New Zealand Memories, March, 2011

Celebrating 40 Years

Great NZ Names for Places

The Remarkables
Invincible Creek
Resolution Island
Rainytop
Speculation Range
Wild Man's Brother Range
Mt. Doleful
Mt. Aspiring

Cape Foulwind
Doubtful Sound
Dismal Creek
Unknown Lake
Paradise
Anxiety Point
Gentle Annie Rocks
Happy Cove
Farewell Spit

The Diary

Day -2—We were supposed to leave LAX at 11 PM, but mechanical problems delayed our Airbus 330 for 4 hours. *(Take your time, guys….)* The Qantas lounge is rather plush, however. *No worries.*

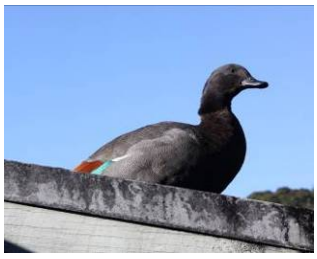
Day -1—Left LAX, unprecedented luxury in business class. *Thank you Sandie's miles!*

Day 0—Lost in crossing dateline

Day 1—Landed in Auckland, dealt with a long flight delay again, but we finally left on a twin prop on the late afternoon in pelting rain, then flew directly over Mt. Taraniki—the classic volcanic cone on W Coast of North Island en route to Nelson. We arrived with golden late light on puffy cumulus on the hills above Nelson with bonus of a very low tide, glistening in the setting sunlight. We got our car, stayed on the left, found our motel, and enjoyed a great dinner at Hopgood's. *(Thank you, Jack and Renee).* On our walk, a huge roar surged out of the stadium a mile away. *(Good on you,* Crusaders, rebounding from a post earthquake funk.) This is rugby country, and the World Cup is approaching. Christy and Michael, you're gonna love it here.

Day 2 & 3—Hopped the Sea Shuttle to Awaroa Lodge on the Abel Tasman NP, 4 meter tidal swings, golden sand as advertised. Shells cover the high tide lines with pearly rifts, and boats rest on the expansive flats at low tides. We had a nice dinner and lovely

bottle of wine and then a touch of Port, and then hiked giggling with headlamps into the bush to see the glow worms. Hundreds of little points of blue light, arrayed like stars in the banks above a creek, which, given the romantic circumstances, had to be a *trickling* creek. We walked sections of the AT track through the ferns, saw the eels in the restored wetlands. Saw our first Paradise ducks…couples mate for life…presaging a theme of our trip, climaxing with a rough road trip to Paradise itself. Relaxing, low key, very peaceful place…lovely "green" ethos.


Day 4—Took the boat back to Kaiteriteri mid day, and drove up to Whahariki Beach (pronounced Fara-rickey) in far NW corner of S Island—*thank you Scott Cook for* NZ Frenzy *guidebook.* Stunning sea stacks at low tide, caves in the cliffs, dunes in the late afternoon low sun…drove back in rain to Annie & Barden's place in fading light.


Day 4 & 5—We stayed with Annie and Barden in Pangatotara, *"Chief's Big Canoe,"* upriver from Motueka. Great friends, great mischief, plenty of wine. We started the next day with a trip to Mapua on the coast, and there we found Sara's dream car.

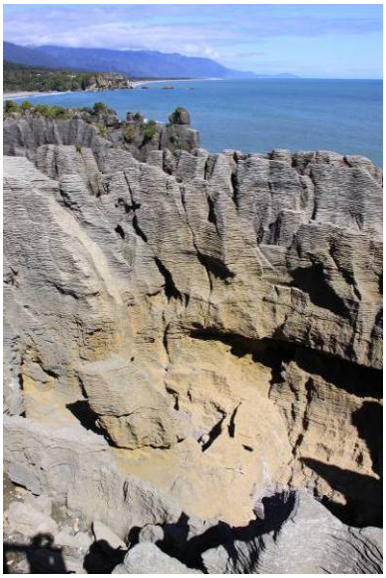
Later we visited wineries in the Nelson area (Wollaston, Neudorf, & Waimea). The vines were draped with white netting a week before harvest. Fine Pinot from Wollaston (Moutere Clay 2005). Best wine of the whole trip, though, was Barden's Stevenot Syrah 2000. Also noteworthy in Nelson area was hop growing…with unique, tightly planted vertical windbreaks. Excellent map guidance from Barden…who recognized my dilettante status in fly fishing and refrained from mockery.






Day 6 drove southwards up the Motueka River to Tophouse and then 100 km down the 4WD Rainbow Road to its terminus. This was our first close encounter with blue NZ river water, and the Wairua River Gorge was "perfect." This road was legitimate 4WD with multiple fords and scrabbly uphills—*thank you Sara for that advice*. We took a side road to Lake Tennyson, which was austerely, quietly beautiful…then finally up and over Jack's Pass and descended to Hanmer Springs. Yes, we went into the pools. Dinner at Chantellini's was a high point—worthy of recommending to Jack and Renee.

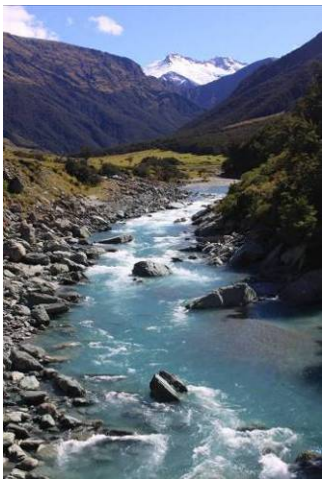
Day 7 Sandie swam in Hanmer Springs lap pool, and then we drove to the West Coast, to Punakaiki to see the required, eroded limestone rock piles, and then South along the coast to Hokitika, which was a cool place. *(Thank you, George.)* George saw the green flash here, apparently invisible to imperious Germans, but other things are less fleetingly green. The jade craft was really wonderful. The *koru* of the unfurling frond *is* NZ. Sandie couldn't help herself at the possum place—so we'll soon have 2 suvvy possum pillows. Dinner at Café de Paris. *Thank you, Barden.* We considered staying an extra day for the Wildfoods Festival, with BBQ bush meat and other improbable comestibles, plus costumes and likely committed merriment…but we moved on.

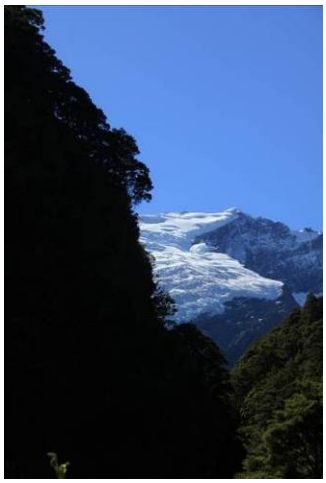


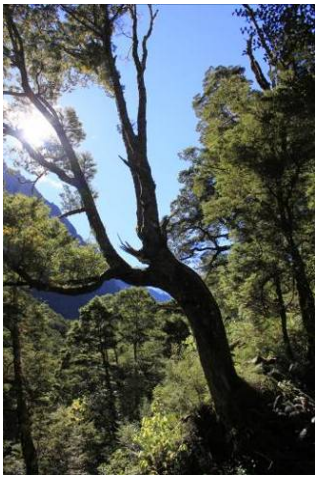
Day 8—our only fully rainy day—we drove down West Coast to Haast. The Whataroa River crossing, as billed, was impressively blue and bold *(thank you, Scott Cook).* The Franz Josef and Fox glaciers were barely visible, but nevertheless appealing in the raw weather. Green, green everywhere, with some Ent trees silhouetted against the clouds.

Day 9—Drove over Haast Pass to Wanaka—scenic route with some engineering flourishes and no doubt lots of dynamite entertainment for guys. Depot Falls was a nice, secret stop—*thanks again, Scott Cook*. Multiple river crossings with great blue waters below the bridges. The last stretch before Wanaka takes a traveler along 2

lakesides: Wanaka and Hawea, both of them sapphire gems on a sunny day. Upon reaching Wanaka, we paused only for gas, and then drove around the head of the lake in the direction of Mt. Aspiring. Along the way, we gave Henri from Brasil a ride…on his way to a squeeze-in 3 day backpack with an ambitious topo route. The road rumbles past the Treble Cone ski area access, past the LOTR scenery used for "rough country south of Rivendell," out to the trailhead for the Rob Roy Glacier hike. We got certifiably tired on this 10K uphill and came back to find practically the last motel room in town, since there was a farming fair going on. At the Wyndham motel, we had our first encounter with really obnoxious Americans in a restaurant, matched ignobly by NZ'ers with neglected wild children…but it was blissfully brief.







Day 10—Early start—we drove from Wanaka south towards Queenstown over the recently completed Cardrona Road—the highest sealed road in NZ…yet another engineering spectacle for the Kiwis! The summit was missing only the snow it will receive in a couple weeks. After all those switchbacks, we drifted back among the trees and finally emerged on the Queenstown flats. Happily, before getting into the chronicled urban scene, we bolted due South, past the aptly named and utterly jagged Remarkables, West around the toe of yet another impassable mountain range, looped through pastoral country, and then turned back northward to Te Anau. All the Milford Track group trampers take the road about 30 km north from Te Anau to get to their long-ago-booked ferry rides to begin their well-regulated walks and their overnight hut community togetherness experiences. The road leaves the lake and continues through pleasant country for a while, but the last 50 km of this road to Milford are world famous, and *we now believe!* As you forge into the Fiordland high country, think the splendor burst of Big Sur and Yosemite…with no shoulders and fresh rockfalls. Ridgelines feint in the billowing clouds. Deep gorges peel off below you, full of fast, milky water from the snowfields above. Waterfalls stripe every cliff, it seems…making me wonder what it would look like in a downpour. We didn't get to Milford until 3 PM, which turned out to be great timing, as we caught the last boat tour on Milford Sound and enjoyed magical angular light on the peaks…and by sheer luck…we successfully dodged the legendary rain. We spent that night at the Mitre Peak Lodge in Milford…happy not to have to drive a long way on those roads in the dark after all that. Also happy not to be stuck with a pack of squawking group trampers. Also nice to be prepared for sandflies. I hate the smell of DEET, but so do those vicious little suckers!

Day 11—Left Milford early in the day before the buses. Nice views of the mountains and waterfalls in different light…especially the terrain between Homer Tunnel and Hollyford. After reluctantly leaving the mountains…we came back to Lake Te Anau draped with a rainbow, and then lots of rolling bucolic country. Side road up to Mavoro Lakes where LOTR filmed Fangborn Forest—where we found a profusion of red-orange *Amanita muscaria*, perfect setting for a Primitivo promo shot. Then back up along the Remarkables, dodging Queenstown again and turning Eastward out to Cromwell (named by schmucks deliberately to spite Irish immigrants in 19th century). We visited the Wooing Tree winery—nice Pinot again—and stayed in Cromwell. Cromwell has abundant orchards, with dwarf apples pruned and trained on trellises just like grapes. We pigged out on plums, peaches, and nectarines. One variety called "yum yum" plum we'd never seen—orangy yellow with red highlights…and perfectly named.

The Wooing Tree in the Pinot

Day 11—We drove the 4WD back road (Hawksburn Road) from Cromwell through Bannockburn to Clyde. Black clouds, mist rising from Lake Dunstan far below, rugged rocks, power lines, a thousand bunnies and quail, and one dicey detour which did not please my Alexandra. Then to the more pleasing town of Alexandra, where they host an annual hare hunt for charity…on Easter weekend. *Love these guys.* Back on regular road to Cromwell to taste at Northburn, and then past QT to Glenorchy. The drive from QT to Glenorchy was fabulously scenic, as billed, with the mountains rising in the North over Lake Wakatipu. Spent the night in the Glenorchy Hotel—sparse, but better than sleeping on back seat. Good food…as we found almost everywhere.

Day 12—Crystal clear morning in Glenorchy, nary a cloud anywhere, but barely above freezing. The mist rising from the Dart made it worth freezing my toes.

We drove N from Glenorchy past dewy Paradise with Fiordland peaks with their glaciers above, green pastoral grass below, braided inlets of the Dart River on the West.

The road to Paradise

The woolly one

I took a short hike from road's end to Chinaman's Bluff while Sandie read a bit. As we drove back through Paradise under clear, windless skies…a plan hatched. We decided to splurge on a small plane flight to the glaciers high above us, maybe even a fly-by to Mt. Aspiring. Chances are fair we'll not have the chance again. But it seems Fate, too, has a sense of mischief. In the few hours between making the decision, cinching the arrangements, and cranking up the propeller, lenticular clouds popped up over the peaks. The wind picked up to blow-your-hat-off velocity, and the sky started boiling with Gothic menace. We went anyway, with some trepidation…and what a breathtaking experience! Ridgelines are, I suppose, my favorite landform, given all the allegorical symbolism beyond the visual intrigue. This flight was a ridgeline glory. McKenzie, the 22 year old professional pilot of the little Cessna, was obviously having a good time, and the bumps proved tolerable for Sandie. All done, back to QT for a civilized hotel and a fabulous meal at the Botswana Butchery *(thank you, Jack and Renee).* This may have been our most refined meal, although Hopgood's and Chantellini were stars, too.

Ridges in the rain

Last view of Glenorchy, Lake Wakatipu

Day 13—Back to the airport for our QT to Auckland flight. Uneventful travels, but I think it's fair to say Auckland is not appealing as a destination for a city-phobe like me. We did properly honor St. Patrick, however. The Museum and the surrounding green Domain was impressive, especially the Maori Court, with special wows to the intricately carved war canoe. Sandie pointed to the adept textile work with native NZ fibers—both for art and work. Noteworthy, in light of all the recent earthquakes and the eruptive history of the Ring of Fire…NZ most especially…is that Auckland is actually built upon a cluster of volcanoes, a number of which are visible as perfectly recognizable little cones.

Day 14—Auckland to LAX to San Jose. Unexpected light shows! Flying Northeast into the night, in the accelerated sunset, the nearly full perigee moon rested above the orangey pink clouds which were rapidly sinking into the Earth's shadow. Later, the Southern Cross hovered out the starboard window for hours, resting above Gemini. Approaching LA before dawn, Venus beamed uncommonly brightly in the East. We arrived at 6:30 AM, March 18, having left Auckland 2 PM, March 18…in other words, we got back before we left.

Notes, Opinions, and Hopes

Wine!

Every single Sauvignon blanc we tasted was well made and varietally recognizable, if not in fact instructional. NZ is trying to establish a reputation for other varieties, and no surprise in this climate, the Pinot Noir is a natural…and really good. No condescension here… and I know Pinot.

Most are "Oregonian" style with lighter color and body, clean bright fruit, and varietally true aroma, but a few had more body and "earthiness," which I appreciated. Many resembled our 2008 in structure. I'm guessing Dijon clones are prevalent. Pinot gris and Riesling are also popular, and very good. Overall—I'm *truly* impressed.

Young Pinot Noir in Central Otago District

Great wine descriptors, too. "Racy…bloom…fruit driven…schisty…." "Gooseberry and quince"—not too familiar to Californians. Late harvest wines are "stickies." *No kidding!*

Driving: One lane bridges with yield-instruction signage…even out in the way-boonies. Not so many turnouts—these roads are just wide enough, no waste of tarmac on wide verges. Dicey for bicyclists, I'd think.

I got used to L sided driving quickly…Australian experience quickly refreshed…but needed to be hyper alert at roundabouts and intersections. Yield conventions are unique in NZ, and it took 3 days to reverse the positions of wiper lever & turn signals.

Glad to have the RAV 4—*Thank you, Sara.* We used those 4 WD features often enough to make it worth the extra bucks. Comfortable car, with enough room to pick up solo backpacker hitchhikers 3 times. Great forward vision but blind spots on right and backing. Bad enough that I'd not buy one unless the mirrors were improved.

Gas is expensive—$2.20+ NZ per liter…equivalent to about $6.50/gal US.

NZ beer and ale, as expected, was fantastic. Speight's advertising of the Southland ethos—gruff cowboy no city wuss no frills tickled me. Monteith's was also consistently good. Somehow we actually drove past the brewery on the West Coast.

Sandie in New Zealand, 2011

Sandie in Wales, 1971

40 years of companionship, cuddling, and fine barley products in the Commonwealth

Herds of red deer browse behind fences. *Yo, Buck: "V" is not for victory!* Sheep look like white fleas on a green dog. Lots of happy cows graze in amazing meadows.

People speak elegant English…in every venue…and they invite playful expressions. Sports announcers combined eloquence with enthusiasm. It makes me mourn the decay of basic education in the USA. *Well, like, whatever.*

At check in, motels give you a small bottle of milk for morning coffee—"trim" or "full."

We were joyfully reunited with "Golden Fruit," better known to our family as Squashed Ant Cookies.

Irreverent ads: “Mutton dressed as lamb.”

I hiked less than I expected (not good for Sandie’s paw, and I didn’t feel right about leaving for hours by myself). And the food was superb. I think I wound up losing aerobic conditioning, which I’ll need to overcome in CA.

Domestic flight security was civilized, respectful, and sensible…very little of the TSA attitude and silliness of the “security charade.”

Backpacking here struck me as unpleasant—the major tramping routes are restricted heavily, with access often limited to guided groups. I suppose that limits degradation. Hikers are forced to sleep in crowded huts, although I suspect I’d be promptly expelled by group consensus, unless Sandie is exaggerating her reports. I don’t fancy walking all day in rain pants through clouds of devil sandflies. DEET in your eyes and chemical corrosion of all your stuff. On the other hand, once above the pasture drainages, the water is both plentiful and potable. Lots of young people backpack around NZ, with accommodations designed for them everywhere—cheap, dry places to sleep with laundry facilities. There are strict restrictions on car camping, called “freedom camping,” again forcing people to use sites designated by the DOC—Department of Conservation. On the other hand, there was zero litter, including the unspeakables in the bushes. The DOC campsites are well dispersed, with respectably clean toilets and informational kiosks and modest overnight fees...but still more of a social experience than I’m inclined to seek in the wilderness. Maybe in 5 years I won’t be so cocky.

Camper vans are everywhere, inevitably in front of you going up hills, and not my cup of tea for sure, but better than sleeping in a tent in the rain.

I took my computer which we used for details in places that had web access, and I sheepishly checked on some of my work stuff, having left several major projects in barely finished shape, with several others looming up.

The Japanese earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear power plant catastrophe happened while we were on this trip. It felt wrong to be enjoying a holiday when all this was going on. Poignantly, in NZ, the Christchurch earthquake was just 3 weeks earlier, with fresh

human wounds and severe economic consequences. The human pathos of that local event was almost trumped in the papers and TV by the Japanese apocalypse. A broken steeple and collapsed broadcast building can't compete with the image of a ferry boat sitting on top of the debris of crushed houses and smoke belching from a nuclear reactor building. Yet NZ has only 3 million people, and every single one will be affected by Christchurch's calamity. As we were preparing to leave, all of New Zealand watched a moving memorial ceremony with Prince William playing a gracious and dignified role. Everybody in that departure lounge stood in silence. It made me want to get home.

Sandie and Wells
March, 2011

Land of the Long White Cloud

(in this photo engulfing the serrated ridge of the Remarkables above Lake Wakatipu)