

The Hamer Newsletter



21 February 2014

Hello to One and All,

This is our special edition New Zealand newsletter – North Island. It is hard to do justice to the beautiful scenery but we hope the photos will give some indication – and they have not been photo-shopped either. The intense blue of the waters is amazing and the green, green countryside just fabulous. We were lucky to have visited at a time when there had been plenty of rain and everything was looking lovely – and we had almost perfect weather for the whole 5 weeks. In fact, we had too many warm clothes and not enough shorts & T-shirts! One aspect of this trip was the daylight until late in the evening, giving us plenty of time to enjoy the day and not having to stop too early to find a camp spot.

3 January 2014

After a short night's sleep (arrived hotel 12.45 am) we had breakfast and were picked up at 9am by our Wilderness Motor Homes representative. After filling out the paperwork and a comprehensive run through of the vehicle, it was off to the nearest supermarket to stock up on groceries, then away we went Northwards.

Once clear of Auckland the scenery was beautiful and we had lovely weather. We went via Helensville to Atiu Creek regional park



overlooking Kaipara Harbour and Wairoa River, and stayed the night after some walking in the area. It was very windy, but the views were stunning and we were the only campers there.

4 January

We awoke to another bright sunny day and drove via Wellsford to Matekohe and the Kauri Museum. This is a really interesting museum with great displays of timber, equipment, buildings and people of days gone by. We spent a few hours there and it was not long enough. The photo is of Bev sitting in a sculptured Kauri log which was dragged out of a swamp and was buried 35,000 years ago.



We then looked at Kai Iwi Lakes which were crowded with holiday makers and kids swimming. The water was much too cold for us. We finished up at Trounson Kauri park for the night, a Dept of Conservation camp ground.

5 January

The morning was spent doing walks in the kauri forest and visiting the giant trees. These are approx 2,000 year old magnificent kauri trees and well worth going to see. Then we drove across to the other side of the country, via Omapere, Opononi and Kaikohe to Aroha Island campground near Kerikeri



where we met up with friends Jill & Al and spent the night.

6 January

We started the day with a scenic drive to Whangaroa Harbour and Matauri Bay, stopping off for lunch at Te Ngaere with Jill & Al.





Then a long drive down to a camp at Manganese Point near Whangarei. Along the way we looked at the very interesting public toilets at Kawakawa, and Whangarei Falls.



7 January

Another long day driving past Auckland (and paying the toll on the only toll road on the North Island), to the Coromandel Peninsula. The drive around the peninsula is slow, due to both the narrow winding road along the coastline, and the scenery. We ended up staying in a designated freedom camping spot in a car park in Coromandel Town and treated ourselves to fish & chips.



8 January

We continued around the Coromandel Peninsula and stopped to do a walk at the Broken Hills Mine Site near Whitianga.

A minor problem with the bathroom drain blocking up meant we had to detour to have it fixed.



We then carried on to another old mine site at Karanahake Gorge. How they ever managed to construct the rail lines through solid rock along the face of a gorge is mind boggling.



Our overnight stop was at an old railway station at Waihi.



Rotorua and a walk in the Redwood Forest at Whakarewarewa – love these Kiwi place names! The forest was planted for timber harvesting but has been left to grow and is a reserve now. We would have liked to do one of the walks to view a geyser, but a thunderstorm started and we managed only a short walk through the forest. From there we went to Waikite Thermal Pools campground for the night and had a relaxing soak in some of the pools – all at different temperatures and very enjoyable.



9 January

This morning we drove first to McLaren Falls park near Tauranga and had morning tea in the café. The park is lovely with various camping spots dotted around. Then on to



The water comes straight out of the ground at 98 deg. C and is cooled for the pools. It is the cleanest, purest and most odourless hot water you can find. The steam rising from the springs and the river into which it flows is permanent and quite eerie in the moonlight.

10 January



Leaving Waikite we drove through a scenic landscape with steam coming out at various places, often very close to farm buildings. Huka Falls is very photogenic – very blue. The Craters of the Moon boardwalk was interesting and eerie.



After that we drove the Desert Highway, so called because of its arid nature.



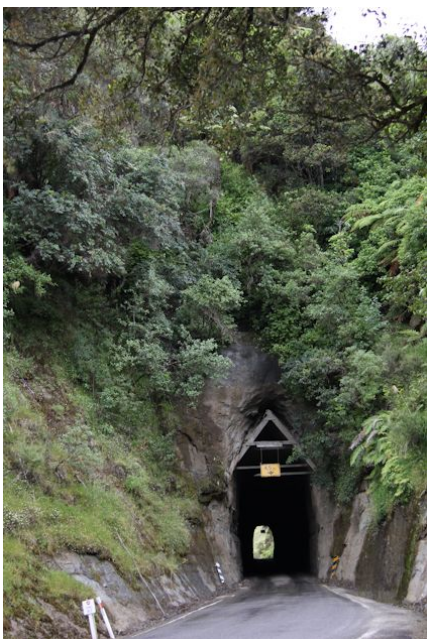
It was very windy and cold and the snow capped mountains in the distance quite majestic.



That night we stayed in the tiny village of Piriaka.

11 January

A grey and cloudy morning. We left Piriaka and went via Taumarunui to the start of the 150 kilometre long Forgotten World Highway. The road narrow, winding, steep in places



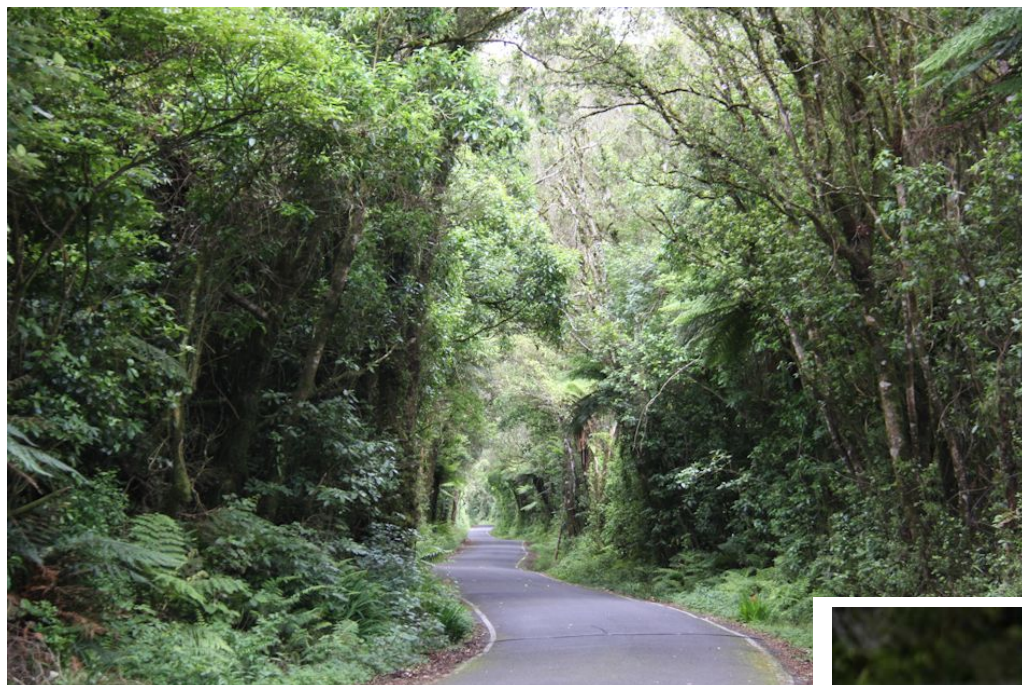
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and a really beautiful drive. It passes through beautiful steep grazing country, over high saddles and rivers, through a rock tunnel, and the Tangarakau Gorge with its dense rain forest. It also passes through the tiny historic town of Whangamomona which declared itself a Republic in 1989.

This quote is from one of the many internet descriptions of the road:

"Built on colonial bridle paths formed in the late 19th century, the highway is remote and mysterious to the extreme. "A bit upsy downsy" is how one local resident puts it - a classic New Zealand understatement to describe a road that hugs the rugged contours of the land to provide a natural roller coaster experience."

It is definitely an all day trip. We ended up at Dawson Falls visitor centre at the Mt Taranaki National Park, did a walk in the Goblin Forest and stayed overnight in the car park.



12 January

Another grey and cloudy day. We left the park early to avoid any incoming traffic on the single lane access road and had breakfast just outside the park next to a farm fence which showed evidence of the 5 metres annual rainfall they have!



Then it was off to Opanake for a look, south to Wanganui and east through Dannevirke to Waihi Falls. We could have stayed the night in the small car park at the falls, but it was very windy and exposed so we went back to Dannevirke and stayed at the golf club for the night. (We were able to stay at these clubs because we had joined the NZMCA and could use our membership to access many great overnight stops).



13 January

We headed south to Featherston then on towards Wellington across the Rimutaka Range. This is a very interesting drive to say the least. The wind was extremely strong. The narrow road hugs the side of the mountain and twists and turns constantly and the wind buffets you around every bend. Our average speed was about 35k, but there are plenty of small pull-in bays so we could let the faster cars past. The scenery is spectacular. As it was the cook's birthday we stopped at Upper Hutt for a birthday lunch in the Cosmopolitan Club.

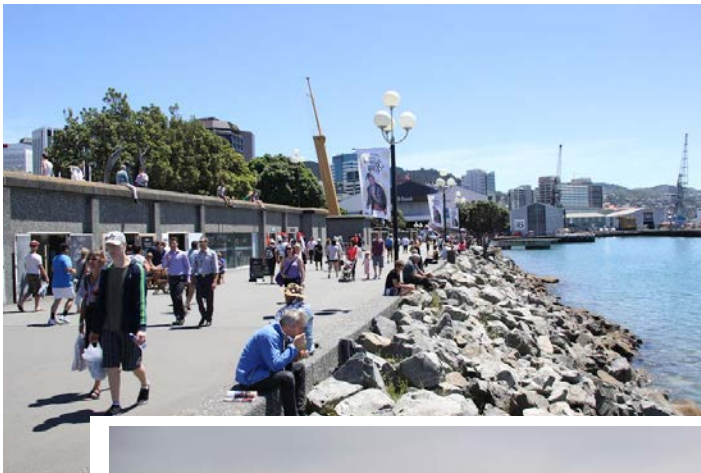
Then on to the Rimutaka Forest park for some walks and an overnight stay in the campground.

14 January

In to Wellington to the city council Motorhome Park on the waterfront – not that we could see the waterfront from the site, which is just a car park with power points and an ablutions block. However,



it is very convenient if you want to be in Wellington to catch the morning ferry just up the road. We went up to the botanic gardens in the cable car for great views over Wellington, wandered



around the city, had lunch at a waterfront restaurant and spent some time in the Te Papa museum.

15 January

Up early and queuing for the ferry just after 7am for our trip to the south island. Once we left cloudy Wellington the day was glorious, warm and sunny and perfect sailing weather. So, goodbye to the north island and hello to the south in the next edition.

Regards,
Bev & Frans



