

Greenmount - October 2014

We landed in Singapore more or less on schedule just after 7 a.m. local time on Wednesday 1st October and our passage through immigration was straightforward, using the fast-track customs aisle without a hitch, having collected our baggage. I must have an honest face.

We were met by our very nice drivers from Hotel Beds on arrival and taken to our hotel, The Orchard Hotel, not surprisingly, on Orchard Road. First impressions were good and the staff were extremely helpful and attentive. The accommodation was acceptable but examination of the detail showed signs of neglect in the décor and furnishings, although this did not affect our stay.

We spent much of the day exploring Orchard Road, the main shopping area, looking for places to eat. Again, first impressions indicated that these fell into one of two extremes. They were either geared up for tourists, very pleasant, westernised and expensive or sleazy-looking, cramped and very reasonably priced, frequented by what appeared to be local people. I was sure that what these latter establishments lacked in looks was not reflected in their food quality and most of the dishes looked very appetising and seemed very popular. Unfortunately, none of them offered gluten-free food for Jenny.

Not being particularly hungry, we made do with some fruit we had brought with us and a bottle of complementary water from the hotel for lunch and we had an evening meal in the hotel bar. The cost was not as high as I had expected, although the drinks were very expensive, that being mediated by the “happy hour” between 5 p.m. and 8 p.m. (??) when one could buy one drink and receive the second, same drink free.

On Thursday 2nd October, we had breakfast in the hotel. That was not included in our room costs and we had a choice between the à la carte menu and the buffet. At \$36 (about £18) a head plus GST, we went for the buffet on the basis you could have what you wanted and as much of it as you wanted. In practice, there wasn't much Jenny could eat, needing gluten free food and she settled for two fried eggs, there being no poached ones and beans. I had the usual fruit juice, cereal with fresh fruit, toast and tea. I remembered when I used to be able to buy a full English breakfast for £3 10s.

The plan for the day was to take the hop-on, hop-off tour bus. Edith found the heat too overwhelming and returned from the bust stop to the hotel, the stop being a short distance from the hotel. Jenny and I caught the Singapore Airlines tour bus for \$8 each, discounted from the usual \$33 each because we were SA passengers and had retained our boarding passes to prove it. The ticket was valid for 24 hours and buses ran a circular route with a bus about every 20 minutes.

Our first stop was Raffles (where else?) We took a few photographs and I was a little annoyed that I didn't have my wide angle lens with me. We called in at one of the arcade shops and Jenny bought a Raffles cap and I bought a Raffles T-shirt. The large size subsequently turned out to be too small, obviously designed for the slim, oriental body and not the fat European or American one.

We hopped back on the bus to the Singapore Flyer, the huge Ferris Wheel and we debated whether to go on it or not. Jenny decided we would do so on our return trip, particularly since the fares were heavily discounted for SA passengers. After failing to

find any gluten-free food outlets, we hopped back on the bus for one stop to go to the Esplanade Park and strolled past the Marina Bay and along the riverbank, passing the location at which Stamford Raffles landed.

We hopped back on the bus just before it went round Chinatown and had a restful, air-conditioned, 40-minute journey back to the hotel for a cup of tea, a rest and a shower before tea.

We ate at The Black Angus Steak House across from the hotel. The meal was very good but, once again, the drinks were expensive. The restaurant also slapped on a 10% service charge and GST.

It had been a very interesting day and we saw much more of Singapore than we expected, with lots still to do on our return journey, this being our second and last day on the outward bound trip.

The alarm woke us at 3:30 a.m. on Friday 3rd October and it was 5:30 before we were all gathered in the lobby with our bags, awaiting the two limousines (one for Edith and one for us) to take us to the airport, due at 5:45 a.m. We were on our way by 6 a.m. and on the plane by 9 a.m., Jenny and I sat together in two of the centre seats and Edith in the row in front, across the aisle from Jenny, despite a request for three seats together.

The flight to Auckland was pleasant and, as always, Singapore Staff were very attentive and the food was good, better than on the first part of the journey. We arrived just after 11:30 p.m. and then the fun began.

After a long queue to pass through immigration, Jenny and I were directed to bio-security for an examination of my walking boots. That extended into an examination of my walking sandals and a full scan of our cases, hand luggage and the computer, once again, out of its case. Meanwhile, Edith had passed through a similar exercise because a sniffer dog had found traces of food on a used tissue in one of her bags and when we met up with her in the arrivals lounge, one of her bags had disappeared.

Jenny waited with all the luggage and Edith and I went in search of her lost bag, finally receiving it from bio-security control.

I followed the instructions, supplied by the Kiwi Hotel, for contacting the establishment and requesting our transport, which arrived within about ten minutes. We booked in and I paid the rest of the cost of the three rooms in advance, having paid for one night at the time of booking on the Internet. The hotel didn't look much, but, then, the Orchard Hotel, even with the detail needing some attention, would have taken some beating, especially at the price. We got that for which we paid.

After another hour updating the accounts for the holiday, we finally got to bed by 2:30 a.m. on Saturday 4th October.

We were up at 8 a.m. for breakfast and Jenny struggled to find something that was gluten free, after upgrading from a continental breakfast to a cooked one, even though I had asked for gluten-free food at the time of booking. In fairness, we had the same problem at the Orchard Hotel. Not so with Singapore Airlines, though.

Our first stop was at a garage to put some fuel in Edith's car, which Keith, her son, had left at the hotel with a near empty tank the previous day and for which Edith was handed the keys when we registered.

We went on to pass Edith's first house in Auckland on Taylor Road in Mangare Bridge, to Keith and Angela's house so that Edith could drop off some luggage she did not require and collect some clothes for the tour we had planned. That was a waste of time, because Keith and Angela were out and, although Edith had keys to access the premises, there was a new padlock on the gate to the passage leading to the door and she did not have a key for that. In short, she had been locked out of her home. Edith had tried to contact Keith and Angela beforehand but they had ignored her messages. Intrigued? Read on.

Not deterred, we sped on to the shopping mall at Manukau City and had a good wander round, since the weather was not good. We lunched there and then went to investigate the fare at the organic shop, Huckleberry Farm at Onehunga, followed by a stroll in the Royal Oak mall there.

On our way back to the hotel, we called at Keith and Angela's house again. Angela, who was in the front garden, immediately went inside as we drew up and Keith came to the locked driveway gate and told us not to bother getting out of the car because we were not welcome there. Edith attempted to talk to Keith and he made it clear she was not welcome, refusing the gift she had brought him. Why? Well, it's a long story and not one for these pages.

I will say that I did not consider their attitude fair and reasonable considering the hospitality we showed to them when they came to see us in England, although it did not upset our plans and I was not particularly bothered.

We came back to the hotel for a cup of tea and a rest before tea in the hotel.

On Sunday 5th October, Keith called his mum and asked her to join him for breakfast and a chat, which we thought was an excellent idea and he collected her from the hotel. Jenny and I drove to the Onehunga station car park and ride and caught the train into the centre of Auckland. The trains only ran every hour and, as luck would have it, we had just missed one. Edith called me on the train to say Keith was dropping her off at the station in Auckland and she would meet us there.

Edith, Jenny and I went for a wander round the large mall, lunched there and then had a quick saunter on the quay. The city struck me as somewhat ugly, with huge, modern high-rise buildings, interspersed with the old, graceful and architecturally-pleasing, stone buildings that were completely overshadowed. I was later to observe, travelling south to Mount Maunganui, that it was also a sprawling city, invading the surrounding greenery as a cancer eats away at the body until it is no more. The city planners have much for which to answer and will no doubt do so in a later life. It is not a place in which I would choose to live.

We caught the train back to Onehunga, having just missed one again and went to some friends of Edith, Pete and Ann, for a most enjoyable dinner and a very pleasant evening.

Edith had a doctor's appointment at Royal Oak, not far from Onehunga, on Monday 6th October and that was our first call. Afterwards, we joined Pete and Ann for tea/coffee in the Royal Oak shopping mall before departing for Mount Maunganui.

I drove to Mount Maunganui, stopping off briefly to take a couple of pictures of the spectacular Karangahake Gorge, with its many paths and local railway left over from the gold mining days, now giving pleasure trips and at Katikati, famous for its murals on building walls, to have a quick look round. The small, old, gold-mining town has several trails to follow in the surrounding countryside and my thoughts turned to Mike, Frank and Steve, back home in Greenmount. It was a long way to come for a few days' walking though.

We arrived at our very nice B&B, dumped our bags and went to the very nice and reasonably-priced Returned Servicemen Association (RSA) for an evening meal.

I jumped out of bed just before the alarm went off at 7:30 a.m. on Tuesday 7th October in response to a text message from Rachel. Fortunately, I was already awake.

After breakfast, we went to explore Mount Maungani and lunched in the Bay Fare Mall before Jenny and I climbed to the top of the mount itself, with spectacular views of the town, of the adjacent town, Tauranga, which we planned to explore the following day and of the beautiful coastline, with its soft, white sand and blue, clear sea. The icy southerly wind had dropped by lunchtime and the afternoon was most pleasant in the warm, spring sun, shining between passing clouds.

We ate tea at the RSA again and retired early for a cup of tea in our room and to watch some recorded TV programmes on Jenny's laptop.

We explored Tauranga on Wednesday 8th October and saw the house on Selwyn Street where Edith and Terry once lived. The best I can say about Tauranga is that it has a nice shopping centre and a Robert Harris café that makes gluten-free sandwiches, not that the Tourist Information office knew this, or if they did, they didn't tell us. There are some interesting-looking walks, one being the circular walk round the Waikareao Estuary but from the map, that looked like an all-day walk and we didn't discover it until lunchtime.

We visited an organic shop on Cameron Road around the junction with 17th Avenue in Tauranga South to see what they had and compare prices with the UK. On the return journey we called at the New World supermarket on Manganui Road in Mount Manganui for some bottled water and compared prices there with the UK as well. It was encouraging to see some organic products in the supermarket but fewer than even at Tesco back in England.

Our conclusion is that food generally in NZ is between 50% and 100% more expensive than the UK, which is odd, since the population is relatively small for the size of the country and NZ is geared up for farming and food production. I was of the opinion that the only explanation is profiteering and it was about time the ineffective NZ government did something about it and earned their keep. The question has to be asked whether members of the government have vested interests in keeping food prices here high and to what extent these interests, if they exist, are within the bounds of the law.

Once again, we went to the RSA for our evening meal, it being much more reasonably priced than commercial establishments and offered reasonably good meals. More than three visits would, for me, have exhausted the menu options. Since this was our last evening in Mount Maunganui, that was not an issue.

I drove to Rotorua after breakfast and saying our goodbyes to Esther at Mt. Maunganui B&B on Thursday 9th October. We stopped off at what I think was lake Rotoiti for a few minutes' break. There are a lot of lakes in this area.

We eventually found our B&B in Rotorua, having mistaken the Lake Lodge Motel for the Lake Lodge B&B next door. Discovering our error brought considerable relief. The Motel looked very grubby and shabby from the outside and the ladies sat in the car with no intention whatsoever of staying there, booking or no booking, even if it meant sleeping in the car. The B&B could not have been more different. It was clean, tidy, pleasant and comfortable and the accommodation was most acceptable. Not only that but it was within a minute or two of both the city centre and the large lake from which the city derives its name.

Our first impressions were that the city was very nice. There were no high-rise buildings, the roads were laid out in a square grid and clearly signposted and there were flower beds everywhere. There were times when the sweet smell of the flowers failed to mask the acrid sulphur fumes from the thermal pools, though. It struck me that this is one of those places where passing wind would go unnoticed! Nonetheless, it was a very beautiful city.

One of our first stops was in Tourist Information. There were a lot of activities and they were quite expensive. I formed the opinion that Rotorua was not the place for one holidaying on a tight budget. There were plenty of interesting walking tracks, some quite challenging, had one the time and my thoughts strayed back to Mike, Frank and Steve back home once more.

We lunched at a small café called PicNic. Jenny and I ordered sandwiches that were not on the menu and they were delicious. The cost was a little higher than one might expect but the food and friendly service was well worth it.

We spent the afternoon pottering around the town.

We ate at the Lone Star pub/restaurant, a bit like a Beefeater back home, except it was very noisy with people chatting in the large, high-roofed building and the background music (I use the term loosely) from the speakers didn't help. On top of this there was a large screen television nobody seemed to be watching. Fortunately, that was at the opposite end of the pub to us. The staff were very nice and the food was excellent. Many dishes come in two sizes – medium and large. Unless you have a huge appetite, I recommend the medium. I made the mistake of ordering the large – and it was. It occurred to me that the large portions were of a size with which most Americans would be familiar.

On Friday 10th October, Edith was feeling in need of a rest and Jenny and I went off on a trail following the lake edge to the thermal area. It was most impressive and I ventured onto the rocks to obtain some close-up photographs of the holes from which the steam was rising and in which the boiling water could be heard. That was before I noticed the

sign indicating that, although the rocks looked firm, in places the crust was only centimetres thick and could give way into boiling pools at any moment. After that, I wisely kept to the marked path.

Our travels took us to the lovely gardens by the museum, blue baths and council offices and, from there, we made our way back to PicNic for lunch, where we met up with Edith.

After lunch, Jenny and I went on a Duck Tour, a ride round Rotorua and four local lakes, splashing down into three of them, on a WW II Dukw, driven by a chap from Bolton. With only five of us on the tour, we had a great time and I strongly recommend it, even at \$75 each.

We had our very good evening meal at the Pig and Whistle, originally a police station and now converted into an aptly-named pub.

On Saturday 11th October we had the long, five-hour drive to Paraparaumu, stopping briefly on the way to view the Hukka falls and reaching our destination just in time to freshen up and go for tea. We had eaten sandwiches on the way for lunch. Our host in Paraparaumu, Brian, at Seascape B&B, was charming and it was like a home from home.

We ate at the Fisherman's Table at Paekakariki, Edith having dined there before. It was a little disappointing and expensive and, on the whole, I would not recommend it.

Before leaving on Sunday 12th October, Jenny and I walked down the beach, overlooking the Cook Strait, to Raumati where we met up with Edith for lunch at the excellent No 6 Café. Then it was another hour's drive into Wellington.

We arrived at our accommodation, Richmond Guest House, in the late afternoon and what a disappointment that was. It was grubby, shabby and the décor and finishing touches left much to be desired. Our host, John Cairns was not well versed in people skills (I should talk) and we regretted the booking almost as soon as we stepped over the threshold. The prospect of spending three nights here on this occasion and on the way back was too much to contemplate. Parking was not easy either.

We had an evening meal at the Hop Garden which was satisfactory, the menu being limited.

On Monday 13th October we took the car into Wellington. For those contemplating this manoeuvre, at the time of writing, it was not a good idea. There wasn't much traffic but the one way road system was a nightmare for those unfamiliar with the arrangement and parking, often restricted to two hours or less in any one spot, was \$4 (that's about £2) an hour and even those, like Edith, with disability parking permits have to pay. In ticketed areas, the cost for disabled people was for only half the parking time. At meters, we had to pay the full price.

We found a large organic shop and browsed the stock, buying a few items. We visited the Tourist Information centre (iSite), lunched in the library café, which I wouldn't recommend because the attitude of the staff was very matter-of-fact and booked for the Hop-on-hop-off tour of Wellington the following day.

After lunch, we went up the Hut Valley to Upper Hut to meet up with two friends of Edith, Vince and Joy. Vince used to work with Terry on the railways. They are a very nice couple and we had a lovely afternoon and evening with them, being invited to stay for an evening meal, before driving back to our hovel (no, that's not a spelling mistake). Negotiating the roads in the dark was a challenge but we made it after stopping to consult the map twice.

On Tuesday 14th October, we went on the Wellington hop-on, hop-off bus tour. It wasn't as good as the Singapore one, the ticket only being valid for one loop and not all day and it cost a lot more than the Singapore full-rate ticket, which, to us as Singapore Airlines passengers, was heavily discounted. The tour was useful in as much as we saw parts of Wellington we had not seen before and it gave us some idea where we wanted to spend our time.

Jenny and I stopped off at the cable car and looked at the small and interesting museum, which left no time for a ride on the cable car as we had arranged to be picked up on the next bus an hour later. That was another limitation, having to arrange on which bus to be collected after stopping off.

After the tour, we met up with Edith, had some lunch and wandered around town looking for a decent restaurant at which to eat our evening meal. Would you believe we couldn't find one? We had to drive out to Johnsonville up State Highway 1 to find a decent place. We ate an acceptable meal at 1841 (that's the restaurant name, not the time).

Wednesday 15th October was the date of our departure from Wellington and, after packing the car, we drove up to the Botanical Gardens to have a look around, our expectations not being very high. In fact, we could have spent the whole day there. There are walks and tracks galore to explore and a very nice café at which to rest.

We eventually made it to the ferry, having missed the exit of the state highway and sped a short way up the Hut Valley before doing a u-turn. We arrived at the ferry a short time before the deadline for our check-in and everything went without a hitch. The crossing was smooth enough and the scenery entering the narrow waterways of the south island to Picton was beautiful, much different to the north island.

The drive down to Kaikoura was straightforward but rushed. Having had the lightest of meals for lunch on the ferry, we were quite hungry by the time we arrived in Kaikoura, close on 8 p.m. We found our accommodation easily and, to our surprise, our hosts had gone out to dinner, information provided to us by another guest as we entered through the unlocked door. Jenny spotted our names on the notice board and the keys to our rooms on the hooks beside them. We made ourselves at home, unpacked the car and went out to find somewhere to eat.

The first place we tried had closed its kitchen for the night (at 8 p.m.??) and the second, Tuti's Restaurant, could only offer us a curry or chowder as their kitchen was on its way out as well. Jenny and I settled for the curry, Jenny for a mild chicken curry and me for a mild prawn curry. Edith had the chowder. The curries were very nice indeed, being served up with rice and a large side salad and I lost count of the number of king prawns in my bowl of curry, also containing large chunks of vegetables. Edith said her chowder was alright. Edith and I enjoyed a sweet and I had managed a large glass of Stella.

On returning to our accommodation, Brook House B&B, we met up with our very nice host, Judy and made ourselves a cup of tea in the kitchen. Judy worked for the whale watching company and sorted out our booking for the trip on the following day, also giving us a 10% discount voucher.

We managed to get to bed for 11 p.m., relieved that we didn't have to be up too early for breakfast because Judy did not clear away until 10 a.m.

We spent the morning of Thursday 16th October exploring the north bay of Kaikoura and observing the seal colony. There are some nice walks around the headland from the north to the south bay which we did not have time to tackle.

We lunched at the organic café and then Jenny and I made our way to the Whale Watching centre for our trip out to, would you believe, watch the whales. The check-in was scheduled for 12:45 and, having rushed our brief lunch to arrive more or less on time, we discovered that the trip had been cancelled due to 20 knot winds and the sea state being unsafe for our vessel. That came as something of a surprise because the sea in the bay was quite calm. We were informed that we could consider the next trip at 7:15 the following morning or a later one at 10:15. Unfortunately, the later one would mean we would not arrive in Christchurch by our deadline of 5 p.m. and the earlier one would mean crawling out of bed very early. We decided to sleep on it.

Instead of the boat excursion, we met up with Edith and pottered around the nice, small town of Kaikoura and explored the less attractive south bay, followed by a brief rest before tea.

We had earlier booked a table for three at the organic café (Hislop's Café) for 6:30 p.m. and we made our way there for our evening meal. That was quite expensive with a bottle of mediocre Hawkes Bay Merlot at over three times the price of a much better one from Australia (Yellow Tail) purchased at Asda back in England. On the whole, I would not recommend the restaurant.

And so back to our B&B for a cup of tea and an early night with the prospect of a whale watching trip the following day.

Friday 17th October brought a similar disappointment, with the cancellation of the whale watching trip once again so we had a leisurely drive down to Christchurch, much to the annoyance of some impatient NZ drivers who think that the 100 Km/h speed limit is a target and not a maximum. I did frequently pull over to let a convoy of cars pass wherever possible and I was, occasionally thanked with a short blast of the horn.

We stopped en route for lunch and looked at the house in which Edith and Terry used to live in Christchurch before making our way to Sue and Bill's house. We arrived earlier than anticipated to find both Sue and Bill were home from work and, after a brief cup of tea, Jenny and Edith tripping to the local supermarket and loading Bill's van, we were on the road to Bill and Sue's house at Wainui, their week-end and holiday retreat.

What a lovely house Bill and Sue had there, with stunning views of the bay, the heads and the open sea in the distance.

Jenny, Edith and I spent most of Saturday 18th October exploring the old, quaint town of Akaroa. Being of French origin, all the road names are in French, as are some of the shops and cafés and we lunched at L'Escargot Rouge. It was a dull, cold day with lots of cloud and a southerly, Antarctic wind. That didn't stop people going out to swim with the dolphins, although Jenny declined the suggestion we should join them.

Jenny and I went for a walk in the opposite direction on Sunday 19th October and followed the road up and down steep hills, eventually down to the shore and the centre of the Wainui community, continuing on away before retracing our steps to the house, having failed to find the shortcut along a track across farmland. Tracks here are not signposted as well as in England and there is nowhere near as much public access to land, something to which the government in NZ needs to turn its attention.

The evening turned out very nice as the clouds cleared and the sun shone, admiring the view from the veranda. We left for Christchurch just before the sun set and driving into the bright, low sun made some of the journey just a trifle difficult.

Jenny was quite tired and we did not rise until after Sue and Bill had left for work on Monday 20th October. I caught up with E-mails, accounts and other bits and pieces on the computer which I had left at Christchurch over the week end, there being no broadband at Wainui. Jenny and Edith did some long-needed washing.

On Tuesday 21st October, we drove into Christchurch and generally potted around the central area, looking at the effect of earthquake and how the rebuilding and restoration was progressing.

Jenny and I spent a most enjoyable day on Wednesday 22nd October exploring Christchurch. We travelled in on the bus and had a second look at the city centre before walking round the lovely Botanical Gardens, where one could easily spend the whole day. The old Curator's House, now a restaurant, was quite expensive and the new café in the gardens was worse than useless when it came to gluten-free food, so we came out of the gardens, crossed the road and found a Robert Harris café for lunch, before returning to the gardens.

We arrived back at base camp about tea-time, where Edith was about to send out a search party, thinking we had got lost.

On Thursday 23rd October, we spent much of the day with Mel (Sue's daughter) and her husband, Josh, chatting and lunching and thoroughly enjoyed their delightful company. We had lunch out with them at Raewards which had a reasonable reputation, not so demonstrated on this occasion, with Jenny's meal not arriving. Since we had all finished our meals, Jenny told them where they could put hers and the manager apologised, offering her meal for which she would not be charged but she was adamant and we left.

Jenny and I wanted to have a look at the Antarctic Centre but we arrived too late for a visit to be of use and we decided to return the following day.

We returned to Mel and Josh's house and had tea with them. Mel invited her dad, Mike and we all had a very nice evening. I left wishing we could see more of them.

On Friday 24th October, the forecast was not good and Jenny and I had already decided we were going to the Antarctic Centre. Edith dropped us off and made her way to Mel and Josh's house. We had arranged to text Edith when we had finished and expected that would be about lunchtime, having arrived just after 10 a.m., in time for the penguin feeding at 10:30.

Were we in for a surprise. The experience was one you shouldn't miss if you go to Christchurch. The penguin feeding was only the beginning. That was followed by a short spell in the special chamber where we experienced an Antarctic storm, with a wind-chill factor of -18°C. The wind was so strong, I found it difficult to breathe and the few minutes seemed like hours. And that was a simulated storm in summer!

After that, we went on a Håglund ride (that is a ride on a vehicle used to traverse the ice at the Antarctic) and we went up and down steep inclines and across ground that threw the vehicle off the perpendicular, first to one side, then the other, at frequent intervals, often while climbing or descending hills. The final stretch was a steep downhill run straight into deep water. All I can say is that it was brilliant and I'd like to try more of it. Whether I could stand three hours on hard seats with no cushion and no comfort break, as is usually required at the Antarctic, is another matter.

We then went to watch a movie about travelling to and around the Antarctic by ship in 4D (that's 3D with physical effects on the seat, like water spray for sea spray and pitching and rolling of the seat to match the movement of the ship). What an excellent experience that was.

After meeting up with Edith, who had come looking for us, for a bit of lunch, we went back in to the centre for more experiences and watched a HD film about the Antarctic, a movie about overwintering in the Antarctic and much more.

The whole experience left me with a desire to visit the Antarctic, even given the adverse conditions there.

We met up with Edith again afterwards and came back to base for a cup of tea.

Jenny went out with Sue for a coffee before Edith, Jenny and I went to a local Indian Restaurant, Corianders at Rolleston, for a very nice evening meal.

On Saturday 25th October, Jenny and I went off to the West Melton 150th anniversary celebrations. The event was well attended with an excellent, large parade of floats, steam tractors, vintage tractors, vintage cars and so on and Jenny and I met up with the West Melton Scouts. There was a display of horse racing memorabilia in the school hall and there were several stalls, including a demonstration of sheep shearing using hand-clippers as opposed to electric ones.

By the time we had returned and lunched back at base, it was too late in the day to do anything much and we tootled off to the mall at Hornby for a look round. That was disappointing, particularly Pack 'n' Save for groceries (it was good for wine though).

We came back to Rolleston for groceries at Countdown, another disappointment and ended up at New World, which had a better, if limited, selection of organic produce and, more importantly, gluten-free items. We returned to base for tea.

On Sunday 26th October, Jenny and I dropped Edith off at the Westfield Mall at Riccarton and retraced our tyre tracks along Riccarton Road as far as the roundabout at which we turned off right towards the racecourse. We spent the morning at the outdoor Riccarton Market, a sort of cross between a traditional outdoor market and a car boot sale, not that prices were particularly low, as one might expect at such an event. In fact, many of the items were the same price as in regular shops. A few stalls were selling DVDs and CDs at prices we were used to paying back home but there were no CDs I wanted and I had most of the DVDs that were of interest already.

We rejoined Edith for lunch at Coffee Club in the mall before heading out to the coast and a stroll along the pier at New Brighton, followed by a scenic tour through the road tunnel to Lyttleton harbour and round the huge, picturesque inlet there before returning to base for tea. There is a good deal of walking along the coast and round the head to Lyttleton, again, for which we didn't have time and we could easily have spent another couple of days exploring these tracks.

On Monday 27th October, we had tentatively discussed going on a tour of the east side of Christchurch with Mike to view the earthquake damage. We rose late and it was not a very nice day. We had also been invited to Aaron and Emma's house for lunch, so we decided to have a relaxing day in, preparing for our departure to Nelson the following day.

We drove some distance south, following Bill and Sue, down to the farm where Aaron worked and lived with his very nice partner, Emma. We had a late lunch and a long chat and it was nice to see Aaron again, although he did not remember us from back in 1989 when he was a few years old.

We made our way back to base and suggested going out to the local Italian restaurant in Rolleston for an evening meal but it was closed, this being a public holiday for Labour Day, so we ate at home.

Tuesday 28th October saw our departure for Nelson and I wish we could have stayed in Christchurch longer with much more to explore and, sadly, we had no time to go further south and explore Dunedin or the Milford Sound.

The journey through the Lewis Pass was a long one, taking seven hours. The scenery was lovely but the good weather did not hold and changed from sunny periods to torrential rain as we came down the west side of the pass.

We reached our destination just in time for a beer, wine, an evening meal, a chat with our lovely hosts, Lyel and Judy and bed.

On Wednesday 29th October we potted round Nelson, Stoke and Richmond in between the heavy showers and witnessed an electrical storm in the evening from the vantage point of Lyel and Judy's house, overlooking the bay. The cold night dumped some snow on the mountains and we awoke on Thursday 30th October to blue skies and sunshine. What a changeable climate this was.

After some discussion, we finally set off on foot at 12:20, walking into Nelson which took about an hour. We had a couple of sandwiches we had brought with us and a couple of bottles of water from the Countdown supermarket on a bench before starting

our trek along the picturesque path by the Maitai river, starting from the back of the iSite information centre. That took us as far as the bridge over the river at Hardy Street where we headed off through the Botanic Reserve to the path leading up to the lookout known as “The Centre of New Zealand”. That was some climb. After a bit of a rest and a photo session, we made our way along a track through Whitehead Park, eventually leading down towards Founder’s Park via Walter’s Bluff. Not having time to go to Founder’s Park, we cut across to a track that led us down to Atawhai Drive and we followed the road to turn left on Grove Street, on which we found a fair-sized organic shop, back to the information Centre where we had arranged for Edith to pick us up in the car at 5 p.m. We had covered somewhere between 8 and 10 miles altogether and climbed quite a bit and we were ready for a shower, a glass of wine, tea and bed in that order.

On Friday 31st October, we had another look at Richmond and Waimea beyond before returning to Melrose House in Nelson for lunch. This is a very old, grand, colonial-style house in its own grounds and serves an excellent lunch and high tea for those who can stretch to the cost. It is well worth a visit.

After a leisurely lunch, we potted round the Nelson shops before returning to base in preparation for an evening meal with all the family here in Nelson at La Gourmondise, a French restaurant. I have to say that it was disappointing and expensive. The escargot were a little on the rubbery side. The confit of duck consisted of two small legs. The salad was just a modest mixture of green leaves. The chips were so thin as to be too crisp to eat. The one and only dish they did well were the crepes and, let’s face it, making those is not exactly rocket science and Jenny makes equally good ones at home. All in all, I don’t recommend it.

We returned to base and finished off the evening with cheese, crackers and wine and a single-malt whisky, for which the effect will become clear in the next stunning instalment of this epic journey into the unknown.