

Another summer is drawing towards winter. It has been another lovely summer, maybe not as consistently hot as last year but we have not needed a coat in months. In fact the other week it did rain and we both discovered our waterproof jackets were not really waterproof so need replacing before the real winter arrives.

I think my highlight of the summer was a weekend escape to the South Island in February. It was completely unplanned in fact we didn't know we were going the weekend before. Steph came home saying that she had to go to a meeting in Picton on Friday afternoon. Picton is a small town at the northern tip of the South Island, it's where the inter-island ferry goes. So, she hatched an idea to spend the weekend there. She was flying but I could catch the ferry across after work and we could spend the weekend away. Now we just needed to get some accommodation, in the middle of summer, on Queen Charlottes Track, at a week's notice

– hmmm
tricky.

The most well known of the Great Walks at the top of the South Island is Abel Tasman, and it is won-



derful but its a bit further from Picton, not that far but it would take half a day each way and we only had a weekend. The other option just across the sound is Queen Charlottes Track and its pretty good as well. We scoured the web for accommodation, and were not having much luck, eventually we managed to find a place that looked alright, it would sleep 12 so it was a lot bigger than we needed but it wasn't that expensive and anyway we didn't have a lot of options. It was a balance, the further out we went the more likely we were to find a place but the longer it would take to get there and also the more it would cost. We had no car and anyway there are not many roads so we would need to charter a boat to get there.

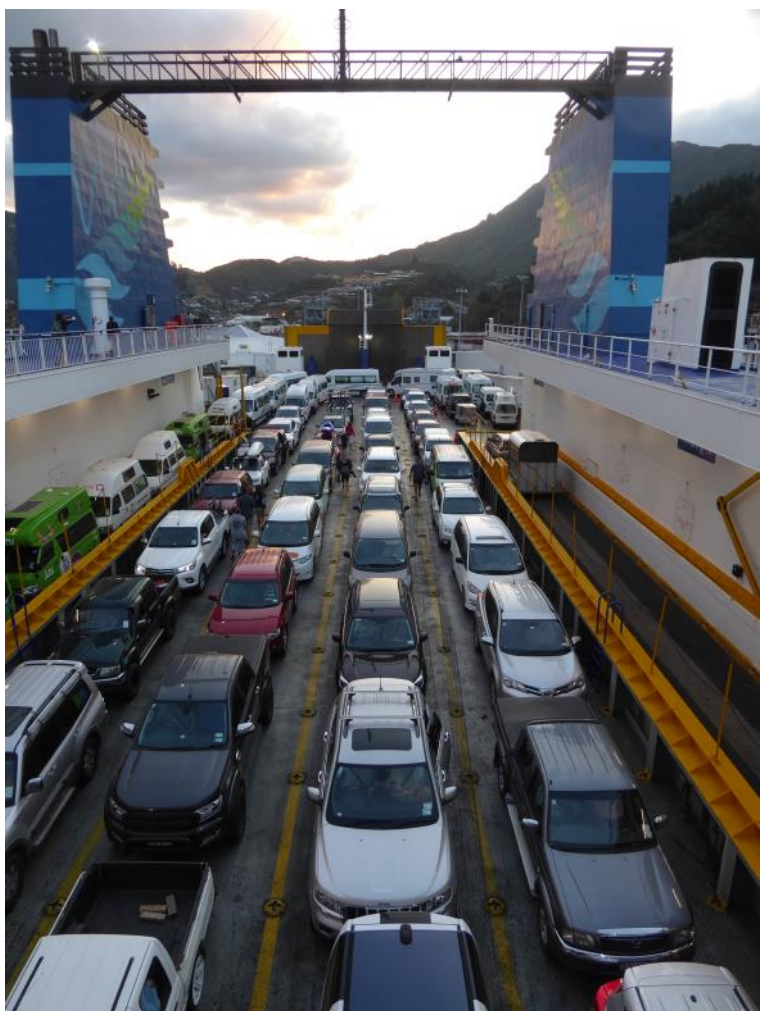
So we booked, well we hoped we were booked. You never really know when you just do the whole thing over the internet, sometimes you get an email a day later saying that the accommodation is not available, or you wait for the booking to be confirmed and it never happens. This time however we it all seemed to work.

We both set off on Friday



morning; we parked in the Wespac arena carpark and went off to work as normal. I had tried to find the cost of parking at the arena but it was not listed on the web site. We ended up having to phone them up to ask why, and it turned out that it was because parking was free over the weekend.

Steph left the office at lunch time to fly over to Picton, it's not far, maybe 50 Km, under an hour in the Sounds Air small Cessna. We know one of the pilots from Sounds Air, however he was not the pilot on this flight, it was slightly surprised to discover that they had more than one pilot. Work tends to end quite early on a Friday for me, we stop around 3 for Friday Night



Drinks, so I was able to escape quite early and make for the ferry and plod across in the evening sun.

Like I said the summer had been very hot and sunny, even more so at



the top of the South Island, so much so that they were having serious fires over on the west coast, we had lots of police on the ferry who were going over to help out.

The trip that took Steph under an hour took me four hours, I didn't mind I sat in the big bar at the front of the boat and read my book while the sun slanted in and we slid slowly through the sounds. They could well be fjords; we have a terrible habit of calling them sounds, like Milford Sound is actually a fjord.

I arrived and met up with Steph. We had time for some food and some very silly TV and then we crashed – it was Friday evening after a full 5 day week and we needed to be up early.

The following morning we managed to wake up and make tea and toast and sit out in the early morning sun. Our water taxi had reorganised us to be a bit later, which suited us. We did need to buy out trekking pass, though I did wonder how likely it was that we would have to present

the pass but the money goes to maintaining the track so it's a good thing.

We got our pass and found the taxi. Its an odd setup, there really are more boats



than cars in the sounds. There are lots of places that you cannot get to unless you use a boat. Its a proper working boat, the largely seems to carry locals around as the other two on the boat knew the skipper. We ran down to the end of the sound and dropped them off, picked someone up and then came back up and dropped us off at the right bay. While I was paying I sat with the skipper and checked he



knew he was picking us up on Sunday evening, he checked his list, even checked it twice, and he did seem to understand the plan so here is hoping, because

if he
doesn't
turn up
we will
not be in
work on
Monday.
Its crystal
clear and
gloriously
sunny –
what an
absolutely fantastic Saturday morning start to a weekend hike.



We clambered off the boat and set off up the hill. We had our big pack with everything we needed for the weekend, the plan was to try and find the accommodation and dump our big bags and then we could maybe go off with lighter packs. The way the sounds work is that they are ridges, like fingers pointing out into the water. Our destination was up and over the ridge line and then down the other side. We climbed all the way up and then pottered along the road for a bit, we got side-tracked by the attraction of a coffee. Cafes are few and far between so we decided to go for it.

Of course it was quite a side-track as it involved walking down from the ridge to the water and then back up again

but it was worth it, we sat and chilled by the water and drank our coffee. The cafe was there because there was a little collection of apartments, there does seem to be more of these around than I remember from the last time we did this walk, four or five years ago.

I had been a bit worried about finding our accommodation, we didn't really have a proper address for it, we only knew it was on the road we were walking down, its the only road here, and we knew it was in Broughton Bay. I needed have worried, as we hiked down into the bay we could see there was only one house in the whole bay, so if it wasn't that one we were sleeping in a field.



It was the right house, it was huge, we knew it slept 12 but it looked even bigger in the flesh. We made tea and went to explore, feeling like Goldilocks we went from room to room until we found one that was just right.

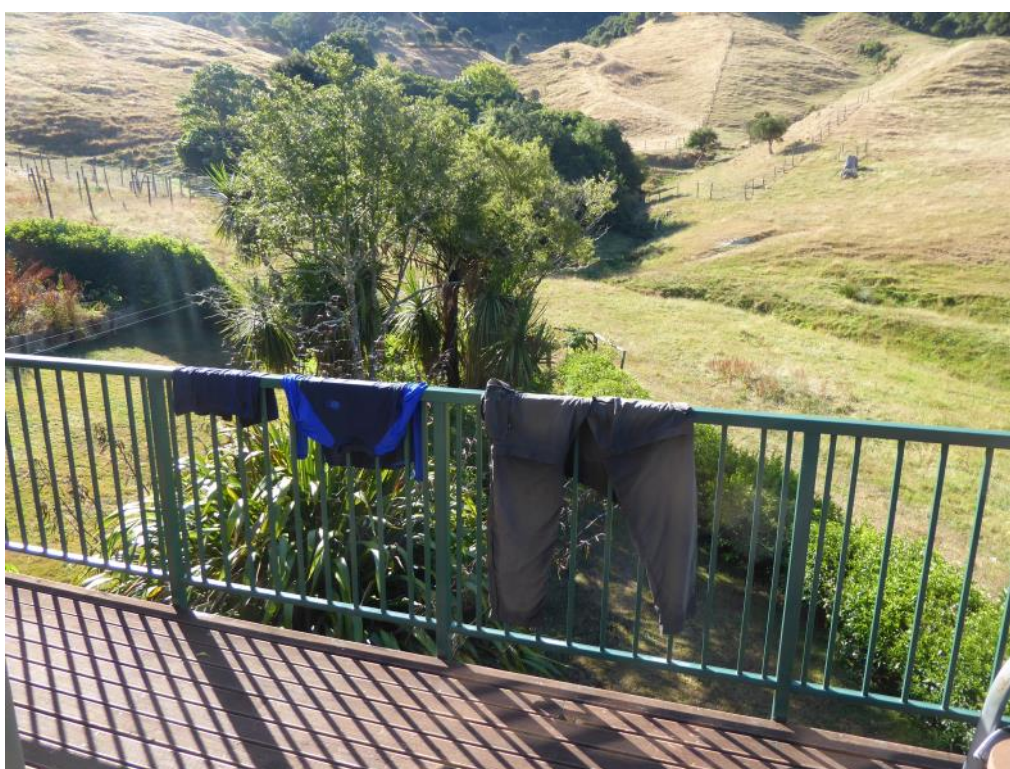
We had sort of planned to drop our bags and then do a walk in the afternoon. However the



house came with two “sit on” kayaks. I have had a bit of a patchy record with kayaks. I remember going out in Milford Sound when we came here in the nineties and enjoyed it. We went out a couple of times when we lived on the beach in our previous house, we even made a Christmas card featuring us in Santa and reindeer costumes in the kayak. Then I did a course where we deliberately capsized and then practiced getting back into the kayak, it was designed to give me confidence, it seemed to have the opposite effect. So I was a little apprehensive, as we dragged the boats down the hill to the waterline. It was quite windy and as we progressed down the sound we became more and more exposed, but after a little bit of a

wobble I eventually got the hang of it. We were sort of thinking we could go back to the little bay we had coffee in this morning and have another one, but it was always one more bay away. We did eventually get to a point where we could see the bay that had cafe in, but it was still half an hour away and we had already been out paddling for an hour. Enough, my arms were already starting to ache from the unaccustomed exercise. I don't think I've done this much shoulder exercise since I broke my shoulder. So we stopped of on a beach for a breather and then paddled back, I am glad we saved our energy, we were going to need it.

When we got back to our bay I almost didn't recognise it, I could not see our launch point, the tide had gone out, and then some. When the boats were grounded we were on the edge of a large mud flat and then we would have to drag the boats back up the hill. Steph got out first and promptly



fell over in the mud. I thought this was very funny until I got out and did exactly the same. The mud was phenomenal. If I kept moving quick-

ly I could somehow keep on top of the surface, however the moment I slowed down I sank in up to my knees, oh and I was trying to drag a kayak behind me as well. I had to stop to dig one of my sandals out of the mud and in the end threw them into the boat and finished the crawl to the bank on my hands and knees. It could have turned us into grumpy things as we were both tired but luckily we both thought it was funny and could not stop laughing, which to be honest wasn't really helping.

Eventually we had both boats on the shore and with the last of our energy we manhandled them back up the hill. We still had to hose them down and store them under the house, then we had to hose ourselves down, including cloths and shoes. We were knackered but took advantage of the huge spa bath as the sun started to go down. It was very

pleasant
to watch
the way
the sun
caught
the trees
in the
valley
sipping
wine
while the



water-jets eased our aches away.

We had brought our dinner, we knew we would not find any alternative, so we had a nice home cooked beef stew and read our books as the sun set.

It felt like it was going to be the start of a proper holiday but it was actually just a weekend, and so when we woke up on Sunday morning we had to pack up our stuff and get ready to return.

We hiked back over the ridge to where the boat had dropped us off. We got about half way there and I realised I had left me Kindle behind next to the bed. Well I certainly wasn't going back, Steph texted the owner to ask if he would send it to us, he said he was just over the hill so he would try and drop it off this afternoon.

We had gone straight back to where we landed – which was much faster without the coffee side-track. The packs were not too heavy but we were glad to drop them off at the little shop and cafe at the landing. We cooled off with an ice cream and then hiked up to one of the lookout points on the main Queen Charlotte Track. The view was



spectacular and there really are more boats than cars, and more jetties than garages. It was very hot; we lay on the grass and watched the boats meander through the sounds.



We still had some time so we headed back down the hill to see if we could go for a swim. When we got down we found that the owner had dropped of my Kindle, it made me smile, I have a replacement so I could have coped but I took it as another piece of Karma showing that the day was working out just as it should.

What a lovely end to the trip, we got changed in the boat shed at the end of the dock and then jumped into the water and swam across the bay and back. On the way out across the bay we were into the sun and it seemed surreal, almost blinded by the sun and warming in its glow on a late Sunday afternoon after a weekend of exercise, Monday morning seemed a long long way away. We turned back towards the jetty and the sun behind us brought it into sharp focus, we really were here.

The boat arrived while we were getting changed, but he



waited as he was booked for us. This was the extravagance of the weekend \$100 for our own personal charter to get us back to the inter-island ferry, we

got to sit at the back of the boat while we zapped across the sound. It was very James Bond, he asked which boat we were going on and then swept down the side of the boat and dropped us off at the bottom of the boarding area.



There was cricket on the TV and napping as we crossed the Cook Strait while the sun set. We arrived home late and its work on Monday but what a wonderful weekend escape.