

Chronicle II

February 12. We are shuttled to the ferry that will take us through the Cook strait to Nelson on the northern end of the North Island. The ferry takes people, cars, vans and trucks.



The passage is scenic and as it would happen the seas were very calm for our journey. We arrive on South Island and board our new Mercedes Benz van that is capable of seating eleven, in addition to the driver/guide, somewhat tightly but seats 6 very comfortably. Dean drives us to Nelson and shows us around the city by van. Nelson has a population of 43,000, the 9th largest city in NZ.

February 13. Today is dedicated to visiting and partaking of Abel Tasman National Park (part of *Te Papa Atawhai*). *Atawhai* means *kindness*, and *Te Papa Atawhai* means *department of conservation*. In Maori there is no *f* but *wh* is sometimes pronounced like an *f*. We were going to get there by boat but the seas were rough so we bused around the bay instead. This turned out to be an interesting trip punctuated by tidal mudflat art. When we got there we boarded a shuttle boat that took us up the coast to *Onetahuti Beach*.



Soon after departing from the beach we see one of the many granite rock formations called split apple.



We disembarked and hiked back to Bark Bay, a distance of 6.1 km. The trail rose steeply into a forest of tree ferns and beech trees. Although a bit late in the season we see a large tree fern *koru* uncurling. *Koru* means *curled shoot* and is a popular symbol in Maori culture, often depicted in jade amulets.



High up on the trail we get a splendid view.



We were told that at the end there would be a sand spit to cross and we would be met by a guide with sea kayaks for us.



But instead the sand spit was under several feet of high tide water and the tidal current was strong.



We back-tracked up the steep trail to a fork we had passed going down, mostly because it had a sign saying “track closed.” Fortunately an elderly group of hikers appeared coming out of that track and they assured us that it wasn’t closed. We took the fork and eventually found our guide, our kayaks and our lunch.

From Bark Bay we kayaked down to Anchorage, 7.8 km away by foot.



This was fun and tiring, even with the wind and the current at our backs. The shuttle boat picked us up and deposited us at the start point where we caught the boat back across the bay to Nelson, the rough seas having abated by then.

February 14. For valentines day we drove to *Kaikoura*, a peninsula on the east coast. *Kai* means *food* and *koura* means *crayfish*, or *lobster*. The drive takes time because the roads are only two lane and they are hilly and winding. The scenery is a mixture of farmland, mostly for sheep, Douglas fir monocultures and native forests rich in tree ferns, beech and some primitive looking large *Rimu* or red pine trees.

February 15. Today conditions reverse the order of events, whale watching and swimming with the seals. Rough seas make us go whale watching first. We

board a small plane and fly several kilometers offshore to a site where sperm whales had been seen earlier. We are eventually lucky enough to see three. They can be seen moving along the surface and replenishing their oxygen with deep breaths that produce that familiar whale “blow.”







One whale turns head down, exposes its tail flukes and dives into the deep, all in a moment. On our return we see a few dolphins “dolphining” through the water.





After lunch we put on wetsuits and take a shuttle bus to a boat and take the boat out to some rocks upon which some seals are sunbathing. The Gates are in their wetsuits.





We enter the water and so do the seals. I have one youngster come within three feet of me and it quickly moves away.



February 16. We add a diversion to the trip and drive to Christchurch on the central east coast of the South Island. It has a population of 375,900, third for all of NZ and first for the South Island. Christchurch suffered a devastating earthquake on February 22, 2011. This magnitude 6.3 quake was centered 10 km southeast of the center of Christchurch. 185 persons were killed. Much of the destruction is still apparent today and many buildings are boarded up and fenced in as a constant reminder of the danger.

Stores have rebuild inside large shipping containers. Once inside you quickly adapt to the environment and forget how contained you really are. The Re:START Mall opened in November of 2011 and has 27 stores. This has revitalized downtown but illustrates how tenuously the merchants trust the geographic stability. We visited Re:START for a short while.

Near Darfield, west of Christchurch some 10 km, we spend the night at Helen and Charles Thompson's sheep farm. Their young boys, Harry 10 and Geordie 6, show us some sheep and Harry feeds carrots to a handsome old horse.



I am surprised to learn from the rancher that cattle are replacing sheep in the marketplace. The invention of synthetic fibers has contracted the wool industry, and raising dairy cows as well as exporting cattle to China are very lucrative now. Mr. Thompson has more sheep on 3,000 acres some kilometers to the South. He visits this property only twice a month. He told me the sheep require almost no care. They graze on their own and the grass grows on its own as well. Sheep are low maintenance, especially compared to husbanding dairy cows. In addition, Charles said that when you do put in time for the sheep, say when shearing, it is intensive work and nomadic shearers needed for the job are becoming too expensive to hire. Sheep ranching will probably decrease markedly in the next decade. We slept in a cottage near the farm house.