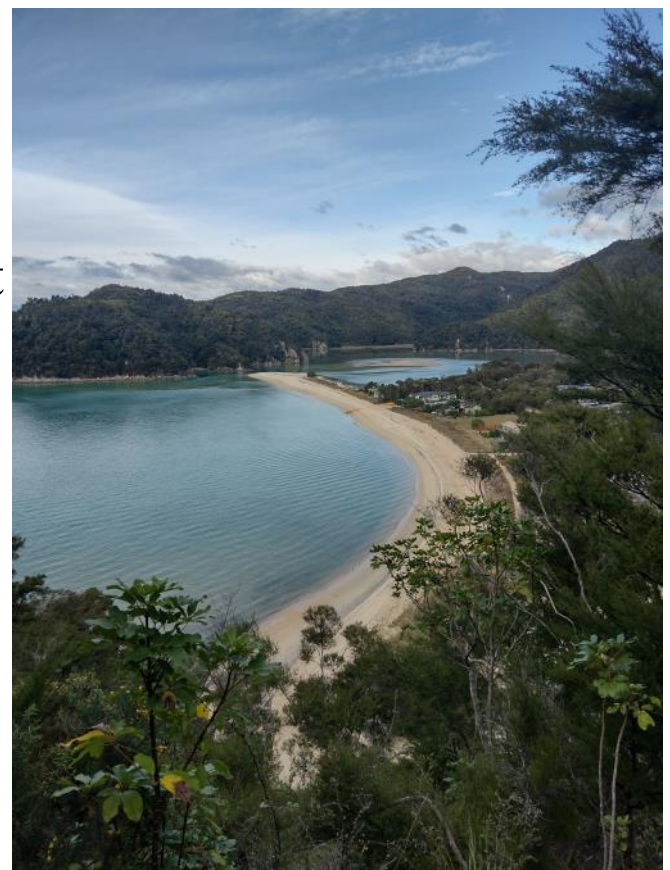


Season-lag, its a thing, or at least it is this year. I guess I haven't traveled for the last three years, at least not far enough to change season. We left NZ in a windy and rainy June, lucky the flight managed to get out on an unexpectedly sunny Saturday. I knew intellectually that it was summer in Europe and packed light weight cloths but even still when I got there I found myself sweating in cloths that were too heavy for the temperature. When we returned from a sweltering UK August I had bought some linen trousers and sandals which I could not wear in a frosty NZ winter. Now spring is starting to unfold I think I almost think I missed out on the chill winter mornings.

But I am starting in the middle, I should go back to where I was. When I last wrote we had got past Easter and were slipping towards winter. Earlier this year we trusted travel enough to start domestic holidays and we continued that trend in May we went to Abel Tasman National Park. Its at the top of the South Island so it is possible to do a weekend trip from the bottom of the North Island. We did need to fly and then get bussed across from Nelson but it was good to squeeze the last days of good weather out of the summer. We





had to chance our pot luck of tide times which meant wading across estuaries at suboptimal times, knee high water is different for different people. We also had to take pot luck in the only restaurant in town, it was its last two nights of business for the year, and we had two very different meals. The first night nothing was too much trouble for the skeleton staff and we had a very enjoyable evening. The following night was the opposite; we were told in no uncertain terms that there was not enough staff so we would have to make do with what was delivered. To this day I have no idea why we could order glasses of wine but not a bottle. A very different experience that made me think that my impression of any restaurant can vary enormously from night to night.

As our Omicron peak of Covid passed we can start going into the office again. It did seem odd to see Karl again, in person that is, I got to wish him Happy New Year in May as it was the first time we had been in the office together this year. Work did try and make us feel welcome organiz-





ing coffee and cakes and games downstairs in the “Garage”

For my birthday, Steph bought me a cast iron Dutch Oven. The idea was to cook on top of the wood burner. I have

to say I was slightly skeptical as I thought that the wood burner ran so hot it would incinerate food rather than cook it. Turns out I was wrong, the pot is such a large lump of iron that I could place my hand on it while it was on top of the burner, it was hot but bearable. I tried to make some bread and I ran the fire as cool as I could, as a consequence it didn't do very well, it took almost two hours to bake. Actually it tasted OK but didn't look great. After reading up about it the general advice seems to be to treat the pot like a slow cooker. I made some slow cooked lamb stew and it was lovely, even if I do say so myself. Well I did say we were sliding into winter.

It did mean that we were starting to find it difficult to get the weather and indeed the light to carry on sanding



and painting the house. When we booked our flight to the UK it meant that we had to make haste to neaten off where we were up to and paint it so that it was protected from the oncoming weather.



And so to the UK and season-lag. I type this only three months after we left and already that seems like a different time. When we booked international travel from here was still starting up, Natalia, a team mate, had just gone to South America and had had to have test results before she could travel. For us things were a little easier but we still had to produce a mound of paperwork to travel and after reading about the horror stories of UK airports we had some trepidation about traveling. The general advice seemed to be to get to the airport more than three hours before your flight and be prepared to stand in a queue, good advice as it turned out for everywhere except our first step in the journey. Bless, little Wellington airport has so few in-





ternational flights that they close security in the middle of the day. Domestic air travel here is fantastic as it is so informal that you can basically wander onto the flight without any ID and just an online boarding pass. So for our first leg of the trip we got to the airport and then had to wait for security to open. The rest of the travel was, as the advice said, time consuming but it did work. Something of a surprise to me as after three years of stagnation I expected there to be more teething troubles. By the time we returned the paperwork was even less than when we started, I can see that it will not be long before most of the complexity drops away.

We made it back to the summer and started to reconnect with people we hadn't seen since before the pandemic. Its such a privilege to be able to fall into people's lives and such a joy to be able to see the chaos of family and pets and a busy household carrying on a full pace. Being accepted and being able to get





a glimpse of how their lives are developing makes me smile as I type this.

Now I look back on the trip I see that so much of our time was built around walking. It seems a bit much to call it hiking but then again some of the organized “walks” did require hiking boots and quite a lot of stamina – I’m looking at you Caroline. No matter how long or short the walks were they were such a good way of chatting and catching up as we trogged along. Caroline did ask one group of us “What is your best walk?” and it kept the group occupied for a good amount of time and since then I have often given time to thinking about it. So many different walks and so many of them stick in my mind that I



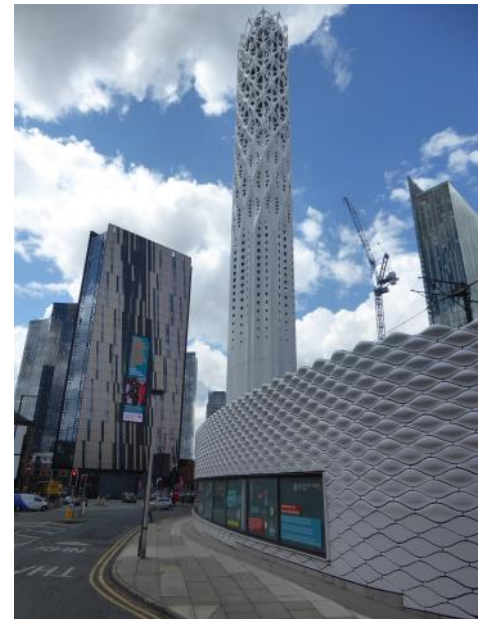
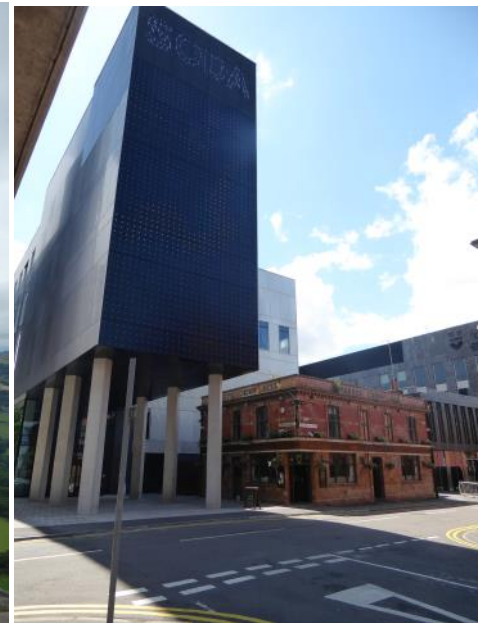




find it hard to pick. On this trip we heather bashed our way across most of Yorkshire (or so it felt at the time). We went on a beautiful circular walk around Newquay which was Keith and Dianne's exercise walk when they were working from home. We took in some of the South West Coastal Path on a stunning day and climbed a hill for a delicious lunch. We hiked across the Cheshire plain to have a Sunday roast in pub and in France pottered back from coffee in the village. On a bonus day we walked along the canal from Marsden to Slaithwaite while Caroline tried to teach me how to say Slaithwaite







proper (I never did really get the hang of it to her satisfaction). We walked back into Chris' childhood in Cloudside and wandered along Speyside with Pat. As you can tell we covered a lot of ground.

The walks were not always rural, we also explored the cities we grew up in and used to know. I find it amazing that I can get lost in Manchester, how can that be? But huge building developments have appeared since we were last here and that was just before the pandemic so I guess that means they have been built during it. One of the cities we walk around was Derby with the group of OTs and Rolls Royce engineers, 40 years af-



ter they had been here as students. Not so much a trip down memory lane as there was so much change that it was hard for anyone to remember what it was like, however some of the landmarks were easy to find like the Sunday morning recovery pub.

Then we were off to France for a change of pace. The same bed for three weeks – how blissful. We did manage to be in the south of France at the peak of the heatwave. It was well above 40 degrees Celsius but only for a couple







of days. We got to help out and cut hedges and swim in the pool when it all got to hot and even played cards and Trivial Pursuit.

When we went back last time we had a wonderful break within a break in the







form of a weekend in a win-  
tery London. This time we  
did spend a little time in Lon-  
don and even managed to go  
to the Old Vic but we also got  
a weekend in Bordeaux and  
Koln. The weekend in Koln  
was unexpected and forced  
by Covid illness, though not  
to us. I guess there was no  
chance that Covid would not  
affect some parts of the trip  
and this was where we felt its  
effects most. To compensate  
we did have a fun couple of  
days in Koln and our very  
own little apartment, its fun-  
ny how you miss cooking if  
you don't get to do it for a

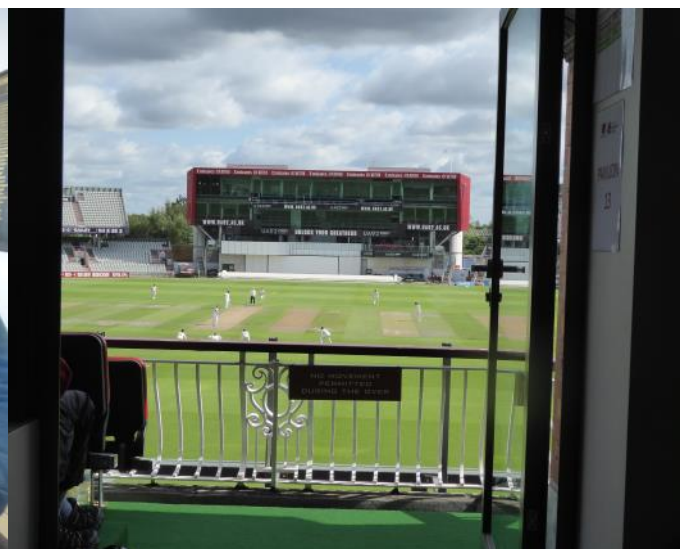






while.

After France we returned to the UK and I went to see Lancashire play in a county game for the first time in...? Well I cannot remember but its almost certainly the first time this century. We baked 70 cupcakes and went to celebrate a half-birthday by playing cards and dancing. What a fine







thing.

And then, would you believe it two months were gone, how could that be? We did have time for one last meal and one last walk and then we were done. Things had changed in the UK, what had I noticed? Cars didn't drive as fast on the motorway, maybe that's



a cost of petrol thing. The houses we visited didn't seem to play music in the same way, people streamed playlists but, with some exceptions didn't seem to care about what they listened to. Shopping was not as attractive; generally cloths seem to have gone up to match prices in New Zealand. Though there are some bargains to be had, Trego Mills jumps off the page.



And so we are back to a very soggy New Zealand. More than double the usual amount of rain has fallen for both moths we were away, and its normally wet. So much rain has fallen that the ground is sodden and there are hundreds of landslips across the area. One of the road links down the coast has been closed for three weeks and the trains are still very disrupted. It has made it more difficult to actually go to work. Work is pretty disrupted anyway, now that borders are opening people are starting to revisit friends and family they have not seen



in three years and the remaining members of the team seem disproportionately affected by a particularly virulent flu, not covid, they have been tested, but flu. So when more than half of us actually



make it into the office it's a cause for celebration in the form of coffee and beer and bowling. When I do travel into the city the thing I most notice is masks. In Europe pretty much nobody wears a mask but over here the majority of us are still wearing masks, and on public transport pretty much everyone. Even though it's the middle of winter our numbers are falling fast.

When we left Stripy with JP and David it was on the understanding that he might not be here when we got



back, he is an old cat and he has suffered some TIAs recently. He was still here when we got back but he is still not completely well. He now has some kind of problem with his mouth which is either a tooth infection or cancer, so we are waiting and seeing.

I wrote the paragraph above while Steph was at the emergency vet. It turns out that Stripy has cancer. It's a very aggressive type and so with lots of tears we said goodbye to Stripy today.