Chapter 18 – The New Zealand Trip

(2012)

Contents

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(22nd June 2015 – Singapore)

New Zealand, South of the South Island

Blog Entry for New Zealand, February 2012, March and April and May

Christchurch

In February 2012, we left Penang for Singapore with Yin Yoke who had been staying with us for the previous five days. We first stayed with Linden before moving over to Josephine's place in preparation for our trip to New Zealand together. Jo was to spend the first eighteen days with us on our fifty-two-day driving tour of New Zealand. Jo is a very courageous young lady, having survived a viral heart infection which required open heart surgery to fix, followed a few months later by a mastectomy to remove a breast cancer. She was determined to come on this trip with us despite only finishing her chemotherapy treatment a few days before our departure date.

There was no direct budget-flight from Singapore to Christchurch on the South Island where we intended to start our 6,000 km tour of the country, as a result of which it took us all of twenty hours to reach the city via Auckland on the North Island. In February 2011 a second Christchurch earthquake killing 185 people in one of the nation's deadliest peacetime disasters. The magnitude 6.3 earthquake was centred two km west of the port town of Lyttelton, and ten km south-east of the city centre. It followed nearly six months after the magnitude 7.1, which caused significant damage to Christchurch and the central Canterbury region, but no direct fatalities. The February 2011 earthquake was the most damaging in a year-long earthquake swarm affecting the Christchurch area. It was followed by a large aftershock on 13 June 2011, which caused considerable additional damage, and a further series of large shocks on 23 December 2011. We felt it unfair to stay long in the city and add to the housing shortage the quakes had caused. Most of the hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation were taken up by people displaced from their homes together with the army of building workers who descended on the city to help with the rebuild. We didn't visit the city centre, all of us agreeing that it seemed a little ghoulish to go as tourists to gawp at other's misfortunes.

The Northern Island of New Zealand was the first to be inhabited by humans as recently as around 800 years ago, making it the last place on the planet for our species to exploit. European settlers led by Herriott and McGillivray established themselves in what is now Christchurch, early in 1840, following on from Capt. Cook's charting of the islands in 1790. The exact basis for the name of the city is not known. It has been suggested that it is named after Christchurch, in Dorset, England, after Canterbury Cathedral, or perhaps in honour of Christ Church, Oxford which is the generally accepted explanation. Christchurch became a city by Royal Charter in July 1856, the first in New Zealand. Many of the city's Gothic Revival

buildings by architect Benjamin Mountfort date from this period and were badly damaged in the recent earthquakes.

Lake Tekapo

Lake Tekapo

A Top Mount John

After a one-night stay in the Christchurch suburbs, we motored south and west to spend a couple of days at Lake Tekapo. What a beautiful turquoise colour it was. The colour of the lake's water is created by 'rock flour'. The glaciers in the headwaters of Tekapo grind rock into fine dust on their journey down towards the lake. The 'rock flour' is suspended in the melt water and when combined with sunlight creates the unique water-colour, a phenomenon we were to see many times in the coming weeks. The clouds floated very low amongst the mountains surrounding the lake. The atmosphere is a landscape photographer's dream being very dry, making even far away mountains look crystal clear. I hadn't seen such clarity in my photographs since we left Mongolia, and I am afraid I got a little carried away, snapping multiple images of every scene we came across for the whole trip. With Jo's and Gek's photographs, we collected almost 4,000 images, as compared to the 2,500 we took on our two-month trip to Australia the year before.

We partook morning tea/coffee at the Astro Cafe on Mount John's summit. A local operator runs a tour to view the night skies at the Mount John Observatory, but it was too cloudy the two nights we were there to avail ourselves of the service. From the summit of Mount John, we got a bird eye's view of Lake Tekapo and following our refreshment, we drove to a smaller lake, Lake Mcgregor where I plucked wild apples from a tree on the shore. Scrumming down under, was I.

Mount Cook as seen from Lake Pukaki's shore

After our lunch, we drove to Mount Cook, about ninety km away. At 3,753m Aoraki/Mt Cook is New Zealand's highest mountain. It towers above a splendid cast of massive snow-clad peaks that make up the Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park. Nudging one side of Aoraki/Mt Cook is the mighty Tasman Glacier, a 30 km giant and one of the longest outside the Himalayas.

Queenstown

Our next port of call was Queenstown. My Mum, your Great Grandma visited New Zealand as part of her world tour in 1985 and there are photographs she took back then in our Whitworth's Photo Gallery. Unfortunately, I didn't start the Gallery collection until we returned to Penang, otherwise I would for sure have found the places she photographed for a now-and-then comparison. I suspect there would not have shown much difference in the town over the intervening 26 years.

Arts and Crafts Market

Queenstown is built around an inlet of the same name on Lake Wakatipu, a long thin Z-shaped lake formed by glacial processes and has spectacular views of nearby mountains. I think one of Mum's photographs was taken from the latter. You must remember that back in 1985, Mum did not have the luxury of being able to take multiple images. Using slide film, as she was, makes you very conscious of just how many clicks your camera shutter makes. No automatic metering either, meaning you needed to acquire a skill in setting the lenses apertures and exposures for every shot. We have it easy these days with point and shoot.

As we were in the town over a weekend, we had the opportunity to visit an arts and crafts market by the wharf. The products were created by local artists and there was very little of the usual tourist that I always associate with these sorts of fairs. I did search out miniatures, of course, but none did I find. Exploring Queenstown's art galleries, we came across the gallery of a landscape artist, Tim Wilson, who specializes in oil paintings on linen canvas which involves thirty layers of paint. He creates paintings that have a magical effect under light of different intensity by using the kind of luminescent paint

Lake Wakatipu, on the way to Glenorchy

normally found on silver car bodies, the kind that changes colour when viewed from a different angle. A typical landscape painting can take him up to a year to complete. They are realistic in the extreme with a mood changed under different lighting, giving the impression that you could step over their frame and take a walk in the woods.

Whilst based in Queenstown we took an afternoon's excursion to Glenorchy, a rural village about forty-five minutes' drive away, well known as the backdrop for many key scenes in The Lord of the Rings film trilogy. Surprisingly, neither souvenirs nor signs of the movie having been filmed there were evident in the village, except for organized trips in 4-WD vehicles offered by a tour agent. I first read Tolkien's the Lord of the Rings in Ghana, where I borrowed the book from the British Councils Library in Cape Coast. Once I started to read it, I couldn't put it down. Why the British Council in a coastal Ghanaian town had a copy of Tolkien's mythical tales of elves and fairies in an imagined European middle kingdom is a mystery I have yet to solve. The film locations back drop here near Glenorchy are very dramatic. The photograph shown here is not in black and white but is as we saw the lake and the mountains on the day of our visit, awe inspiring. They also sell a very delicious honey here-about too.

(23rd June 1025 – Singapore)

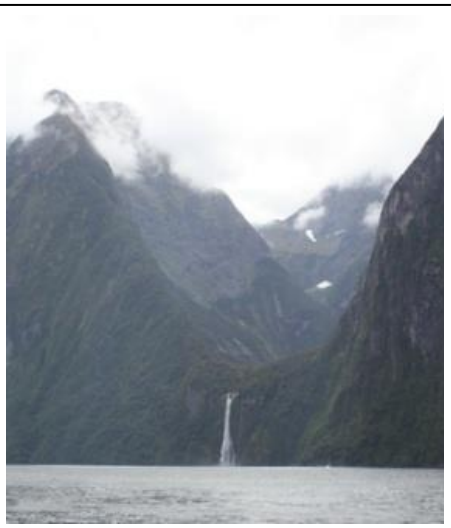
Milford Sound

Mirror Lakes

Te Anau was the next place we hung our hats, the centrepiece town of Fiordland and the starting point for the famous southern walking tracks. Located on the shores of a lake again with the same name, the largest lake on the South Island and the second largest lake in New Zealand, it is a very relaxed little town. The lake is an impressive 417m deep and 64 km long. The main reason for us staying in the town was to take a day trip to Milford Sound, a minimum two hours' drive to the northwest.

On the way to Milford, we stopped at the Mirror Lakes, small tarns situated at the roadside with crystal clear mountain reflections in them for more photo opportunities before passing through the 1.2 km Homer Tunnel. The tunnel road is a single lane through a mountain at the head of the sound, the traffic flow being controlled by traffic lights at either end. As we were waiting for our convoy's turn to pass through, we had time to notice the previous winter's snow still on the ground by the tunnel entrance. This was February and the end of the Southern Hemisphere's summer and yet the snow was still here on the ground in small

drifts. No wonder my two Singaporean companions were so well wrapped up, complete with woolly hats some more.



Milford Sound

Milford Sound, its namesake being in Pembroke, Wales, is one of the wettest places on the planet, raining two days out of every three but it has to be said that it is as beautiful in the rain as it is with clear skies. Milford Sound sports two permanent waterfalls all year round, Lady Bowen Falls and Stirling Falls but after heavy rain, many hundreds of temporary waterfalls can be seen running down the steep sided rock faces that line the fiord. They are fed by rainwater drenched moss and last only a few days at most once the rain stops. And you have guessed it already, it was raining on the day we graced the Sound with our presence. As the large cruise ship was already booked out by the time we arrived at the quay, we boarded a much smaller vessel the size of your average fishing boat. That was OK until we reached the sea entrance to the Sound, when the angry Tasman Sea made itself felt with huge rolling waves causing our little boat to pitch quite violently. Caution being the better part of valour and with a few of the passengers becoming a little queasy, our captain was soon heading us back into the flat calm waters of the Sound.

Milford Sound runs fifteen km inland from the Tasman Sea at Dale Point, also named after a location close to Milford Haven in Wales, the place I went on a summer camp back in 1965. The Sound is really a fiord formed by the action of glaciers and is surrounded by sheer rock faces that rise 1,200m or more on either side. Among the peaks are The Elephant at 1,517m, said to resemble an elephant's head, and The Lion, 1,302m, in the shape of a crouching lion. Milford Sound was initially overlooked by European explorers, because its narrow entry did not appear to lead into such large interior bays. Sailing ship captains such as James Cook, bypassed Milford Sound on his journeys around New Zealand for just this reason. He also feared venturing too close to the steep mountainsides, afraid that wind conditions would prevent escape back to the open sea.

The fjord was a playground for the local Maori, generations before the Europeans' arrival with Welshman Capt. John Grono 'discovering' it c.1812 and naming it Milford Haven. Capt. John Lort Stokes later renamed it Milford Sound. While Fiordland as such remained one of the least-explored areas of New Zealand up to the 20th century, Milford Sound's natural beauty soon attracted national and international renown, and led to the discovery of the Mackinnon Pass in 1888, soon to become a part of the New Milford Track, an early walking

Lake Manapouri

tourism trail. In the same year, the low watershed saddle between the Hollyford River and the Cleddau River was discovered, where the Homer Tunnel was to be developed about sixty years later to provide road access.

Another day trip we took from Te Anau was to see Lake Manapouri. That day was windless, and we spent an hour just watching the ripples on the lake created by passing boats, the reflection of the clouds in the lake and people fishing and relaxing on the shore. Then back to Te Anau for an ice-cream and a film at the Fiordland Cinema there, before driving over to Dunedin the next day

Dunedin

James Cook stood off what is now the coast of Dunedin early in 1770, naming Cape Saunders on the Otago Peninsula, and Saddle Hill. He reported penguins and seals in the vicinity, which led sealers to visit the area from the beginning of the 19th century. Epidemics of new diseases from which the local people had no immunity, reduced the local Maori population dramatically at this time. The name comes from Dùn Èideann, the Scottish Gaelic name for Edinburgh, the capital of Scotland. Charles Kettle the city's surveyor was instructed to emulate the characteristics of Edinburgh. There resulted both grand and quirky streets as the builders struggled and sometimes failed to construct his bold vision across the challenging landscape.

Dunedin today is a university town, home of the University of Otago. Our visit coincided with University's fresher's week and what an unruly lot they were. The local press carried stories of their riotous behaviour which seems to be an annual event the town's folk must suffer. We walked a few of the street where the wild parties had been, to find rubbish and furniture randomly scattered across the roads. Lame excuses for their delinquent behaviour were banded about, the most common being it was the

The Queen Elizabeth

youngsters first time away from family and home and they were just letting off steam. What nonsense, no excuse at all.

The weather was still very wet and wild, raining the whole day one of the days during our stay in the city. The highlight of the stay in Dunedin for me, at least, was watching The Queen Elizabeth sailing away from Port Chalmers. The cruise ship arrived in the morning and left on the same day. Gek and I waited for two hours in the wet and cold, sheltering in our hire car at Aramoana near the narrow pass between Otago Peninsula and the mainland, to catch a glimpse of the luxury cruise ship leaving the sound. Jo decided we must be crazy to suffer so, just to watch a ship sail past and decided to stay in the hotel to keep herself warm. She was right, of course, the wind was so strong coming off the sea even the seagulls had taken refuge behind a windbreak. With the rain lashing against the windscreen of the car, when The Queen did finally arrive after a late sailing, to get a half decent picture I had to dash out of the car, bracing myself against the wind. But it was worth it. To see such a big ship in such a small sea space was awe inspiring, and when the captain put the pedal to the metal as a clear view of the sea hover into view, she seemed to just fly away from the shore. As I watched her disappearing into the mist, I noticed the tiny pilot boat which had been bobbing in the bay in front of our parked car, pull alongside and a small door just above the waterline in the side of The Queen opened for the pilot to transfer ship. The sea was very rough at the time, making the transfer extremely hazardous. We departed the Point, along with all the other parked cars there also to watch the show, before we saw if the pilot boat had collected its pilot safely.

Advancing, Barefoot Without the Girls

The West Coast

From Dunedin, we drove northwest across the island stopping at Wanaka on the way to the glaciers on the west coast side of Mount Cook. The Fox Glacier, the first of two we visited, is thirteen km long, and was named in 1872 after a visit by the then Prime Minister of New Zealand, Sir William Fox. It has the distinction of being one of the few glaciers to end among lush rainforest only 300m above sea level. Although retreating throughout most of the last 100 years, it advanced between 1985 and 2009. In 2006 the average rate of advance was about a metre a week, a flow rate about ten times that typical of glaciers. Since then there has been a significant retreat, with the 2009 high level still clearly visible as a vegetation line on the southern slope

above what is left of the lower glacier today.

As we approached the end of the glacier, there was a stream running across the path with no obvious means to cross it without getting your feet wet. The girls chickened out, but I just had to get to end of the river of ice and get closer shots of the glacier, so I took off my shoes and socks to wade through the ice-cold water. Jo and Gek sat picking stones from the stream while awaiting my return.

Franz Josef Glacier

The second glacier we visited was the Franz Josef. Having retreated several kilometres between the 1940s and 1980s, the glacier entered an advancing again phase in 1984 as did the Fox. Over the longer term, the glacier has retreated since the last ice age, and it is believed that it also extended into the sea some 10,000 to 15,000 years ago. As is the case for most other New Zealand glaciers which are mainly found on the eastern side of the Southern Alps, the shrinking process is attributed to global warming.

Arthur's Pass

Viaduct through Arthur's Pass

On the way to Arthur's Pass, we stopped at a couple of seaside towns, Ross, the Gold Town and Hokitika, the Jade Town. In Hokitika we visited the Jade Factory and Museum and I was pleased to be able to buy a couple of jade pieces that I could mount as miniature sculptures to decorate the Black and White model house. They were in fact intended to be worn around a lady's neck, but I had a mind to mount them, one on a tiny wooden stand and the other in a frame to hang on the wall. It rained most of the days we were on the west coast. The drive over Arthur's Pass at 920m is a switch back affair until you are almost at the saddle on the ridge between the valleys of the Ostara River on the west and the Bealey River on the east, when out of the blue you are on a beautifully curving viaduct. The large span of the viaduct's arches, striding from one side of the valley to

Kea

the other as they do, seem to make the surrounding mountains shrink, causing the whole to appear disproportionate.

We parked the car at the head of the valley and, stepping out to record the scene, we noticed the Kea birds attacking other parked vehicles rubber bits, the seals surrounding doors and windows. They were also having a go at a bicycle tyre mounted on the roof of one of the cars. And these parrots are not afraid of humans. Not at all. The Kea is a large species of parrot found in forested and alpine regions of the South Island. About 48cm long, it is mostly olive-green with a brilliant orange patch under each of its wing. It also as a large powerful looking, narrow, curved, grey-brown upper beak. The Kea is the world's only alpine parrot. Its omnivorous diet includes carrion, but consists mainly of roots, leaves, berries, nectar, and insects. Now quite common, the Kea was once killed for bounty due to the concerns by the sheep-farming community that they attacked their livestock, especially lambs. It received full protection in 1986. Kea are known for their intelligence and curiosity, both vital to their survival in a harsh mountain environment. Kea can solve logical puzzles, such as pushing and pulling things in a certain order to get to food and will work together to achieve a certain objective. They have been filmed preparing and using tools. They can also ruin your car. But I will forgive them that because they were so cute, even if they are so naughty.

The pass is named after Sir Arthur Dudley Dobson, who led the first party of Europeans across the pass in 1864. Soon after, the discovery of gold triggered the West Coast Gold Rush. The provincial engineer was commissioned to examine every possible route to the West. After finishing his examination, he declared that "Arthur's pass" was by far the most suitable to get to the gold fields. The road was opened in early 1866. We were to bed down for the night in the nearby village with the same name, arriving late on a very wet, cold afternoon. Our accommodation was next to the railway track which runs between Christchurch and Greymouth with many goods trains trundling noisily passed, day and night. Only one passenger train makes a daily run between the two cities on this scenic alpine route. Poor Jo really suffered from cold up here. She retired to bed early, fully clothed and wearing a woolly hat.

After only one night in Arthur's Pass we drove back to Christchurch to complete a figure of eight tour of the south of the South Island.

(24th June 2015 – Singapore)

New Zealand, North of the South Island

Murchison

Jo was due to leave us now for home and early the next morning we drove her over to the Christchurch's airport for her to catch a plane back to Singapore via Auckland. Gek and I were very sad to lose such an amiable travelling companion but leave us she had to.

Th'ar be Snow on them th'ar Hills, th'ar be.

After a final wave to Jo through the departure gate, Gek and I returned to our car and set off straight away on the five-hour drive to Murchison. Our ultimate destination was Golden Bay where we were to stay with Morfydd, an ex-colleague and friend of both Gek and Jenny from their time at Ngee Ann Poly together. Morfydd had advised us to take the inland route to her place as opposed to the drive up the east coast, which was just as well, we took, as the weather turned bad enough on this inland route never mind on the coast. It was cold, windy and wet. The temperature went down to 5 deg C and there was snow falling on the mountain tops as we drove through valley after valley. And then the all clear, Murchison welcomed us with blue sky and white fluffy clouds. The sun was smiling the whole afternoon. What a change of scene from morning to afternoon, from grey clouds and snowy hills to lush green valleys and blue sky.

And what brilliant accommodation Gek booked for us here, a most spacious, homely two-bedroom self-contained unit at the Mataki Motel, and at the lowest rate we had paid so far. The following morning, we walked into the village for an 'explore', shopped at the Four Square Supermarket, and enjoying a home cooked lunch, the first for quite a while. The village has a compact place with a hospital, fire station, vetinary, a small museum and a church. Later in the afternoon, we decided to stretch our legs again and went up one of the surrounding hills for a bird's eye view of across the village and the valley. The uphill trek took all of forty-five minutes, but our effort was well rewarded with beautifully clear views

Murchison's Lush Valley

from the ridge across to the opposite mountain ranges. A perfect relaxing day, before we set off again the next morning towards the north and Golden Bay.

Golden Bay

Morfydd and her husband Bill welcomed us to their home, Chatswood Villa, a very large bungalow set back about half a kilometre from the Bay. After some refreshment at their poolside, we went with them to feed the chooks, chickens to you and me, some thirty of them. They also took care of six sheep, two very large dogs, Ben and Briar, together with two cats, Duke and Duchess. Lots of fruit trees in the orchard and vegetable patches as well. I have never visited a home with one room dedicated to games big enough to comfortably accommodate a playable, full size billiard table, outside of a National Trust house, that is.

Farewell Spit

Golden Bay itself is a shallow, paraboloid shaped bay, an arm of the Tasman Sea, lying northwest of Tasman Bay and the Cook Strait. It is protected in the north by Farewell Spit, so name by our friend Capt. Cook as it was the last land he saw as his ship sailed away from New Zealand. The Spit is a 26 km long arm of fine golden sand and is the country's longest sand spit. The Bay is known for being a popular tourist destination, because of its good weather and relaxed, friendly lifestyle. It was once a resting area for migrating whales and dolphins such as Southern Right Whales and Humpback Whales. Access by road is via the Takata Hill Highway that climbs to 2600m from Nelson before dropping into the south end of the Bay at the small settlement of Takata. This is the only road into the Golden Bay area. Morfydd told us that if there is a medical emergence in the Bay, a helicopter is called in from the nearest hospital at Nelson some two hours' drive away. The place is so remote. The road down into Takata drops at a fair old rate, with a couple of rather vicious hair pin bends, but the views from that side of the mountain are fabulous.

The west and northern regions of the bay are largely unpopulated. Along its southern coast together with the Takata township is Collingwood and the Abel Tasman National Park. Separation Point, the natural boundary between Golden and Tasman Bays is situated within the park. In December 2011 the Bay, as well as much of the Nelson/Tasman region, was hit by heavy rain and flooding, which affected many homes around the area. We were passing

through in March 2012 and the storm damage caused to the roads was still very much in evidence, with temporary diversions in place on some stretches. Morfydd also told us that after the storms the Bay was cut off from the outside world for a couple of weeks before the roads could be made serviceable again. Much of the National Park was also still closed, as a result of which we decided to give it a miss.

Estuary of the Aorere River

Maori lived along the shores of Golden Bay from at least 1450 as shown by the earliest dated archaeological evidence yet found. Dutch explorer Abel Tasman anchored seven km out in this bay in 1642. After a bloody encounter with the local Moaris, who rammed the Dutch ship's boat with a war canoe killing four Dutch seamen, Tasman named it Moordenaar's Bay. Tasman saw at least twenty-two waka. He recorded that in the eleven waka that chased his ship, most had seventeen men on board, making a total of about two hundred men in hot pursuit. In 1770, during his first voyage, Capt. Cook included the bay as part of Blind Bay, but on his second voyage to the bay in 1773, he realised that it was in fact the location of Tasman's Murderers Bay.

European settlement proper began in late 1842 with the Lovell family settling at Motupipi near the then existing Maori hill fort. Prior to the Lovell's settling, in March of that year, coal had been discovered coal on the beach near the fort. In the 1840s, following these discoveries, the local population unsuccessfully sought to have it renamed Coal Bay. Then, in the late 1850s, with the discovery of gold in at Aorere, its name was changed to the current name of Golden Bay. Today Golden Bay area is now full of farms growing apples, kiwis, berries, hops (for beer) and has many wineries.

The Chess Players

(29th June 2015 – Singapore)

Morfydd and Bill had a romantic love story to tell. They first met in the late 1950s at the teacher training college they were both attending. Bill, who is ten years older than Morfydd, was a mature student, returning to college to train as an educator to teach others his work-acquired skills. On graduation, Bill joined a merchant ship bound for New Zealand being taken on as a tutor for the ship's apprentices. The ship had been fitted out to facilitate on the job training as part of the students

'finishing'. Once in New Zealand, Bill decided to stay and found a new job at a land-based college there and after a couple of years, he and Morfydd lost contact with each over. Morfydd went on to marry another and embarked on a career path that lead her to working with Gek and Jenny in Singapore's Ngee Ann Polytechnic in the early 1980s, by which time she was a divorcee. When her contract with Ngee Ann was completed, she returned to England and Chippenham where she lectured at the military college there.

Meanwhile, Bill stayed working in New Zealand and, still not married, retired around the same time that Morfydd took up her lecturing post in Chippenham. He hadn't forgotten Morfydd and decided to try to get back in touch with her again. The only lead he had was the name of the college where Morfydd had working on graduation and, more in hope than expectation, he wrote to the current head of the college to ask if he/she had any knowledge of Morfydd's whereabouts. Not surprisingly after 35 years, none at the college had a clue as to what had happened to Morfydd, but the college head was still in touch with the previous incumbent of the post and passed Bill's letter on to her. And Bingo, the two were reconnected. The rest is history. Bill flew to the UK and joined Morfydd in Chippenham, soon after which they were married and where they stayed until Morfydd retired, when they left for New Zealand and Golden Bay. A happy ending, no?

In spite having an enormous room dedicated to games, Bill and I played chess most evenings on a small table by a window. I hadn't played the game since I don't know when and was very rusty. Bill on the other hand played most days with Morfydd and as a consequence, I was soundly trashed in every game. The only hope I had was to employ a strategy of surprise, making moves that my opponent didn't expect. This worked for a while, as Bill is a very methodical player, knowing the 'value' of each piece on the board and making decisions to keep his most valuable pieces in play. Me, I just went for broke and charged his

Chocolate Shop

Home Made Chocs

line in frontal assaults, taking as many prisoners as I could whilst incurring plenty of casualties on my own side, much to his amusement. Chess and wine, a very nice way to spend an evening.

Morfydd kindly took us around to show us the delights of the Bay which included many artist studios, from painters to potters, as well as the beautiful beaches. Gek was in her element with so many different types of art forms to see. On a visit to Collingwood we dropped in at a chocolate shop with a difference, The Pink Chocolate Shop. The shop was pink, not the chocolate, by the way.

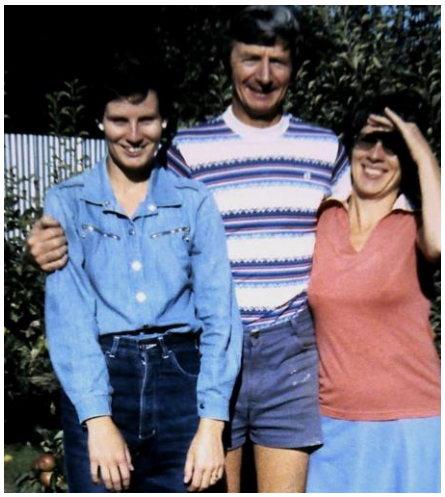
Marlborough Sounds

Queen Charlotte Sound

After three days with Bill and Morfydd, we left Golden Bay and climbed back up the switch back road over the mountain to Nelson where we partook of a small lunch in a church cafeteria. Yet again I was struck by how English my surroundings were, but from an era perhaps fifty years ago. Nelson was proclaimed a city by royal charter in 1858 but even today it only has a population of around 46,437 souls. Following our ecclesiastical lunch, we moved on to our next bed for a couple of nights, in Havelock.

Havelock is a great place to use as a base to visit the Marlborough Sounds. The sounds at this northern end of the South Island were once river valleys that were flooded by the rising sea levels after the last ice age and, unlike the ice formed fiords of the south, have relatively gently sloping side. They are very, very beautiful, with photo opportunities around every bend in the winding, coast-hugging roads. And best of all, we had the sounds to ourselves. No doubt in school holiday times these quiet roads would be teaming with cars, but now, no. If ever there was a place to make the most frenetic person relax, this is it.

The sheltered coastal bays of Marlborough supported a small Maori population possibly as early as the 12th century. Maori in the Marlborough Region cultivated crops, including sweet potato and exploited the marine resources. Although the early history of Marlborough was closely associated with the Nelson settlement, the people of Marlborough wanted independence from Nelson and nineteen years after the original Nelson settlement, the request of Marlborough settlers was granted, and Marlborough became a separate province in 1859. Although gold was discovered in the province in the early 1860s, the boom



The Cartwrights Vicki, Frank and June, 1984

did not last and, while it helped to expand the region, the development of pastoralism provided the greatest long-term benefits. Marlborough squatters developed huge sheep runs that dominated the countryside, rivalling Canterbury's sheep stations in size and wealth. But we could not linger long, we had to move on again after a couple of nights to go stay with my Mum's cousin Frank in Blenheim.

Blenheim's surrounding area is well known as a centre of New Zealand's wine industry, a fact that must have pleased my Mum on her 1984 visit to the town. It enjoys one of New Zealand's sunniest climates, with hot, relatively dry summers and crisp winters. Blenheim is named after the 1704 Battle of Blenheim, where troops led by John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough, defeated a combined French and Bavarian force. On the drive over to Frank's place we passed the head of the Queen Charlotte Sound, the sound down which we would be taking a ferry through to the open sea and Wellington to start the second month of our New Zealand tour on the North Island. But more of Charlotte later.

Frank's father, my Mum's uncle, spent his years of military service during the First World War as a soldier in the India. After the war ended and he was demobbed, he was offered a passage back to UK and home or, alternatively, a berth on a ship bound for New Zealand. I guess he could not see a bright future for himself in a war weary England and packed his knapsack for a more uncertain but possibly more interesting life south of the equator. And so, it turned out to be, he putting down new roots there. His son Frank is nearly fifteen years younger than Mum, and they only met for the first time in 1984 when she stayed with him for a couple of months on her world tour.

June, me, Gek and Frank
2012

(30th June 2015 – Singapore)

Frank is a keen fly fisherman and regularly contributes articles on the sport to a local fisherman's club magazine. He also writes prize winning short stories about

his experiences during his innumerable fishing trips, notably one where he won a bottle of malt whisky, which I have reproduced here.

Tommy's Trout

On his days off law enforcement duty Tommy relaxed with his trout rod quietly fishing the Wairau River. He had located a very large brown trout in a long, deep pool just prior to Christmas but his best efforts to capture it were not successful. He wisely rested the area for a day or two before returning with renewed enthusiasm, but each carefully placed cast failed to bring the slightest response from the big brown. Once again, he retired from the river to let the trout settle down before returning on Boxing Day for a further attempt.

Arriving at the pool, he could see the trout lying deep but not feeding. He was weighing up his options on how best to fish to it when a young lad cycled up to him and asked if he could fish beside him and gain a few tips as he had never ever fly fished before. He was the proud recipient of a brand-new fly-fishing package which he had received for Christmas and was obviously very keen to try it out.

"Have a go lad!" said Tommy, supremely confident that a young, raw recruit to fly fishing would never get a response from a particularly angler-smart trout. Brimming with youthful confidence, the lad set about rigging up his rod and line then selected a lurid dry fly "as big as a budgie" according to Tommy. After several minutes of uncoordinated fly flinging and attendant tangles, the lad finally managed to throw a crude cast of a few metres in the general direction of the trout but suddenly, and against all odds, it surfaced with a great rush and engulfed "the budgie." The rod bent double and although the tippet must have been on the point of breaking, it somehow held. The lad whooped and hollered in his excitement as the trout dashed back and forth, up and down and around the pool. Very sportingly, Tommy gave advice and encouragement and after a considerable struggle, the trout suddenly tired, was drawn towards the bank and Tommy, acting as the lad's ghillie, slipped his net under a beautiful trout of eight pounds.

Tommy was flabbergasted that "his" trout had been captured with just one cast by an angling novice but the lad, grinning and flushed with excitement, simply shoved the trout head-first into his backpack, tied his fly rod to the crossbar of his bike and cycled off.

At the end of the track he paused, looked back and called out "Thanks mister! Have a nice day!"

Frank Cartwright

Frank has a fairly robust utility type vehicle in which he took Gek and me on tour of some Marlborough Sounds that we wouldn't have probably seen without his help, with photo

opportunities aplenty. Frank also recounted an incident from during the time of Mum's stay with them which says a lot about what an independently minded lady she was. Frank and June arrived home one day from work to find the house empty but were not particularly concerned until dusk was falling and Mum had still not returned. When Mum did finally arrive home, it transpired that she had taken it into her head to 'walk' up the Wilking Hills she could see from June's garden. Mum loved to walk, walking the moors around Darwen well into her late seventies.

The four of us got along famously during our short stay in the Cartwright household and we were very sad to leave so soon, but leave we must to catch the Picton-Wellington ferry and start the second half of our New Zealand tour on the North Island. Picton is close to the head of Queen Charlotte. The town is named after Sir Thomas Picton, the Welsh military associate of the Duke of Wellington, who was killed at the Battle of Waterloo. Inter-island ferries to and from Wellington arrive and depart here by way of the Sounds, the most sheltered part of the route is through Tory Channel, south of Arapawa Island.

Picton Harbour

We arrived in Picton early as we always do to places when travelling on a pre-booked itinerary, particular when there is a transport to catch, giving us time to walk around the town and grab a bite to eat. Along the waterfront were palm trees, a sure sign that we were journeying into milder climes than in Fjordland's, 800 km to the south which is about the same distance as between London and Inverness, in UK. As we were sitting at the ferry terminal waiting for our ferry to arrive, a coach load of secondary school children filed past us, each carrying a rucksack. Nothing unusual about a school outing, I know, but when all fifty or so of them started to embark on a fishing boat, bags and all, barely big enough to carry a quarter of their number, I began to get a bit concerned. At one stage the little boat was listing so badly, the skipper had to ask the children to shift themselves to avoid the boat capsizing. I was conflicted as to what to do about it but before I could make up my mind to take an action to stop the boat sailing, it did just that, sail. I was really annoyed with myself for being so indecisive and having abandoned my 'Think it, Do it Now' approach to life. Subsequently, the next day I was scanning the news for any reports of a disaster in the Sounds, a very real possibility but nothing, thank goodness.

Still agitated by my inaction in the face of an obvious danger, we boarded the Wellington ferry, to discover that it had once plied the English Channel. Her old name, The Pride of

Cherbourg, although painted over was still visible in relief on the ships bow. I might even have been on board her before. What a strange thought. To get to the open sea and the Cook Strait that separates the two main islands that make up New Zealand, we made our way out down Queen Charlotte Sound before turning right into Tory Channel. Queen Charlotte Sound is the easternmost of the main sounds of the Marlborough Sounds. It is, like the other sounds, a drowned river valley, and like most of its neighbours it runs southwest to northeast before joining Cook Strait. To the east of the sound lies Arapawa Island and Tory Channel. Some of the small side arms of the sound are only hundreds of metres apart and are separated by a steep serrated range of hills, making a beautifully landscape to enjoy as you sail past. It was from a hill on Arapawa Island in 1770 that Capt. Cook first saw the sea passage from the Pacific Ocean to the Tasman Sea, which was named after him. Capt. Cook sheltered in Queen Charlotte Sound at various times during each of his three voyages of exploration.

The Narrow Sea Entrance to the Sound

Queen Charlotte Sound has calm waters and is popular for sailing, in marked contrast to the notorious waters of Cook Strait. Many ships have been wrecked close to the entrance to the Sounds, most notably in recent years the Russian cruise liner Mikhail Lermontov, which sank in 1986 in Port Gore after striking rocks. One life was lost in the incident. I can personally testify to the hair-raising dash the ferry makes through the turbulent waters of the narrow entrance to the Tory Channel following a sharp right turn towards the sea. The entrance is scarily narrow compare to the width of the ferry and the water you pass over appears to be boiling. Fortunately for us, I have to say very fortunately for us, the Strait was behaving itself the day we crossed to Wellington, without the slightest hint of a roll or pitch of the ferry.

(1st July 2015 – Singapore)

New Zealand, South of the North Island

Wellington

Wellington is New Zealand's capital city with some 400,000 residents. The 2014 Mercer Quality of Living Survey ranked Wellington 12th in the world. Earlier, in 2011, 'Lonely Planet Best in Travel' named Wellington as fourth in its 'Top 10 Cities to Visit', referring to it as the

"coolest little capital in the world". Well, after our four-day stay in the city, I have to agree with their assessments.

Wellington suffers from earthquakes. In 1855 an earthquake on the Wairarapa Fault to the north and east of Wellington was probably the most powerful earthquake recorded in New Zealand's history, with an estimated magnitude of at least 8.2 on the Moment Magnitude Scale. It caused vertical movements of two to three metres over a large area, including raising land out of the harbour and turning it into a tidal swamp. Much of this land was subsequently reclaimed and is now part of the central business district. For this reason, the street named Lambton Quay is 100 to 200m from the harbour. Plaques set into the footpath mark the shoreline in 1840, indicating the extent of reclamation. The area's seismic activity is high even by New Zealand standards, with a major fault line running through the centre of the city, and several others nearby. Since the Christchurch earthquakes of 2010 and 2011 in the South Island, earthquake readiness has become even more of an issue, with buildings declared by Wellington City Council to be earthquake-prone and which need work on them to meet new building standards. Every five years, a year-long slow quake occurs beneath Wellington, stretching from Kapiti to the Marlborough Sounds. It was first measured in 2003 and reappeared in 2008 and 2013. It releases as much energy as a magnitude 7 quake, but as it happens slowly there is no damage.

Wellington Te-Papa Museum

Gek booked us into a motel on a rise out of the city centre with views over the harbour and towards the hills beyond, a super little pad it was too. We had returned the hire car to the company in Picton before boarding the ferry across the Strait with the intention of picking up a new vehicle from their Wellington office the day before we were due to move on to Napier. The walk down Cuba Street from the motel into the city, which is full of eateries and cafes, was a very pleasant stroll we took each day. We spotted a 'Penang Restaurant' in Cuba Street advertising authentic Malaysian dishes cooked by Malaysians. Well, we did have to give it a go did we not, but although the food was good, it still didn't measure up to the real thing. Note to self, always eat local dishes to avoid disappointment.

There was a Festival of Arts on in Wellington during our visit with lots of performing shows, exhibitions of all kinds and some street art. We took the funicular railway to the Adam Art Gallery at Victoria University of Wellington and walked back down through the Botanic gardens. From the University campus, I looked down to see people playing crochet on a field dedicated to the game. This was not the first crochet field we were to see but the

surprise was that it was there at all. They are quite often located next to a bowling green and are most likely run by the same games club. Interesting that a game last regularly played in England on the lawns of great houses in the 1800s, should still be popular enough in New Zealand to have a club following amongst its citizens. Well, I say that, but I have just remembered that I played a couple of games on the lawns of the Manor House, my student accommodation, during my undergraduate days.

I was impressed by the very modern trolley bus system that Wellington had installed, a much more advanced system than even the one I had seen in Beijing. I know you will think me a bit of an 'anorak', but I do like trolley buses. The first route operated here between 1924 and 1932. At its maximum extent the network stretched for around fifty kilometres. The network has been threatened with closure over the years, mainly on grounds of cost but the growing emphasis on environmentally friendly transport has however prompted campaigns to keep the trolleybuses. In 2007 it was announced that a new generation of trolleybuses would be funded. However, in 2014 a final decision was made to phase out the use of trolleybuses by 2017. In my view, a dumb decision, as trolley buses are relatively much simpler machines to design and make than a diesel engine powered bus. Their overall carbon footprint must be much lower than a bus and with a longer serviceable life to boot. Think of the 30-year-old trolley buses still running in the streets of Ulaanbaatar.

A 1924 AEC 602

Trolley Bus. 2012

Napier

Having hired ourselves a new set of wheels, we set off north from Wellington and headed over the Tararua Range to Napier. Up until this point on our New Zealand jaunt, Gek had declined to take the driver's seat, but on this day, she decided to get in a little overdue driving practice. Well, that was no problem, until we were descending the very winding road on the north side of the mountain, when Gek ended up on the wrong side of the road on a blind bend. I do not mind admitting, I nearly shit myself. When it was convenient and safe so to do, we swapped seats for the rest of the 320 km, 6-hour drive to Napier. Once we

found our bed for the night in Napier, we quickly reconnoitred the town centre before turning in after a rather tiring day on the road.

Capt. Cook was one of the first Europeans to see the future site of Napier when he sailed down the east coast of New Zealand in 1769. He commented:

> "On each side of this bluff head is a low, narrow sand or stone beach, between these beaches and the mainland is a pretty large lake of saltwater I suppose."

The next morning, after a fitful night's sleep, we walked into the town centre again, to visit the farmer's market. The centre was alive with people sitting outside the cafes, strolling the streets or relaxing in Clive Square. Gek liked the square with its colourful flowers and was charmed by the chiming bells that sound every half hour from a clock tower. Napier is New Zealand's Art Deco centre, rebuilt in the 1930s after a huge earthquake all but destroyed the town in 1931. Nowhere else can you see such a concentration and variety of buildings in the style of the 1930s. I did take a lot of photos of the buildings but because of the many trees lining streets and in the central gardens of pedestrianised parts of the town, I didn't really capture any images to do justice to the beauty of the place. I did, however manage to find some craft items for my Dollhouse, including original miniature paintings and an in-scale platter made from Kauri wood.

Typical Art Deco Frontage

After lunch, we took a long walk along Marine Parade up to Napier's port area and the little village of Ahuriri, taking in the panoramic view of the Pacific Ocean. There were quite a few containers at the port which got us wondering what they contained and where they were from, where they were going to, as Napier didn't seem to be on the way to anywhere. Not long before we arrived in Napier there had been a lock out by the port's owners, along with all the other ports in New Zealand, in their struggle with the strong port workers union. It appears that union was opposed to the rationalisation of New Zealand's ports which would mean the closure of most of the smaller ones like Napier's. The walk back to town was shorter as we cut through residential houses on the back of the headland instead of taking the seaside boardwalk. Many of these houses were wooden structures from the Victorian era, complete with sash windows which I hadn't seen since they were replaced in my Mum's house in Darwen some forty years ago. Wooden, single story houses fare much better in earthquakes than stone or brick-built structures.

We woke after our second night in the town to another sunny day. We left the hotel intending to visit the Sunday farmer's market in Hastings but there was a horse show on at the same time. The place was so crowded, we decided to abort that idea and took ourselves off to the Hastings City Art Gallery. The gallery's current exhibition was of large hanging paintings on un-stretched canvases, an inspiration Gek was to use for the 'Seven Ages of Man', part of her FACES exhibition in Penang two years later. We had a wonderful lunch at an Irish Pub in Havelock North as the shops and cafes were closed, followed by a visit to the Black Barn Vineyards (mainly for the art gallery), Arataki Honey Visitor Centre and finally the Birdwood Gallery which surprisingly has a wonderful sculpture garden with works in stone created by Zimbabwe sculptors. After such a hectic day, we designated the following day a rest day and contented ourselves with doing computer stuff and reading.

Taupo

Lake Taupo with Mt Ruapehu in the Far Distance

We left the wet weather in Napier and Hawkes' bay for a windy one in Taupo. A storm overtook us as we drove to Taupo, the road being partially blocked at one point by a fallen tree. By the time we arrived in the town the storm had wreaked its havoc with the felled power lines cutting off the town's electricity supply. Once we had booked into our motel we ventured out into the town centre, to find most businesses shut for the day and with the wind gusting at 70 mph, we decided to beat a retreat and headed back to the warmth of our motel room.

Taupo is located at the outlet of a lake of the same name, New Zealand's largest lake. Lake Taupo was created 1,800 years ago after a major volcanic eruption created a crater about the size of Singapore, 26 km by 40 km. That is one big hole in the ground caused by a single eruption. The area is seismically very active with the volcanic Mount Ruapehu just six km to the east which last erupted in 2007. We were able to pick up pumice stone on the lake's beaches from such an eruption.

The weather continued to be pretty wild. On the third day we did drive around the Lake, which took us more than two hours, with a stop at the quiet village of Kinloch where we could vaguely see in the distance across the lake, Mt. Ruapehu at a height of 2797 mts. By

the time we got back to the motel it was sunny in Taupo again. With the weather damage, a couple of the area's tourist attractions were closed for repair and so we again took the opportunity for a little rest and relaxation before heading off to Tauranga.

Tauranga

Wai-O-Tapu

On the drive over to Tauranga on the coast, we called in at the Wai-O-Tapu Thermal Wonderland following which we stopped for lunch at Rotorua. At Wai-O-Tapu our visit began with a show, the induced eruption of the Lady Knox geyser, achieved by pouring soap powder into the geyser's opening. This was followed by an amble around the thermal pools and springs, some 18 sq. km of collapsed craters, boiling mud pools, steaming fumaroles, all giving off hydrogen sulphide gas which gave the whole place a 'rotten egg smell'. The mineral elements brought to the surface by the water, produces wonderful colours in the pools and on the rocks, really an artist's palette. The whole central area of the North Island must be one huge thermal underground pool as we often saw 'steam' coming up through the forests as we drove over to the coast. At first, I miss took these whiffs of 'steam' drifting up out of the trees as the rain forest plumes, similar to the ones we get in Malaysia after rain. But no, these were coming out of the earth, not out of the trees.

Gek had booked us into another great motel for our stay in Tauranga with full kitchen facilities and views of the bay from the living room windows. It was really an apartment, bigger than our bungalow in Wales. The earliest known settlers were Maori who arrived at Tauranga in the 13th century. Europeans trading in flax were active in the Bay of Plenty during the 1830s, some were transient, and others married local women and settled permanently. The first permanent trader was James Farrow, who travelled to Tauranga in 1829, obtaining flax fibre for Australian merchants from the Maori in exchange for muskets and gunpowder.

On the first morning of our stay in Tauranga, we drove over to the Farmer's Market at Mt Maunganui. After buying our supplies of veggie and fruit for the week, we treated ourselves of coffee and cake at a roadside safe. Little did we know at the time but two friends from our time in Mongolia, Margie and William, were sitting only a few metres away, up in their apartment behind the market square. Margie was a VSO volunteer like Gek and me. She was one of several volunteers from the Philippines who would hold regular get-togethers,

they being much more sociable than the rest of us, to some of which we were invited. William, an American, was teaching English in an Ulaanbaatar school, which is how he and Margie got together. They married only recently in 2014. Lovely couple.

Mt Maunganui from Ken's Garden

The next morning, we set off in search of Ken's house in Welcome Bay after dropping our punctured tyre in for repair. I noticed the tyre had blown at the hot springs on the drive over from Taupo. Always good to check around the car every now and then, something I learnt to do after the Volvo incident back in 1986. They even do a 'visual' check around aircraft at airports just before it takes off. So, it must be a good idea. Ken was one of the two sculpture tutors who taught Gek during her time at Emerson College. Ken's house, which he designed and was currently building himself, was set well back, up in the hills behind Bay. The place he chose to build the family's new home is so remote there is no electricity supply to the site and there wasn't the likelihood of it being connected to the national grid anytime soon. He, Kate and their two boys, Jocelyn and Rowan, had already been living in a large shed on the site for the past four years whilst the new house was being built. The lighting in the shed was supplied from car batteries which had to be charged in Ken's van every day. But what a location, with views down the valley towards the sea.

Ken was born in the UK, his parents emigrating with him to New Zealand when he was very young. After having lived in the UK for a few years, in 2007 he decided to relocate with his family back to New Zealand and this remote hill site. They had first spotted this place was for sale during a holiday visit to family in the area and were moved to put in an offer for it. Returning to the UK without giving the place much thought, they were surprised to hear a couple of months later that their offer was accepted, and did they want to make good on it, which they did. After our morning tea and chat with Ken, we went back to collect the tyre and home for lunch, promising to return in the evening to meet with Kate who was

Gek in the Cathedral.

out at the time of our visit. This was the first of three subsequent meetings we had with the family over the next four days.

The motel accommodation was so homely that we spent our time in Tauranga as if we had lived there for years, visiting markets, art exhibitions and entertaining friends round for dinner. We took a two hour climb up Mount Maunganui for some exercise and it was such a clear day I managed to take some beautiful seascapes photographs from the summit.

(31st July 2015 - Singapore)

Coromandel

Reluctantly, we left Tauranga on the fifth day to continue our journey north. The route to our next stay took us along the coast north of Bay of Plenty, up the east coast of Coromandel Peninsular, over the north (not the extreme north) of the Peninsula, and down its west coast to Coromandel Town. On the way we made several stops. We stopped briefly by KatiKati (meaning nibble nibble), the mural town followed by a morning coffee stop at Tairu. On the way around Whangamata, we came upon a load of old American cars as they made their way to a rally of 1950/1960s classics. The roads were very bendy here about and we decided it was prudent that I drove most of the time. On the stop at Cathedral Cove, we took the one and half hour walk to the beach to stretch our legs. Little did we realise that this would involve over 150 steps down the cliffs to the Cove. As everything that goes down must come up, we had to walk back up the same steps. We certainly took tens of thousands of steps in that six days, in Tauranga and on the East Coromandel coast.

Te Kouma

Approaching Coromandel town, it took us some time to find the cottage Gek had booked for us that night with several u-turns and eventually a call to the cottages owners before we realised that we were supposed to be in Te Kouma, a few miles south of the town. When we did eventually find our bed for the next couple of nights it was in one of the best locations of our trip so far, at the head of a scenic inlet which served as an overnight shelter for several yachts. We watched a beautiful sunset over the adjacent hills and saw the stars in an ink black sky. Very quiet and very, very dark this place was at night.

After a relaxing morning with a bush walk near the cottage, we ventured back into Coromandel town for lunch. After the lunch crowd had disappeared, the town was quiet again, with many shops shut for the weekend. As we didn't feel much like driving around, we took the time to just chill at the cottage on the Sunday afternoon, reading newspapers and going through our photos.

New Zealand, North of the North Island

Warkworth

We made an early start for Auckland. It was cloudy and a bit wet when we drove the winding road toward Thames where we had a coffee break, then on through Kaiua and Clevedon before finally arrived at Kohim Beach on the outskirts of Auckland for a lovely lunch. As was our habit, we shared a main course as the portions are so big. Finally, we made our way northwards to Annie's B&B in Warkworth to be pleasantly surprised by an upgrade to a cottage for our intended one night stay after which we decided to stay at Annie's place for four nights and stay only two nights in Auckland city, thereby avoiding the ugly cityscape. Sorry Auckland.

The Harbour View from Kohim Beach

The cottage was fabulous, fully furnished with everything you could want for, a real home from home, with the quirky design sense of our Asian hostess thrown in for free. Gek and I both relaxed and became Darby and Joan for our stay there. The photo of me sitting on the balcony says it all. Mind you, on the first day there, we were confined to our new 'home', watching the horizontal rain sweep passed our French windows, the wind blowing out the weeping willows branches like a horse's mane at full chat.

In comfort

On the second day, we drove out to the Kauri Museum at Matakohe about 50 km north of Warkworth. It was still rainy, but the wind was throttling back making it a six-hour outing mainly viewing the scenery from the comfort of the car. The Kauri is New Zealand's largest native tree. It first appears in the fossil record in the Jurassic Period 190-135 million years ago. Giant Kauri trees once covered most of the Northlands but today only about 4% of these primeval forests are left. The oldest tree alive today, Te Matau Ngahere (Father of the Forest), is estimated to be 2000 years old. The largest existing Kauri is 4.4 m in diameter.

Auckland

On the way to our final port of call, Auckland, we drove down the west coast via Muriwai to visit the gannet colony there. It was the end of the breeding season with most of the young birds having already fledged and making the perilous ocean flight to Australia for the coming winter months. The few birds that remained on the cliff ledges faced an uncertain future, with quite a few of them already having succumbed to starvation having been abandoned by their parents in the rush to migrate to warmer climes for the winter months.

The isthmus north of Auckland was settled by Maori around 1350 and was valued for its rich and fertile land. Many hill forts were created, mainly on the volcanic peaks. Maori population in the area is estimated to have been about 20,000 people before the arrival of Europeans. The introduction of firearms at the end of the eighteenth century, which began in Northland, upset the balance of power and led to devastating intertribal warfare beginning in 1807. As a result, the region had relatively few Maori when European settlement of New Zealand began. There is, however, nothing to suggest that this was the result of a deliberate European policy.

Auckland was officially declared New Zealand's capital in 1841. However, even in 1840, Port Nicholson (later Wellington) was seen as a better choice for an administrative capital because of its proximity to the South Island, and Wellington became the capital in 1865. About 50% of the population was Irish which contrasted heavily with the majority English settlers in Wellington, Christchurch or New Plymouth. Most of the Irish, though not all, were from Protestant Ulster. Most settlers in the early period were assisted by receiving a cheap passage to New Zealand.

In Auckland we met up with the last of Gek’s friends in New Zealand, William and his family. But by now both Gek and I were running out of touring steam and in the couple of days in the city, our minds were more occupied with our imminent return to our home in Penang.