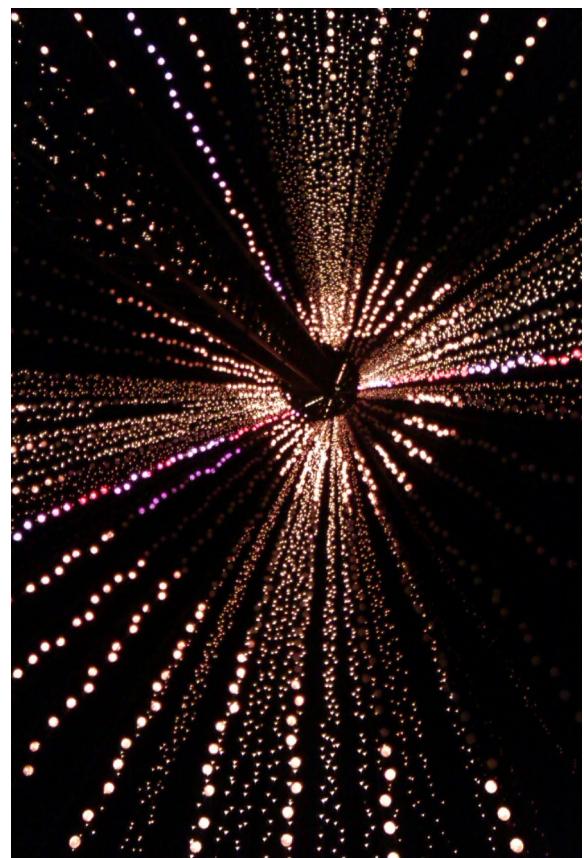


The end of the year.

Here we are at the end of the first year out here in New Zealand.

We tried to get into the Christmas mood early, to a certain extent we had to as we needed to write our cards in November to be sent back to the UK with Steph's sister Caroline. Then we constructed the advent tree which was one of packing luxuries. There were many very silly presents, a Maori Santa in his canoe (questionable political correctness there), Archers mugs, tickets to Cinderella (oh yes there was). The panto was great, and we have now lived here long enough that we understood about half of the jokes.

We have also got a Christmas tree with lights, its nice but it really doesn't go dark early enough to warrant it but it does smell very nice. There is/was a giant Christmas tree in the centre of Wellington that was made up of strands of lights that you could "control" by sending texts to it and send a message to Santa, after



the panto we lay on beanbags underneath the tree and watched the messages shooting up into the sky. I say it was there as Christmas is pretty low key here, no blaring Slade Christmas music in every shop, what decorations like the tree were gone before New Year.

After the last day of work we had sunset and mince pies with people from my work and Steph's work. It was good fun, we even has red mulled wine frozen slushy, well it the nearest we can get to mulled



wine in these temperatures. The following night we had been invited up the coast to dinner at Sid's, a psychologist at Steph's work. He was a very interesting man and we had a very lively discussion, he had started off Hindu and then became Catholic and was now Atheist. He believed in strong but flexible opinions.

Our lease is up at the end of January - yes we have been here for a year. We are trying to find somewhere we can live where Steph and I can cycle a bit together. Steph works in Porirua and I work in Wellington, they are about 20 KM apart. We live in Johnsonville which is about halfway between them, it sounds



like a good idea however it means that Steph goes one way and I go the other so we don't cycle together and although the views are fantastic - we live at the top of a very big hill. So the plan is to live either in Wellington and we will cycle into the CBD and then Steph will catch the train to Porirua or we will live up the coast somewhere like Plimmerton and then we will both cycle to Steph's hospital and then I will get the train into town.

However its a complete mad house with everyone looking for rentals at the moment and the whole of New Zealand shutting down for 3 weeks over Christmas. So we haven't got anywhere - at this rate we may be back in the van again. We will keep everyone posted about our new address as soon as we know it.

We have tried to be a bit active over the holidays. We went up [Colonial Knob](#) (no really it is called that) on a beautiful sunny day, however unknown to us 20 KM away there was a sea fog that closed the airport. My sister Bunny and Allan had a somewhat hectic arrival from Perth Australia, the pilot "gave it a go" but in the end decided that it wasn't safe so went off to Auckland. They did manage to get down on Christmas Eve. I had assured Bunny that it

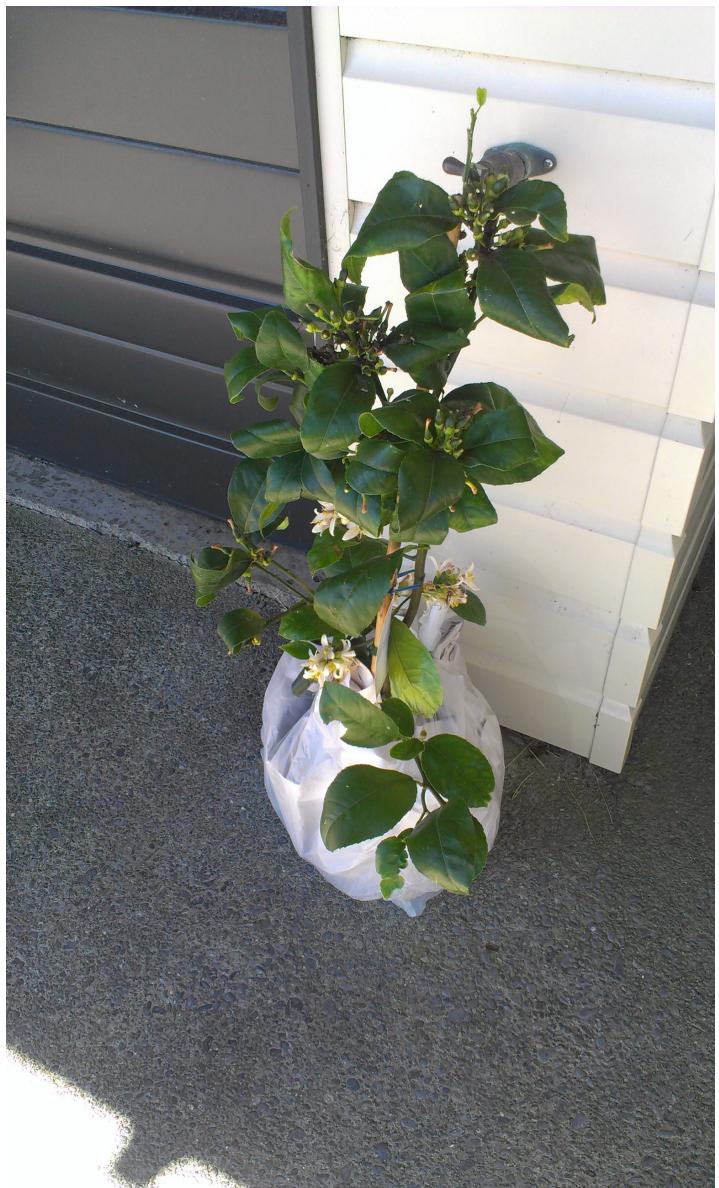


never really gets hot in NZ, however we have had the hottest Christmas since



1952 or 1935 (it depends who you talk to). It has been hot, high thirties in the sun and very hot in the house.

Christmas Day itself was fun. Steph and I got up early and got a walk for an hour in glorious sunshine. I got an inflatable life size kangaroo with "Australia" on it from Bunny, she also included a whole packet of glitter stars in the present so that the house was covered with stars that shimmered in the sun. I also got a lemon tree (I did buy one in the UK and killed it after it produced one lemon, hopefully the climate here will be more



to its liking.

For lunch Antoinette and Johann joined us. Antoinette is an OT and works with Steph, they are both from South Africa and have sold up and plan to stay here permanently. We had a very pleasant afternoon.



On Boxing Day we went to the Basin Reserve to see a twenty twenty game of cricket. It was a fun thing to do even if the weather had turned showery by then. The ground is very small and the ball got hit



out onto the surrounding road 18 times, at least one taxi got hit. England are touring this year and I would like to go and see at least one day of the test match.

If I thought Christmas was low key the New Year was even low-

er. No Jools Holland, in fact nothing special on TV or the radio at all (there was a 3...2...1 New Year caption over the top of a repeat of Graham Norton from 2008) Andrew and Liz came down from Auckland and we brought in the New Year watching the fireworks in the valley below. Antoinette went into the city to see the fireworks but they got cancelled due to wind. I think we had better luck from the top of the hill.

New Years Day was a lovely day, like a proper Christmas. We got up early and with Andrew and Liz walked up to the top of the Skyline path, this is the hill on the other side of the valley from our house with the Kaukau TV mast on it. Then we collected Bunny and Allan and had a little walk in Plimmerton and bought Fish and Chips for tea. After tea we played Perduo (apparently people might know it as liar dice) It was good fun and Steph is a surprisingly good liar. Finally we watched The Incredibles, an excellent day.

Andrew and
Liz went
back to
Auckland
(delayed by
wind this
time, noth-
ing is simple
at Welling-
ton airport)



We have loved getting all the letters and e-mails over Christmas with oodles of news. We hope you all have a great 3013. It shocks us that this time next year we will be thinking about if we stay longer in New Zealand than September 2014 or we come back to work in the UK for a while. We are still no nearer a decision at this point.

Its lovely to hear how everyone is getting along so keep your emails coming, and if anyone fancies coming to the [middle of middle earth](#) then.....

Lots of love Derek and Steph