

Bentley Driver's Club tour of New Zealand

28th January to 6th March 2010

The very name of this 'tour' conjures up visions of a bunch of old duffers driving around in very old immaculate. Concours vehicles, jamming up the highways and acting superior. Well you would be right !. Myra and I decided to pass



on a rally of New Zealand in favour of a gentle trickle around the country with a bunch of well healed retired W.O. owners. For those not in the picture a 'W.O' is the series of original 1920's Bentley designed and built by Bill Bentley himself, see photo. These grumbling giants get along better than you might expect and make an earth shattering roar when the accelerator is depressed.

They also have the peddles in the wrong order so for beginners are nigh on impossible to drive without catapulting your passenger through the tiny and completely useless windscreen.

For those of us with more sense we drive Darby Bentleys' built by W.O.'s arch rival messieurs Rolls and Royce. These cars however are faster, lighter, easier to drive and in my view a lot prettier than the jolly green giants, yes, all W.O.'s are British Racing Green as that is the colour one is expected to have. Envious - a little, persuaded – no not yet. Hurling a £400k car around tight bends and gravel are not my idea of a good time, if something goes wrong it is like owning a boat only less cold and wet !

So we arrive in Christchurch to be met with 25 degrees, a huge improvement from our departure form the UK. The car is waiting at the airport and believe it or not starts first time. Off we go to a cacophony of horns as we ignore traffic signs, speed limits and some ludicrous rule in relation to turning left desperate to just get our heads down after a 32 hour flight.



The hotel is small like most things in NZ but is comfortable and we sleep until midnight when we get up ready to start a brand ne night ?, well early day I suppose. We off out for a walk to try and tire ourselves out and eventually get back to bed just as the morning traffic starts up.

After a day in Christchurch, wholly uninspiring I am afraid, we have visited the Gondola, seen the shops and looked for a few bits and pieces, we head off to supper with the Moffatts, our rally buddies, to a great restaurant recommended by Richard Pullen who was here last November. The photo above is of Lyttleton taken from the top of the Gondola that straddles the hills between Christchurch and Lyttleton. Myra and I first visited this area in 1974 on the M.S. Fusus, a Shell tanker. Not sure it has changed much but to be honest we did not remember much about that visit.

The next day we head out to Akaroa on the Banks Peninsula to see the Bleasdale's, Swire folks will remember that Charlotte does the magazines for mariners, Chris built the Baggage Handling System at Chek Lap Kok airport after we won the contract (we were not responsible for the 250,000 lost bags in the first week, that was the airport authority !!!). Chris and Charlotte have bought 3090 acres in a tiny bay called Le Bon which along with the rest of Akaroa is absolutely beautiful.

The first thing that strikes you when on the beach front in NZ is that no one else is on the beachfront. Akaroa itself, much prettier than NF or Salcombe has a population of 3,000 and a dozen empty beaches and bays etc. There are a few boats out in the bay but nothing compared with Plymouth Sound which is much smaller in area. There is just no one living here, marvellous if you are a hermit and like lots of space.



The weather was perfect for a boat trip and we went to see Seals, Penguins, Dolphins (Hector's, little ones about 4 foot long) and lots of birds. I helped the captain navigate, hate him to get us lost !

In the evening we experienced our first 'Southerly', this is the wind that swoops in off the Antarctic and drops the ambient temperature by 5

or 10 degrees in the space of minutes. Quite extraordinary, you are sitting outside in the heat one minute and the next rushing in to get a coat.

From Akaroa we head back to Christchurch to meet up with everyone else who have just flown in from all over Europe. There are 20 cars and therefore 40 participants and everyone is keen to get our instructions and head off around South Island.

Monday 1st February sees us wave goodbye to Christchurch and set out across the central mountains to Arthur's Pass and on to the west coast. The drive is pleasant as the weather is a balmy 27 degrees Celsius and the sky cloudless. Myra and I were not that excited about the scenery on our way up the mountain road it was rusty green with large swaths of grey screed on many of the slopes. The rivers are all down at this time of year and hence the river beds are great wide tracts of grey stony matter. So not over exciting, reminded me of the day in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan when we were in a similar river bed loading Barry Wear's Aston Martin DB2/3 onto

the back of a lorry with just local manpower. Same grey stony riverbeds. But I digress.

Arthur's Pass was a massive disappointment, no panoramic views, a rotten little café, one fuel pump and not much else. We did not get a good panorama until we were well down the West side and could see the sea. By now the temperature is getting up towards 30 degrees and the sun blisteringly hot. Fabulous start to the weather and the drive. We arrive in Hokitika for lunch, this town is on the beach and has nothing going for it culinary wise, in fact we had an awful lunch before retreating to the car and getting onto Franz Joseph our stop for the night. Franz as it is called by it's inhabitants is at the base of the Franz Joseph glacier which you can see stretching away into the distant heights.

We arrive without a hitch to find two cars with minor difficulties. On this tour there are no mechanics so we all have to help where we can. I helped John Popple in a Petterson built Speed 6 'blower' Bentley seal a leaking fuel tank. John's car is a rebuild which was finished two weeks ago so teething troubles were not a surprise. He had also broken a weld on his exhaust pipe which a local mechanic subsequently repaired. His fuel tank however had the propensity to be a long term problem and so spending 3 hours draining it, cleaning and sealing the leaks was clearly essential if the problem was not to re0-occur.

One of the other Derby Bentley's in fact a prototype from 1933 had fuel problems and we quickly tracked these down to one of the two fuel pumps not working. Someone had used household fuses to do the job of a proper glass one and this had gone 'dry'.

So at the end of the first days driving we had travelled circa 200 miles broadly without incident. Unlike rallying we were now stopping in Franz for a further day so we could all go up in a helicopter or on foot to see the two glaciers, the second being named the Fox Glacier. Misses Moffatt



was determined to see the Polar Bear and was extremely disappointed when all she found was a load of grey screed and a dirty white glacial cliff in front of her. I went up in a Helicopter and landed on the Fox Glacier before doing a circumnavigation of Mount Cook and Mount Tasman. The glacier is impressive but not so much as the ones in South America's Torre del Paine wonderland where I was with Charles in

2001 on the Inca Trail. These glaciers were covered in a red dust from Australia which took away they breathtakingly untouched feeling.

From Franz we bowled onto Wanaka on the Northern edge of Fjord land. Wanaka is on a beautiful lake and the scenery from Franz to here was fabulous. However, the

beaches on the West coast suffer appallingly from sand flies, Jacistas as we called them in Mexico. Myra and I avoided these, by not going on a beach, but everyone who did venture out to the waterline were mercilessly bitten by these appalling midge like beasts.

We rushed past the beaches and pushed on into Wanaka for lunch. We went to a beautiful bay called Glendu where we hoped to have a bite to eat, only to find a caravan park with NO amenities at all. This is a classic observation in NZ even after such a short time here, there are just no people, hence no need for Café's or restaurants in little pretty bay etc. It is really weird, in the UK there would be 20 eating establishments on the water front, here there are none !

We head back into Wanaka fro lunch and here is another funny thing. You can buy fresh fish everywhere but the trout in the lake are not for commercial fishing, most of the seafood is battered in a deep fryer and having a sole a meniere is not really the norm. You can get it but most of the Menu's seem to favour a battering.



Anyway, I had sole in butter whilst the other three had Seafood Chowder, rapidly becoming a lunchtime favourite as it is filled with real fresh seafood usually in a great homemade soup.



Wanaka is quickly left behind as we climb the Cordova Valley to the peak overlooking Queenstown, the capital of adventure.

Our arrival in Queenstown was fairly spectacular in itself, the town is on the edge of a singularly beautiful blue lake that reaches for some 50 kilometres from one end to the other. We arrived early

enough to go straight off to the Gondola, a scenic ski bubble that takes you to the top of a local hill giving a spectacular overview of the town and lake. Believe it or not here we bumped into the ex-wife of a good skiing friend and her new husband – the world only seems to get smaller.

We also visited the Kiwi sanctuary as we felt we had to see the real thing whilst we were here. They are as strange as New Zealanders but do not play rugby nearly as well.



to 360 degree spins was awesome.

However, Queenstown is known as the gateway to adventure and we decided to try out the Shotover Canyon Jet Boat. This was amazing, utilizing Hamilton jet technology with which I am well acquainted as Swire Engineering is their agent for China and we supply all the jet units for the HK Macau Ferry. These 3 ton boats were superb and racing at speed through the canyons before being subjected

I then continued my adventures by going White Water Rafting the next day, Myra declined preferring to shop and have her hair done. However, the rafting was a bit tame, even the level 4 rapid, was a breeze after the experience I had had with Ayesha and Richard Dangerfield on the crocodile infested Zambezi in 2003. On that trip we even got out of the rafts and went river boarding (surfing on a river) with the crocs for company !

Notwithstanding the tameness of the run it was beautiful scenery along the river. The only slightly unnerving thing was the endless bits of steel and machinery lining the canyons which were the leftovers from long ago Gold mining in the river. These bits of machinery are pretty well lethal if you hit one or became entangled in them.

Having now been in New Zealand a week, other aspects of Kiwi life have now become apparent to us both. Besides the general lack of people there accommodation is largely shapeless and uninteresting bungalows with tin roofs. The latter are painted various colours but seem to offer little if any insulation and it is notable how hot or cold these properties are depending on the time of day and season. New Zealanders seem to shun air conditioning in their Motels and heating is sparse to say the least. Probably why they seem so healthy !

Another impression is how laid back they are, the national speed limit for locals is 100 KPH and rarely does anyone except us seem to exceed this !. The lack of people leads to a lack of café's and it is quite difficult in the South Island to find somewhere to have a mid morning coffee or afternoon tea unless in a moderate sized village or small town. I guess that if there are not enough customers then such businesses do not spring up.

However, the absolute peace and quiet of the Island is fantastic and one can drive for miles without seeing a car or person – you cannot avoid the sheep, cows and Red deer.

Anyway, Queenstown was fabulous if very quiet and we managed to have a super time there all round. I would love to come back for the winter sports which would be terrific fun I am sure.

From here we travel further south to Te Anau. Famous as being the jumping off point to Milford Sound and Doubtful Sound. The tour had arranged a trip to Milford and so we decided we would visit one of the nearby lakes, Lake Manapouri, on arrival in the town. The trip to Milford was to be in a coach but Myra and I felt we



would see more if we took the car. We were warned that it was a difficult drive with limited parking but decided to give it a go. As it turned out the only downside was the extreme cold of driving at 0800 in the mountains in an open car without the proper clothing.

All worth it once we got there and we ooh'd and arh'd with the rest of them as we toured the sound.

Our return journey was slightly more eventful when one of the Brookland Bentley's on the tour announced they had no petrol to get back to Te Anau with. Bloody idiot there was a huge sign, which his wife pointed out to him, as we left Te Anau saying there was 'NO PETROL'. Anyway, he asked us to go with him in case he runs out and I reluctantly agree. Reluctantly as this means we have to drive 20k off the road on a dirt track to an emergency petrol dump in the mountains. However, there but the grace of God go I.



dust, rattle our bones and finally arrive at this road camp in the middle of nowhere. Is he there - NO. So we ask the locals if they have seen a Bentley, NO they say. So I buy a Jerry Can, NZ\$50 and 10 litres of petrol, NZ\$30 in the sure knowledge he has missed the turning and missed any chance of getting to Te Anau. Back on the road with the most expensive Jerry can in the world full of the most expensive petrol and go looking for him.

An hour later we arrive back at the Motel, NO bloody Bentley, but a dusty car and a can of very expensive petrol. Turns out he had enough fuel and had made it back, terribly sorry that you had to go to so much trouble. Well not only did it cost him the NZ\$80 but he gave me a further NZ\$40 for a bottle of wine, cheap wine that is !. Very apologetic about it all but only offered to wash the car after I had already done it !

So, after Te Anau the tour is going to visit car and aeroplane museums, not for us. We head Off Piste to Invercargill by the scenic route through a tiny town called Tuatapere where we had the best sausage in South Island along with wonderful scrambled eggs for breakfast. We then stopped on the first sea going promontory we came to, Mac Kinnon's Point, and saw Hector Dolphins playing in the surf. Unbelievable but true.

We bypassed Invercargill and headed for Bluff. What an awful place (sorry if you live there), a port with houses dotted amongst the warehouses and port equipment. Worse still, we pass through Bluff to Stewart's Point so that Myra can have some



mussels and her friend Oysters and yes you guessed it, it is not the season for Oysters !. They say Invercargill is the world southernmost city but I would dispute that, Ushuaia is a lot further south and although it may not be designated a city, it is of a similar if not larger size.

However, we are here for a reason, Mrs Moffatt has promised Dean Winter and Martin Cubbon of Swire Properties that we would take a picture of the 'Upper House' hotel bag that we have been given at this point to show where the patrons of this 'wonderful hotel', her words not mine (I haven't stayed there yet), get to. Not until this photo session was complete could we move on.

In Invercargill there is a motorcycle, in fact the World Fastest Indian as portrayed by Anthony Hopkins in the film. The bike is actually on display in a hardware store which seems strange until they tell you that Munro sold it to them as he needed some money. It was a great film but unless you are a motorcycle buff the machine itself seems fairly ramshackle. However it did do 200 MPH and I must say I would not have driven it at 100 never mind 200 !



Myra and I decide that we are really keen to see The Catlins and that a day driving through them will not be enough. We decide therefore to forego the glamour of Invercargill and press on to this fantastic bit of coastline on the South East tip of South Island.

We are not disappointed, our first stop Waipapa Lighthouse at the end of a 6 km stretch of gravel is the home to Sea Lions and there was one just waiting for us when we arrived to start doing his tricks. Fantastic, we get heaps of photos and video before moving on to the southernmost point in New Zealand, Slope Point.



Here we have to walk down to the light beacon some 10 minutes from the road. It has fabulous views very much like the Apostles in Australia. There are several seals frolicking in the surf just beneath us and a suitable signpost for us to record our achievement.

From Slope Point it is back onto gravel to the petrified forest of Curio Bay. Here there are surf dudes everywhere along with a few tourists. We head for the forest which, quite frankly, was as dull as mustard but in walking along the beach we meet our first Yellow Headed Penguins. Myra has already turned back by this point and I have to

go back to get her. It is a wonderful moment when Myra meets Penguin, difference in height only 3 feet so they are almost looking eye to eye ! Oohf, I just got hit for that comment !



Having now achieved most of our goals for the two days, we head onto the local village for lunch. Well local caravan, there is no shop or Café in Wikawa. The caravan has a great menu of Blue Cod and Chips along with Ginger Beer and Ice Cream. Just what the undertaker ordered for two people on a diet !. Food is fab and we leave the village having been given details of a secret bay where there is an abundance of Sea Lions

and Penguins each day.

This place, Purakaunui Bay, is some 20 km up a gravel track to a beach below very high cliffs on one side and sand dunes on the other. There are a few camper vans there but nothing else. Camping vans by the way seem to be the transport of choice for most people visiting NZ and we see more of these than cars most days. Seems a pretty good way to travel but as we did Europe in one in the early eighties Myra now prefers the comfort of a Motel. Either would suit me.



Purakaunui Bay was everything we had been told, I just narrowly missed falling over a female Sea Lion which barked at me but was near invisible in the sand dunes except for when it occasionally flipped it's fins to cool itself with sand. Myra and I could not believe how docile it was, completely unphased by having a human nearby. A little later I found a huge bull Sea Lion similarly basking in the sun covered in sand and looking very dead

except for the occasional flip of it's 'fin'.

Brilliant start to the Bay, we then sat and had some biscuits whilst waiting for the main event anytime after 1700 we are told. At about 1800, we suddenly see some Penguins on the head some 30 metres above the beach. Dashing over with cameras flapping we see two pairs of adults with a single cub each making there way slowly down to the sea so that they can go fishing. We takes loads and I mean loads of photos', batteries finally running out of the wonderful little birds. The calls are as clear as a bell and there is no one to get in the way, upset them, warden us or anything else. A true moment with nature.

We finally depart the Bay at 2000 realising we have no motel to go to. After driving through Owaka we decide that we might as well press onto Dunedin and stay an extra night there at the tour hotel. It is dark and freezing cold when we arrive in Dunedin and we are really pleased to get inside and warm up.

Temperatures in South Island are very variable and change very suddenly. It is almost as if the ambient temperature is say 10 degrees Celsius but is warmed to 25 degrees when directly in the sun and out of the wind. As soon as you are in shade the temperature plummets and likewise in the wind. Get the two together and I swear the temperature drops 10 to 15 degrees. We spend all day putting jumpers and windcheaters on and off whilst accepting cold legs in my shorts. I bought Myra a fleece sleeping bag yesterday into which she tucks her legs when it is really cold in the car. The temperature is a strange one, you need to have two sets of clothes ready here at all times.



Our arrival in Dunedin a day early is uneventful, it is a much larger town than others in the very South and humming with life. On our second evening we visit Larnach Castle on the Otago Peninsula. This mock castle is located in one of the best spots on the peninsular and has stunning views down into the harbour and out across the Southern Ocean. We return to the peninsular the next day to visit the penguin colony and Albatross centre. However both these sites seem very touristy and we decide to forgo them in favour of a boat trip on the Monarch. This small boat takes us out of the harbour and into the blue, it was a great call as we see Albatrosses, all four species, flying around the cliffs and out to sea, something I do not remember ever seeing during my time at sea. Needless to say we see hundreds of seals, we are pretty blasé about these now as we have seen so many.



A pod of Hector Dolphins with offspring's play with the boat for a full 20 minutes and I manage some great video of them. Myra took a hundred photos of which one, I think, actually had a Dolphin in it !.



Back on shore we head off to see the seaward side of the peninsular where each farm cannot be seen by the next, most have their own beaches and the land is green. However, I am pleased to say farmers enjoy the struggle as much here as they do in Devon and the one we stopped to talk to

complained about the wind, the rain, the price of sheep and all the usual grumbles of working what must be one of the most scenic farms in the world !.

On the way back to the hotel we stop at St Clair where there are surfers and beach bums everywhere, needless to say in thick wetsuits as the sea is not that warm in the South Pacific !



After a pleasant evening eating at the Wave in St Clair, watching the surfers, we up sticks and head for Omarama in the centre of the island south of Mount Cook. Omarama is the world capital for gliding and that is ALL !. Say no more about the town or for that matter the hotel, both lacked any reason for being there except for the gliding. Being in Rome I tried the Gliding Experience,

luckily only signing up for a 30 minute session as I hated it, felt hemmed in and air sick. It was a lot noisier than I expected and seemed to consist of endless bouncy spirals upwards followed by a long fight to avoid losing altitude. Not many experiences I have been reluctant to embrace but this is definitely one of them.

From Omarama we travel North to Mount Cook. We have left the tour and gone 'off Piste' for this section as they are not visiting the mountain and we could not come to NZ without doing so. It is awesome, visible from 50 kilometres away across a deep blue lake. The drive up to the Edmund Hillary centre is very relaxing with wonderful scenery in every direction. On arrival in Mount Cook we drive to



the Tasman Glacial Lake for a walk to the viewpoint and then down to the lake side. The glacier is again a bit of a disappointment as it is dark brown and dirty with moraine. In fact we almost missed it because it is so different to that which we have seen in South America and the Himalaya's. However, it is still fascinating as are the icebergs in the glacial lake.

Mount Cook itself towers 10,000 feet above where we are staying and offers a fabulous backdrop to supper at the Hermitage, a strange looking modern hotel designed like Avorias in Portes de Soleil and Le Dai in Val d'Isere to blend in with the countryside and failing completely to do so !

Onwards from Mount Cook, leaving in blinding sunshine for Hanmer Springs, North of Christchurch. The weather soon changes as we approach the drop to the Canterbury plains and we drive in heavy showers all the way north. We pass Mount



Hutt where Ayesha's boyfriend spent some months last year ski training.

Over the last few days the tour has had it's tribulations. A Brooklands burst a tyre due to bad tracking and has had to fit wrong size tyres that look strange but seem to work. The Trafficators on one of the other Derby's keep going in and out of there own accord caused by a short in the electrics, fixed by a local auto electrician and finally the boot

falling off Beatrice, the oldest Derby in the world !. However, compared with a rally hardly a problem anywhere.

The group have split into a various factions, the fast - including us, the slow – those that stop at every museum and the fickle – those that come and go at will from the tour.

Back to the trip Hanmer is not inspiring so moving quickly on we have a wonderful drive west and north to Nelson through Springs Junction. Nelson is a lot warmer than we have hitherto experienced and of course is close to the Abel Taman park, Green Lipped Mussels and North Island.



After a great lunch at the Boatshed and a relaxed evening at our hotel we head off to the Abel Tasman for coffee with a local Bentley owner, fabulous house on a hilltop with views to die for. He has arranged a helicopter to come up and take those that want to on a tour of the national park. I jump at this, Myra not so keen. We fly off to

pristine beaches, a forest and hills. We land for a coffee in the middle of nowhere and experience for the first time the inherent noise of the local beetles and hoppers, it is loud and unceasing. After an hour you have definitely had enough of it, this coupled with sand fly's are the two downsides to the otherwise fabulous area. Having a house by the sea here would be hard to beat anywhere in the world it is

just so peaceful, uninhabited and glorious that words cannot really describe the beauty.

From Nelson we take the Queen Charlotte Drive to Picton from where we will eventually be getting the ferry to North Island. The drive is challenging in an old Bentley with stiff steering but good fun as it is fast as well as twisty. The 50 kph speed limit was clearly not for touring rally cars ! Picton is a port town with a pretty centre but it is only after we have passed through that we reach the truly fabulous coastal area between it and Beaufort our next stop.



There are numerous beachfront properties with boat houses on the water and stunning views, many for only a couple of hundred thousand pounds. There is one magnificent one with it's own headland and bay for about a million. The drive is on gravel and very twisty but made up for by the pretty inlets and coves. We travel for an hour and then run slap bang into a forest fire. Luckily before we go too far we meet a fireman who says we can get through but not without risking damage to the car. In the middle of this conversation two helicopters with water buckets slung underneath fly close overhead and deposit their water on the ridge above us.

It reminded me of the Maclehoose Trail in 1993 when four of us including David Ewings, who we hope to see in North Island, were caught in a forest fire having



walked 70 kilometres and were at the bottom of Ma On Sham the highest hill in the New Territories HK. We almost ran up the hill not wanting to abort the challenge with less than 30 k to go, David never forgave me for the damage it did to his knees nor indeed my legs. It was bloody hard work but we kept ahead of the fire and completed the walk.

After filming the fire and the helicopters etc we reluctantly turned around and drove the 20k back to Picton so we could take the main road to Blenheim.

Blenheim is famous as being the centre of the Marlborough wine making area including an old favourite, Cloudy Bay. Consequently the town is fairly affluent and the surrounding area a lush green full of wineries aka vineyards. We are only here

for a day and that is taken up with a trip to Havelock and a boat ride in the Pelorus Sound to the Green Lipped Mussel beds. Although this was a great trip on a catamaran, we are a bit scenaried out and I took very few photos of the sound.

In the meantime, our friend, David Moffatt has been taken ill and Myra has given up the trip to be with Yvonne and make sure David is looked after by the local hospital. Needless to say the facilities in Blenheim are excellent and they soon determine he needs an op for gall stones. Not sure yet how this is going to work but at least he now knows what is wrong.



After a trip around the wineries of Marlborough we head North to Picton to catch the Interisland ferry to Wellington. We are sorry to leave South Island but will never forget the endless scenery, strange temperatures and lack of people that make this island so special.

We set off across the Cook Straits, taking photos of the North Island as we approach, Oops, wrong direction, actually it's the South Island we are photographing, a simple mistake for a Master Mariner.



We land at Wellington, well at least I think it is the North Island and set off for Wanganui. That first evening the weather is similar to the south, hot, cold, wet, dry, windy and calm. We spend a pleasant evening on a steam boat shipped over from the UK, heavens knows why, and dumped

in the Wanganui river. Very pleasant but not exciting. In fact the first few days in North Island are slightly disappointing, Myra and I are scenaried out and there are not as many adventures to be had here as in the South.



The drive across central North Island from Wanganui to Napier was good fun, much of it on gravel but all of it through beautiful mountain and forest scenery.

We front up in Napier in the middle of the Edwardian Weekend when people from all over NZ bring out their old cars and parade them through the town, picnic, have an Air Display and generally have a good time. Myra loves the dressing up and all the beautiful clothes, I enjoy the cars and the cheap beer. The town is

architecturally the most interesting we have yet encountered and one of the few places where there are proper houses as we know them.



After Napier it was on to Taupo, unfortunately the weather was poor and we could see little of the lakes and mountains. We did visit the Huka Falls in another of these fantastic Hamilton Jet Boats which are so much fun and highly recommended for anyone visiting here. Sitting below the falls with 1200 HP battling against the current is amazing and it is a touch

frightening when the boat pays off and whips down stream at a hell of a rate. We also feel the effect of the hot water bubbling up from the thermal springs below this region, the temperature sufficient for a hot bath.

Besides David and Yvonne Moffatt having to return to the UK, Myra was also called into action when a young man had an epileptic fit right in front of our table in a waterside café. It was particularly scary as we thought we had lost him for a moment when he stopped breathing. Luckily he started again as he slowly calmed down from the fit. Very scary and we were relieved when the ambulance arrived to take over. Nurse Myra was a star as always in a crisis !

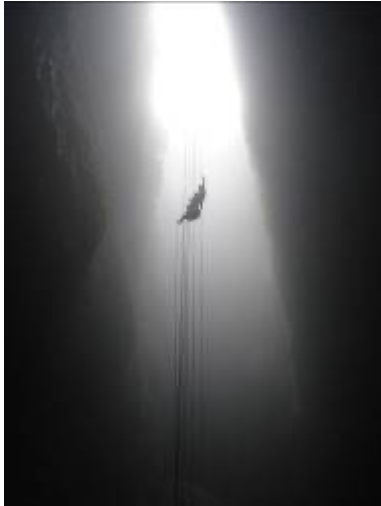


We met up with our rally friend, Alistair Caldwell on his motorbike. He was passing through on his way to an off road rally across the mountains near Queenstown, Always on the go is Alistair even when he is in NZ visiting his

mother. We have had many adventures together and he is the nana that took a Ferrari on the Inca Trial in 2001 which he had to rebuild almost every night !



From Taupo we drove North to Rotorua, very smelly town. After visiting one sulphur pit and geyser, I fled and went west to Waitomo to go abseiling and caving. Good call, left Myra with rally and had a great evening to myself with a group of farmers in a pub in Te Kuiti. Learnt what a Jafa was – Just Another F’ing Auckland, and was introduced to the world fastest shearar. Te Kuiti is the capital of shearing so they told me. By the time I went back to the motel it could have been the capital of NZ !



The abseiling was awesome as was the following 2km climb, swim and hike along the subterranean river to get out again. 100 metres straight down on the abseil, really scary but good fun. Lunch at the bottom on wet rocks before setting off through the caves and river bed. Great day out coupled with a super drive back to Rotorua through the central farmlands.



The North Island is far more populated than the south and the people are far more

pushy. Service is still rubbish but the choice of food far greater, much less Fish and Chips – everything in batter. Definitely the more sophisticated island but not quite as friendly. However we love the place nevertheless and as we get further north so the country comes closer to what we are used to in England. Only without Gordon Brown, Health and Safety and millions of meaningless and unenforceable laws and rules. Also NO Capital Gains Tax and NO Inheritance Tax !

Travelling to the capital Auckland is uneventful and boring, the roads are ordinary UK A roads but with a lot of people travelling at below 60 miles per hour. Overtaking is not easy but has to be done - for the speed they drive at the whole of the population should only be allowed Suzuki Swifts, Holden 5.5 litre super cars are a total waste on both the road and the drivers.



Clarkson is here at present I wonder what he has to say about the driving and the bloody motorhomes !

We stop North of Auckland at Takapuna, we are just passing through this first time so besides a quick trip to the harbour we spend the day sorting out cars and laundry. Myra finds a

washing machine in our 'suite' and wore it out in one evening. However, I do have clean clothes now so it was well worth the whirring all night.

Driving north from Takapuna we are looking forward to meeting up with our friends, David and Ainsley Ewings who live in the Bay of Islands not far from Kerikeri. However first we have to travel to Paihia to see the southern islands and visit the picturesque village of Russell, close to where the first capital of NZ was, Okiato.



We cross to the island by ferry and drive up through the oldest capital to Russell itself which is a haven of Englishness in the middle of NZ. In fact we

Speak to several people there and they all seem to be from the UK.

This
and

go

Mike
takes



area of NZ soon grows on us like Akaroa we decide it is probably one of the nicest places in the country. Beautiful scenery, few people, lots of sheep and very laid back. On arrival in Paihia we arrange to sailing on a 20 metre Catamaran, eat your heart out !. It is called 'On the Edge' and us out amongst the Island for a

brilliant day in the sun and breeze before landing us on the largest Island in the area for lunch and a walk up the hill. Great day out for both of us, with a swim thrown in for good measure.



The skipper on the cat, Paul, is a laugh, works as little as possible, 3 days a week, surfs when not sailing and has no long term ambition beyond a sail and a beer ! What a life. The little dot in the water in the photo to the left is Myra.

We have three days in Paihia including one when we drive up to Kerikeri to meet David and

Ainsley and visit there fabulous farm overlooking the Cavalli Islands and the Bay itself. David meets us in KK in his Healey 3000 and we travel back in convoy to their home. After relocating some cows, we have a great lunch and catch up as it is 15 years since Myra and Ainsley have been together and about 5 since I met up with Ewings in Plymouth with David Walker and the Swire Mariners Club.



Nothing much changes in NZ including David and Ainsley !. Great day and we retire back to Paihia tired but delighted.

On to the north for our final two night stop at the very top of the island. Taupo is not very inspiring but the town of Mangonui nearby is another gem. We sit at a fish and chip restaurant there eating prawn and mussel cocktails before indulging in the fish. Not sure why so much fish is battered here but I am now used to peeling back the batter, discarding it and consecrating on the fish which is always fab, Blue Cod in particular. Myra of course is huge on the Green Lipped Mussels which are freely

available in most places. Oysters, which neither of us like are back in season this week.



Our main purpose for being in Taupo is to travel up 90 Mile Beach to Cape Reinga the very north of NZ, well not quite we can see the very northern tip but do not actually go there. Cape Reinga is very interesting primarily because from it you can see the King Islands, fabulous untouched beaches and the enormous sand dunes of 90 Mile Beach.

On our way to the Cape we stop at a Gumdigger's camp, famous for where the name 'Gumboots' comes from. These guys use to dig up the roots of long dead Kauri Trees which produce an amber like gum used in the 19th century for varnish and paint. They wore Wellington boots but used to call these Gumboots as they wore them when digging. Couldn't get overexcited about this stop as Myra and I were keen to have a go at the Sand Surfing on the giant dunes at Cape Reinga.

When we finally got to the dunes, a lot of fun was to be had watching people careering down the slopes straight into a rather wet and soft sandy river bed where they were washed and sanded. Finally persuading Myra to have a go, she found a spot where any overrun would not land her in water and set off in a great flurry of soft sand to the bottom, yelling all the way !.



Discretion being the better part of valour I stayed firmly at the bottom and watched the decent !. Unfortunately I cannot reproduce a photo here as I video'd the historic run rather than taking a snap !

Once done with the dunes we headed off down 90 Mile Beach past a stuck rental car, these are banned from the beach and un-insured here !. The two lads were desperately digging to get the car out before the tide came in. No sympathy from our driver so we have no idea whether they are still there or not ?



Our last day of the tour is a dash back to Auckland ignoring the tour route and taking the fastest way south.

On the penultimate day of our visit we meet up with Alistair and Jean Caldwell again to visit local attractions including

– The starting of an aero engine built by a NZ genius of a mechanic now dead ! , An Art Gallery on a beach, a Fabulous National Park, Kouranguei, and their beautiful home in Devonport. A great day in every respect and many thanks to them for making our final day such a good one.

Cars washed and containerised now, we both at Auckland Airport waiting for the flight to Christchurch and then onto Bangkok for the next leg of our trip.



A great six week trip around a wonderful country with lots to see. We leave exhilarated and grateful for the opportunity to see so much of the country. We do not think we could live here, just far too quiet and unsophisticated, but we loved the visit and I may try to come back next year for the 2011 Rugby World Cup if England have any chance at all !.

Bye from NZ.

Paul and Myra
8th March 2010