

Southern Man

Its been a while since I have written and it feels as though we have done lots.

We worked all winter and then come the spring we had our first real break since the autumn cycle in Otago. We went to the north end of the South Island and did some hiking on the Abel Tasman Track and then on the Queen Charlotte Track.

The weather here has been a bit sketchy, but by comparison to the north of England I suspect I am becoming a soft southern jessie. Anyway every day we were away the forecast was revised from rain to sun so we were not complaining.

The South Island really is absolutely beautiful. We have walked some of the Abel Tasman Track last year but could not walk the end of it as the tides were wrong, the track is across the mouth of some inlets. This time we drove all the way down to the end of the walk and camped at a DOC campsite. The DOC (Department or Conservation) campsites are bare bones camping, no power, but fire places for a Barbie. The campsite was huge, and there were very few of us there but apparently if we were to be there between Christmas and New Year it would be



heaving. We stayed a couple of nights and had even less power when I ran the CD player for 4 hours and flattened the battery. Who would have thought a little CD player would flatten a big car battery (well apparently people do know this but I am not one of them) you live and learn. Luckily we had a jump starter kit so were able to rescue ourselves.

When we hike we have a pattern. We only take one day pack, with our food and water. I carry the pack when we are going uphill and Steph carries it downhill. The way the coastal walks work out this means that there is a rhythm to our walking. Its not like a mountain when I carry the pack for the first half of the day and Steph the second on a costal walk we are continually stopping and changing over. It is a nice rhythm to the day.

Steph wondered if we talk less now when we walk. I'm not sure I think it depends if we are thinking and doing some "Zen walking", I guess we end up chatting in bursts and then we are quiet for a while.

The walking was lovely. We were down on the beach one moment and then up in the trees the next.

We completed the sections of the walk we had not done before and even had the surreal experience of booking a water taxi for 2:30 to take us home the end of the walk and it really did turn up.

We got to go out the Golden Bay, which compared to the "hustle bustle"



of the rest of New Zealand is even more laid back, which pretty much means they don't actually get up. Again we camped on the beach and walked along marvellous almost deserted beaches.



Its odd, I got my hair cut (granted it was in a caravan in the car park of the local supermarket) and the hairdresser was a local to Wellington (capital city and the south end of the North Island) and he said that he had never been to the South Island. I guess I sort of expect all Kiwis to be explorers but it turns out that there are a mixture of people everywhere.

We walked along Farwell spit and actually got lost, well it was super windy and the spit was broader than we expected. A very eerie and windswept place and a lot more interesting than I was expected.



We went to the Nelson lakes and then to Blenheim which was fun, the

weather a bit iffy, we watched people barbequing in the rain, now that's dedication. We had our only wet day in Blenheim – we hired a tandem to cycle around the winery's. They are quite chic down here and this



worked well when we got stuck at one for a 3 hour lunch as it bucketed down. They had a fire and magazines – not the worst hardship in the world.

Queen Charlotte Track was great, different walking somehow a bit more remote walking along the spines of land looking down on the maze of waterways that were to be used to hide the US pacific fleet if it ever came to that (it never did). They build huge gun emplacements with elaborate overlapping fire patterns and then never used them so took them down.

The accommodation this time was a bit posher, no DOC campsites, and got progressively nicer as we got upgraded on the last night to a room with an ensuite bathroom that had a shower that was the same size as some hotel rooms I have been in. We sat on our own private balcony overlooking the bay where a pod of dolphins were fishing. Well they were catching fish but I think they were just lads out mucking about.

We were in Wellington this year for November 5th fireworks. Yes its odd that Guy Fawkes really has nothing to do with these



islands but is still celebrated. Well sometimes, windy Wellington does not always allow fireworks, if it gets too bad then they have to cancel or it just becomes dangerous.

This year we were lucky, it was clear enough and we managed to get ourselves invited to the 13th floor of an office building in the city (that's pretty tall by Wellington standards) The fireworks were pretty spectacular, I think everyone stopped to look at them, they even broadcast special synchronised music on FM.

The rhythms of our inlet are a thing of beauty. The wildlife that I remember from the end of last summer when we moved in that was missing all winter has returned, the stingrays, herons and kingfishers are starting to come back and fluffy new ducks have arrived. Still waiting for the swans but I guess that will take a bit more time.

We went up to Taupo, to watch Andrew do the Taupo challenge, he cycled the 160 km around Lake



Taupo, he said it was a bit boring cycling so far.

(Steph's bit) Work wise Derek has been really busy and tired. He was really ready for a break. My new job is going fine. It is the nearest to pure management I have ever done. I have had to set my budget for next year and have employed somebody and have somebody leave. Both these create buckets loads of paperwork. I have had to learn 14 computer systems. We have had external auditors in! I am now well into appraisals! We had Australia booked but I was a little worried about leaving them over Christmas – we will see how it went when I get back. I now just have train people up for when I am away for four months, in the UK. The day I left my manager resigned so from February I really will need to know how it all works!! It is still easier than my last job and my work life balance is much better. I get to be clinical as some days we have too few staff. My staff love the fact I have done most of their jobs before – especially the mental health team (as the last manager had never worked in mental health). I like developing services and staff but it is still not as exciting as seeing patients!!

(Back to Derek) And now Christmas is upon us again. It does rather sneak up on us here, I guess in part because it's quite subdued here. We still get the advent tree out - try and out-do each other in silliness of



our gifts. (A USB key with software to download The Archers, a nut cracker specifically for walnuts, water inflatable lips in the shape of a kiss)

We didn't get a tree because we are away for Christmas. We are in Australia getting some sun and going to the Boxing Day Test (cricket).

The end of the year a blur of booking Australia, getting the camper van up to Auckland for Ed's arrival in January and a mince pie/slushy mulled wine party. In Auckland we got a flavour of their subdued Christmas BUT got to see The Hobbit 2 in 3D, high definition, IMAX – well there was an experience (different not better). We have also been booking tickets to Europe.

Plans are shaping up for us to return to the UK for a bit next year. The plan to head back to Europe for a bit we will set off at the beginning of May and call in on my sister in Texas and Andi in Germany and then to the UK. We will be in the UK until the beginning of August and then we will return to NZ.

We hired a car for the week from going to Auckland and flying to Australia and I just love the hire car's process for out of hours collection. Bear in mind that it is the airport in the capital city. We picked up the car at 8pm so they left it in the car park, unlocked, the keys in the glove box and our name on the dashboard, we did the same on the way to Australia – only in New Zealand.

We think of you all at this time of year and hope families are meeting and sharing good company. We wish you a healthy

2014 and hope to see many
of you when we are in the
UK.

Happy Christmas and
Healthy New Year

Love Derek and Steph
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