

When we last posted, we had arrived in Christchurch and on our first full day there we took a self-guided walk. We were using pages from an 8 year old guide book so we knew a number of sites would no longer exist but what we didn't realize was just how extensive the damage from the 2010 earthquake was throughout the city. We knew of the cathedral of course, but for blocks around it in every direction there was evidence of the almost total destruction that must have occurred. Five years on, a good deal of re-building has taken place and a number of temporary structures are in place and doing business, but there are large areas of waste land and partially destroyed or demolished buildings such that the area still looks much like a war zone.



There are boards up in many places showing artists' impressions of what an area will eventually look like and clearly there is a lot of desire not only to rebuild but to re-vitalize. It is equally clear that the city is looking at a very long term project and it will take a lot of money in addition to the determination being demonstrated.



Our first stop was not on the "old route" as it was at the so-called cardboard cathedral or, more properly, the Christchurch Transitional Cathedral. This is about three blocks from the old stone building and is an A-frame structure set on a concrete foundation. It would appear that the main supports are indeed tubes of cardboard with some sort of plastic surround and this has been covered with an exterior grade sheet. It is of course much smaller than the original cathedral and has seating for no more than a few hundred but it is a usable home until such time as a more permanent structure is available. This cardboard building is said to be capable of lasting for as long as twenty years. Nowhere, however, could we find any details as to what was going to happen on Cathedral Square and/or how long it might take.

From the cardboard cathedral we walked several blocks through building sites and open spaces left by the earthquake before we reached our next stop – the Bridge of Remembrance spanning the River Avon. This bridge was built to honor the men of New Zealand who fought in World War I, particularly those who served in Gallipoli and Egypt. Once again, this bridge is in the middle of a reconstruction zone and is closed to pedestrians, although we were able to get close and could appreciate how it must look without bulldozers and cranes around.



Near here has been built a temporary shopping mall in which the shops and cafes are housed in what looks like trailers side by side to give the



appearance of a typical shopping area. This and several other such projects around the city are labeled Re-Start Christchurch and are another attempt to bring some semblance of normality to an otherwise surreal environment. We also visited a beautiful old wooden church that had survived the earthquake and seemed to be unscathed.

A more typically Christchurch scene was just ahead as we saw a group just finishing a trip on the river in a punt and were being returned to the only remaining boathouse on the river. Their "cruise" (in a beautiful area lined with trees) finished just in time as the rain which had been threatening all

morning now started in earnest. For our part we chose to shelter in the Canterbury Museum which is just inside a huge park and botanical gardens which spans an area much bigger than the city streets we had just walked.

At what appeared to be a slight easing of the rain we set out to walk through at least part of this huge green area and see some of the magnificent tree specimens as well as the New Zealand gardens. It really was a beautiful walk and on a dry day would have kept us interested for much longer but today the rain just got heavier and forced us to head back towards the city sooner than we would have liked.

On Thursday morning it was still raining as we left the hotel on our way to Lyttleton Harbor – and it continued to rain on and off throughout the day. We drove out of town to the next hamlet of Sumner where we found a small coffee shop for breakfast. On the coast road leading to Sumner there were areas where hundreds of containers (the type use on container ships) were lined up at the base of the Cliffside in a makeshift wall, presumably against the risk of falling rock resulting from the earthquake. In fact we did see one example of a flattened house on one of the hillsides so clearly the effects were felt this far out of town. Indeed, the whole of the coast road seemed to be under construction (as were those in the center of town) so clearly there is still a lot to do.



Leaving Sumner we climbed the Evans Pass road which on our map looked as though it would take us over the top to Lyttleton. We both remembered having taken this somewhat hazardous route on previous visits, although Molly remembered that it had come to a dead end before reaching the town. She was right! We came to a parking area which had a great (if misty) view over the sea but it was little more than a place for hikers and bikers to leave their cars and take one of the many trails over the hills.

We continued on mountain pass roads which was a nice drive with occasional

good views as the mist cleared a little but the clouds really thickened as we neared sea level and the port of Lyttleton. This is the port for the city of Christchurch (and is only about 20 minutes away via a direct route) and really has nothing to offer as a tourist destination. It is definitely a working port and there were several ocean-going vessels in dock being loaded with wood. It is also the jumping off point for New Zealand's expeditions to their base in Antarctica and is the terminal for about a dozen cruise ships visiting this part of the South Island each year.



On Friday we left Christchurch before 8:30 and were soon headed out of town towards Arthur's Pass and the West Coast. We had breakfast a little way out of the city and then set off across Canterbury Plain (farmland with lots of sheep and relatively flat) with the Southern Alps in the distance and partly shrouded in cloud.

As we started to climb, however, the clouds lifted somewhat and we had magnificent views of the snow-covered range that forms the spine of the South Island. It was now sunny (although still cool; we had left Christchurch with a temperature in the mid-forties) and the view seemed to get better with every turn in the road. Despite the fact that this is basically the only major road across the island, it wasn't very busy and even the odd truck didn't slow us down for long so we were able to travel at or near the 100 KPH speed limit. This was reduced some as we neared the summit at Arthur's Pass and the road became much

more twisty, as it was on the downward side as we drove towards the coast.



The views and the nice weather made for a very pleasant drive and we were happy to keep driving (with the occasional photo stop) until we were on the south-bound road running along the west coast. Here we had some great views of the Tasman Sea with its high surf and long beaches. It was al-



most another two hours to Franz Josef, with more ocean views and one twisting climb and descent as we headed inland for a while. All the time we had huge hills and mountains to our left, although views of the glaciers became obscured by mist and then some light rain as we got close to our destination.



Friday started out as a sunny morning and we had some good views of the snow-covered mountains near town but there was still cloud shrouding most of the surrounding area. We drove about 5 Km south of town to an area where we could park and take one of several paths to view the Franz Josef Glacier. We both walked about $\frac{1}{2}$ Km and got a good look at the glacier in the sunlight at a distance of about a mile from our vantage point. From this point there was another path which led to the closest viewing point allowed by the park rangers – as close as 250 meters from the foot of the glacier. I took this path.

It was a very pleasant walk (with dozens of people following the same path) although the clouds came down and it started to rain as I made the walk back. The views of the glacier were still quite clear, although I am not sure that the camera captured that as well as being there.

We then drove about 25 Km further south to Fox Glacier where we had lunch before going just a few kilometers further to view the Fox Glacier. The viewpoints here were even further back than at Franz Josef and the cloud had come down more so our views were extremely limited. We both went to the nearest viewpoint and then I walked another one mile round trip to view an historic suspension bridge (limit five persons at a time!) that spanned maybe 200 feet across a roaring glacial stream. The bridge had been built in the days when

getting to see the glaciers was a matter of trekking from the town over the rough terrain. As the glacier was in retreat even then bridges, access paths and routes changed as the geography changed.

The big news when we woke on Sunday was that the New Zealand All Blacks had beaten Australia in the final of the Rugby World Cup in London. Bars had been open from about 4am to broadcast the game live to excited fans who were now sighing a collective sigh of relief or confirming that the outcome had never been in doubt! Anyway, we were pleased that they won, if only to assure decent service in our remaining days here.

We left Franz Josef and were now driving towards the southern end of the South Alps. The road hugged the west side of the mountains for about 100 Km with just a couple of short stretches next to the Tasman Sea. At the second of these, Haast, we had a coffee before the road turned inland and started to climb. Haast was an Austrian explorer who named the Franz Josef Glacier for his emperor.



Once we were headed inland the clouds began to clear and soon we were driving under clear blue skies with some of the most magnificent views anywhere in the world. We drove through thick forests of trees and ferns, some wide valleys with lush green fields (with sheep and cattle as well as deer) and broad rivers, but mostly we were gazing at snow-capped mountains in virtually every direction. Every bend in the road seemed to yield a more impressive sight and it was difficult not to stop every few hundred yards to take “an even better photograph”.

This scenery continued as we drove along Lake Wanaka and then Lake Hawea with breathtaking reflections of the nearby mountains in each and a number of spectacular waterfalls from the steep-sided cliffs. Even after a short break in the town of Wanaka (right

on the lake and a beautiful spot in its own right) we were still driving through the mountains as we climbed the mountain pass at Cardrona on the highest paved road in New Zealand at a little over 3000 feet.

Finally, as we reached the summit and started the descent to Queenstown we had perhaps the best view of all as the whole valley was laid out below us like a topographical map. We could plainly see the airport runway (one of the most exciting landing strips anywhere), the city of Queenstown, the lake and, of course, mountains all around. We arrived at Molly’s sister’s apartment in Queenstown around 4:30pm and checked in. We sat on the deck while the sun still shone brightly and the temperature was about 70F. This was just a little shy of the 75F high we had experienced earlier in the day but even so was one of the hottest days of our trip so far.



On Monday we drove to nearby Arrowtown. This was a gold mining town which had been “flushed out” by Europeans who then brought in Chinese workers who were prepared to work a little harder and get the more difficult seams. This led to the establishment of a small Chinese community and some reconstruction of the village has taken place. The buildings, together with explanatory plaques, show the conditions under which the immigrants (mostly men) worked and describe something of the life in the small encampment. Apparently it wasn’t until the 1980s when the government relaxed its immigration laws that any further influx of Chinese took place in New Zealand.

The rest of old Arrowtown is the main street which is now full of tourist shops and cafes but which has a few 100+ year old buildings, including the post office. It had been sunny and mild the whole morning (far better than the forecast) so we decided to take a drive up the road that leads to Wanaka and has the superb views that we had seen on our way in yesterday. Alt-



though there were a few high clouds today, the valley views were still fantastic as we climbed up very steeply towards the highest point – just over 1000 meters. I got some good photographs, although taking pictures was rather precarious at some spots because there was a gale force wind blowing straight up the valley to our vantage points.

Unfortunately the weather changed dramatically and on Tuesday we woke to heavy rain, low mist and a temperature about 40F. This was a day to relax, catch up on washing, journals, etc so that's exactly what we did.

The clouds had lifted some as we woke this morning (Wednesday) and there was no rain. It was now obvious that there had been some additional snow at the higher elevations across the lake. The forecast was for clearing skies but still low temperatures – highs in the mid- to high-forties.



We set out on the 50 Km drive to Glenorchy. This is a beautiful road alongside the lake (Lake Wakatipu, which is the same as the one outside the apartment) with some absolutely stunning views of the blue lake and the mountains virtually all around. With the clouds now quite high in the sky and the sun shining brightly we couldn't have picked a better day for these views. Again, every turn in the road seemed to present an even better picture.

In Glenorchy (which is a tiny town used primarily as a jumping off point for more adventurous journeys into and over the mountains) we took the Glenorchy Walkway. This was

advertised in the guidebook as a 2Km walk around a lagoon but the signs at the outset suggested either a 30 or 60 minute walk, depending on whether one took the inner loop or the inner plus outer loops. The routes we followed (we separated after about a mile) did indeed follow a small lagoon and crossed over a good deal of swamp land via a raised boardwalk. It was a very pleasant walk but by the time I got back to the car I had covered 3.6 miles and Molly must have done over two so we both had some comments that we wanted to convey to the sign maker. However, we enjoyed it and rewarded ourselves with a sandwich and tea sitting outside (despite temperatures still less than 50F) at one of the cafes in town before driving back to Queenstown – again with absolutely stunning scenery.



So, we have now concluded three weeks in New Zealand and, as usual, have had a wonderful time. The weather could have been warmer at times but it never really interfered with our scheduled activities. We certainly could not fault the scenery on both the North and South Islands. Tomorrow we fly to Auckland where we will stay two nights before our long flight home on Saturday so this is our final post for this trip. We hope you have enjoyed the pictures and maybe read a few of the words!

Bob and Molly



