away from my 'zenith' lookout but the town map showed no track in that direction. It doesn't matter if I reached the end of the track; I got a good short work out and got three nice views.

Hokitika

24 February 2023. A morning excursion! It was windy. It was cold. And the bus was late!!!! The alarm had been on for 0630 and breakfast of poached eggs, toast, avocado, feta was over by around 0745. From this point I had itchy feet. I filled in a few minutes by paying the hotel bill but then I had to force myself to sit down and relax. I almost achieved it. At 0810 we wandered outside and stood on a lonely and sparsely occupied road. We had been told to be ready for pick up at 0815! Slowly the traffic increased, and more and more busses headed our way. ..and beyond. They all had yellow signs. Lots of kids would get to school. But would we get our excursion?

I commented to Andrew that, given the timing, the bus must be attached to Nelson taxis! At around 0825 Andrew spotted the



bus we needed, - going the other way. It was around 0830 when the bus turned up to pick us up...with another customer in the front seat.



This was a basic tour. A half day visiting two locations around Hokitika, the tourist town around 40 kilometres to the south of Greymouth. The driver wasn't what you would call the best interpreter, but he seemed to have a fair bit of knowledge, or at least a list of things to point out to his customers. He was also partially deaf, not answering a question that Andrew had asked - twice. The other guest was from the UK doing a world tour who had managed to not watch the news for the entirety of her trip. I suggested that perhaps she turn a



television on in the next couple of days to manage her hoped for trip to the North Island. She is going to get a shock.

Our activity at the Hokitika Gorge was a casual 50 minute circuit stroll by ourselves, the driver didn't join us. Neither did he join us for the Tree Top walk, the builder of which is apparently the same manufacturer who has constructed all of Australia's Tree Top walks.

We got dropped back in town rather than our hotel and after lunch we started walking along the West Coast Trail. Andrew's idea was to walk to the point at the south side where the Grey River meets the sea, but he pulled the pin on that idea; the wind was still very cold. So we headed back to base for a cuppa and then I went off to the post office to send a card to Australia and pick up some cauliflower to add to last night's leftovers. I was back not long after 1600.

Birds

Black shag, red billed gull, black winged gull, black swan, grey teal?

Greymouth

25th February 2023.

A couple of days ago the plan for today was to hire a bike and ride some of The West Coast Trail. Whilst there was no rain predicted, the top temperature wasn't exactly inspiring and [windy.com](https://www.windy.com) had some of the wind gusts to high teens. Not brilliant when you are riding along the ocean with winds coming straight from the Antarctic. Our decision to instead walk the other side of the Grey River out to its mouth was justified, as the temperature of the icy winds as we were going over the longish road bridge to get to Cobden reminded me of the walk over the bridge in Vancouver in freezing winds the day we went to pick up the car last May. The bridge wasn't quite as long and the winds weren't quite as cold but....



The track along the river, after you pass Nimmo Park, was along the top of a raised wall (flood mitigation I assume given Greymouth's history) and then a bituminised path on the opposite side of the road to the Speedway, adjacent the Lagoon. Andrew was disappointed when we got to the end. The town map distinctly had Hector Dolphins drawn in on it just offshore from the light. But, funnily enough, they weren't there!. We returned essentially via the same route, just detouring around the Lagoon where five small ducks came over to say hello when we stopped at a picnic table for a break. Lunch was at a cafe in town, (after reading some coal mining interps along the flood wall and losing our hearing because the historic clock went off at 1300 just above our heads), and after a quick shop for dinner provisions and nibblies for tomorrow's train trip, we headed back to base, spending the afternoon in our typical fashion, reading and watching some of the final of Te Matatini.

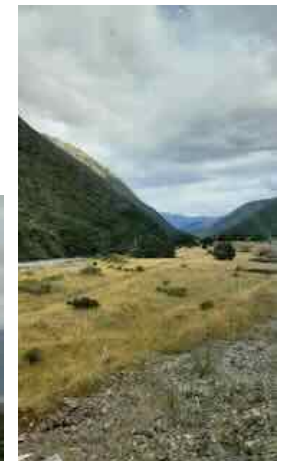
Birds..black shag, (small) duck, pacific black (local lookalike), black swan, white heron, pied stilt, red billed gull, black winged

gull, sparrow
TransAlpine

Greymouth to Christchurch

26th February 2023. The aim this morning was to leave the hotel at a reasonable time and drop our bags off at the station at 0900, when the i-Site opened up. We were, after a quick shuffle of clothes, recycables and food, essentially on time, and found ourselves with a few hours to fill in. I didn't particularly want to get sweaty so none of three of the remaining 'up' walks were considered. I did want to take a couple of photos of a sample of the old dilapidated buildings around town, but that didn't fill in much time. We considered the short walk to the cave on the other side of the bridge but I cancelled that before we crossed the river, instead making a short detour to a section of remaining old railway bridge and its non-maintained interps board, further upstream.

After that it was a wait for the train. After reading the interps board for the Greymouth Railway Station Andrew settled himself on the platform to wait. I headed across to the





Warehouse (Kmart/Target equivalent) and grabbed myself a book to read. The big History of New Zealand book I had bought at the second



hand book store a few days ago had already been checked in.

And then we waited. And waited. We did have a couple of hours to fill in. Entertainment came the way of a Kiwi couple who joined our seat whilst waiting for friends to arrive on the train, and then, between its arrival and when we could get on (the train goes into the yards to change the engine around) a Melbourne lass with hubby and sister in tow.

The train was around half an hour late getting to Greymouth, and whilst we get the impression that it is never exactly on time, today's delay was caused by a medical incident. The delayed arrival meant a delayed departure but the driver was talking about trying to catch up time on the way back. For those with ongoing commitments this was a good aspiration. For those of us without commitments like us I strangely thought we was being cheated out





of time we had paid for. As it was, whilst apparently we had made up time we were still late into

Christchurch, not helped because the Coastal Train from Picton had arrived at the station before us and we had to wait for them to unload people and baggage.

The train trip itself was quite enjoyable, and even Andrew admitted he enjoyed it. The seats were relatively comfortable but not for the full time. Andrew didn't get up. I got off for the five minutes at Arthurs Pass and I managed the hike down to the observation car for a few minutes giving my legs a stretch. We were grateful we had bought nibbles on the trip, getting food from the food car would have involved standing in a longish queue and I didn't want to miss either the scenery, or the commentary-which is provided by headphones - along the route. Some people didn't seem interested on the commentary. Which is a pity as it provided a nice combination of geological, biological, botanical and anthropological history.

We walked to our hotel from the station in Christchurch, although the motel owner had offered to pick us up. The room was thin, but neat and clean and had we been staying in Christchurch I would be happy to base myself here. The bedroom and bathroom are separate from a galley kitchen (no oven) and a lounge. There is even a back sitting area outside.

Because it was so late on a Sunday (it was after 2000 when we headed out), dinner was at the closest restaurant, Madam Kwongs, about five minutes walk away. It was dark when we walked back to our room. We both read until we went to bed at around 2230.



Orana Wildlife Park

27th Feb 2023 This morning's departure from our hotel was framed with several expletives expelled from Andrew's mouth, immediately after he had power driven his head into the light fitting in the corridor of our 'room.'

I think the fact he had felt rushed didn't help but we had said last night that we would get up and leave as early as possible.

We took the hotel proprietresses advice for our journey to the airport; and caught a bus instead of a taxi...a much cheaper option and as we were going to unavoidably have two taxi trips during the day then anywhere we can save money is appreciated

Breakfast for Andrew had been last night's left over Chinese. For me the Real Meals Tropical Pudding that had been my emergency hike food.

We made the bus that was supposed to stop at The Antarctic Centre, except that it didn't, and we got off where the next bus was scheduled to stop, across a major road from our motel. Within a very short time we managed to

get across the road, find our way to reception, get our bags stored and have a taxi called for us.....

And it arrived in very short time. Which was phenomenal service but I discovered I was an hour out and had to send it away again. The driver said he would be back in an hour -ish..

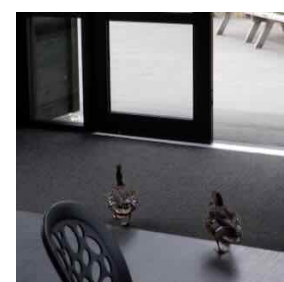
In the mean time we had to explain to kitchen staff that we'd like a coffee but we didn't have a room yet. That was not a problem. But then again we were in a 4 star hotel...a rarity for us.

The taxi driver came back and got us to Orana Wildlife Park about ten minutes before the Park's opening time. The only 'experience' they offer is the lion experience where you are in a cage and the lions are jumping up around you...a bit like the shark cage experience off the South Australian Coast. However, they don't hold it on Mondays so that was out. They have 'keeper talks' throughout the day where, at scheduled times, the animals are fed and you get a blurb. Except for several of these events today the animals had been fed earlier by the keepers and the interpretive guides were volunteers. Not usually a problem but some individuals were more fluent at this job than others. The first talk is the meerkats and I wasn't going to miss that! The most popular talk is apparently the giraffe at 1200. Andrew wasn't that



interested in that talk so we beat the rush to the cafe and had lunch instead. We could however see the giraffe enclosure from the cafe and can appreciate why it is popular....you get to feed the giraffes. The otters were cute, the porcupines pretty cool, but the cheetahs and hunting dogs were hiding in long grass. Of course the reason I had chosen this location for today's activity was the fact they have kiwis...we hadn't yet seen one and we couldn't possibly leave New Zealand without seeing a kiwi. They were of course in a nocturnal house but that is better than nothing. The Kiwi talk was packed although the masses (a few young families and a mass of pre schoolers on excursion) moved on after five minutes or so. Andrew engaged the keepers and they were impressed at his knowledge. It made him think that most visitors must be pretty uninformed.

We caught a shuttle service back to the hotel and the driver mentioned another wildlife park on the other side of town that was all native birds...had we only known (but then again had we gone there we wouldn't have seen the meerkats). And apparently now the Antarctic Centre (which is next to our hotel) has huskies. That would have been really cool but we didn't have time today. It was back to the room, clean the bottom of our hike boots, prepare for tomorrow's flight home, and then relax.



Flying Home

28th February 2023. The irony was that at around 1010 the Air New Zealand flight to Auckland lifted off. The skies were blue with small cumulous scattered around the heavens. Our flight had been due to leave at 0825. Fog had descended quickly. The delayed departure according to the board went from 0825 to 0845 to 1020 to 1030 to 1110! We could have in theory booked a later flight - we would have been in Auckland sooner!



Flight	To	Scheduled	Actual
9800	AUCKLAND	0825	1110
9801	WELLINGTON	0830	1115
9802	DUNEDIN	0835	1120
9803	CHRISTCHURCH	0840	1125
9804	INVERCARGILL	0845	1130
9805	BLUNHEIM	0850	1135
9806	HAIRIRANGA	0855	1140
9807	WAIKATO	0900	1145
9808	TAIRāPAPA	0905	1150
9809	WAIKATO	0910	1155
9810	TAIRāPAPA	0915	1200
9811	WAIKATO	0920	1205
9812	TAIRāPAPA	0925	1210
9813	WAIKATO	0930	1215
9814	TAIRāPAPA	0935	1220
9815	WAIKATO	0940	1225
9816	TAIRāPAPA	0945	1230
9817	WAIKATO	0950	1235
9818	TAIRāPAPA	0955	1240
9819	WAIKATO	1000	1245
9820	TAIRāPAPA	1005	1250



Andrew's only comment to this delay was along the lines he was sorry we hadn't had a decent breakfast at the hotel.

Instead we had checked out at reception around 0615, argued that the cost on our account for dinner last night wasn't ours, grabbed the shuttle to the domestic airport (we could have walked if desperate but it was still dark), and after checking our gear in (the pedestal had given us boarding passes but not luggage tags), we attempted to find breakfast in one of the two cafes open in the upstairs foyer at that time in the morning. The best I got was yoghurt, discarding the muesli on the top and the syrupy fruit below. I did finish off an apple I had been carrying around for a couple of days.

Through security the pickings were even slimmer, the only cafe offering nothing gluten or wheat free so given we had time after being informed of the first delay we ordered hot chocolate and a stick of chocolate.

We finally lifted off the tarmac three hours after we were supposed to. The fog had lifted and it was a beautiful day. Two Air New Zealand/Qantas share flights had headed off under normal time and conditions. Andrew was told he could not have the toastie that he had ordered for the inflight meal but would a pie and sausage roll be okay as a substitute...it was now technically a lunch they were feeding us, not a breakfast. Somehow in the software that only allowed me to order one lunch, he had ended up with two pieces of banana loaf! If we ever get stuck on Jetstar again i am just going to preorder a meal voucher...the gluten free options on the menu are not shown on the web. The noodle soup has instructions to leave it settle for 7 to 8 minutes. I wasn't told this. When I eventually did wait for the hot water to do 'its thing' the brew went from sink water to something resembling broth, but I suspect the calories are minimal, I loaded up on those in the Premier Lounge

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'To the back and turn right,' said the flight attendant. It was the second flight attendant standing next to him that picked up something might be amiss. I was the third person on the plane from Auckland to Brisbane. Business Class and Alliance Partners come on board first; why was I being sent into economy? We all chuckled at this but after our Jetstar experience earlier today I hoped this comedy of errors wasn't an omen for our Qantas flight.



Waiting for our Christchurch flight

The flight back to Australia was filled in by a movie: and the first episode of the Australia Wars. I grabbed the best available option for lunch, although the timing was interesting as it could have been an early dinner in Aus. As it was when we landed and we were picked up by Need A Lift, we ended up going out for dinner at Australian normal time anyway. After a good catch up and chat we were driven back to Sengo around 0845 - which was 1145 NZ time.



We had been up for over 15 hours; it was time to sleep in our own bed. And time to get back to normal!

No option to end up on Border Security. We declared everything!