



This week I moved into the boarding house where I can use Internet, cook, do laundry and perform all the basic functions that I couldn't while at the hostel. I also got all the paperwork sorted out for my job, which I can start taking shifts for in mid October. After housing and work were figured out, I gave myself some time to explore the nature reserves around Auckland.

It rained on Friday, but I walked around to all the little beaches in Ponsonby anyway. Ponsonby is the suburb just north of Auckland's Central Business district and borders the water. All the homes in Ponsonby have ocean views, if not direct access to a beach. The coast is actually mostly cliff, with short stretches of beach that have to be accessed by wooden stairs from residential roads. Though the beaches are small, they are good for sitting and watching the waves, as well as great views of Northshore across the bay.

On Saturday, I took a ferry ride to a volcanic island called Rangitoto. All along the ferry ride and the hike to the top of the volcano, there are great views of the Auckland city skyline. Around the wharf where the ferry drops passengers off at the island there are little old homes called baches that were built by early settlers who were using the island as a getaway. Though some of the baches have been preserved, people no longer live on the island, and it has been restored as much as possible to its original state.

The Island is covered half in thick forest, and half in open expanses of large volcanic rocks. The areas of forest are filled with native birds and their calls. The Tui bird is a black bird with a small tuft of white feathers at its throat. It was the loudest bird in the forest and, fortunately, had the prettiest song. I also saw some Weka birds, which are small, flightless, brown birds that travel in pairs. I mistook them for kiwis at first, but their bills are much shorter and their bodies are less round. These birds don't scare too easily and I was able to get some pictures as they foraged for food along the trail next to me.

At the top of the volcano, hikers can look into the bowl created by the center of the volcano. It is now filled with green vegetation, and only the shape is reminiscent of an active volcano. The top of the volcano also has the remains of an old military look out that was built in fear that New Zealand would come under attack during World War II.

On the way back down to the wharf, a slight detour leads to a series of lava caves. These small

openings in the rock go deeper than can be seen. Standing near one, I could feel the cool insulated air from under the earth, like a natural air conditioner.

There is a lot to see on Rangitoto and I'm sure I haven't seen it all. Anytime I need to escape the city life, I'll know where to go.