

Tuesday 6th December 2016 New Zealand Day 4

Last night we watched the news as it unfolded that the very popular Prime Minister of New Zealand, John Key had resigned. Trev and Marg had a great deal of respect for him during his eight years of office, so a period of uncertainty will follow. We had dinner of sausage and mash outside, followed by a spectacular dessert involving meringue, cream and ice cream.

Today Trev took us on our regular pre-breakfast walk in the neighbourhood and today we went up Mount Pigeon, another volcanic plug that had been sold by the Maoris to the settlers, who then took half of it away, and were again asked for money, so the story goes. It was another great walk, coming back through the bird reserve. We saw and heard Tui, pukeko, goldfinch, blackbirds and thrush among others.



After breakfast in the garden we set off for Piha on the west coast of the Tasman Sea. We drove through the the city and up over the Waitakere ranges, which climb high up with a great view at the Arataki rest point and visitor information centre. There was a picture frame set up with a great view, so a number of photos were taken, and then we went on up to the information area for more views. It was all very well done, and informative about the native trees. We drove on up to see a huge old kauri tree, where we had first to spray our shoes so for biosecurity.



Last we descended to Piha with a great view of Lion Rock rising from a black sand beach. The beach is famous for surfing as there are huge waves and a long run up to the beach, and there were certainly plenty of surfers out there. It was the beach next to this one which was used for the Jane Campion film *The Piano*. We drove down to the cove and bought chips and coffee to take to the dunes to eat the chips were incredibly tasty! We then went for a walk and a paddle - the sea was cold! Next we went in search of a waterfall walk. Trev used to come here as a child more than 60 years ago, and hadn't been back since. So with help from Google maps we walked up to Kitekite Waterfall. We had a lovely walk up through the trees. There were quite a number of people on the trail, and when we finally made it, the fall itself was spectacular and had several levels above us. There were lots of teenage girls enjoying the pool at the bottom, which Trev and John quite enjoyed too. (It was impossible to photograph the falls without getting the mermaids in the picture!)



We headed back down to the car, and then on up over the Waitakere Range back to Auckland. Stopping at a supermarket for supplies for our overnight stay tomorrow, we got back in time to pack before going out for a barbecue.

Good friends of Trev and Marg are Elrose and Don Lawrie. Their three sons went to TAS in Taipei, and their middle son, Mike was David Bond's best buddy. I taught the eldest son Clinton, but we are going back to the 1990's.

Well, to top all this, Elrose had spent her early years in Mansfield Woodhouse at a similar time to when the Lee family were there in the early 1950's. What a small world! We had a fantastic view from their deck of the harbour, and a great barbecued beef meal with salad. It was such good fun company and we had a really convivial evening.

Wednesday 7th December 2016

An early rise for everyone as John and I were off on the 7 am ferry from Half Moon Bay. Margaret helped John get the food organised, and Trev drove us down for the ferry. There were lots of commuters heading to work on the 40 minute ride right into the heart of the city. Great way to travel as we know from Turkey, and indeed John used to commute here in Auckland from Devonport.



We had just over an hour to wait at the downtown terminal, so had a coffee and watched the many ferries coming and going on the four piers. It really is a very busy place. It was fascinating watching what everyone was wearing from city suits, to very casual shorts and t-shirts. Our ferry was pretty full with day trippers, and it turned out that only six of us were staying over at the bunkhouse on Tiritiri Matangi island. We made one stop in the hour and a half journey at Gulf Harbour and arrived around 10:30. Everyone unloads and John was impressed by the pushcart railway that transports heavier stuff off the ferry. The ranger gave a talk to everyone about the dos and don'ts, then had a word for those staying over, and off we went exploring. John had been a friend of Tiritiri during his time here and been over several times, and even brought me to stay in the bunkhouse. Although it was all a long time ago, we had enough knowledge to get started.

This island has been cleared of predators completely, so the native trees and birds have come back in remarkable numbers with conservation intervention. The birds are not fearful of anything and anybody, so you can see them close up and personal! We hiked first the Wattle trail, one of several which have board walks, some feeders and information all of which is excellent. We saw lots of tui, stitchbirds and bell birds to begin with, but later encountered pukeko, saddleback, North Island robin, whitehead, quail, brown teal, red

crowned parakeet, kingfisher and fan tails which are so glorious. Other birds more familiar included black-backed gulls, goldfinch and blackbirds. We spent the whole day walking with very little break, just really for a debrief at the bunkhouse at 1:30. The ferry left at 3:30pm, and we just kept walking the amazing trails hearing and seeing birds. Around 4:30 we went down to the beach area and saw nesting dotterel and baby variable oyster catchers - these are different from ours with longer red beaks. The weather was perfect as it was not too sunny, so we were not worried about sunburn.



This was a great day of exploring the native species and appreciating the work that has gone on by many volunteers and donors to make this happen over the last fifty years.

Supper was pasta and a tin of fish, then we went out exploring again until quite late, coming back up in the dark with red cellophane on our torches so as not to disturb the ground birds. We did not see a kiwi, but we did hear the morepork which is a kind of little owl.

We were sharing a bunk room with a couple of young lads, one from Germany and one from Spain who are volunteering for a week with the head ranger. I had the top bunk, and was soon snug in one of Nette's sleeping bags.

Thursday 8th December 2016 Tiritiri Matanga

John woke me at 6 am with a coffee and rain. It did not deter us and we set out for the dawn chorus. We chose the Wattle Trail which has lots of cover and some bird feeders, so we were not disappointed by the bird song. We found a different route back for breakfast and the heavens then opened and we chatted to some researchers who were studying the kakapo. The numbers have increased from 32 to 59 in the last three years (but that didn't make them any easier for us to see!). The rain had died down by 9:15, so we headed out for the morning having packed up the belongings. We took lunch with us and had a brilliant morning not seeing a soul for around three hours. John recorded a lot of birdsong, and we had some great sightings, probably the most exciting was the takahe which is similar to the pukeko, but has thicker beak and heavier feet. It was really neat to see this bird, as we are getting a bit blasé already about the others, which only yesterday were exotic.



We did the whole of the Kawerau Bush Walk, and then the whole of the East Coast Trail, all fabulous and most enjoyable. We stopped for lunch twice, once we had a-bit-too-windy a spot, but the second time we had a fabulous spot out of the wind with a great view of Fisherman's Cove. We made it back up to the lighthouse for a tea and catch up before the last walk. The ferry left at 3:30 on the dot, but we went back to see the dotterel sitting on her nest and the variable oystercatchers with the two fluffy young en route down.

It had been raining in Auckland, so the Captain of our boat announced, so we were lucky to have a fine day. We caught the 5: 15 ferry back to Half Moon

Bay.



Some of the Auckland photos are already [in the Auckland Flickr album](#). More will follow.

Stephanie & John