

2013 New Zealand

Tuesday, 17 December. We arrived two days before our group by surprise. I goofed a bit in transmitting the tour details to our travel agent. The trip left Los Angeles on 17 December. With a day in transit and the international date line, I was two days off. Nevertheless, we checked into our hotel two days early and arranged a bus trip for the next day. Having arrived late in the day, we went out for dinner and an early bedtime.

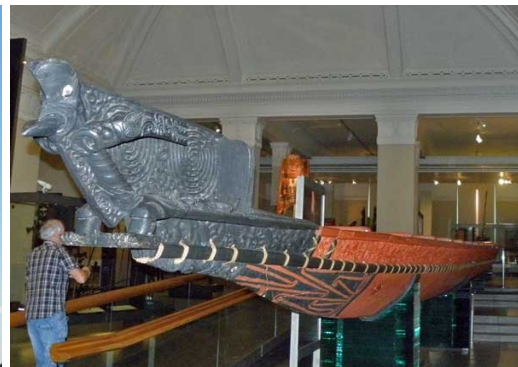
Wednesday, 18 December. We were picked up at our hotel by our guide, Dawn, who took us with four others to see the Waitakere Ranges (Why-tuck-er-ey) part of the regional park system of Auckland. We enjoyed seeing the natural flora, walking in the woods and enjoying an aspect of nature that we had not previously experienced. Our guide was very knowledgeable about the plan and wildlife and enthusiastically told us about her home town.



Thursday, 19 December. Our group arrived mid-day and we met the rest of the group. Our first trip together was a walk around the park near our hotel. That evening, we had dinner at the waterfront.



Friday, 20 December. We continued our walk and enjoyed the Auckland Museum, a tribute to the Maori, Polynesian culture and New Zealand's war memorials. We also visited a botanical garden where a wedding was taking place. The Kiwi's participation in WW I led to their request for independence from the British crown. From their perspective, they were used as the front lines in Britain's participation in the war. We met a representative from the local Maori tribe, Prince, who explained how the Maori's had assimilated into the European culture, to their advantage in contrast to the aborigines of Australia and the American Indians. That afternoon, we went by ferry to Devonport, the community across the harbor. We had a "flat white," New Zealand's favorite coffee (somewhat like cappuccino), and some carrot cake at a little shop just before its closing at 4 p.m. To our surprise, our host invited us to pick out sandwiches to go for free as they would otherwise go into the "rubbish bin" as surplus. We were delighted as dinner was on our own that night. In appreciation, we moved the outside tables and chairs into the shop for the young lady.





Saturday, 21 December. Today we drive southward to Rotorua, home to the hot springs and other natural geothermal phenomena. On the way we stopped at an organic cattle station (ranch) to meet the owners and learn how an organic dairy farm worked. I was amazed at how limited mechanization worked for this farm family when my last dairy visit was in first grade when we saw the cows walk onto a milking merry-go-round. Notable at this farm was the lack of cow washing facilities. They had learned that the use of water to clean the cows was not only not necessary but also lead to the spreading of contaminating materials wherever the water would go. In my summary, I concluded that, once you get the knack of organic farming, it is more efficient and less work than the other way. The key is to put aside so many of the concepts that you grew up with to adopt the homeopathic, balanced traditions of organic.





It's always nice to see something unexpected, like a polo match

Sunday 22 December. We arose early to beat the cruise ships to our view of Rotorua's geothermal playground. We were hosted by a Maori man who had lived in the area for many years. He took us out by bus and boat to see the surrounding area and lake. New Zealand is a land of volcanic activity so it is not surprising that fissures developed in this area allowing water to seep into the ground, become superheated and then to rise as steam from the underlying rock.



Sunday afternoon was a visit to a family in a nearby community where we split up and had lunch in her home, met her granddaughter and visited with the resident teenagers in the mental health service facility and at the community pool. The young lad was so excited to perform for us that we followed him to a place where the pipe goes over the river so he could demonstrate his "bombing" techniques.





Monday, 23rd December. We take an internal flight to Queenstown. Notable about internal flying in New Zealand is that there are no security screening. Firearms are very limited in New Zealand and of course, the Iranians do not recite “Death to New Zealanders” (as they do Americans) every Friday at the mosque. Accordingly, air travel is easy and convenient.

We were each given the name of another traveler to buy a secret Santa gift for so one of the first thing to do in Queenstown was souvenir shopping. I was given the name of a single lady for whom I bought a pair of green-stone (similar to Jade) earrings. Judy bought a camera lense tether for the single man of our group who had trouble keeping track of his lense cap. We had a burger at the world-famous, Fergburger. We stopped to eat our burgers and feed the birds at the local park.



Tuesday, 24 December. Today we went to Milford Sound on the west coast of New Zealand, part of the fiord area of southwest New Zealand. Our trip takes us through the natural forests of this splendid, unspoiled area. We also go through a 1.2 km tunnel directly through the rock mountains. We take a boat trip through the waterway into the sound and due to the rain see thousands of waterfalls bringing the rain water down these rock mountains.



Wednesday, Christmas Day. We are pleased to be able to book a spot on the abbreviated schedule of the Dart River Safari. This wild adventure includes a jet boat ride up the river. It travels at speeds of 45 mph upstream and ever faster downstream. Along the river one sees, water, trees and mountains. At our drop-off point, we then go on a nature walk through the hillside. Finally, a bus takes us home stopping at places that are known for their photography sites. Scenes from popular movies such as “Wolverine” and “Lord of the Rings” were taken here as well as photos for commercials. Even the emblem for Coors beer was shot here.



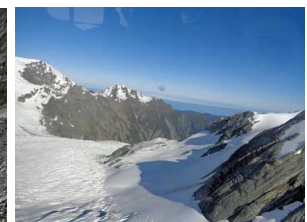
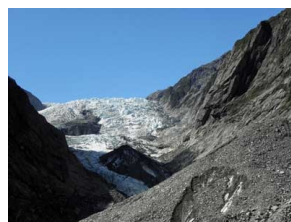
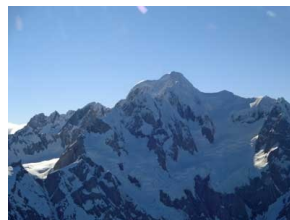
That afternoon, we had Christmas dinner at a local restaurant with ham and turkey. We exchanged our gifts. I got a New Zealand All Blacks cap which I now wear proudly as the symbol of the rugby team. We got an early rest so that we'd be ready for Skyping the next morning. Boxing Day in New Zealand is Christmas afternoon 18 hours later in Florida.



Thursday 26 December. We began the long ride northwest to the Fox glacier we are to see tomorrow, stopping along the way to take in the sights. The wine tasting was closed due to boxing day so our wonderful guide bought some wine in a supermarket. We stopped along the way to see the Tasman Sea and the flora and fauna of the west coast. Though we were in a rain forest, today was the first day on the south island that we haven't had rain. The sun was out and the weather was beautiful. Unique to this area is Whitebait, a juvenile fish that swims from the sea up the river to spawn as an adult. These little fish are cooked with an egg and served on white bread.



Friday 27 December. Today we took a helicopter ride up the glacier, landing on the top and back down the other side. It was fantastic! We then joined the rest of the group on a hike up the riverbed to the terminal moraine. The southwestern coast of New Zealand is home to its tallest peak, Mt. Cook and the two glaciers, Fox and Franz Josef.



This is a glacier, a slow moving flow of ice down a mountain, generally into a river then into the sea.



We don't get to do snowballs much in Florida!

Saturday 28 December. The unusual “pancake rock” is our first stop. This rock formation is the result of sedimentary rock on top of deceased ocean life, in layers. The formation was pushed up by a geological activity then the limestone from the deceased shellfish is eroded away.



Fur seals are the next stop, once endangered by over hunting, they are now recovering well unimpeded by natural predators.



common in New Zealand.

Kiwis, above, as are other non-flying birds are



Reefton is the home of the first central power facility and town-wide street lighting. The first in the southern hemisphere, second only to New York City in the northern hemisphere. We were entertained in the Odd Fellows hall, the home to the miners and other tradesmen benevolent society. Our host demonstrated the difference

between candlelight and electric light.



The Bearded Miners' Association entertained us with how it used to be by making us tea and biscuits with jam.

Museum of Stuff containing many artifacts from the homes and businesses of this gold mining era.



New Zealand is very proud of its being the first county to give women the vote.



We then toured the gold mining operations from the late 1800s. This belt-driven masher runs on stream water to crush the gold bearing rock.

Sunday 29 December. Today is our chance to visit a working sheep station (ranch). Richard, the manager handles 30,000 sheep with his dogs. He showed us how the dog will move the herd from one paddock to another, how they shear the sheep and separate the wool fleeces. We talked about reproducing lambs and the difference between lamb and mutton. Judy has a chance to hold a young lamb.



We travel over the Southern Alps to cross from the west coast to the east ending at Christchurch. The mountains and scenery are outstanding.

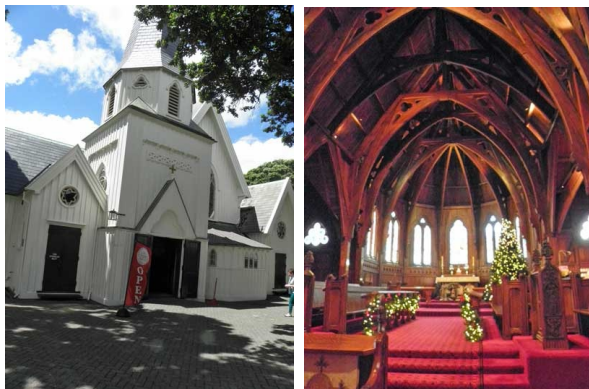
Christchurch was devastated two years ago by a tremendous earthquake. The major damage was caused by the second tremor that was downtown in mid-day. They had not had quakes in Christchurch before so this was unexpected. Many damaged buildings were torn down and only recently has the affected area been opened to the public.



As Christchurch is the jumping off place for Antarctic expeditions, the US and New Zealand have their exploration centers here. A multi-media Antarctic exhibition center provides visitors with simulated experiences including a freeze room and a 4D movie. New Zealand penguins are seen here. They were rescued and rehabilitated from predator damage before coming here.



Monday, 30 December



Last night we flew from the South island to the North to the nation's capital, Wellington. This city is built on hills surrounding the harbor and is prone to earthquakes. Accordingly the buildings are set on moveable foundations with insulators of rubber and steel that provide stability when the earth moves. Wellington is the home to the New Zealand cinema arts and where the special effects of the Hobbit trilogy and many other movies were made. Our leader is also a movie producer so he was able to get us a private viewing of the DVD that showed the inner workings of this creative facility. It was amazing. You scratch your head

thinking, will I ever know what is real and what is not again?



We ate lunch in a pub across from Parliament where figures of the politicians are made in caricature. As Parliament was out of session, no big wigs were present though they would otherwise commonly be seen there.



The highlight of my day was a visit to the Capitol where the prime minister works and the Parliament sits. The guide explained the relationship of New Zealand with the Queen and her governor. When Parliament becomes dysfunctional, the Queen can end it and require a new election. This has happened two times in New Zealand's history. There are limits on political contributions and lobbyists are not permitted. Nevertheless, the public has a chance to discuss bills with the legislature in special committees.



On the left, the executive headquarters, their Whitehouse, though the Prime Minister does not live there. On the right, the Parliament.



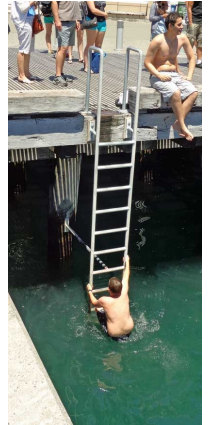
Tuesday 31 December.



We visited the national museum of New Zealand's natural history, political history and native history. Far left is a tall Maori sculpture. On the street on the way to lunch is an unusual water "sculpture" where buckets at the top fill and dump into those below. It was rather fascinating.

The temperature may have been 75 degrees, perhaps warm for Wellington summer. We saw these lads mounting this jump platform and jumping into the harbor below.

We took a ride on the cable car. Wellington is built on the side of various hills.



The harbor view from the top.



January 1, 2014. We met a man from the Community Bible Study that meets in Wellington, saw the church where his group met and talked about their mission in this town. He

lamented that about 5% of the people of New Zealand were bona-fide Christians. We corrected his notion that the US was a Christian country.

We returned home, pleased that we had seen so many varied aspects of this wonderful country.