In 2020-2021, our family—me, Priscilla, and our sons Max and Tom—lived in a caravan.

This is a permanent record of that journey, transposed from the original blog which is no longer online.

SEA CHANGE

BY IAN ALLAN

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Contents

About 4
First time full-timers in Pākiri 8
Winter play in a suit 16
Sponge Bay Retreat 18
It's just the vibe of the place, Tokomaru Bay 22
Meeting the locals at Anaura Bay 28
When you need to park somewhere, Kaiaua Bay 34
Tom: "Where's the beach?" 42
Gray days in summer town 44
Care to make it interesting? 46
How is Max doing, and the importance of meeting other full-time family travellers 48
Idling, and going back to where you came from 56
Uncut gem 60
What would you say you do here? 62
For when you really need to go that little bit further 64
Waterworld 66
Compelled to disconnect at Lake Tutira 70
Aratiatia circuit 78
Holding out in Taupō 84
Worthy recent brews 88
That need to know what's around the corner 90
Big tanks, firing semi-automatic milk, Taupo to Plimmerton 92
Not the Wellington Waterfront 116
Covid-19 malaise manifesting in Marlborough 132
Crunch time, Onamalutu 136
I created a legit monster for Tom 142
In love with a view, Cape Foulwind 144
Life is what you make it, Fox River 160
The sea hitting the land, Punakaiki, West Coast 170
Content in Kumara 174
That fine line between stupid and worth it, Arthur's Pass 184
Lessons at Broken River 202
RIP Goldie 208
Hooray for Ben, Christchurch 210
Recharging and rebooting, Peel Forest & Temuka 220
Throwing things in the water and winding them back in 228
Bonus scenery! Clay Cliffs, Omarama 254
Bend it like Bendigo, Lake Dunstan & Cromwell 264
Speights for Christmas 276
When your new neighbour's butane heater explodes on him 280
If you're travelling in New Zealand, just don't be an A... 282
A parking spot photo story, Alexandra-Clyde 284
Haere Ra Central Otago, Part 1: Keeping Max and Tom busy at and around home. 300
Haere Ra Central Otago, Part 2: Tom turns 3! A boys day out. 320
Haere Ra Central Otago, Part 3: When weekends matter again 328
Haere Ra Central Otago, Part 4: Bailing to the beach, Dunedin 342
Haere Ra Central Otago, Part 5: 4WD adventures 360
Haere Ra Central Otago, Part 6 (final): Making friends then saying goodbye 372
It should never take this long to get here 384
Tracing heroes 410
Trying to "do the Catlins" 442
Oamaru Oddity 488
Post Kaikoura 508
Regrouping in the North 524
Anxious for a plan 528
A life almost ordinary 530
Epilogue 536

About

AS @ MAY 2020

We're a family living in a caravan while slowly moving around New Zealand to figure out what we should do after that.

Who are we?

We are a family of four – Ian, Priscilla, Max, and Tom.

Ian *(43)*: Originally from Gisborne, I've finished up a 20-year career in digital products based in Auckland. Some say I'm stoic, but I think my grimace is too obvious when it comes to my kids in the caravan. I'm mostly into design (in case you're interested: 1920's poster design, brutalist 50's graphic design, the Japanese aesthetic, resilient design, small architecture), new business ideas, the nature of social media, politics, the media, music, comedy, football, beer, sake, whiskey, my gravel bike, and Larry David.

Priscilla *(36)*: Originally from Macau, at 17 Priscilla came to New Zealand to study at Auckland University. After a few years work she completed a postgrad teaching diploma. Somewhere in-between me and Priscilla got together so she went and taught in Singapore for a year. Since Max was born Priscilla'a been a full-time mum, a zero-waste mum, and a teacher. Priscilla's mostly into waste reduction, community-run ventures, the outdoors, living with less, frugality, gardening, garden-to-table cooking, Japanese minimalist philosophy, biking, and Korean dramas.

Max *(5)*: High energy and loves birds, undersea animals, trees, growing, harvesting and eating, the beach, riding bikes, Bakugan, Transformers, Octonauts, first best friend Tyler, thoughts of seeing cousin Ben in Christchurch, and Tom.

Tom *(2)*: Thinker and loves ABC's and 123's, Chinese, magnet tile building, the beach, books, Khan Academy Kids, Octonauts, undersea animals, and Max.

What's the caravan setup?

We have a 2016 Bailey Pegasus Palermo, towed by a 2011 Mitsubishi Pajero Exceed. This is our first time owning a caravan, and a big SUV. We ended up spending more on the caravan ($45k) and less on the tow vehicle ($20k) than we first expected.

Our 2016 Bailey Pegasus Palermo (at Ray's Rest in Miranda)

Our 2011 Mitsubishi Pajero Exceed (at Wairata Station, Waioeka)

There will be occasional posts that cover what it's like full-time living in this setup – what's great, what's a struggle, what's a total stress merchant, and what we'd do next time.

Why Sea Change?

Sea Change; noun. A profound or notable transformation.

We had been thinking about moving out of Auckland for a year or so, but the inertia of everyday life gets in the way and you just keep going. Priscilla had a frightening incident late in 2019 where she was threatened with a knife while out biking with Tom. It was enough to shake us out of the everyday and we made the decision to do this.

I had been thinking about non digital-first stuff, and perhaps not something for someone else anymore. And we've dreamed of resiliency through a plot of land somewhere for an off-grid build and a giant garden. That would also give us more options to switch roles. But we haven't figured out these what's and how's and when's, so we're on this *Sea Change* to find out.

How do we get by?

We have our modest house in Panmure, Auckland that we're now renting out. That rent covers the mortgage.

We're not working while on the road but are picking up some seasonal work and staying put for a bit. There isn't a desire to continue doing contract work for previous roles.

If I stick to Double Browns, and Priscilla keeps hold of the purse strings, we can keep going until the end of the year before we need to think about what to do.

There will be some posts about what it costs us to live like this each week, but groceries, gas, and diesel are easily our biggest expenses.

Why this record?

- You're family or friends and want to see where we are and how we're doing.
- You're someone with similar thoughts about chucking it in and want to get a feel for what it's like.
- You're already living full-time on the road and want to link up and shake your head at some amateurs.

First time full-timers in Pākiri

22 MAY 2020

And we're off!

And we were very nearly off into a northern motorway barrier at high speed with big-time caravan sway.

That's putting it politely.

A horrifying moment to kick off and the first big lesson. I had understood the nose weight should be about 100kg. So I checked it before we left and it was about 130kg. So I moved some stuff further back in the 'van. BUT, overall, while not being certain, we're overweight. Meaning I moved some of that overweight further back, and then nearly this...

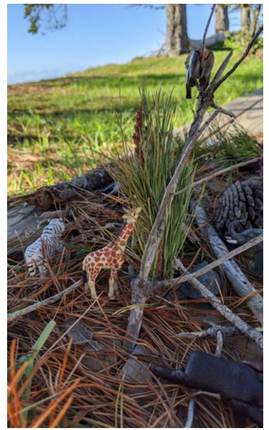
Needless to say...

With heart in mouth, and ears pinned to the creaking tow ball, we made it to Pakiri.

It was an ideal first camp, heaps of space to practice backing the caravan. Backing a caravan under duress: my big fear.

That caravan sway did some food prep for us. Heavily spiced soup anyone?

It wasn't smart carry so many glass jars in hindsight anyway. But post-clean-up there was a late summer sunset so soak in.



Max and Tom not yet realised that just because it's dark outside it doesn't mean you can't be seen inside!

And so begins a new set of chores for Max. Poo box to the dump station.

Max and Tom had beautiful Pakiri beach to themselves.

It's only onwards and downwards (and without sway) from here!

Winter play in a suit

02 JULY 2020

Just because it's getting colder it doesn't mean Max doesn't want to keep on keeping on when living near the beach, or the river.

While a good wetsuit does set you back quite a few dollars relative to other caravan life necessities*, after only a few cold water sessions it has totally returned its value in bracing free play!

* That's 30 nights at NZMCA parks!

Sponge Bay Retreat

07 JULY 2020

Being NZMCA members, there's a cosy little POP (Park Over Property) just outside Gisborne, on the road to Sponge Bay.

Generous to be able to have these places to stay, with power, with water, for a modest donation. Good people.

Nice to be abe to share their park-like grounds.

Sponge Bay isn't really how I remember it. It always felt like a bit of a secret golden sand spot. But it has eroded a lot since then, and winter makes it feel even more rugged.

Still we were in the mood for searching for little jewelery rocks so no worries.

Onwards and upwards then.

Wotevs.

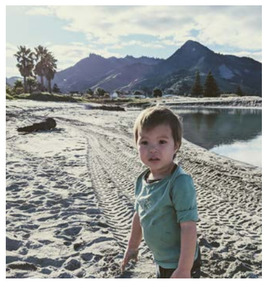
It's just the vibe of the place, Tokomaru Bay

11 JULY 2020

Beachfront freedom camping with new caravanning friends.

After a couple of nights in Tolaga Bay we headed straight up to Tokomaru Bay as we'd heard some new caravanning youtubing friends had arrived there and the weather was bright.

Maybe it was that perfect East Coast winter weather but Tokomaru Bay has a cool ambience. It's a smaller township than Tolaga but it means there isn't a large main street with empty shops; instead, the shops that are there feel like the busy community servers they are.



Out the back of Café 35, would be nice late afternoon with bustle and beer.

The famous Paua Pie, oishii! The pork belly pie is a strong rival.

Looking back from 20m down onto the beach from the camping spot.

Being set against the hills, there's a sense of mystery that has many good and bad stories to tell.

And in the other direction.

Like all the beach parking spots, Max and Tom loved it: "can we stay two more nights, no three?" Which makes us happy too as we get a breath while the two of them get amongst it.

Hard to tell it's only ~12 degrees.

If you're ever passing through Gisborne (jokes), it's worth kicking on past Tolaga Bay to stay in Tokomaru Bay.

Staying overnight makes it easy to be up for sunrise.

Meeting the locals at Anaura Bay

13 JULY 2020

I'd like more chances to get to know the locals; it's certainly easier in smaller communities, and they don't get much smaller than Anaura Bay.

Little did Max know Dad would be bringing home the insides of that shell the next day.

We came in here mainly to recharge our battery in the campground.

It's an incredibly down-to-earth site, especially as Victor the manager is (slowly) renovating the communal areas in time for, I take it, the summer.

Victor Jacobs from Anaura Bay. Photo courtesy of Gisborne Herald.

It reminded me of a YHA hostel in Miyajima, Japan that I never thought could exist.

Only it wasn't nearly as bad as that, in fact I loved the she'll-be-right state it was in. Victor's private but welcome-in covered outdoor space next to his house reminded me of local Japanese bars that are more like a DIY shed do-up where you put in what you have and what works; they're very comforting.

When I went to say hello, Victor had a lovely Japanese guest welcomed-in. Yuki was travelling down from Coromandel to Wellington, and was settled in with a drink and chopping Victor's home-grown tobacco.

From a Japan trip years ago, I didn't realise the Japanese could live like this!

Victor asked if I'd like to pull up his cray pots in the morning.

"Yeah!" was my chuffed response. Though I came to realise that the offer is really because it's a shit of a job on your own.

I'm pleased I had enough boat'n'rope experience over the years to not make a dick of myself, and Max and Tom were impressed with Dad's take-home pay #winning.

Man of sea.

Into it like an ice cream!

It was one of those overnight stays where you make your own luck: have a chat with the locals and good stuff happens. No doubt the same has happened to many other campers there as most reviews of the campground refer to Victor's hospitality overcoming the shortcomings of the facilities.

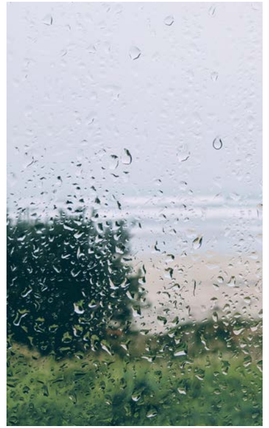
It's where you go to have a shower, the lights aren't working, so you visit Victor and he says:

"Ah yeah mate, I forgot to mention, the electricians were meant to come last week but didn't show up, but here I've got a bunch of torches, one of these should do the trick."

And you think yeah, that's pretty alright by me.

When you need to park somewhere, Kaiaua Bay

15 JULY 2020



We had a few days up our sleeves on the way back down the coast, and the battery was holding up OK after a good few days of solar, so we headed into Kaiaua Bay even though the weather was average.

One of the nice things about doing this full-time is you still need to stay *somewhere* when the weather's crap. We would not have bothered detouring into Kaiaua if it was just a weekend run, but now it's a case of might as well, better than nothing, otherwise we'll be staying in a dull NZMCA park.

In fact, it's a *lot* better than nothing, you get the place to yourself!

Pretty pretty pretty pretty vacant.

Room with a view.

Max and Tom are still stoked and we get some long (separate) walks and some quiet introspection.

It's warm when the water temperature is higher than the air temperature.

Still, in this life when it's *really* wet, there are these regular blocks of time between lunch and dinner that just need filling and/or Max and Tom literally bounce off the insides of the caravan screaming and shouting.

That's when you start shouting:

Then you shake yourself out of it—Priscilla is better at doing this than me—and you come up with an activity.

Priscilla on sorting, Max on building, Tom on misc.

Sheep were too shy to walk by.

Or magically, Max and Tom just stop for a bit.

Kaiaua Bay is better known for summer day trips from Gisborne and the annual beach races.

Still, we thought a few grey winter days were pretty special too, and a chance to see it at a few different angles.

North end.

Around the point into the private end. Someone has a beautiful farm house tucked in there out of sight.

If you're doing the East Coast trip, make sure you come in here, it's a stunning spot where you're closer to the beach than you are from your bedroom to the kitchen.

Tom: "Where's the beach?"

15 JULY 2020

There's so much talk about the "new normal" it's become the fastest cliché since I was *living my best life**.

If things were normal before Covid-19, returning to it is the last thing we need; we were crushing the planet and people then, and we'll keep doing it to future generations given half the chance.

* A stupid phrase that is used, commonly on Instagram, to give the false reality that you can wake up and choose which "life" you want to live. Perhaps you want to be a lazy dog, or a human facing the challenge of whether to have avocado on toast or a green smoothie for breakfast. Either way, it's got to be the best (breakfast) life you could possibly be living.

For Tom (2 ½) however, he's decided his new normal is living within jumping distance of a beach. Well, it's back to the reality of a cold wet boggy NZMCA park in Gisborne for you Tom!

Gray days in summer town

18 JULY 2020

It has been solidly wet during our time in Gisborne, making caravan living more intense with Max and Tom.

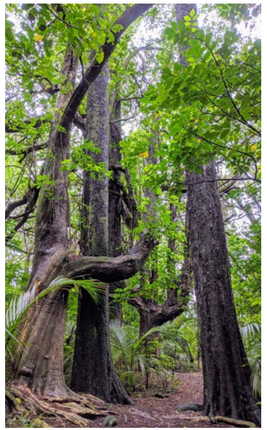
Gisborne is tuned as a summer town, which leaves few things to go out and do on a rainy winter day with kids (without kids though, no brainer*). There are only so many times you can go to The Warehouse (*and* not buy things).

On this rainy Saturday Priscilla packed lunches, and after a quick cold visit to the farmer's market to get our vege for the week, (and a detour to The Warehouse to *not* buy Bakugan,) we went through the lovely Gray's Bush Scenic Reserve.

* Sunshine Brewery

The gumboot; a total caravanning necessity.

Max: "A haunted tree" (big on monsters and ghosts at the moment).



Gray's Bush is a reserve of National Importance because Kahikatea and Puriri trees grow together, here a Puriri is twisting its way around a Kahikatea. Nationally, they usually require different soil moisture.

To pad out the rest of the rainy day I fell back to devices, me on here and the boys on Octonauts (downloaded when bludging off friends and family's unlimited internet, a necessity of caravan living).

And at least one go at Bingo.

"TV Time".

Not quite a new Bakugan.

Care to make it interesting?

23 JULY 2020

Funny how you get asked:

“How is it possible to, y’know, have adult time?”

This little peanut is arriving in February 2021!

So what does this mean for the *Sea Change* journey? Apart from having the baby in Gisborne, and a couple of check-ins for scans and the midwife, we’re still on the road until December when we’ll need to stay put in Gisborne.

After the baby’s born we still really don’t know what we’re doing. At this stage it’s no jobs and living in a caravan with three kids.

How is Max doing, and the importance of meeting other full-time family travellers

26 JULY 2020

It's not always easy for Max to be without regular mates. It was something we feared before kicking off, but figured young ones are (more) resilient (than us). He doesn't say he wants a friend, but at times you can see what he means in his behaviour.

Those YouTubing kids

So I understand and accept why he enjoys watching *Kids Fun TV* on YouTube, even though it disturbs me: it's vaguely exploitative, peddles merchandise, is extremely American, and feeds the gross social media fame machine.

Max didn't choose this life on the road, so it's not fair of me to take away the comfort of friends even when they're not real.

Stir crazy

Like us, Max can get cabin fever and grumpy when we can't just spill out onto a beach. That's when he antagonises Tom the most, and where Tom picks up on some of the destructive behaviour.

Still, when they're going mental in the caravan, it is a fun sight to behold (yes, I'm stressed and thinking don't break the caravan or your heads). The freedom of expression!

The jumping videos are too explicit to share.

Nestled in at Pakiri.

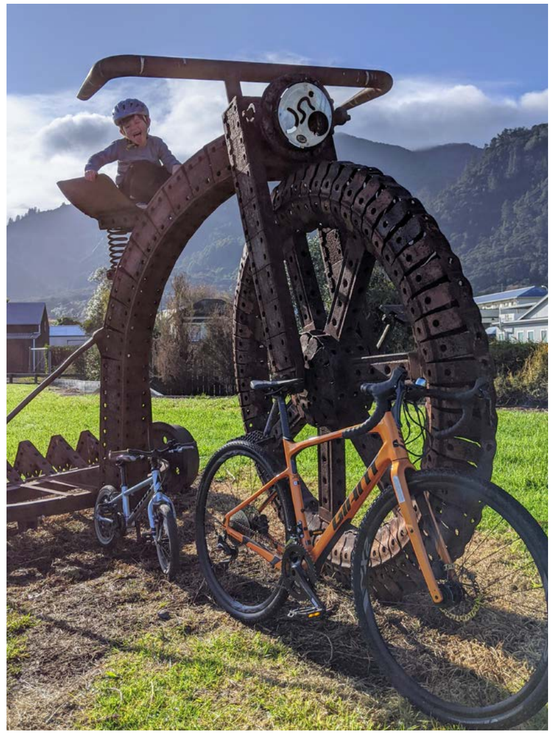
In the outdoor expanse though he's great, and a great brother to Tom.

And on balance, inside too.

So overall, great

Max is generally thrilled with the journey:

- Experiencing new places and curious about the next
- So much outdoor time
- For once plenty of time in Gisborne with Nana and Poppa and cuzzy Bruno
- Knowing he's on the way to see cousin Ben in Christchurch
- Already had new experiences with bestie Tyler and knowing he's likely to see her again in Taupō
- Chatty bike rides with dad
- Lots of movie nights together on the bed
- YouTube hour on weekends
- Regular lolly and ice cream treats
- And that dad's around all the time (hence the treats).



Nana's birthday money this time.

Though when we ask if dad should go back to work, sometimes he says:

"Yes. So we have money."

Even better with mates

As best you can, it's worth making contact with other family travellers and sharing parking spots when possible.

We recently met the lovely Tiffany and Jamie and their three kids. Tiffany and Jamie create beautiful YouTube videos of their travels too, which is how we first learned of them.

They are way better at this living than us, having already learned all the lessons we are. And I have serious rig envy.

Now that's a tow vehicle!

Getting comfortable by meeting in-between - not all kids want to dive straight into each other's vans.

T&J called out on one of the several Facebook groups that they would be in Gisborne, so we said yeah, we're parked up at the NZMCA park – not their usual as they're fully set up for freedom full-time. That was enough to then line up a mutual parking spot in Tokomaru Bay.

With no prompting all the kids were into it, Max had an absolute blast with his new friend Atlas (A-t-l-a-s Max, not Alex), and you see what a difference that kind of human recharge makes.

It's not only Max and Tom that get connected and recharged.

We're sure to line up with T&J as we head south, and in-between meet-ups with friends and family we'll keep aiming for these park-ups with other full-time travelling families.

Sharing stories, like hanging washing at NZMCA parks and cleaning the poo box.

Idling, and going back to where you came from

31 JULY 2020

Well, not in *that* inflammatory way.

But yes after idling in Gisborne for another couple of weeks, we now need to make our way back to Auckland in mid-August.

There's a complication with the pregnancy so diagnostic tests have been lined up. They can't be done in Gisborne. We're keeping calm and carrying on until we have clarity from the test results.

Apart from the worry re the pregnancy currently being labelled high risk, it is deflating to have to, in a sense, return to square one. On the upside we can still do our upcoming Napier-Taupō run, albeit a couple of weeks later than planned. And we'll park the caravan there while we go to Auckland for a week or so and catch up with everyone and do some admin.

All plugged in and no place to go.

So as I said, mostly idling here.

We've stayed too long at the NZMCA park and have had to move up to the showgrounds. In this life that's a pricey move – anything is compared to free camping or $6 a night at NZMCA parks – but it sure is nice to have running water in the caravan and mains power!

Thinking we might end up floating around Gisborne for quite a while, we did a day trip to Mōrere Hot Springs, hadn't been for a few years, gee that's a little treasure. The walk up to the Nikau pools and the pools themselves are just so nice.

Vintage kiwi hot pools.

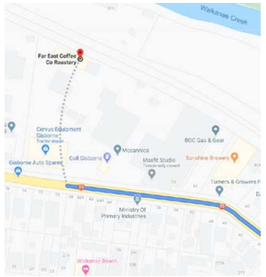
Yeah, while circumstances are far from ideal, we're looking forward to seeing some of you in Auckland again in a few weeks.

Uncut gem

01 AUGUST 2020

The Far East Coffee Co in Gisborne is one of those places that just get it totally right.

First off, it's so hard to find that you feel like you've discovered an oasis when it appears.



It's in an industrial estate far from retail, and even then there's no signage, it's down the back of a driveway, behind repair yards and warehouses, and around a corner.

Priscilla and I often think about the type of café we would open. It would do great coffee—that you go out of your way for—and sell the best simple and delicious snack of its kind in town, that you go out of your way for.

Far East do the best coffee in town (better than Raglan Roast, though that's bloody good too), it's locally roasted, and they had the best Louise Slice in town.

40c Cameo Cremes! We BYO fluffy cups as too many cafés serve them in paper cups afraid the young'uns will knock over the real thing (Far East do serve them in espresso cups though).

What would you say you do here?

02 AUGUST 2020

We've never thought that at the end of all this, that in small town NZ I'd pick up the kind of work I had been doing.

So there are a few business ideas floating around my head at the moment:

- The **seaweed** opportunity I've waxed lyrical to anyone who'll listen has come up again; there's a business for sale, it's not quite Greenwave but it's a start
- An **integrated under-sink bokashi compost system** and service that would be a fraction of the cost of this over-engineered solution
- The **opposite of a photo app** for gigs

Make it stop!

- Smarphone-sized books (**"Pockit"**)
- A men's **clothing brand and boutique** for resilient hard-working-man gear, starting in Macau
- A **listening room bar** in a reasonably-sized town
- A **zero waste general store** in a reasonably-sized town
- Various **bars and cafés that do the best one thing**, mostly for Macau or Japan.

Before starting this journey I imagined I'd have a *lot* more time to develop ideas, but strangely time isn't proving that easy to come by.

Ordinary things (like cooking and dishes) take more time, planning moves takes time, moves take time, Max and Tom take a lot of time, and at the end of it all, yeah Netflix and straying on Dragon's Den and Tiny House vids on YouTube still takes time!

For when you really need to go that little bit further

03 AUGUST 2020

I met Brett as he passed through the NZMCA park in Gisborne. He has started importing these impressive go-anywhere machines from Oz, the TOPAZ and TVAN.

Just quietly, I think I was more impressed by his beautiful old Land Cruiser.

Brett's still learning about the quirks and features of these serious off-roaders and managed to lock the keys inside. Fortunately I had the one tool he needed – a five-year-old boy named Max capable of fitting through the smallest of windows.

Max the tool, earlier at Sponge Bay.

Waterworld

08 AUGUST 2020

Water water everywhere and not a drop to drink.

Just about anyway.

What's the big deal

Water; something we barely gave a thought to when we lived in a house, and we were conscious users (you tend to be in Auckland when you get a water bill every month; sidebar: this should be the case in all of NZ).

Now that we're in a caravan, that only has a 60 litre tank, that we need to empty before we go anywhere, and that we can only fill with a pressure hose, water is kind of a big deal.

If we want water to pump out of our caravan taps, we need to fill the tank via that hose inlet. That means being near a tap where we park. And unless we're in a campground, where we park a tap usually is not.

(And as for pumping it out of the taps, that needs power and until recently, we didn't have enough solar or winter light to reliably do that.)

Container living

So we have water containers. 60 litres in the back of the truck (we can't keep them in the caravan as the extra payload most UK caravans can handle is only ~200kg over it's empty weight, more on those full-time living fun times in another post!)

There is a way that I can pump that container water into the caravan tank, one of these $10 drill pumps...

A hose on each end, one in the source, one attached to the caravan, then attach your drill and pump away.

In practice at least. When I used mine I somehow soiled it and the grease inside it got into the water flow. I haven't seen another in a store since to try again.

The tap runs dry

So 90% of the time, we do not have running water. Instead we have a 20 litre container in the caravan.

In this case it was filled from a non-potable supply. Even if we do fill with potable water, Priscilla boils before she drinks, as was the norm growing up in Macau.

It becomes clear that the primary use of water is cleaning – veges, dishes, ourselves.

As anyone knows, cleaning dishes with cold water is hopeless, so the most used appliance is the humble kettle.

You don't realise how convenient hot water from a tap is until you need to wait 5-10 min for a litre or two of hot water.

And you definitely don't want precious boiling water to go to waste, so typically you transfer it into secondary water containers, the humble thermos.

If you're looking for thermos recommendations, the Stanley is best-in-class.

Them: "What do you do with all your time?"

Us: "Dishes mostly."

Dishes

It's surprising how little water you can get away with for a complete load of dishes. About 500ml of boiling dish water goes in the tiny bowl in the tiny sink.

The post-dishes water then remains in the bowl to be used for rinsing dishes until the next round.

The full-sized pots are the real test.

Bathing

If it's surprising how little water you can do dishes in, then the thimble-full for cleaning the body is a dirty little secret.

Using the caravan shower is out of the question unless plugged into a campground, and when we're paying to live there we exploit the camp showers anyway.

The shower head, watching over us as we wash with a bowl.

With only a 60 litre tank on board, waiting for the hot water to come through the shower head is an obscene waste.

So you end up just using a small bowl of hot water, two bowls if you need to wash your hair.

For washing the vitals in-between proper showers at campgrounds, swimming pools, friends and family houses.

Max and Tom don't do so badly. Every few days they get a bath in the luxurious pink tub.

I laugh at your puny white wash bowl!

And the water, used once, used twice, used three times, eventually makes its way out into the grey water tank.

40 litre grey tank. Sorry I'm not lifting this back into the caravan to dispose of it at a dump station, I rather help the grass and trees grow.

Mostly I install the grey water tank to keep up appearances, since you generally can't just let it spill onto the ground.

The grey water fairies take care of it in the black of night.

Go on, tell us about poos & wees

Poo deserves its own post but water plays a role here too.

Think of caravan toilets like airplane toilets without the suction.

Bet your toilet in your fixed house doesn't pivot around like this.

They squirt out a little flush that efficiently covers the bowl. But yep, sometimes you do need to deal with stuck wet paper and smears, and there be no glamourous way to work your way through that.

The cistern has its own separate tank.

Filling the back passage.

Which you need to go outside and round the back and fill with a jug of water. Which is fine until its pissing rain at 1am and you've got a mess to clean up.

The simple things in life

Hey we love the freedom and feeling of parking up alongside a beautiful beach, river, sunset. But aah, running water, it sure is nice when you can get it.

Previously, living like kings at the A&P Showgrounds Campground in Gisborne.

Compelled to disconnect at Lake Tūtira

10 AUGUST 2020

Going south toward Napier from Gisborne, there's a lake you pass that you usually think wow, that looks like a really nice place for a break; but because you're on a mission, and you're surrounded by logging trucks, you just barrel on.

Because we have no place to go, and don't like driving far at once, we planned to stay at Lake Tūtira for a night. A donation is all that's needed for an overnight stay, and because the iron maiden is nowhere to be seen we couldn't even give that.

About 1km down the turn-off we found big empty spaces.

A compelling disconnect

Compel; it's one of the most mis-used words in the English language. I mis-use it all the time while thinking I know that's not right.

So we were compelled to disconnect, not because it's so great there we wanted to, but because we were forced to as there's no signal.

A special spot not far from the road, with no cell signal.

I thought disconnecting was going to be a big part of this journey, but in reality there's usually a cell signal, and like almost every smartphone owner on the planet, I haven't managed to stamp out the addiction.

Removing those pointless down-time FOMO feelings altogether for three days really opens up new space in your head, and I *have* to do it more.

Without the distraction of the Internet during those free moments, the composting system made good progress.

Tom having a ponder.

Another room with a view

I reckon Tom appreciates the beauty more than Max, we do find him just gazing out the window.

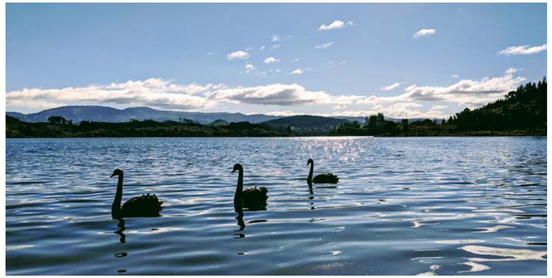
Max less so even when he's got a million dollar view from his bed.

Max's bedroom.

"Careful Tom"

Water + Clear Skies = Happy Family

We've learned it makes a major difference in this life when we're staying near water. And even better when the skies are clear.

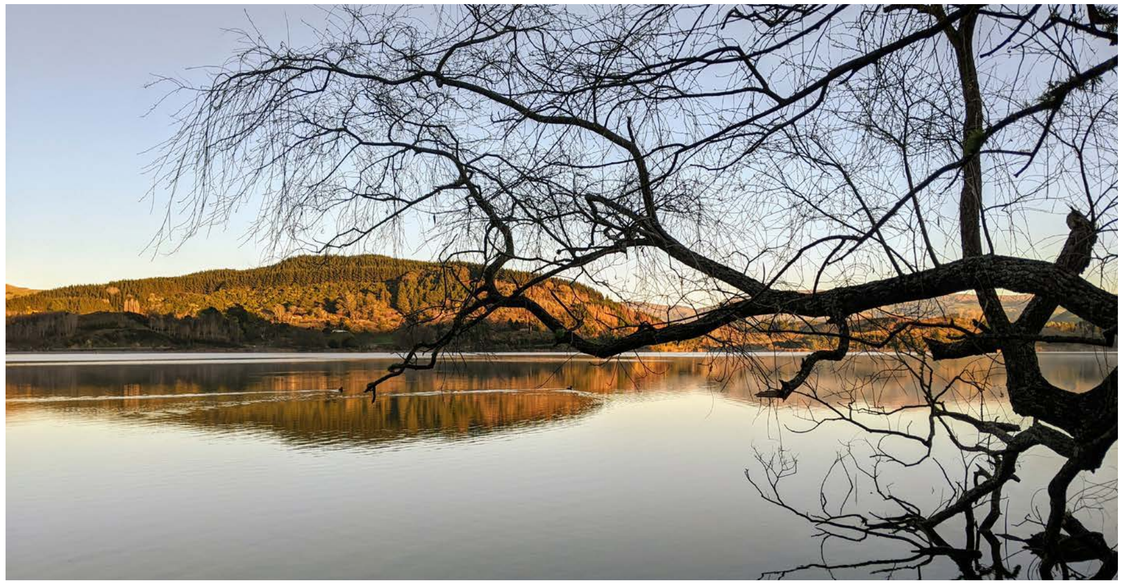


Actual graceful black swans, not like that cray-cray lot in Rotorua.

We were greeted with picture-perfect early morning air; something we noted you miss out on when doing day trips.

We do feel very lucky to get these moments, like being rugged-up under a black starry sky with Max.

Brrr.



Lake Tūtira has unexpectedly been one of our highlights so far. Peaceful, beautiful, productive, energising, whiskey under shooting stars, lake-side reading, just solid appreciation for what we're able to do.

Aratiatia circuit

21 AUGUST 2020

Sensing I needed to get Max and Tom out of the caravan and create some peace for a bit, we did a few of the freebie attractions in Taupō.

Replacing things with experiences

Because we've reduced our things to a serious minimum—Max and Tom even more so than us—those toys need replacing with experiences.

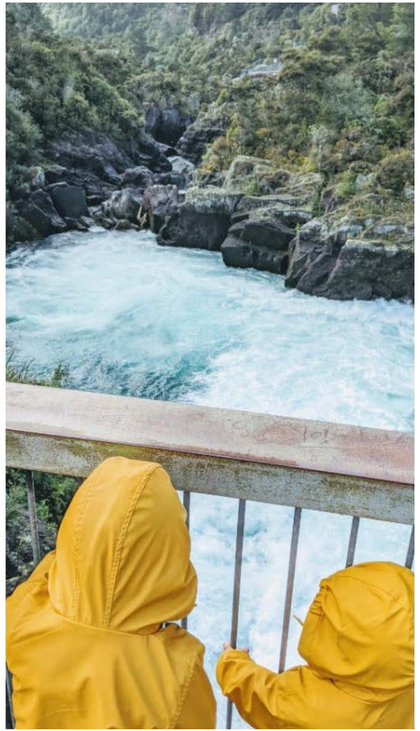
It's what every parent says they wish for, but hey, it comes with the necessity to spend *much* more present time with them! And sometimes you just need some headspace to think and do adult things, and a room full of toys helps (when you're trying not to feel guilty about putting a screen in front of them).

When providing experiences, I have to actively be present in the moment; thoughts of things I need to do have to be pushed down, and it works!

Aratiatia Dam

Max rated this way better than Huka Falls and I get why. The last time I saw the dam opening it was mesmerising, and it was even better with Max and Tom who were thrilled. The countdown sirens made it all-the-more exciting.

Covid QR's everywhere, good stuff.



This way and that.

You know that feeling of looking at an open fire, or rolling waves? Tom does now too.

Huka Falls

There's not much left to say about Huka Falls, it's awesome, but...

Little ones can't really see.

Uh, nice river.

Taking Max and Tom I realised they can't actually see it that well from the lookouts at their height.

Lifting them up for a better look gives me that irrational feeling that somehow, all-of-a-sudden, I'm going to suffer a series of mishaps that sees them fall in.

Huka Honey Hive

This store/experience is great!

- Free tastings galore of beautiful honey varieties
- Super friendly staff
- Big kids area with educational videos, Bee Movie and PlayStation games playing
- A big glass cross-section viewing window of a real beehive (find the queen!)
- **So many delicious products**

Sheep Milk & Honey Gin (well, I haven't drunk that yet so jury's out).

Indulgent.

- And ice creams by the fire; Triple Chocolate for Max and Tom, Fig & Honey for me.

What a great way to round out an easy morning circuit outside Taupō.

Holding out in Taupō

23 AUGUST 2020

We had always planned a week-long stay in Taupō but not under these circumstances.

Tom making himself at home at "Nana Julie's" (Max' best mate Tyler's nana's house).

Originally it was going to be a link-up with Tyler, Max's old Auckland neighbour and best friend, at Tyler's Nana Julie's house.

Max and Tyler during their last meet-up at Ardmore NZMCA park a few months back, just out of lockdown.

A couple of things threw out the plan:

- Covid-19 Level 3 hit Auckland again meaning Tyler couldn't do a roadtrip down to Taupō
- And we had a complication with the pregnancy meaning we had to make a beeline back to Auckland for an amniocentesis procedure.

First things first, we've had the all-clear from that test meaning no serious baby development abnormalities, phew! That wasn't going to be an easy decision to deal with.

Living like locals

So we spent a lazy week in Taupō waiting for the run into Level-3-Auckland for that appointment. Nana Julie is so welcoming, her house is basically permanently open to the neighbourhood, so we did spend a lot of time in a normal house again, so comfortable and roomy!

Frost early morning dash to the house.

Max got lucky; when we arrived Tyler's cousin Ruby was staying. Max and Ruby hadn't hung out much before since Ruby was always on the periphery of the Max and Tyler show. It was nice for them to get to know each other better.

Finding treasure in the kinetic sand.

AC Baths

I lost count of the number of times we went there, 3 I think.

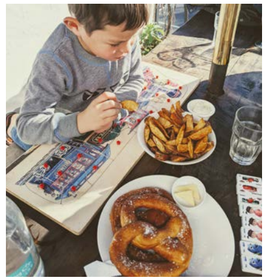
Max and Tom *love* them. They're such a great asset for Taupō, and probably eventually taken for granted. We couldn't argue with $8 for a few hours family entertainment at a time, and hot showers!

The lake

I mean it's beautiful, looking across to Mt Ruapehu, but for Max and Tom it's no match for a beach and waves.

If we were to live here (it's an open option at this point) I think I'd need some kind of boat to make it worthwhile.

For now, Max enjoyed finding a whole new kind of rock: volcanic!



Great salty buttery pretzels!

This drinking game's sure to get messy on the big nights.

Crafty Trout

We sampled the local brewery—Crafty TROUT Brewery—at BierKAFE, or at least I did. (Lakeman Brewery should appear in a separate post.)

Thanks Nana Julie!

It's been an (even more) uncertain time for us while waiting for the test and results in Auckland, so it was a real relief to have an inviting home base in Taupō.

And with the positive results we can once-and-for-all get stuck into the journey south.

Worthy recent brews

23 AUGUST 2020

If there's a local brewery in town, I do my best to sample it. They're not always the finest, but it's still nice to taste regional influences.

Segue: food tourism

With Covid-19 making New Zealand rethink what tourism means, we should take a page out of Japan's recipe book. Domestic food tourism is huge there, people hike up mountains just to taste the soba noodles half way up, I did!

We dabble with crayfish in Kaikōura and salmon in Tekapo, but Tourism NZ could get serious about it... Though thinking about it, maybe NZers just aren't that mad into food, not enough to travel for it.

Back to the brews...

Spruce Beer, Wigram Brewing Co.

Picked this up at the Huka Honey Hive—the beer has honey in it, so they sell it obvs—and it was way better than I anticipated. I often find these kind of brews too heavy on the extra flavours, but this isn't, it's really moreish.

The Buzzer, Huka Honey Hive

An indulgence. This couldn't be your daily, but when you're sitting by the fire, it's a must buy.

Footnote: Yoshi and I went to the wrong noodle house, not the Michelin star one, idiots.

Black Jack Stout, Lakeman Brewery

At 8.1% I expected this to be in Imperial Stout territory—one is enough, or three if you had a shitter of a day—but it didn't taste that strong, and it tastes exactly as it does on the tin. I wouldn't need a shit day to down three of these.

Wild Coast Black Beer, Moa Brewing Co.

Moa beer is pretty underrated generally I reckon, and this is a good example of that. Kind of a black lager/draught beer. I think I prefer it to Monteith's Black now, it's not quite as sweet.

Oto's Original, Boasters Coffee Roasters

A solid working-man's everyday brew. Not too strong, not too weak, wouldn't tire of it. I got this big bag from my mate Bob in Rotorua who's now owning/running the roastery for the area.

Double Brown, DB Breweries

OK, it's hardly regional, like Steinlager in Gisborne, but take a look at that! Don't knock it mate, it's the best example of a classic New Zealand draught beer. AND I've discovered a secret: a wedge of lemon and a few fresh mint leaves and it is something special!

Let's get real, those craft beers are a special treat these days. When you're living in a caravan and not working, I'm not going to pass up $22 for 18 DoBro's!

That need to know what's around the corner

24 AUGUST 2020

When you're at a new beach, or a new city, you're enjoying what's in front of you, but soon enough you have this urge to see what's just around the rocky point, or around the next corner.

The view around the point.

Even though right now is amazing you feel the need to see what else. Sometimes you discover a secret spot, but more often it's not great, or just more of the same.

I still get that feeling. I'm a long way from contentment.

Big tanks, firing semi-automatic milk, Taupō to Plimmerton

01 SEPTEMBER 2020

In Max's eyes we're now really doing what Sea Change is all about—going to Christchurch to see cousin Ben—but still, on travel days we only drive for an hour, two hours tops. Which means plenty of stopovers and samplings.

We'd hoped to get a few days up both sides of Ruapehu but the sour weather meant neither side of the mountain opened at all. And with Max and Tom asleep by Tūrangi, and the camping ground there looking decidedly grim in the wet, we trudged on around to Ohakune.

Should have bought a caravan in my 20's

Just so I could have parked up at places like the Ohakune Club for a fiver a person a night, rather than booking accommodation way in advance or panicking about getting a place to stay.

And just like that we unwittingly parked right beside Evette, the mum of a friend of ours in Auckland who we used to spend time with at Max and Tom's swimming lessons.

Realised the cute little motorhome looked vaguely familiar.

Quite the stand-out design in its day.

The original kind of tiny house, before they became cool, sat on trailers, and didn't move; this one towing a van for storage.

Coffee and scones were had.

About as much of the mountain we saw in our circuit around it.

Hard to beat Ohakune on a good day but

It takes a bit more work on a mountain-closed day.

Fortunately a giant carrot can still impress Max and Tom.

And had me trying to explain what fibre glass is to a 5-year old.

Bo & Luke, the Dukes of Salad.

That joke I didn't try explaining to a 5-year old.

Trying to make a Bakugan slide (steps?)

The good old boys.

I thought Mountain Kebabs were the only must-eat in Ohakune

The perfect chocolate éclair, $2.50

Why didn't I know about these éclairs??

And so excusable when going up the mountain; we weren't going up the mountain.

We had our first topless mince and cheese pie too, which is perfect for Max as he, infuriatingly for dad, eats pies by taking off the top and eating that first.

Tom having a go.

The kindness of friends, Rangataua

Next stop just down the road, then up the road, through a track, over humps and dips our caravan isn't cut out for... our friend Claire's closely held family bach in Rangataua.

Had to get out for an assessment of the bridge to make sure I could get the 'van around and over.

The Graham family bach.

There's a special long history to the bach, first bought for $450, since rebuilt, and there are lovely family guestbooks daily-diarying long stays for the next family members to catch up on.

Plugged in for a couple of wintery days.

Having a peek inside.

We felt so grateful Claire extended the welcome mat to their home-away-from-home, even just for the caravan power and water.

Not sure what you're expecting out of that "straw" Tom.

Still, sometimes you need some fresh Netflix downloaded too.

They painted their own faces, I can do a bit better than that.

Going slow

With Turoa closed and next-to-no Internet, we did not much at all and that was fine.

The undies don't come out when parked at an NZMCA park.

Water + Stones = 1 hour passed.

Hill, must be climbed.

King of the hill.

A lovely outlook for a few days.

It was almost enough to check the real estate pages.

Describing war, Waiouru

Spoiler alert, it's worse than Covid-19.

They're even bigger than you dad! (Thanks son)

Max would have known next-to-nothing about war heading in; he didn't know what the huge vehicles were outside, let alone the horrors of war.

So it was something else to describe the conditions the brave, frightened soldiers lived in, the power of the weapons, the destruction and pain they cause. All in service of our country.

Checking items off his search and find list.

Which country made the most kick-ass guns?

I reckon this museum is about the best way to introduce war to your children. It is extremely well put together, with a balanced combination of honour, horror, hardship, humour, boredom, wider impacts, and simple adventure and excitement.

And for me, having played with an army men collection a lot through my childhood, the guns are still awe-inspiring for their mechanical simplicity, ingenuity, and incredible power.

And apart from hunting and pest control, this is the place they belong.

Taking the Manawatu Scenic Route

Since we're ambling about, something we're able to do is take roads we would never otherwise take.

I ain't reversing from here.

Always looking for those layered hill shots.

Rangiwahia

And a big reason we went down this way was the great little CAP (Charges Apply Property) in Rangiwahia where we could stay for the night.

The local community centre lets you park up, plug in, and fill up for a tenner.

But other than that, there isn't much going on, at all.

RANGIWAHIA GARAGE

GENTS

Best Sausage Roll in NZ, until proven otherwise, Kimbolton

One of those small places I didn't previously know was there, Kimbolton is a lovingly preserved little village on the way to Fielding.

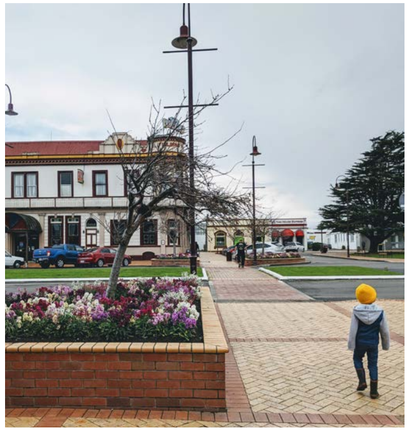
Pride and joy in the Kimbolton Garage doorway.

Hansens Café in Kimbolton Village.

And it just so happens, Kimbolton appears to be home to NZ's best sausage roll, we'd demolished them before I thought to get a snap. But the reviews seem to agree.

Next stop, "New Zealand's most beautiful town"

It didn't seem worth our while to do an overnighter in Fielding so we decided we'd keep going towards the Kāpiti Coast, but not before we checked to see how it wins its beautiful town titles.



Max noticed and mentioned the lamp posts and railings were all the same nice colour, so that's something.

So rival towns, the trick is to have red cobbled streets, and ornate lamp posts and rails in the same colour. Do that and you're in with a chance next year.

Self-service milk at Arran Farms is the best!

On our way out of Fielding we detoured to Arran Farms because we'd read they do great farm gate milk.

"That was so awesome" was about all I managed when I came out of there and back to the family waiting in the car.

The self-service vending system they've setup is genius and yes the milk is great! A real treat for us as we make (albeit good) powdered milk for our life on the road.

A vending machine for bottles, bottle bags, and milk cards; clever!

Waiting my turn.

The instructions for my fill-your-own. It all worked perfectly, so impressive!

Sampling our future lives in Foxton Beach?

Foxton Beach seemed like a nice place to go in and park overnight. And we could use some Max-and-Tom-on-the-beach time again.

We went to the Manawatū Caravan Club as it was $20 a night for us for a space with power and water; pretty pretty pretty good!

Solo mission.

Where jetski's go to die, good riddance!

It's a retirement home really. And it's a great place, maybe less so if you were living there with the camp politics and nosey neighbours, but prima facie it looks like the laid back of all laid back ways to wind down life.

It was also nice to just let Max and Tom head off on their own, find the play ground, and do different loops around the park.

Manawatū Caravan Club.

Free at Foxton Beach.

Hoping the motorists see him.

You made it, thanks!

The big expanse of a long open beach feels like a good place to end this long expansive post.

Plimmerton and beyond

The Plimmerton NZMCA park was our final park-up of this leg. We spent a few days around the Wellington region before boarding the Picton ferry.

I'll wrap up Wellington in a post soon. Thanks for making it this far. Note to self: don't wait this long to post, it's a burden to create, and to read!

Not the Wellington Waterfront

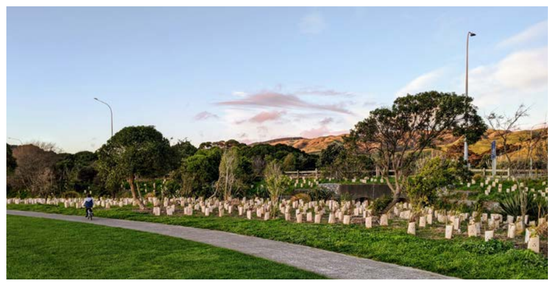
02 SEPTEMBER 2020

It turns out it's not all espresso cacao nib marshmallow stouts and suit trouser clips on fixie riders. No, there are sweet bike spots and great coffee in Porirua too.

Plimmerton

Because there aren't suitable parking spots for us with a caravan in Wellington we were stationed at the NZMCA park in Plimmerton.

Plimmerton NZMCA park. And the short ride to the train station.



Nice story side-note

Max and Tom like an open space and Priscilla is good at setting up provocations. Priscilla and Max made a "kite" out of a paper bag and some string and Max did his bestest to get it up into the 04 wind.

Then later that evening we came home to a new kite under our welcome mat! (That we subsequently blew apart on another eventful day; see "Lessons at Broken River".)

We think the couple parked next to us who we'd chatted to about living on the road must have been watching Max and Priscilla struggling. Figured we had fallen on hard times, and helped us out in their small (but big) way. Good buggers eh!

[end of side note]

As it turned out it was nice to be based outside the city for a change and get to know places like Plimmerton a little better.

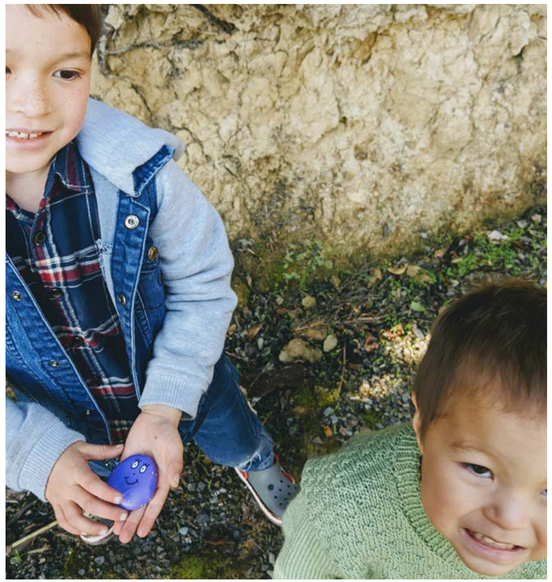
Though the crispy wind pushed us inside earlier than usual.

The next day after some Google mapping I took the boys on a circuit of the area.

Oversight from Si Wan Sensei.

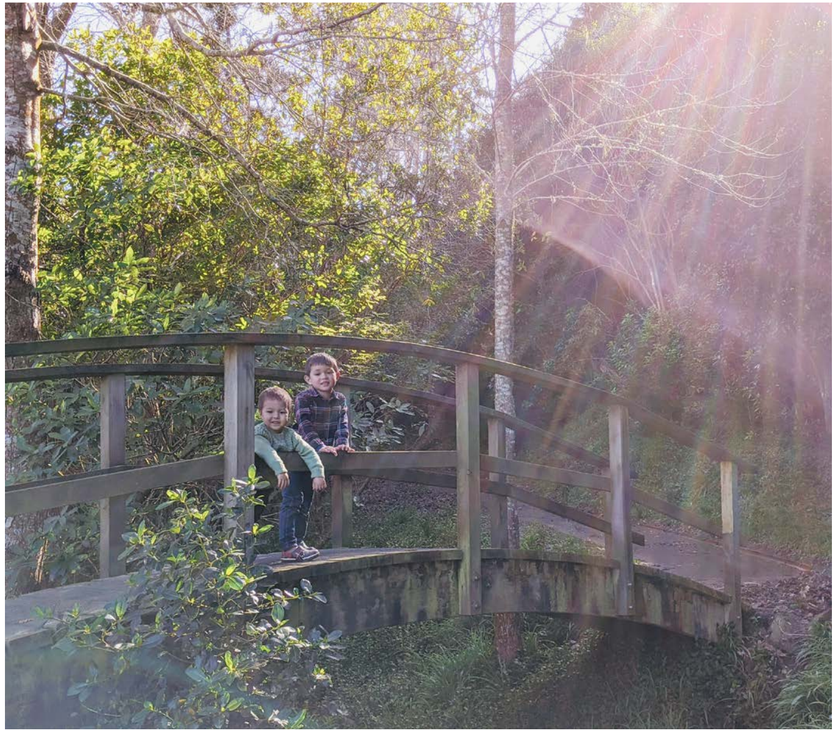
Whitby

We started with a summit walk to get knocked off our bearings.



Spinnakering themselves.

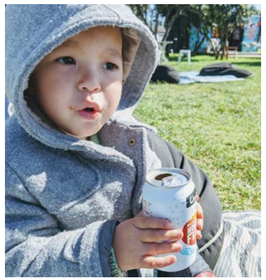
Then down into a nearby Japanese garden for another photo op.



Porirua

The only times I really recall hearing about Porirua is in crime-related stories. Much like when Gisborne makes the news, though these days it's in relation to historic crimes (relocations of Endeavour models) and property crimes (out-of-control prices). But as usual that's so unfair, Porirua's a vibrant place!

We dropped into Get Fixed Bicycle Café for refreshments.



Only hipster Fanta for this boy.

OK, we did make it in for a Milk Stout

What's nice about the Plimmerton parking spot is the easy—at the time Level 2—train ride into Wellington city.

Fortunately no masks needed for Max and Tom.

Te Papa, as always a must-see. The new Te Taiao exhibit zone is beautifully done. It's a golden era for museums and libraries (see the new Christchurch Library).

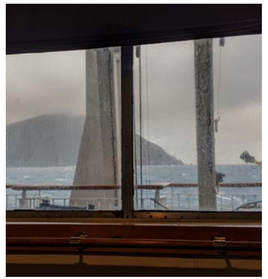
Then it was on to that Level 2 beer.

A reminder of what a production life in Level 2, 3, 4 is. So wear your masks on PT, scan the QR, and keep your distance in shops. Let's not go back there!

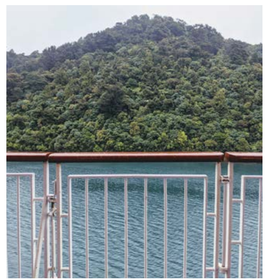
Hokey contactless ordering at Hashigo Zake.

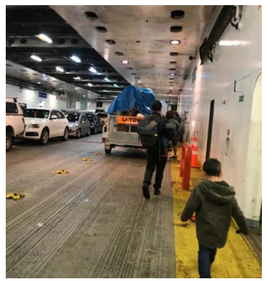
Goodbye Wellington... [uuugh]
...Ahoy Picton!

Ferry crossings were filling up fast with the increase in domestic travel allowed at Level 2. So big swells or none we stuck to our crossing day.



An Old Dark kept my stomach settled so I could tend to the other three.



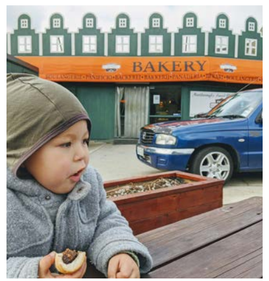


We'll be back at some stage to fill in the gaps.

Without the pre-Covid backpackers,
Picton had become a very sleepy town.
Still picturesque.

We parked up at a humble tavern for the night and stayed long enough to do some washing, have a pub dinner, a great pie and a pink bun.

OK, now where do we go...



Covid-19 malaise manifesting in Marlborough

03 SEPTEMBER 2020

There's a bittersweet end to this one.

Not having managed to buy our annual DOC pass on the drive from Picton to Onamalutu (flaky connectivity), the next day we drove back out and into the The Vines Village in nearby Rapaura.

It has free WiFi among many other very nicely put together things.

The long tail of COVID-19

We'd recently been in Auckland during its second Level 3 lockdown and it was sad stuff. Inner-city Auckland, like Wellington, is a fraction of its former busy self. So many businesses that have relied on people simply being in the city are going under.

It just feels like an absurdity to be standing in doorways of food places, looking at the lonely manager, while ordering their chips and burger via a shopping cart on your phone.

When I think about the effects of COVID-19 my mind does tend to go to these city businesses directly impacted by no people being there.

Apart from the habit of scanning COVID tracer QR codes, I do have the privilege of often forgetting that the damage is still going on around us.

Being back in Auckland during the second Level 3 lockdown, never again.

From 32 to 2

Priscilla was chatting with the owner of the merino store in The Vines Village. She mentioned that the café, honey & boutique gin store, and tap room complex had 32 staff prior to COVID. Now it has 2. The kitchen and tap room are closed and the two lovely women are juggling what's left with, by the looks of it, a great deal of catharsis.

The Vines Village doesn't outwardly seem like a tourist destination, but the combo of lost international visitors, lost local tourists, and locals staying home is, like COVID, making it hard for the place to keep breathing let alone thrive.

COVID19 UPDATE - *The Vines Village is OPEN.*
Coffee & Snacks are available Mon-Fri 9am-2pm in the Pop Up Deli.

See bottom of page for individual business updates.

The Cafe, Deli & Taproom are closed indefinitely with the business for sale.
See Trademe. For any buyer enquiries please contact BAYLEYS MARLBOROUGH
Glenn Dick +64 21 731 201 glenn.dick@bayleys.co.nz
Pete Coldwell +64 21 524 990 pete.coldwell@bayleysmarlborough.co.nz

The village website makes it pretty stark.

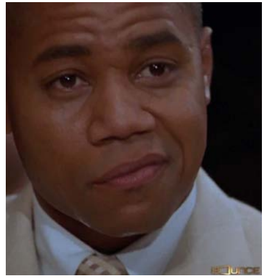
Well, if you don't ask

After our coffees and while Max and Tom continued playing in the Pirate Playground, I had another wander through the stores.

I couldn't buy any fresh fill-your-own honey straight from the tap, that was closed too. I poked my nose into the tap room to see what may have, once, been pouring.

The ladies asked if they could get me anything. "Uuh," looking around, "what time is it? After 12? Ok, I'll buy one of the brewery's dark ales in the fridge." "You can have it if you like, they're expired, free-of-charge, need a glass?"

Having finished the free beer out in the sun, she asked how was it? "Heh, yeah it was worth it." "Nice one, you can take a case home, take two. We'll never use them."



Free case in hand, it didn't seem right but they wouldn't take money for it.

Cheers The Vines Village, I really hope you make it through the COVID malaise. You've built up a great collection of businesses in lovely surroundings and your people are the best.

Crunch time, Onamalutu

04 SEPTEMBER 2020

I managed to go four months without hitting something with the caravan, and even here it was on the way out, not in.

We're making our way from Picton to the West Coast and we noticed this Onamalutu area in the NZMCA app – a DOC site with power, pretty rare.

It was a bit of a detour in, but worth it for a couple of snail-pace days without connectivity.

Just one other solo traveller there on the first night.

It's a surprisingly huge open area, I wonder if it ever really gets busy in the summer. And while it was cold in there, it was worth getting up for the beautiful frosty starts.

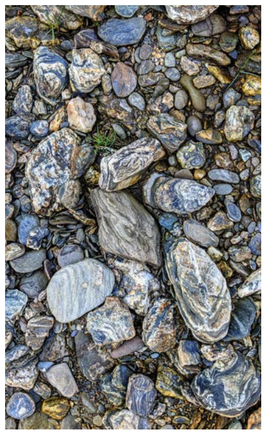
Rock hunters

I'm no trout fisherman, yet (get real, two young boys with another coming soon, it's not even around the corner), so there wasn't a great deal for us to do in there, but we still had a good time down by the river.

Max is totally into minerals at the moment—he watches Minecraft gameplay videos on YouTube though has never touched the game himself, I think he's studying up for when he meets his older cousin Ben again—and I remember I used to be too.

The river here is a treasure-trove of interesting rocks.

We fossicked for hours, searching for something special, even gold, why not.



But you didn't come here for the rocks

It's a very tight one-lane bridge to turn into the campsite. And we'd driven some way to get there and I couldn't turn round anyway so I committed and got in fine.

Coming out however, trying to be clever I over compensated on the inside turn, staying quite right on the bridge, forgetting the back was going to swing out when I turned off the bridge.

TL;DR: I crunched the bridge, pulling the back right corner off the caravan.

It looked ugly; like shit shit shit, where's the gaffer tape so I can hold this together until a large town. But damn, we didn't think to take a photo at the time.

Getting on the tools

I had thought bringing a decent tool box with me would be a necessity, but aside from some minor repairs to drawers and things inside, I've mostly just had a **big pink container** occupying a large part of the boot.

Today was the day I was pleased I've carried and assortment of screws, washers, wrenches, screwdrivers, glue...

If you look closely you can see the posts on the right corner of the bridge I've smushed.

That back right corner was hanging off.

Driving away

Max: "Tom did you know the caravan's broken?"

Tom: "Dad, the caravan's broken?"

Dad: "No boys, Dad fixed it."

#howtodad

Panel beated.

I created a legit monster for Tom

05 SEPTEMBER 2020

Wooooh, the Tree Goblin.

You know how sometimes you make stuff up for your children?

Like that you know all the words to every musical but just choose not to sing... or a Tree Goblin.

I went around the corner from where we were camped in Onamalutu and saw this tree guarding the entry to the forest. So I dashed back to the 'van and said "hey Max, have you ever seen a tree goblin? Come with me... Tom do you want to come?"

Looking at this photo now Tom already looks nervous.

Back at the 'van I kid around with Tom zooming the Tree Goblin's face in and out of the phone, he was cracking up but moving further and further away. Then I pushed it one too far, said ok no more Tom, I'll show you a picture of a cat. He tentatively came back after lots of reassurance and then **RAAWWR**, the Tree Goblin again in his face.

It was all tears then, and that was that.

The next day we went out for a walk, the same way. After hiding behind mum's legs walking down toward the Tree Goblin, Tom took as wide a berth as possible around it.

Tom wasn't too stoked with the rest of the walk either, thinking about the Tree Goblin over his shoulder.

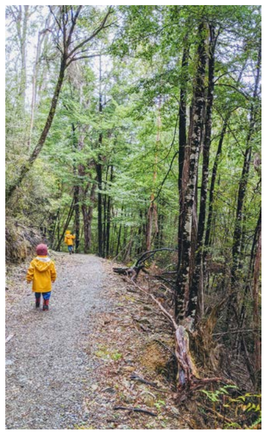
"Tree Goblin's gone?"

The forest walks haven't been the same since. Even today we had to reassure Tom there are no Tree Goblins here.

Looking out for more goblins.

But there is now a Rock Monster...

He's been introduced to try and keep Max quieter in the forest.

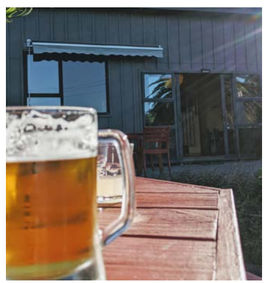


In love with a view, Cape Foulwind

08 SEPTEMBER 2020

We poked out onto the West Coast at Westport. The POP (Park Over Property) we picked at the Star Tavern in Cape Foulwind was perfect.

Across the road from the POP.



Musseled In

On the last day there, a bloke parked up next to us, with an older bloke parked next to him, said he was heading down the cliffs to gather mussels.

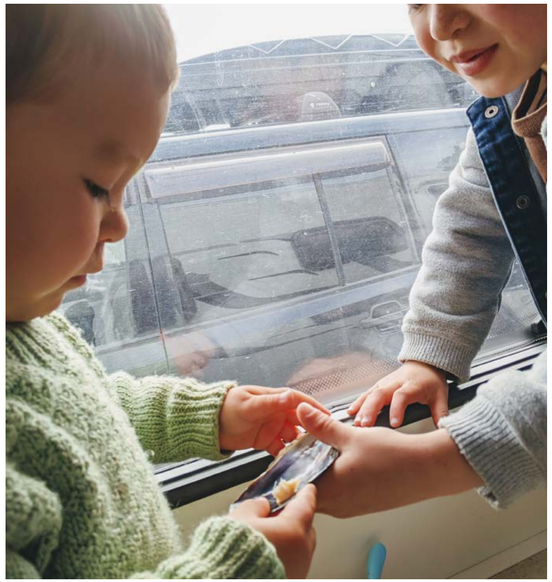
So I grabbed Max and tagged along.
And mussels we did gather!

If only Max was into eating them.

There were tons!

Really only needed to pull in the massive ones.

Nevermind, Tom is definitely into them, got his mum's taste buds.



The delicacy for Tom was the gristle the mussel uses to attach to the shell.

Working hard to extract the gristle.

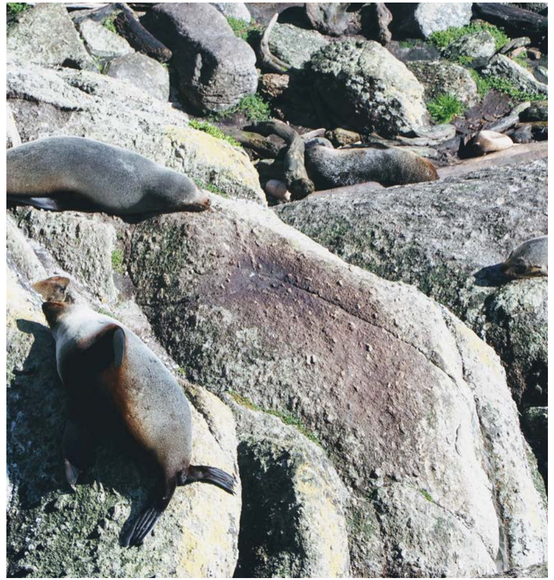
Whenever there's an arch, it must be obliged with a photo.

A surprise for Max and Tom that wasn't an ice cream, a toy, or lollies

We didn't tell them we were walking out to the seal colony.

Fortunately the sight of seals mucking about did trump the thought that they might be getting an ice cream, a toy, or lollies.

Hey buddy.

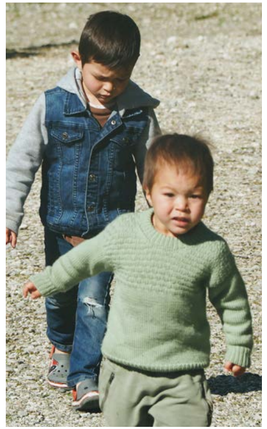


You can watch these layabouts for ages.

Mesmerising sea and seals.

Another beautiful deserted surf beach round the bend.

Maybe not so obvious now, but that hairy rock is Mufasa!



Making them wait, Lighthouse Walk

Before they got to their seal surprise they had to come with us on the walk to the lighthouse (well they have no choice).

The odd thing about the lighthouse at Cape Foulwind is DOC have established this well-groomed walk to the lighthouse, except for the final few metres where us and others were all poking around to see how you get up next to it.

They hadn't thought that the one thing you want to do when you go to a lighthouse is to stand next to it.

Luckily many before us have forged the path so we wriggled our way through the scrub tunnel to the top.

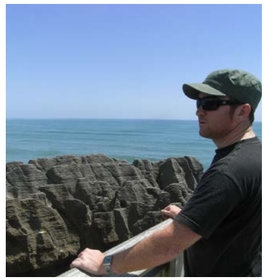
A very blue day.

But the best thing about the easy walk is the view...

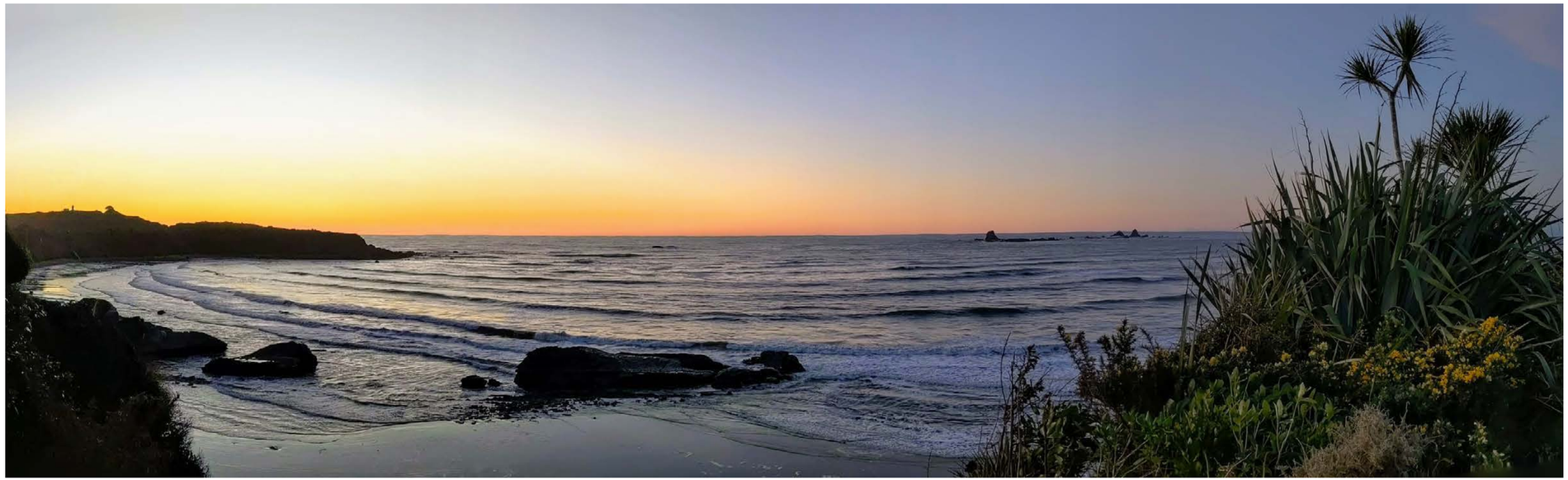
About those views

I loved this spot, and the road to Greymouth, when I was **last out this way over 10 years ago in Yuya's beat-up Honda Accord wagon**.

Almost 12 years earlier.



And that coastline has an even more profound effect on me today, spiritual I guess you'd say.



So I have a few TradeMe Property searches saved for land along the West Coast.

Life is what you make it, Fox River

11 SEPTEMBER 2020

"Such a great night, such good people!"

—Ian, morning after, masking overhang of the last whiskey

We plan our travel using the great NZMCA/CamperMate app to find places to park, and from those spots we figure out what there is to do and see.

The Fox River carpark was a nondescript spot for a stopover on the way to the next place.

But comments stood out:

NZMCA App, essentially a google map covered in useful information and comments.

"Great night at the Wednesday night jam session."

"A local man shows up in the morning between 8.30-9am to sell all sorts of hot drinks and pancakes."

"Andrew pulls up with his coffee cart ... you can chat to him about the South Island and play with [his dog] Peanut!"

"You definitely should go on a Wednesday because they have an amazing jamming night! I loved that spot!"

So we went there on a Wednesday, failing to imagine what a jamming night in a carpark was like.

They jam in here??

That was not what I imagined; I was readying myself for some locals emerging from their vehicles in the carpark.

Instead I learned there's a legendary commune that's been living a hardy, (mostly) quiet, earthy life for 40 years or so. And once a week past and present members, and honorary guests, converge on their ramshackle setup for craic and rowdy jams.

Their idea of living off the land was either super backward or very forward, depending on who was judging. People came and went and, as they continued on their way, they spread tales of parties, of a good and uncomplicated life. Everyone shared; makeshift dwellings were swapped, more were built, many burnt down.

I shared a drink or two with the guy playing guitar here, and his wife.

Life's like that

He's a retired school teacher. He'd taught in Lytton High in Gisborne while I was starting St Mary's, and now he culls wild goats in the West Coast mountains—he was 3 short of 2,500 when we spoke—and comes in for the jam once a week among other resilient pottering that most get up to out here.

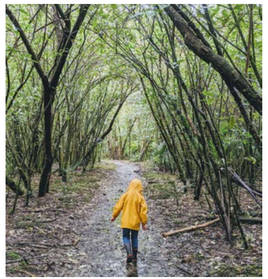
His wife was also an ex-secondary English teacher from Wellington. The easy flow of like-minded conversation took me back to those days in the early 00's, at the Horse & Trap on a Friday afternoon with the EGGS teaching rabble.

Met another couple passing through like us, partial to the jazz-cabbage, travelling full time too, with grown kids scattered about the country, enjoying the jams and their freedom to travel to their children whenever.

The young big lad in the hi-vis pants walking up to sing back there, he'd just come in from an over-nighter white-baiting, had Fox River in his heritage.

And Fox River itself?

Super relaxing. Contentment levels high.



Burning in the memory

To finish off our special couple of days at Fox River, we made it memorable for Max and Tom too.

Thank you Fox River and the people that choose to make it home. You really helped show us that **life is what you make it**.

We'll be back.

The sea hitting the land, Punakaiki, West Coast

12 SEPTEMBER 2020

"I just love it out here, I dunno what it is, it's just, it's just... the sea, hitting the land."

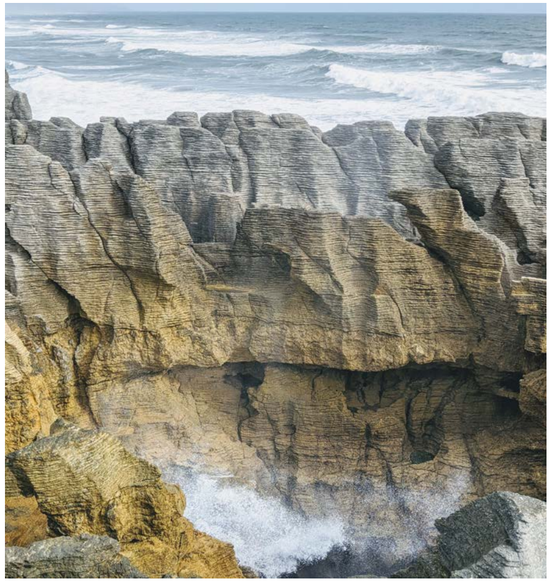
—Ian, articulating while driving along the West Coast

No images and words can ever do justice to what that drive down SH6 feels like. And when it's wild it's even more woah... oh wow... just look at THAT.

Pancakes for lunch

[Max and Tom were perhaps a little disappointed when they discovered what pancake rocks really were.]

Punakaiki is one of those gobsmacking places where I try in vain to capture the power and beauty. Just can't be done, but here's my effort.



Content in Kumara

13 SEPTEMBER 2020

Kumara was our stop before heading through Arthur's Pass. Mainly it was so we could give Max a go at gold panning, especially since he's so into rocks and minerals.

[Relevance of that gif's a stretch but I'll take it for the Seinfeld memories.]

We were going to stay in the DOC campground right alongside the gold panning river, but the weather was turning and we couldn't resist the lure of affordable power and water at a local retreat.

After a 20-point turn to squeeze the rig in, we were so pleased we stayed.

Quirky, unexpected, cosy and welcoming, very affordable and totally relaxing - Review of Greenstone Retreat, Kumara, New Zealand - Tripadvisor

Greenstone Retreat: Quirky, unexpected, cosy and welcoming, very affordable and totally relaxing - See 29 traveller reviews, 28 candid

Kumara Pride

Kumara has done a proud job of retaining and sharing its heritage as a pioneering gold mining town. Still, with a population scratching 300, it's a long way from the over 4,000 that lived there almost 150 years ago. It reads like it was a wild time! (There were over 50 pubs!?)

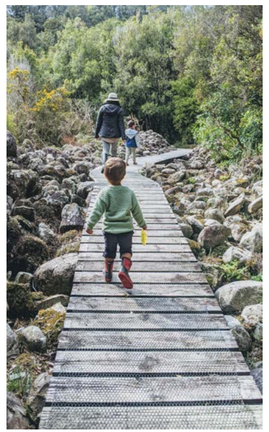
It was special to get that sense of history oozing from the town. The good and the bad. Seddon reads like a champion as New Zealand's first Premier. But he was also terribly racist toward the hard working Chinese migrants that came over to try their luck, robbing them of legitimate land and businesses. That sort of racism wasn't at all unique back then; it pervades today but it isn't typically as blatant anymore.

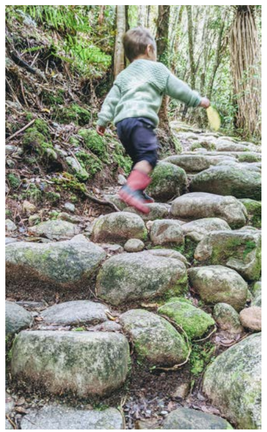
It was comforting for Priscilla to read those stories of the early Chinese migrants; re-scouring mines the Europeans had abandoned, using new techniques to extract more gold from them—that'd annoy anyone. Many of them went on to earn hard-won respect through market gardening, importing, and tailoring.

None of this interested Max of course; it is painful being a kid while your parents read *every* word of the information boards.

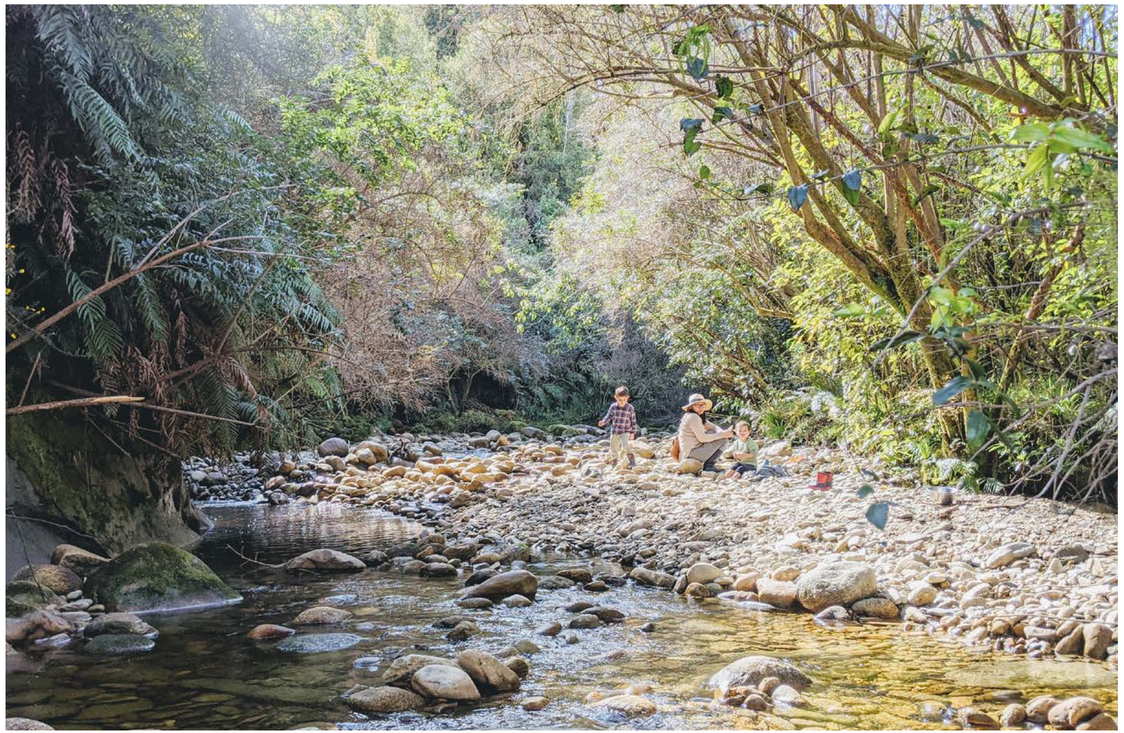
Minecraft

It's hardly boom times but it was still fun to give the panning a go. I did mention that I could live here and happily pan each day. Strangely enough there's been a significant rise in gold panning chancers since COVID.





With a packed lunch we wandered up the peaceful river and we (me) made a good go of it.



She's hard yakka mate.

You're doing it wrong mum.

Just using your hands?

We can't say we came away better off financially, not even for an op shop splurge, but better off mentally... and gastronomically.

Best. Burger. Ever.

Open only for a few hours a few days a week, Prospectors, makers of the best burgers this side of The Divide, and the best I've ever had.

A Nigel reviewing so I don't have to:

And thank you to a David too:

That fine line between stupid and worth it, Arthur's Pass

20 SEPTEMBER 2020

Having finished our stint in Fox River and Kumara (with a feeling of contentment that has us looking at land out that way) it was time to cross The Divide toward Christchurch.

The weather through Arthur's Pass was forecast to get really sketchy—snowfalls, rising river levels, and extreme gales—but we thought the time was now to get ahead of it and hunker down somewhere in the middle. Because, all going well we would wake up to a snow dump all around us.

We got to the Otira Stagecoach Hotel and figured we could stay there a night and assess the new forecast in the morning.

The "bar": an unusual museum collection of historic paraphernalia.

BUT, the bar was closed/open-to-hotel-guests-only, they wanted to charge $20 to use the carpark, and the nail in the coffin... they served "**the worst fluffy ever**" according to Max, and agreed by us.

A detour to Lake Brunner

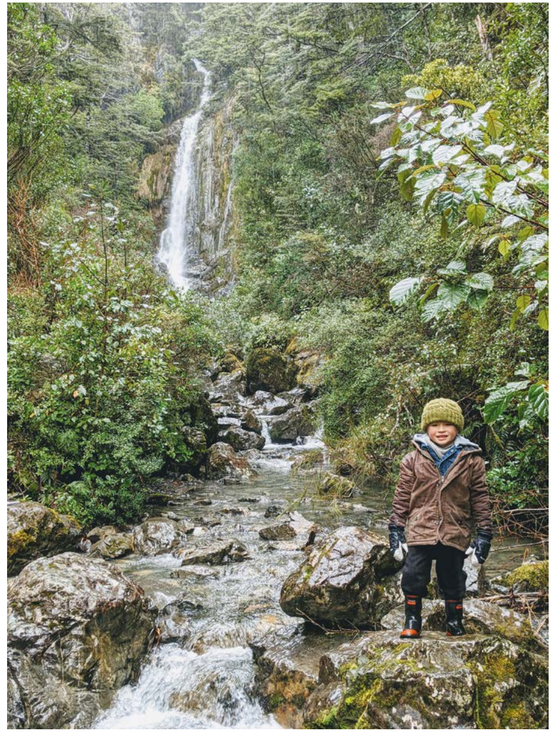
So we packed up, hooked up, and turned back, deciding to go all the way back and up to Lake Brunner for three windy wet days of nothing much.

Highlights of our stay at Lake Brunner.

Gunning it

We picked our day to get back into Arthur's Pass. We let the most blizzardy day pass (albeit missing out on 25cm of fresh snow) and set off.

My biggest concern was the wind broadsiding the caravan while driving. But we entered around the eye of the storm so it was all ok!



We had a short stop in the Arthur's Pass village. Some were more into it than others.

Into it. Not into it.

Planting our feet

We setup camp, and hoped for the best.

What the photos don't show was how bloody windy it was!

Looking a bit ominous in hindsight.

We settled in for the remains of the day. The noise of the gale winds bashing the caravan was kinda tolerable in daylight, a bit of a thrill even.

During the night, not so much fun. Less thrilling, more terrifying.

Pitch black, you could hear the next "severe gale force wind" coming down the valley, through the trees and then...

Max and Tom slept like lumps through it all as normal but there was no sleep for Priscilla and me, quietly playing out worst case scenarios in our heads, like being blown over or worse, blown apart.

The worst of the wind was forecast to be passing, but in the night each time it hit we're thinking:

"Was that the worst?"

"Is that a 120km/hr wind?"

"What's a 120km/hr wind supposed to feel like?"

By daylight we assessed what to do, and checked whether the caravan was holding up.

Still rough out there, and now the river is rising!

There's no way we could get any sleep again if this time we're thinking about the river flooding too. DOC ranger said nah, ***worst should*** be through, won't rise ***much***, should be fine.

"What does worst *mean?"*

"What is should*?"*

"What is much*?"*

But there was also a sign from above.

It'll be worth it!

Perseverance

We thought if we moved back in closer to the hill, not too close mind, then we'll get some shelter for the night, and the next day would be worth it, and

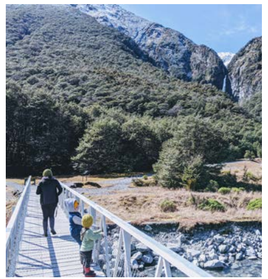
Stoked! C'mon Max, Tom, let's get out there!

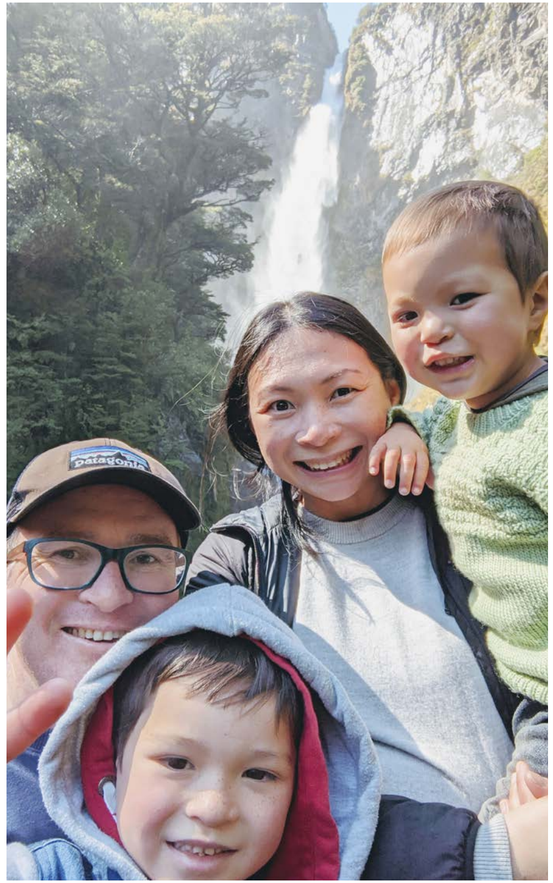
Just a glorious, photo-crazy day.

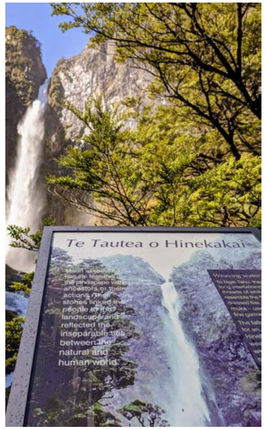
Using it while it lasts

Another wave of average weather was on its way so we went back into the village for some sightseeing.

Love the cheeky kea.







I finished off the day with a short memorable ride along the Waimakariri River.

Being among the mountains is just so grounding; I need that feeling of being simultaneously tiny, insignificant, a speck in time, while being at one with the land.

It's no wonder I feel the urge to find some land among the mountains to (eventually) see out my days.

Lessons at Broken River

20 SEPTEMBER 2020

Prologue

When you're making a lot of decisions, or last minute decisions, you're going to make some bad ones.

How often do you hear "we need more spontaneity"? And those with plenty of it hearing "we need more planning". So even with balance, we make mistakes.

Live and learn.

One of those days

Before arriving at our campsite at Lake Pearson, I realized we were going to be near three ski club fields.

Lake Pearson DOC campsite.

On the morning of the mission, I had just enough connectivity at a high point to know Craigieburn Valley was closed for the season, Broken River was open and all-a-go, and Mt Cheeseman said carry chains at all times.

So I decided we should go to Broken River.

A lesson: when you have good connectivity do as much research as possible as the next stop may have next-to-none. Include in your research: is this child-friendly?

Leg One: On the way up

So far, so stunning. The drive up through the alpine forest on the narrow one-way road is beautiful, quite special. The car park is small, maybe 50 vehicles, but we managed to squeeze into the gutter.

Leg Two: And UP!

After the expected, but still patience-testing, 30-minute rigmarole of suiting everyone up, we took the Tyndall Tramway up to the ticket office.

WOW! The ride is more breath-taking than the gondola in Rotorua and Queenstown.

Steeper and creakier than the Hong Kong one!

Don't look down Priscilla.

Leg Three: A little walk

The nice lady at the ticket office seemed a little anxious to get up the mountain herself; we realised we had just caught the last morning tram up (didn't absorb that it ran a couple of hours in the morning and a couple of hours in the afternoon, refer earlier lesson).

I bought a riding pass for me, a non-riding pass for Priscilla, and Max and Tom were free.

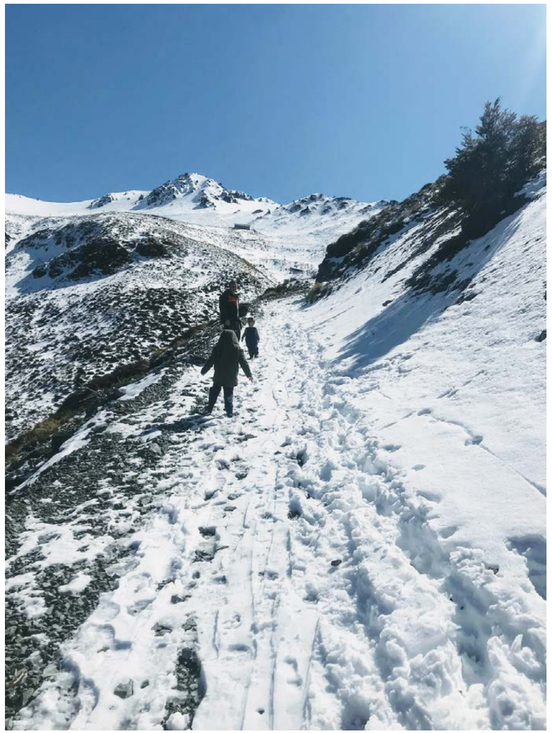
The ticket lady's final passing comment was:

"There is a little walk up the hill for you."

"What's little with these two?"

"About 20 minutes"

OK, we're here, it's fine, we can handle it, no problem.



Gumboots not fit for purpose.

Well a bit of a problem with a tired Tom and Max in slippery gumboots, but I saw it as a challenge with a reward.

Leg Four: I don't think so

The end of that 40-minute walk wasn't the base to relax at after all. Just a shed and the start of the first rope tow.

I knew it was rope tows, I'd done it before and was up for it.

But I didn't know that rope tow now needed catching to get to the lodge, food, shelter, view, and toilets.

A kind local called out:

"Can you snowboard?"

"Yeah"

"Are you a confident boarder?"

"Yeah, I suppose so"

"Used nutcrackers before?"

"Yeah, 15 years ago"

"OK, I'll give you hand to get going, I'll take your two boys up on my back, and your partner needs to get up there and walk that track to the lodge, about 30-40 minutes"

"Uh, we'll have our lunch and think about it"

Max had a bit of a play on a small snow hill, he was having fun, even though his gumboots were filling up with snow. Tom was starting to fall asleep and saying he wanted to go home. Priscilla had the look I'd seen before.

After some back and forth on whether I should go up and have a run, I said **no, you can't sit here in this corner with Tom asleep, and needing to go to the toilet while I board.**

Leg Five: The descent

We took the 30-minute walk back down to the ticket office. Tom now asleep hanging off my arm, snowboard in the other, Priscilla helping Max in his slippery gumboots.

As expected the Tramway was now closed until later in the afternoon. Leaving our only choice to walk the steep zig-zag road back down to the car park.

Nice view but.

Sore legs, boots off, hardly impressed.

Not nice walking downhill in snowboard boots.

Help a brother out.

Leg Six: The quiet drive home

I congratulated everyone for their efforts: not a grizzle, just stoically drudged downhill for an hour, one sore foot in front of the other.

I was bloody proud of 'em. Tom still finding a smile.

I tried a few niceties on the drive down: my pride in them, Max still saying it was good, learning from failure. Didn't really work.

Even so, I at least had a sense of acceptance and satisfaction. I was immensely proud of Max and Tom for the way they managed the $75 ordeal.

I've spent $75 on worse dining experiences.

Epilogue

Go fly a kite

When we got back to the caravan, Max and I stayed outside and practiced our kite flying.

The kite was flying chaotically well in the strong wind until that wind literally blew it to bits. We had a huge laugh with the flying success and the creative destruction.

Seeing life as a stomach half full

Then cooking at the end of the day, at the end of the shopping week, and without much planning, I produced a frittata that, depending on how you look at it, either had too much filling or not enough eggs. I said sorry.

Without a note of sympathy, Max said "it still tastes good Dad".

With half left he asked "is there more in the pan?"

Max powered through the rest and had seconds.

RIP Goldie

30 SEPTEMBER 2020

We're very sad to say that we lost the baby last week.

Stillborn at 21 weeks, 200 grams, 21 cm.

It was a tough week. We had a scheduled regular scan in Christchurch—along with Max and Tom, and my mum and dad who happened to be in Christchurch—but discovered there was no heartbeat.

Priscilla had had some uncertainties since the pregnancy was regarded as increased risk and we had travelled to Auckland for diagnostic tests. Even though those tests came back all OK.

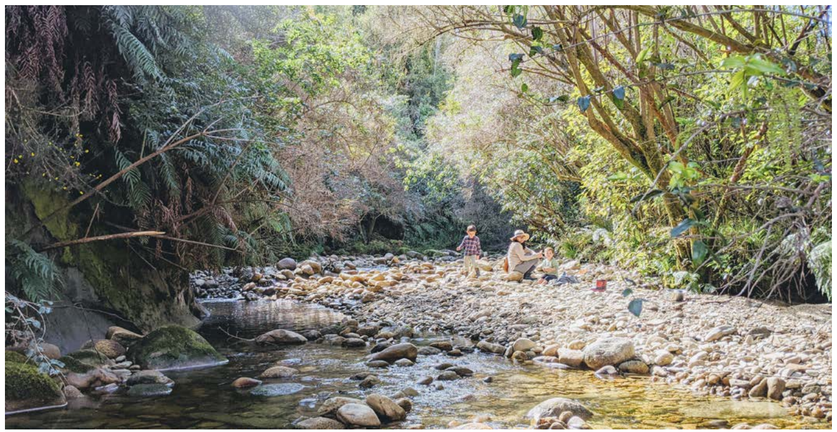
For those that are sadly familiar, it has meant Priscilla has since gone through an induced labour and all the pain, complications, and anguish that goes with that. Much of the grief poured out through that process and the blessing the following day.

We were so very well looked after by all the staff at Christchurch Women's Hospital; we're so lucky to have such great care in New Zealand.

Goldie

We named the boy Goldie.

While gold panning at Goldsborough.



We think we lost him while at gold mining sites on the West Coast. We'll get back over there one day to scatter Goldie's ashes.

It just wasn't meant to be this time.

Thank you dearly for all the love and support. See you out there.

Hooray for Ben, Christchurch

12 OCTOBER 2020

So good!

After the shock of losing Goldie, we were really fortunate to be able to spend a couple of weeks at the house of my brother Mark, his wife Paula, and their son Ben in Christchurch.

We've mentioned Ben a few times.

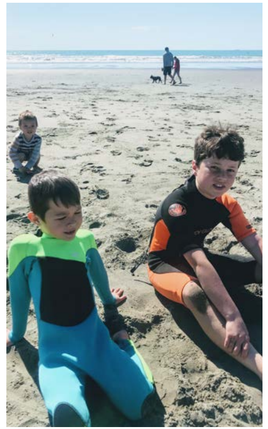
For Max, visiting cousin Ben was the whole point of Sea Change. And it didn't disappoint.

Even when it was just waiting around for the grandparents.

It was for great for Ben to play big brother for a couple of weeks. Or at least, it was great for Max and Tom to have a big brother. Even though Max barely stops talking, Ben showed his trademark patience and care.

What a good sort!

Fanboy, after Ben's final game.



Allan Idol.

Working together.

Willowbank.

Even managed to finally get a real day skiing and boarding up Mt Hutt.

First time for Max and loving it, helped in part by a desire to be like Ben.

Lounging around.

Best food buddies.

It was the ideal tonic to have Max and Tom happily occupied, giving Priscilla and me some room for reflection.

Recalling, Tom looking like all of us on the way to the hospital to see mum.

But we have to say, the shoulders do come down once we get back on the road and we no longer need to worry about Max and Tom breaking anything, staining anything, or any of us distracting or annoying anyone.

We return to our little meandering travel bubble, and Max and Tom rediscover their old table manners.

Recharging and rebooting, Peel Forest & Temuka

20 OCTOBER 2020

Peel Forest was the ideal place to get in the groove of being on the move again.

Mainly because while it's a DOC campground, it's more like an old-school proper campground. It's "free" for us as annual DOC pass holders, and with that comes power, water, hot showers, toilets, and a shared kitchen.

And in a lovely touch of New Zealand, volunteers live on site and serve as camp hosts; inviting us in, helping us get settled, and looking out for us throughout our stay.

The lovely camp host couple's residence.

The area's a great place for walks long and short. Still, five days there was probably more than enough for us as Max and Tom need to be bigger, faster, stronger before we can attack the 3-hour+ walks.

Enjoying the freedom feeling again.

Determined to fish

I've felt at times on this Sea Change that it's been a bit of a sampler, that we're observing places without the full appreciation of participating.

So I took Max to the fishing shop and we got us a rod and reel that can hopefully serve us on the rivers, lakes, and also the seashore. (In reality, it's probably a poor compromise like most "general purpose" tools are, **but I could hardly get hundreds of dollars of specialist kit through the finance dept.**)

While not really knowing anything about river fishing, and with lures from the Warehouse—being the only place open on a Sunday in the provinces—and with a freshly minted license and a read of the fishing regulations, we made an afternoon of it on the Rangitata river.

As expected, a solid fail on the first day.

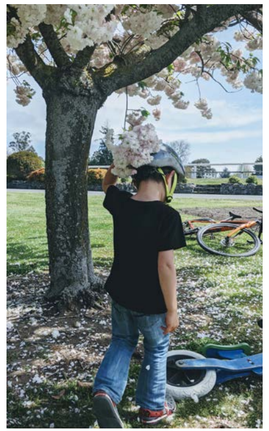
Max and I assessed what wasn't working and tried again just after sunrise.

After another solid fail—the river flow was way too strong, quickly pushing our tackle out to the river's edge—we decided we'll try again when staying at a better river spot.

Meanwhile

We caught up with our road.life.nz friends again at Peel Forest and did a nice Big Tree Walk together.

Big Tree Walk, Peel Forest.



On to Temuka

Priscilla is already on to me that the places I recommend we park now are coincidentally near known fishing spots.

So we had a quiet couple of days in Temuka at a humble holiday park overlooking a big open field perfect for ball kicking, kite flying, paper plane throwing, and bike riding in the domain.

There was the strangest of hedges nearby where local kids must have, over time, carved out its insides, allowing them to hide and pop out the top.

I had to get this...

Back to the fishing

Max and I took another early start down to a known fishing spot.

I'd been there the morning before; I could see the trout, I just could not get near the trout.

But on this day I had a new rig plan.

It was another solid fail and I seemed to be now over-complicating the setup.

This was confirmed the next day when, before we left Temuka, I visited the local fishing store.

I was overwhelmed by information in the space of five minutes by the super-fisher owner. But the end result was three lures he recommends depending on where and what you're after; just tie one on the end of your line, and cast and return, cast and return.

Now, where should we park up next Priscilla?

Throwing things in the water and winding them back in

29 OCTOBER 2020

It seems premature to call it fishing when the closest we've gotten so far is being *gifted* a trout by a lovely Chinese couple I befriended on the lakefront.

My first fresh lake-side trout... given to me by some generous locals.

But it has been a helpful steer for finding sweet parking spots.

Lake Opuha

After trying the new rod and getting some tips in Temuka, we drove on to little Lake Opuha north of Fairlie.

There are fish in there, there MUST be.

Max already seeking fishing advice elsewhere. (That's not me.)

Feeling at home at Lake Opuha.

It turned out to be a really easy-going few days (parking spots have a major impact on the chill-factor of Max and Tom) with us all comfortably spilling out of the caravan and into the sun.

Probably haven't felt this since Kaiaua Bay.

I was able to throw the line out for hours a day (thank you Priscilla, thank you Max and Tom for occupying yourselves).

Fishing is all about where not what anyway right?

FISHING DETAIL: The kind couple that gifted me the trout also gifted me some of the prawns they were using as bait. I gave that a good go, and got a few early bites, but my wrongly-shaped (I later learned) sinkers were regularly snagging on the stones. So while it looked like I kept hooking the big one, I was really only trying in vain to loosen the tackle.

Fish caught: 0

Contentment: 5/10

FISHING DETAIL: Then with lures, all I pulled in was weeds. That and still snagging on stones. And so became my first freshwater fishing challenge: judging water depth for casting and returning so your lure drops down to just above the bottom (where the trout supposedly are) before winding in, and winding in at a rate that doesn't pull the lure to the surface.

Fish caught: 0

Contentment: 7/10

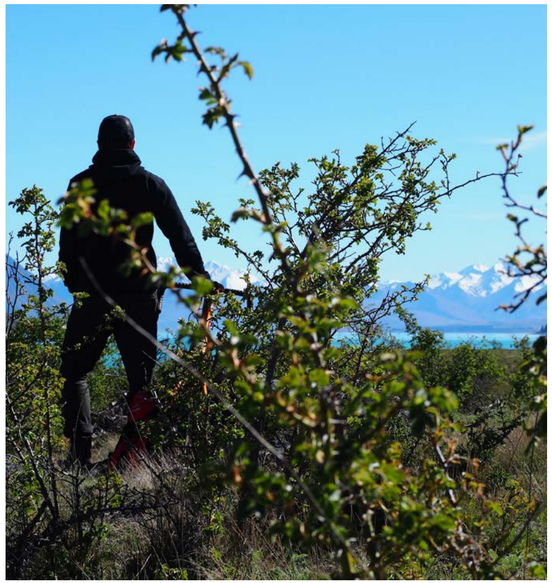
Onwards and downwards.

Lake Tekapo

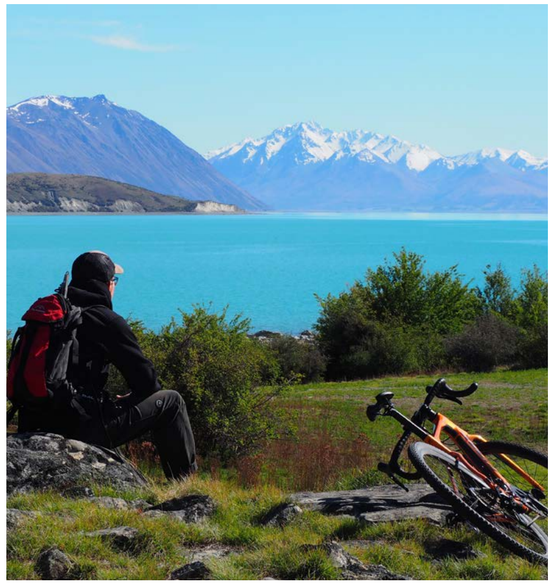
Not much is left to be said about Lake Tekapo. It is glorious no matter how many times you've visited. As NZMCA members we are lucky enough to be able to stay lake-side for the tidy sum of $6 a night.

View from the park back to town.

Lake Tekapo isn't much of a lake-side fishing lake, but that didn't stop me heading out for some exercise and glory shots.



Feeling lucky.



It's when I couldn't help think about "Is this life? Or a break from it?" again.

But who really cares!

Again, surely fishing is about the where not the what, right?

Fish caught: 0

Contentment: 8/10

And yeah, I got no salmon, but...

We got even better, beautifully sashimi'ed Salmon at Kohan, the best view-while-eating-salmon-don in the country.

A Tekapo must-stop every time.

Lake Wardel, Pukaki

Lake Pukaki is even more glorious than Lake Tekapo. But the free parking spot was too exposed to the wind. Years ago, Priscilla, me, and her family had also spent a special time at a station halfway up Lake Pukaki shortly after we married.

Lake Pukaki, 7 years earlier.

And anyway, it's the nearby canals where the fishing action's at. So we parked at a great free/donation camping spot at Lake Wardel right alongside one of the Ohau Canals.

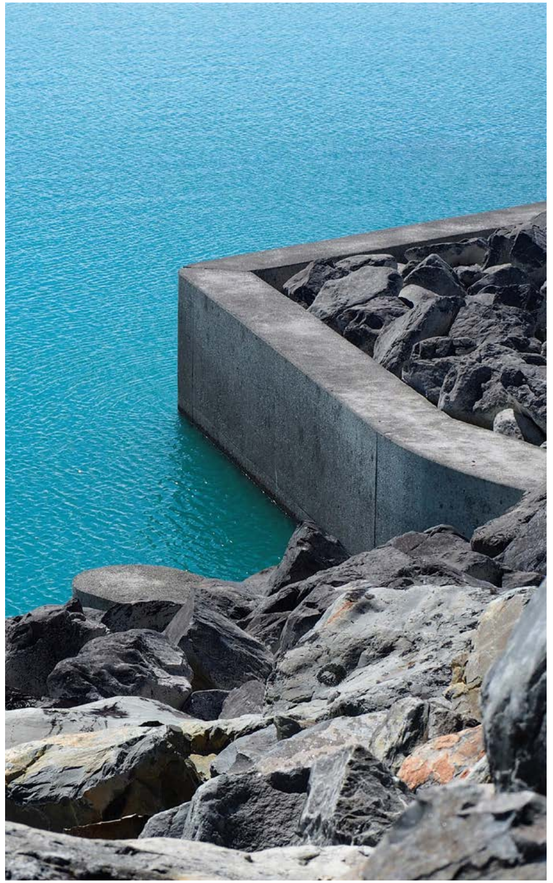
It's a place where you can let yourself go, so-to-speak, without worrying about what a nosey neighbour thinks of your washing...

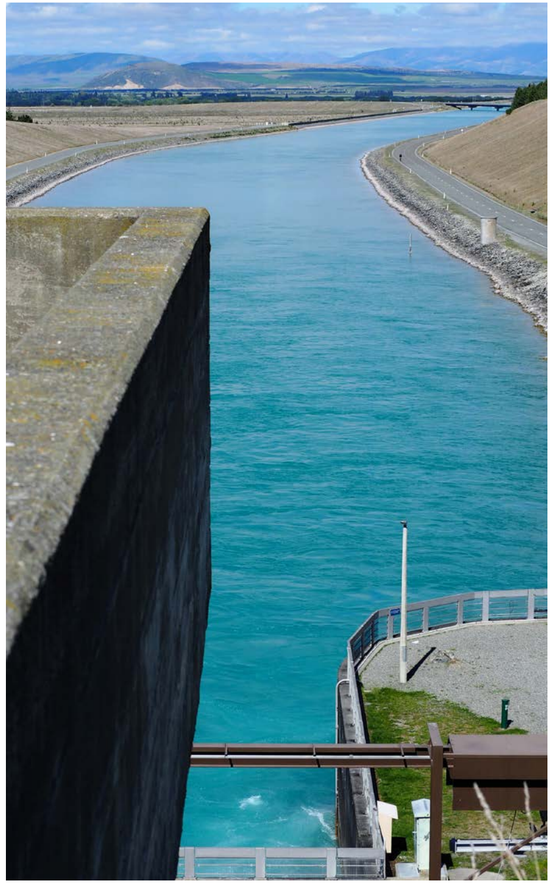
Spilling out at Lake Wardel.

The weather was a bit wet and grey during our few days there, but Max and Tom never seem to mind.

The sun and sky makes a huge difference to the spectacle of the water round these parts. So it can look dreary like previous, then back in blue below.

Getting drier the further south we go.





Lake Pukaki.

FISHING DETAIL: As for the canal fishing. I got plenty in, but got nothing in. More snagging on the weeds and rocks. And I couldn't say well, the fish just ain't out there today. I spoke to the mate of this guy on the day he caught it!

Those same regulars also gave me some more tips. It usually goes a bit like this:

"This is the lure you need along here—the booby—make sure it's a black booby, the black booby works best here."

"Well, though I did pull in that big salmon today on a pink booby."

"Yeah you did, well who bloody knows really, some days you're lucky, some you aren't."

And like everyone we meet, they're as generous as ever, insisting:

"You must take this lure with you, and I want you to put this sinker on and use it tomorrow. Tie it like this."

Fish caught: 0

Contentment: 8/10

Twizel, briefly

One last thing, in Twizel is the best. store. ever. Jake's Hardware. I love these everything hardware stores, built up as the go-to for a whole community.

It is JAMMED full!

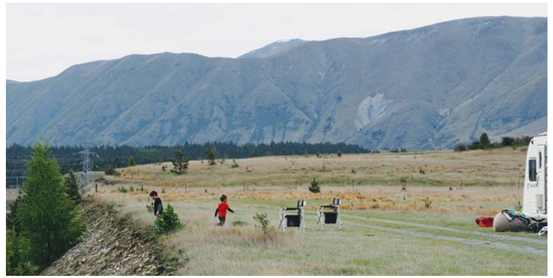
Lake Ruataniwha

Next stop was another very peaceful few days at Lake Ruataniwha. There's a free parking spot overlooking the lake, plus there's another canal just over the back.

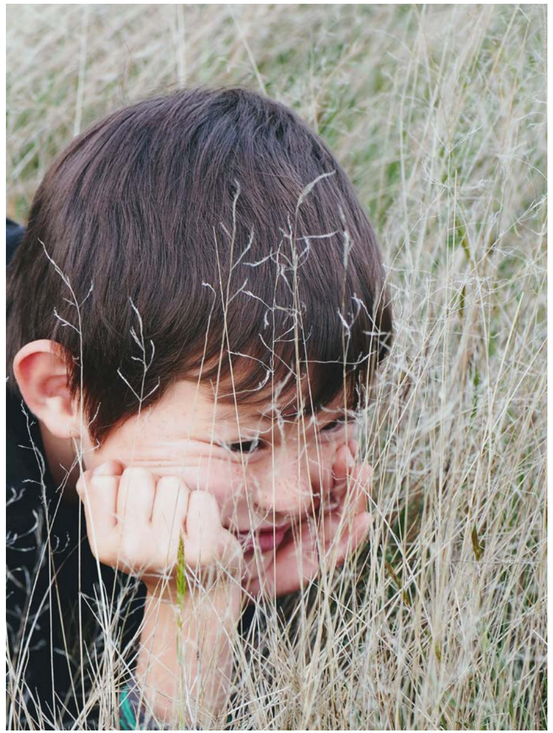
Lake Ruataniwha is one of these man-made lakes, an outcome of the major dam projects in the 1970's. I reckon greenies (and I'm one) need to dial back the anti-hydro stance. We've got to install more hydro power in New Zealand. Sure the initial ecological damage isn't pleasant, but look how beautifully the scarring heals over. Just get on with it.

If this is what you get out the back of a hydro scheme, I'll take it.

Can't complain with having another
place to ourselves either.



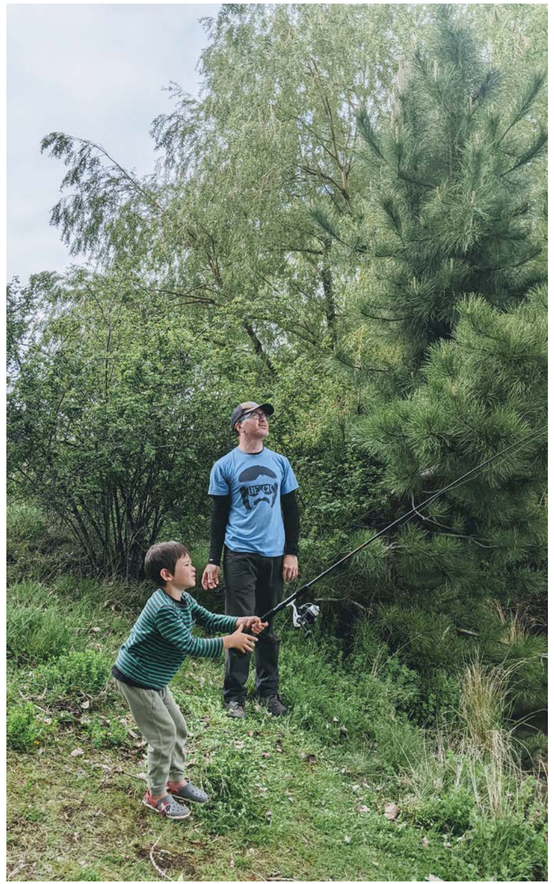
The wide open spaces ground Max and Tom.



FISHING DETAIL: I couldn't find many spots lake-side; the spot I found brought a new hazard, overhead trees! I was able to try out some rig setups based on the advice I got at Lake Wardel. But really it was all getting a bit complicated and tangly adding floaters and T-joins. On the bright side it was also time for Max's turn and I was able to teach him how to cast.

Fish caught: 0

Contentment: 5/10



Ah, now we're snagging foliage above us!

FISHING DETAIL: After that failure, I decided to squeeze in a quick fish after dinner, up at the canal by the dam. With the sun setting I took it back-to-basics with just a spin lure on the end of the line.

Cast and return, cast and return.

Fish caught: 0

Contentment: 8/10

The dam at Lake Ruataniwha.

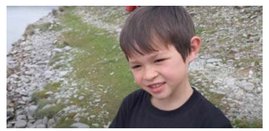
One more go before we leave the region

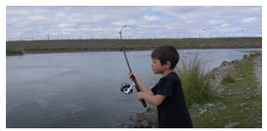
A fresh new day and Max and I take off on the bike and trailer to a new spot near a Salmon fishery where two canals join.

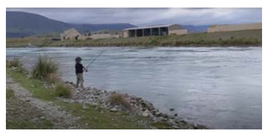
It goes without saying at this point...

Fish caught: 0

But, on the other hand...







Contentment: 9/10!
(Only 1 left for an actual fish.)

Bonus scenery! Clay Cliffs, Ōmarama

01 NOVEMBER 2020

We'd just spent a couple of weeks in Mackenzie Country alongside that stunning set of turquoise lakes and canals. And #humblebrag alert, I was running the risk of NZ's equivalent of temple fatigue. Maybe I was just fed up with not being fed up to the gills with fresh trout from the end of my line.

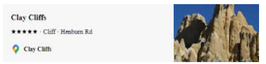
Before travelling through Lindis Pass, we overnighted in a nondescript DOC camp outside Ōmarama.

Land on which to park. With bonus wild mint alongside the nearby river, used to craft-ize my Double Brown.

Fortunately we'd gotten a hot tip from our good friends Chiaki and Kengo.

Chiaki and Kengo, 13 years earlier.

Chiaki and Kengo also shared some photos of Clay Cliffs. And now so will I to make sure you visit them too when next doing the Christchurch-Tekapo-Queenstown run.



They'd recently done the fancy Ōmarama hot tubs.

But they're a holiday splurge and out of our reach, both in terms of price and ability to "soak in the view" with Max and Tom doing cannonballs.

It's $10 to drive over a private road that takes you right up to the base of the cliffs. Totally not a holiday indulgence with young children.

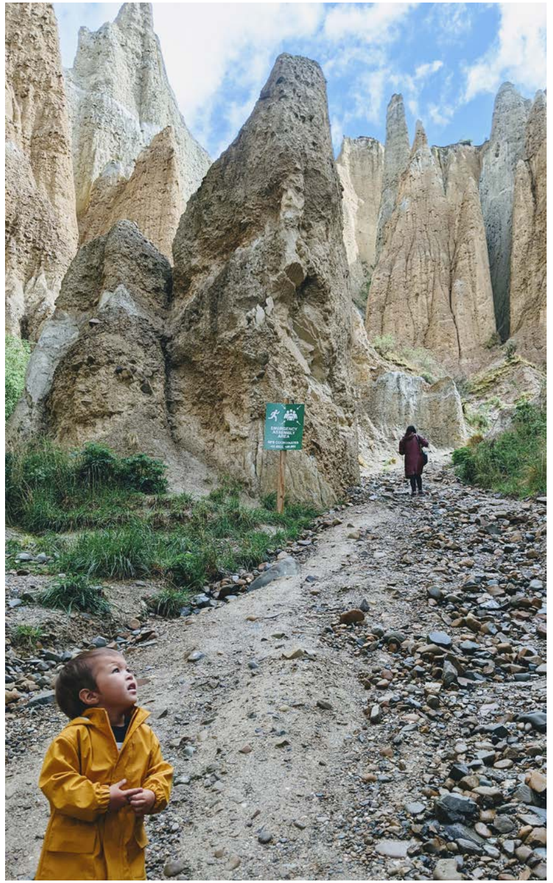
Especially given Tom's not the most enthusiastic walker.

FULLTIME HOLIDAY SIDENOTE: I get that it looks like we're on a permanent holiday. But when you're on holiday you have that nice beer, that flat white, that steak, that spa, that macca's, that wine tasting, that thrill ride... when you're fulltime living in a caravan you drool in the beer aisle each week thinking one day I'll have a $4 can of beer, you window-shop café menus, you worry about the $10 you blew at the op shop on a pair of shoes, you carry your family's poos and wees to a drain every few days, you check if you have power to charge a phone, and you don't have hot water in a tap. OK, I get that you're still not convinced, so carrying on...

OK I'll do it, but I don't have to like it.

Heading in.

Pausing for rock and plant examinations.

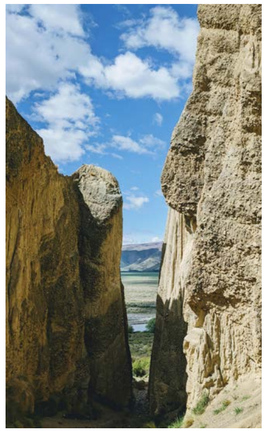


Bird watching. (Regular old pigeons nest in here.)

Up in there, but quite hard to photograph the 360-degree feeling of it.

We loved it here, a bit of a hidden gem (though quite obvious from a distance on the state highway). It has a quiet, surreal, out-of-NZ feeling. Our little Cappadocia.

Tom's still an unenthusiastic walker but.



Bend it like Bendigo, Lake Dunstan & Cromwell

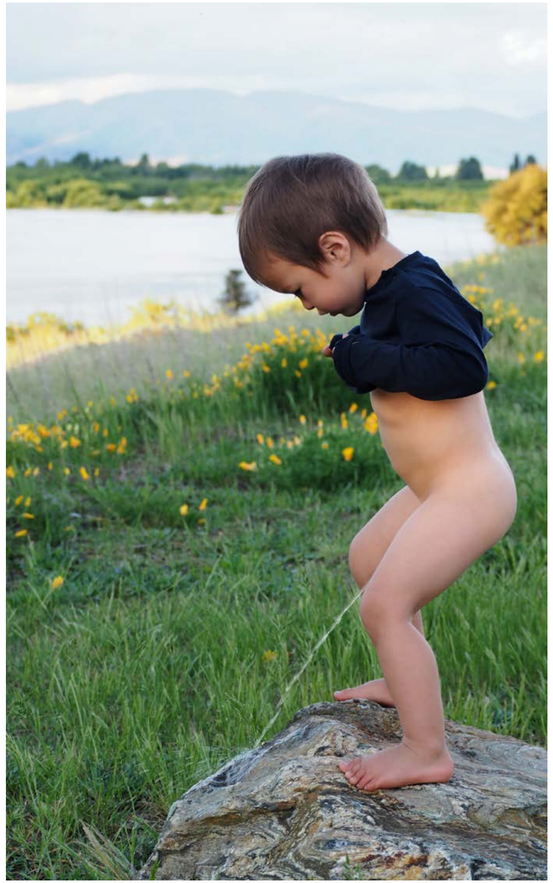
08 NOVEMBER 2020

Bendigo

Bad puns aside, Bendigo was one of the more beautiful free parking spots. What a privilege to have places like this to stay.

And as luck would have it, the next day, right in front of us, was the the annual Cromwell to Wanaka jet boat race.

A locked toilet about the only downside!



There's a short sharp walk across the road up to Mt Koinga. I charged up there to get the view and earn a Double Brown.

Thank you council for the parking spot! You must be re-thinking the closure of it now that all the soiling backpackers have been COVID'ed out of here! Even then it was a great service for those seasonal workers given the state of rental accommodation in the area.

Cromwell

Cromwell's a bit of an unusual place. It's "modern" town centre is a throwback to the progressive planning ideas of the '60's. Which today makes it look a bit like a tired old open-air mall, albeit pedestrian-friendly, with an odd collection of stores holding on.

There is giant fruit and a playground on the edge at least.

Meanwhile it's seeing major property growth spilling over from Queenstown, plus the trendy establishment of boutique cherry orchard lifestyle properties. There's a rush on to get a piece of that Chinese cherry money! Picking up the property pages, it's a tempting proposition.

And then there's the old quarter (well, there's half left following the damming of the Clutha) that feels a little too facade-y and touristy compared to say Clyde.

Still neat without a doubt.

A weekend's worth of treat.

I suppose I could live on a few hectares of cherries here.

Speights for Christmas

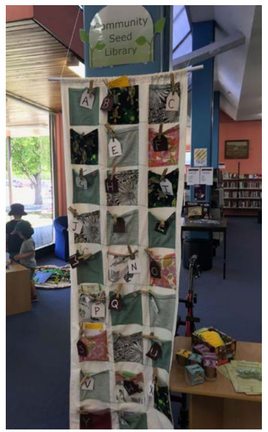
15 NOVEMBER 2020

We've decided to hang around Otago for the next couple of months to pick up some seasonal work. It'll help out with our required plan, since the bank won't allow us to have the Auckland house rent cover the mortgage. (See: "Is this life? Or a break from it?")

Priscilla's doing the first draft—walk-in-the-park apple thinning—and I'll do the second stint in the new year—contract-rate cherry picking pain.

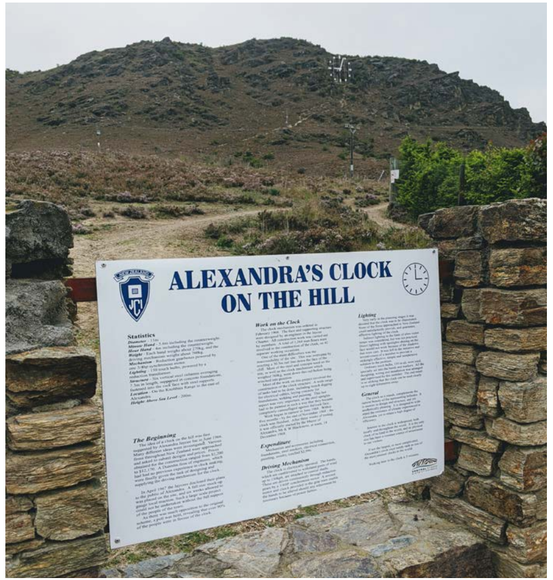
The fruit-picking worker situation is pretty dire down here; it's arguable who needs the work more, the growers or us! I reckon it is more complex than just "we need to let the Vanu's back in" when you wonder why has this work become so unattractive (unviable?) for NZers.

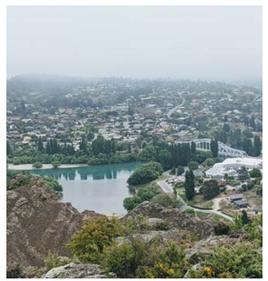
We'll be living in and around Alexandra for now, which is an active, green (and warm!) little town.



We'll probably bounce around a handful of free and low cost parking spots, depending on how over packing up and packing down I get. It's fine when we're packing up to move on to a new place, less motivating when in a 10km circle.

We've been over the Shaky Bridge and done the Hollywood sign-style Clock on the Hill. You can get a feeling for how warm it'll get, already the photos look deserty!





Different wild foliage round these parts.

And I'm scoping out this property for sale, I've got ideas, though it may be out of reach, stay tuned!

It'll be an interesting Christmas; I've opshopped a tree and decorations with Max, might even splash out on a Speights Distinction Ale.

When your new neighbour's butane heater explodes on him

16 NOVEMBER 2020

We arrived at a very humble parking spot today in preparation for work tomorrow. A sort of seasonal worker lodging slash permanent mobile resident holding. We've got a nice sunny spot among the trees, next to a couple of quiet companions parked next to each other with their little dogs.

You would never expect to end your day hosing down a man's serious burns to his arms, hands, legs and face as St John's workers help with pain relief and wait for the airlift to arrive for Dunedin hospital.

Oh woah.

The poor bloke. He was freezing from all the water, in excruciating pain, pleading for his brother to arrive. Amazingly just keeping the shock at bay.

That smell of burnt peeling skin and hair, coupled with his anguish and quiet cries for his brother, and his lurches when I tried watering another spot. To be honest I could barely hold it together and in the end had to step away for a breather before I fainted or threw up.

Apparently he had a little butane gas heater, and we're not sure but sounds like he was adjusting it or trying to fix it or something.

I heard a crash from our caravan and saw him run around the bus with no pants on. My first thought was what quirky little part of NZ have we ended up in. But then could see his companion Angela dousing him with her fire extinguisher, then a hose, and then she was on the phone to 111.

St John's arrived in about 7 minutes, as great as ever. Because all his facial hair and nose had been burned they couldn't know how serious things were internally. Hence the airlift straight to Dunedin after about 20 minutes of watering him down.

Oh the poor bloke.

His brother arrived in time to see him. And Angela drove straight to Dunedin with their dogs.

If you're travelling in New Zealand, just don't be an A...

23 DECEMBER 2020

...Aucklander.

One of the best things about having lived in Alexandra for the last six weeks is I have an acceptable answer to the question: "Where are you from?"

Before:

[enjoyable chit chat], then;

"So mate, where are you from?"

*"Ah yeah, I uh, grew up in Gisborne... but I've been working up in Auckland for the last 20 years"**

"Oh ok"

[bit of a chill in the air]

* That answer has tested to be more successful than a straight up "I'm from Auckland"

After:

[enjoyable chit chat], then;

"So mate, where are you from?"

"I'm living in Alex"

"Nice, what are you up to?"

[enjoyable chit chat continues, friendship ensues]

20 NEWS
The News, December 17, 2020

Summer reading . . . Visiting the Alexandra Library to pick up forms for the summer reading challenge last week are Ian Allan and his sons Tom (centre, 2) and Max (5). PHOTO: ALEXIA JOHNSTON

See, I'm from Alex.

C'mon rest of New Zealand

It's like the long history of New Zealanders angsting over Australians while they just look over, shrug, and get on with life.

So Christchurch, Fielding, Napier, Nelson, Wellington, Twizel, Temuka, be the bigger brother for a change! Appreciate the fact that your fellow kiwi is visiting, relaxing, loving, and spending in your beloved part of New Zealand.

We can't do much about the fact that a third of us live in Auckland. (And it's likely we're not "from" Auckland.) We don't all love being there all the time, but we get jobs there, we get crippling mortgage debt there, we try to make good of it, just like you do in Geraldine, Foxton, and Timaru.

We love-hate the traffic there, the $13 viaduct Asahi's, the endless property talk, the twats in their Hosking jackets. And we do that so you don't have to.

I don't need to get into everything that's pretty effing great about Auckland. You already tend to really enjoy your visits, and see and do things you can't do in the rest of New Zealand. And you can go home yawning "I'm just glad I don't have to live there, oh the traffic...".

We're just as proud of all the beautiful corners of our country. And living in our international gateway, we wax lyrical about it every chance we get. Heck, sometimes we even get the chance to visit ourselves.

So next time when the answer to your question is "I'm from Auckland", try saying "Nice one, great to see you." Followed by "you have to have a beer here, go for a ride here, check this local spot, and then visit our neighbours over there."

If you don't, we'll just come and buy all your houses anyway.

A parking spot photo story, Alexandra-Clyde

25 JANUARY 2021

I did a loop around our parking spot to take some photos with Max and Tom. We're parked on a property in-between Alexandra and Clyde. It's where we've been living on and off since November while Priscilla works in the orchards.

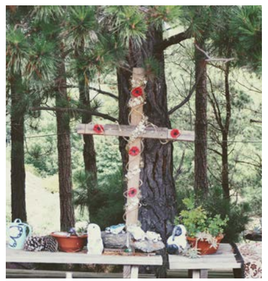
As an exercise, it didn't turn out as expected

When I think of this place I usually think:

- Hot, bright, and sunny
- The sound of Max and Tom's constant natter
- Them playing outside, throwing paper planes, riding bikes in the sun
- Countless chooks and turkeys calling out to anyone who'll listen
- People coming and going to work in their vehicles
- Little chicks following their mums, and pheasant duo's darting across the grounds
- The happy pig snorting for attention (food)
- The quiet sprinkle of the irrigation
- Chatting with the salt-of-the-earth gardener, and getting given produce
- Talking with the lovely owners, they're the best
- And regularly taking off on adventures around Alex and Clyde on the bike-and-trailer or truck

A melancholy lens on home

In 4pm light on an overcast day, and toning down the colour, a walk around felt melancholy, like we'd discovered somewhere that, save for the birds, had been hurriedly abandoned.



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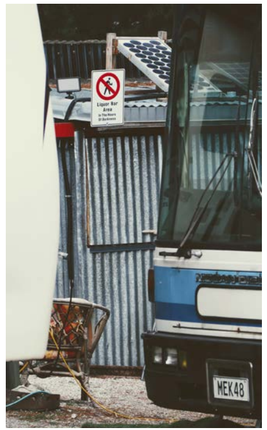
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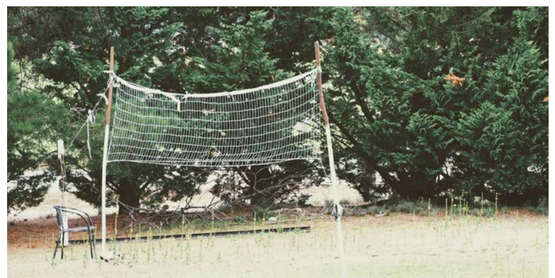


And hey please, don't send help,
we're fine!

Haere Rā Central Otago, Part 1: Keeping Max and Tom busy at and around home.

20 FEBRUARY 2021

After three months in Alexandra (just like that) it's time to say bye for now. Thanks for having us!

I haven't been posting much while here even though we've stayed put for so long. I don't have the busy travelling excuse or the no connectivity excuse. I mostly have the Max-and-Tom-don't-go-to-sleep-in-the-southern-light-until-10pm-and-I'm-braindead-by-then excuse. Or the we've-blasted-through-our-mobile-data-for-the-month-in-the-first-week-and-now-we're-on-the-go-slow-and-it's-too-maddening excuse.

Here's a round-up of our time here. It's as much a record for us but some of you may enjoy seeing Max and Tom kept occupied, and for others there are some decent scenes.

Pyle's Camp

Our base has been the superbly humble "Pyle's Camp"/"Lyngveien" property in between Alexandra and Clyde, right about there on the map.

It's definitely been all good since our hairy start!

It's owned by the gentle giant owner Derek Pyle, a former pastor from up north, and his lovely caring wife Andrea. Derek arrived some 20 years ago and saw a need for fair seasonal worker accommodation. So he turned the large chicken barn into accommodation. And apart from their home, the rest of the sprawling property houses people like us living in caravans, buses, lean-to's, some of which have been there about as long as Derek! The place and Andrea and Derek have been so great to us.

Home. The crap Warehouse sunshade lasted all of three days before collapsing under a breeze.

Clutha Boys, Max and Tom

Max and Tom have enjoyed their simple outdoorsy life at our base and around Alex. Mind you, Max has mentioned he's happy to be moving on as he's "running out of things to do around here" (I think he's parroting me from a challenging fathering day!) And I'll accept Max's motivation to wear his watch each day and learn the time is so he can know when it's 4pm (screen time).

My kingdom.

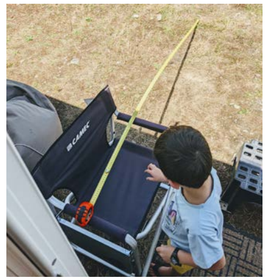
Fishing spot 1 minute from town.

When we try fishing, Tom has an annoying knack for needing to go poos five minutes after we start. So we've hardly thrown the line out.

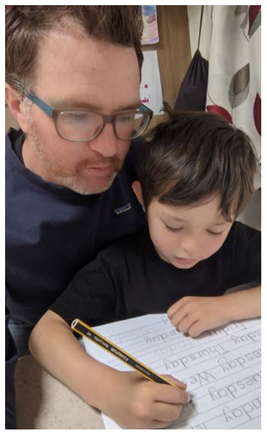
Christmas became very exciting with parcel drops arriving every now and then at a friend's house. (We have no address of course.)

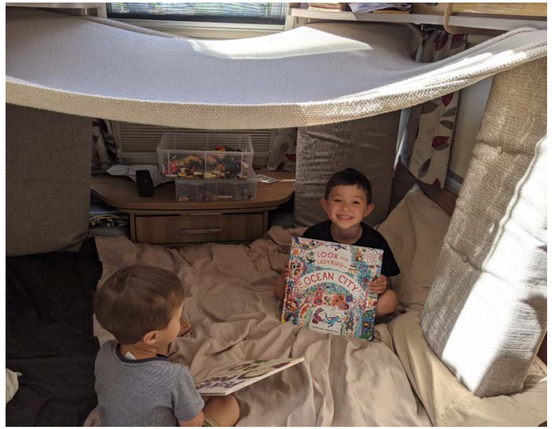
Our local "beach" above the Clyde dam.

Though they prefer the indoor pools, the wusses.
This one at Cromwell.



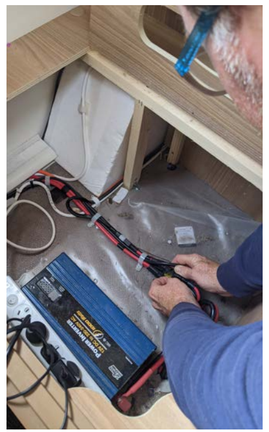
Pottering (no, learning) at home.

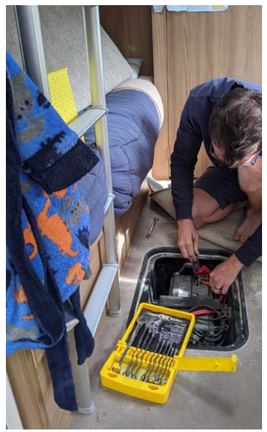




Yes!

Fixing the 'van together.





If in doubt, sprinklers!

Breakfast table.

Good feeds with Dad.

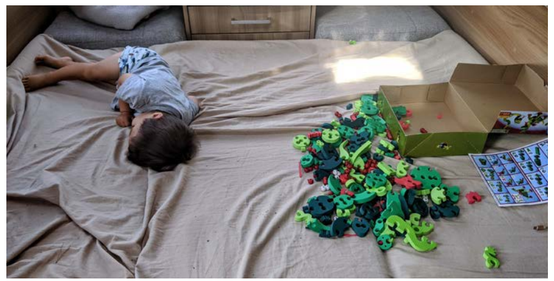
And better ones with Mum.

Day trips, this one to Wanaka.

Too much at times.

Bloody noses and grumpy mornings.

Stubborn one this Tom. Refusing to tidy for the morning.



Haircut day.

Desert-like footie conditions.

Max discovering what it's like to carry you lugs around.

Important for Dad to have some alone time too!

My Sunday afternoon ritual. A cycle along the river track with a break here to plan my business ideas.

A memorial for Goldie, who would have been born on this day.

Haere Rā Central Otago, Part 2: Tom turns 3! A boys day out.

20 FEBRUARY 2021

What do you do for a third birthday in Alexandra?? **You go to McDonald's in Queenstown!** No Macca's in Alex. (Ordinarily this is a good thing.)

Oh the Big Mac was everything I hoped it would be. So was the Quarter Pounder that followed.

Max and Tom were stoked too. It's sad I know, but I'm lovin' it!

It started with a classic, Cinnamon on toast. And a birthday tee shirt.

Then buying one's own cake.

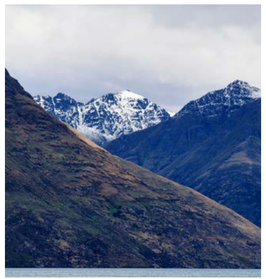
Chuffed!

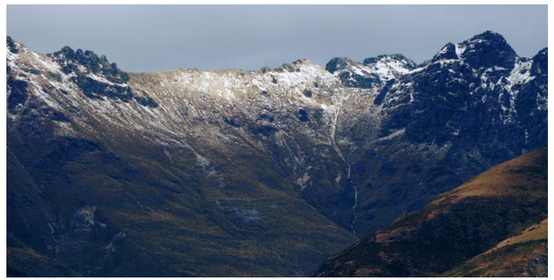
And the beautiful one-hour drive over.

Clyde.

Gibbston Valley and Cromwell.

Some scenery and selfies.





And onto their favourite playground.

"Speed action" - Tom

Totally looking 3!

Very nice to see big brother Max performing the role.

You can do it Tom!

Happy Birthday Tom! I'll drink to that.

Haere Rā Central Otago, Part 3: When weekends matter again

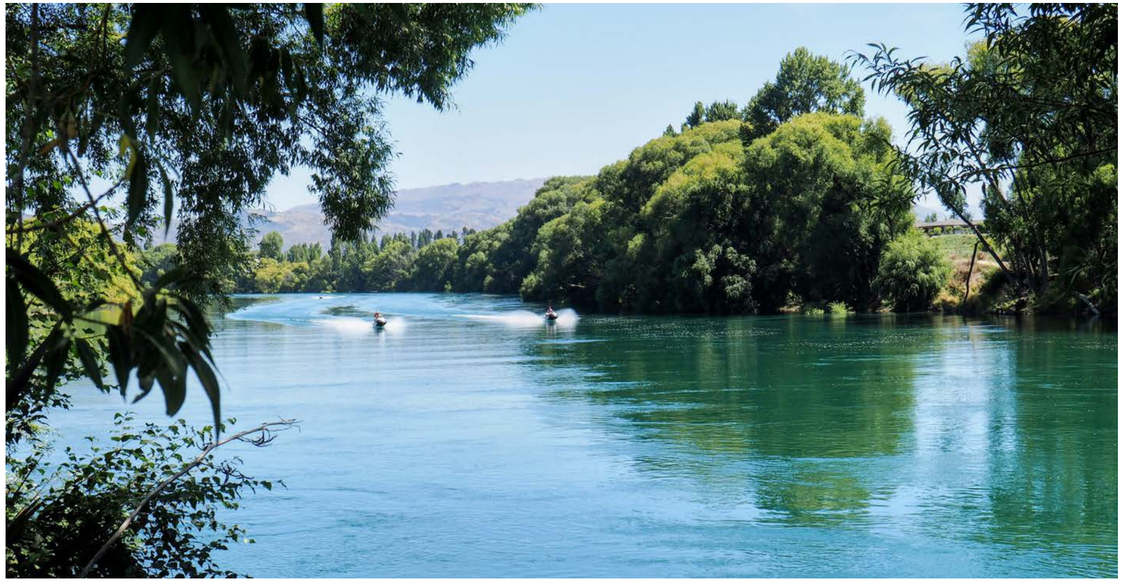
21 FEBRUARY 2021

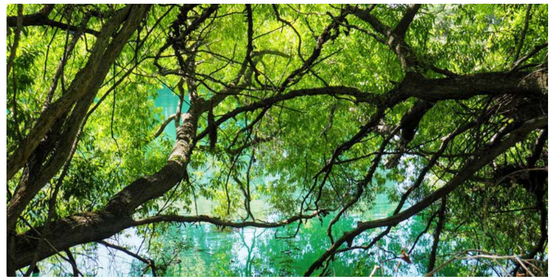
With Priscilla working, we remembered that explicit feeling of weekends again. So we did some Waitangi Day and other weekend day trips.

Well they weren't Waitangi-specific trips as there is NO sign of this significant day down here—it's a major blind spot.

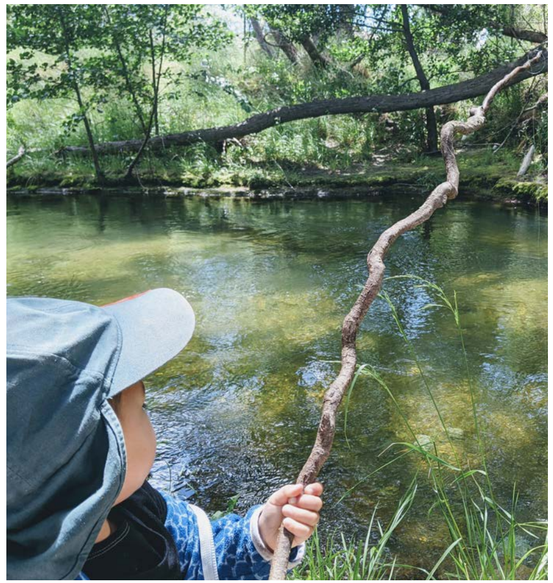
Walking along the Clutha

The Clutha is such a commanding river. It feels gnarlier and more impressive than the Waikato. This walk (a cycle trail) is between Alexandra and Clyde.





Fishing up one of the streams.



An Alexandrian's creative front lawn along the river track.

Lush foraged blackberries Dadded into lusher ice cream sauce.

Walking up Mt Iron

The next day we drove over to Wanaka to walk up Mt Iron. Perhaps the best thing about Alexandra is its pivot-point status to so many other great spots.

View from the summit.

But first, the walk up. Alone it's a short sharp 40 minute climb. With a 5'er and a 3'er it's a slow grind in the heat. Well done boys! And Priscilla! It did recall Broken River, so many lols on that day.

Weren't you carried up and down Tom?

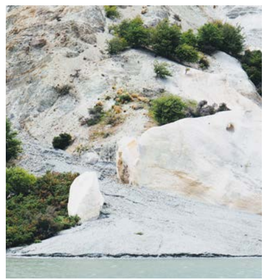
Finished with an ale at Rhyme & Reason Brewery.

Basking in St Bathans

An hour up SH85 is the slightly otherworldly St Bathans with its man-made lake and historic village. I'd love to cycle in here and stay a few days.

There's an easy hour-and-a-half loop walk along the left side of the lake. Not so easy for Max and Tom, but they trucked on with only a few how-much-longers. And poor ol' Tom, dragging his feet only to see later that evening that he had a fever, oops.

It's funny with young children, they don't really appreciate big stunning landscapes, they're much nearer-sighted, focusing in on the details. And wondering when they get to have chips and a drink.



It's an Allan tradition, alright!

Time for a beer then.

Cheers!

Haere Rā Central Otago, Part 4: Bailing to the beach, Dunedin

21 FEBRUARY 2021

Christmas. What to do. It has always been a special family time for us. Some of the family is always together somewhere. We were gearing up for a strange Christmas with just us in the middle of nowhere.

Then brother Mark confirmed he was at least heading in our direction from Christchurch, to Karitane (to drink some lead as it happens!)

Waikouaiti

We found a nearby camping spot in Waikouaiti, to also pour some lead water down the gob!

Max and Tom just as excited, even more so, about Christmas Eve preparations. An open window a fair substitute for a chimney, it's not like we're in a hippy bus.

Something Max and Tom have become well attuned to on these travels is not having, expecting, or asking for much. They get that there's not much space, that there's not much money, and that we buy most things from the op shop.

The reward is that they get excited about even the little things.

And even more excited by the big things from Nana and Poppa and the cuzzies.

Yes it really challenges our zero-waste aspirations, especially Priscilla who didn't grow up with a Christmas tradition. But a material blow-out three times a year is OK, surely!

Super happy to have managed to spend the day with family, we know it wouldn't have been the same otherwise.

And the best excuse to crack open a few decent beers!

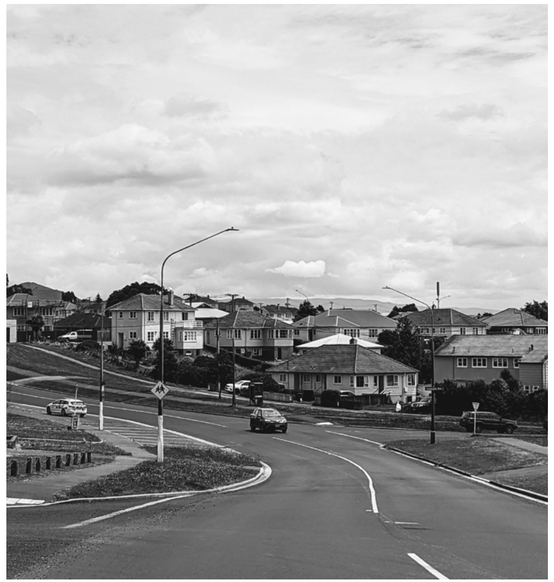
Moeraki

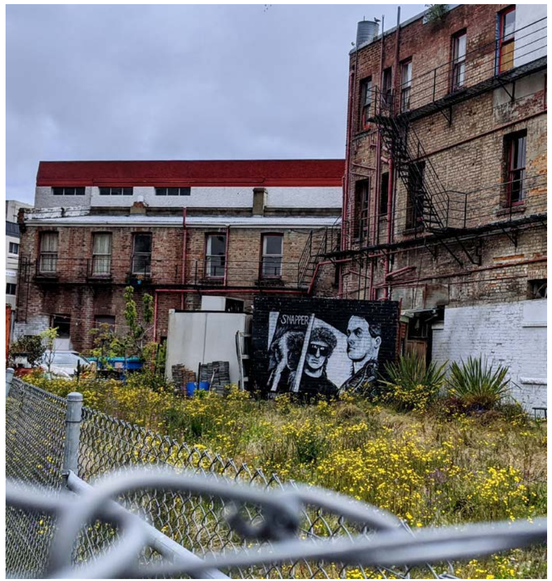
Had to check out the boulders.

The day after the big day.

On to Dunedin

One of the places I've been hanging out to get to since we started was Dunedin. I don't remember ever being there before and I wanted to soak up where the Dunedin sound came from.





Bragging rights ... Hungry Hobos owner Romeo Dowling-Mitchell makes New Zealand's best toastie, according to a recent national competition run by a pickle company.

PHOTO: SUPPLIED

'Simple, familiar' toastie NZ's best

MOLLY HOUSEMAN

A DUNEDIN sandwich shop has secured official bragging rights over the best toastie in the country.

Hungry Hobos, which serves old-fashioned comfort food, won this year's Great New Zealand Toastie Competition, beating more than 80 other entries in the McCain's Pickles competition.

The "Bat out of Hell" toastie, labelled a "power" sarnie, features potato, gravy, aged cheddar and sweet and spicy pickles between herb-buttered ciabatta.

Owner of the George St shop Romeo Dowling-Mitchell said the win was exciting and promising.

"It is nice now that we get the bragging rights ... and probably bring in a bit of business, which is a bit of a bonus."

At first, he thought the call notifying him of the win was a prank call. It sounded like a friend of mine, but became apparent pretty quickly, and the realisation soon gave he that it was not a prank.

Mr Dowling-Mitchell spent some time "tinkering" with the recipe, waiting to break the good news to his girlfriend, who was driving at the time.

The idea for "Bat out of Hell" was to create something different, while sticking within the realm of comfort food, someone would choose together "ambitiously" with the lovers, he said.

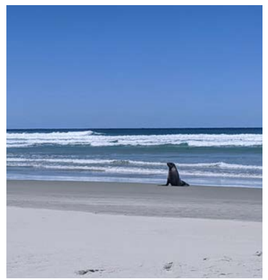
Pickles director Gerry Tyrck said the combination was "an once wholly expected and a total surprise".

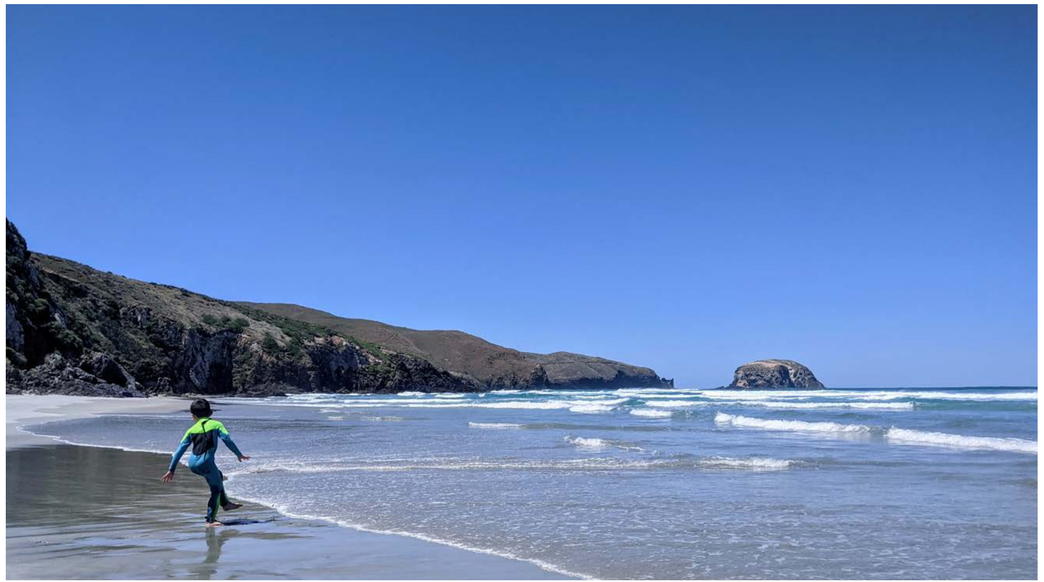
"The assessment team felt this one like a toastie that has not tried to be anything more than wholly unsophisticatedly tasty!

"Simple, uncomplicated, familiar, comforting and delicious every bite of the way."

molly.houseman@odt.co.nz

▶ VIDEO: www.odt.co.nz/tv





And finally...

In keeping with family tradition, after a hot tip from Mark:

Happy to oblige!

Just putting it out there.

Haere Rā Central Otago, Part 5: 4WD adventures

21 FEBRUARY 2021

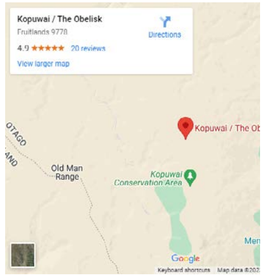
When our road friends swung through Alexandra we took the opportunity to do a 4WDing trail—it's not smart to go out there on your own if you can't get yourself out.

Buddies together again!

There's a visible overlanding culture around here. Classic Landcruisers, Patrols, and Pajeros much cooler than ours.

Some are decked out like preppers expecting the apocalypse (or COVID cutting loose). I'm into it and have now taken to googling "Pajero accessories". One day. For now, sweet day trips.

We went up in here:



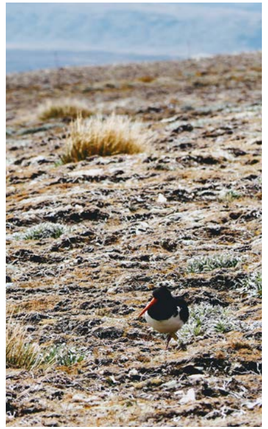
At the bottom of the road there's a nicely preserved early settler cottage.

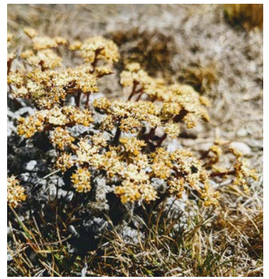
A bit further on there was this beautiful modern version. I just love the scale of this house. I put it in the catalogue of inspiration for when I get the chance to build a home.

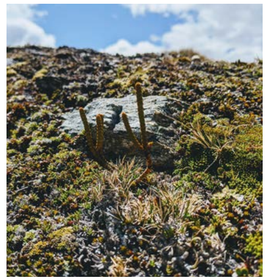
I'll take one please.

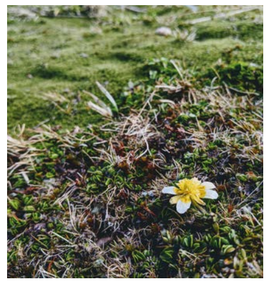
Our friend's 4WD is a bit more serious than ours!

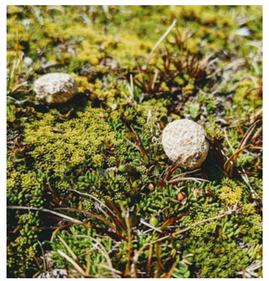
Yeeha!

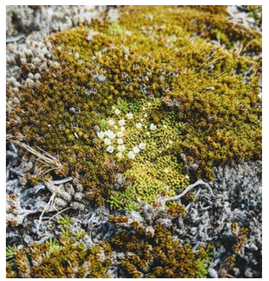












Alpine flora.

We were totally underdressed for the occasion. It was an alpine wind that's for sure.

Hurry up and take the photo Dad!

These ruts are getting deep.

So let's stop for some entertainment for the younger ones...

(They don't really enjoy the overlanding; you need to keep them pumped with treats as it's really just a long bumpy drive to nowhere for them.)

Pockets of summer snow.

All in all, 10 out of 10, will do again!

Haere Rā Central Otago, Part 6 (final): Making friends then saying goodbye

21 FEBRUARY 2021

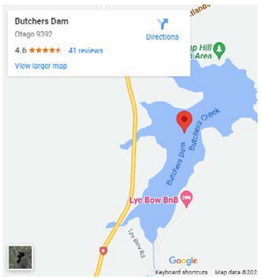
We've been really grateful that we made, or Max first made, early friends here. It has made our three months in Alexandra so much more fulfilling.

Max saw Jacob at the library one day. Then he saw him at the local market later that day when Jacob, from under a table, said "hey I saw you at the library". And from then we felt like locals and saw each other once or twice a week for swimming, play dates, and adventures.

Play date feeds and trampoline chooks!

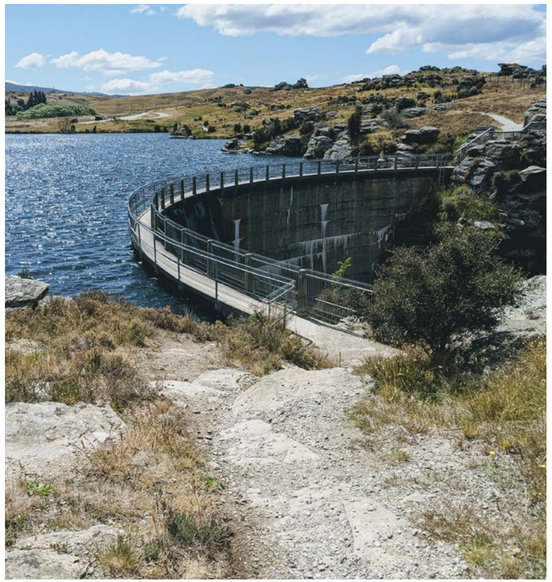
Seeing the sights together

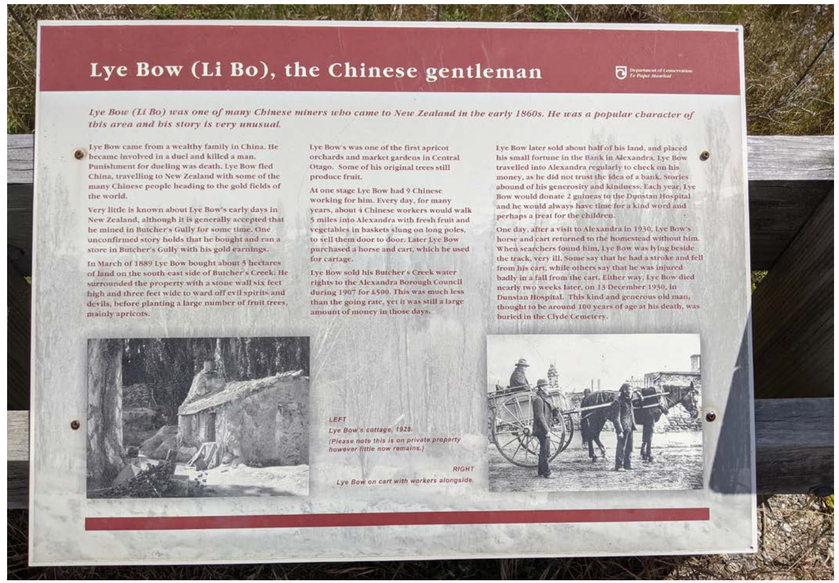
We met up at Butcher's Dam one day for a lovely afternoon.

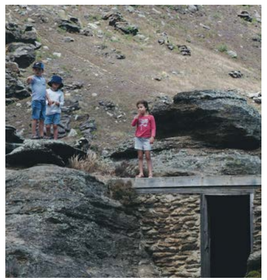


Snuck in a quick fish. No luck obviously.

The dam itself. A constant overflow type.







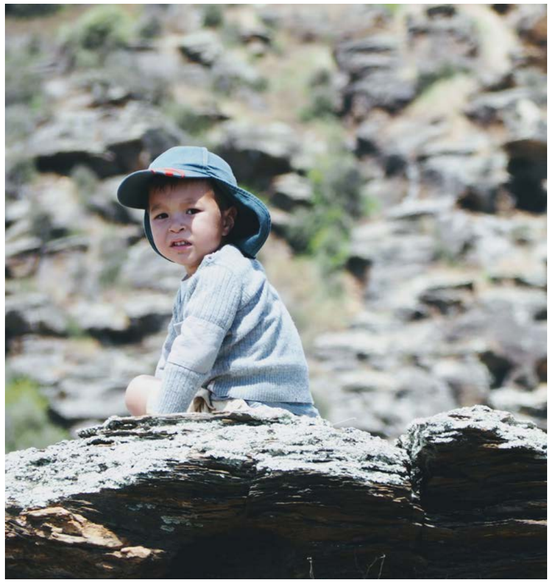
Traces of the past. Again, early Chinese settlers going hard under duress.

I have a fascination with the plants down here.

Smashing rocks, why not.

These are the real social climbers.

Tom does well to keep up all the time, onya Tom!



Keep going mate!

2 out of 4 ain't bad.

It's been a treat to have mates down here.

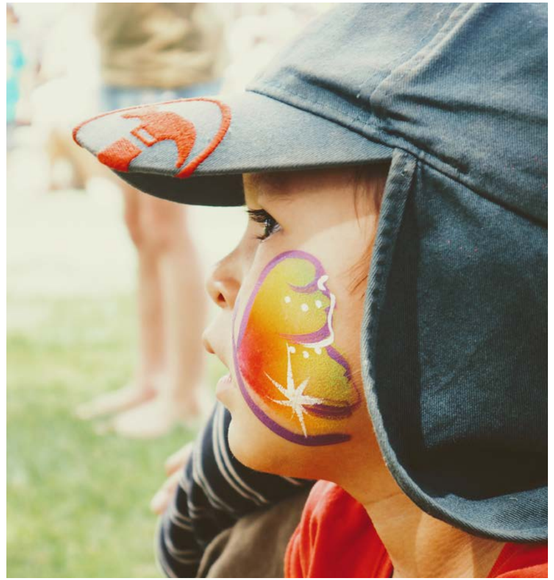
That's better.

Omakau A&P

Just recently we met up again at the Omakau A&P show. This is the one they talk about in Central Otago. Sure it's no Gisborne A&P show, how could it be, but still top times at the rural folk's big day out.

Getaways play out a little differently down here.

I'll tell ya what the Gisborne A&P show doesn't have, mad scientist bikes! And so much better than the rip-off carny rides that don't come this far too!



I hate goodbyes

But sadly and plainly good things come to and end, at least for now. This is one of the hard bits about living on the road, it's all friends for a season, rarely a reason, but who knows, maybe for a lifetime.

It's hard leaving Central Otago. And I have a feeling I'm going to really miss the feeling of living around these mountains once I'm gone.

So we'll see where things end up, for now it's a two month journey back to Gisborne to be with mum and dad.

It should never take this long to get here

28 FEBRUARY 2021

I'm going on 44.

In that time I've flung from Tamsui to Wakkanai, from Toronto to Abidjan.

But I'm not at all unique in New Zealand to, until a week ago, have never been to our signature destination, Milford Sound. (Waitangi still to do.)

We were on the road regardless, but something COVID is doing is allowing NZers to value their own backyard. Previously the thought of travelling to Milford Sound (from the North) brought the response, “yeah but I could go to Aussie for that, and quicker”.

In hindsight, valuing a shopping trip to Brisbane over the awe of our own Fiordland is mad.

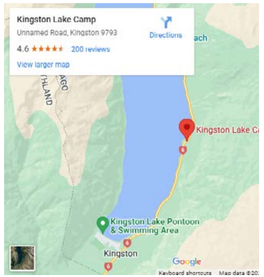
The beauty of getting there first

It’s likely you’ll come in via Queenstown. And if you’re anyone like us you won’t be flying in from there, you’ll be driving.

Kingston overnighter

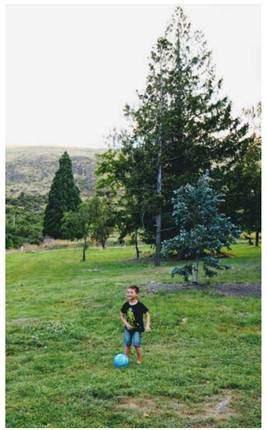
We managed to find a flat(ish) spot at the free parking site popular with sliders* near Kingston.

* The white Hiace sleeper vans.



You don’t have to spend much for a multi-million dollar view! New Zealand camping, the great leveller.

PEGASUS



Couldn't leave without a swim, or a dip at least.

Silence in Te Anau

Poor Te Anau. Like the communities on the lower West Coast, Te Anau has taken a COVID beating.

Max see things his way.

We arrived on a wet day which exacerbated its mood.

Max has taken to using my camera. I think he captured the mood better than me.

I also think he's taken the nicest ever photo of his brother!

Max captures Tom.

While I continue my classic 4WD spotting.

The lack of international tourists arriving for the big walks and big views has sucked the vitality from these towns. Sure it makes things easier for us, but we too like being surrounded by the excitement of international visitors.

It made for a serene early morning cycle to go fishing.

Felt like we had the place to ourselves.

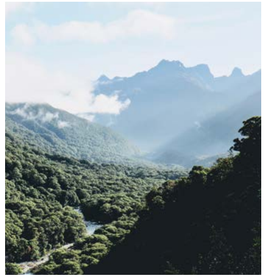
Drive to Milford Sound

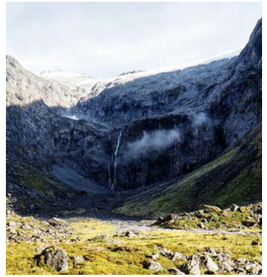
That's a directive.

Don't cheat by flying in.

The towering scenery make it one of New Zealand's most distracting stretches of road. Like Westport to Greymouth, and Otira to Castle Hill.

It just has to be driven to feel the scale. I don't have the skills or gear to photograph it, especially the deeper in you get when it's near vertical around you.





Tom the poor fella was finding it pretty tummy-turning.

The only downer? $10 an hour to park *anywhere*.

Kinda understandable, but it still stings.

And you soon forget!

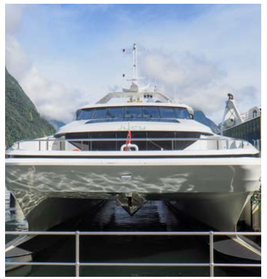
We took the Jucy Cruise. 2 hours for just $59 each and $25 for Max.

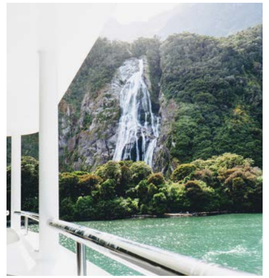
There are longer cruises, but 2 hours is plenty for Max and Tom.

Absolutely happy with the operation. Jucy generally has their customer experience nailed.

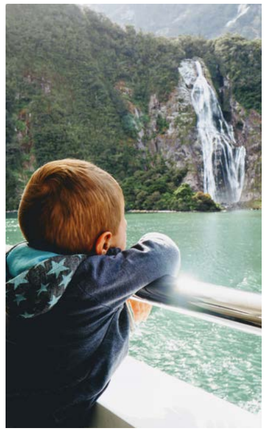
(A recent stay at Jucy Snooze in Queenstown was also a brilliant customer experience.)

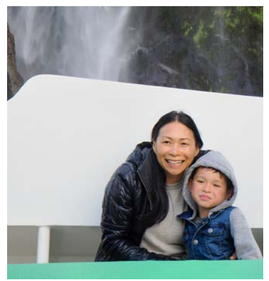
From a previous stay at Jucy Snooze.





The cat was really comfortable and in great condition with its modern decor. Totally recommend it. When booking I thought maybe I'm cheaping out on this and should pay up for a non "budget" cruise. Nah, it's great.



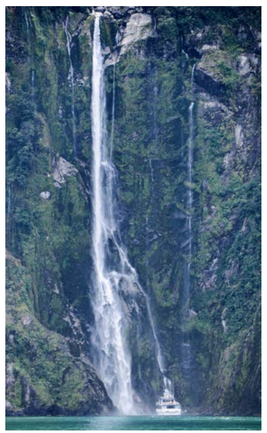


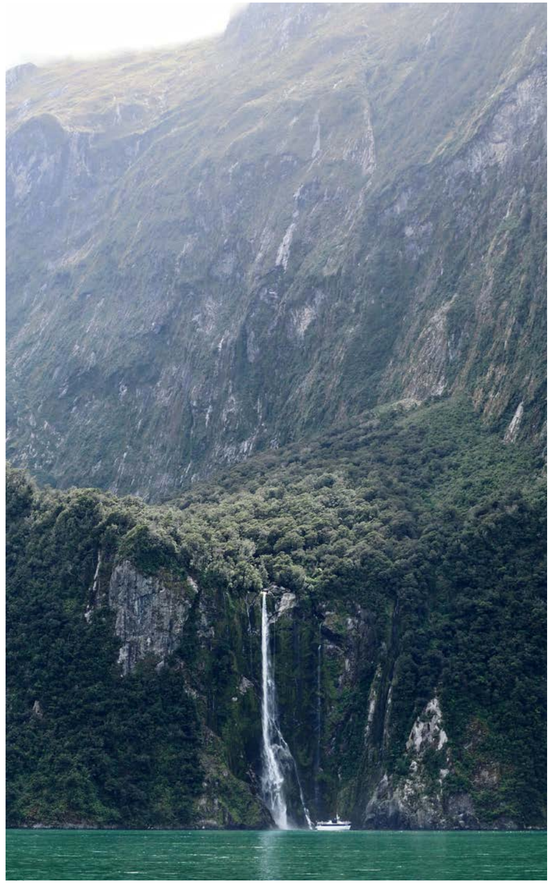
Solo travellers?

I mentioned in a St Bathans story that young children aren't really captivated by big scenic views. They prefer the details, and sure enough:

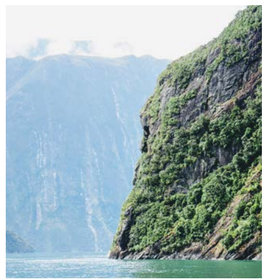
Definitely a stand out bug.

Seals and waterfalls get their attention though.





I could have spent all day attempting to capture the scale of the sound.



A couple of hero shots to finish that'll bring back familiar feelings for everyone else that didn't wait as long as me to experience Milford Sound.

That one's going straight to the laptop wallpaper.

Maybe I should just get strangers to take all my photos.

Tracing heroes

05 MARCH 2021

Of all the world, my greatest cultural heroes are a couple of unassuming New Zealanders.

Sure there is Larry David...

Larry's co-creation of Seinfeld once had me tracing iconic scenes through New York.

Exploring NYC during the GFC via Seinfeld landmarks.

Beck...

Beck's first single Loser was released in my last year of school. I've swallowed his albums ever since. I can trace just about every musical interest I have now back to some work or influence of Beck's.

But if I had to pick two,

It is Wellington's Vorn Colgan...

I kinda remember blearingly saying to Vorn one night after a Wellington Sea Shanty Society gig at Leigh that about 12 people showed up to that:

"I don't wan't this to sound morbid but I just really wish you're not one of these artists that gets discovered and loved once they die."

It was probably only months after that Vorn announced he was dying of cancer and was going to keep touring until he couldn't anymore.

I took a day return flight to Wellington for Vorn's first Last Chance to See gig. It was his biggest ever crowd.

I had the last flight back to Auckland. It was cutting it fine but I held on for the encore and he played his song that has always struck me right on the bone, **Dirty Lie**. After that I remember pushing through the crowd and running down the street to a taxi, tears rolling down my face.

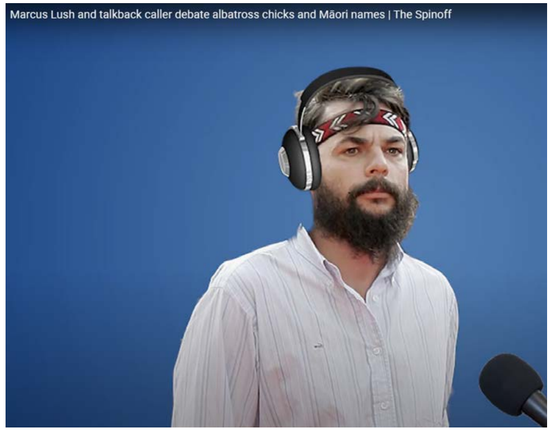
I listened to this song untold times on the walk to and from work. It tipped me into doing what I'm doing today.

I bloody love what Vorn stands for and the creativity that drives him. Go see him play.

And the other is Bluff's Marcus Lush...

Lush demonstrates so much time for ordinary folk. Head-down workers and their stories. He's motivated by his love for New Zealand where most of us take it for granted.

He's true to his principles and his character.



Sure it means people hate his broadcasting—the silences, the confessionals, the finger-tapping, the all-night talkback on the search for canned feijoas—but that is *exactly* why I love him.

And the next leg of Sea Change from Te Anau meant going into Lush Country—Bluff—something I was quietly very excited about.

Two a tap a ree

We bumped our way straight through Tuatapere.

It looks like there's a great old hotel there and some quirky open and closed-down stores, but their road was so preoccupyingly terrible we drove right through before managing to consider a stop.

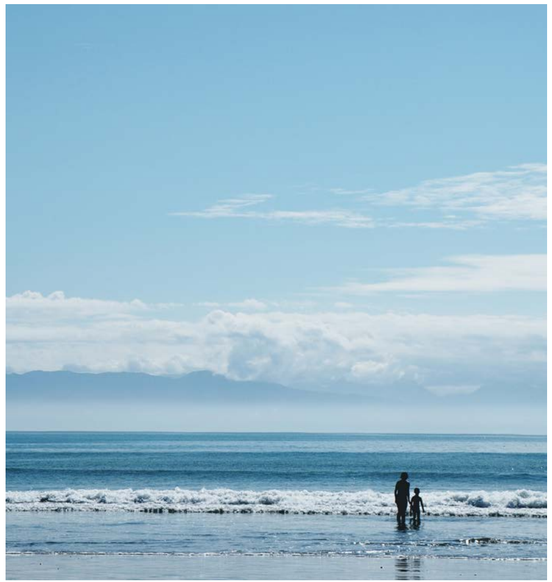
My only memory of it is saying:

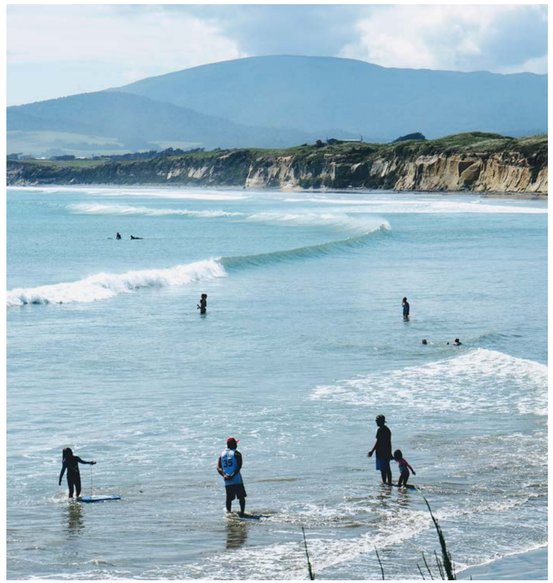
"Looks like they call it 'Two a tap a ree (mate)' round here."

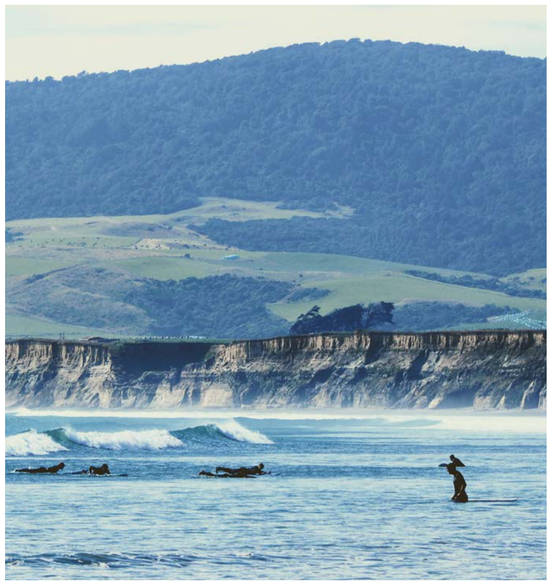
Sure enough, a few days later when we had to call-out AA from Orepuki to replace our car battery, I asked the salty good bugger mechanic if he'd come over from Riverton or... "yeah nah, just over in Two a tap a ree mate".

Orepuki

This turned out to be one of the unexpected gems since we started, what a spot!



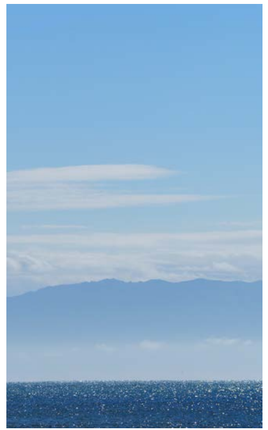




Sure there are full steamers in summer out there (I thought they were made of hardier stuff down here??), but that end-of-the-earth feeling, with the leftovers of the Southern Alps on the horizon, and beach-front free parking spot... we would have stayed longer if we could have dumped the poobox.

Southern Alps tailing off on the horizon.

It was phone wallpaper friendly too.



A trio for the phone.

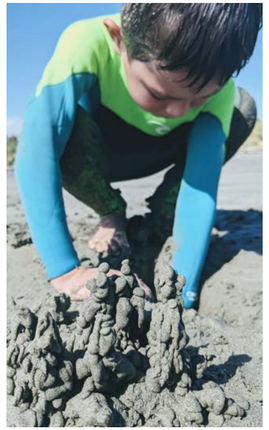
And the light was right for those layered silhouette landscapes (is there an English word for that?)

And it being a beach, Max and Tom were easy peasy.

Most of the time.

Something to do with Max no doubt.

And Max discovered his new thing, recreating Clay Cliffs, Ōmarama.



Ōmarama in Orepuki.

Y'know, you can park your family in a special spot like Orepuki, and they'll still fixate on the pile of gravel in the carpark.

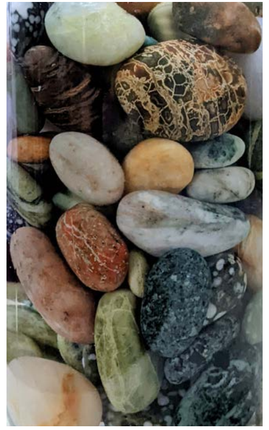
But then, I was preoccupied by the red barns behind them.

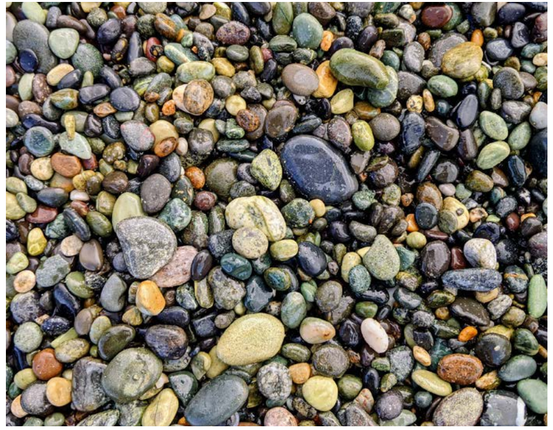
Side trip to Gemstone Beach

"Gemstone Beach" is a typical Southland understatement. It is laden in beautiful gemstones!

The first shot below is my little haul from less than an hour of searching. The second shot is simply a photo looking down at my feet on the beach. And there's Max's beautiful collection too.

I reckon if this was elsewhere it would have been brutally mined by now.





It's like panning for gold.

And apart from the gemstones it's a beautiful slab of coastline.

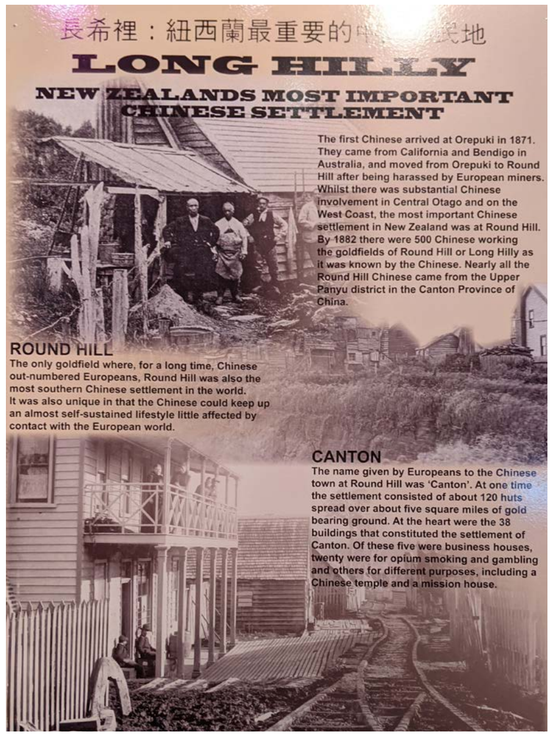
Riverton

So I wrote a whole bit here about Riverton. Wandering the street. About dining at Level 2 with table service but cabinet food. About seeing more hospitality businesses for sale, like much of Central Otago. That they're holding out for cashed-up Auckland lifestylers. Also that there's this Longwood Loop project bringing local resiliency to the region through its growers. That it's got a great example of a small town museum with its 20min dramatised movie introducing the unique Māori-colonial history across Foveaux Strait, the whalers, the sealers. That it's hard to tell if it was an entirely honest retelling of early relations. But like many museums and historic sites in the area, they've now respectfully told the stories of the early Chinese settlers. That the town's quaint but I felt no affinity as it feels like it's propped up by retired farmers and seamen and holiday-homers.

And then it didn't save. Barely even thought that was still a thing. So here are the photos that were interspersed.

The Longwood Loop
Project
www.longwoodloop.co.nz
WELCOME
NEW
GARDENERS
COME ON IN
FOR ADVICE
SEEDS
TOOLS
COMPOST

長希裡：紐西蘭最重要的中國移民地
LONG HILLY
NEW ZEALANDS MOST IMPORTANT CHINESE SETTLEMENT
Gold Gold Gold
13


長希裡：紐西蘭最重要的中國移民地
LONG HILLY
NEW ZEALANDS MOST IMPORTANT CHINESE SETTLEMENT
The first Chinese arrived at Orepuki in 1871. They came from California and Bendigo in Australia, and moved from Orepuki to Round Hill after being harassed by European miners. Whilst there was substantial Chinese involvement in Central Otago and on the West Coast, the most important Chinese settlement in New Zealand was at Round Hill. By 1882 there were 500 Chinese working the goldfields of Round Hill or Long Hilly as it was known by the Chinese. Nearly all the Round Hill Chinese came from the Upper Panyu district in the Canton Province of China.
ROUND HILL
The only goldfield where, for a long time, Chinese out-numbered Europeans, Round Hill was also the most southern Chinese settlement in the world. It was also unique in that the Chinese could keep up an almost self-sustained lifestyle little affected by contact with the European world.
CANTON
The name given by Europeans to the Chinese town at Round Hill was 'Canton'. At one time the settlement consisted of about 120 huts spread over about five square miles of gold bearing ground. At the heart were the 38 buildings that constituted the settlement of Canton. Of these five were business houses, twenty were for opium smoking and gambling and others for different purposes, including a Chinese temple and a mission house.

Invers

So I wrote a whole bit here about Invercargill. That is was mostly a stop for supplies for us. That there's an obvious (or not) comparison to Gisborne. Demographics, scale, buildings, carefree attitude to dress, bogans and mullets, emerging talent, plaintive business names. And that where it beats Gisborne, as does just about every other town in New Zealand, is its community facilities, its well-loved parks, gardens, playgrounds, and especially aquatic centres. That Alexandra, Cromwell, Taupo, Queenstown, Dunedin, Invercargill, Whanganui and so on, all provide quality aquatic centres compared to Gisborne. That I fear even Gisborne's multi-million Olympic Pool upgrade will fall well short and won't be nearly as well used as it could. That Gisborne still seems to rest on its beach laurels too much.

And then it didn't save. Only just realised that was still a thing. So here are the few photos that were interspersed.

Bluff

We made it! Lush Country.

Bluff is simultaneously utilitarian, worn-in, loose-fitting, twee, loved, and off-kilter.

Now I get why ex-Aucklander Marcus Lush has lived here for the last 20 years. It's so, well, Lush. The small fishing and oystering town he admires as the "last of the ungentrified seaports in New Zealand".

I'd include a snap of his house that I later realised I took, but that's a bit fanboy and weird.

First we had to tick the bottom-of-the-south tourist boxes.

Next time then.

Then we parked up at a playground so I could amble around the streets. I knew we were onto a good thing when a local mum rolled up in her Mitsubishi Mirage with "Don't you (forget about me)" pumping on the stereo.

With earworm in my head an ambling I did go.

WHITETOPS
White Tops Dairy
7 DAYS
White Tops Dairy
COKE
FRESH BREAD
ON SALE HERE!
OPEN

RSA
BLUFF

Lee St
POLICE
BLUFF HILL
LOOKOUT
MOTUPŌHUE
Bluff Lodge

Bluff Lodge
OPEN
OPEN
BEDS
$25

Foyle St

KEEP CLEAR
ALL TIMES

Apart from a brief moment of "hey, was that Marcus?!", that was that, and I absolutely loved it. Back to the 'van parked up in Invers for a good beer and a good read.

Culture Beer

Shining Peak Brewery

ALICE NEVILLE

Classic hits

Kiwi craft brews are all the rage, but guess what gets beer enthusiasts really frothing?

BACK IN NOVEMBER, at the end of the first session of Wellington beer festival Beervana, I got chatting to a couple of brewers. We, along with hundreds of other beer enthusiasts, had spent the past few hours trying all kinds of wonderful brews – crayfish gose, durian IPAs with mango boba tea pearls, rum barrel-aged raspberry stouts, and so on and so forth. But when I asked them which beer they were most excited about, they singled out what could safely be described as the polar opposite of those wacky offerings.

Their pick was Shining Peak's Taranaki Amber, which the New Plymouth brewery describes as "a nostalgic celebration of the classic NZ draught style famously served in frosty handles around the country".

That's right, New Zealand draught – like Double Brown and Speight's. What your granddad probably drank. You might know it as "beer", but these brews developed over time and became unique to Aotearoa.

Relatively low in alcohol, with toffee and caramel notes, and a sweet finish, New Zealand draughts don't exactly have much, well, flavour. So, what's the appeal? For brewers, it's perhaps partly because they're not the palate-blasting hoppy numbers or the high-alcohol, barrel-aged, wild-fermented beers that sometimes feel like you need a PhD to appreciate. They're a beer designed to throw back without thinking too much about it.

And, as highly regarded brewer Kelly Ryan, of Wellington's Fork Brewing, explained on an episode of the New Zealand Brewer podcast last year, New Zealand draught is a style that requires technical accuracy and finesse. It's technically a lager – brewed with a top-fermenting lager yeast rather than a bottom-fermenting ale one – and it's a hard beer to get right.

There's no definitive theory as to how the New Zealand draught came about, but pioneering Kiwi brewer Morton Coutts certainly had a role. In the 1930s, Coutts developed the continuous fermentation process, a revolution in brewing that sped up the process and allowed remarkable consistency – which has a lot to do with why these beers all taste pretty much the same. Most hover around the four percent mark, thanks to the temperance movement that held sway in the first half of the 20th century. That same movement gave rise to pubs having to close at 6pm, a measure that stayed in place from World War I until 1967, and the resulting "six o'clock swill". New Zealand draught developed as the perfect six o'clock swill beer.

Shining Peak isn't the only brewery to have nodded to this most humble of styles. If you swing by Fork & Brewer in Wellington, you might find Kelly Ryan's 3.8% "Draft". Kaimai Brewing in Northland is another to have had a go. But if you're in a nostalgic mood, it's still no trouble finding a "Lion Rouge" or Speight's, the choice is yours.

92 Kia Ora

1

SHINING PEAK BREWING TARANAKI AMBER
4%, 6 x 330ml cans, $23
First brewed for Taranaki Rugby's 2020 season and marketed as a community-focused beer the locals can be proud of, Taranaki Amber is a classic New Zealand draught using Wakatu hops.

2

EDDYLINE BREWERY AMIGO MEXICAN AMBER LAGER
5.5%, 440ml, $5.50
What's a Mexican lager doing in a column about classic New Zealand draught? Well, Nelson brewery Eddyline reckons the Amigo is a fine alternative to it. It's brewed with a hint of maize malt and has a lovely clean finish.

5

DOUBLE BROWN
4%, 18 x 330ml cans, $22-$23
I can't claim that Double Brown is better than other iconic NZ draughts but I love the name, I love the label, I love the no-nonsense Kiwiness of it. The website says it's "typically enjoyed by mates in a variety of settings". And isn't that what beer's all about?

As Marcus would say, "of course it is".

Trying to "do the Catlins"

12 MARCH 2021

Everyone round these parts says "oh the Catlins are great, make sure you do the Catlins."

The Catlins is a big stretch of coast. Similar in size to the East Coast north of Gisborne, but much more complicated with bendy in's and out's to the spots to be and to see.

And with a lack of dump stations and water points for us, accessible places to park had to be carefully planned.

The TL;DR is: it was as memorable for the Lost Gypsy Gallery as it was for its gnarly coastlines.

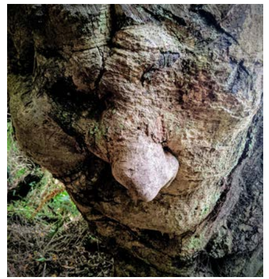
More on that in a bit.

One-upping Bluff, Slope Point

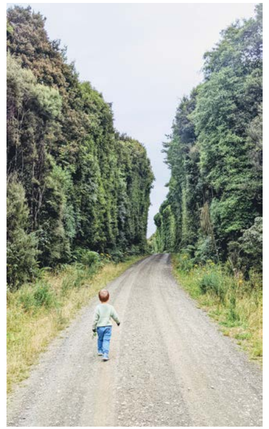
First stop on from Invercargill was a bit of a sketchy DOC site at the start of the Waipohatu Walk.

It was eerie and isolated, but another camper later parked beside us so we stuck at it for a couple of nights and had a bit of a walk around.

Not the nicest spot.

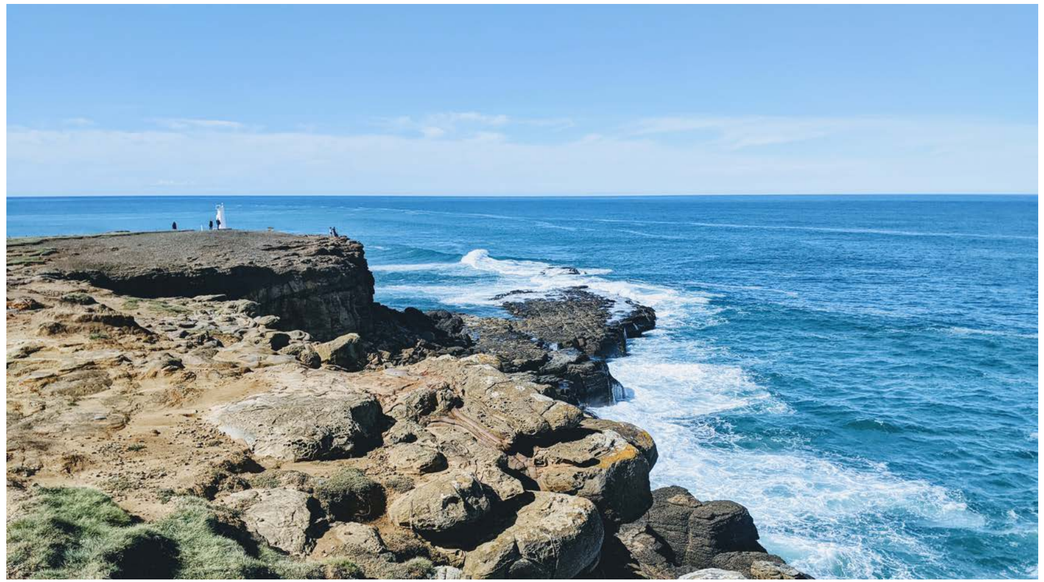


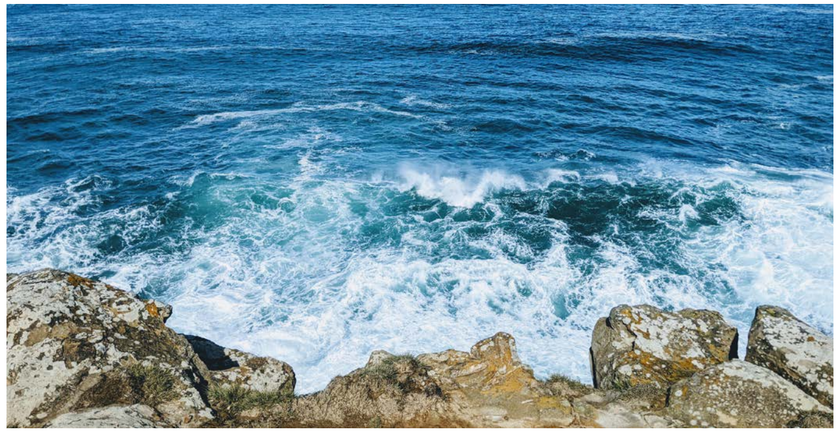
We weren't parked here for the spookiness; it was to out-south Bluff with a trip to Slope Point, the real southern-most point of the South Island.

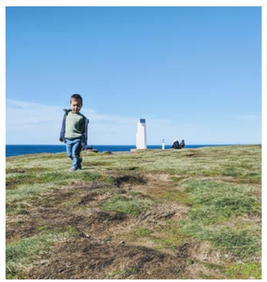


Can say he's been there now.

If you find yourself this far down it is worth the detour. The Southern Ocean meeting the Pacific Ocean, pushing and shoving their way into the rocky cliffs.







Once you've sat and had lunch, what's left to do?

Throw rocks off the end of the South Island of course!

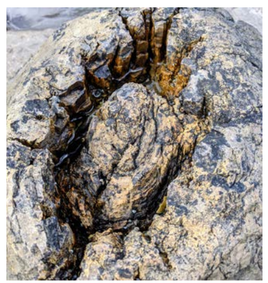
The only way is up from here.

Or sideways for this stubborn group of trees.

Curio Bay

If we weren't peasant travellers we'd stay at the Curio Bay campground. It is a beautiful private spot set among native flaxes and bush on a point between the petrified forest and Porpoise Bay.

Instead we hunkered down in our isolated DOC site and came over here for the day.



The petrified forest

It's by no means a pretty spot. If you didn't have children travelling with you, you could relax into the evening to see the penguin colony emerging.

Still, it is disconcerting to see what looks just like an old forest of felled trees, only they're hard as rocks, because they are now 170 million year old rocks.

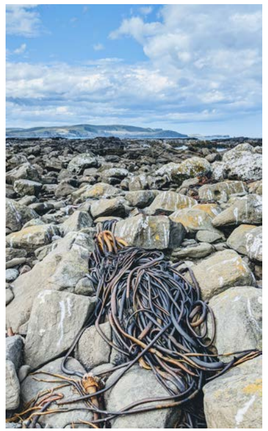
Tom wasn't interested in the stone cold forest, but he was keen on the kelp: "Salty"!

Porpoise Bay and Curio Bay Cliffs

A great surf spot according to my brother Ross from his surf travels here (and seeing surfers out, one of those occasional reminders that I'd like to participate more in these environments, rather than just observing).

Small today.

It's also another spot to see the Southern Ocean make landfall.



Papatowai and surrounds

After a reluctant but necessary drive out to a dump station and water refill, our next parking hub was the DOC site in Papatowai. We were eyeing up a different beach-side DOC site, but the drive in was too much for our low-slung caravan.

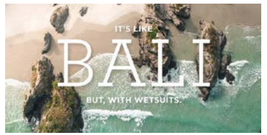
This place was *much* better. Like campgrounds in the '80's (probably). And an ideal pivot-point for several Catlins sights.

Malt biscuit break.

Papatowai village itself now largely pivots around the Lost Gypsy Gallery, and it's no surprise. More on that in a bit.

Tautuku Bay

Just over the hill from Papatowai is Tautuku Bay. I can see why Dunedin ran a campaign with:



It's a beautiful stretch of beach, with native forest spilling onto the sand.

Beforehand we did an underwhelming walk to Lake Wilkie. It's fine, it's a short walk, do it to get the blood flowing and for the fresh forest air, just don't expect anything special.

We drove down the Tautuku Beach access road... and kept driving, because, why not.

Gratuitous Pajero shots.

For some more exercise, we pulled off the road for the Tautuku Estuary Walkway.

Another not particularly memorable walk. I mean I totally get how important estuary ecosystems are to nature working. It's not their fault they also happen to be dull landscapes. It's no wonder they're threatened when most people think pffft, why save a muddy swamp?

NOTE: save the estuaries!

What was memorable though is the bird song in the forests here. Constant and varied and beautiful. And infuriatingly hard to see the birds making the sounds. I'm sure they throw their voice just to mess with you.

We pulled over again for another walk to learn a little kiwi ingenuity history.

An Innovative Design Sells Well

When mass production of the "Fordson A" farm tractor began in the United States in 1917 it started a world revolution in farm mechanisation. In New Zealand thousands of farm horses soon became redundant.

The same Fordson farm tractor was soon adapted to bush logging use. The traills tractor was the forerunner design in this revolution.

The farm tractor, minus wheels, was mounted on a four wheel chassis. Shafts and gears transmitted power to all four wheels. A reversing box gave equal operating capacity in either direction. The most innovative part of the Traills design was the transmission of power to a log bogie, which gave the tractor much increased adhesive weight and a total of eight driven wheels. In a later development, power was transmitted to two log bogies, one at each end of the tractor.

The design is credited to Frank Traills, a sawmiller at Riverton and Fortification, and was patented in 1924. Traills tractors were manufactured by the engineering firm of A & T Burt, Dunedin.

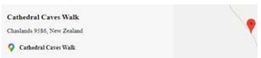
The Traills tractor design was an immediate success, and was the first rail tractor to achieve widespread sales.

In 1925, the first full year of production, 15 units were sold. Altogether it is estimated that 36 were sold to sawmillers throughout New Zealand in the period 1924-36.

[illegible] to a [illegible] introduced on the [illegible] The Traills tractor can be regarded as the most significant design in terms of the initial development and spread of technological innovation. In the course of one year, 1925, the Traills tractor significantly changed the character of log transportation in the New Zealand bush.

Max and Tom were into it, attempting to get it running again?

$10 per adult at the ticket office. EFTPOS available.



Cathedral Caves

I've heard a few barely suppressed racist remarks about visiting the Cathedral Caves.

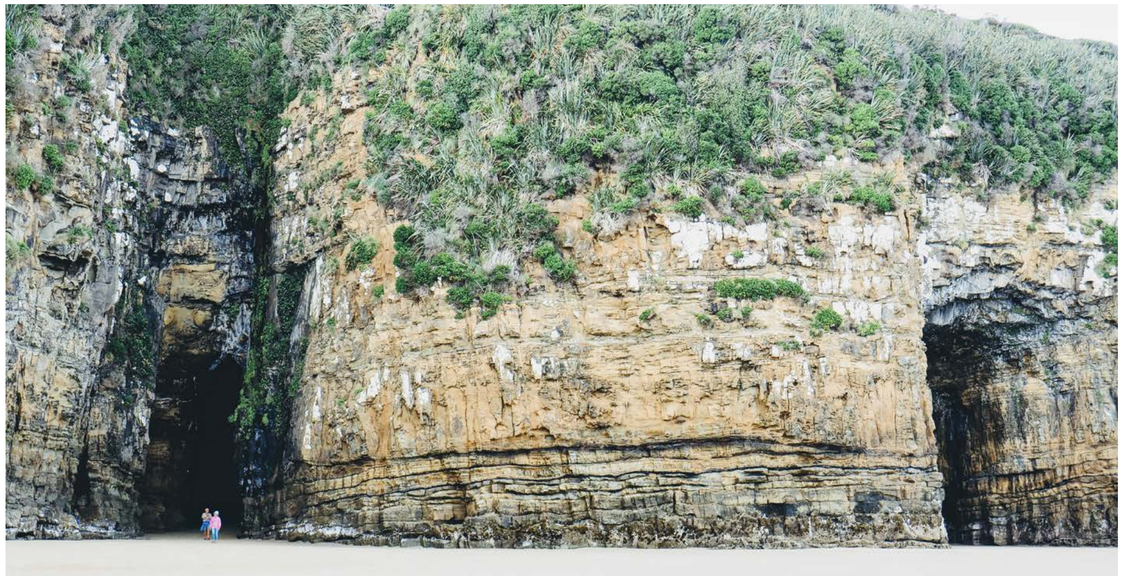
"You have to pay the maaaris some money."

I see the reviews of people complaining about having to pay to access the beach. Well I'm sorry, it's private land, happens to be owned by Māori. They have infrastructure to maintain the access road, large carpark, a website providing tidal access times, and an (excellent) steep 1km track down to the beach. And I'm sure the owners have a sense of responsibility (and insurance?) about people getting in strife on the way down or being in the caves at the wrong time.

So check your prejudice and get over it.

As for the caves themselves? Hard to photograph for one.

They're BIG holes in a BIG slab of rock.

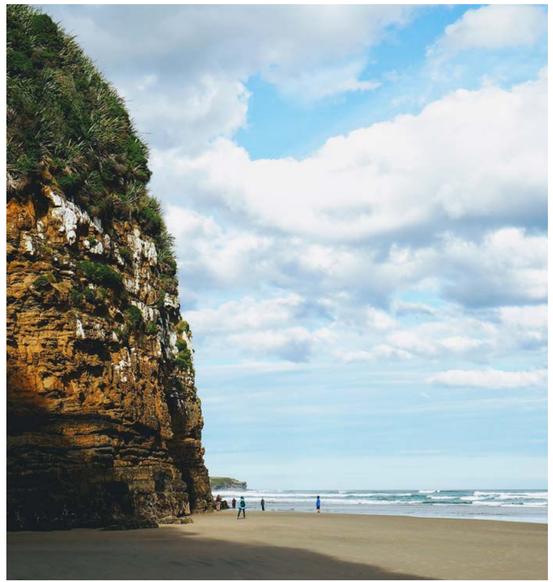


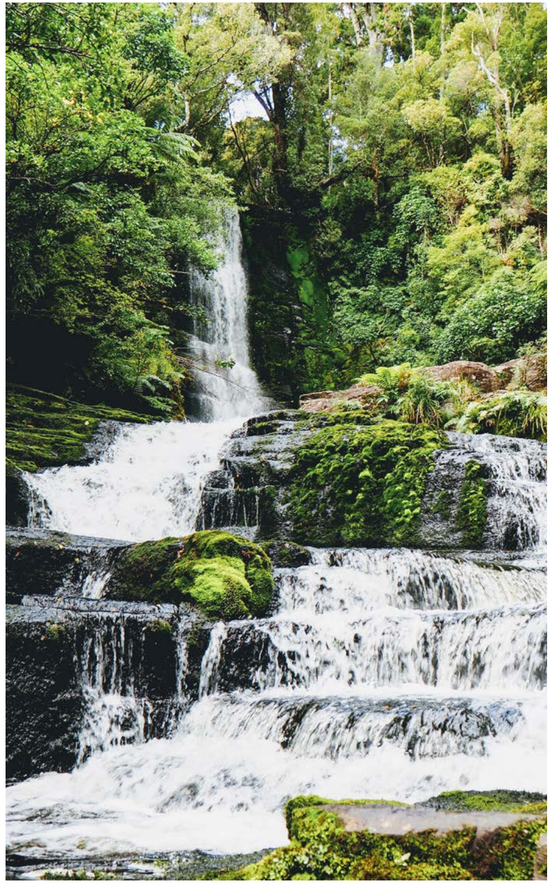
I drove home thinking the Catlins' Cathedral Caves were the brutalist cathedral to the Coromandel's gothic Cathedral Cove.

Brutalist vs Gothic.

Most people don't like brutalist buildings (think of those concrete university blocks), but I love them. And Cathedral Caves in the Catlins command a massive presence. A real -boof- to the senses. It gave me the heebie-jeebies walking through them whereas for Cathedral Cove you just feel aww this is lovely.

Definitely worth $10, don't be ridiculous. Just note: the 1km forest walk down (and back up) is steep, much steeper than anticipated. Plenty of visitors were struggling. And it's only open during a changing 2-3 hour time window based on the tides, so check beforehand.



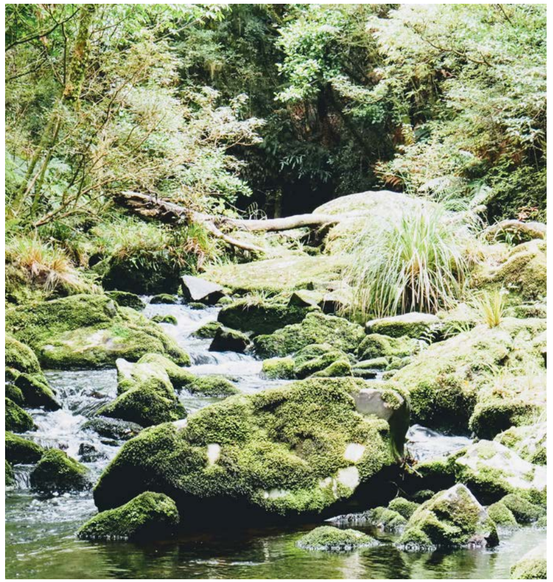


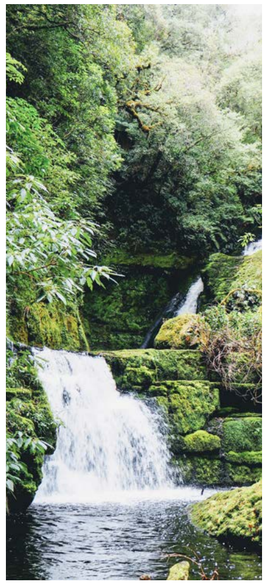
McLean Falls

Another should-see and another difficult place to photograph. Ooh you're a tough one to love eh Catlins!

I literally dashed here before going to Cathedral Caves knowing I only had a short time window to get down there. The forest walk is another beauty, more amazing bird song.

And the falls are ones you need to see, tall and cascading. And too much for me to get in shot, so here are parts.





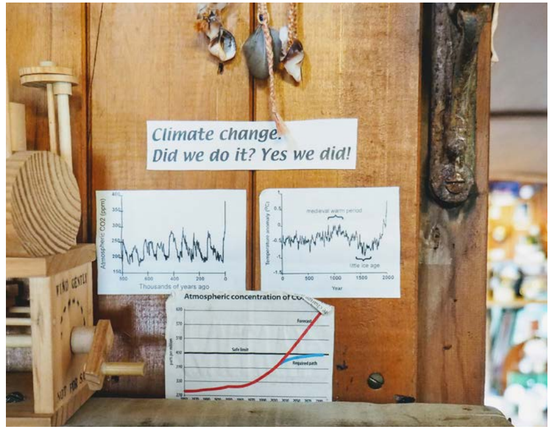
That Lost Gypsy Gallery

OK sorry big nature, the highlight of the Catlins were tiny automata.

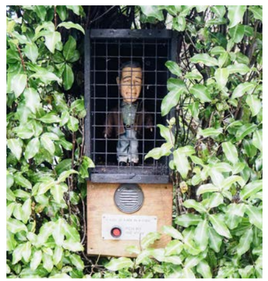
I knew about the place from recently re-watching the South series by Marcus Lush.

It turned out to be the best shop slash gallery I've ever experienced. Max too. Simple unbridled creativity.

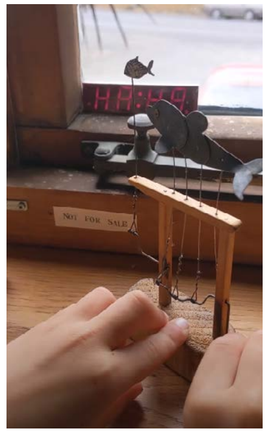
There are satirical, idiosyncratic notes and ephemera covering every spare space.



Outside too.



"Poppa would love this place."



Max could only go in the main store slash gallery; there's a separate adults only "theatre" of automata for $8. It's small and it's ingenious.

I don't want to share much of the self-help theatre here as it's his livelihood and must be uncovered for yourself. But here's a respectful sample of maybe 3% of the interactives.

Max didn't want to leave so we had to go back the next morning before we packed up. So disappointing for him that we'd forgotten it is closed on Wednesdays.

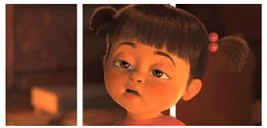
We hung out outside for an hour instead!

Go there! Just not on Wednesdays.

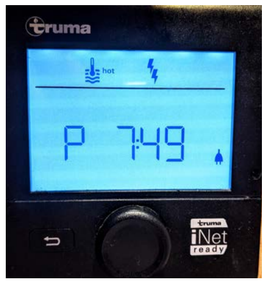
Darker take on the fuseball table.

Nugget and Kaka Points

Akin to temple fatigue, we thought we'd seen the big sea landscapes.



But I was keen on seeing one last spot—Nugget Point—and we needed another dump station, and a shower, and OK maybe some mains power would be nice, so we stayed in a campground for the first time in five months.



Hot water and mains power! First time we've parked under trees in five months, normally trying to absorb as much solar as possible.

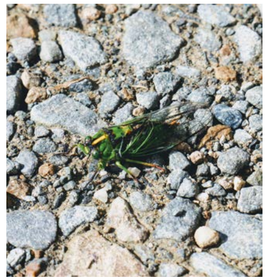
Our stay coincided with the end of the America's Cup. The whole camp was in to watch.

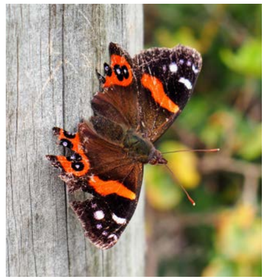
Could have been mistaken for a Grey Power meeting. Something we've become used to over the year is mostly being surrounded by the retired. But they brung the noise.

The Pounawea village however was silent.

With a playground that never got beyond wireframe sketches.

To Nugget Point then, meeting a few locals on the way.



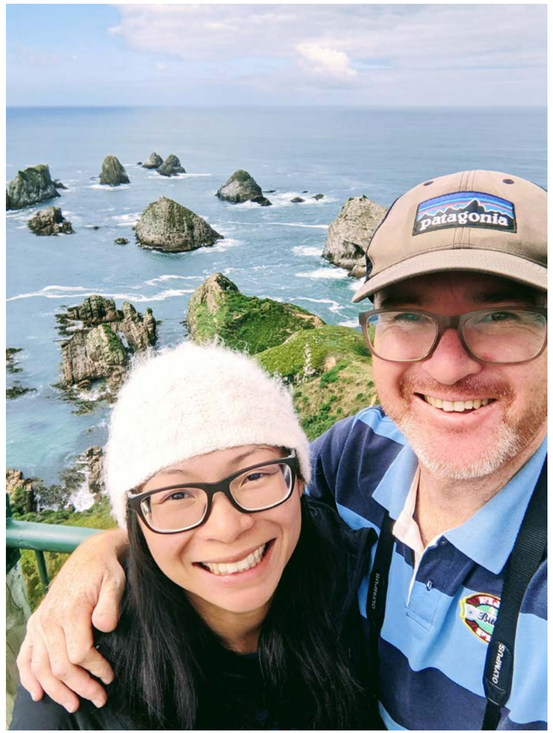


It's a well maintained track, good on you DOC, and if you suffer from vertigo, aiieee, huge cliff drops either side.

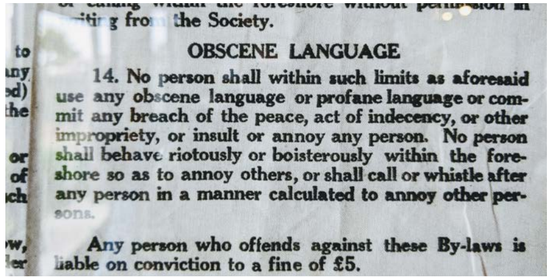
I'd seen the photos online, but they don't portray how *big* the nuggets are.

There's been some major tectonic action to tip the land 90 degrees.

A gobsmacker view, my favourite in the Catlins, we hung around the excellent lookout soaking it in for a long time.



That all deserved some hot chips and a local pint. Fortunately Kaka Point delivers, being one of the only places in the country serving Catlins Brewery's finest.



OBSCENE LANGUAGE

14. No person shall within such limits as aforesaid use any obscene language or profane language or commit any breach of the peace, act of indecency, or other impropriety, or insult or annoy any person. No person shall behave riotously or boisterously within the foreshore so as to annoy others, or shall call or whistle after any person in a manner calculated to annoy other persons.

Any person who offends against these By-laws is liable on conviction to a fine of £5.

It was perfectly timed...

...to allow some bloody good beer, all of 'em.

The usual two for me one for Priscilla.

In what appears to be a recurring theme, the post has rounded off with more pictures of beer. It makes sense.

The scenic photos and fun family moments betray the unrelenting routine of packing-in and packing-out every few days, looong days in the close confines of active children, and daily data, power, water and poo-space anxiety.

Add to that a persistent leak in the van, and yep a highlight is the opportunity for good adult beer time.

So the Catlins. It's rugged. Lush yet barren. Coldly uncompromising. Brutally beautiful.

It's totally worth the effort.

Oamaru Oddity

17 MARCH 2021

Before it oddly became the Steampunk Capital of the World,

How an ordinary New Zealand town became steampunk capital of the world

Farming community of Oamaru attracts visitors from around the globe after community embraced subculture where wrought iron meets scene.

The Guardian

Oamaru was New Zealand-famous for its Victorian quarter.

Three quarters of our family didn't know steampunk. It's a strange thing to describe. Even after:

It still raises a so, why?

Hopefully an up-shot of the steampunk is that Oamaru attracts a lot more visitors, and by the look of the very tidy old quarter, it's working.

I hope the businesses are hanging in there OK through COVID, because there are some unique shops, even the brewery stands out among New Zealand craft beers with its devotion to Belgian ales.

COVID? Be local-first

Something I've learned—apart from still not liking sour ales at all—is that there are, or are soon going to be, plenty of post-COVID business opportunities in the struggling tourist spots in New Zealand.

Looking at Queenstown, and even the lovely Oamaru, my reckon is that if you start something that caters to your locals first, you're set once tourists return. Craftwork Brewery is a good example.

It's evident that too many businesses in Queenstown became visitor-first rather than local-first.

When I'm thinking about the businesses I'd like to start they've all centred on serving the immediate community, whether it's a tiny bar, a zero-waste general store, or a composting product. If you can do a sustainable job serving locals, when the tourists return, you've got an absolute winner where visitors will love your authenticity and spirit.

Local Courier at The Last Post.

The end of Harbour Street emerges onto another very Steampunk slash English vibe with a quaint harbour and playground.

And the coolest public BBQ in New Zealand.

Penguin spotted!

There are penguin-spotting spots all the way up the south coast, but it hasn't been easy for us with Max and Tom, and the need to hang about until after dusk to get a glimpse.

There's a spot to see blue penguins right in Oamaru.

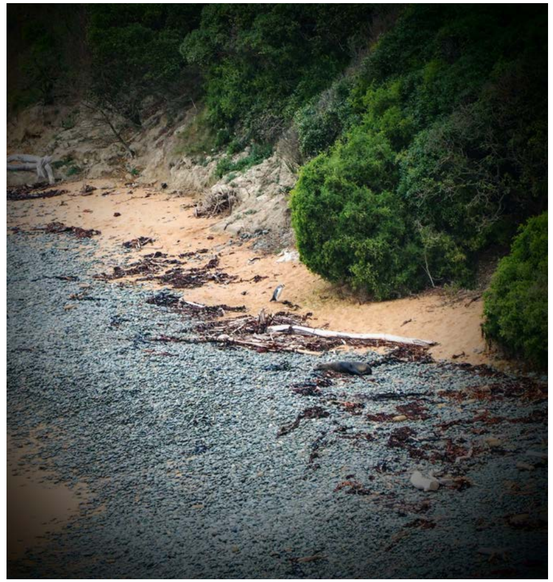
Only we didn't realise it's a $40 per adult attraction. So after seeing the local seals at arm's reach we were shuffled back out the gate.

As a bonus there's a bird colony that has claimed the wharf.

There was another free spot for people like us. And even better, if lucky we could spot a rare yellow-eyed penguin.

It was getting dark, it was wet, and Max and Tom were in tag-along mode.

Then, seeing something bob in the waves for too long to be an ordinary bird, there it was, a solitary yellow-eyed penguin making its way into the bush.



There, right in the middle.

That was a special moment for us.

Duntroon, Fossil Capital of New Zealand?

The next day we took a day trip to Duntroon.

Like Central Otago, it's another small South Island town getting a new life as a cycle trail stop.

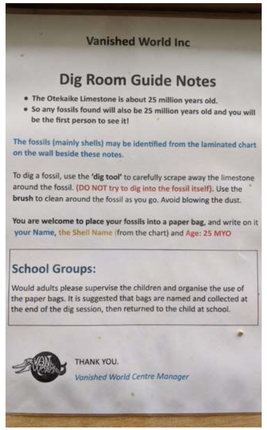
This was a new one, a little little Honda touring group.

And a new craft brewery opportunity? It is all about the story after all.

Vanished World

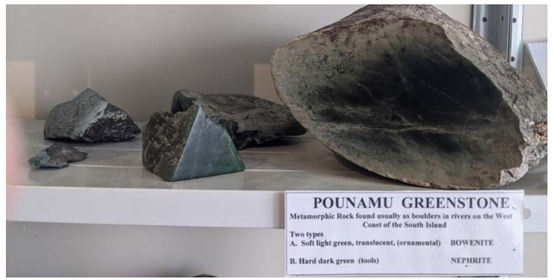
There's a super little totally hands-on fossil centre there.

Where you can do your own archeological dig and take home any 25 million year old fossils you find. Sure it's mostly shells—from when this was once all underwater—but it's a neat idea.



It's classic EOTC (Education Outside The Classroom) innit?

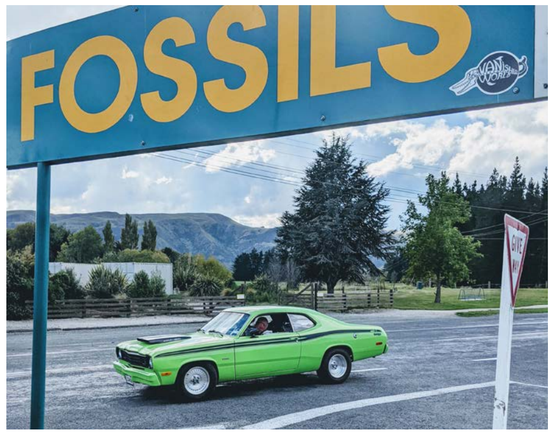
Plus, they have other spectacular ancient specimens, all from the immediate area.



Including Moa bones to wave around.

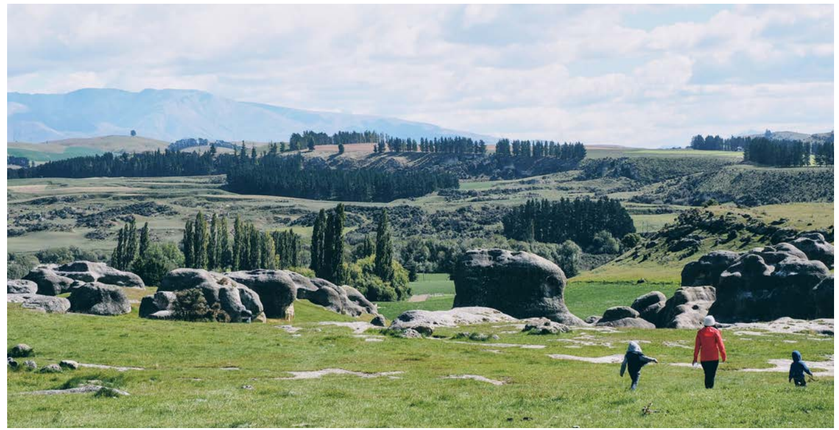
You can't take that one home Tom.

Speaking of fossils...



Elephant Rocks

On the way out we detoured via Elephant Rocks—like Castle Hill in Canterbury—and kindly made accessible by the land owner.



A fun place to race Hot Wheels cars!

One more thing

It's good to see Māori history starting to be better acknowledged in the South. We saw it happening in Riverton, and this was a nice small preservation on the Duntroon-Georgetown Road.

It's modest for sure, and has been ruined somewhat by graffiti (which strangely, hundreds of years from now, will have its own story to tell here), but it's an important reminder of a much deeper, older, pioneering Aotearoa.

It's going to be hard to hold on to these early Māori drawings, but we have to do whatever it takes to try.

From Oamaru it was literally the straight trip to Christchurch for another short stay with family and to collect Goldie's ashes.

We'd stayed in Temuka and Timaru before, and let's be honest there's nothing else to see along that stretch of SH1. Oh you're upset Ashburton? Well how about the grief we get for the crime of having previously lived in Auckland? Harden up.

Post Kaikōura

28 MARCH 2021

We said farewell to Christchurch friends and family again.

Farewell family!

Thanks to that tumbler-sized-sake birthday session for Kengo, we didn't drive back to the caravan that night!

It took me back to the hospitality of Kengo's otosan in Ena, Japan some 12 years ago; bringing his favourite bottles of sake out, even though they were way too big to drink (seemingly!)

We were now making a beeline to Picton, so just needed a couple of places to stop between Hanmer Springs and the ferry.

I wasn't expecting a post to come out of this (dammit.)

Parked with the other NZMCA'ers 5min outside Hanmer Springs village.

Hanmer Springs was a total blast for Max and Tom, no photos to show for it, but the pools are (still) the best. Totally worth the $99 for two adults, two children, two large woodfired pizzas.

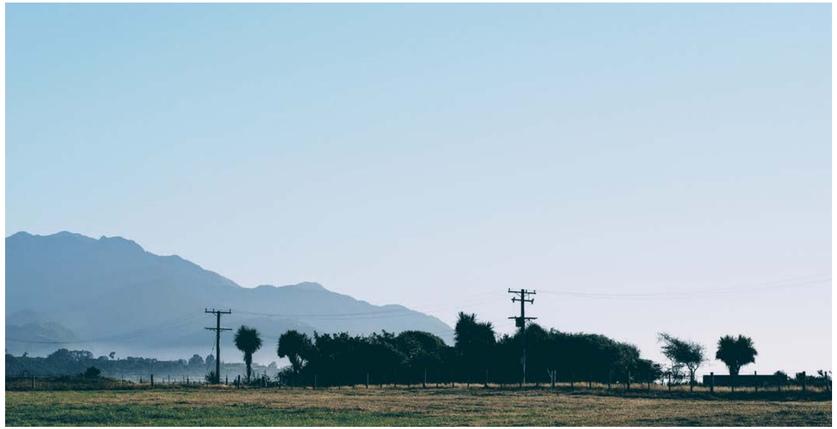
Kaikōura

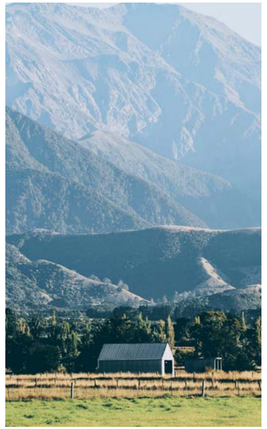
Not being in a position to go whale-watching or dolphin swimming (cost + young seasick children + amazing setting = dad's stressed face), and having had unbeatable East Coast crayfish, Kaikōura was just looking like an admin stop for groceries, washing, ablutions.

Kaikōura is one of these South Island tourist towns that has taken a COVID beating. And, still rebuilding its infrastructure after the 2016 earthquake, poor Kaikōura got it real bad.

People, even my hero Marcus, like to rag on the sliders—the foreign travellers in their Hiace vans—but it's sad to see the impact their absence has on the vitality of towns like Kaikōura.

For us, it was a peaceful short stay.





The view from the parking spot.

From a morning in the library, to a walk up the hill, to an impromptu afternoon with a glorious view.

Driving back from the walk there was just enough thirst and hunger in the car to turn right into the Pier Hotel.

Thank you hunger!

Superb pub seafood platter, not your usual deep-fried fish bites!

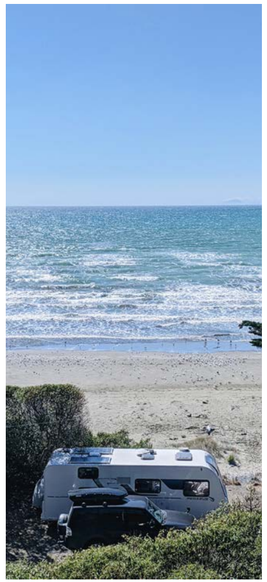
And thank you Kaikōura!

One more stop, Marfell's Beach

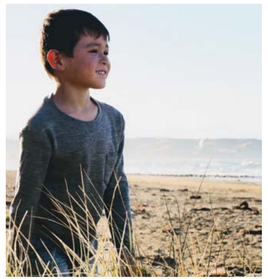
On what we planned as a long drive for us from Kaikōura to Picton, we took a detour to have a look at the Lake Grassmere salt lakes.

Unless you're up high there isn't much to see from ground level, but we continued on to Marfell's Beach where there's a DOC campsite.

What a great surprise spot, we couldn't have been closer to the beach. If you're heading north to cross the strait and need an overnighter, stay here!



Nice for Max and Tom to get back on a sandy beach, a taste of what's to come on a return to Gisborne.



It looks like the camp host is well settled in: two caravans and an awning and an outbuilding!

A lone kite surfer proved a good late afternoon subject.

Until the next crossing Marfell's, thanks
for the memories!

And as we cross back over the strait,
it no longer feels like we have a
derestriction speed limit.

Regrouping in the North

13 APRIL 2021

We've ended up spending a year ambling about some of the North and South. So it feels strange to have just completed a whirlwind week back in Auckland when we were in Bluff last month.

By our standards, once we crossed over the strait a couple of weeks ago, we screamed through the North.

Levin-Whanganui-Tongariro-Taupō-Rotorua...

And Auckland again

Where to next?

Anxious for a plan

15 APRIL 2021

We're typically asked when revisiting friends:

So are you still travelling?

What's the plan?

Well, quite.

It's been a year of possible plans.

We set out to give Sea Change three to six months. Then COVID hit and delayed our start and also parked the option of moving to Macau for a few years.

Early on our travels we learned we were going to have a third child. We put in place a plan to return to Gisborne by last December to have the baby in February, and settle with jobs and look for a piece of land.

Very sadly we lost Goldie in the middle of the South Island winter last year. That turned several things in life upside down. And it put an end to the plan.

Once we lost Goldie we decided to continue looping around the South Island, taking it a week at a time. We got as far as Central Otago and needed to pick up some work. We happily lived in Alexandra for the summer; I laid some homeschool foundations while Priscilla did the hard mahi in the apple orchards.

It has been a real mental challenge for me not to have something to aim at. I wish I was better at seizing the day and not getting preoccupied by what's next. I do believe the best thing a father can do for his sons (beyond love and care) is to pursue something worthy, hard, and admirable.

Then late last year Dad was diagnosed with cancer. That news re-energised the plan to spend time in Gisborne. Around then I was also contacted by EIT (Eastern Institute of Technology) to see if I was interested in tutoring/lecturing a couple of courses. I start with those courses in a few weeks. And we'll be in Gisborne for at least a few months.

I've fleshed out 20-30 possible businesses I could start, now shortlisted to half a dozen of the most accessible. Some possible Gisborne starters, others for other parts of the country, some for Macau, some for Japan, some location agnostic.

I've sketched house plan after house plan in my little book.

Meanwhile in the last 12 months, land for sale in Gisborne has become super-rare and is priced as such. (Yet there's so much land!) Existing housing stock is a rip-off. This makes it tough to justify "settling" there.

We've looked at land and houses and orchard home businesses in Kumara, Hokitika, Christchurch, Dunedin, Alexandra, Cromwell, Wanaka, Queenstown, all the way to Bluff.

So what's the plan?

The plan today is we're going to stay put *somewhere* until we can move to Macau.

That somewhere is Gisborne, then… more Gisborne? Queenstown? Christchurch? Back to Alexandra?

We'll keep the house in Auckland and we'll live in the caravan or rent depending on income stability and rental options.

I'd like to think one of the businesses pops out while we're somewhere; it will take courage and support, and cashflow will likely get in the way.

Max and Tom can go to school and kindy.

I'll keep drawing house plans for the day that dream becomes a reality.

And I'll change the cadence of this record so I can focus on the plan.

Having said all that, if last year is anything to go by, the plan tomorrow might be different!

A life almost ordinary

7 JULY 2021

Last time, after having just arrived back in Gisborne, I said:

The plan today is we're going to stay put somewhere until we can move to Macau.

We're staying put in Gisborne for the foreseeable; it's good being near mum and dad, and we even get the occasional visit from Max and Tom's cuzzies in Tauranga. Macau is still floating out there as a later option, but we're committing to Gisborne to the extent we're looking for a house.

That somewhere is Gisborne, then... more Gisborne? Queenstown? Christchurch? Back to Alexandra?

Gisborne it is, provided house prices continue to plateau (after a rocketing 12 months), which is our feeling in the market out here now.

We're cycling everywhere, Sunshine Brewery is here, I'm already embedded in a local football club, and Priscilla's embedded in the Enviro Centre, and running kimchi workshops with the local Korean reverend!

I mean, it's even got the snowy mountains I crave!

Gisborne, almost looking like the bottom of the South.

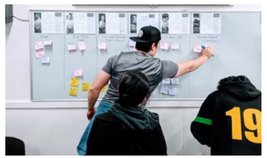
If it doesn't work we'll consider Christchurch which offers much more housing bang for the buck.

We'll keep the house in Auckland and we'll live in the caravan or rent depending on income stability and rental options.

We're keeping the house in Auckland, and now with steady incomes we'll stay in the caravan until we find a Gisborne house.

Improved the indoor-outdoor flow by putting up our full-sized awning for the first time.

I'm full-time with EIT now (having been part-time for the first stint), teaching and developing Bachelor of Computing Systems courses.



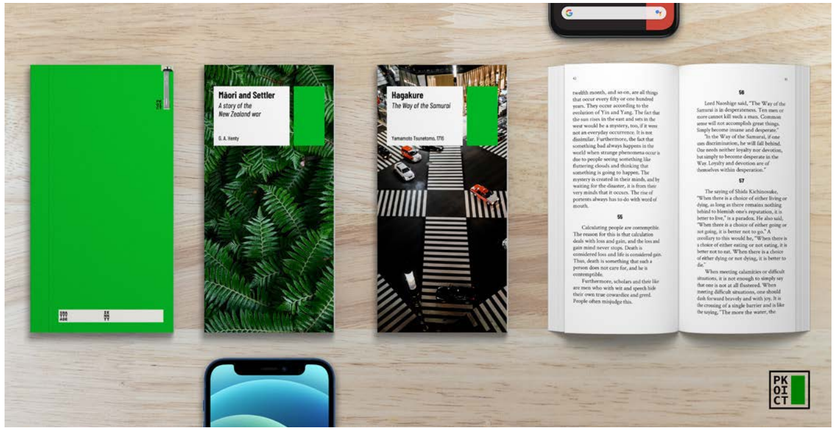
UX'ing with my students.

It's a neat place to work. And I'm about to begin studying for the New Zealand Certificate in Adult and Tertiary Teaching—locking it in! Priscilla has also started a role with Waka Kotahi, which is a nice change of pace for her in all regards. Good people all round.

I'd like to think one of the businesses pops out while we're somewhere; it will take courage and support, and cashflow will likely get in the way.

As it happens, cashflow isn't the issue, it's full-time work (and study??) getting in the way. I have still managed to get as far as a pitch for the leanest low-capital idea.

A prototype *Pockit Note* is made, and the first *Pockit Book* (Hagakure) is just about ready for the inaugural print run, that's exciting!



Max and Tom can go to school and kindy.

Tick and tick.

Max loves school, apparently he's very popular, like his Mum then. He wants to be the first one there, and often tries to be the last to leave (to get in extra play).

His reading and writing is going well, and his maths was already well on the way after a year of calculating distances, speed limits, and time!

Tom, perhaps surprisingly, really likes (maybe not loves) kindergarten. After a year in his safe little bubble with just us, we thought he'd be fearful. He's in there 2-3 days a week, and has overcome his apprehension to make a couple of close friends and will happily potter away on his own, like his Dad then.

Hurrying us out the door, even on the first day.

Hanging with his cuzzies at Nana and Poppa's.

I'll keep drawing house plans for the day that dream becomes a reality.

I have been, but land prices here mean house designing and building is something we can only do if/when we sell up, which would be years away. So really, drawing house plans is a means of procrastination from the studying and business developing.

And I'll change the cadence of this record so I can focus on the plan.

Tick.

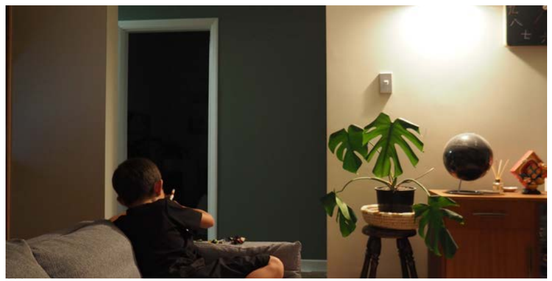
Having said all that, if last year is anything to go by, the plan tomorrow might be different!

Tick!

Epilogue

30 APRIL 2023

We did buy a house. We went to the auction thinking if we get it then that's what we're doing, if we don't then we'll do something else. By "what we're doing" I mean we're doing it up, she sure needs it!



But wait! A week before moving in I went and broke my leg, or should I say another munter on the football field broke my leg. And there went six months of pain, for me and the family dealing with me!

Still, life must continue. And that meant carrying on at EIT, Priscilla at Waka Kotahi and the Enviro Centre and compost workshops and building our garden and ... she doesn't stop.

With ~3 hours to the next main centre, our big Bailey rig was now really too big for life in Gisborne. Tiring of it in the back yard we sold it for as much as we bought it (#winning).

And then we sold the trusty Pajero too for close to what we bought it (you have to discount out here to attract out-of-town buyers).

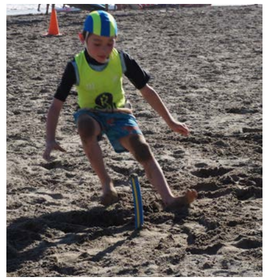
That sale was certainly encouraged by our splurge on an EV after selling another big thing, our house in Auckland! Quite the purge overall.

We were always reluctant landlords and while we loved our Panmure cottage + little cottage, dealing with it from a distance added unwanted clutter to our Gisborne minds.

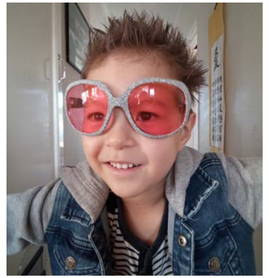
Speaking of clutter, figuring out how to pack our joyful new ride for camping missions is a work in progress, but so worth it.

Offloading those big assets has given us a lot of work/life flexibility; the greatest return being time to think about, and time to do, things that aren't working for the man.

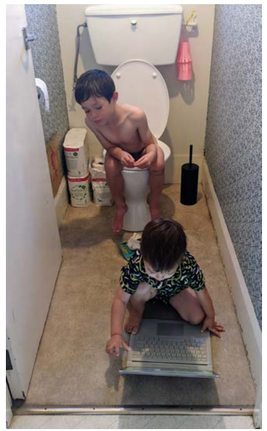
Max and Tom are happy and busy out here. School is a welcome routine for both of them. Caravan life is back-of-mind but, depending on when you ask, they could imagine doing it again.

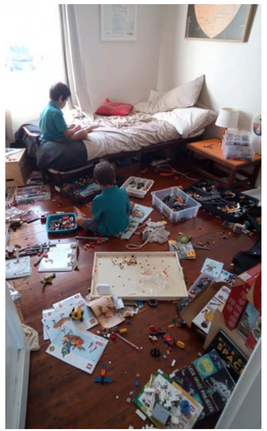


Summer is the beach (not much point being in Gisborne if not!) and winter is football. They're still great brothers to each other, even if they have learned to push each other's buttons like no other.



That cliché they grow up so fast is all too true. Fortunately that aforementioned work/life balance means we're right alongside them on the way. So far they're still happy to have it that way, give it a few years but.

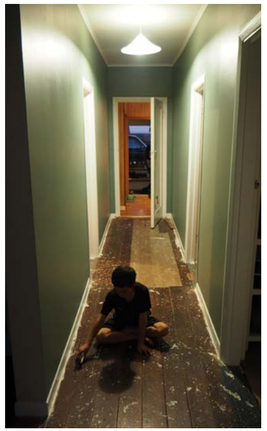




The main reason we've put down some shaky foundations (well hey, look at that house) for this phase of life here in Gisborne is to get in more good times with mum and dad. And by extension the rest of the family accustomed to making their way through the gorge or over the strait.

If it isn't a Gisborne Gold bringing us together then it's definitely a funny farm family photo.

Pre-epilogue, for me personally, professionally, *Pockit* was the most likely thing. It's still gestating and has grown into a broader mindful digital lifestyle business. However, house DIY rules all, so until then...



I've also returned to *Boyakashi*, the integrated under-sink composter. It's now *Sinkashi*, and in amongst DIY (and "one more thing") I'll be thrashing the business plan and leaning on some locals to help me build a prototype.

Oh, and one more thing...

We're having a baby!

A girl! She is as yet unnamed but not likely "Bob", as much as Max and Tom might like to think.

And with that, until there's another Sea Change, thank you and hei te wā tītoki.