

REPORT Aotearoa /New Zealand Geotour 2023

By Iraphne Childs (Trek Leader) and Ralph Carlisle

From 19 October to 2 November nineteen RGSQ members enjoyed a geographical tour of New Zealand's **TE WAI POUNAMU / SOUTH ISLAND**. A good time was had by all. Throughout the trip we had exceptionally fine weather (although still a bit cold for Queenslanders) with only a couple of afternoons of rain. Spring was evident everywhere in the bright green new leaves of trees and flower displays, including beautiful blooms of rhododendron bushes. The crossings of Cook Strait and Foveaux Strait (from Bluff to Stewart Island) were unusually (and thankfully) calm. We had many opportunities to encounter native wildlife – New Zealand fur seals, sea lions, birds including kea, kaka, kiwi and albatross - and walks in native forest reserves. All breakfasts and some excellent dinners were included in the tour. Our thanks to Stuart Betlem of Integrity Travel Durack for making all bookings for accommodation, coach and meals which were excellent.



Communications: To save everyone having to obtain New Zealand SIM cards, a Whatsapp group was set up before the trek. This needed everyone to install the Whatsapp app on their mobile phones. Whenever the members could access the internet, messages could be sent to the whole group or individuals in the group. The group leader installed a New Zealand SIM card in a spare phone for calls to NZ numbers

BRISBANE to WELLINGTON (Thursday 19 October)

We left Brisbane at 10.30am on Air New Zealand NZ274. We arrived in Wellington airport at 5.00pm local time. John and Mary Nowill were waiting for us and joined our group after their tour of the North Island over the previous few days. The Super Shuttle bus was waiting for us.

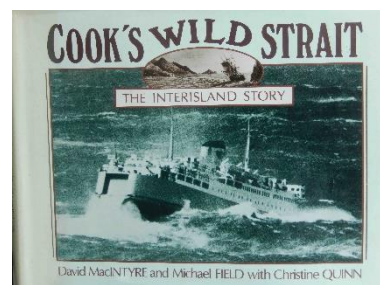


WELLINGTON (Friday 20 October)

We stayed overnight at the Ramada Hotel and had a welcome group dinner at the Southern Cross Restaurant, within walking distance of our hotel. The next day we had breakfast at the Microtel restaurant, again within walking distance of our hotel. The visit to **TE PAPA MUSEUM** was excellent. We had a guided tour for one hour which introduced us to many aspects of the natural environment, Maori culture and art galleries. We met back at the hotel at 2.30pm for transfer to the ferry terminal.

COOK STRAIT

We departed Wellington at 4.00pm on the Interislander ferry. This ferry is the main passenger and cargo ferry and has been connecting North and South Island for 60 years. We were surprised at how much cargo the ferry took on board, including two large buses and a train ! Despite its notorious reputation, and very often rough conditions, our crossing of **COOK STRAIT** from Wellington to **PICTON** was smooth. We were able to enjoy the scenery of **MARLBOROUGH SOUND** as we crossed to South Island, arriving in Picton at 7.15pm. We stayed 2 nights at the Jasmine Court motel.



PICTON (Saturday 21 October).

We boarded Beachcomber Cruises at 7.30 am and were again very fortunate with the weather – it was fine, calm with no wind on beautiful Queen Charlotte Sound, passing islands and accompanied by seabirds. The ferry captain and crew gave very good commentary, especially about ecology. We learned about the extensive conservation, forestry management and predator-control efforts being made around the area, and in NZ overall. There are now nine predator-free islands in Marlborough Sound of which **MOTUARA BIRD SANCTUARY** is one of the most successful. We arrived at Motuara Island after one hour and climbed the 800m to the top of the hill for spectacular views across the Sounds and Cook Strait to North Island. On the walk we did see tui birds and little blue penguins in their wooden nesting boxes. On the top of the hill there is a stone cairn memorial to Cook as this was the spot where he is reported to have “claimed possession” of New Zealand on Wednesday 31 January 1770. Beside that memorial is a poster board explaining the “Meeting of cultures” with the Maori side of the island’s history. We re-boarded our boat tour making several stops at various coves to drop off luggage and supplies. Jonathan and Susan disembarked at Furneaux Lodge to do the 11 km walk. They were picked up later in the day by the ferry. After returning to Picton around mid-day it was free time for our group for the afternoon and evening.



KAIKOURA (Sunday 22 October)

The next morning, we boarded our coach driven by Viktor Torok at 10am at Jasmine Motel. The large coach capacity was 45 so our group of 19 could spread out which was great. Viktor would be with us for the whole of our tour in South Island. He proved to be an excellent driver, very capable and cooperative to any requests we had, often going above and beyond his duties to help us. He had very good local knowledge and stories to tell along the way. There were showers of rain most of the way from Picton to **KAIKOURA** but the weather was kind to us. The rain stopped as we approached Kaikoura and we were able to walk out onto the coastal flats to view the seal colony. We had lunch at various cafes in Kaikoura and some of us actually were tempted to try the (rather expensive) crayfish – the famous speciality of Kaikoura. We left Kaikoura at 2.15pm.



CHEVIOT

We made a toilet stop at **CHEVIOT** (about half way between Kaikoura and Christchurch). Two interesting connections of our party with Cheviot were revealed: Firstly, we pulled up outside the school in Cheviot. Kath's grandfather had been headmaster there about 90 years previously. Secondly, Robin Spriggs had participated in the 2010 9th World Rogaine Championships, a 50km round-trip cross-country rogaining (like orienteering) starting and finishing at the Cheviot school.

We arrived at our motel, Centrepont on Columbo in Christchurch around 5.30. We had three nights in this motel while in Christchurch. The motel was run by a Korean couple who were possibly rather new to the business. They were very helpful when asked for anything, and breakfasts were left in our rooms overnight on a tray ready for the next morning. The Korean idea of a continental breakfast, cereals, toast, etc. was OK but white bread and a large jar of strawberry jam was not our preferred fare! However, they did prepare our packed lunch as ordered for everyone ready to take with us on the coach for the third night.



CHRISTCHURCH (Monday 23rd October NZ Labour Day holiday)

A member connection with this city: one of Kath's ancestors arrived in Christchurch in 1850 on the *Randolph*, one of the 'First Four Ships' bringing migrants to settle Christchurch. It was an Anglican settlement and Kath's family story is that her ancestor was almost put off the ship for espousing his Methodist views.

Our coach picked us up at 8.30 am to go to the **ANTARCTIC CENTRE**. Several of us took the 20-minute tour in the Hägglunds amphibious Antarctic vehicle that gave us an experience of what it's like for scientists in Antarctica as they travel across the ice, up and down hills, over crevasses and through water. We met some very friendly husky dogs and then experienced the “snow room” temperature of minus 18 degrees Celsius.



In the afternoon Viktor gave us a scenic tour, with excellent commentary, driving over to **LYTTLETON**. On the way we passed some of the areas which had been cleared by landslides from the 2011 and later earthquakes, the large Lyttleton harbour with many container ships and some picturesque beach suburbs. After dinner, having waited for about half an hour for a taxi which we had booked, eventually the manager of the eatery assisted us and booked an uber on my NZ phone. It came within 5 minutes and charged only \$8 back to our motel ! We were later to discover that this is often a problem with taxis in Christchurch !



Tuesday 24 October

Professor Jamie Shulmeister, Head of Geography at **UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY** and former RGSQ President, hosted us at the University for very interesting presentations by Geography staff on their local research projects: <https://www.canterbury.ac.nz/study/academic-study/science/science-schools-and-departments/school-of-earth-and-environment/contact-the-school-of-earth-and-environment>

- **Jamie** – overview of NZ geology and earthquake risk, including the 2010/2011 Christchurch earthquakes
- **Carolynne Hultquist** – participatory community mapping
- **Heather Purdie** – glaciology & local glaciers research
- **Sarah McSweeney** – coastal geomorphology
- **Matt Wilson** – geospatial and remote sensing technology
- **David Conradson** – social geography and disaster aftermath

We had lunch at the Ancestral café in the geography building and left the university at 1.30pm. Jamie took us to the **RED ZONE** in the east of the city along the **AVON RIVER**. Jamie explained what had happened here with the 2010/2011 earthquake, flooding and liquefaction, where 5000 homes were destroyed. There were on-going debates about how to use this land now, including options to give co-governance to the local Maori group, rewilding, recreation land. Interestingly, now “foraging fruit” is available for the public in the former residential gardens. On the way back to our hotel we passed the central Christchurch cathedral which is still undergoing repairs from the earthquake, and also the “cardboard” transitional cathedral, designed by Japanese architect Shigeru Ban after the earthquake. We had a good dinner the Two Fat Ladies Indian restaurant, hosting Jamie and his wife, Val.



CANTERBURY PLAIN (Wednesday 25 October)

We left Christchurch at 8 am with Jamie on board for the next two days as our guide. Had coffee at the famous Darfield bakery. In many fields dairy cows have replaced sheep. Our first major stop was at **RAKAIA GORGE** – Jamie took us down the escarpment to the Rakaia riverbed where we walked along to see a major fault line and loess deposits.



Had a relaxed packed lunch under the trees at **METHVEN** – the weather was so warm and the flowering trees (camelias?) were beautiful. We then went on to **ASHBURTON LAKES** - very interesting post-glacial landscapes. Jamie interpreted the geology for us pointing out some moraines and post-glacial ridges. He explained a new method of dating rock formations – Cosmogenic nuclide dating can be used to determine rates of icesheet thinning and recession, the ages of moraines, and the age of glacially eroded bedrock surfaces. Cosmogenic nuclide dating uses the interactions between cosmic rays and nuclides in glacially transported boulders or glacially eroded bedrock to provide age estimates for rock exposure at the Earth's surface. It tells us how long the rocks have been located at the surface, for example, on a moraine.



GERALDINE (Thursday 26 October)

Enjoyed ice-cream and cheese shop at Geraldine. That night we stayed at the Andorra Motel in **GERALDINE**. Next morning a very good full buffet breakfast at Mundell's café.

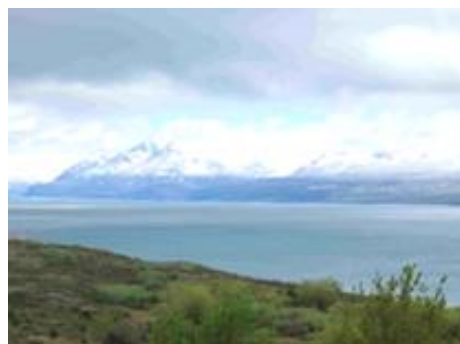


LAKE TEKAPO

Drizzle turning to rain. Short walk to the Church of the Good Shepherd, built in 1935 as a memorial to the European pioneers of **MACKENZIE COUNTRY**. In the 19th century, Scottish shepherds came to work on the pastoral runs of the eastern South Island. The high country could not have been farmed successfully without the border collies they brought with them. To honour these 'canine Scots', a statue of a collie has been raised at Lake Tekapo.



LAKE PUKAKI is the largest of three roughly parallel alpine lakes running north-south along the northern edge of the Mackenzie Basin. Group photo taken here. On the way to Aoraki we stopped at a salmon farm and enjoyed sashimi. We drove by large canals, which form part of the hydroelectricity system.



AORAKI/ Mt COOK (Thursday 26 October)

On the way to **AORAKI** the rain increased so we could not see most of the mountains. By the time we reached Aoraki it was pouring rain. We had difficulty finding our motel units in Mt. Cook Motel. The units were very good, warm and spacious. That night we had the most wonderful buffet 800m up the hill at The Hermitage hotel (all paid for as part of our tour). Viktor managed to drive our large bus up to the Hermitage.



Friday 27 October

We woke to a winter wonderland of snow outside our window. There had been an overnight snowstorm resulting in a brilliant snowy landscape and a fine sunny next day. After another great buffet breakfast at the Hermitage, Jamie guided us on a hike to the **TASMAN GLACIER** lookout near Mt. Cook. This was quite a strenuous stepped walk in the snow up to the lookout where we had a good view of the Tasman glacier. Jamie left us to return to Christchurch when we reached **TWIZEL** around 10 am. Jamie's commentary explaining the geography of glaciated and other landforms and his local knowledge of contemporary NZ was a highlight of the tour.





WANAKA (Friday 27 October)

Passing the Omarama clay cliffs we travelled through Lindis Pass into the Waitaki District. Stopped at the Lindis conservation areas to view a reserve of snow tussock grassland. We did not stop in Queenstown, skirting around the Remarkables and saw lots more sheep. We got to **WANAKA** Oakridge Resort around 2.30pm. Viktor took some members into Wanaka town. Iraphne stayed at the hotel to make phone calls confirming bookings & arrangements over the remainder of the trip. Dinner at the Oakridge hotel dining room.



MANAPOURI Saturday 28th October

A long bus trip from Wanaka to **MANAPOURI**. We needed to get to the ferry terminal at Manapouri by 12 noon and arrived at 11.53 – well done our bus driver Viktor ! We boarded the ferry to cross Lake Manapouri, then took the Doubtful Sound coach across the range of mountains in this part of the Southern Alps. There was snow on the summit at 671m where we stopped for a great view of Doubtful Sound.



DOUBTFUL SOUND (Saturday 28 October)

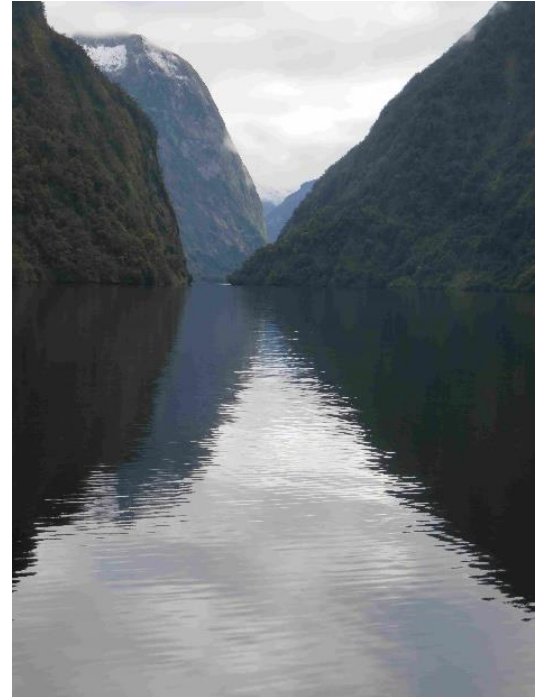
Arriving at **DEEP COVE**, we finally boarded the **FIORDLAND NAVIGATOR** for our overnight cruise in **DOUBTFUL SOUND**. We were served a delicious afternoon tea, and tea & coffee were available on tap all through the voyage in the dining room. Some of us ventured into a small tender boat carried by the ship for an hour on the fjord waters to get closer in shore. It was cold even in the tender, but no wind! The sailing was truly awesome, with calm weather enabling the ship to venture part way out of the fjord into the Tasman Sea. We saw a seal colony on the rocks at the entrance to the Tasman Sea.





Sunday 29th October

The fjord was just like glass this morning, with picture-postcard vistas of the waters and cliffs surrounding the fjord. Some of us took the opportunity for a 30mins trip in a zodiac to get closer to the shore. Unfortunately we did not see any dolphins and only a few penguins. We sailed and anchored into one of the side tributaries, **HALL ARM** where we experienced one of the highlights of the cruise “sounds of silence”- all engines and noises were silenced. We sat for around 10 minutes listening to the sounds of nature, birds and the fjord around us. We arrived back at Deep Cove then on to Manapouri around 12 noon where Viktor was waiting for us. And so was the resident kea welcoming us back.



Manapouri to Bluff (Sunday 29th October)

The journey to **BLUFF** on the southern tip of South Island took around 3 and half hours, arriving at 3.30pm. We had time to take the bus up to the Bluff lookout with a good view of the town and the Tiwai Point aluminium smelter. We boarded the Stewart Island Ferry at 5.15pm across **FOVEAUX STRAIT**, which again was unusually calm.



STEWART ISLAND/ RAKIURA (Sunday 29th and Monday 30th October)

We stayed at the South Sea Hotel – an old hotel on the waterfront at **OBAN**, the only town on the island. The weather was fine and warm, sea calm. After a leisurely breakfast we joined the Island and Bay tour from 11.00am until around 12.30. The predator fencing and predator-free policy on Rakiura was impressive. Then from 12.45-3.15 we took water taxis in Paterson Inlet to predator-free **ULVA ISLAND** wildlife sanctuary. We saw tui birds, fantails and heard lots of bird song – difficult to identify them! On the walk back to the ferry we encountered a grumpy fur seal on the beach and gave him a wide berth! We had some free time after returning to Oban. Some members encountered a party of frolicking kiwis on a guided night walk. We met a resident Kākā parrot outside our unit at the hotel. At our dinner that night everyone seemed to have enjoyed a relaxing day. Our two days on Stewart Island was another of the highlights of our tour.





CATILINS AND DUNEDIN (Tuesday 31st October)

We left Stewart Island on the 8.00am ferry, arriving back in Bluff at 9.00am where Viktor was waiting for us with our bus. We drove through the **CATLINS DISTRICT**, stopping briefly at **TOKAMI** village and had a good lunch stop at the Whistling Frog café which was in the middle of nowhere ! Outside the café was the best hedge of large New Zealand flax plants. On to the Catlins coast, passing through **BALCLUTHA**, **PAPATOWAI** and a stop for the magnificent view at the **FLORENCE HILL LOOKOUT**. We arrived in **DUNEDIN** at 3.30pm. Viktor took us on a short tour to two iconic Dunedin sites: Baldwin Street, claimed to be the steepest street in the world and Signal Hill Lookout. We stayed at the Alcala Motor Lodge in Dunedin. Dinner at Harbourside Grill.



Wednesday 1st November

Low clouds over the city with light drizzle. Our tour ended in **DUNEDIN** with a visit to the **ROYAL ALBATROSS CENTRE** at Harrington Point where we had a very informative talk at 11.00am and guided tour to the observation lookout and bird hide. On the walk we saw numerous red-beaked gulls nesting on the ground and a colony of Otago shags also nesting. Although it was between seasons for the albatross nesting and the latest chicks had already fledged and gone, we caught glimpses of two amazing royal albatross as they landed in their colony on the headland.



We returned to Dunedin city for free time, visiting the iconic Dunedin railway station. Several of our group visited the Koru (greenstone) shop, where they very generously bought Iraphne a wonderful greenstone pendant and a tui bird wooden wall plaque as a gift for organising the tour. She was so pleased that it had all gone so well and thoroughly enjoyed the whole trip with great friendship. On the last night, our farewell dinner was at Platos restaurant, Birch Street, Dunedin – a long-established but a little difficult to find but once there it was a very good meal. Iraphne had arranged to celebrate the 80th birthday of Graham (on 31st October) and of Chris (12th November) with two very good iced fruit birthday cakes. The restaurant did a good job with those ! Final speeches from Iraphne, Ralph and Kay were well received.



Thursday 2nd November

Departed the hotel at 7.30 am for Dunedin airport. John and Mary picked up a car at the airport to begin their next week travelling on the west coast of South Island: Ian, Len and Laurelle returned to Christchurch on the bus with Viktor to spend a few days on other parts of South Island. A domestic flight from Dunedin took the rest of us to Auckland, arriving around mid-day, where Chris and Robin, Roger and Glenda left the group for a final few days in and around Auckland. The remaining ten of our group left Auckland International airport at 4.00pm arriving back in Brisbane at around 5.00pm (time difference of 3 hours). Overall, a great tour with a geographical focus, visiting some wonderful places in the beautiful South Island and with great company of all who participated.

