

# New Zealand

## October 2015



*Bob and Molly Hillery*

This was our fourth visit to New Zealand so we covered a lot of ground that we had seen on one or more of the previous trips. We have never thought this “repetition” a waste of time and always find something new to look at or get a different perspective on a place or event. However, this time we did take in the area of the North Island north of Auckland and were pleased that we took the time to visit Waitangi (the site of the Treaty between Britain and the Maori) and the magnificent Kauri forests. Both would be added to our list for next time!

We were in New Zealand for 24 days, 14 on the North Island and 10 on the South. We drove 3000 kilometers (a little shy of 2000 miles) and stayed in eight different places, most of them for three nights so we were able to spend two full days sight-seeing in the area. Once again we were impressed with the diversity of landscape in this small country: beautiful coastlines, expansive forests and farmland, magnificent mountains and lakes, and, of course, the unusual but attractive variety of thermal activity. We were shocked at the devastation we saw in Christchurch that resulted from a series of violent earthquakes five years ago and hope that we will be able to visit again when the city has been restored to its former beauty.

In all, it was another great three week trip and re-enforced our opinion of New Zealand’s status in our Top Five worldwide destinations.

Our route is outline on the map below.



# ***New Zealand, October 2015***

## **Sunday October 11,**

We left home at 7:30 to have our “usual” pre-trip dinner at Morton’s in downtown Cincinnati. We then drove to the airport Marriott where we were staying the night. Our departure on Monday wasn’t until afternoon but we decided to stay near the airport to avoid any possible problems but, equally important, a night at the Marriott gives us parking privileges for the weeks we are away! It was a little after 11 pm when we settled down for the night.

## **Monday October 12**

We were up about 8:30 and had breakfast in the Concierge Lounge. I then went for a 3 ½ mile walk in the neighborhood near the hotel. We had a 1pm checkout and caught the shuttle to the airport shortly after that.

We had purchased three separate tickets for this journey – two on Delta and on Virgin Australia, with whom Delta has a code sharing arrangement. We had been told that checking bags all the way to Auckland, New Zealand should be no problem if we could show paperwork for all legs. Indeed, the agent seemed to know what she was doing and we soon had completed the process, apparently successfully. However, I was concerned that the airport code she had used for our destination (AUK) was not right and it should have been AKL, although all flight numbers were correct. Once in the Sky Club lounge I asked about this and, after some deliberation and phone calls, was told that AKL was correct and that our bags had been successfully re-tagged. Otherwise, they may have ended up in Alaska!

So, we were on our way and so were our bags. Unfortunately, the plane to our first stop of Detroit developed a mechanical problem (a blocked toilet) and the delay started eating into our layover time. It was touch and go for a while but then we boarded (sans toilet facilities) and were told that it would be an extremely short flight to Detroit. It was, but when the doors opened we had less than 15 minutes to make the connection – with a twenty minute walk between gates. I ran/walked/stumbled as fast as I could and arrived at our new gate to find the doors had closed and “FAA regulations prohibit re-opening”. The plane was still at the gate and was there for the entire half hour of our negotiations regarding alternative arrangements.

The best we could do was to take a later flight to Los Angeles which was scheduled to arrive four minutes before our departure for Sydney, Australia. Perhaps some time could be made up en route but we were already weighing the prospect of starting our New Zealand vacation at least one day late. Fate was on our side, however, and we arrived at LAX gate 58 just 30 minutes before our next flight left – from gate 57! We had made it! But not before one more hiccup! The check-in agent asked if we had purchased a visa to enter Australia to which we said “no” since we were simply transferring there. That didn’t satisfy her as the only ticket she could see took us to Australia. I brought out all our paperwork yet again and, after more phone calls, she announced that “we were lucky” and Delta had fixed it. We were too relieved to debate the fact that there was really nothing to fix and happily boarded our 14 hour onward flight.

## ***Overnight and across the International Dateline. “Missed” Tuesday October 13***

We both had a light dinner before settling down for what we hoped would be a good long sleep. For my part, I slept about seven hours over the Pacific and then was awake for a while before attempting to get some more rest. The euphoria of making our key flight had now faded some and the endurance test was taking over.

Despite its length, the trip to Sydney wasn’t as bad as it might appear and we felt reasonably fresh when we deplaned and found our way to the Air New Zealand lounge for breakfast and a sit down (!). It was a beautiful morning (it was now Wednesday; most of Tuesday having been lost somewhere over the Pacific) in Southeast Australia; sunny and a warm 65F.



We had two hours before our final leg to Auckland. This was on Virgin Australia and, once again, we were reminded just how mediocre is the service and staff appearance on Delta. On Virgin we were greeted by name, told of flight times, meals available, etc, etc and had excellent service throughout the three hour flight. The meal served was excellent and well presented. Someone had told us that Virgin (with whatever suffix) is an excellent company; now we know why.

*Little did we realize how much we would be hearing about this event over the next two weeks!*



We landed in Auckland at 4pm, went quickly through Immigration and went to baggage claim with a little apprehension considering the changes and tight connections that had been made. However – and here we can give kudos to Delta – our bags were on the carousel as promised. We took a taxi to the downtown hotel (a \$60, 15 mile ride which we thought exorbitant) and checked into our room by 5:30. So, only 33 hours after leaving the Cincinnati airport Marriott (!) we were settled in Auckland on the other side of the world. A refreshing shower was now the first priority.

About 7:15 we felt awake enough to walk outside to find a local place to eat. It didn't take long; about ½ block up the hill from the hotel was a small Italian restaurant which was inviting. We shared appetizer and a pizza and a bottle of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc – the first of many we anticipate over the next three weeks. We finished with a good espresso and then braced the now chilly evening for the short walk home and to bed.

#### **Thursday October 15**

We both slept well until about 4am and then rather fitfully until we finally got up around 7:30. Considering the time difference between here and Cincinnati (17 hours) and the broken sleep of the journey, we felt that we had done a reasonable job of countering jet lag.

After breakfast at a local Starbucks we walked up the hill from the hotel to Sky City where we got the 9:45 Hop on/ Hop off bus. It was a pleasant morning with some sunshine and the temperature was close to 60F as we started. We drove past the waterfront (with the Sun Princess docked for the day) and got off at Bastion Point and Mission Bay lookout. Here we

had some great views across the water towards the center of town and we also visited the Michael Joseph Savage Memorial Gardens. This was a very pretty garden area and in the center was a huge tower dedicated to Mr Savage who was the first Labour prime minister of New



***The Auckland skyline and the Savage memorial***





Zealand in the 1930s. We both felt that a monument of this size was a bit over the top for a prime minister but apparently he was very well liked by most and must have been a very popular leader.



Rather than simply catch the next bus (on which we were planning to go to the next stop) we decided to walk down a rather steep path to the hamlet of Mission Bay and, after a short coffee break, along the sea front to that stop.



This proved to be a very pleasant walk and we again had some great views of the city as we covered the 1 ½ miles to Kelly Tarlton's Sea Life Aquarium. This is an interesting sea life exhibition with a large penguin colony and dozens of fish species, including sharks, on view as one walks through a glass wall "tube" within a tank containing 3 million liters of water.

Also inside the building is a mock-up of Scott's "hut" set up for his Antarctic explorations. It is apparently an exact duplicate of the one actually in the Antarctic (and which is being restored as a heritage site there) and contains all the things that he and his team had on their ill-fated journey. Although it is called a hut and was probably a bit rustic, it contains everything that they could need as they spent many months exploring this largely unknown continent in the early 1900s. It even had a printing press on which they published a newsletter, a photographic darkroom and many other amenities to help not only with their scientific work but to make life a little more bearable in extreme conditions.



***The "Hut" of Scott of the Antarctic. An unlikely piano and a more predictable untidy bedroom***

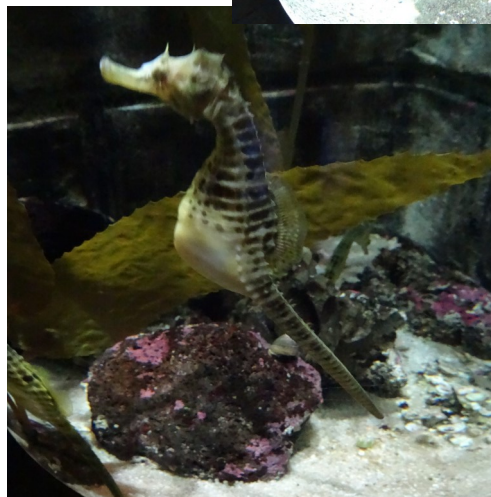
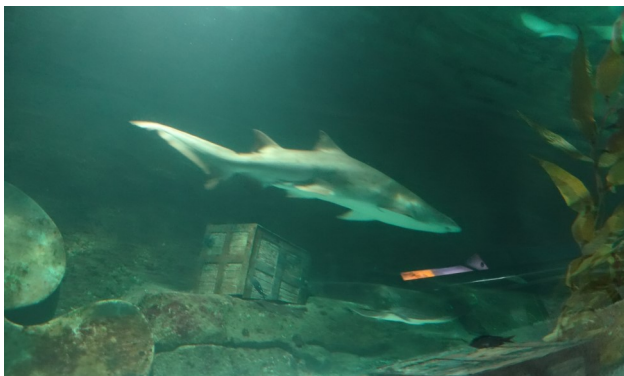
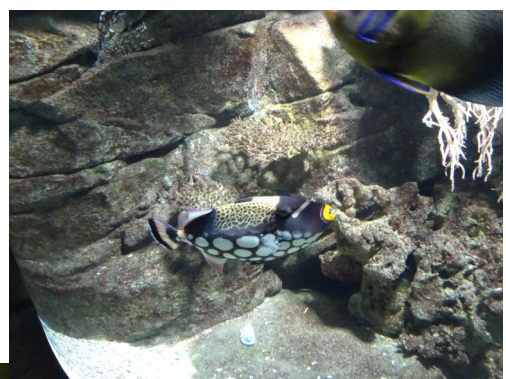
But of course the museum had so much more than a tribute to Scott and other Antarctic explorers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and earned its reputation as one of the best aquariums in the world. The exhibits were well laid out



and had lots to hold the interest of young and old alike.



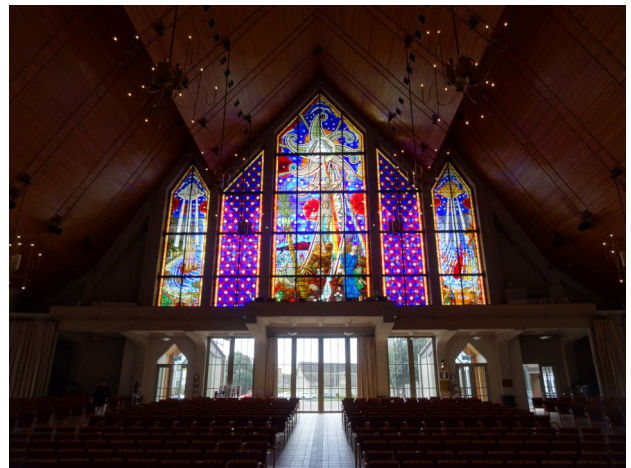
*An unusual  
entrance and  
moving walk-  
way under  
the water*



*Sharks to  
sea horses  
..... and  
everything  
in between*

After leaving the Aquarium we took the bus to the Auckland Cathedral. This is, on the outside at least, a very modern-looking building but inside is partly modern (wooden with chairs, not pews) and partly more classical with an enormous stone Gothic high altar area. Perhaps of more interest is the older and smaller St Mary's, which had been the former cathedral and had originally been located across the street. In the early 1980s they decided to move it next to the new cathedral – in one piece! They dug underneath the foundations, put the entire building on a steel platform and then rolled it to its new location using wooden rollers. Quite an achievement but the facility looks no worse for wear and it is a very fine wooden structure both inside and out.





*The New (above) and the Old  
Auckland Anglican Cathedral*



*On the move  
in the 1982*





Tonight we ate at Tony's Lord Nelson restaurant, literally next door to the hotel. It was a good meal in OK surroundings (a bit like an English pub) but I was disappointed that they had run out of green-lipped mussels. Still, we had another good bottle of wine and it was an easy walk back to the hotel!

**New Zealand (Aotearoa)** is an island country in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. The country geographically comprises two main landmasses – that of the North Island (Te Ika-a-Māui) and the South Island (Te Waipounamu) – and numerous smaller islands. New Zealand is situated 900 miles east of Australia across the Tasman Sea and roughly 600 miles south of the Pacific island areas of Caledonia, Fiji, and Tonga. Because of its remoteness, it was one of the last lands to be settled by humans. During its long isolation, New Zealand developed a distinctive biodiversity of animal, fungal and plant life. The country's varied topography and its sharp mountain peaks, such as the Southern Alps, owe much to the tectonic uplift of land and volcanic eruptions. New Zealand's capital city is Wellington, while its most populous city is Auckland. Polynesians settled in the islands that were to become New Zealand somewhere between 1250 and 1300 AD, and developed a distinctive Māori culture. In 1642, Abel Tasman, a Dutch explorer, became the first European to sight New Zealand. In 1840, representatives of the British Crown and Māori Chiefs signed the Treaty of Waitangi, making New Zealand a British colony. Today, the majority of New Zealand's population of 4.5 million is of European descent; the indigenous Māori are the largest minority, followed by Asians and Pacific Islanders. Reflecting this, New Zealand's culture is mainly derived from Māori and early British settlers, with recent broadening arising from increased immigration. The official languages are English, Māori and New Zealand Sign Language, with English predominant.

New Zealand is a developed country with a market economy dominated by exports (of dairy products, meat and wine) and tourism. New Zealand is a high-income economy and ranks highly in international comparisons of national performance, such as health, education, economic freedom and quality of life. Nationally, legislative authority is vested in an elected, single chamber Parliament, while executive political power is exercised by the Cabinet, led by the Prime Minister. Queen Elizabeth II is the country's head of state and is represented by a Governor-General.

### Friday October 16

We had breakfast today at Gloria Jean's (a pleasant change) and then got the Hop on/Hop off bus once more. We used it for only one stop so that we could spend a little time on the waterfront near the magnificent old ferry building and also to pick out a restaurant for dinner tonight. Mission accomplished, we then took the bus to the War Memorial Museum where we had a coffee break and waited for the "Blue Line" bus that would take us to another part of the city. We decided not to actually visit the museum – although it is excellent – as we had spent several hours here on previous visits. It contains many exhibits covering the relatively short, but interesting, history of New Zealand, including the wars and treaties between the Maoris and the Europeans. As with most of these colonial "treaties"

it seems, this one was not particularly favorable to the natives and has caused significant resentment over the years and we expect to learn more of this on our visit to the north of the Island over the next few days. Despite the one-sidedness, however, it seems to us that the Maoris have assimilated into the society of New Zealand much better than the Aboriginal Australians.



On the “Blue Route”, our only stop was at Mt Eden. This is an extinct volcano with a very clear and accessible crater (now covered in grass) and is one of four dozen such volcanos in the Auckland area alone. Since our previous visits, the very top of the mountain (only about 600 feet above sea level) has been made off limits to tour buses so we were obliged to take the rather steep quarter mile long footpath to get the magnificent views of the city and the surrounding islands. It was quite windy on top and the sun was having difficulty breaking the clouds but we still thought the views were stunning and worth the extra exercise.

### **Mt Eden Crater**



Auckland sits on a narrow (about 7 miles at the minimum) piece of land between the Pacific Ocean and the Tasman Sea and, although it is difficult to separate the various stretches of water seen in every direction, we presumably from this elevation could see both of these Seas. In addition, this is a perfect location to view the modern city with the 1000 feet tall Sky Tower dominating the skyline of modern buildings.

### **The City of Auckland from Mt Eden**

On our way down the hill, and indeed throughout the bus tours we had taken in the two days here, we saw many of the older homes of the city which provide a pleasant contrast to the tall buildings in the commercial center. These

and many that are not so old sit on very expensive real estate as Auckland is considered an excellent place to live (in world-wide terms) and we saw dozens that were valued in the tens of millions of dollars. In addition, most of the wealthier residents own yachts and the many marinas attest to the city's nickname of “City of Sai

**Auckland** (/ˈɔːklənd/ **AWK**-lənd), in the North Island of New Zealand, is the largest and most populous urban area in the country. Auckland has a population of 1,454,300, which constitutes 32 percent of the country's population. It also has the largest Polynesian population of any city in the world.

The isthmus was settled by Māori around 1350, and was valued for its rich and fertile land. Māori population in the area is estimated to have been about 20,000 people before the arrival of Europeans.

The introduction of firearms at the end of the eighteenth century upset the balance of power and led to devastating intertribal warfare beginning in 1807, causing those who lacked the new weapons to seek refuge in areas less exposed to coastal raids. As a result, the region had relatively low numbers of Māori when European settlement of New Zealand began.

After the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in February 1840 the new Governor of New Zealand, this area was chosen as the new capital and named after George Eden, Earl of Auckland. However, even in 1840 Port Nicholson (later Wellington) was seen as a better choice for an administrative capital because of its proximity to the South Island, and Wellington became the capital in 1865.



Once back in the center of town, Molly went straight back to the hotel while I continued to the waterfront so that I could get a little exercise on the walk back. It turned out to be very little, as the walk was well under ½ mile! So, our walk to dinner this evening is not so daunting. In fact it was a very easy walk both ways and we enjoyed a very good meal at the Harbourside restaurant. We recalled having eaten there on our first visit to New Zealand when we met friends from GE who were by chance also staying in Auckland.

### Saturday October 17

We had breakfast again at Gloria Jean's and then finished packing. I walked about ½ mile to the Hertz rental car facility and picked up our car. Molly was waiting with the bags when I drove back to the hotel and we were soon heading north out of Auckland on Route 1 towards Whangarei. We found a small café for a very light lunch and then detoured off the main road to follow a country road that was slower but very scenic. We climbed through beautiful forests (with what seemed like dozens of varieties in many shades of green) and hugged the coast at times. We stopped briefly at [Bream Bay](#), visited by and named by Captain Cook on one of his voyages around the coast. The whole drive was very pretty and much nicer than following the expressway.

We arrived in Whangarei for a three night stay and easily found the motel. Fortunately they were expecting us as the city (?) doesn't appear to have an excess of hotels – at least from our initial drive through. The room (actually a suite) was very spacious and had everything we needed, including excellent WiFi access. We asked about places to eat and decided on a nearby Thai restaurant for tonight. Unfortunately, most of Whangarei had made the same decision and the place was fully booked for the entire evening so we walked across the street to the Tavern and had a good fish and chips meal in quite rustic surroundings.



### Sunday October 18

We were up by 8 and ready to leave for the day before nine. We had breakfast at a small café in the town center (which was very quiet) and then set off north to Waitangi. We followed Route 1, a reasonably fast two lane road with plenty of passing lanes, as far as Kawakawa, where we turned off the road to visit the small town.



Kawakawa has two claims to fame: one, it has a train line that runs right down its main street (we actually saw the steam train starting its 30 minute tourist journey) and, two, public toilets designed by Hundertwasser, an Austrian famous for several buildings and public utilities in Vienna. We have seen some of his glass mosaic creations in Vienna but we cannot figure out why he would have been commissioned to construct public toilets in this sleepy town right across the world. As it turned out, these are his last creations and were completed just before he died in 1999.



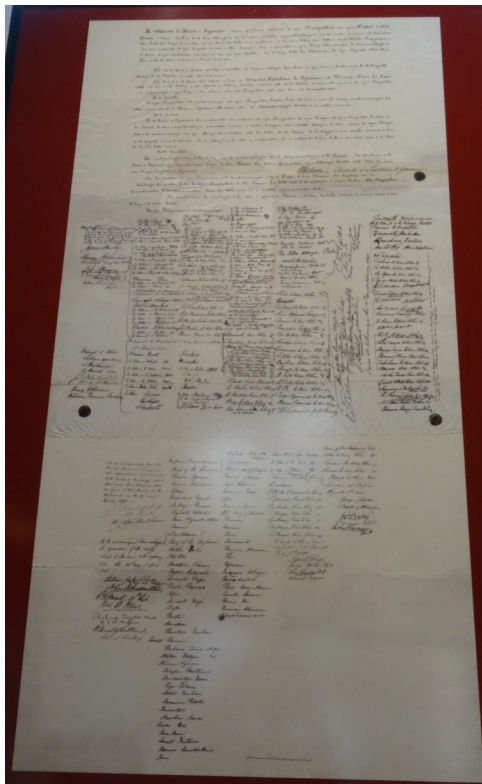




After using the facilities, admiring the steam train and sitting in a sidewalk café for coffee, we left Kawakawa and continued to Waitangi, where we would spend about 4 hours. We parked overlooking the Bay of Islands – a beautiful broad bay with many various-sized islands – and started our 1 Km walk to the Waitangi Treaty site.

It was a beautiful day, warm (upper sixties) and sunny and the view out to sea was magnificent and today further graced by a huge cruise ship anchored off shore. Dozens of tenders were ferrying ship passengers to shore for their excursions on land so there were a number of tour buses and small groups of people all through the resort town.

The Waitangi Treaty site, however, was not at all crowded and we started out on our self-guided tour of this most historic place in New Zealand – the Birthplace of The Nation. It was here in 1840 that a treaty was signed between Queen Victoria's emissary (Hobson) and many (but not all) of the Maori Chiefs; the birth of the nation but the beginning of over a century of contention, wars and demonstrations.



The major problem was in the “translation” of the English version into the Maori language and the degree to which Britain would have sovereignty and how much of their home and rights the Maori would be relinquishing. Depending on your point of view, this could be put down to difficulties of translation and word meaning – or it could be a deliberate slanting of the terms to facilitate the agreement and the signing.

*Left: The 1840 Treaty of Waitangi*

*Below: The reconstructed Treaty Hut on the present day site*

It should be pointed out that the Maori had some years earlier asked the British for some form of alliance to help with trade and to keep other Europeans, particularly the French, from attempting a takeover. So, by 1840, there was a similar mood on both sides and the treaty was signed right here on the beautiful promontory overlooking the Bay of Islands. Unfortunately, the actual





terms soon became clear to the natives and war erupted which continued to various degrees until the end of the century and simmered well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The site, which was initially home to the British Governor General and was essentially the center of government for the country (although the nearby town of Okiato claims the distinction of First Capital) eventually was abandoned and left to the elements, so much so that the Maori built a “replica” of this site just a mile or so from here. (We had passed it on our walk). Demonstrations, riots, tribunals and strife continued into the late 1900s (with a brief respite when British and Maori New Zealanders fought side by side in World War II) and it wasn’t until 1995 that Queen Elizabeth signed an official apology to the Maori Nations for the events initiated in her predecessor’s reign 150 years earlier.

This seems to have gone a long way to healing the wounds and, as we have observed, the Maori and Europeans seem to live in harmony, with the natives assimilated into the more western culture. However, as the informative video at this site pointed out, there are still lingering issues, particularly over what jurisdiction the Maori will have over what was once their land, so all is not perfect.



On the other hand, “Perfect” could be used to describe the physical beauty of this site on a warm and sunny spring afternoon and we thoroughly enjoyed our visit – which we concluded with another outdoor snack at the Waitangi Treaty Café.



***The Waitangi  
Treaty Site***





## ***A Maori “Waka” On the Museum Site***

Molly has always loved cricket and couldn't resist a quick practice with a child's abandoned bat as we strolled back across the green of the Treat site. HOWZAT?!



We walked back to the car and drove about 10 miles out of town to take a short car ferry ride to a nearby peninsula on which sits the small town of Russell. Russell, at least at 4pm on Sunday, is a sleepy town but it boasts the first church established in New Zealand. It is a relatively plain but attractive wooden church and has an interesting graveyard surrounding it. Here are buried and/or commemorated dozens of “pioneers” as well as Maori converts to Christianity and a surprisingly large number of locals lost in both World Wars as well as, presumably, in the inter-racial wars in this country.



Rather than return to Whangarei via the ferry and Route 1, we chose to take the winding country road across the peninsula. This was extremely attractive with changing views at every bend – with bends occurring every few hundred feet! We saw beautiful coastline, sandy beaches, high cliffs and



every kind of flora imaginable. There must be hundreds of species of trees in this country and, as Molly said, we probably couldn't name more than a couple – and even then we would probably be wrong. I don't know whether it's peculiar to this part of the North Island or whether our senses have changed but neither of us remembered such a vast number of styles and colors in the trees from our previous visits.



We arrived back in Whangarei after 5pm after a fantastic day with some wonderful scenery and a little more learned about the history and culture of this country – which, of course, is a large part of our reason for being here.

Another reason for being here is the wine and the food! Tonight we enjoyed both at a very nice Thai restaurant in the middle of town.

### **Monday October 19**

We had breakfast (bacon and eggs for the first time on this trip) at the Kaffeehaus in town and then set out for a long day of driving. The weather today was not as warm and sunny as it had been yesterday and it seemed that throughout our drive we could see evidence of heavy rains in the distance. However, for the most part we missed all but a few showers and for the times we spent outside the car we had dry and sometimes sunny skies – although it was indeed quite a bit cooler than yesterday.

Our destination was the region on the west coast in which there are forests containing the Kauri tree. The Kauri is in many respects of size and age similar to the California Coastal Redwoods and, as with the Redwoods, was seriously over-harvested and is now a protected species. Unlike the Redwoods, the Kauri is a very strong timber and is particularly beautiful in furniture. It also has a sought-after gum which is sold as New Zealand amber in jewelry and art objects.

We first visited the Kauri Museum to learn a little about the tree and its history as well as its importance to the country. We learned (or at least were exposed to) much more! The museum (privately operated) was vast and not only told us all we needed to know about the tree but had many exhibits dealing with the life of pioneers in this part of the North Island. There were also a number of working machines demonstrating how the trees had been felled, cut into board and transported to the towns of the country. After about 1 ½ hours we felt we had learned all we could in “one sitting” and, following the obligatory café visit, we started on the drive north that would take us up-close to these giant trees.

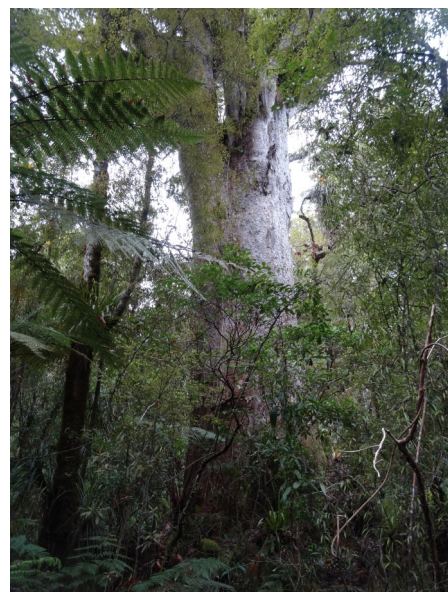






## Kauri Museum

Much like the Coastal Redwood area in the US, the Kauri are now found primarily in protected groves through which pathways have been made. In fact, as the root system of these trees is very fragile, strict measures are taken to keep visitors on the paths and, in addition, we were required to pass through a disinfectant as we entered the groves to avoid the inadvertent transfer of soils, etc that might be damaging to the Kauri.



**Beautiful countryside**  
**And interesting signs!**



The largest living Kauri tree (which we saw at our final stop) is said to be 2000 years old and has a girth of over 40 feet and a total height of about 160 feet. This falls short of the largest Redwoods but is nevertheless a most impressive specimen. Almost of as much interest, however, is the whole area in which these trees now stand in that they are surrounded by dozens of other species of tree and fern. We had seen many of these near the roads in our driving of the past two days but it was very pleasant to be able to walk through such a variety of foliage, most of which was quite different from anything we see at home.



## *Tane Mahuta*

lord of the forest

This is the largest living kauri tree in New Zealand. It is difficult to accurately estimate the age of Tane Mahuta, but it may be that Tane Mahuta sprang from seed around 2000 years ago during the lifetime of *Christ*

The dimensions of Tane Mahuta are;  
Trunk height 17.7 metres. Total height 51.5 metres.  
Trunk girth 13.8 metres. Trunk volume 244.5 metres. (3)

Just north

*Two adults standing*

of our last stop,



the road actually went very close to the Tasman Sea and from an overlook we could see an enormous harbor that stretched many miles further on the northernmost peninsula of the North Island. It was a beautiful natural harbor with enormous sand dunes on the west side – and was probably no more than fifty miles from the similarly beautiful Bay of Islands that we had seen yesterday on the east coast. Nowhere in New Zealand is far from the sea – and, in many cases, not a huge distance from both the Tasman Sea and the Pacific Ocean.



We arrived back at the hotel after 6pm after another scenic day out in an area of the North Island we had not visited before this trip. It certainly was worth the drive north and it would appear there is still plenty to see here on some future trip!

We ate again at the same Thai restaurant we had enjoyed last night. There wasn't a great deal of choice in Whangerei on a Monday evening – but we were not disappointed with a repeat visit.

### **Tuesday October 20**

We packed and checked out before having breakfast again at the Kaffeehaus in Whangerei before starting our 400 Km drive to Rotorua. Normally a drive such as this (250 miles) in the US would be very straightforward and fast but traveling in New Zealand is a little different. As we have said, many of the major roads are two lanes with frequent passing lanes (perhaps every 5-10 Km) and, although the speed limit is about 65 MPH, averaging 50 MPH is good going. Having said that, the route we followed today (Route 1 almost the whole way) had perhaps 100 miles of motorway spanning metropolitan Auckland to the north and south. This is quite a change from our first visit to New Zealand in 2003 when there were only about 20 miles of motorway, all in Auckland.

So, although we had both fast and not-so-fast roads for our drive we completed it in a little over 5 hours and we were

checked in at our hotel in Rotorua shortly after 3pm. The weather was mostly sunny on the way down, although there were a few cloudy patches at times, but the temperature never got above about 65F and was around 60 most of the day. However, the forecast for the two days that we are here shows little chance of rain and similar temperatures so we consider that pretty good sightseeing weather.

Tonight we ate at Bistro 1284 in town. We thought it looked familiar when we arrived and checked that it had been in that location in 2008 and, sure enough, we had eaten there then. We had an excellent meal, so much so that we made a reservation to return on Thursday evening.



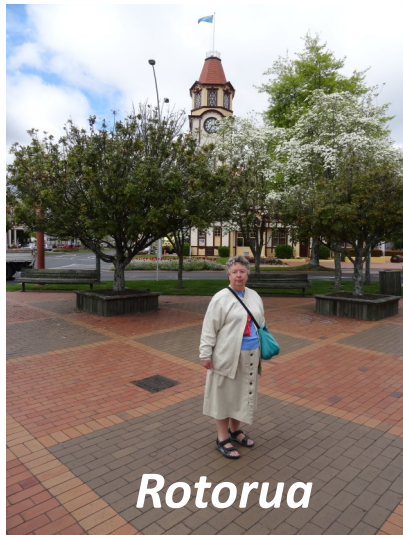
***Rotorua (Māori: Te Rotorua-nui-a-Kahumatamomoe, "The second great lake of Kahumatamomoe") is a city on the southern shores of the lake of the same name, in the Bay of Plenty Region of New Zealand's North Island. It is the seat of the Rotorua District, encompassing Rotorua and several other nearby towns. Rotorua is in the heart of the North Island, 140 miles southeast of Auckland.***

***Rotorua has an estimated permanent population of 56,800, making it the country's 10th largest urban area, and the Bay of Plenty's second largest urban area behind Tauranga. It is a major destination for both domestic and international tourists; the tourism industry is by far the largest in the district.***

***It is known for its geothermal activity, and features geysers and hot mud pools. This thermal activity is sourced to the Rotorua caldera, on which the town lies.***



**Wednesday October 21**



**Rotorua**



We were late up (9am) and went into town for breakfast before driving about 30 Km south to the Waioapu Thermal Area.





This is one of the larger areas with walkways around the various thermal features and has walks of 1 to 3 Km in length, each in loops so you can do as little or as much as you want. We did the whole 3 Km, taking a little over two hours to complete but thoroughly enjoying the walk and the sights. It was a beautiful sunny day with no rain and relatively few clouds such that it felt warmer than the mid-sixties stated.



The area is very similar to several in Yellowstone Park and the features are much the same – bubbling mud pools, fumaroles, geysers (not very active here today) and very colorful pools and runoff areas. We received an explanatory brochure which described about 30 features and gave a little background on their formation and “history”. Much of what we were seeing today has resulted from a volcanic eruption only 700 years ago and even the much bigger area between Taupo and Rotorua is the result of a massive eruption only 2800 years ago. With such geologically recent major activity and the clear evidence of continuing change, one wonders just how fragile is the area on which we were walking. Certainly we have learned on previous visits that the earth’s crust around Rotorua is measured in inches to a few feet, so anything could happen at any time!



We drove back into town for coffee and to do some souvenir shopping before returning to the hotel. I managed a two mile walk in addition to the three or so we had done at the thermal area and in town. Then we were ready for dinner, which tonight was another ethnic meal at the Lovely India restaurant. It was a good meal but as usual with Indian restaurants we seriously under-estimated the amount of food and consequently ate too much. Coincidentally, although we didn’t realize it until late in the evening, we had eaten at this same restaurant during our visit here in 2008.



## Thursday October 22

After breakfast in town (Starbucks) we spent the rest of our day at the Waimangu Volcanic Valley about 20 minutes south of Rotorua. This area is billed as the world's youngest geothermal system since the landscape here was completely changed by the eruption of Mount Terawera in 1886. This eruption and a series of earthquakes, followed by activity that lasted until 1917, destroyed seven small villages, killed 120 people and caused the formation of Lake Rotomahana from two existing smaller lakes. The area is also being watched by scientists as a completely new eco-system develops following the total destruction and plants and trees have been "restored" naturally over the past 100 years. Finally, since it is classed as an active volcanic area, monitoring systems here are of importance in predicting possible future activity throughout the country.



The Reserve is now densely covered with many different flora and a quick glance from the Visitor Center over the valley would not reveal anything untoward about the landscape except for a few areas of steam emanating from the tree tops (not at all unusual in this part of New Zealand!) It is only when you start the walk that the immensity of

the eruption and the changes it caused become more clear – especially with the aid of an excellent self-guided tour brochure.

A boat ride on the lake is offered following the four kilometer walk down the path and we decided to include that in our tour. As we purchased tickets at 10:45, the agent booked us on the 1:10 boat ride, which would "give us plenty of time to enjoy the walk". We were a little less optimistic but she assured us that our ticket was good on any later boat, so off we went



Sign of the times!



The pathway is mostly gravel and well paved so, although it is quite steep in places, we were not taxed too much physically and took our time on a mixed weather day. There was a brief light shower, some sun and plenty of cloud and the temperature stayed in the low sixties. In fact, for the most part it was ideal for a long walk.





We stopped at every marked area, read the details in the brochure and tried to visualize what must have happened to create the crater, stream or fumaroles that dotted the landscape through the trees. In addition to the obvious items of interest, beautiful in their own right, the whole walk was extremely attractive and would have been a pleasant way to spend the day even without the history of the past 130 years to digest.







As expected, we did not make the 1:10 boat but were in good time for the 2pm sailing – on which we were the only passengers. The 45 minute ride on the lake (recently proven to have volcanic activity beneath its 300 feet – and more – depth) was narrated by the skipper who added colorful descriptions of the events of June 10, 1886 to that we had learned on the way down. We could clearly see the mountain that had caused this new lake and one of the seven craters that formed – this one in the vertical face of the hillside. We had seen three others (two of which are now small lakes) on the walk down to the water.



***Above: A rift resulting from the eruption.***



On the final stretch of the boat ride we hugged the shore in which were many fumaroles, small geysers and beautiful colorations caused by the minerals and organisms in the hot areas. The captain also pointed out a rift in the land which was part of the main fault line running through this part of the North Island. We found it interesting that the colorations we had seen both today and yesterday were largely attributed to mineral inclusions whereas the same colors in Yellowstone were predominantly due to organisms in the hot water. In either case, the effect is to produce beautiful deposits in a rainbow of colors and some wonderful and unusual formations in the land.

Following the ride we took a shuttle bus back to the Visitor Center, thus avoiding a repeat of the 4 Km walk (uphill this time) and making for a much easier return. Molly referred to the bus as an “inspired” addition by the park service. A cup of tea and a cake before driving back to Rotorua completed a fabulous visit.

Tonight we ate again at Bistro 1284 and had another excellent meal to end our stay in this very interesting area in and around Rotorua.