

Greenmount (or should that be New Zealand?) — November 2014

I awoke early on Saturday 1st November, feeling just a little worse for wear. A little positive thinking coupled with an early 20 mg of Losec helped to ease my stomach, which was complaining about the previous night's intake. That was until I faced breakfast.

Forcing down a small bowl of cereal mixed with apple and sipping a glass of water, followed by a cup of tea seemed to help matters. I think the Losec had kicked in and I did contemplate taking a second one, although I was only prescribed one a day.

Lyel gave Jenny and me a lift into Nelson and we potted round the Saturday market. Jenny saw a nice, red, cotton top (hippy style — there seemed to be something of a hippy revival here) but the only available size was small.

We paid a visit to the cathedral and, although modern and uninspiring on the outside, it was lovely and peaceful on the inside and well worth a visit.

Lyel collected us and we all set off on a wine trail to three vineyards, Wollaston, Riwaka and Neudorf. Of the three, Wollaston was, in my opinion, the best, with waitress service and a very good Pinot Gris (in lieu of a Chardonnay). The last stop was at the quay at Mapua for a beer, brewed on the premises.

We returned for dinner, Lyel cooking the meat on the barbecue outside. Having consumed copious amounts of alcohol during the day, I declined to imbibe further that evening.

On Sunday 2nd November, Lyel drove us up to Golden Bay, a long drive over the Takaka Hill. Our first stop was in the Kahurangi National Park at the Riwaka Resurgence Walking Track, where we walked up the track to see the stream emerge from an underground source. Then we went on to the Te Waikoropupu Springs Walk where underground water is forced up under pressure into the lake there.

On Monday 3rd November, Edith dropped Jenny and me off at Tahunui beach and we walked along the sand, dipping our toes in the water, which wasn't as cold as we expected it to be. We scrambled up the concrete breakwater to emerge on Rocks Road and walked into Nelson to meet Edith at Café Affair on Trafalgar Street at 1:30 p.m. for lunch.

Cafés in NZ seemed to fall into two categories; most were helpful and would do their best to please while others adopted a take-it-or-leave-it attitude. Café Affair looked like a reasonable establishment. Unfortunately, appearances can be deceptive. When it came to asking for something that was not on the menu, not in the display cabinet and gluten-free, Café Affair moved rapidly into the second category, despite its documented policy of evolution and change. It was not an establishment I would recommend if you like good food and a friendly service.

Jenny went off to source her own lunch, a nice, filled, baked potato from a street vendor.

Jenny and I parted company with Edith and walked down to Founders' Heritage Park. The concessionary entry of \$5 each was just about worth it, with lots of old buildings and items to see, including a train that ran on a short length of track. Unfortunately, we did not arrive until after 3 p.m. and the park closed at 4:30 p.m. which made our visit a bit rushed. In actual fact, we stayed until 5:30 p.m. having a tea and cake in the café there and left by a side gate that had been left open for late visitors.

Edith collected us about 6 p.m. and I drove us all on to visit friends of Edith, Judy and Mike Kelly, for dinner and a chat, returning to base about 10 p.m. It had been an enjoyable day (apart from the abysmal lunch) and we retired, reflecting on the journey to Picton, the ferry crossing and the drive to Paraparaumu the following day. It was enough to give a grown man nightmares.

I awoke early on Tuesday 4th November and showered, one of those rare occasions in a Yorkshire man's life. Jenny followed suit and we commenced breakfast, discovering there was no milk for our cereal. We dashed off to the supermarket in Nelson and took the opportunity to buy a little something for Lyel and Judy to thank them for their kind hospitality in their lovely home, enriched by the company of their children and their partners.

Edith, Jenny and I said our farewells and reluctantly left Nelson behind for the two hour trip to Picton and the ferry crossing to Wellington. Due to a strong northerly wind, we arrived about half an hour late and drove straight up to the Seascape B&B in Paraparaumu where Brian made us welcome with a refreshing cup of tea and some slices of a gluten-free pancake he had made that morning topped with jam and cream.

Brian pointed us in the direction of a local Italian restaurant, Sopranos, for tea and it was excellent.

We retired early at about 10 p.m., contemplating a late start (08:30 breakfast) the following morning.

That meant we were too late for the 9 a.m. ferry to Kapiti Island on Wednesday 5th November so we forewent the climb to the top of the island (about 1600 feet) and made do with a walk along the beach southwards, heading straight into the biting cold wind.

This walk we had done before as far as Raumati and we called at the Waterfront restaurant there to book a table for our evening meal. Unfortunately, they were booked up.

We continued our walk southwards as far as Raumati South and discovered a lovely little café called Raumati Social Club for lunch. It wasn't much to look at from the outside and it was quite rustic on the inside but the food was excellent and it was very reasonably priced. This has to be a must for visitors to the area.

Continuing our walk southwards, we reached Queen Elizabeth Park, the intention being to go to the tram museum and ride the tram through the park. It was at that point we discovered that the trams only ran at weekends and on Bank Holidays.

We pressed on with our walk in a southerly direction to Paekakeriki and headed into the light rain showers forecast for the southern part of the north island. We weren't exactly having a good day, although the walk, for the most part on the beach, had been very enjoyable.

On reaching the small town of Paekakeriki, I telephoned Edith and she came to fetch us. We returned to the Raumati Social Club café for a cup of tea and booked a table for three at the Fisherman's Table for dinner. Had we seen the dinner menu at the RSC café first, we would have eaten there, our previous experience at the Fisherman's table not being all that good.

We came home to shower and change (we did that occasionally) and drove back down past Paekakeriki to the Fisherman's Table. On this occasion, our meal was very nice and my only criticism would be that my well done fillet steak was too well done. It seemed to be a common problem here in NZ. No-one had a well-done steak so the chefs didn't know how to cook it

properly. That did not spoil the event, though and we came back satisfied and tired after our 8 to 10 mile trek earlier in the day.

We left Parparaumu at 10 a.m. on Thursday 6th November, northward bound to Taupo. We stopped off at Taihape at the Brown Sugar Café for a reasonable lunch and reached our destination about 4 p.m. We went grocery shopping and had a quick tea of a somewhat disappointing pizza from the local Countdown supermarket, Jenny settling for the gluten-free option of a jacket potato with Heinz beans, none of which was organic.

Organic produce in NZ was somewhat hit and miss, the New World supermarket stocking a much wider range than the Countdown competitor. Unfortunately, New World had not yet reached Taupo.

On Friday 7th November, Jenny and I went for a walk round Taupo to get our bearings and a visit to the iSite. We did find some organic products in one or two shops, such as Bin Inn, but the one that advertised itself as organic, Hardy's Organics, was a huge disappointment and expensive for the little organic produce they had, as was the Fine Fettle café that advertised organic and gluten-free food and at which Jenny had trouble obtaining a gluten-free sandwich, while I had a take-it-or-leave it option of sandwiches from the display cabinet. When Jenny's sandwich did arrive, her gluten-free bread had been fried rather than toasted and did not taste very nice. Jenny was determined we were not going there again.

We later met up with Edith at the Red Cross charity shop and then went to Countdown for more groceries, mainly for tea. Back at base, Jenny cooked Spaghetti Bolognese, which we enjoyed with a bottle of Wolf Bass Yellow Label Merlot.

Jenny and I got off to a later start than planned on Saturday 8th November due to a discussion with Edith about our visit to Waiheke towards the end of our trip to NZ. That remained unresolved as we left for our walk to Hukka Falls, along the Waikato River that flows out of the huge lake at Taupo. We strolled down to the lake harbour before commencing our walk and that took much longer than expected, mainly because we kept stopping to take photographs and admire the stunning scenery. We arrived at the impressive Hukka Falls much too late to catch the one and only bus back to Taupo so we walked back and met up with Edith at the Countdown supermarket where we bought more groceries for tea that evening and the following evening, not to mention a six pack of strong Kingfisher lager to refresh the parts that were somewhat worse for wear.

It was an even later start on Sunday 9th November after almost twelve hours' sleep! After breakfast, I booked Jenny and I on a sailing trip round the lake at 1:30 and Jenny packed up sandwiches for lunch.

We left in good time, collected our tickets and were at the ship's berth for 1:15 p.m. The trip on the lake went well except that there was not so much wind and we spent only part of the time under sail and the rest on the good old diesel engine. The lake, which lies in the crater of a volcano that erupted some 2,000 years ago, is so huge the whole of Singapore would sit comfortably within it. We saw the expensive mass of week-end properties at Acacia Bay and the even more expensive homes further round the shore. Personally, I'd rather have a 40 foot yacht. We carried on to view the Maori rock carvings, which were only 30-odd years old and created as a present to the people of Taupo, not a tourist attraction.

We were back on dry land just after 4 p.m. and offered a free sail in exchange for a bottle of wine on a day with more wind owing to the fact that we had motored most of the way on this occasion. Unfortunately, we could not take advantage of the offer because we left for Auckland the following morning.

We left Taupo on Monday 10th November at about 10:30 after tidying up the NZ Railway flat in which we had been staying and commenced the long drive up to Auckland, which was a two-night stopover on our way to the Bay of Islands. Jenny had made some sandwiches for lunch and we stopped off at a nice little scenic spot by the Waikato River called Kelly's Reserve, just before Cambridge on State Highway 1. We made a brief second stop in Cambridge for a cup of tea and a bun in the old Presbyterian Church, now a gift shop and cafe, which left me wondering what had happened to all the old Presbyterians.

We arrived at the Railway flat in Auckland about 4 p.m. What a come-down from the flat in Taupo that was. The kitchen was dingy and needed a refit. The one and only toilet, shower, washbasin and laundry facilities were all in one room. Compared with the spacious flat in Taupo, this was cramped. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 is excellent, my score for Taupo Flat 2 was 7 and Auckland Flat 3, 3. (Jenny suggested -1).

Having no knowledge of the locale, we decided to eat out rather than go foraging for food and cooking a meal and I was thinking of the Lone Star. Edith said there was one at Newmarket, not far from the flat and I telephoned and booked a table for 6:30. That proved to be an excellent idea, although the wine was somewhat expensive and they forgot to bring Edith's meal until Jenny reminded them. That seemed to be something of a habit here in NZ.

Edith was supposed to meet with Keith on Tuesday 11th November. She had received a message to say that Keith could not make the appointment because he was working away so we invoked good old Plan B.

Our second priority was to find some decent, organic food and the only place of which we were familiar was in Royal Oak so we headed in that direction and bought some of what we needed, expecting to find the rest at much lower prices at the New World supermarket, the only snag being we didn't know how to get there.

We decided we needed a couple of items from the charity shops in the nearby Onehunga Mall and journeyed over there, lunching in the old library cafe. We bought a cool bag, a tea strainer and a proper pot teapot, essential items when touring and carrying your own food, especially when you like a good cup of tea. We then paid a visit to the new library to find out if I could use a computer to access the Internet, it being a nuisance not to have broadband in the railway flats.

Unfortunately, all the computers were booked up for after school use. I could have had one later but we needed to press on. I could also have brought and used my own machine. I wish I'd known that earlier.

We did obtain directions to the New World supermarket at Mount Roskill and found it without a problem. I wish I could have said the same about the route back to base. A good map of Auckland would have been useful. The free ones that are given out by various organisations were pretty useless.

As far as New World was concerned, this particular branch was not very well stocked with organic products. We did get most of what we wanted but, surprisingly, New Zealand had more

to learn about the need to offer the more discerning people, including visitors, the choice of a wide range of organic produce. Having survived the previous five or so weeks on a mix of organic food and largely the non-organic variety, we were definitely beginning to feel the difference and were even more convinced that organic food tastes better and is far better for the body and my body needed all the help it could get.

Having detoured through Newmarket, we found our way back to base and settled down to cook tea, or, at least, the ladies did.

We were on the road again on the morning of Wednesday 12th November, heading north to Paihia. We departed at about 10:30 a.m. and arrived at about 4:30 p.m., having stopped at Whangarei for an excellent lunch at the Bob Café on Bank Street. Jenny found the cafe quite by accident having tried several others, searching for gluten-free food and, from the outside, it did not look that good. This was a prime example of appearances being deceptive, with good, fairly-priced food, several gluten-free options and very good and pleasant service, not to mention free Wi-Fi. Unfortunately, I hadn't brought the laptop.

The first challenge was that, as we noticed on the documentation for the Railway Flat in Paihia the previous day, there was only one bedroom containing one double and one single bed. The lounge/kitchen/dining area was equipped with two sofa-beds but these were too soft for Edith. Jenny and I set about rearranging the furniture, exchanging the single bed for one of the sofa-beds. That done, we unloaded the car and had a nice cup of tea, then, as usual, Jenny made up our bed.

Like the Auckland flat, there was only one toilet and that was in the washroom, together with the shower. There was no laundry room, although there was a communal facility. On the whole, the flat was a lot better than the dingy, grubby one in Auckland but nowhere near as nice as the one in Taupo. One point in its favour was that it was only a short walk from the waterfront and shops and had plenty of car parking spaces. I still didn't have an Internet service though.

The plan on Thursday 13th November was to find an Internet connection and potter round the shops. The local library offered a free, unsecured wireless connection, would you believe, outside only. We took the laptop down to the library grounds and managed to contact Rachel at home on Skype, although the connection was a bit on the slow side and we did lose the voice call once and had to reconnect.

That was the least of the problems. No sooner had we established voice communication than a helicopter landed about 100 yards away and drowned out our conversation for a few minutes. We had not been chatting long after that when there were a few spots of rain. That passed and we continued, but not for long, as the rain returned and we had to abandon our wet-hot-spot somewhat rapidly.

I had managed to sort out some of my E-mail while talking to Rachel but there was much more junk to remove and I still had several E-mails to read.

Rachel's news was not good. Our house alarm was being regularly activated by zone 3 and one of our cats, Treacle, was having difficulty eating and had lost a lot of weight, being unstable on her legs. The vet was in the process of checking for a thyroid problem and Rachel was waiting for the results of the blood test.

We came back to our flat and Jenny tended to her washing. We had contemplated returning to the Wi-Fi spot but it was approaching lunchtime so we decided to stay put and eat in, our plans having been put into disarray by the damn weather.

We had earlier checked the weather forecast, which wasn't good and seemed to have put paid to our plans for a sea trip around the bay.

Things seemed to be going downhill quite rapidly.

With the showery weather continuing after lunch, we concentrated on the laundry and managed a short potter around the small town, looking at the shops and buying groceries, mainly from the open-air, food market (Thursdays only), the small Countdown supermarket and the small Four Square supermarket.

Jenny cooked tea while I tried to identify the long-standing problem of Jenny's laptop crashing.

On Friday 14th November, we picked up where we had left off with Rachel the previous day and managed about an hour's discussion on Skype before Jenny's computer's battery was almost exhausted. Treacle was showing some small signs of improvement and the results of the blood test ruled out a thyroid problem. What was evident was that Treacle was leaking protein from somewhere and the vet wanted a urine sample. Rachel had that in hand, although, thankfully, not literally.

The rest was catching up on news and general small talk. Rachel was well and looking after the house. The alarm was still playing up and annoying the neighbours.

I managed to catch up with and tidy my E-mails. There was also a Skype message from Lyel to which I replied. Sadly, Edith was disappointed she had heard nothing from either Sue or Keith. On a more positive note, she had exchanged text messages with Amy, who was still in Monaco (South of France, not NZ).

After that, Jenny and I checked the weather forecast at the iSite and booked the Cream trip for the following day. We returned to base for lunch, purchasing a few groceries on the way.

After lunch Jenny and I went for a walk along the coast track towards Opuha. We walked along the rocky shore and sandy beaches as far as the bridge over the Te Haumi River and then, just over the bridge on the left I spotted this unmarked track that disappeared into the bush and we decided to follow it. It was the coast path to Opuha. Unfortunately, we ran out of time and had to turn back at Beach Side Park, which looked like an excellent place to stay for backpackers, with chalets and spaces for campervans and very good facilities, of which we took advantage.

The return journey was one of retracing our steps, having failed to find the designated path along the cliffs from the Pahia side of the Te Haumi River, probably due to new housing development, something that would not have been allowed to happen back in England. The path along the shoreline was much easier because the tide was further out than when we came, requiring much less scrambling.

We were back for about 5:30 p.m. and stopped off at Countdown for more provisions, including something for a sandwich for our lunch the following day, not included in the cost of the boat trip.

It was a 7:30 start for Jenny and me on Saturday 15th November and we headed for the jetty at the end of the road on which we were staying at about 8:50 a.m. We were at the head of the queue on the jetty ten minutes later, ready to board the jet boat, which we did about 9:15 and we were off at 9:30. I can't remember the names of all the islands in the bay we saw or in what order we saw them but the day's tour was brilliant and, at times, somewhat bumpy with the 25 knot north-westerly winds and the weather could have been better but at least it didn't rain. In sunshine and blue skies it would have been awesome.

Our first stop was with a pod of dolphins and these creatures are so friendly and playful. There was no opportunity to swim with them because they had pups in the pod.

We saw some seals and we kept an eye out from the upper deck most of the time for whales but didn't see any tell-tale spouts.

We went through the hole in the rock (Motukokako), which was a very interesting experience, the sea being quite rough at the entrance and quite calm at the other side, passing the Cape Brett Peninsula (Rakaumangamanga). (It is common, in the Maori language, for the last syllable to be repeated).

We stopped at one island, Urupukapuka (is there any wonder I couldn't remember their names) for lunch and ate our packed lunch on the boat. There was a small café on board but it was expensive, as one would expect. We did go ashore for about a quarter of an hour, the duration of our stay being only an hour in total.

To obtain some idea of the Bay of Islands, it is worth looking at the picture gallery. Better still, go and see for yourself.

We did not have an opportunity to swim with the dolphins because we did not see any more pods during our trip, so I obtained a refund for that part of my expenditure.

In the evening, we met up with Edith and we all went to the 35° South Aquarium Restaurant, overlooking the waterfront, again at the end of the road on which we were staying. We had an excellent meal, with excellent service and a wide range of gluten-free options for Jenny. My only adverse comment is that the wine was far too expensive.

I noticed the restaurant was hosting Jazz sessions at lunchtime on Sundays starting the following day and I passed a comment, hoping that it was Traditional Jazz and not the horrible, cacophonous rubbish that passes for Modern Jazz these days. While some people think it is very clever to squeeze as many notes as possible, in a random sequence, in a given time-frame, personally I preferred rhythm, harmony, improvisation within the context of the melody and intelligent and amusing lyrics. I had a very nice, growing collection of such, including some unusual tracks.

And so ended an unusual and interesting day.

I awoke on Sunday 16th November feeling a little under the weather, suspecting I was starting with 'flu. Determined not to succumb, Jenny and I set off for a stroll in the fresh air, along the sea front, northwards.

We discovered a number of stalls at the end of the road, as we approached the sea front, selling arts, crafts and books. Apparently, a cruise ship had moored in the bay and local businesses had

seized the opportunity. Given that tourism was really the only industry sustaining the lifestyle in the area and rates were somewhat on the high side, who could blame them.

While walking across the grass in her sandals, Jenny was stung by a bee in one of her toes and removed the sting as quickly as possible. Still in some discomfort, she sat down to inspect the damage and a lady from one of the stalls came to her assistance with lavender oil to apply to her toe and pulse points and administered a homeopathic spray under her tongue. That eased her pain considerably and she was able to walk well enough to visit all the stalls. We purchased a bottle of lavender oil from the lady who came to Jenny's assistance in case we needed it.

Our next stop was at the lookout point on the sea front, from which I obtained some shots of the large cruise ship and also of the helicopter providing sight-seeing flights around the bay at \$235 each with a long queue of people with more money than sense.

We strolled all the way along the sea front as far as the Bay of Islands Yacht Club and stopped there for a cup of tea and a bun before strolling back, calling at the two supermarkets for food and wine for tea. I was feeling much better after my walk.

We had checked the weather for the following day at iSite and it wasn't good, with rain forecast overnight and not due to clear until the late afternoon. We contemplated taking the ferry across to Russel the following day and resolved to check the forecast again by looking out of the window when we awoke in the morning, a somewhat more accurate method.

On Monday 17th November, I looked out of the window as planned and the ground was very wet. It wasn't until we stepped outside that it started to rain – heavily. I came back in and donned my waterproof trousers and Jenny grabbed the umbrella.

By the time we were back outside, the rain had stopped and we made our way to the ferry to Russell, with a couple of minutes to spare. The sea was as flat as a pancake and the crossing was uneventful, the return ticket costing us \$12 each.

I would describe Russell as a one-horse town if I had found a horse there. Property for sale in and around Russell was expensive, a few homes being marked up at around the \$1.5M mark. The place was like a ghost town and the beach was all pebbles. Why anybody would want to pay even \$150,000 to live there beat me. The sea front was picturesque enough and there were some nice buildings worth seeing, including a couple of churches but the place had little else going for it.

We came back on the ferry before lunch, intending to find somewhere to eat in Paihia. The crossing was somewhat rougher than the outward journey due to strong winds and the rain had started again.

Not only was Paihia wet and windy but it had also suffered a power cut and we decided to go back to base for lunch, the power being restored a few moments before we stepped through the door. Was somebody trying to tell us something?

That was more or less it for the day as the afternoon was very wet until about 3 p.m. We did manage a quick sortie to the supermarket for bits and pieces for tea.

Tuesday 18th November marked the start of our last week in New Zealand. We left Paihia for Auckland, detouring by the east coast through Wiapu Cove for a quick look at the lovely beach

there and then cut across country to rejoin State Highway 1, taking the exit to avoid the toll section and rejoining it at the far side of Orewa.

We found our way back to the railway flat in Remuera without a hitch and settled in, the first priority being to find somewhere for tea. The second priority was to remove a cockroach from the washroom wall, which I captured in a glass covered with a paper leaflet and I released it into the bushes across the road. I then checked the flat for signs of any of its friends of which there was no sign. Whether it came in through the open window, crawled from some hidden corner or was transported by us unknowingly I had no idea.

As far as food was concerned, we settled on The Lone Star at Newmarket again. We had difficulty parking and ended up in a makeshift car park on a derelict building site a few minutes' walk away from the restaurant at a cost of \$4.

The quality of food and the service were very good and the only comment I would make was that the wine was expensive, although I have to say that it was very good too.

We awoke from our torture chamber to the sound of the alarm at 7 a.m. on Wednesday 19th November. The term "torture chamber" relates mainly to the state of the bed in which we slept, which was good only for causing dislocation of the spine.

After another quick check for cockroaches, we had breakfast and decided to pack all our belongings into the car, having unpacked only the evening before, in preparation for our trip to Waiheke. The original plan was to take only what we needed for a couple of days but given the state of the bed and the fact that a couple of the flat's lounge window catches were broken and that we could not close and lock the washroom window because some idiot had fixed a piece of metal to the exterior of the frame to prevent anyone from doing so, we thought it would be both more comfortable and safer to take our chattels to Waiheke and that we might possibly stay longer there if we could.

We set off about 9:30 a.m. and stopped for petrol at Remuera, followed by the New World supermarket, also at Remuera, for groceries. We made it to the ferry terminal at Half Moon Bay on the north-east side of Auckland without too much difficulty and with about half an hour to spare before our departure at noon.

The crossing was uneventful and we arrived at Kennedy Point on Waiheke about an hour later. It was a short drive to the bach belonging to two of Edith's oldest friends, Bill and Edna, the bach being next to the one Edith and Terry used to own. They bought their section for \$600 back in 1980 and Terry built the bach. Today the sections were fetching \$1M.

At first sight, the bach didn't look much, still the original wooden construction and water supplied from a large, concrete, rainwater butt, collected from the roof. Inside it was cosy, with drainage into a septic tank and electricity. The washroom was bolted on out back and there was a covered walkway between the back door and the washroom door. There was a through lounge-diner with kitchen area. At the front was a sliding veranda door and there were two bedrooms off. And, yes, TV had reached the island of Waiheke, albeit by satellite. Bill and Edna hadn't installed a telephone in the bach, so there was no broadband.

Enclosure Bay was a couple of minutes down the road. It was a nice beach but full of pebbles and shingle which made it hard on the feet. The water was not that cold and the warm afternoon sun made it look quite inviting. Jenny and I resisted the temptation, except to dip our feet.

We walked back along the road for a few minutes to reach Sandy Bay and, as its name suggests, it was a lovely sandy beach. Unfortunately, it was not as sheltered from the north-westerly wind as Enclosure Bay, except for the far corner and we made for that, sitting on a rock with our feet immersed ever deeper in the incoming tide. That was until the cloud thickened and the wind became quite strong, whence we made for base.

The quite heavy rain came later in the evening and we retired hoping for better weather the following day so we could go for a dip, our first of this extended vacation.

We had a bit of a lie-in on Thursday 20th November and the leisurely start gave the strong wind time to subside. The heavy overnight rain had also died out and the day started with sunny periods and increasing white cloud. Apparently, this had so far been the worst November on record here in NZ. Now there's a surprise.

We didn't get away until very late morning and made our way to the only town on the island, Oneroa. I needed to visit the library, mainly to use one of their cabled computers to access my bank, the public, free, wireless networks being too insecure. I did use Jenny's laptop on the wireless network there to try to resolve the problem of it randomly and increasingly frequent crashing, without much success in identifying the driver that was most probably at fault.

I switched to the cabled desktop PC to access my bank only to discover that the web site's certificate was flagged as invalid. I did not proceed. I tidied up my E-mail instead.

Back at base for lunch, having deleted what I thought was the faulty laptop driver the previous evening, leaving me with items in my hardware device list without drivers and having failed to establish the relevance of the hardware to this machine, I deleted the items from the device list. The machine didn't complain about any missing hardware after a reboot.

After lunch, we went to see Bill and Edna, the friends of Edith who own the bach in which we were staying. On entering, I was offered a bottle of beer. You can't get much more friendly than that.

The purpose of the visit was to ask them if we could have an extension of our occupancy until the following Monday, to which they agreed. They also offered me the use of their telephone to alter our return ferry booking, which I did.

We met with their son, Dennis, who captains the Fuller ferries from Auckland and who had been a keen yachtsman, now owning a small power boat. He was not working for a week and invited us to join him on his boat the following day.

We chatted the time away and it was 7 p.m. before we noticed how quickly the time had passed. We stopped off for a bottle of wine on the way back and Jenny cooked meatballs with pasta, broccoli and tomato sauce, washed down with a bottle of Yellow Label Shiraz. How the other half live!

We were back at Bill and Edna's house at 9 a.m. on Friday 21st November, ready for a short excursion on Denis' launch in Matiatia Bay. Dennis drove Jenny and me down to the pebbly beach where the dinghy was kept and I helped Dennis take it down the beach, into the water. Dennis rowed Jenny and me out to the launch and we motored round the bay and out into the channel beyond, heading directly for Auckland city for a short while to charge the boat's

batteries before returning to the mooring, something Dennis did every couple of weeks if he was not using the boat.

(Dennis used to be a keen yachtsman and had his Master's ticket. He had raced yachts and sailed yachts to Fiji and Australia. He trained as an engineer and was once sent to repair the engine on Sir Keith Park's boat, Sir Keith Park being the man who led the combined air force into the Battle of Britain during WW II. His father, Bill, was the cousin of Sam who married Ida, the mother of Edith's husband, Terry. At the time of writing, Dennis doubled as the chief engineer and captain of a Fuller's ferry between Auckland and Waiheke.)

We returned to the bach for lunch before heading off to look at Palm Beach, which was very nice and Jenny and I decided we would return to the bach for our swimming gear.

We set off again, this time for the next beach along, Onetangi, where we went for a swim in the Pacific Ocean!

We returned via the opposite side of the island to call at the Countdown supermarket for a few groceries and then came back to base for tea and settled down for the evening.

The plan for the morning on Saturday 22nd November was to go to the library to contact Rachel on Skype. We were there just after 10 a.m. and chatted to Rachel for about an hour. Meanwhile I reinstalled the Jmicron flash media controller driver I had uninstalled in an attempt to fix the memory problem on the laptop because the hardware I had removed reappeared in my device list.

The good news was that the laptop seemed to have resolved the memory problem and seemed to have stopped crashing. The bad news was that it was failing to recognise the second 2 Gb of memory again. Even worse, I didn't have a screwdriver to remove the memory cover to try to fix the fault, so I was running on 2 Gb. So was the laptop.

I forgot to fix the problem with Norton Utilities 16. When I loaded that it reported corrupt modules. The funny thing was that it seemed to work alright.

After chatting with Rachel, we went inside the library to use one of their desktop machines to look at something on the Internet for Edith. Internet Explorer was so slow that I gave up on it and used Firefox instead, which was much better. After that, I sorted out my E-mail and my accounts. I attempted to access Jenny's E-mail but it needed a security key and she had forgotten what it was.

We called at the Four Square supermarket for some water and a bottle of wine (had I got my priorities right?) to have with the gluten-free pizza Jenny was making for tea and went back to the bach for lunch.

After lunch, Jenny and I went down to Enclosure Bay, wearing our swimming togs. That was too stony. We walked along to Sandy Bay and that was too windy. We decided to walk to Palm Beach, using the road to walk up from Enclosure Bay and then a track through the bush to drop down to Palm Beach and that took about 45 minutes. By the time we reached Palm Beach, it was too cool to swim, so we made do with sitting on a rock and dangling our extremities in the incoming tide, attracting the attention of a pair of mallard, which seemed to be as much at home on the sea as in a mill pond.

We returned by the same track to the top road and then found another track back down to Enclosure Bay through the McKenzie Reserve, leaving us a couple of minutes' walk on the flat to the bach. That shaved about five minutes of the journey and was much more pleasant than using the road.

We seemed to have established something of a routine by Sunday 23rd November, going to the library for Internet access in the morning and going to the beach in the afternoon. It was a really gruelling life here on Waiheke Island.

I used the Internet to find the route to Denis' house for the following day and to try to fix a problem with Norton Utilities 16 that turned out to be a fault caused by Norton and for which they would be providing a fix in the next two to three days. Meanwhile, Edith sorted out her E-mail and banking on the library's computer.

After returning to the bach for lunch, Jenny and I changed and made for Sandy Bay where we had a swim in the lovely, warm sunshine and refreshingly cool Pacific Ocean.

That was topped with an ice cream cone with chocolate flake from a passing ice cream van and a long chat with a local family.

We returned for a cup of tea, shower and a make-do evening meal, part of the process for eating up the leftovers as our day of departure approached.

Our day of departure from Waiheke arrived on Monday 24th November, as we contemplated returning from warm, sunny days to the English winter. If I'd had £1½m to spare, we might have considered staying, at least for the winter, although Christmas wouldn't have been the same in hot weather and I wouldn't have a log fire to play with.

Bill and Edna came down to the bach about 11:30 to say their farewells and to secure the bach as we left because it would be unoccupied, at least until the week end.

We were due on the ferry at 1:30 p.m. and the crossing was very smooth, the day being misty and damp with no wind.

On our way back to the railway flat from the ferry, I turned left on Pakuranga Highway instead of right and ended up in Howick, which was rather fortunate because we found a nice café in Howick mall at which to have lunch.

We went back to the flat to dump our baggage and sped on up to see Dennis and his wife Susan at Weimaku. We also met up with their daughter, Sarah and her two lovely children, Nixon and Lilly, not to mention the dog and the cat. Dennis showed me the Triumph he had been rebuilding in the garage. He had made a lovely job of that.

It was about 9 p.m. before we left and 9:30 before we reached Remuera, just in time to see the fish and chip shop close, so we went to bed without any supper.

The day of reckoning arrived on Tuesday 25th November and we left the flat and handed in the key before 10 a.m. From there, I drove to the airport and put the car in the short stay car park because Edith wanted to come inside and see us off. We checked in straight away and then walked around the shops and sat and chatted until it was time to say our farewells and disappear through security.

Everything went like clockwork, the only minor inconvenience being some turbulence during the flight, over Australia and approaching Singapore. The pilot landed the A380 comfortably enough despite the adverse weather conditions and we were met at the airport by one of the very nice drivers we had the last time we were here.

The ten-hour flight and the time difference of five hours between Auckland and Singapore had taken its toll and the comfortable bed with proper pillows beckoned almost immediately we had settled in the room at the Orchard Hotel and had a cup of tea. We were tucked up by 9 p.m. local time, the time in Auckland being 2 a.m., having been up at 8 a.m. Auckland time that morning. That's what you get for crossing time zones.

We were woken by a telephone call from Lyel at about 2 a.m. on Wednesday 26th November. He had mistakenly thought it was our day of departure from NZ and wanted to wish us a safe journey home. He was most apologetic.

After a good night's rest in a comfortable bed on the 12th floor of the Orchard Hotel (at the corner of Orchard Road and Tanglin Road), we awoke about 8 a.m., showered and partook of the buffet breakfast at roughly £20 each, which I thought was a bit steep.

There was lots of choice and as much as anyone could eat, so I suppose it wasn't too bad, except that Jenny was very limited in her choice, there being no gluten-free bread. I didn't do too badly, with fruit-juice, cereal with fresh fruit, bacon, egg and beans on a slice of toast (albeit white bread) and a croissant with jam, all washed down with two very nice cups of tea.

We caught the Singapore Airlines hop-on, hop-off bus to Little India and had a wander round there. We were impressed with the beautiful Sri Veeramakaliamman Temple we visited.

Our next stop was to board the Singapore Flyer and it was a pity the weather wasn't better. It didn't start to rain until we came back down to earth and later in the day it turned to an electrical storm. By then we had returned to the hotel, after catching the tour bus back to Wheelock Place, wandering through Marks and Spencer and along Orchard Road. It just started to rain again as we stepped off the bus and we dodged the rain using what cover there was from the shop fronts and large trees along Orchard Road.

Back in our hotel room, I discovered that the technician had been in and fixed the faulty network socket and the wall-mounted air conditioning remote control that was loose and which I had reported on my way out. Unfortunately, the hotel wanted to charge me about £14 a day to use the Internet so I didn't bother. Since I could access the Internet for free at most other places, I think they had got a bit of a cheek to charge extra for it. I could survive two more days without it.

On balance, I didn't think I would be staying at this particular hotel again and I wouldn't recommend it to others unless they specified exactly the package they wanted in advance and were happy with the price and the terms and conditions. If they required gluten-free food, forget it. I certainly didn't have these kinds of problem with my landlady in Whitby.

I resorted to using my phone to send text messages earlier in the day, in response to Lyel's telephone call. I discovered my phone was out of money again. I tried topping it up with another £10 but the message from Orange was that the service was unavailable at the time. Was I plagued by gremlins or what?

I did manage to top it up when I returned to the hotel and send the messages I needed to send, so the rest could wait until I got home.

We had our evening meal at the Black Angus Steak House, again, across the road from the hotel and, for Orchard Road, it was not unreasonable. The portions were good and the service was excellent. The 10% service charge was included in the bill, which saved me having to think about tipping, which, being from Yorkshire, I don't usually do anyway and which is supposed to be discouraged in Singapore (my kind of place). On this occasion, I didn't really have a problem with a tip since the meal and service were so good. We sat outside, under the canvas cover, providing protection should the rain have started again, watching the people and traffic go by.

The temperature in Singapore is always around the 30°C mark and the humidity is always around 98%, so sitting outside, under a canvas cover with fans circulating the air, is good any time of day or night.

On Thursday 27th November, we breakfasted in the hotel again, becoming quite familiar with the procedure and Jenny worked out the gluten-free options.

After breakfast, the first priority was to check out, since our room had to be vacated by noon even though our airport transfer was not until 8:10 p.m. We stored our luggage with the hotel concierge. I did not risk leaving the laptop computer or my camera case, so they stayed with us all day, making the going somewhat tiring.

We walked the length of Orchard Road to Raffles to change the T-shirt I had bought the last time I was in Singapore from the Raffles Gift Shop. The large size was too small for me and I exchanged it for an extra-large. The staff were most helpful.

We retraced our steps, pausing briefly to look at Chijms, a religious building created to house an organisation dedicated to caring for homeless children and stopped off at a subterranean food hall for lunch. Jenny had spotted a salad bar there on the way down and I managed to find a chicken sandwich. Jenny also found a stall selling cups of tea.

We continued on, back to the hotel for a brief rest and personal refreshment before strolling up Tanglin Road towards the botanical gardens. Again, we could have spent most of a day there. As it was, our visit was curtailed by the threatening weather as an electrical storm developed and a few spots of rain fell. Time was also passing and we decided to call it a day, returning to the hotel for yet more personal refreshment and settling down in the bar, eventually with a glass of Chardonnay each, even at the extortionate prices there. We sat, chatted, reflected and sipped our wine. A second glass each helped to put things into perspective and, since this was "happy hour", we had two glasses for the price of one.

Our airport transfer arrived on time and our very nice driver dropped us at the departure terminal with plenty of time to spare. We said a fond farewell to him as we parted company.

The very pleasant lady at the Singapore Airlines check-in placed a priority sticker on our luggage for us and we made our way to the departure lounge, where we had a cup of tea and Jenny bought some ear rings using some of the remaining Singapore dollars I had left.

We made our way to the gate stated on our boarding card and waited. I eventually checked the departure screen to discover that our flight had been moved to a gate at the opposite end of the

terminal, about fifteen minutes' walk away. Off we went, feeling quite tired by this time, about 10 p.m.

We went through security and to the gate and, after a short wait, boarded the plane on the last leg of our journey. It was 11:30 before we moved off, some 20 minutes late. We managed to catch some sleep on the long flight to Munich and were allowed to stay on the plane while it was serviced, before the onward journey to Manchester. By this time, the plane was almost empty.

We arrived ahead of schedule on Friday 28th November and all went well. We had changed our plans and arranged for Matthew to collect us in our car rather than pay for a taxi and we were back home for 9:30 a.m.

The first order of the day was a decent cup of tea.

After that it was a case of sorting things out with Rachel and dealing with the mail. I also tackled the problem with Jenny's laptop and discovered it was due to the memory seating in the memory slots. I removed the memory, vacuumed the memory slots, cleaned the contacts with a soft brush and replaced the memory. That seemed to do the trick.

Eventually we made the usual weekly grocery shop at Unicorn and Waitrose, something we had dearly missed, followed by tea and an early night.

We were somewhat reluctant to get out of our comfortable, warm bed on Saturday 29th November but it was necessary to do so because we had left our cat, Treacle, in the conservatory overnight with a litter tray to try to obtain a urine sample for analysis by the vet. We were trying to resolve the cause of her wasting problem, she having lost a lot of body weight and become extremely weak.

To our delight, Treacle had produced the goods, with a bonus, if you get my drift and I had the job of cleaning it all up.

After breakfast, we dashed off to the vet in Radcliffe, the Bury office being closed on Saturdays, only to be told the sample was too old to be of use and we needed to get it there sooner. We were not happy. It's not easy obtaining a urine sample from a cat.

While in Radcliffe, we thought we might as well take the opportunity to call at Asda for some odds and ends we hadn't found the previous day. It was lucky we did. Yellow Tail Chardonnay was on offer at £5 a bottle or six for £25.

Back home, I continued with the pile of administration work.

That rolled over into Sunday 30th November, interspersed with household chores like cleaning out the cat's litter tray again, vacuuming, cleaning out the log fire after using it the previous evening and so on.

All this feverish activity had a purpose. Rachel was bringing a young man, Matthew to tea and we all had a very pleasant evening.

Do you want to know more? Well, you will just have to wait for next month's exciting and revealing episode of the life and times of Lord Daffodil of Daffodil Towers, a title bestowed upon me by a very good and insane friend of mine from my happy schooldays at Firth Park

Grammar School, Sheffield (alas no more – not Sheffield but the Grammar School – oh, I don't know, though!) He knows who he is! (How profound is that?)