

SOUTHLAND ADVENTURES

**Make yourself a cuppa and go on an adventure with Keith & Andrea (Our much-loved ex Settlers Maintenance Man & Receptionist).
The way Keith writes is surely the next best thing to being there....**

Hi Guys,

We are in Te Anau, gateway to Milford Sound, it's been a dull overcast day with rain and there's definitely a nip to the wind but I'm a happy little sand boy. T'internet says weather is good tomorrow and day after, so the plan is explore Te Anau tomorrow and Milford Sound on Friday. It's a 120k drive on probably NZ's most scenic road, and I can't wait. But I digress, doing my dream started on Monday 22nd February.

We bought a motorhome in November, it's a 2nd hand Burstner Aviano 1727, 7.56m of luxury, whopping double bed and leather for Africa.

Sadly, doing the dream meant retiring from my job at Settlers. After a lovely farewell on 10th Feb. we planned our NZ tiki tour. After a slight delay (thanks Covid) we set off for South Island on the 22nd, luckily escaping before another lock down, (I am lucky, ask my wife).

Arrived in Wellington on the 24th after an overnight in Taupo and a visit to a favourite haunt, Jolly Good Fellows for the Guinness and a great feed.

Had a very smooth crossing of the Strait and headed for our first destination, an NZMCA stop called Damfam vineyard in Blenheim. It's a paddock with sheep, and lots of sheep poo, but it's a tranquil spot by the river and they do a mean happy hour. We stayed four nights!

Recommended by a friend, the first day we blobbed, partly because it was raining, but it's quite restful watching sheep (they never stop chewing) and innumerable people sculling, waka'ing on the river (there are two boat clubs). Happy hour included fresh caught whitebait fritters, and of course you don't have to drive home.

I have a confession, despite being in the heart of the most prolific wine growing area we didn't visit a vine yard, not that there wasn't a fair amount of wine tasting. I consoled myself with the promise we were coming back. The weather was toasty and we spent our time bike riding and visiting the Omaka aviation museum, (its excellent, sponsored by Sir Peter Jackson, we are now members) and eating out, Grimaldos, for Andrea's big birthday, a memorable evening, she had a chilli margarita, and now has the moniker hot lips. I also bought her a full body massage.

Onto Kaikoura, stayed one night, its lovely, we fortunately stopped at Rakutara on the way and spotted a large seal basking on the pebble beach, thought how lucky we were. Then we stopped at Kaikoura peninsula walkway, a whole seal colony. Whole families of seals playing and scrapping, in the rock pools and surf. I feel like I'm living a David Attenborough programme.

1st March, on our way to Hanmer Springs, suggested to Andrea, why not have a go at driving the bus, just in case anything happens to me, it's a straight quiet road, with little to no traffic. OK she says. Well it turned into a road worthy of the Coromandel, some of the bends were sign posted 15kmh, the devils staircase springs to mind. I found out Andrea has a good command of old English. So I'm driving in future! J

Hanmer Springs, weather has been very kind, before we left we bought a grab one deal for the Hanmer Jet, thank goodness, It's \$125 each! (down to a reasonable \$40 each). Brilliant though, gets up to 90kph and shows you quite a portion of the river, complete with free shower. Followed this with an easy bike ride and then to the hot pools, They have tube slides that you ride in a two seater rubber tube. We were like two kids, after 3 rides I was pooped from the climb up the towers, then had a good soak in progressively hotter pools. Finished the day with fish n chips from the local chippie, sat outside washed down with a couple of Heinekens. Bliss.

Onto to Lake Tekapo, another NZMCA site, it was windy but the setting is beautiful. Next day we rode our bikes into the village to see the Church of the Good Shepherd and NZ 's most famous

dog statue, then back for breakfast. We are on a mission, a friend has let us have her apartment at Millbrook for a couple of days, something we wouldn't normally afford, Tekapo can wait, so next stop was Lowburn Harbour on Lake Dunstan, a very well maintained free camping site overlooking the lake. Quick visit to Cromwell to buy an accessory for my new Weber bbq and onto Arrowtown and Millbrook.

Apartment was awesome with mountain views to die for and its own spa. Andrea did a big wash (4 loads), we had a nice chorizo pasta and watched tv. The apartment is luxurious and warm, it was great to just blob and take in the views and changing clouds and weather. South Island, I have decided has different clouds, probably due to the mountain ranges, but definitely different. Next day was Andrea's big birthday celebration, complimentary shuttle into Arrowtown for a walk (round the Chinese village) and a nice lunch. Then back for Moet in the spa and a crayfish dinner with all the trimmings, finished off with a video chat with our granddaughter. It was so good I wished it had been my birthday.

Next stop Queenstown, well Coronet peak actually outside Queenstown. The only place we could park (and afford). Queenstown has well earned its reputation as a destination for the well healed, they have been so long on the pigs back they cannot adjust to hard times. Although some of the businesses are working hard to earn a dollar while the council makes it a hard place to visit with its unrealistic parking restrictions and costs. Rant over, I'm in a bad mood as Andrea has thrashed me at cards, pass the pig and pool!

The other reason we are here one is of Andreas birthday gifts was a visit to Onsen spa pools, hot spa, bubbles and nibbles with a view to die for. Earlier we had ridden from Queenstown to Frankton and back, so we were ready for a hot soak.

On to Manapouri, gateway to Doubtful sound, which we had planned to do instead of Milford. The weather was not good so we moved to Te Anau, stayed 6 nights at the NZMCA park overlooking a paddock with a flock? of alpacas. Weather was kind so we ate drank and explored on our non-electric bikes. We must be the last people in NZ riding ordinary bikes! We rode to the control gates of Lake Te Anau planning to do a little of the lake to lake ride (Te Anau to Lake Manapouri), now you'd think it would be pretty flat being by the river, no, it was like a Tour de France, uphill and down dale, after I had ridden over my phone on a downhill section (\$289 for new screen, thank you) I had had enough, so Santa is being asked for an electric bike.

Weather has been very kind, we did the Milford sound cruise, got all toggged up, even took my beanie, glorious sunshine, we could have sun bathed.

Back in Te Anau we went to the bird sanctuary where they look after and rear Takahe, amongst other things. We did the tour so you get a lot of info and get to see the birds up close. Well not too close, they have to forage for most of their food, ready for release into the wild. The ranger lady had the brightest red hair and looked like some exotic bird herself. She was great though and one of the wonderful people we have met on our travels.

We are on a roll with the weather, we had been talking to a guy from Nelson, he said how lucky we were as it rains 300 days of the year, that was it, so having missed the Doubtful Sound cruise, we decided to do it from the air. There's a float plane on Lake Te Anau, so we booked in for the Doubtful Sound trip, not been in a float plane before, so was pretty excited. Trouble is float planes don't like choppy water and the wind got up, pilot said we'll wait and see what happens. Got to about 5pm and I got the bbq out ready for dinner, next thing we got a call from the pilot, we're on. I left the bbq out on a table and took off in the van for the lake shore. Squeezed in the plane, I'm sat next to the pilot, (now it's tight and me and the lady pilot are instant friends), there's a couple behind and Andrea is in the back. Nice take off and I'm enjoying the views but there's a light on the dash glowing away saying over temperature, now it's like the ignition warning light in the car, it's hard to ignore, I'm about to mention it when there's an awful electrical burning smell, the pilot (quite calmly) mentions the burning smell and say's we'll go back. The burning smell has passed and the over temperature light has gone out, I'm hoping she'll change her mind, I look back, and the acrid burning smell has settled in the back of the plane and Andrea's eyes are watering. We (I) had a nice flight around the lake and a nice gentle landing. Oh well, I've promised myself this flight in the future, Andrea is off to buy a lotto ticket having escaped a fiery death.

So from here we have to drive over the crown range and visit Cadrona (again, but that was 20 years ago). It's a must do drive, and the weather was perfect. We are discussing what to do in

Wanaka. I love Wanaka, we park up by the lake eating pastry from the local bakery and a nice coffee.

Andrea gets a phone call with bad news, a friend has passed away. We head for Christchurch to fly home, a friend from long ago offers parking for the van and a lift to the airport. God bless friends.

That was two weeks ago, 4th April we are back in Christchurch, with a promise from our friends to be shown around. Awesome, we were driven to Akaroa, sight-seeing on the way, its lovely to be able to stare out the window at the incredible views. Had lunch at a bistro on the beach at Sumner, and finished off driving the red zone of Christchurch, where they will never build again. Over the next couple of days, we literally bump into a good friend from Auckland!, ride the tram, visit the very moving Quake City exhibit, had our first ride on a Lime scooter (it's addictive) and went up the Gondola for 360 views of Christchurch and Littleton. I love Christchurch. What a resilient city/people fighting their way back from the awful destruction. Off course the weather was perfect, coffee and food good.

We left Christchurch via Arthurs pass, had to stop at a place called Sheffield (where we are from in the UK). Had a photo by the sign and across the road is a bakery/café. Well it is the best pie shop in the world (you can see I was very impressed), It takes you half an hour to decide what flavour, and that's just the savoury pies, OMG I was in heaven, If I come back I want to live near that pie shop. We left weighed down with pies for the freezer. I have decided all our future trips must pass through Sheffield, nuff said.

Half way through Arthurs pass is a place called Otira Stagecoach Hotel, the owner is straight out of the past, eccentric and exactly like the hotel, it's a collection of memorabilia piled high. We stayed had a drink by the coal fire, played the piano, you pedal it plays, and soaked in the ambience. He had to leap the bar to give us a drink (forgotten his keys), and showed us his latest acquisition, a blue cockchafer, (google it).

Onto Hokitika, where our friends in Christchurch use to live, where they are famous. Everybody knows everybody in Hokitika.

To be continued
Keith X