

I was just trying to find out where I got up to. It was high summer and the cricket world cup was about to start. Now I am in a hiking hut and the temperature is just about zero.



The summer here has been amazing, yes I did say that last time but it does bear repeating. We decided that the middle of summer was the best time to learn to sail and it turned out to be a great idea not just because the water is at its warmest if we are to fall in but also because it's been sunny with light winds most evenings. The course runs for 10 weeks on a Tuesday evening so we need a good run of decent weather. We sail a variety of boats; phase two, fever, and 420's however they can all be characterised as 2 man skiffs, small 2 man skiffs. In fact very small, they are really designed for teenagers to learn in, finding an adult class has been a challenge; it appears that people in New Zealand are just expected to learn how to sail at school. The other day on the way to work I did notice a group of schoolgirls wearing tartan skirts and each carrying a wooden oar bigger than themselves, the kiwi equivalent of taking football boots to school.

Anyway, where was I, sailing. So we are learning in these small two man skiffs and the can only really handle winds up to 15 maybe 20 knots. In the ten weeks we only failed to get out to sail once. The pattern is that we need to get there as soon after 5 as we can manage and then eat as it's pretty hard work and you get hungry if you don't eat.

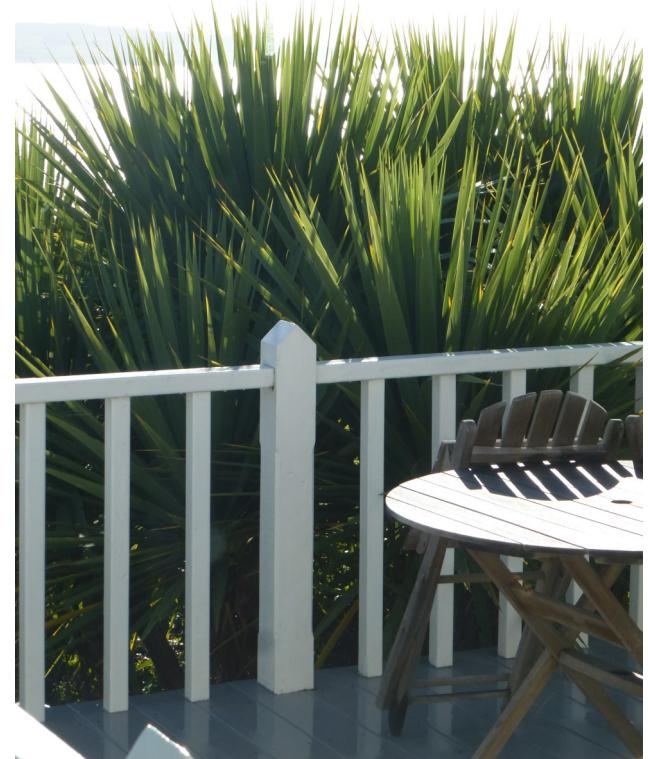
Then we rig the boats. This means putting up the mast and then screwing down the stays and tying down the rest of the riggings and the boom and then hoisting the sails. Lots of chances to practice our knots. Then we have the briefing, which can be a bit rambling but generally covers where the wind is coming from and what the course will look like and what we are supposed to do with it.

Then like some giant Le Mans start we all rush down to the boats and try and bag a boat and get out on the water.

At the start it was harder because we needed to get a boat and an instructor, my favourite was Angela who managed to get me round the course on two successive weeks without capsizing, but as time went on Steph and I started to sail together. It's fun, though as



we are both beginners we have to work everything out from first principles. At the end of the course we are basically competent. We can tack upwind and sail a circular course and control a boat well enough to pick someone out of the water or place the boat on the jetty, most of the time. I do wonder if the wind is a bit stronger and everything starts happening faster how often we will capsize but that's for the future.



We take turns, someone is the skipper and they have the tiller and are in charge of steering and the mainsail. The other is the crew and they are in charge of making sure that the boat is balanced. These boats are so small and light that any slight movement will unbalance them. This apparently is why they are good to learn in, any slight mistake and you are liable to capsize. We did alright, I didn't capsize at all, mind you I am a little conservative when it comes to speed, Steph likes to go faster. If you are the crew you can spend the whole session, it could be two hours, on your hands and knees, or squatting and balancing and getting under the boom, it's about two feet off the

deck. So after that I was usually pretty stiff. The crew also needs to keep track of all the boats around and make sure that we are not going to hit anything, we only had one mishap and there was no real harm done.

The when the light goes we need to get into the jetty and then derig the boat, unstepping the mast and washing down the boat and putting it away. Then a debrief when we went over anything he thought we were not doing right, usually not pulling the jib in enough or not going fast enough. Then home, usually out 10 to collapse.

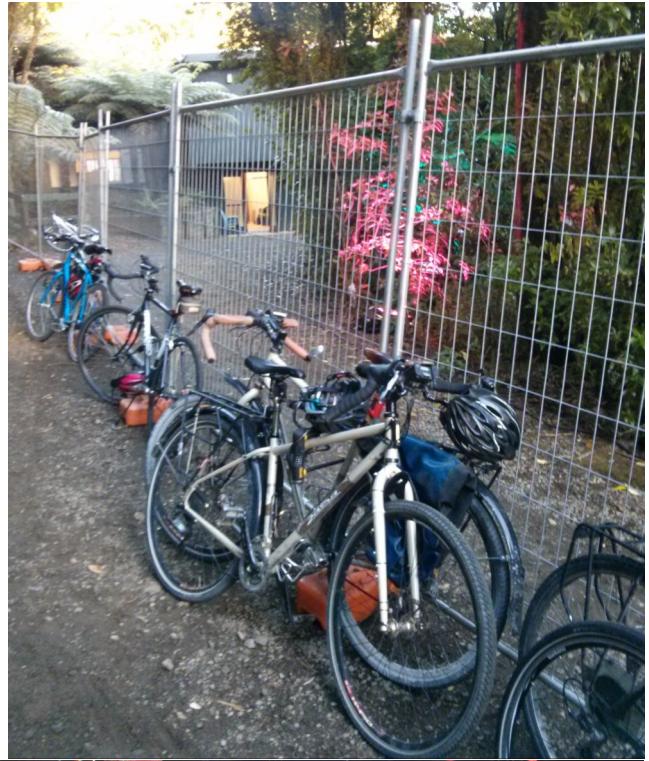
We did the course with Johan and Antoinette, Johan thought we would be on much bigger and more relaxing boats and I think that Antoinette just got drawn in, I am not convinced that they are completely sold on sailing mind you maybe we will be maybe not, let's just see how it goes. Mind you I said that about New Zealand.

When we bought our latest campervan, a year ago can you believe, we got it from New Plymouth and we had to fit in around the seller going to a music festival: Womad. At the time Steph said we should maybe go one year so this year when we were in a booking frenzy we booked to go.



New Plymouth is on the west side of the North Island about 4 or 5 hours' drive up from Wellington. It was a glorious weekend, hot and sunny. We stayed in a nearby campsite and cycled down to the event, padlocking our bikes with all the others, and at the end of the night we got to cycle along the beach able to hear the last act perform away in the darkness. Its not Glastonbury, they budget for about

1200 people a day for three days, you have probably never



heard of any of the bands, the headliner was Seanad O'Conner. As an event it was very well run and kept us amused, no queues for the loos or the bar and

the coffee was extremely good. Probably the most fun band we saw was Fanfare Ciocarlia, a 24 legged brass band who did an insane version of the Bond

Theme.



The other big event over the last month has been the world cup, the cricket world cup. It's been a big deal over here as New Zealand have done really well, easily getting to the final and then losing out to Australia, not a popular result but probably a fair one. Enroute, we went to see them flatten England and soundly beat the West Indies. Then we went across to the South Island to meet up with Caroline, Steph's sister. Who brings provisions from the UK. All the shoes that we bought in the UK last summer. The first night we met up in Kaikoura it we like Christmas. We huddled round the small table and yakkered and then went through the bags Caroline had bought with new



shoes and trousers and even real Christmas present cheese knives from Roger.



We then went out whale watching, we had tried to do it last time Caroline was here, the day we arrived in town was so sunny then that we did a superb walk along the cliffs, bad move as the next say the weather was poor so we could not go out. This time there was to be no mistake we were straight up and away the following day on a very flash and very fast boat. Apparently it was 18m long and had engines that developed 1,500 horsepower. Very nippy. It is a planned operation; they are confident enough to offer you your money back if we do not see any whales. The whales in question are sperm whales and are also 18m long but weight about four times what the boat weighs. They really are weirdly majestic, almost static and completely uncaring about us. On the way back in we stumbled over a pod of about 100 dolphins, they are great, completely manic and excited, diving into the bow wave of the boat and trying to race it. We only visited for a long weekend, to catch up and pick



up the goodies, we would meet up again for Easter on Stewart Island. Back to work for a couple of weeks and then we flew down to meet up again.

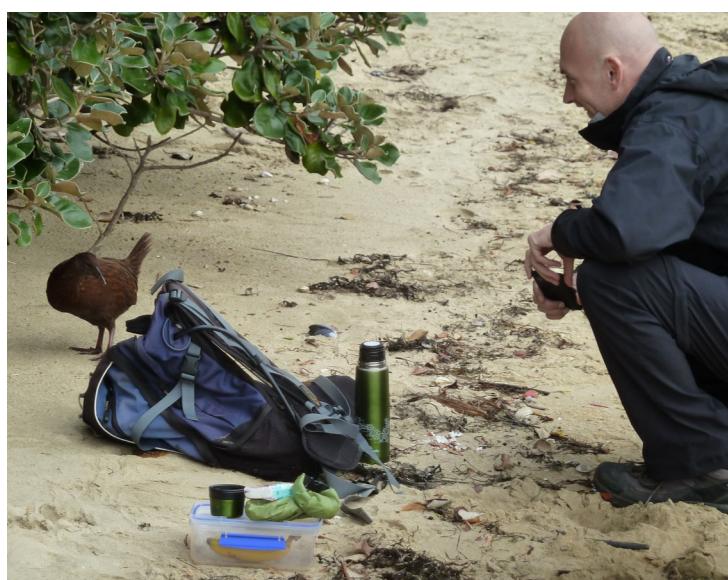
New Zealand is usually thought to comprise of two islands, North and South, this is largely true there are other islands one of which is Stewart Island

which is a small island off the south coast of the South Island, next stop the South Pole. The population of the island is about 370, so as the guide books say, if you stay for longer than a couple of days and go to the pub (there is only one) then you will quickly become known to the locals. It's a very odd place. We went to buy stamps, on a Thursday afternoon and was told, you know they won't leave the island until next Tuesday, it was Easter but even



so.

We were there with Caroline and Margaret, from Caroline's walking group and also Andrew and Liz who took three flights down from Auckland. To



get to the island you can either catch a ferry which is a famously rough crossing or you can fly. We flew, it was fun but it was quite an experience, you would not want to do it if you didn't like flying.

We all walked around the island and popped across to Ulva Island, which has had its



mammals removed so that the birds can have a chance.

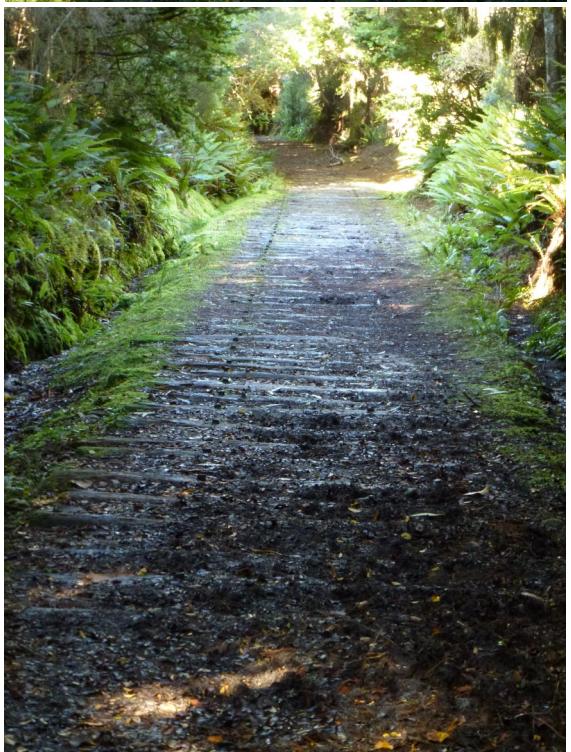
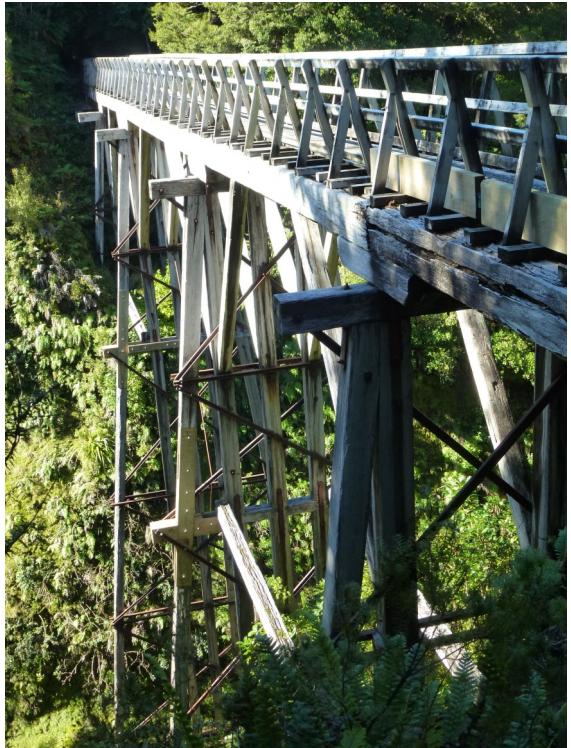
We also went to the famous pub quiz, held in the community hall with take-out fish and chips as the pub could not open on Easter Sunday (very old style licensing laws).

Then on a whim we booked onto the Hump Ridge trek, we took the luxury option, private room, hot water bottle and the place apparently had a bar. All sounds very civilised.

The trek itself did rather involve a ridge as the name suggested. The first day was flat flat flat and then a 900 meter

climb through the trees. Just as we got to the bottom of the climb it started to rain hard, we passed the 5KM to go marker at about 2pm and I thought, no problem we will be in mid afternoon. Hmm it took until almost 3pm to get to the 4KM marker so by that scale we had another 3 hours climbing though the rain with a big heavy pack on. Not completely ideal. Also I had a nasty idea that I had not unpacked the rucksack properly and we may have a bonus wet suit at the bottom of the pack.

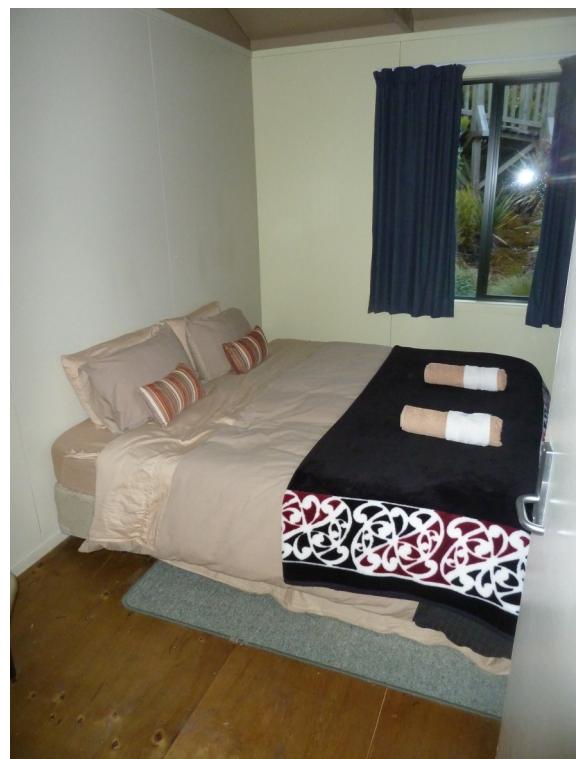
Anyway we did get there and it wasn't that bad, the last kilometer was pretty flat and along the ridge





on a boardwalk. The lodge wasn't quite how I had imagined it, no carpet and the bar turned out to be a cupboard with a padlock, actually given that it was 1 degree centigrade all we wanted was Yorkshire tea.

The bed was just as I imagined, huge and comfy, and I don't think I moved all night. Revitalised by loads of porridge and brown sugar and we set off. Day two was down the hill, though not as steep as day one and then along to disused railway line and across the viaducts. Day three was along the beach and out to the car.





We said goodbye to Caroline, and drove back to Dunedin though the snow.

We are now back in Wellington but the brief preview of winter we got to see on the South Island is definitely coming here, we are well into autumn and summer is just a memory from the start of this letter.

