

FROLICKING IN FIORDLAND

And Flicking Around Its Fringes

The Grand Traverse

A 6-Day, 2 track
combination of valley and
alpine walk

From Page 8

Hollyford Track

A 4-day valley walk

From Page 36

Mechanical trips

The in-between boat, bus and
helicopter rides!



Back Walking in New Zealand: 2024



New Zealand January 2024

Frolicking in Fiordland... and flicking around its fringes!

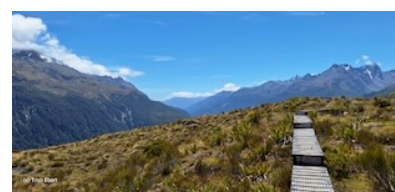
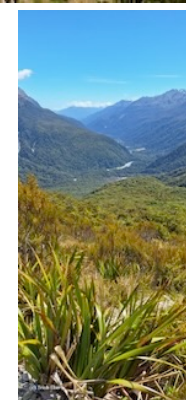
Three tracks...two very different walks!

Given last year's mixed experience in New Zealand, I had to come up with some creative ideas to get Andrew back. In short, I had to bribe him. This meant: lodges and cooks. Guides were an added bonus. So, after finding a walk that Andrew was interested in (Hollyford Wilderness Experience) I managed to stretch his patience with an extra walk (The Grand Traverse) - one I wanted because it would click off my aim of completing one more of New Zealand's Great Walks. So, almost immediately after we got back from New Zealand at the end of February 2023, we had booked our next New Zealand venture.

Whilst we traversed through beech forest on both the Grand Traverse (The Greenstone and Routeburn Tracks) and the Hollyford Track, and both journeys had valley bottoms in them, *and*, they were partially next to each other in geographical location, they were very different walks. The first was a much more 'up and down' affair, although we baulked at the two biggest, scrambiest, challenges. The second tramp was a much easier route; the rise over Little Homer Saddle a blip compared with what we had experienced the previous week. The group sizes were also different: the first walk had 24 participants, the second 14. The international makeup was similar for both groups (14 Kiwis (or links) vs 10 Aussies on the first sojourn, 7 Kiwis vs 7 Aussies on the second).

Guiding styles were also different. The first journey had three 'track' guides: very young (compared to us) and fit individuals, who knew a bit about the tracks, but you had to ask. We were fortunate that one of the lads was keen on birds, and he was good value. The second journey had 'interpretive' guides, and the walk organised to stop at specific spots where knowledge was imparted and the experience enhanced. Andrew treats the 'interps' as an added bonus, but I love the immersive experience... with that in mind however, the guides on both walks did a good job.

Huey, the 'weather god,' gave us a great break...but we were in Fiordland, New Zealand after all, and we couldn't get away with no rain altogether. The first track had overnight rain on the first night, and fog/low cloud for the first half of the

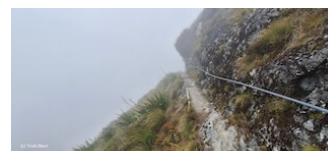
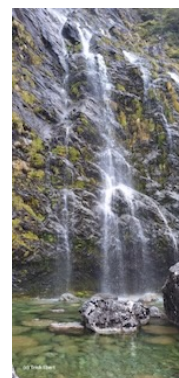


second-last day. The second track had 'on and off' light rain on the third day, and a torrential downpour on the fourth morning. This rain added to the atmosphere and the experience (although Andrew managed to stay dry by weaselling his way out of the last interps session around Martins Bay).

In between our walks we visited Arrowtown (very briefly, not seeing all of it), took two different boat rides on Lake Whakatipu, and a had helicopter flight above some of the mountains surrounding Queenstown.

I didn't take my good camera; weight being the deciding factor. As usual when I leave it behind, I later rued the fact. So, photos have been taken with the waterproof camera and my new phone. Photos from the helicopters will have reflections! I also tried a few 'selfies' but I have not yet mastered that art. Of course, as usual, I took an enormous number of photos! Why? Because it was all so beautiful! Photos from the phone are generally placed in order. Photos from the camera are placed where there was remaining room on the page.

We are not used to people, so travelling in a group had its challenges. On the whole however, we got along with all individuals we met, and some of them were delightful. Lodgings were mostly comfortable, although one mattress was a bit hard for a comfortable night's sleep (unfortunately this was the night before a very long walk), and had we not taken our hiking pillows, I think the nights spent on the bunks may have been memorable for the wrong reasons. Yes, taking the hiking pillows meant we were carrying slightly more weight, but it also meant we had more control over how comfortable our sleep was. All admin, lodge staff, and drivers were good as well. The only thing I am a bit grizzly about was the fact we weren't given a return customer discount. Yes, it was 16 years since we did the last walk with one company, but in 2021 it had been 16 years since we had done a walk with a company in Tasmania, and they gave us a return customer discount - they even suggested it. That company had changed owners but we were still on the database. This time however apparently the cut off was 7 years (when we booked, it was 5 years when we came off track), which is a bit disappointing. It was also disappointing to hear a fellow walker boast next to me that they had got a discount for being a return customer - it wasn't exactly the comment to make my day! I grumbled in the review but I haven't heard back from them. Given that frustration however, I would still recommend the walk to others.



Preparing to leave.

Boat to Tullamarine Airport

1st January 2024. No alarm was set but we woke to a quiet morning. No wind. The sun was out and there was at least one swallow on the lifelines. Breakfast was halloumi and eggs. I put some absorbent padding in the port engine bilge to soak up some oil.

Andrew had suggested leaving at 1000. The expected travel time to the airport was around half an hour so we were early. The Eurocar staff were surprised at the vehicle we returned (its age and condition), and it was too early to check-in to the ParkRoyal Hotel. We ended up storing our luggage, and heading across to the airport building; having lunch at a cafe at the shops in the International Terminal.



The afternoon, after waiting in the hotel lounge until we could get into our room, was spent watching television. Dinner was back down in the lounge (the hotel restaurant is under renovation). Lights were off at 2130.



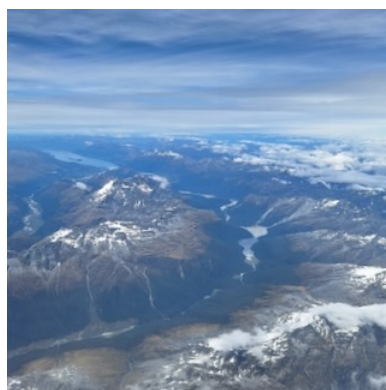
Crossing The Ditch!

2nd January 2023. Our alarm was on for 0430. I was up at 0300 to click my back back into place, then again at 0330. I don't think I got back to sleep after that. The aim was to be in the airport building around 0500, but check-in was delayed a few minutes because I had to buy a luggage tag (I had forgotten that I'd moved my luggage tag from the outer-pack cover to the smaller bag we took to the Kimberley last year - and I hadn't replaced it).

Getting through security was a little more frustrating than expected; firstly we grabbed the wrong queue, and then our tub got held-up in the X-ray machine. We thought it might have been the three apples I had in my bag (which would have been discarded before getting on the plane had they not been eaten) but in the end, after a second look at the screen, we were waived through without further inspection.

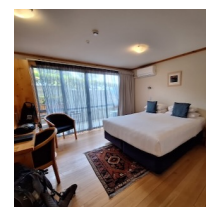
I managed a hot breakfast at the lounge because given my luck there may not be anything on the

plane that I could eat; I had realised very late last night that I hadn't rung the airline to state my food preference. As it was, I was pleasantly surprised. The airline had a 'gf' meal listed for me anyway. Has Qantas reverted to its old rules, or has my record been updated to a permanent request as I am still having a tussle with them over some stolen money? Still, at least this time I hadn't been singled out for tests for drugs or explosives!



The plane took off slightly later than expected. I assume it landed in Queenstown on time - I forgot to look at my watch. We declared our gear but it didn't get checked.

I wasn't prepared to walk the 7 kilometres to the hotel so we caught a bus. A bus card costs \$15; this includes a cost for the card plus \$10 credit (you can pay cash for a ticket but if you are going to be using the bus multiple times a card is the cheaper option, albeit not necessarily the most environmentally friendly one). We were dropped off within a block of our hotel.

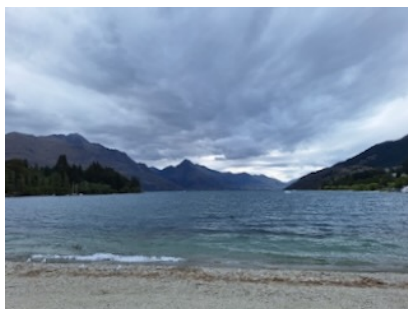


After a cuppa we headed into town for a late lunch. Last time we were in Queenstown we didn't really find any decent eateries. But that was a long time ago. It seems to be a 'pizza' town now, at least in the cheaper eateries. We found 'Hell'.



Andrews Pizza looked, and smelt, fabulous. I had 'snack-size' with a sprouted gluten free base. According to their board it is apparently the healthiest pizza in NZ!





I had brought two pairs of hiking boots across The Ditch with me, both fairly-well-worn, and I figured that each pair would last each one of our booked walks. I had thought to bring some tape across with me for emergency repairs, but I forgot to pack it. The other thought I had was to carry the extra pair of boots with me as a back-up. I wasn't expecting to take either pair home. Neither was I expecting to buy a brand new pair of boots, but strolling into Kathmandu that's just what we did. The display boot was the only pair of size 10 in my preferred style. I wore them back to the room.

Of course the most important items on the shopping list today were insect repellent and sunscreen - and we forgot to buy both of them. We

did however get yoghurt and fruit for tomorrow's breakfast.

We started watching television when we got back to the room. And settled on the tennis. That didn't last long. I suddenly felt a bit tired. And so did Andrew. I had been awake since 0330 (Aus Time) and Andrew had got up not long after. The tv went off, the blind closed, and we both snoozed.

I woke up thinking I had slept 12 hours. It was light outside. It was only 2000! Having caught up on sleep we were then up for a while

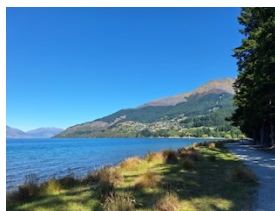
It was raining in Melbourne. Point Cook, just up the road from where Sengo was moored, had had 10mm. By late afternoon it had had more. I just hoped our hatch wasn't leaking! Or if it was, the bucket and towel under the hatch would be doing their job.

Birds. Black billed gull, sparrow, blackbird, Scaup - one with ducklings

Track Briefing Day and a Boat Trip!

3rd January 2024. We slept in. After yoghurt and blueberries for breakfast we walked into town, via the outside of the Queenstown Gardens. It was busy, but it is peak summer season after all. Not that we needed it, but we indulged in a Patagonia Ice-cream and ate it whilst 'people-watching' the crowds along the promenade.

We finally got around to purchasing insect repellent



and sunscreen, and then made our way to the Grand Traverse walk briefing - which was scheduled at 1245. Given the description of the track, buying the new boots was probably a good call - the only issue now is that I have three pairs of boots to take home - thankfully our plane weight restrictions are generous.

We found a little Japanese restaurant for lunch - which was okay but Andrew had appreciated yesterday's pizza more.

The afternoon activity was a cruise. This wasn't an extensive cruise as far as distance goes - it just ducks around the corner of the Botanic Gardens and up into the arm toward Frankton. We got a basic history commentary of the area - most of which was interesting. However, when the skipper called the Black Swans, Canada Geese I got a bit worried - Of course, knowing there were a couple of Aussies on board (because he

introduces himself to each passenger as they get on the vessel) he may have been just taking the 'mickey' and trying to ascertain if anyone was listening.

Back in our hotel room we packed up for tomorrow and went to store our bags. It turned out we didn't have to be ready so early after all (I had wanted to get the bags into storage before reception closed at 1900), because the advice was to just leave the bag in the locked room when we left early in the morning.

We spent the rest of the evening watching the cricket.

Birds: scaup, 'Australasian grebe', black-backed gull, black-billed gull, grey duck/ mallard mixes?, small unidentified birds in the gardens, blackbird, sparrow, chaffinch.



We start walking...

The Grand Traverse...

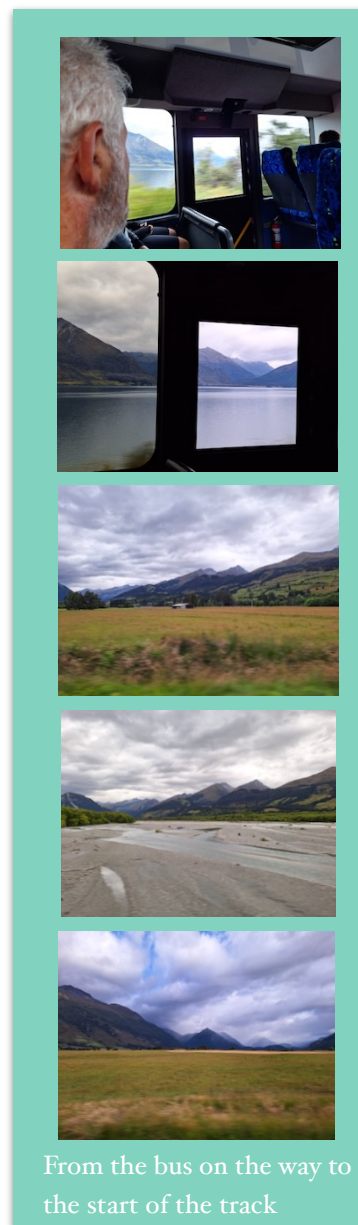
up the Greenstone and down the Routeburn!

4th January 2024. Back to the TA! Well, not quite. The alarm was on for 0545 but we were up twenty minutes before this. After locking our hotel room, with our excess luggage inside, we exited the hotel via the car park, and headed to the cafe adjacent the tour company offices for breakfast. And got a shock. The website indicates the cafe is open at 0630. Which it was...sort of.

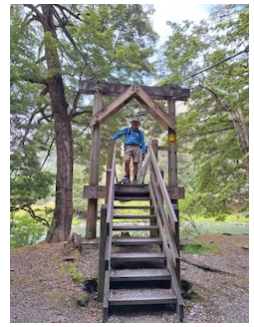
The counter and coffee maker is open at 0630 but the kitchen isn't open until 0700! There was no time to find an alternative. Andrew was happy to grab a sandwich out of the cabinet, but I wasn't, (there was no substantial gluten free option in the cabinet) so I had to wait for the kitchen to open for my eggs and bacon. I wasn't the only one waiting for a fresh, hot, meal. With breakfast finally delivered, and consumed, we gathered with the rest of the mob in the tour company offices around 0720. The bus left with all of us and our gear on board at 0740. After a toilet and introductory stop at Glenorchy we started walking The Greenstone Track at around 1000. There were three stops during the 18km walk: morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea. All breaks were predicted by one of the guides to be 1.5 hours apart, but I assessed we stopped around 1.25. But, unusually, I wasn't at the back of the group so 'the tail-end-charlies' may have taken the average assumed time. Most of today's undulating walk was through beech forest, but the last section was over exposed valley occupied by bovine livestock. A couple of bulls where close to the trail: we skirted around them, however one solo walker had a closer than preferred encounter!

The section of the Greenstone Track up until the afternoon rest stop is part of the Te Araroa. But at this point we diverged, the 'Te Araroa' turned left toward Greenstone Hut; we continued straight on.

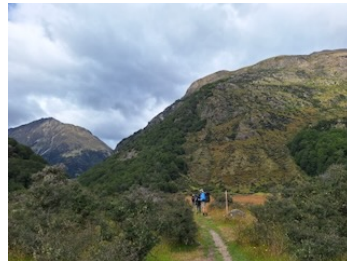
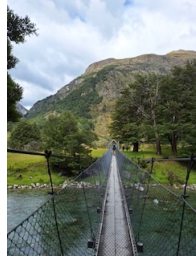
After emerging from the tree line we found ourselves with a headwind, which we had been warned about. It was a tad chilly and Andrew changed his sunhat to a neck sock (for wind-burn protection) and beanie. I put a raincoat on, as a windbreaker; the 'rain' at this point only an odd drip.



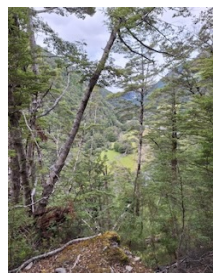
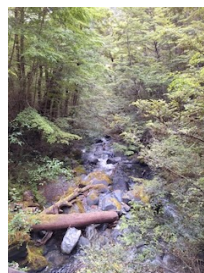
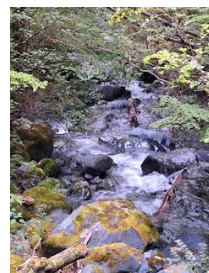
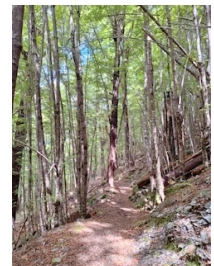
From the bus on the way to the start of the track

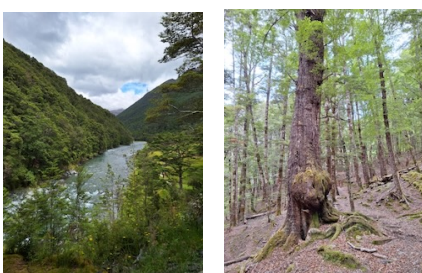


The last stretch, to Steele Creek Lodge, was exposed and windy, and the rain, whilst still light, had changed direction to a horizontal attack. Andrew and I got to the hut in a light drizzle around 1600, well before the rain really came down after 1830. It got even heavier overnight.



24 walkers had to fit into two bunk rooms: one larger room (with partial partitions in groups of four bunks) and one smaller room. We were in the smaller room of 6 bunks, occupied by five of us. There was a bit of snoring overnight, but it was light.





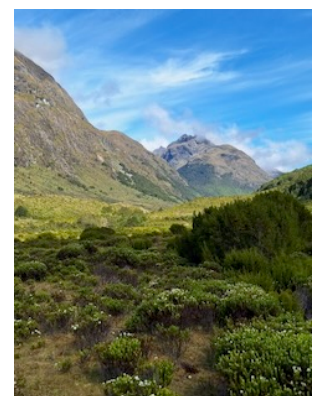


Steele Creek Lodge to McKellar Lodge

5th January 2024. I was up at 0630, the first of the group of five in our small bunk room. I managed to find a space in the lounge area (between the tables) big enough for a small yoga routine before the living area got populated; by 0730 most walkers were in the living room ready for breakfast

Outside the sun was shining through the gaps in the clouds. There was no rain.

For a day that was supposed to be a shorter walk we started earlier, finished later and the step app suggested I had walked over 20km. The 'mileage' was probably not quite right as there were a few short steps up and down hills, and, in and amongst tree routes and rocks. We left Steele Creek Hut at 0830. And once we had stepped the 115 cross-beams over the single person suspension bridge, we emerged into a relatively open, but boggy, valley. We arrived at McKellar Lodge around 1730. Today's terrain was a mixture of beautiful beech forest and open valley, some occupied by cows (and some walkers spotted deer).





Lunch was taken at a shelter (with a flushing toilet) up a steep incline off the track, and a curious rat was spotted. There were many traps along the track but they are probably set for larger ferals as well as rats!

Birds. There were quite a few birds chirping in the bushes near the track during the day, and a dotterel (apparently, it sounded like a lapwing to us) was heard at ground level near the edge of a clearing.

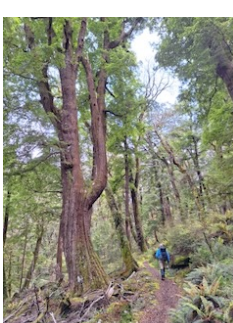
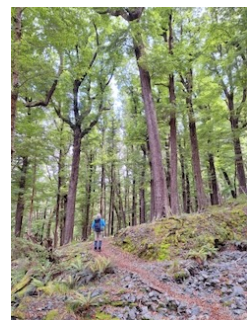
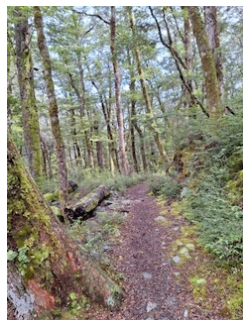
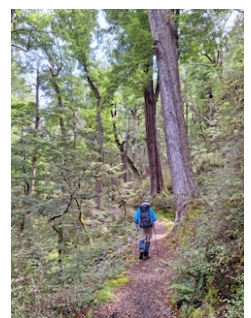
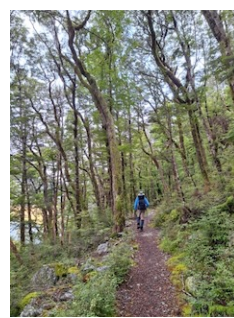
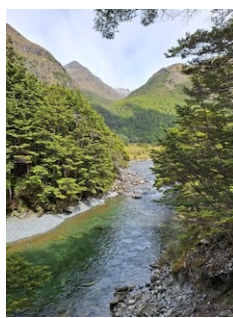


Birds spotted: Rifleman, thrush, paradise shell-duck (pair), tomtit, fantail, swallow (apparently there was a nest at the last hut), and Kakariki (silhouette..one guide got a good look). We were looking for Takahe (recently released here) and whio (blue duck) but we didn't spot any.

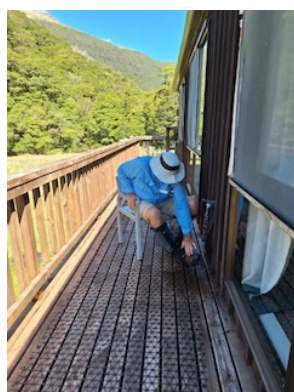
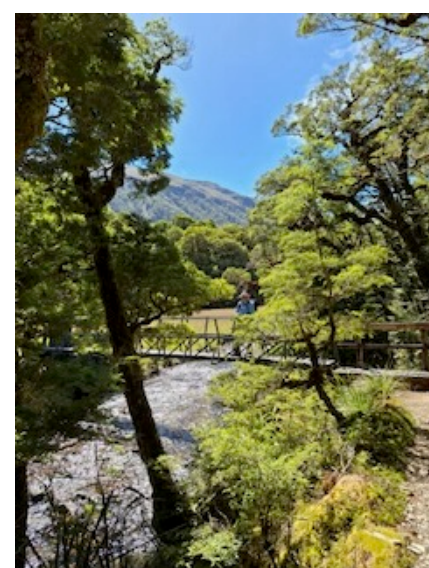
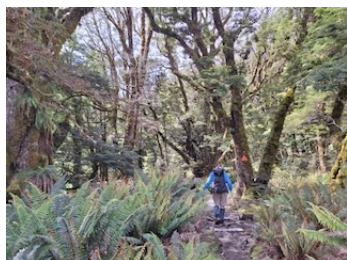


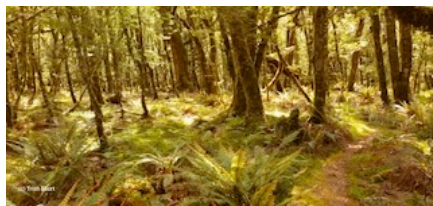
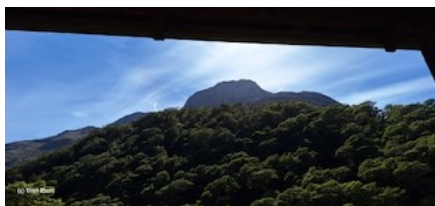
We had been warned that the drying rooms on the track would be very hot but the room at the Mckellar Lodge was 'mildly tepid.' We washed our tops and underclothes and put them in the drying room to dry overnight. We also, eventually, pulled our boots inside to dry (initially we had left them outside in the sun). We did leave the 'gaters draped over the balcony balustrade overnight.











Mckellar Lodge

6th January 2024. In this Lodge, rooms consist of four bunks. Andrew and I were 'bunking' with two single male walkers. They had got to the hut first yesterday so Andrew and I had been left with the top bunks. The steps to get up on top were definitely not barefoot friendly!

The snoring was louder overnight than it had been the night before. And all three boys were snoring. I got up and nudged Andrew a couple of times to shut him up, hit the side of the bunk I was on to shut H up below me, but not knowing C well enough, left him alone, although he was the quieter of the three. I got up at 0630 to stretch my back. B (who we had shared a room with the night before last) was up sitting in the living room with a sore neck. My hips were a bit grumpy too but I suspect that was the usual reason of staying too long in bed. After a stretch I went back for a final snooze - it was a bit too chilly to stay up, probably not helped by an open window in the living area.

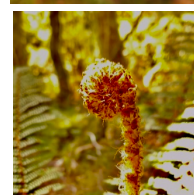
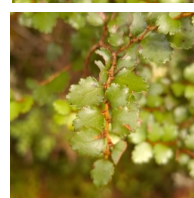
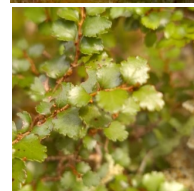
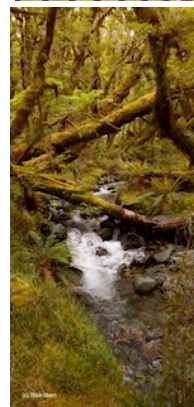
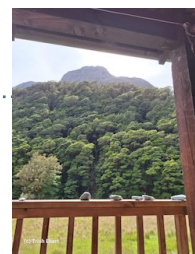
In the end the boys on the bottom bunks got up for the day first, and Andrew and I pulled ourselves out of the top bunks for the day at 0745. Knowing that it was potentially chilly outside of the bunk room, I put my fleecy camp-pants on. The attempt at putting the firebox on in the living area didn't really work but the main living area was warming up nicely with the sun, and didn't stay cold for long.

I had decided, upon my first getting out of bed, that I would not walk to the lookout today. Andrew was not going to do it anyway, but last night I had indicated I was going to give it a go. However I decided that perhaps a rest day would be a good thing.

There were six walkers who didn't take today's side-walk to the lookout. The rest of the group left for the morning excursion at 0940.

We had left our gators on the balustrade overnight and they were still covered in dew mid-morning. The walkers who had stayed behind were mainly ensconced in reading, although everybody engaged in a bit of friendly chatter. Rap music was keeping the guide staff company as they were preparing lunch in the kitchen.

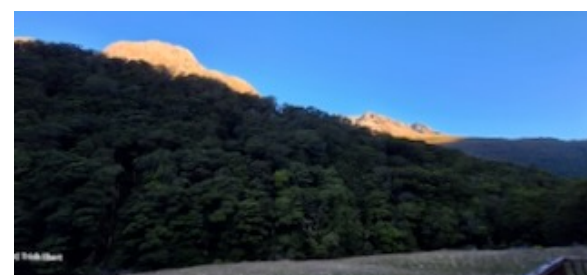
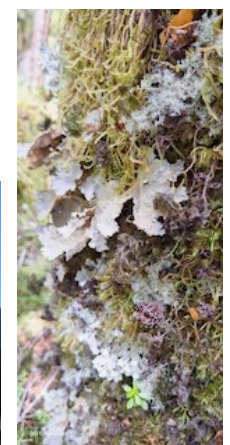
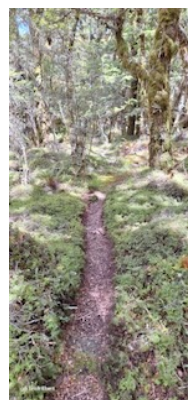
The first of the morning's walkers was back at 1130.

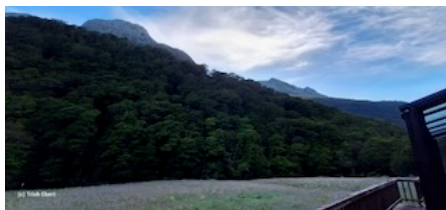


After lunch, I went cascade hunting at the bridge behind camp, and then walked to the outflow of Lake Mckellar. One scaup was fishing where the lake was emptying out, and a bellbird entertained me by singing in the branches above my head. There was a smaller bird singing above as well, but it was unseen and I didn't recognise the song. The only other wildlife noted at that time was lots of black, bitey, bugs.

A few walkers had a swim in the waterway below the lodge....the water was too chilly for me to contemplate a dip.

Birds: A group of Canada geese swam past before breakfast. Other birds of note: scaup, bellbird, chaffinch





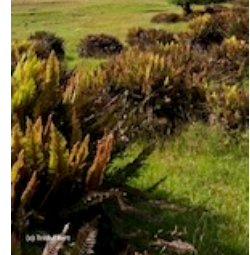
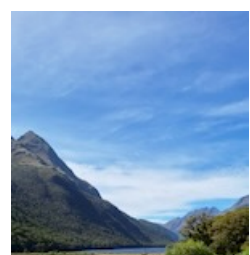
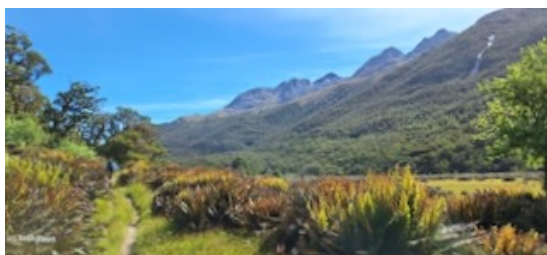
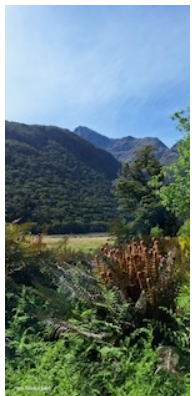
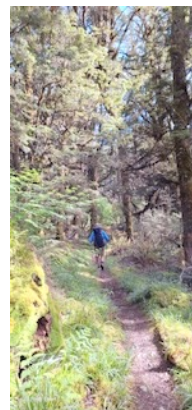
Mckellar Lodge to Mackenzie Lodge

7th January 2023. Andrew and I were up just before 0700. This time we beat the other two boys: one of whom was the main culprit for snoring overnight, but he hadn't noticed because he had his earplugs in!

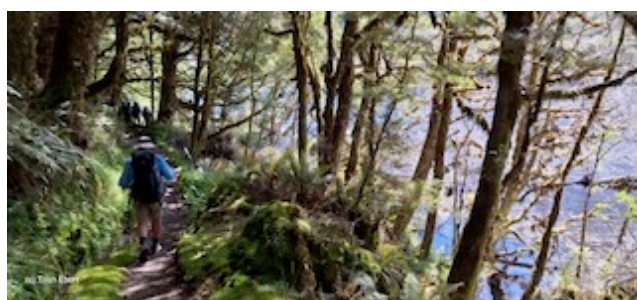
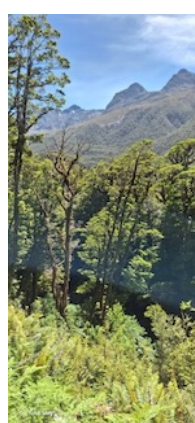
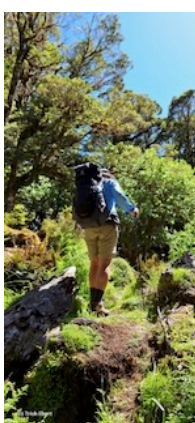
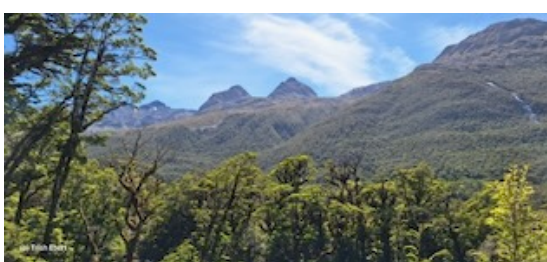
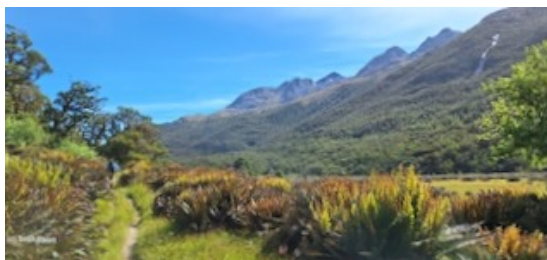
Before leaving the lodge we were required to scrub our boots and pole ends and dip them in a disinfectant. The pathogen of concern was not one I had heard of. According to one walker, today was supposed to be the longest/ hardest day of the trip (if you included the side walk) but that wasn't in the brochure!

As per yesterday morning I managed a hiking yoga sequence. Breakfast for me consisted of yoghurt with pineapple, and a plate of eggs and beans.

We left the Lodge at 0940. After undulating and rocky terrain through beech forest, our first stop was near the junction with the Caples Track around 1125. Lunch was at Lake

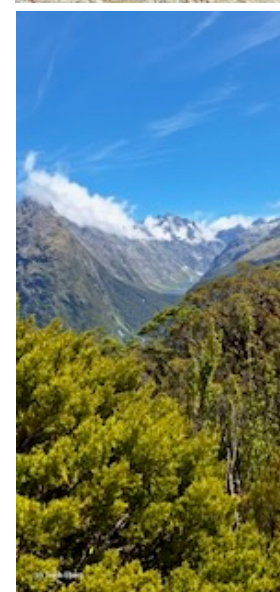
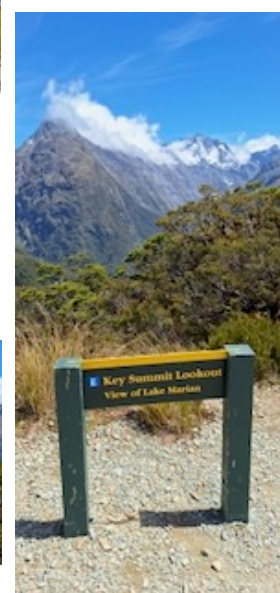
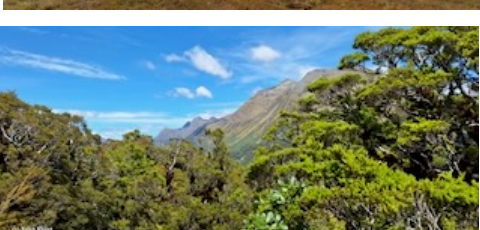
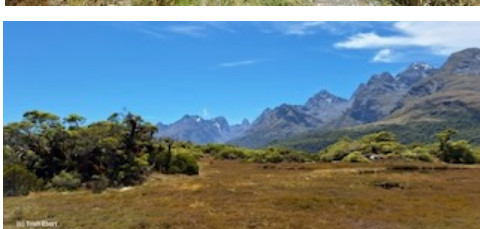
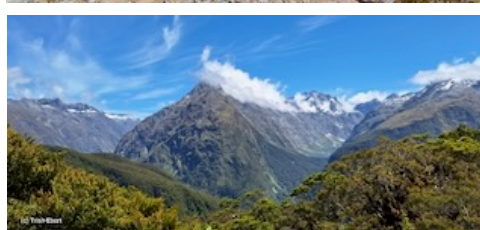
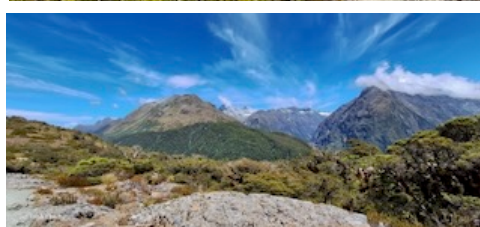
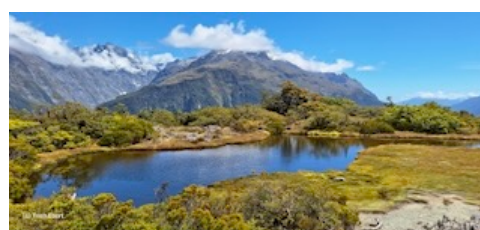
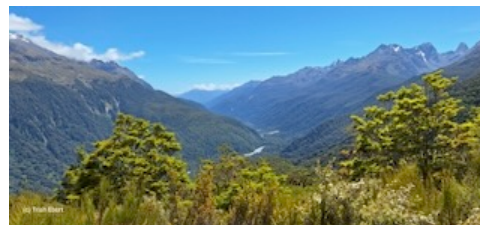
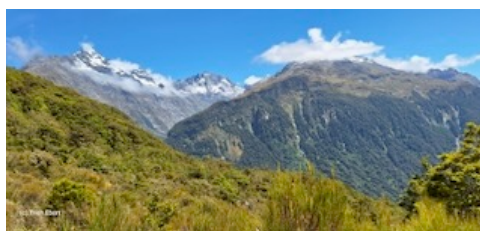


Howden. Andrew didn't take the side trip. The '1.5 hour' side trip took just over 1.5 hours for me, and by the time the last five of us had got back to the lunch shelter, the rest of the group had moved on. I left the lunch shelter at 1400 knowing that the final four walkers, and the remaining guide, would be a few minutes behind me, and fully expected them to catch up. They didn't. The next few kilometres of the track was a consistent, steady, 'up' and at 1455 I was spent. I was breathing heavily, clearly dehydrated, hot, and mentally exhausted. I had started the day with 1.5 litres of water in my bladder...not really enough, but plenty based on my water consumption of the previous few days. I had also started the day with a full 750ml bottle of water in my side pocket.. the idea was that this would be my emergency supply: except H and I had gone through 3/4 of it on the walk to Key Summit, and having completely



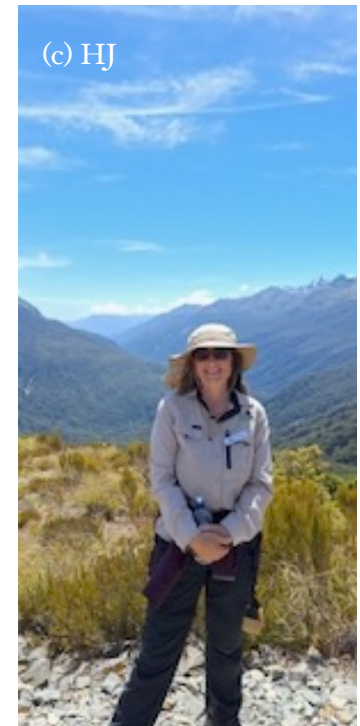
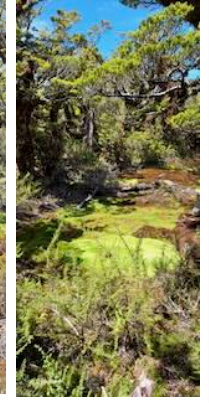
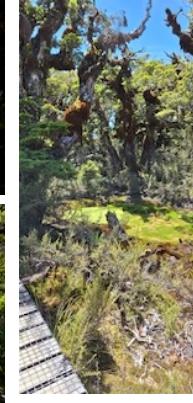
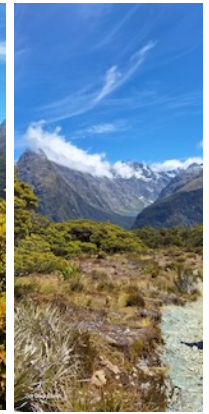
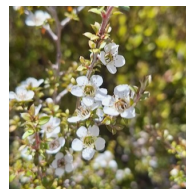
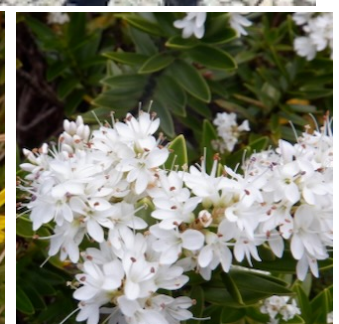
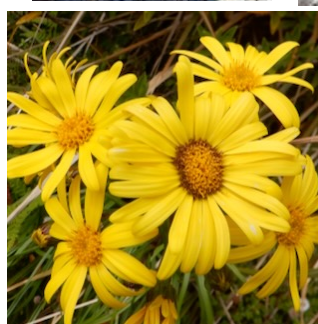
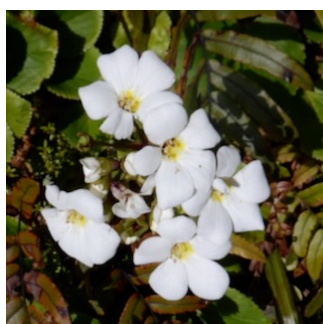
forgotten about it at lunchtime, I failed to fill it up from the streams on the track just after the lunch shelter. Fortunately in my exhausted state at 1455 I found a lovely little soak on the side of the track, rehydrated myself, had a 5 minute rest, and consumed a bag of scroggin from our collection..and for an extra sugary boost, indulged in a very sweet protein ball.

Moving on I was still tired. Twenty minutes later I passed a trail runner coming the other way who said there was a 'beautiful surprise' not far ahead. Ten minutes after this I find R, one of our guides, on a junction with an alternate route, just below the bottom of a spray from a magnificent waterfall. All that struggle was definitely worth it! I took my pack off, grabbed the uneaten apple, and lay on a rock letting the light spray cool me down. If timing hadn't been so tight I would have loved to have stayed longer. But I didn't. Suggesting to the guide that the 'tail-enders' were probably not that far behind me, I moved on, and the next 1.5 hours provided some magnificent views and magnificent forest. Apparently it is aporox 45



min. to an hour to the hut from the sign at The Orchard. I stopped for photos and made it in 50 minutes. Andrew had settled in and had already showered.

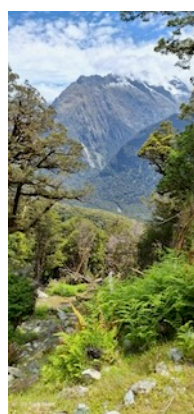
Tonight we had a room to ourselves. With our own ensuite! The shower was great and I enjoyed the massaging of hot water as Andrew was off washing most of our sweaty clothes...the drying room here was very hot!





After the briefing for the next day, and dinner, I extracted the last of my day's energy and walled to Lake Mackenzie. Andrew stayed in our room, reading. The light was lovely and there were quite a few people enjoying the last vestiges of the day at the Lake's edge, either sitting on rocks, or in a couple of cases, taking a refreshing dip in the chilly water. A big thanks to S for sharing her block of chocolate!

Birds: In the morning at Mckellar hut; Canada geese and a robin plus small unrecognizables. During the day; I often head the long-tailed cuckoo. Andrew saw kea/ kaka, chaffinch, redpoll, paradise shell duck, riflemen.



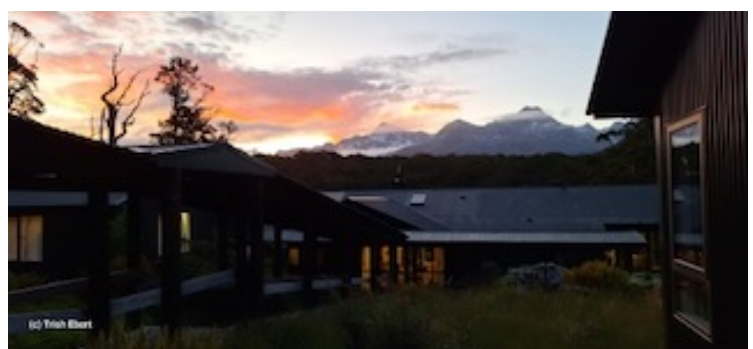
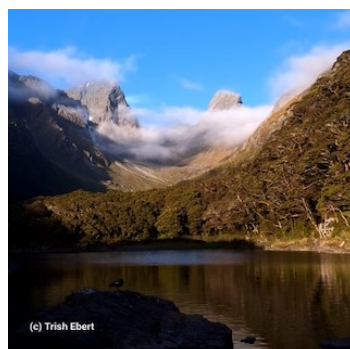
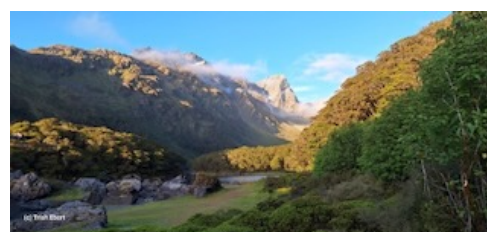
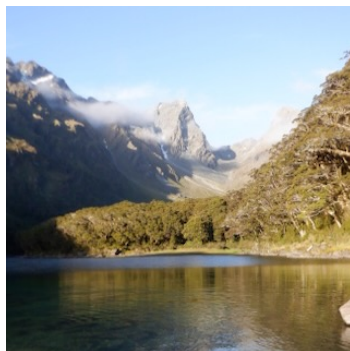
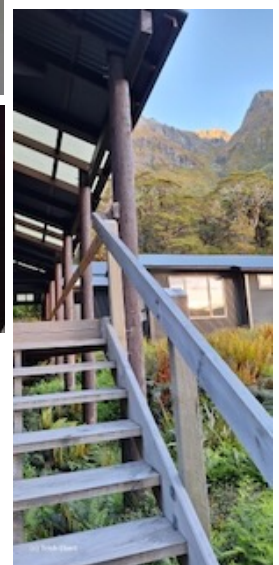
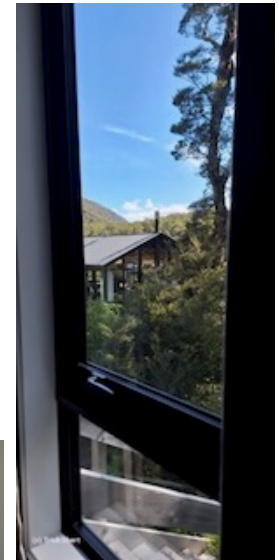




A German lass at the Lake suggested that the Merlin App is working off-line. I tried the App when I got back to our room. It didn't work for the long-tailed cuckoo, but a straight search confirmed the sound. The next sound pick-up worked. Unfortunately it was only a blackbird. Later it picked up a song thrush. Again not an interesting (or native) bird.

I had started the day with some developing issues on my toes, by the end of the day I also had hotspots on both heels.

Andrew spotted the New Zealand version of a red-back spider hanging in our bedroom window!



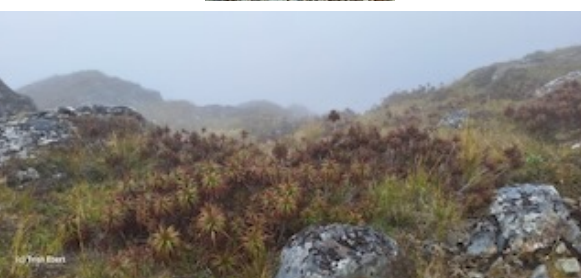
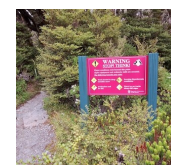
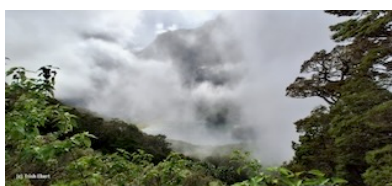
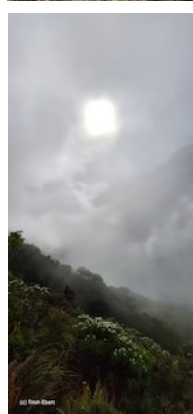
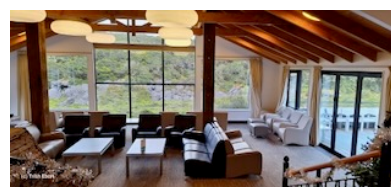


Mackenzie Lodge to Routeburn Falls Lodge

8th January 2024. 0630. Light outside. Silence. Andrew hadn't snored much overnight but I had given the occasional tug of the doona to shut him up. Still it had been a much quieter night than the previous couple of nights when there had been two more snorers in the room. I had woken only once overnight and was delighted to hear a morepork.

Whilst Andrew was waking up I managed my usual stretches and hiking yoga sequence.

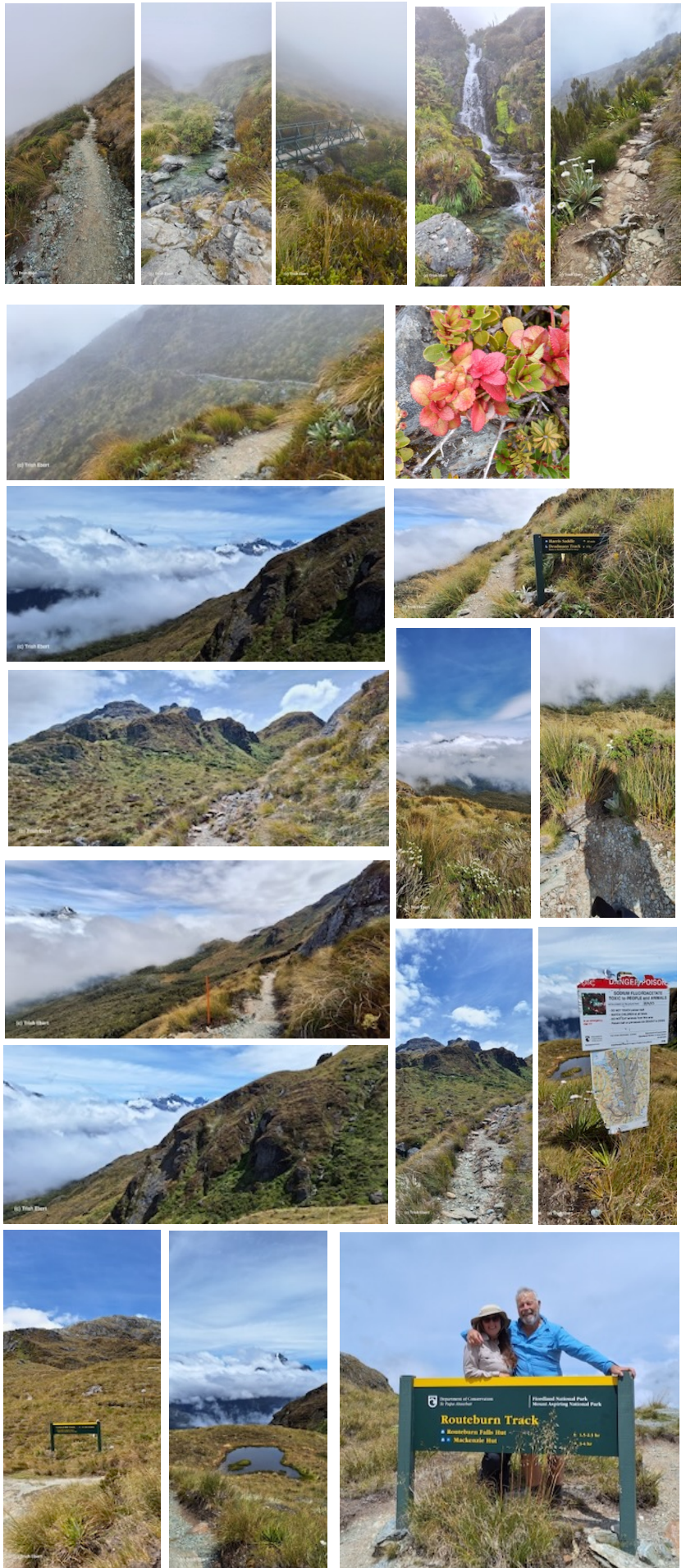
A couple of small-tailed birds flitted around in the bushes outside. But they didn't sing. And they moved through too quickly to be identified. The sun was briefly noted shining on the snow topped

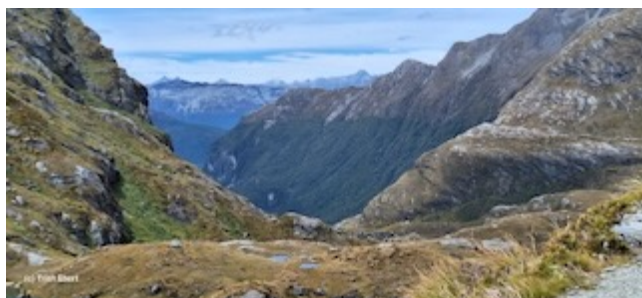


mountains to our west but clouds were moving through too quickly and obscured the view.

A few small bird calls were heard from around 0650. Just before we left the Lodge there was some intense concentration by several of the walkers on finding the keas flying about. There were three.

After the group photo at 0915 at the Lake (along with the admiration of a whio that Andrew had spotted (on the rock where a paradise shelduck had been last night)) we started 'up'. Whilst Andrew streaked away with J, I was happy to hold H's pace up the large steps. I separated out on my own once the path became a tad more pedestrian, just before the stop for morning tea. The fog/low cloud had by this time increased until it blocked all view, and the morning tea spot was found by spotting a bunch of quiet silhouettes putting their jumpers on in the thickening atmosphere. Andrew and J streaked away again, along with K. I eventually caught up to them, just below the lunch





stop. By this time the fog had lifted immediately around us but fog was still blocking out the view of the snow-topped hills on the Hollyford side of the Track. The track up to Conical Hill was clear but the first section, up a steep set of stairs, looked foreboding. Apparently, talking to fellow walkers who made the effort up to 'amazing views', the steps were the easy bit. The rock scrabble up from the top of the steps and down again was apparently quite hard. We didn't go. We headed back down to Routeburn Falls Hut (Andrew streaked ahead, I spent a lovely time with S), and arrived 1 hour 5 minutes after we left the lunch spot.

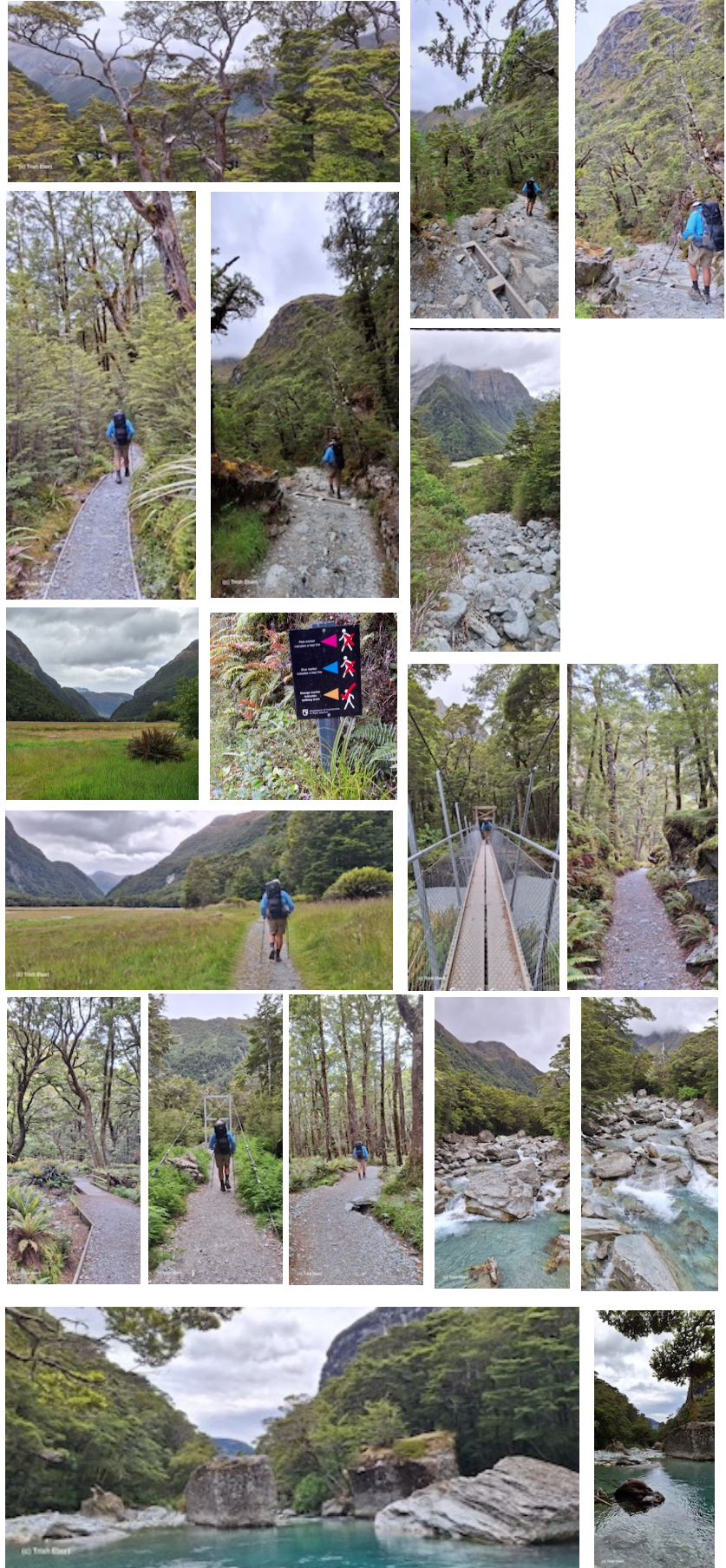
After a lovely hot shower, some afternoon socialising, and a great dinner, it was early to bed.





Routeburn Falls Lodge to the end of the Track

9th January 2024. The shortest day on the trail and walking out the end. I was up and dressed, and had conducted a short yoga session by 0645. Andrew was still snoozing. Clouds covered the top of the adjacent mountain top. Like yesterday morning Andrew put a couple of 'Compeed' blister patches on the back of my heels where a couple of blisters were threatening to become more than annoying, before I put my socks on and headed down to the main lounge: I wanted to look up some plants whilst I remembered what they looked like. I was back in the room a couple of minutes later: the lounge doors weren't open yet (or was it that I tried the wrong door?). The generator was due to go on at 0715. Lunch and breakfast making was due to start at 0730..the times were a little different to what was on the emergency sign on the wall.



We left the Lodge at 0904 for a predominantly downhill walk, firstly steeply down extended steps (which we had been told about), and then along a downward slope until the Routeburn Flats, where the flatlands of the windy river settled for a while, before the the river plunged downstream through a thinning gorge.

A quick stop was taken at a public toilet near the Routeburn Flats campground, where, in coloured texta on a board, was written the weather forecast for the next couple of days. It wasn't all sunny - coming rain may cause us some worry for the next walk.

Lunch was around 1100 at Forge Flat, where a couple of our number went for a swim, and a curious mouse was hoping for some crumbs.

We were on the bus at 1310 after having followed the track further down the hill to the carpark. After the penultimate swing bridge there is a junction; you have a choice - you can take the 'direct' route back to the carpark, or you can detour via the Nature Trail. We detoured and we were delighted to spot (Andrew's spot) a

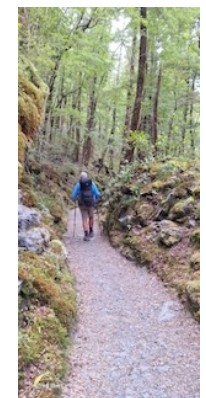
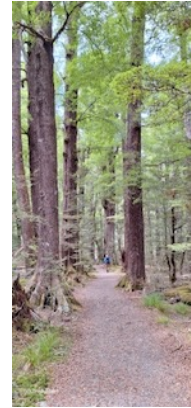
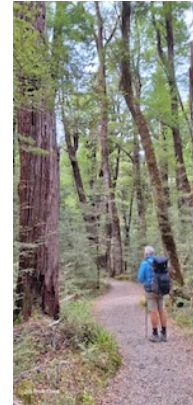
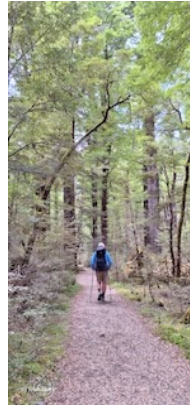


falcon, standing contentedly on the ground eating a snack. Unfortunately I hadn't learnt the concept of moving photos so the picture is fuzzy!

During today's walk cheeky tomtits and robins had frequented the track, including one tomtit who very briefly landed on the end of one of my walking poles. Quite a few rifleman also flitted along the bush adjacent to the latter section of the track.

A chaffinch was heard according to the Merlin App but I was unable to recognise or determine a much more raucous call. At the carpark a tui amused us on a flower stalk, and a yellowhead was spotted as we drove out.

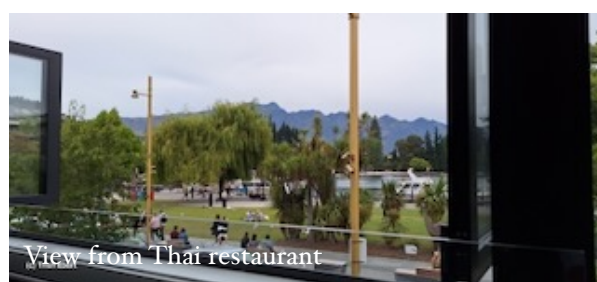
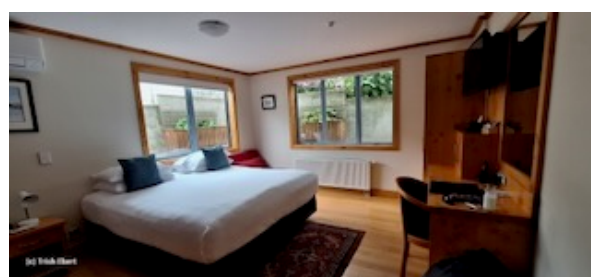
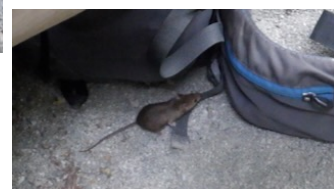
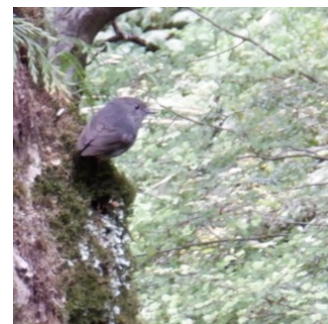
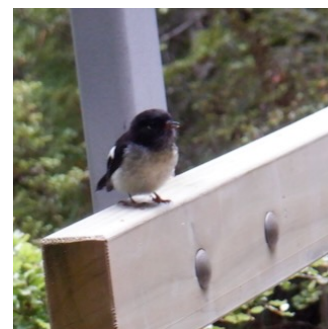
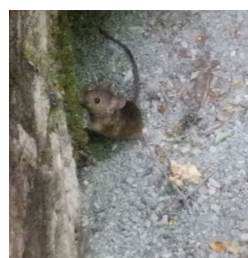
Birds: Chaffinch (heard), rifleman (several), tomtit, robins, falcon, tui, song thrush, yellow head.



Back in Queenstown, when we got to our hotel (after getting breakfast provisions at the supermarket) we found we had been given an 'ambulant room,' which meant there wasn't a lot of shelf space in the bathroom - but the shower at least was hot. The blinds had to be pulled down because, unlike the room next door, that we had had a week ago, this room didn't have sheers and close-able pull curtains; instead it had blinds that needed to be pulled down to block out light; there was no middle layer, and with windows that faced the street on one side and a carpark on another, a sense of privacy after our showers was prudent.

After catching up with our usual Brexit Youtube (for some of the past six days' episodes) we headed off to town, booked another boat trip for tomorrow, had a filling meal at a Thai restaurant, moseyed past the supermarket to restock Andrew's crappy coffee supply, and got back in the room at 1915, retiring in expectation of a quiet, easy, movie-watching evening in front of the television. The movie: The Last Samurai.

Birds around Queenstown: shell duck, blackbird, black-billed gull and sparrow.



View from Thai restaurant

Spirit of Queenstown

10th January 2024. I was up around 0515. I had a sore neck (left side) due to the supplied pillow, and hadn't got around to pulling my hiking pillow out. I spent an hour cleaning up emails. And then some more time cleaning up more emails. As a break from email storage admin I emailed off to our next hotel in Queenstown for after the next walk, to ascertain out-of-hours room access, emailed off to a tourist provider in Europe, and did a few yoga stretches, concentrating, of course, on my neck.

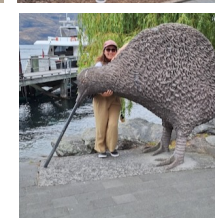
Pipped at the post. I waited for 0800 for the reception to open to get change for the washing machine and laundry powder. By the time I collected Andrew's washing, (he was just getting up when I got back from reception), it was around 0815. By the time I got downstairs to the laundry..... A fellow guest (from a neighbouring room) was just putting her laundry detergent in the machine! There is only one machine and one dryer downstairs... (although there is a washing line outside)..so I

reversed my steps, headed back upstairs and spent time on Duolingo for thirty minutes. When I went back downstairs to try again, my neighbour was transferring her clothes to the dryer..talk about perfect timing second time around. Back upstairs it was catching up with Brexit again.

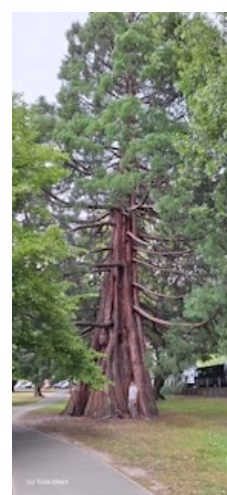
The drying machine won the intelligence race with me this morning (I forgot to press the start button). After the clothes were dry, and a latish breakfast of yoghurt and strawberries consumed (in tea cups, this is not a self-contained room), we headed out: the day's activities consisted of a walk along the St Omar Park, a walk around



town, a quick hello to five of our fellow walkers and our boat trip.



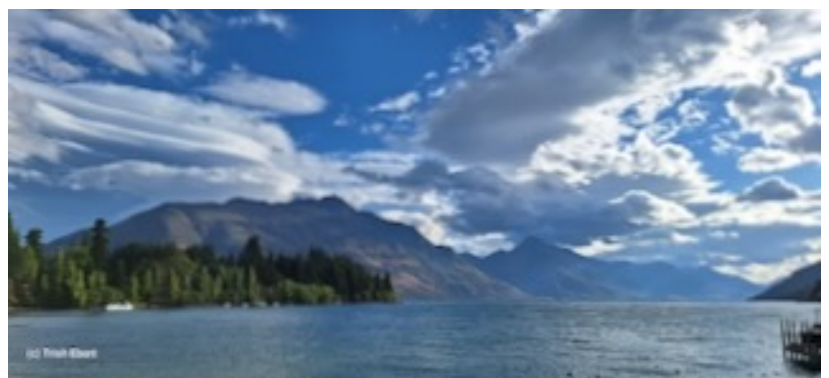
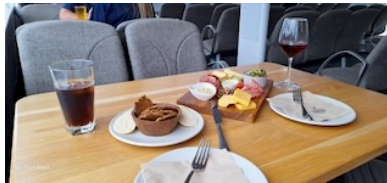
I would have loved the ***Spirit Of Queenstown*** to head up the North Arm of Lake Whakatipu so we could see the start of the Greenstone Track from the water. However the North Arm was too windy and the skipper had to adjust his timing. I would





also have liked to get more commentary, but at least the ride was smooth , and a late lunch of a cheese and meat platter onboard a bit indulgent and fancy.

We caught up with H for dinner and were back in our room at 1950.



Arrowtown and the start of the Hollyford Track

11th January 2024.

A bust trip to an historic township!

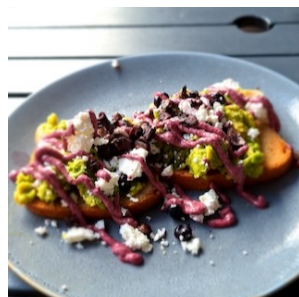
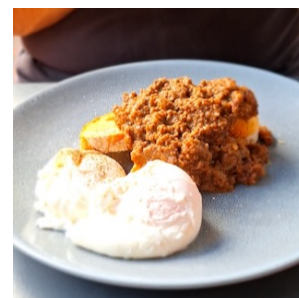
We didn't have the alarm on because we knew we would be up and ready to check-out by the time the reception was open at 0800. The plan was a latish breakfast at Arrowtown, but as we would miss the 0805 bus, the 0905 bus meant breakfast would probably be around 1000.

We actually left the hotel around 0815, having left three big bags for storage until the afternoon, and made our way down to the bus hub. We had 35 minutes to wait here, which we did, saying hello to last night's dinner companion as he sauntered past looking for his own breakfast.

The bus ride to Arrowtown took a little over 35 minutes but there was no admiring the architecture upon alighting. The first priority was breakfast. Once sated, we slowly walked the historic street, sticking our nose into a souvenir shop and a clothing shop; the latter to get a hat



Views from the bus



because Andrew had left his at Queenstown and the day was turning out to be hotter than expected. This didn't last however (now that we had bought the hat!) and after a stroll down the tree lined avenue, a



very short wander over some of the old Chinese village, we found it was threatening rain. So much so that the maître-di of the cafe we went to for a smoothie was encouraging us to take an inside, rather than an outside, table. 'Smoothies are not going to take long are they?' I asked. So we took an outside table, got a bit rattled by a windy front,

enjoyed our cold drink, and went for a wander along some of the river path (given the time by that stage we didn't have time to walk the circuit track before catching our preferred bus) and waited 30 minutes for the bus. There was no time for the museum, or to admire the architecture of the renown church...perhaps next time.

We got back to the hotel with plenty of time to spare before we were going to be picked up. The kitchen is open to hotel guests - but on request only - and there were noisy members of the owner's family in there. But to stay out of the wind we sat inside for a while (with a cuppa) then went for a short walk, before finally returning to the hotel to wait outside on the front porch for the bus.



View from bus window en route back

The Hollyford Tack.

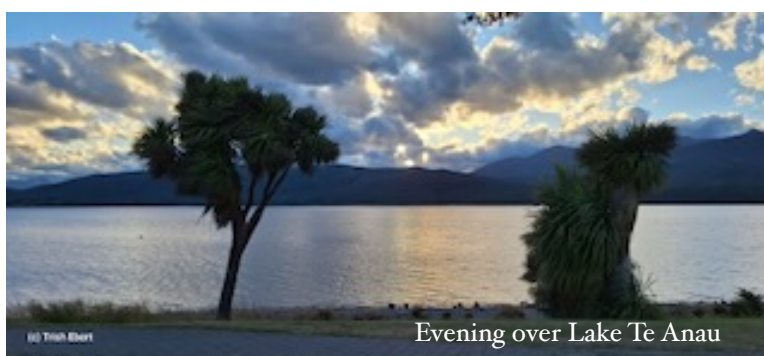
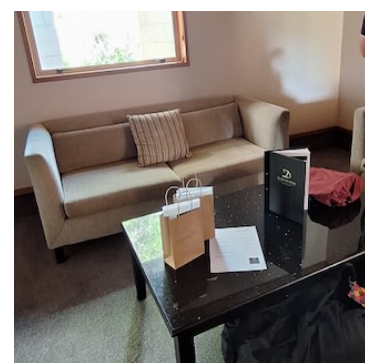
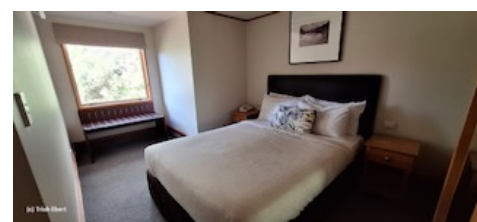
The tour bus was early - not that that mattered, as we were the first pickup. The second pick up, at a nearby hotel, picked up three passengers, and the third stop, at the airport, (after a brief lookout piccy over Lake Whakitipu) picked up another five. The final four participants of our upcoming walk were already in Te Anau.

The drive to Te Anau took about two hours, and included a very brief toilet stop in Galston (labelled New Zealand's Most Inland Town). Our room at the hotel was a lovely little suite - with a separate living area, but we didn't have time to enjoy it - there was only time to change for dinner, and then afterwards it was best we get an early night - tomorrow was going to be a long day!

The group had its briefing and dinner in a small room adjacent the hotel dining area. Our two dinner companions were regular walkers. They were older than us - and clearly fitter.

We were in bed at 2230.

Birds: Blackbirds chaffinch, sparrow, magpie, starling, harrier, shell duck, black-billed gull, black-backed gull, yellow head



Evening over Lake Te Anau

The Hollyford Track

To Pike Lodge

12th January 2024. I actually got up at 0300 and cracked my back in with a couple of yoga moves. The floor was on par with the bed for comfort: a hard bed that was a little too hard vs a soft carpet over a hard floor. Going back to bed meant trying to get some sleep until the alarm was due to go off at 0550. I was only partially successful.

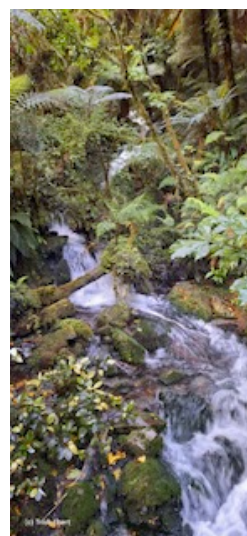
Breakfast was available from 0630 and we arrived in the dining area a few minutes after that. I didn't see and gluten free bread as such but trying to ask the staff about the rye bread proved impossible (language barrier), so I stuck to yoghurt and eggs, mushrooms and beans (the yoghurt on a separate piece of crockery, clearly). We were at the bus around 0730 in time for our approx. 2-hour transfer to the start of the walk.

I didn't get a photo of the bottom end of Deadmans Track as we travelled the access road (having got a photo of the top of the track a few days ago when we were walking the Routeburn Track) but I did



Above:: From the carpark of the public toilets: we beat the next big tour bus!

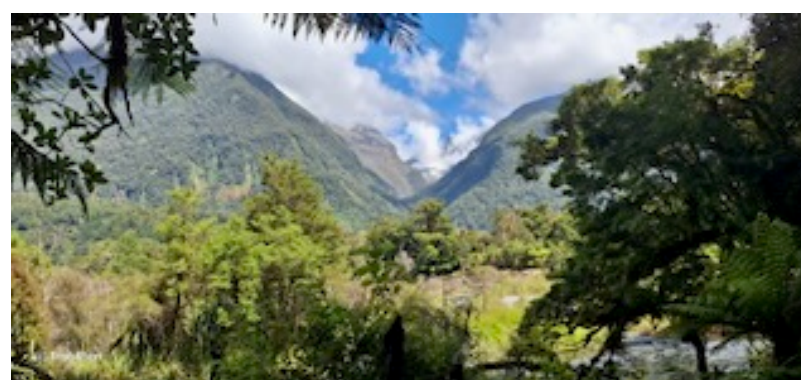
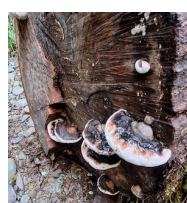
Right: Just before the end of the Deadmans Track



see the sign (at vehicle speed). We started walking at 0950, but only got a short way before a gather and introductions (no name tags on this walk). Walking from there started at 1010. The 20 plus kilometre day (my app suggested 26 kms but others with more sophisticated equipment had 22km as their figure) included several interpretive stops, two magnificent waterfalls, and for some, a swim. Andrew, myself and V left the swimmers, and other 'fall's admirers', and headed the group to the Lodge. Because we enjoyed the walk and didn't rush we came in only a couple of minutes earlier than the rest of the mob.

The vegetation was essentially all beech forest. Well, the overstorey was essentially beech, the understory changed; either subtly - or dramatically. I loved it all, but loved most the 'fern valley understory' adjacent where we had lunch by the river.

Like the previous walk there were little falls and seeps where small rivulets, soaks or cascades crossed the path, but the two big



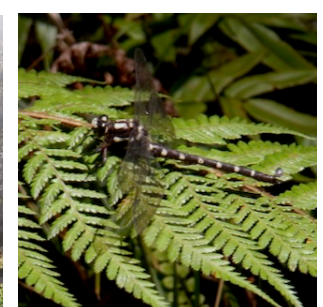
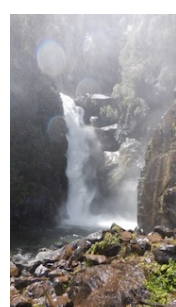
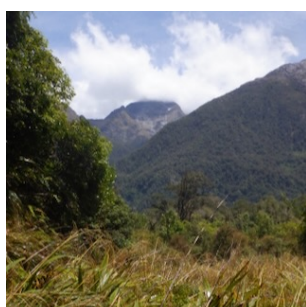
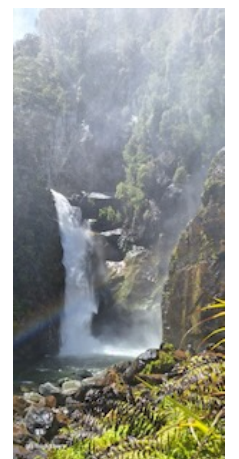
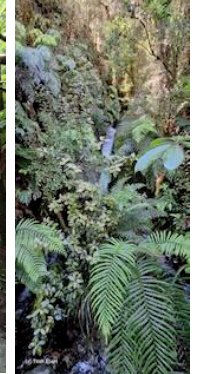
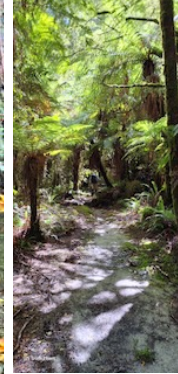
waterfalls (Hidden Falls and Little Homer Falls) were definite highlights, and along with the panoramic wide views (when we saw them) were definitely 'wow' moments.

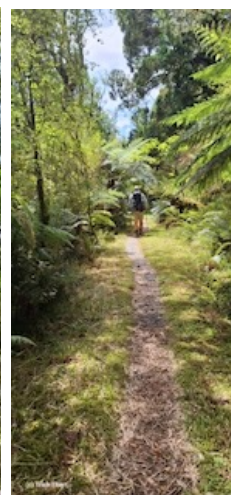
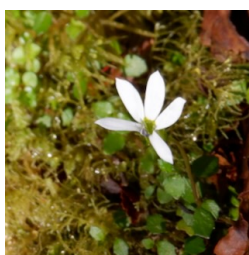
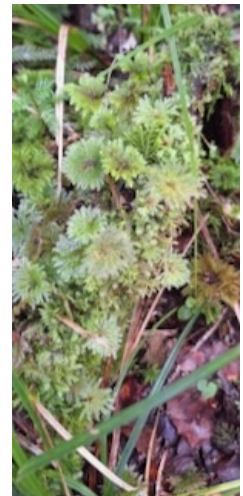


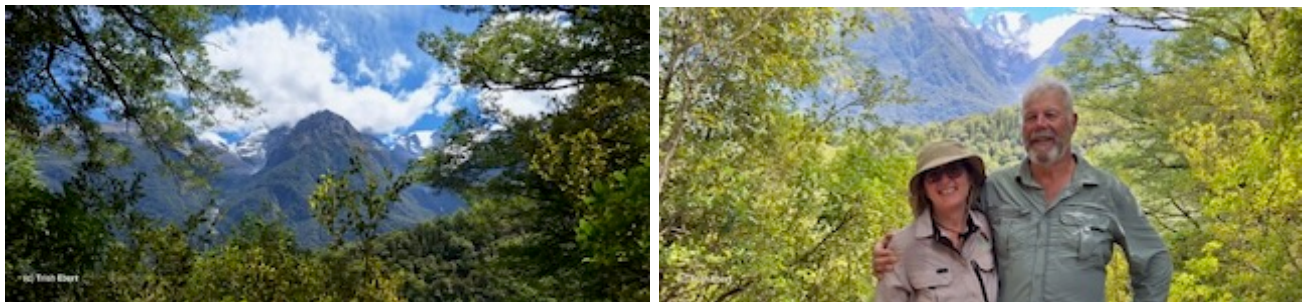
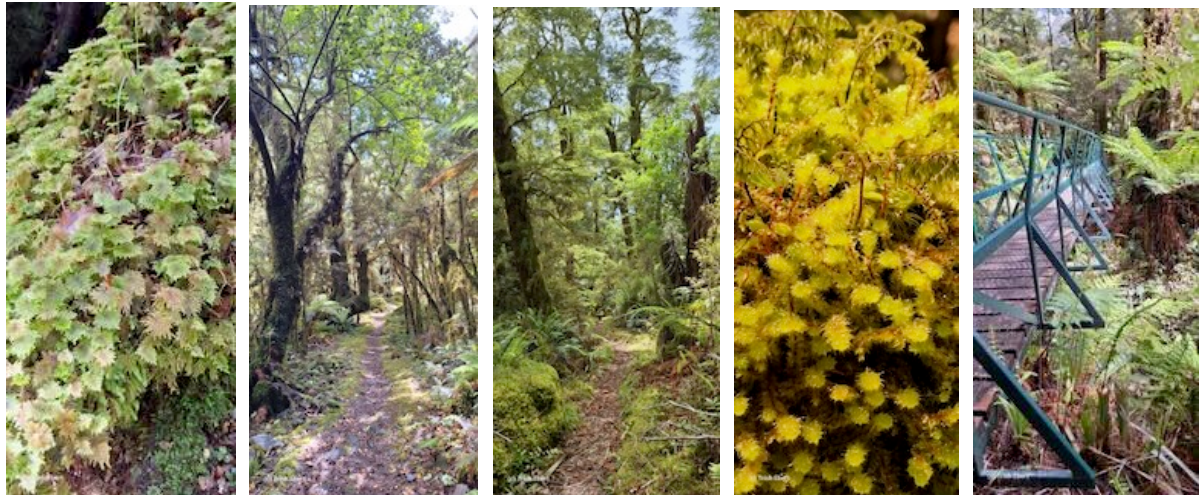
The 'up' walk to Little Homer Saddle was steady, but 'easy' compared to the last walk

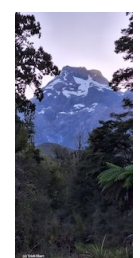
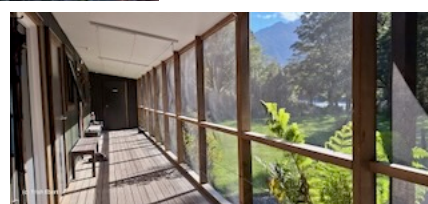
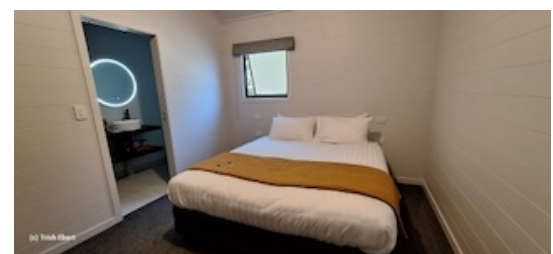
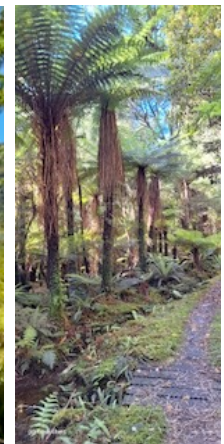
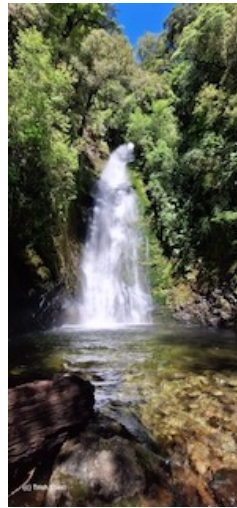
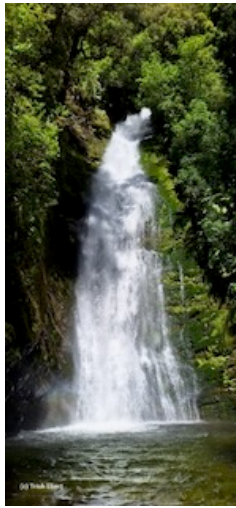
Birds: several tui, several kereru, fantail, tomtit, blackbird, black-backed gull, harrier.

We had retired to our room by 2100. I had sore feet - my pre-existing blister patches had disintegrated.









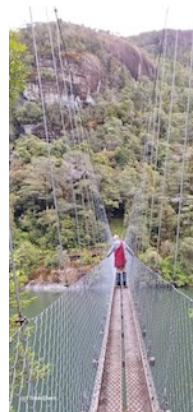
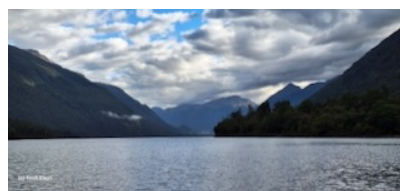
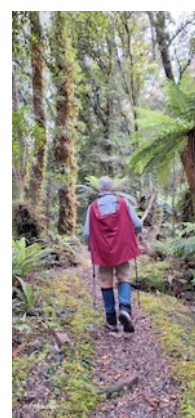


Pike Lodge to Martins Bay Lodge

13th January 2024

'Cloudy with a chance of rain'. We just didn't know when that rain would come down, the forecasters had different predicted times. The wake up call was going to be at 0645. We had the alarm on for 0615. Except we didn't...I had managed to change the time on the clock for the alarm on my phone, but it seems I hadn't actually turned it on. I woke up at 0640. We jumped out of bed but we did hear the wakeup call at 0645. I had slept well, only waking up once in the night..the mattress was firm but not hard, and whilst I had been concerned about the pillow I managed a good night's sleep. Andrew had woken up once, and been lucky to hear morepork (as had at least one other walker)

Today's walking was in a series of separate walks. The first had an 0800 departure up to Lake Alabaster. We returned via a look at the start of the Demon Trail, and after a quick nibble and refreshment at Pyke Lodge, and for me some sticky bandaid protection of two new rub spots which had only played up this morning, we headed down to the jet boat for a ride down river and along lake. Interps was given at several spots along the way, including at a failed settlement, before we started walking through the

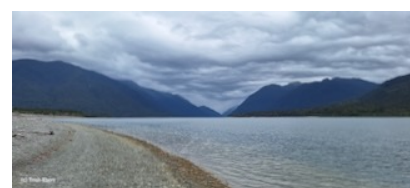
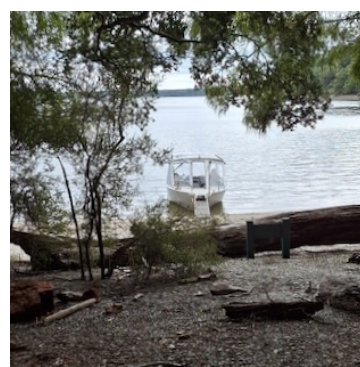
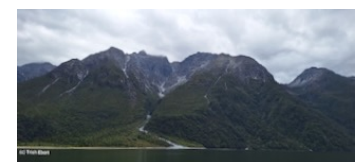
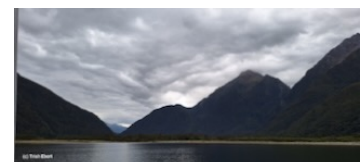
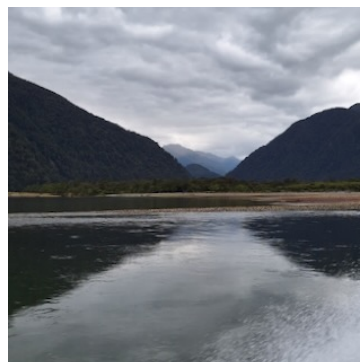
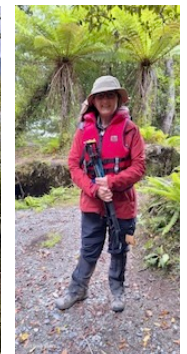
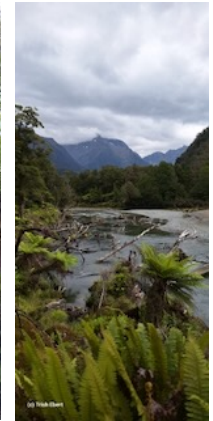
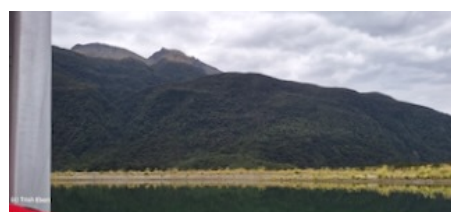


forest again. By this time it was raining and Andrew even pulled out his kilt. Lunch was a delightful surprise under cover just as the rain got heavier. We continued our walk in the rain after lunch, but most of the track was

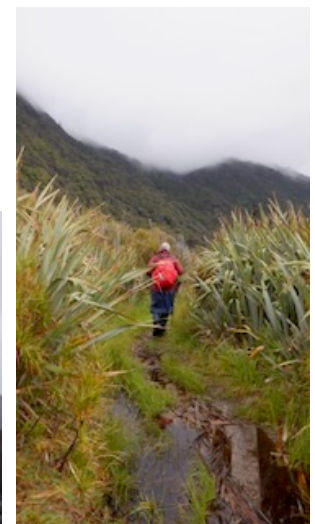


under forest cover so we didn't really notice it. Seals were spotted past the DOC Martins Bay Hut before we headed back to Martin Bay Lodge for a hot shower, nibbly by the 'very hot' wood-heater, and dinner. We were back in our room at 2100.

Birds: pukeko, black-backed gull, great cormorant, paradise shelduck, white breasted tern, swamp harrier, tui, bellbird, kereru, rifleman, fantail, song thrush (kaka: heard)









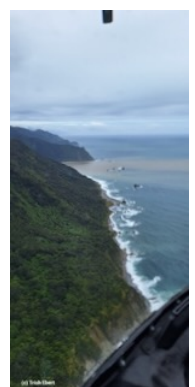
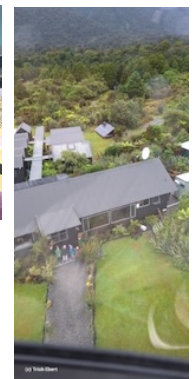
A fitting farewell to the Hollyford!

Fiordland rain...

had finally found us!

14th January 2024. It poured down this morning. Andrew didn't go out. Everybody else did. And everybody else got soaking wet! Andrew in the meantime stayed warm and dry, and had a lovely chat to the jetboat driver - about boats of all things! He did, of course, miss out on more stories and interps, which followed on from the local history that we have been learning about along the trail. We had one member who loved the walk on the beach in the rain....Andrew and I started the Te Araroa in the rain, so for me, a wet beach walk, in the wind, on the wild west coast of New Zealand was not a new experience.

This morning's Fiordland rain apparently equated to 150mm over 3 to 4 hours a little further south, which made for lovely waterfalls into Milford Sound when we flew into it by helicopter; a trip which was delayed for just over an hour because of

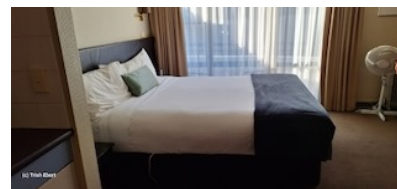
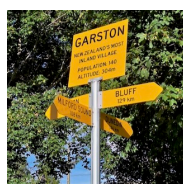
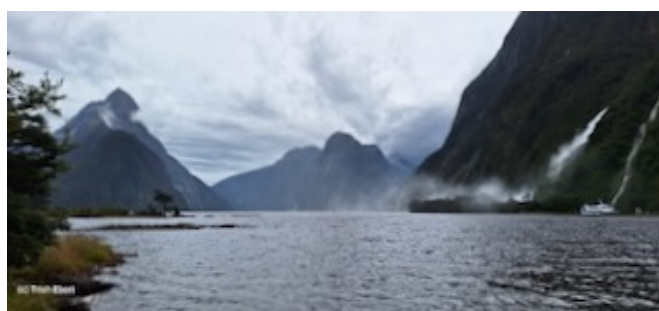
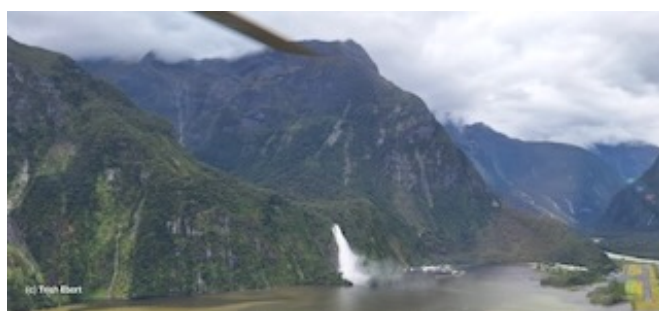
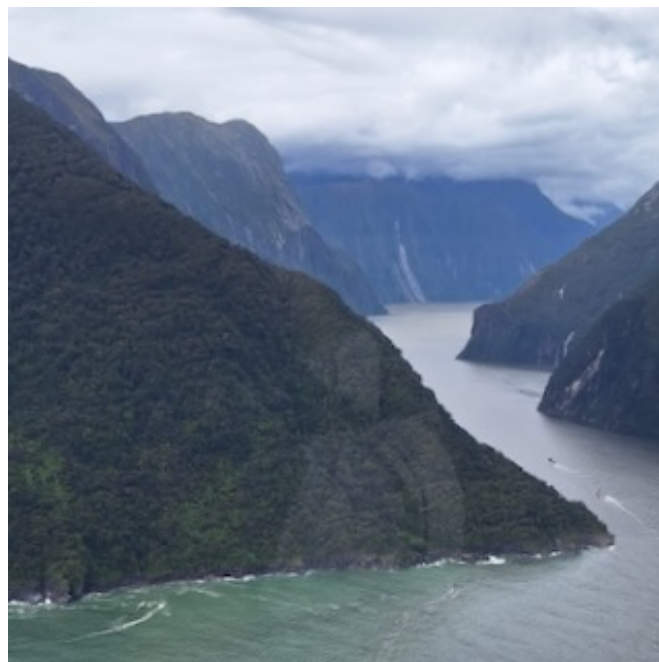


the weather. The time was filled in by reading by some - and game playing by others

After leaving Milford by bus, a stop for a final farewell at Te Anau, and a two-hour drive back to Queenstown, we arrived at our hotel at 2000. I was so glad I had contacted the hotel prior to our trip. Reception closes at 1800 so we had arranged where to pick up the key. The room is self-contained and the Four Square closed at 2200. I got the job of walking down the (very) steep hill (and back up it) to get dinner at the busy supermarket. I decided I didn't want to cook: dinner was a cooked chicken and salad. Desert was creme brûlée.

Birds. Kereru, blackbird, tui, great cormorant, white-fronted tern, black backed gull, swallow, starlings, sparrows , swamp harrier,

Animals (along the road on the drive back to Queenstown): horses, cows, sheep, and deer

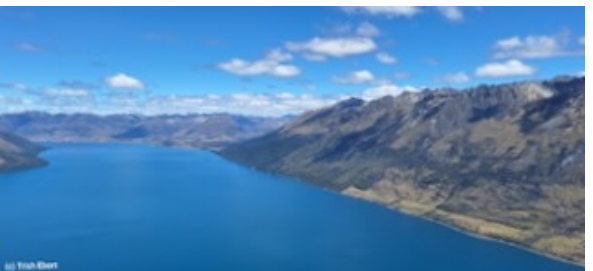
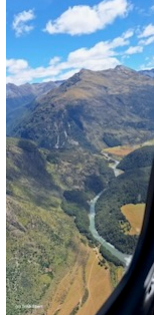


Into Middle Earth

Another helicopter ride!

15th January 2024. I woke up early morning with a minimally grumpy back, but I thought a back crack would help. I didn't get around to it however and instead answered an email re a cancelled credit card and potential accommodation cancellation (and yes I know that answering emails in the early morning is a problem). There was little room for yoga on the floor in the dark anyway..we had stuff spread everywhere! We got up for the morning around 0630. Back in civilisation there was the usual Brexit YouTube over breakfast of yoghurt and blueberries...in proper bowls this time!

My plan for the morning was to walk into town and visit the second hand bookshop, but according to 'google.' it wasn't open until 1030. So, we wandered into the biting wind, (rueing the fact we had both left our down jackets in the room), enjoyed a hot drink in a cafe out of the wind, wandered through MacPac and Kathmandu looking for options of pocket backpacks (ending up getting one at the Ultimate Hikes office) and headed down to the bookshop. Which wasn't open! So, we headed back into town to the Four Square, bought our lunch and another yoghurt for tomorrow's breakfast, and headed back up the hill to our room. We were back at base and ensconced in catching up with the World at 1115. By this time the

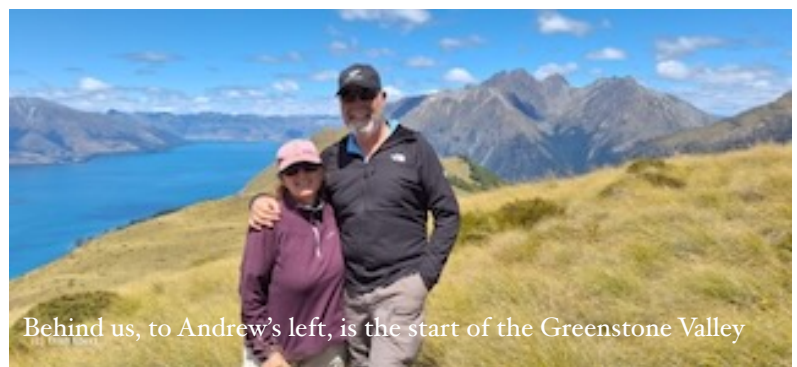


wind had dropped a bit and I put my still soaking hiking boots (from yesterday morning's walk in the rain) on the back balcony in the sun to dry. Our balcony may not have water views, but it had a perfect aspect for drying damp clothes in the sun. I also sat outside to enjoy a cuppa. Andrew stayed inside.

At around 1245 I tried calling the helicopter company, as instructed, to check if the (Lord Of The Rings and Glacier Explorer) flight was going ahead. Given the current weather, I couldn't think of a reason why it wouldn't be. I dialled 1 on the room phone, as per room instructions, and then dialled the given phone number. The automatic voice I got on the other end of the line indicated that the call didn't get through. Strange. So I pressed where I thought the connection would be on the cradle to hang up, in preparation to try again. And my mobile phone rang! Because I wasn't expecting my phone to ring I almost went into shock. How can me pressing the room phone result in my phone ringing? Of course it was only coincidence, but because no-one had yet



The chopper pilot took his photographic duties seriously!

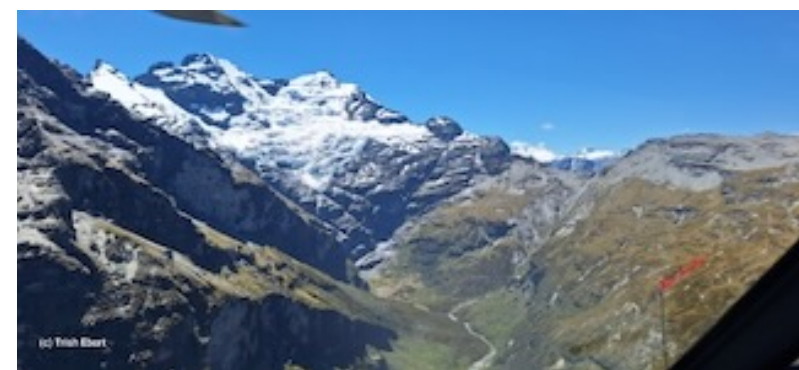
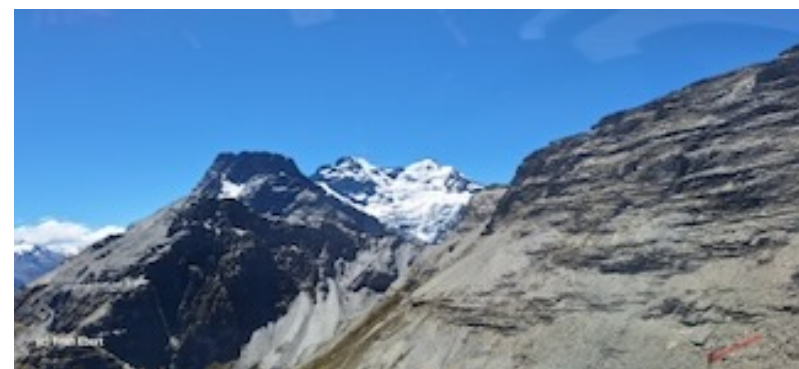


Behind us, to Andrew's left, is the start of the Greenstone Valley

actually rung me on my new phone, and I wasn't expecting the call, my brain couldn't match the events. It was the helicopter company - they were ringing to confirm the flight. The pick up time was now scheduled at 1325, five minutes earlier than listed on the reservation confirmation email.

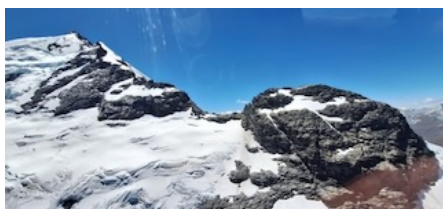
There was one other flyer in the bus when we got picked up. Two more were being picked up at the place we were waiting (the hotel next door). By the time we left the next pick up point, the mini bus was full. The 'copter we were in was a twelve-month-old airbus which seated, if full, six passengers and a pilot. There were only four passengers on this flight: two Australians and two Americans. As there was two short stops scheduled on the route we were taking, three out of four of us got a stint in the front seat. Andrew was the one who missed out but it is possible we will be back so he may get a front seat shot in this area in the future.

After the icy chill of the morning the day turned out to be magnificently mild. The sun was out with scattered cumulous. We



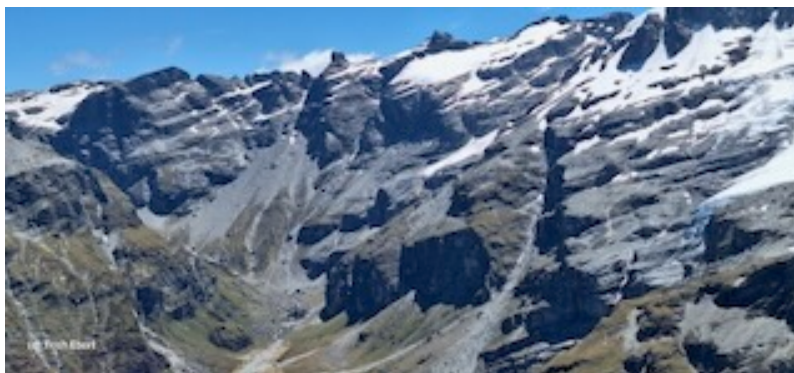
couldn't have chosen a better day. Of course it was a bit chillier on the top of the mountain, but the wind was very light, and there were only two very short bumpy bits on the flight (over ridges).

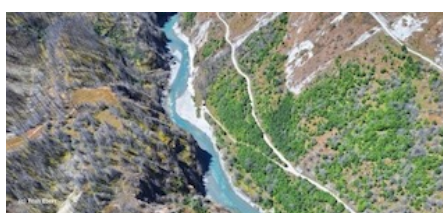
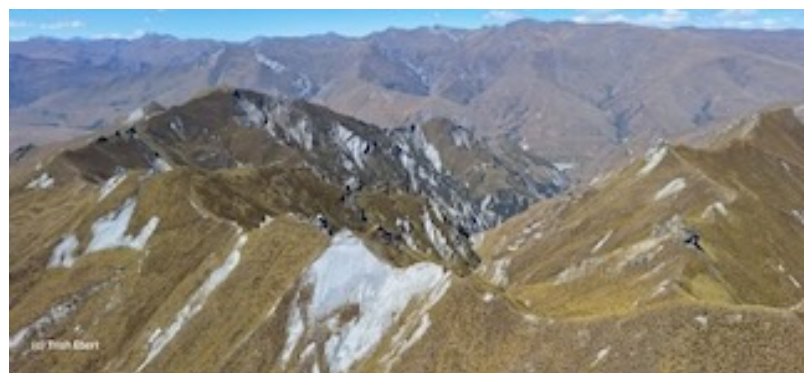
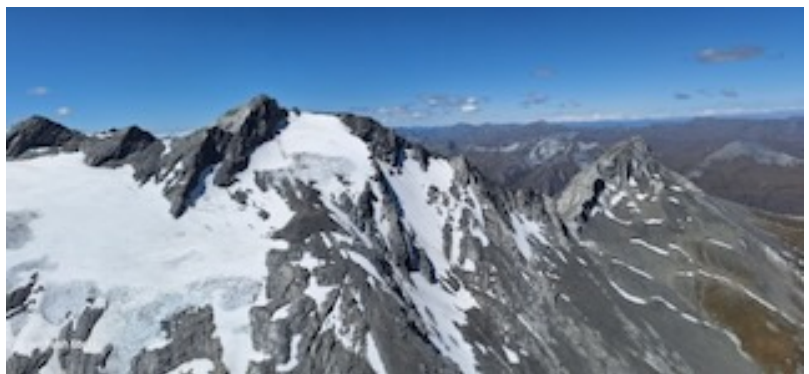
The views were fantastic! We stopped on top of a hillock near the Greenstone/Caples exit into Lake Whakiti, and on top of James' Glacier.



Back on the ground we left the airport around 1420 and as we went round the roundabout I noticed the Hollyford Wilderness Experience bus heading the other way - I hope this lot of walkers gets the same, or better, weather than we did. We were back in our room ten minutes later.

The afternoon/evening was spent lazing around and watching the Australian Open — and packing our bags for a morning departure.



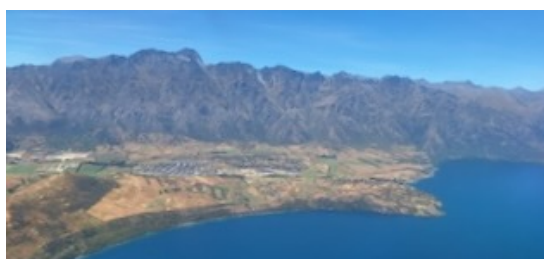
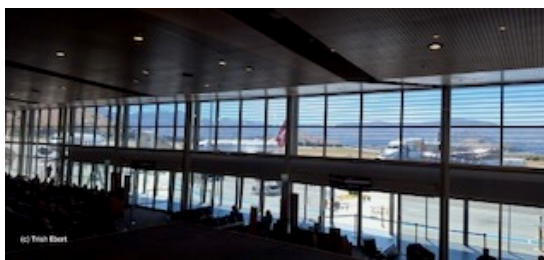


Back across The Ditch!

And back to boat!

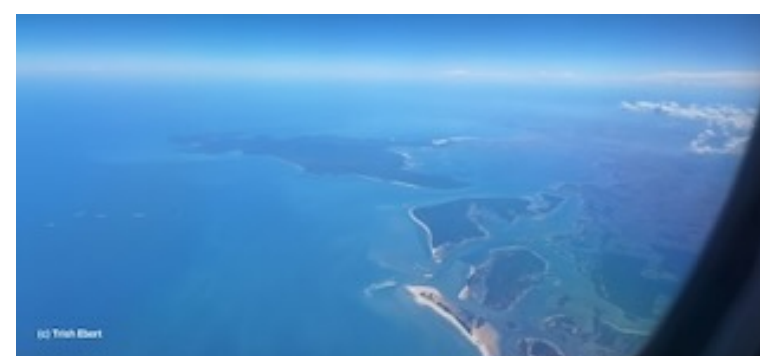
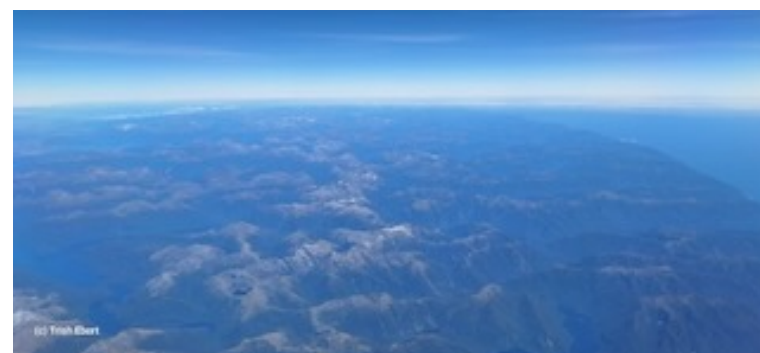
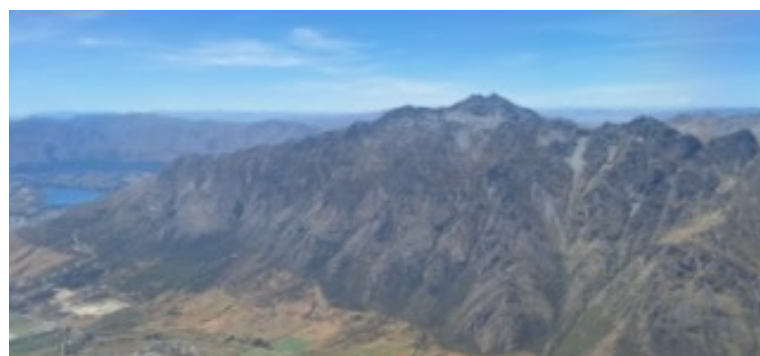
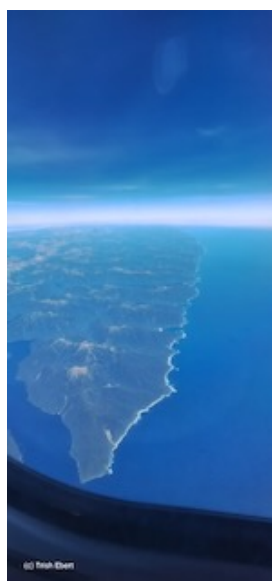
16th January 2024. We were awake at 0630. We got up at 0730. Breakfast consisted of yoghurt, apple and blueberries. The closest bus stop to our hotel had been blocked off by road bypass roadworks (which have apparently been already underway for a couple of years), and so we wandered downhill to a 'temporary bus stop.' Because we caught an early bus we were an hour earlier than we needed to be - four hours earlier than our scheduled flight time! To fill in time we bought a coffee at one of the airport cafes. Finally, with three hours to go until the flight, we could check-in. My hand luggage upset the security people - but it was only the spare batteries for the head-torch that were an issue - they passed after a discussion.

There is only one lounge in the Queenstown International terminal - and it covers all airlines - not that there are many airlines that frequent this small airport- I saw Qantas, Jetstar, Virgin and, of course, Air New



Zealand planes. There weren't a lot of options for gluten free nibbles - the pumpkin soup (which turned out to be quite spicy and I suspect had paprika in it), cheese and crackers, and the chocolate brownie. I had quite a few pieces of the latter.

Our plane hadn't landed by the time the original boarding time was supposed to commence. In the end the delayed flight lifted off a couple of minutes shorter than an hour after our scheduled departure time. However we were on ground at Melbourne only ten minutes later than the original landing time. Grabbing our bags it was a bit of a hike to get to the 'Declare' line but we were the only ones in it. After a couple of questions we were let straight through.



We were driving away from Hertz at 1647. We were back on boat after a quick Woolies shop at 1800. I had decanted my clothes ready for washing and piled stuff to go away by 1845. Andrew was yet to unpack

Melbourne was hot with an uncomfortable north wind when we landed. Thunderstorms were expected but the rain radar suggested that tonight's storms may split and pass us by. Despite a south-east deluge and 40mm in nearby areas over the past two weeks, there was thankfully no water in the bucket under our sometimes leaky hatch!

The second time we have gone past The Prom in a month!

