

Chronicle V

February 22. Today we leave Queenstown for Milford Sound in the Fiordland National Park. The Maori named the sound *Piopiotahi* after the thrush-like *piopio* bird, now extinct. *Piopiotahi* means *a single (tahi) piopio*, harking back to the legend of *Maui* trying to win immortality for mankind. When *Maui* died in the attempt, a *piopio* was said to have flown to Milford Sound in mourning.

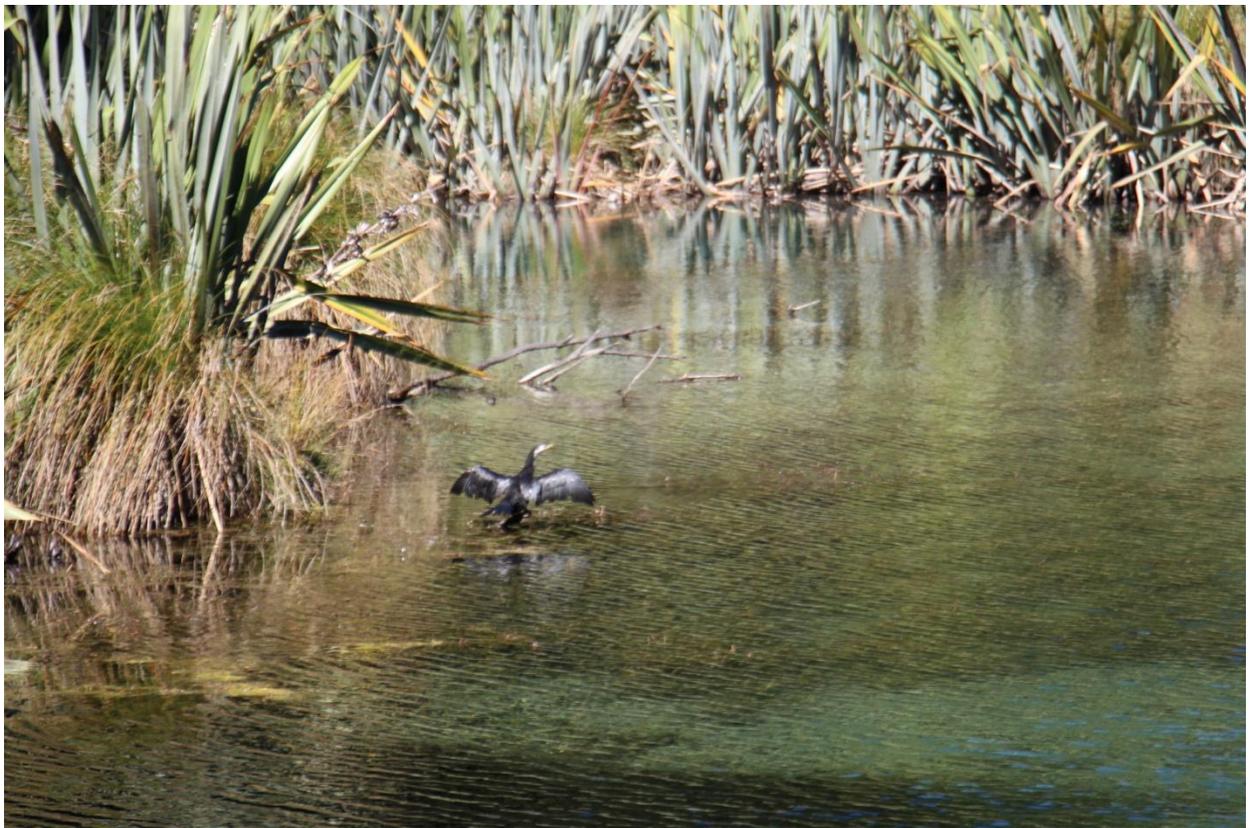


There is a difference between a sound and a fiord. A sound is a flooded river valley. Geologically, a fiord is a long, narrow inlet with very steep sides or cliffs that were produced by a glacier. Clearly Milford Sound is really Milford Fiord.

On the way there, by a necessarily circuitous route, we stop at Mirror Lakes.



A cormorant (shag) is spotted sunning itself.



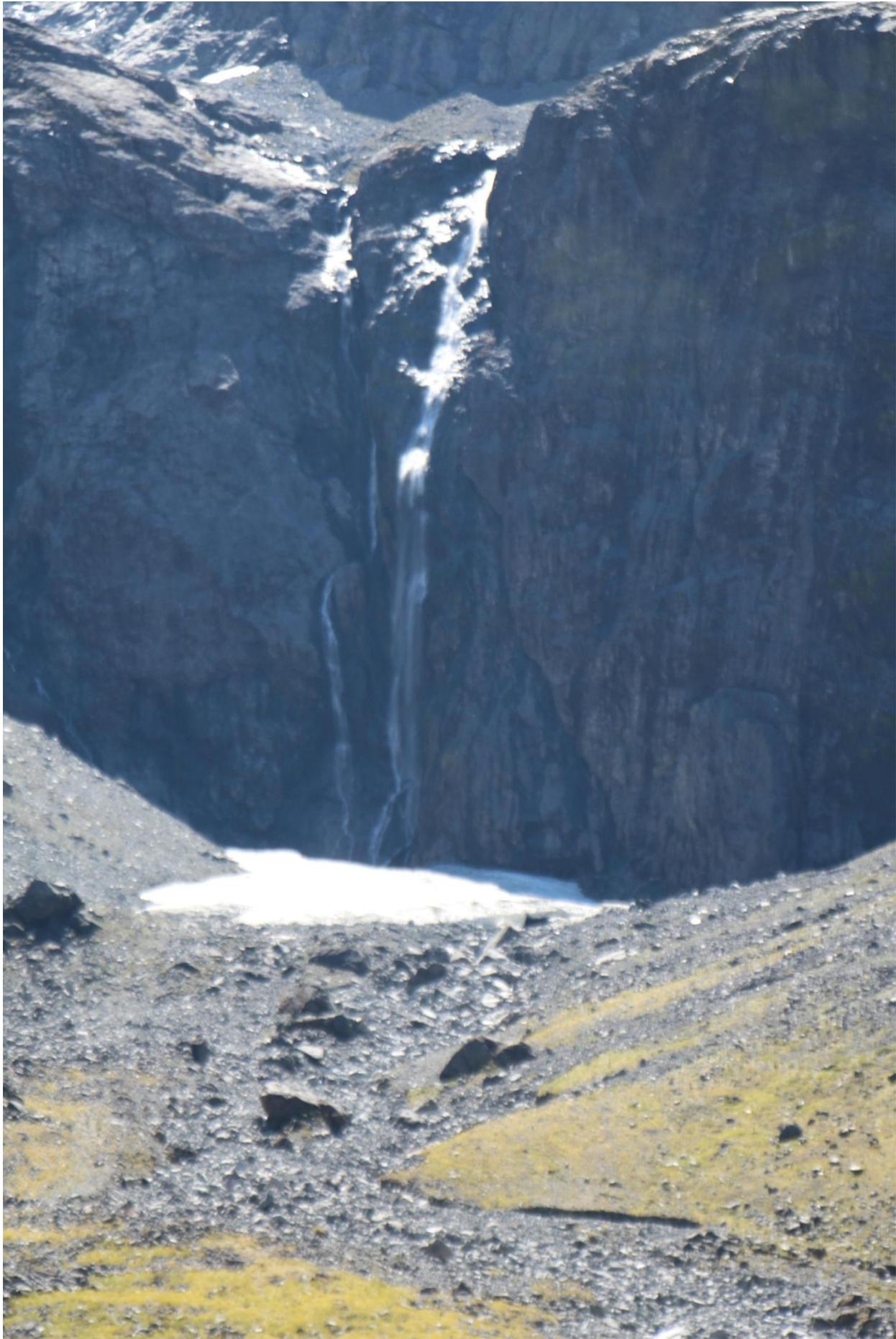
Later we stop at another exhibit along the road where an Australian possum is depicted. Note how different it is compared to the American possum.



The scenery along the way is fabulous. The U-shaped valley carved by a glacier is obvious.



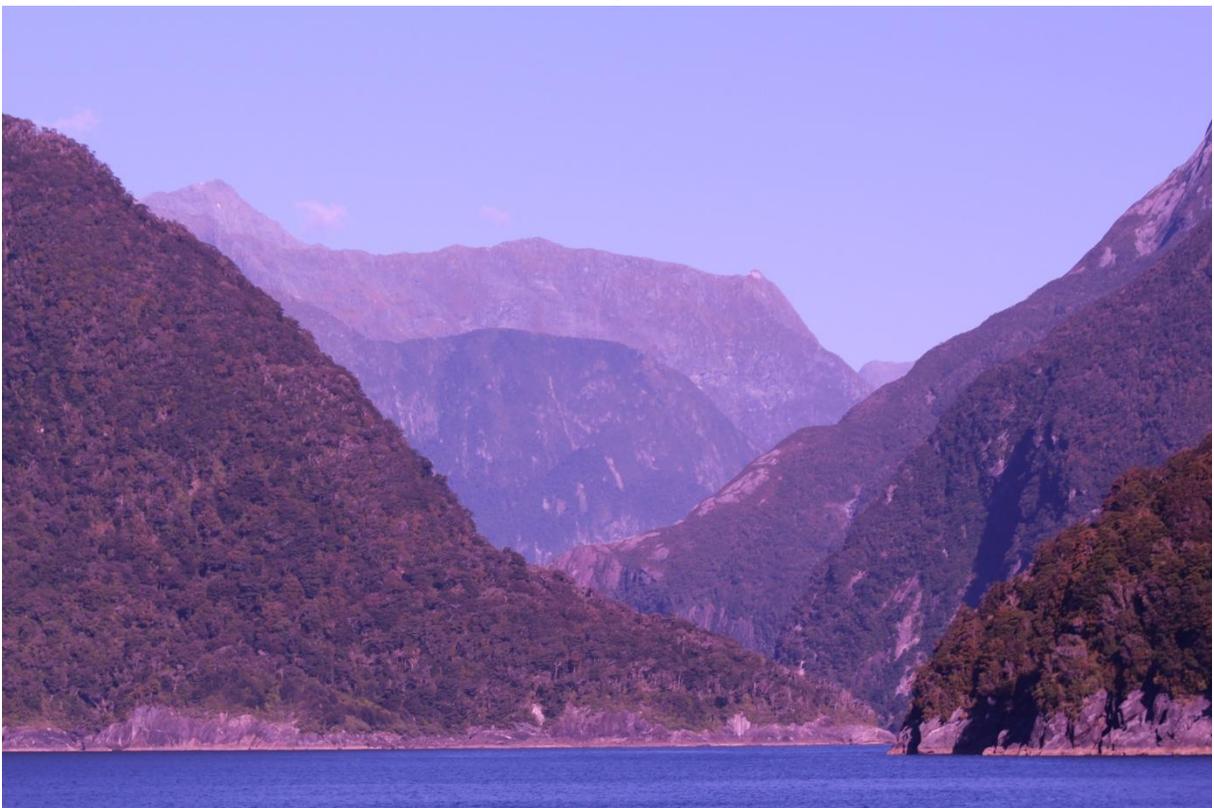
As we near the summit it becomes clear we will not actually go over a pass but instead will pass through a tunnel. Near the entrance there is a beautiful waterfall fed by a small glacier.



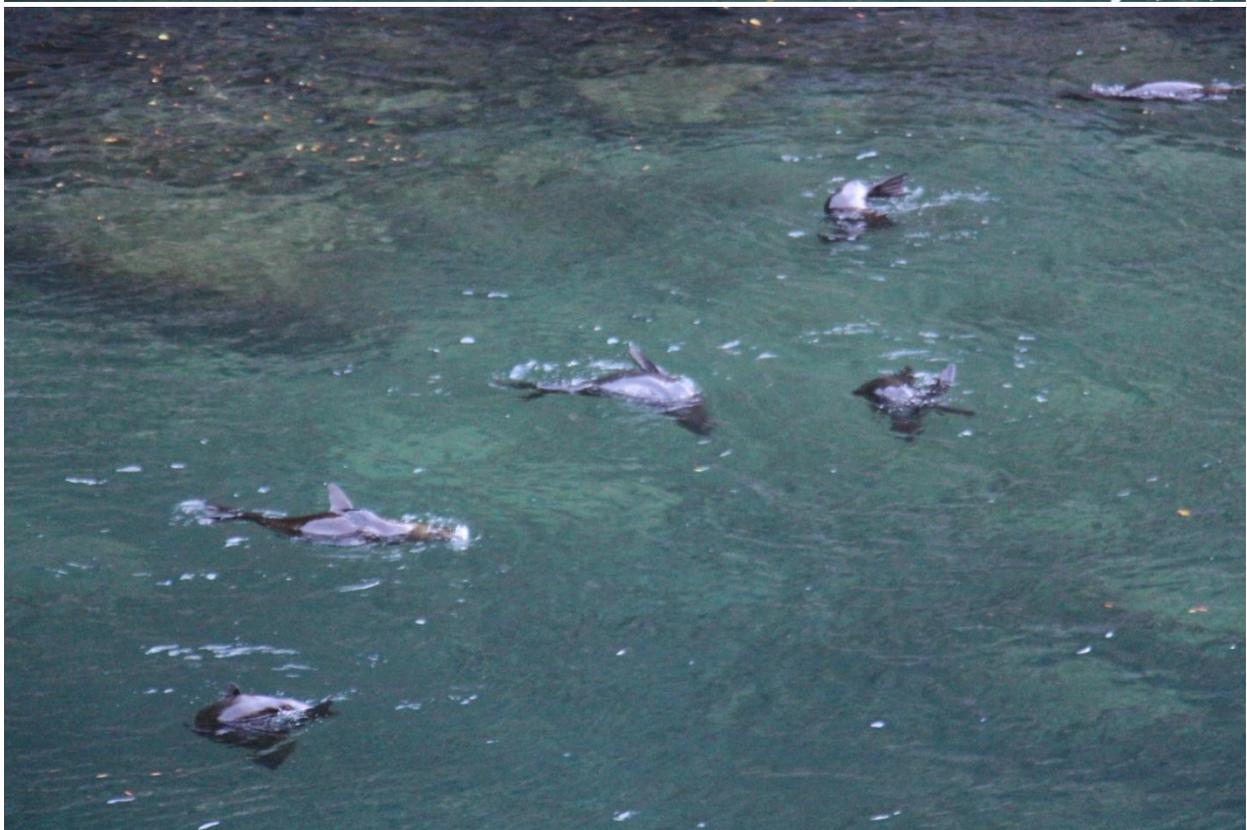
We finally arrive at the beginning to Milford Sound.



As night falls the colors in the sound change.



February 23. We see seal pups at play.



We see a beautiful waterfall. While many are taking pictures I notice that there is a bird on a ledge off to the left. At first I think it is a penguin but then come up with reasons why it isn't. Three others also see it but none of us have our binoculars with us.



Later inside the boat I find a photo of the rare Fiord Crested Penguin (*tawaki*) and it is exactly what we saw, and not a cormorant that can sometimes be mistaken for a penguin. No one's waterfall picture catches the right spot. The white crests and stomachs are unmistakable as well as the stance. We sleep in the boat and then return to the entrance to the fiord the next morning.

During the past few days I have asked Dean if we would see any *Keas*. They are large parrots that are highly intelligent and mischievous. It is one of three heavy parrots in New Zealand, the *kea*, *kaka* and *kakapo*. The *kakapo* is so heavy (3.5 kg) that it cannot fly. I would settle for any one of them but the *kea* is first choice because of its personality. Dean did not go with us on the overnight fiord cruise but instead stayed nearby the port and exchanged notes with other guides. He visited a nearby scenic spot and observed a *kea*. When we returned in the morning he took us to The Chasm and in the parking lot we were greeted by a *kea*.









The *kea* jumps onto the hood of a rental car much to the amusement of the occupant. Her husband is in the parking lot shooting pictures and thinks its cute. He says it is a rental car so he doesn't mind. I tell him the *kea* will look for rubber or plastic liners around windshields or mirrors and pull them off. He shrugs it off until....



The driver becomes animated. The *kea* scoots.



Inside The Chasm the rocks have been carved by rushing water filled with grit and tree logs have been caught by the large holes.



We also see a splendid example of a silver tree fern, or *ponga* in Maori.



At the tunnel through the mountain there is a remarkable specimen of the cubic crystalline granite.

