

I guess when we came out to New Zealand that I expected it to be a bit different but largely that same, I mean white, English speaking, sort of Surrey with volcanoes.

Now we have been here for a year its given me a bit of time to get a feel for the place and it's probably the most alien place there is to go to.

For any number of reasons, the newness of the colonisation and thus the lack of impact man has had on the country, it is amazingly beautiful.

The age of the geological islands, New Zealand was spun off the super continent Gondwana 80 million years ago, before any mammals existed, this is why there are no native land mammals in NZ, well there are two species of bat, everything else was introduced and Kiwis are unabashed at attempting government sponsored extermination of many of those introduce mammals.

As a consequence of this New Zealand has an absurdly high number of endemic species (that is species that are only found here), 80% plants, 70% birds and 90% of freshwater fish. It does lend an alien quality to the landscape as plants and animals just look different. Walking up our path to the calls of Tui and now its Feijoa season – I really have no way to describe Fejora (a fruit), I cannot make up my mind if I like it yet.

Right – I've just looked back and I cannot believe it was February



when I last wrote. We are settled in now and I stare endlessly at the water and the birds of the Pauatanui Inlet, I feel very connected to the country here. The inlet is quite sheltered a fact that is enjoyed by stingrays that breed here and children learning how to sail and kayak. We are in and comfortable, and waiting with baited breath to see how cold the house is in the winter.



We went to the cricket(UK/NZ test match), and although the game was not as exciting as the Auckland game, it was fun to sit on the grass bank with Sarah, Catherine, Jess, and Dan, taking it in turns to walk Jess around the small ground (well she is only six). The ground is very small, capacity only 6,000 and we could sit wherever we wanted and walk around the outfield at lunchtime, it was sunny and the

wind didn't blow, can't really ask more of Wellington weather. I've enjoyed listening to the radio commentary over here – sponsored by Fair Dinkum Sheds, we could probably do with a shed but more of that later.

My birthday, seems to have been a sprawling event. I guess my

reservations about being in my fifties are a bit more about how others will perceive me, how employable I am, how I will fit in with what is often regarded as a young man's thing (playing with computers, which is basically what I do). I find myself finding solace in the UK demolishing its home-grown IT teaching, making me more employable, which isn't a very nice thought.

The birthday started early as Steph had to tell me what she had got for me, a practice I do not normally hold with, however she needed to tell me because I needed to help



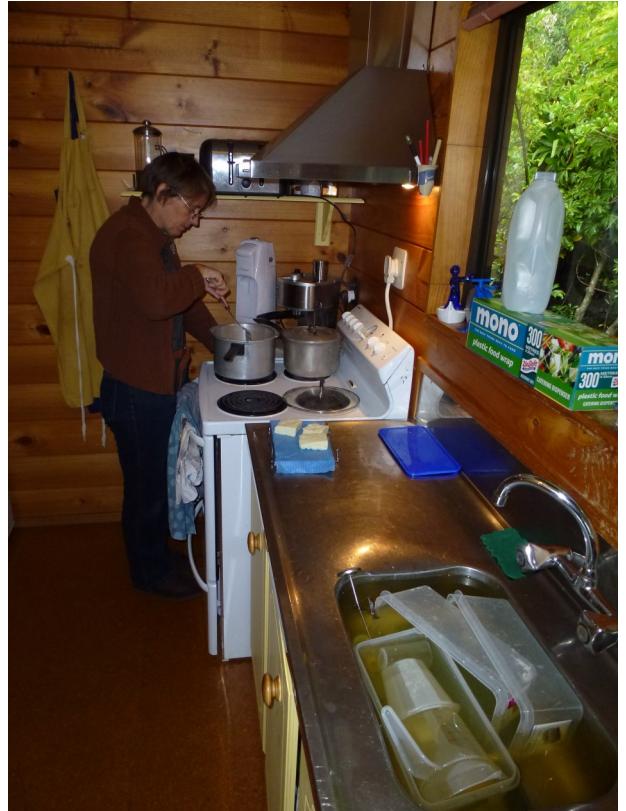
move it. When we got the house on the beach, one of the drawbacks was no bath, there was a shower but no bath, where were we to listen to podcasts. Steph has found a wooden bath but alas they no longer made it. Then she found on trade.me a Spa Pool, but it had to be collected today so we turned up mob handed, with Johann and Antoinette (Antoinette is an OT who works with Steph, they are South African and have just emigrated), plus their relations who were staying. Between the six of us we managed to move it via the beach once again. I even baked car-

rot cake for everyone as a thank you – Antoinette said I was such a man J However, it's been so hot here we have been declared a drought and there is a complete ban on use of water outside – so we had to wait.

We had a party, there were 35 or so of us



in the house and the weather was a bit murky so we did discover that if the house is cold in winter then putting 35 people in the small house makes it toasty. We even made cheese for the event. We went on a cheese making course last year and we have always meant to practice it in case we forgot how and it worked out pretty well. In the first batch we made just about every mistake possible and still managed to produce edible cheese – so it turns out Halumi is quite forgiving.



Last time, in fact the only other time, we were in New Zealand I had wanted to do the Tonariro Alpine Crossing. However I sprained my ankle falling off Rangatoto so it was not really possible. Now we have done it and we got perfect weather, we could not get all the way across as Ruapahu was venting steam but it



was quite dramatic to watch. We did the walk with Liz and Andrew and then we all went up to Hamilton to go glow-worm kayaking, it was very weird and very lovely, it wasn't in a cave, you just paddled down a very steep gorge after dark, and leant back and look up at the glow-worms and the stars above blending into each other.

On the night of my actual birthday, Steph and I went to Hippopotamus, a quite flash restaurant in the middle of Wellington. We turned up with a big cardboard box of presents, but this is New Zealand, nobody batted an eye in fact people kept asking what I'd got. I got lots of very thoughtful presents from friends near and far even some quite mocking ones, an inflatable Zimmer frame for instance, I'm looking at you now Caroline. There were lots of lovely things and a very splendid meal, cheese in two of the courses and beef in the other and a lovely soft red – on a school night!

At last, the water ban is lifted, but now we have a cracked cover, we needed a \$20 part, no problem, then we need to wait overnight for it to heat and then at last we jump in and watch the moon over the inlet from the pool, as Simon at work says – living the dream.

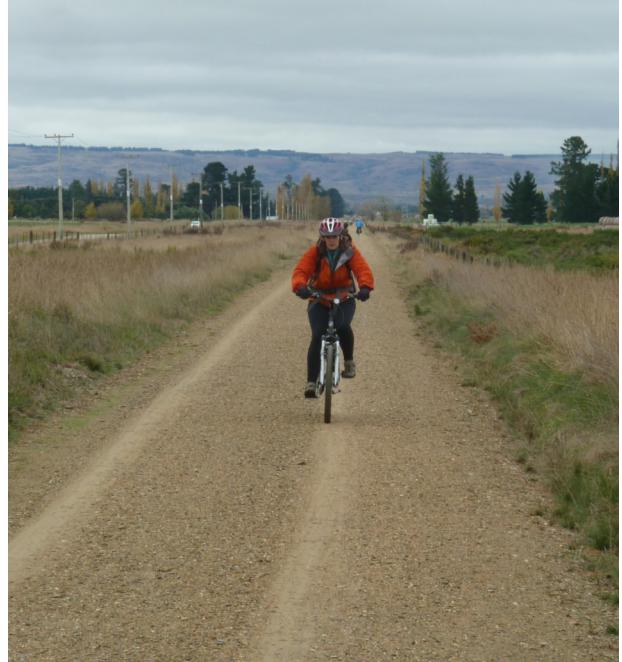
This week we are off in the south island, exploring some of the country rather than just living here. We are tourists, it's still a bit odd when people ask where are we



from and we say NZ.

I am currently sitting in the Lauder Hotel, its quite basic but warm, a lovely wood burner is going and we are tired and fed and watered.

We've cycled 120 KM over the last two days so we are pleasantly tired, all we have to do now is make it past the self-imposed 9pm watershed and we can collapse into bed.



We flew down to Dunedin, all a bit of a rush and a bit of an early start, but eventually it all worked and we ate yummies at the farmers market and then caught the train up the gorge to Middlemarch. Dick was there to meet us, with his little dog called Echo who had his own basket between the front seats. He dropped us off at our chalet and our bikes. Even by New Zealand standards this has been laid back. We flew down, nobody weighed our bags, nobody scanned them either and we didn't need any form of ID, just as well as I'd left my passport behind. The bikes were just left outside our chalet and when we set off we just left our bags on a bench – someone will be along to get them at some point.

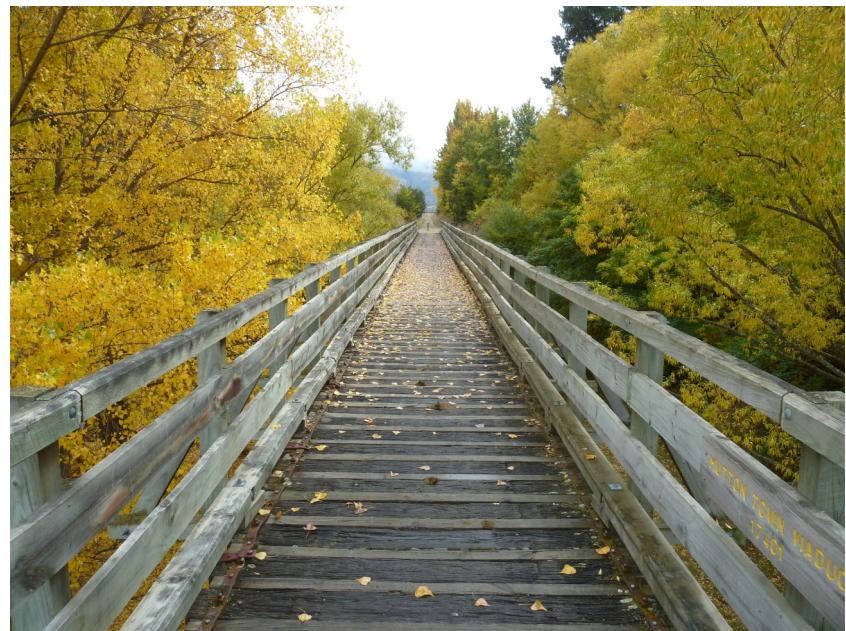
The next day we set off up the rail trail. Basically it's a railway line that ran from Dunedin into the central Otago for settlers to use. The track was gradually extended from 1890 until it was complete in 1921, by then Otago gold strikes of the 1860's where a distant memory and it was in decline. The line was

closed in 1990 and most people round here were sceptical about the possible development for tourism, why would anyone want to cycle past barren forgotten land, wow how wrong, now it attracts 120,000 people a year to

the area and 5,000 ride the whole trail, big numbers and they have breathed investment back into the area. Just cycling the trail you can almost reach out and touch the settlers from a century ago.

Part of my sprawling birthday was a fantastic cycle GPS, so watch this space for trails from the track. The colours here are amazing – it was still summer when we left Wellington but down here its defiantly Autumn and the trees are beautiful in their reds and yellow, even the vines are bright yellow. Unfortunately on the cycle the weather was a bit Autumnal and showers were the order of the day.

Now we are chilling in a very chilled Wanaka. When we were last here 16 years ago we came to Wanaka, its geographically near Queenstown but a complete oppo-





site in terms of feel, Queenstown is all about adrenaline, bungee jumping and jet skiing, Wanaka is all about chill. Well it was 16 years ago – we were worried we would not recognise it, well it has changed its more built up and commercial but its still very Wanaka. Our first day off the trail we spend watching “Oblivion” in the Cinema Paradiso – at the interval he had baked ginger and white chocolate cookies which were irresistible. The Brewski from the local micro-brewery was lovely as we crashed in our sofa.

In Wanaka the weather has perked up so we climbed Roy’s Peak, ,maybe I should have pointed out to Steph that it’s a proper walk, 1,280 meters straight up. On my 30th and my 40th I hiked up Pendle Hill – its about 500 meters. The views from the



top were amazing however we have spent the rest of the holiday tottering around like a pair of geriatrics.

We are now

back home for pottering, letter writing, cooking and washing. The Spa Pool is on so I guess we will try to massage our aching muscles before we have to go up the hill to work tomorrow. The GPS tells me it's a 50 meter hike up the hill in the morning to get to the road, not a bit of wonder I am getting fit.

However I cannot do this and carry my bike so we need to get a shed to keep the bike in. It's a folding bike, I cycle with Steph to her work and then hop on the train into Wellington. Now we are back in the north island its like being back in summer so maybe a couple more weeks of shorts and tee shirts before winter.

