

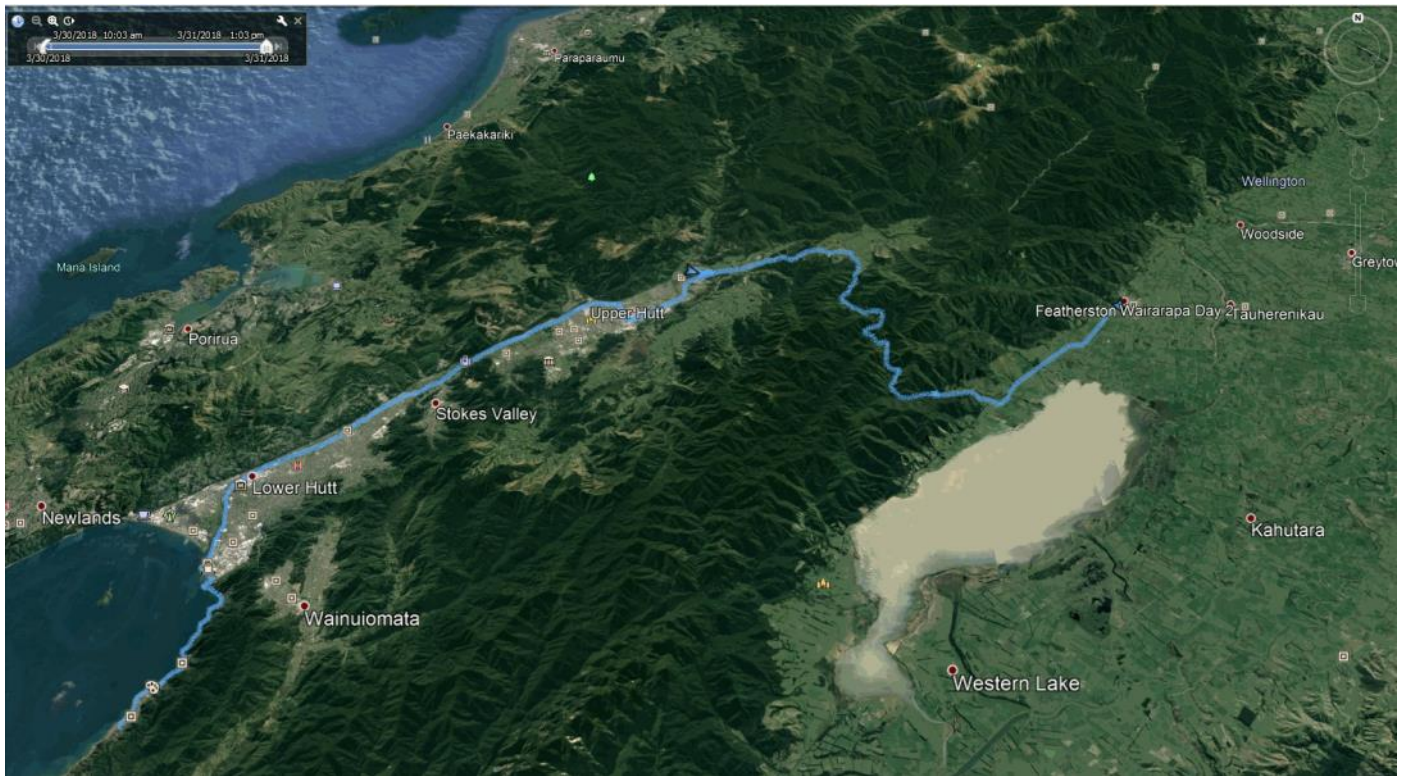
I was reviewing where I got up to last time and in many ways nothing has changed but in some ways lots has. Probably the largest change has



been the weather. When I wrote last we were still at the end of an amazing sunny summer and now here we are shivering in a cold and blowy winter. We could tell the seasons had changed on our way home from the ferry one week the cricket pitch suddenly changed into being a rugby field.



So last time, I was recovering from a detached retina and as a consequence not able to go over the Rimutakas (they were too high for the gas balloon in



my eye). Well the eye is slowly recovering, I have full light sensitivity, but the vision is a bit fuzzy in the eye. I've been for some practice cycles and it seemed to go OK so we decided to go for it and planned a three day trip over the Easter weekend.

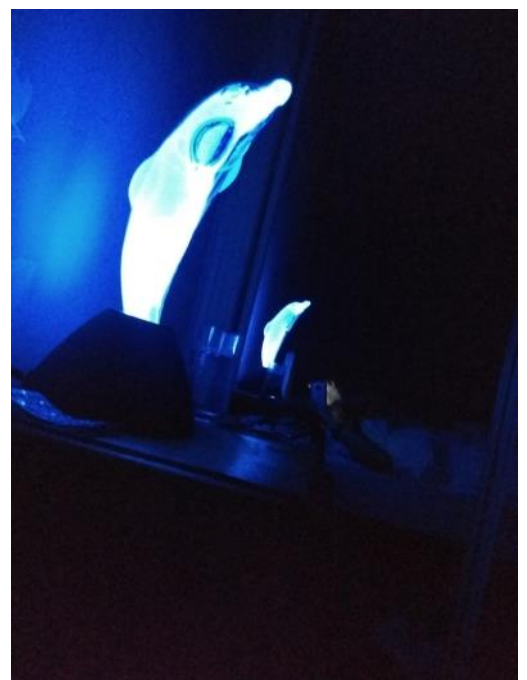
It was great, I have to say I was a bit daunted by the idea of a 75KM cycle before I detached a retina but it was fine, apart from the punctures. We use puncture resistant tires,





and they are fantastic. Apparently they are heavier and draggier than “proper” road tires. I can’t say that my style of cycling is affected much by them. It does mean that I have cycled here for six years without a puncture. Well that run came to an end. My front wheel has had a kink in it since I came off two years ago and broke my shoulder and I knew that made my front tire a bit vulnerable but I had managed for the last couple of years but on the way there I was hopping up onto a pavement and I took out the front tire. Then on the way back I got a puncture in the back wheel, we replaced the tube and instantly got another. Enough, I decided after we get back I would take the bike into a shop and get a new front wheel. I did and the bike is now much better, mind you it almost cost what the bike had cost to have it repaired. It turned out that my multiple punctures in the back tire were as a result of a broken spoke that would periodically flatten the tire.

But I am getting ahead of myself. The punctures were a minor problem at the beginning and the end of the weekend but the bit in the middle was great. Day one we cycled to Upper Hutt just this side of the hills, we had booked into a B&B in a place called Emerald Hill, which should



have been a warning to us because they were not joking about the hill. It was really quite steep; we both ended up getting off and walking. It was a very strange little B&B, it was very swish for the price but it did have some foibles, when we arrived we were asked what we wanted to drink, we were hot and sweaty after our hill climb so we wanted water. So it was water the whole time we were there, we were never offered tea or coffee, and we couldn't find any, we looked. But by far and away the weirdest thing was the light up dolphins on the bedside table, they were not bright enough to read by but they did light up, I still have no idea why. We were only staying for one night so it wasn't that much of a problem, the highlight of the stay was lolling in the bath listening to the last test of the summer, bizarrely using VPN I was listening to the BBC coverage.



The following morning we resumed our cycling. It was slightly disappointing to discover that all that uphill did not count to-





wards crossing the Rimutakas as Emerald Hill is a separate hill. The hills are pretty significant, they are 940 meters high and by the time we got to the top the weather had

changed from late summer sun to slightly drizzly and windy. To keep the weight down we didn't have wet weather gear – probably not the smart move. The cold stretch really only lasted about half an hour so we did get away with it. We swooped down the track into the Wairarapa and the warm sun returned. We had not booked accommodation as we didn't really know where we would be staying and it was Easter so it was a bit limited, in the end we stayed in the backpackers and but for the princely sum of \$10 we got a double room to ourselves.

Featherston is a funny little place,





it's the first place you get to over the hill with Greytown and Martinborough being all swish and nearby. It is trying to catch up with its more eye-catching neighbours, there is

a newly renovated hotel, with an olde worlde bar, and a rather nice restaurant staggering distance from our room. We pottered around town on Easter Sunday, visited a very good cheese shop. It was to be cheese and wine for dinner at our next accommodation. This was a very lovely little bach (pronounced "batch", it's a kiwi term for a holiday or beach house). We played petanque, had long baths and listened to the cricket and then enjoyed the fruits (well cheese) of our labours.

Getting back was a bit of a cheat, you see Featherston has one other useful attribute, a railway station. We





could catch the morning train over the hill and then get off and cycle down the Hutt Valley home, it really was all downhill from here.

It was not all plain sailing, or even cycling. A couple of weeks later we were cycling along the path that winds through the bays to the cinema when I caught my pedal on one of the reflective posts and



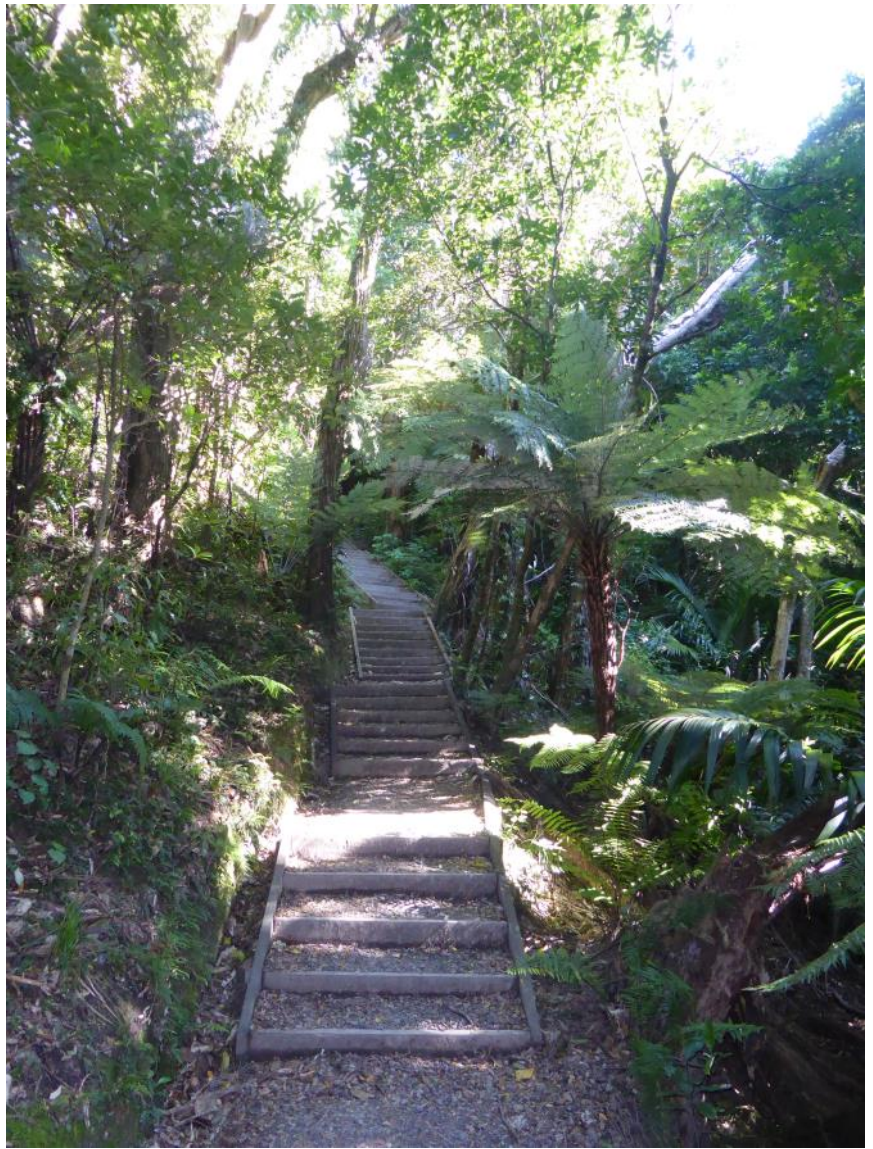
went straight over the handlebars. Having come off a couple of years earlier I know what to check, but everything seemed to be OK, arms and legs functioned fine, no sharp broken ribs however I had landed on my face in the gravel and cut my chin so deeply that I was producing a quite noticeable pool of blood. So we had to go to the walk in center and have my face stitched, and we missed the film.

The way that public holidays work here in autumn means



that we seem to get two Easters in a row. A couple of weeks after real Easter we have Anzac day and it falls on the same week as our Friday off so for one day holiday we can get a

week off. We did think about cycling again but we had been planning to go to Kapiti Island for years, prevented by bad weather on one occasion and a broken camper van on another. We booked into another bach and walked down the long beach on the day before we caught the boat across to the is-



land. It's a funny old place. It's a bird sanctuary which means that all mammals have been "removed". It's probably one of the largest islands that this has been done to, apparently getting rid of the bigger mammals isn't that hard but the smaller rats and stoats are more of a problem, however they have been gone for 20 years now. About five years ago a stoat made it across to the island, it's about 5KM off the coast which is pretty much double what it should have been able to swim but the speculation is that it floated all or some of the way on some wood. It





took months but they did manage to hunt it down. The result is an island where birds can flourish, including many of the flightless birds. I know we are famous for Kiwis but there are other flightless birds like the Taka Hey, this was classi-

fied as extinct until it was rediscovered in the middle of the last century.

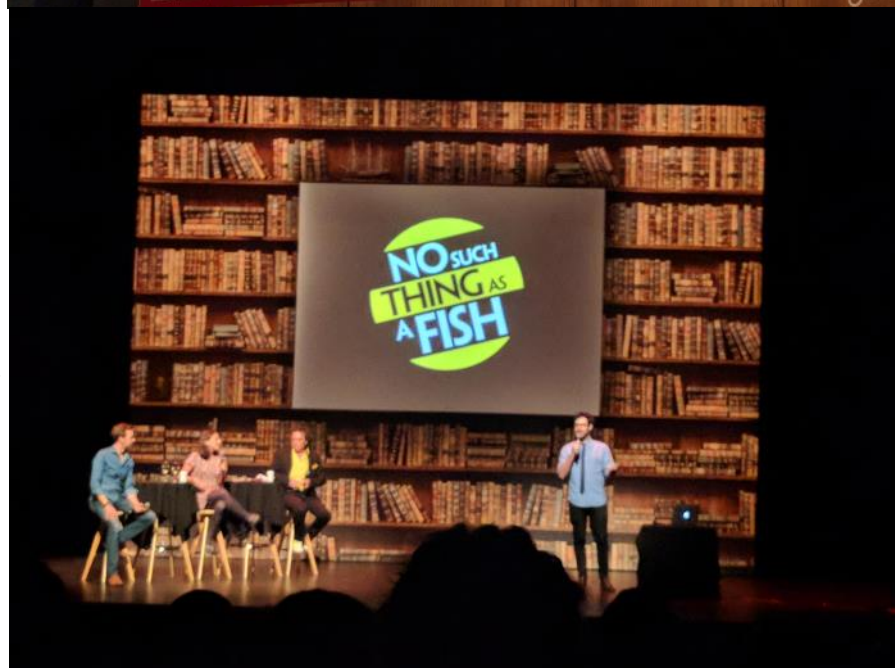
It might only be 5KM but the little boat that we used to get across is nothing like the Wellington harbor ferry we go to work on. Even though the weather was perfect it was quite a bouncy crossing, and being bounced up and down was a bit too much like going over my handlebars for comfort.

It was a beautiful walk up the hill and down surrounded by birdsong and trees. Man's intervention here meant that most of the trees on the island were cut down and the island used for farming. Its only in the last 20 to 30 years

the Department of Conservation have been trying to return it to its natural state. It was interesting to meet up with locals, who have last been to the island 10 years ago, they said that they could really see the difference in the trees.

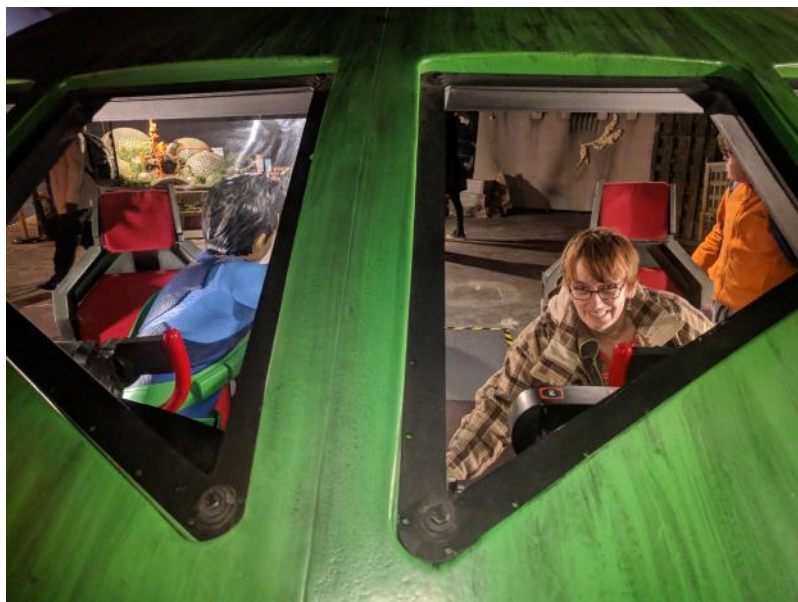
The houses, well its still pretty slow going. In fact sometimes we think we will never get there. We have had offers in the UK and almost a sale but in the end it fell through, the clouds of Brexit are starting to gather so hopefully we can manage to sell before the storm arrives.

We have been trying to keep ourselves amused while we wait. We went to see “No Such Thing as a Fish”. They are the people who come up with the facts for QI, and they do a podcast and as it turns out a live show as well. We also went to see the Thunderbirds exhi-





bition at Weta. This is the heard of the “Wellywood” film industry (Lord of the Rings, Avatar etc). and they are doing a new version of Thunderbirds. It turns out I am quite a lot more of a geek about this than I thought, who knew I had a favorite Thunderbird (2) and that they would let me operate the handle the made the palm trees get out of the way so it could launch.



We also went back across to the Wairarapa with Johan and Antoinette, Martinborough though this time we drove. We did take our bikes but only pottered around the vineyards before retreating to our bach to play cards all evening such a pleasant way to shelter from the rain.

