

The Land of the Long White Cloud and Big Black Mountains

A trip through Aotearoa

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Chapter 1 - Christchurch, Mt Cook and Twizel

Thursday 27th October

Plane trip today... Ok, not as exciting. View of Alps over NZ was AMAZING! Makes me look forward to Mt Cook etc.

Got off at CHc, caught a bus 2 city. Got caught out as an Aussie by the bus driver as I looked too hard at the 3 dollar sized \$2 coins he gave me "big coins for big denominations" despite my best NZ impression. "hey choice cuz 2 tuckits to the cety, fush n chups fush n chups fush n chups."

Chc is v small town like. Kinda like Canberra. Weird. V clean! you can buy booze and fireworks in the Supermarket!?

Found a v nice Brewbar Dux de Lux near the Arts Centre (arts c v nice too). Tried two beers (11s - which is a middy - I swear they made that up to laugh at the way I said 11). Spent part of today speaking in an Irish accent.

I have one other beer here to sample. So going to lose the 9-15 beers sampled tip.

Backpackers is fine. Like really. Small but everything I need.

Naz and I have already had +5 navigational arguments.

Friday 28th October

hard 2 wake up this morning. Jet lag, whatever Naz reckons. Rang the car place, they didn't turn up til 11.

Spent until then in the city. Cathedral was busy.

The car place had the wrong car. Another at airport. Two long trips and we still didn't have a car coz of a smashed window. The guy was talking about Syds crosscity tunnel? Whatever. Eventually got an 'upgrade' to a bigish van, a Nissan Serena. Its ok, but there are annoying problems with it (eg no AC). Chc was v hot last 2 days. Didn't get the guy to say fush n chups.

Finally got on our way. I had Feijoa icecream in Geraldine and we had lunch.

We got to Lake Tekapo, and the chilled wind off the mountains was cool and refreshing. Saw CotGS and Collie Dog! It was only the 2nd coolest thing I'd ever seen. The best was the view at Lake Tekapo. 'eh we should take a photo of Fairlie'

This was later taken by the view at Lake Pukaki. Can't get over the snowcapped mountains view. V excellent.

Found Twizel. We seem to have brought good weathrr with us from Syd. Nice clean and crisp here. Quite sunny. Twizel Smaller than I exp. Accom is ok, bigger and

better than Chc. Went to the shops to buy some stuff for dinner. Cooked it in the shared rooms. Watching NZ TV while were waiting. Twizel only gets 2 channels. Don't want to live here.

NZ is small. I really do think that. I'm starting to think I should Appreciate living in Aus.

Saturday 29th October

Woke up to heavy rain. Got up anyway and by the time we were ready to go it was less heavy.

Drove to Mt Cook. Beautiful views of Lake Pukaki on the way up, but it was still v wet and cloudy. I couldnt get over t feeling that the drive would have been spectacular on a clear day.

Decided to do Hooker Vall track 1st. It was raining pretty heavily when we left on the walk. Had full hoods and stuff. V wet. It cleared as we went, and the mountains revealed themselves from the mist. Saw icebergs in the lake, and the end of a very dirty glacier. Swingbridges were cool, and the scariest part was climbing down wet rocks near 2nd swingbridge. The view of the mountains is amazing.

Near the end of ghe track u could hear the echoes of distant avalanches. Its avalanche season.

We returned to a much drier parking lot than we left. We had a rest and lunch lounged in the back of our van, then headed off again.

Went into village to find Glencoe walk, and climbed a bit of a hill to discover that it was closed.

Went over to the other valley and climbed to the top of a steep hill for what they call tge Tasman Glacier View. It was absolutely FANTASTIC. Its a 360 view, with the high alps to the north, lake Pukaki to the south and the (albeit grubby) Tasman Glacier spread out in front of u. Mazing view, we took a panorama of it.

Breathtaking stuff. Oh yeah all of NZ seems to be made of rocks. Well, the rocky parts are anyway.

Take a cap when ur wearing a hood. Swingbridges are called that coz they swing! Who wouldve thought.

Came back to T had a nap. Now we're gonna drv around crazy Twizel Sts.

Chapter 2 - Dunedin and the Coast

Sun 30th Oct

Busy day today. We left Twz at about 7, and headed down the coast towards Dunedin. Some grt views of the lake (still turquoise) near Twz and stuff.

We hadn't filled up the car yet, and it was on empty long before our first stop. We had some freaking out about what we'd do if we ran out of fuel, but we made it to Oamaru without dying. (we stopped at the commercial fuel delivery ptst, before we worked out we weren't meant to get fuel there).

Oamaru was kind of cool. A lot of old buildings that were still around. They had quite a delapidated look about them though, which I think kind of added to their charm like they hadn't been made too commercial or anything. Naz reckoned they were ugly. Lso saw what was the widest bridge in the Southern Hemisphere up until the yd Harbour bridge was built. It was tiny tiny.

After that we drove to Moeraki, to see the Moeraki Boukders. They were kinda cool, but less impressive than I'd hoped. Turned out they were just round rocks on t beach.

Then it was on to Dunedin. One of the sights we were to see here was Baldwin St, the steepest st in the world. Yeah, it's steep. We went for a walk up it and took some photos.

Then we headed into the city and to our accommodation. There IS a reason why Dunedin is home to the steepest street in the world. The town is built on massively steep hills all around the harbour. Makes for some good views but some less than easy walking. After some aimkess driving around, we found our hostel, an old bluestone building that used to be the residence of tge bishops of t church across rd.

Had an absolute bitch of a time parking our Serena in this tiny narrow very steep st behind hogwartz. The room is good. V big w a queen bed! Quitw a good view too.

We went down to speights and booksd a tiur for t arvo. After another hike up the hill to our accom, some l8nch, we went back down. The tour was really good, v informative and interesting. We had a good tour guide I think. I tried the whole speights range cept the porter which they'd replaced with a chocolate stout made in collab w Cadb, with C choc. Overall, I'd have to give the range a bit of a MEH, but they weren't as bad as I thought.

After that I dragged a tipsy naz around the center of Dunedin. V interesting town. Quite different to anywhere else I've been, and much much much much cooler than Christchurch. I wish we had a bit more time here to get more of a feel for the city. Naz hates it (its too illogical - why build a city on so many hills?), but I think Dun is the best town I've been so far.

We did some supermarket shopping, and I mustered th courage to whip out the camera and take a photo of the FIREWORKS.

Had din at a small caf<1> near the Octagon. Quite nice, although I did feel like a dominos pizza whi\h they had across the rd.

we headed home quite early, after a oong tiring day. I haven't really got to see the harbour yet, but were gonna have a look tomorrow, as eell as doing the Cadbury Factory tour. Looking forward to rhat one. =)

One f9nall thought. NZ emergency vehicles are weird. Their sirens are really piercingly eardrum shatteringly loud, and yet the drive so cautiously. Twice we saw em4rgency vehucs fire truck and ambo- come pelting down the st to stop timidly at an intersection and checking both ways b4 passing through. None of the syd style blazing through red lights, up the wrong side of t road onto the pavement and through the front garden of a kindergarten to get where they want to go...

Mon 31st Oct

Long day today. Got up early, the hot water ran out at our hostel, so splashed myself w cold. Good one Hogwartz.

In order to see a bit more of Dunedin, we headed out to the peninsula to get a view of the harbour, which was quite good. Unedin is a nice city.

We were then booked into our Cadbury Tour at 9, so we headed across to Countdown to park. -Did I tell you about Countdown? when we were at Chc, on the huttle, everyone seemed to want to go to Countdown. We had no idea what this was of course, but when we passed by on the second Shuttle, we saw a big store called Countdown. Why was it so popular? When we got to Dunedin, we discovered another, so we went in, and did our shopping. Wow! Its a supermarket!

Anyway, point is we parked our car there today, coz it's just across the road from the Cadbury Factory.

B4 I tell u aboyt Cadbury, let me make znother observation sbiut NZ traffic. As wewere heading to the peninsula today, we came acriss somw blacked out traffic lights. It wzs obvious that this was a known fact they'd put up signs which said Traffic Lightz out, and there was a guy working on the box, but they has noone directing traffic at all. In effect, it turned unto a big intersection where noonr had right of way. Qeird.

Cad fac tour was disappointing. First, you got to see almost nothing, and what you did see was either DVD footage, or dull. Secondly, our guide was not particularly interesting (and god, the tour was more like "hey, who here is a chocoholic? Who loves chocolate? Who has eaten the most chocolate ever?" it was you, lady, we can tell coz yr fat. Thirdly, for a tour of a chocolate factory, we sure got rorted on the free samples. The most disappointing part was that we didn't ever get to taste the 'intersting' part of the process like the crumb(?), which I saw lots of and got told wasgolf bal suze and v sweet, but never got 2 try.

Eh.

We tried going to Tunnel Beach, but it was actually closed with a gate and everything. A shame, coz Naz I really wanted to go see that. Had fun navigating our way back to the highway and headed down the coast to the south coast of NZ called the Catlins.

1st stop Nugget Pt. V cool, exposed rock. V windy on the pt. It was hot again 2 days. We really did bring good weather with us from Sydney, though. I even went for a paddle in the beach. F**kin freezing, but definitely worth it for the humour value.

We stopped at Cannibal Bay where there were supposedly sealions but we didn't see anything more than an odd looking bird. We took a photo for Dad.

Chapter 3 – Milford Sound

Tue 1st Nov

Today was the trip to Milford Sound. We got up quite early - breakfast then heading to Te Anau. Quite pretty, reminds me of the nice airbrushed tV pictures you see of highland US lakes c.

Then we headed on up to MS. We were intending to go up rather quickly and not stop on the way, and on the way back take our time to see things.

In the spirit of such a trip, I'll hence talk about MS 1st, then talk about the road to/from MS afterwards. Uknow, keep u in suspense.

We got to MS on time, along w about 50 tour buses, and found our way to Mitre Peak cruises (the small boat cruise co) to get our tickets. Then it was off and cruising.

And it was AMAZING. The best scenery I've ever seen in my entire life. Just breathtaking, the mountains and the waterfalls and the fjord. Everything was stunning, and around every corner was something else cool. This was fantastic, and I can't recommend the experience enough.

We were fortunate to have a very nice day, with a fair bit of sunshine, that alas still did not warm away the blasting chilly winds off the fjord. We avoided rain however, which was good aside from when the captain sailed the ship underneath Stirling Falls to give us a bit of a dunnjng.

We were also fortunate enough to see ONE yellowcrested penguin, and a whole group of sea lions, of which we got many photos. They have faces like our ratties. So cute.

However, I think MS is one of those experiences that defies words. Nothing I say can give you a good enough idea of what it's like to be there, but I'll give u my reaction to it and just say Wow Wow Wow Wow Wow!!!!

I do wish it wasn't so commercial. All the masses of buses and tour groups do detract from something that feels like it should be isolated and remote and pristine. Also getting stuck behind buses on the windy road to MS is a good way to make your day go for far longer than you anticipated.

The car trip to and from the sound is also amazing. The scenery itself is enough, what with the deep valleys and spiralling snow capped mountain peaks, but there are heaps of places to stop and see other interesting things. One of the best was the southern entry to Ome's tunnel, where you were surrounded on 3 sides by sheer cliffs, and where the ice was close enough to the road to walk on. There were even some natural ice caves that u could slide into that were fascinating. The only downside was that it was bitterly cold. I swear the wind was turning the saliva on my teeth to ice, so sucking in breath was v hard on my sensitive teeth. Although again, I must give a big

Siskle and Ebert style thumbs up to the Soutgern NZ air. More clean crisp beautiful stuff from the guys who brought you the Catlins Coast farmland air.

The homer tunnel itself was grwat too, although quite freaky, given that it is only lit sparingly. Also sidnt help that on the way there the bus in front of us kept makibg freaky noises that echoed around the tunnel sounding l8ke something I haven't heard outside the Nightmafe on Elm St serirs.

The other point of note was an area caoled The Chasm. It was part of abriver that haf just changed from hard rocj to soft rock, and as a result, there were huge holes and pools cut into the softer rock, which a foamung cascade fell through. Quite spectacular.

as it stands, just the drive to MS is probably the second best thibg I've seen on thw trip do far, sfter MS utself.

We got back to Te Anau, whicg is a lovelt lirtle town, andbiught some atuff fr dinner, then came back to our accim. After dinner we played a game of pool Upstairs in the common area before comibg back down to our cabin, for the menisl jobs of washing clothes and writing in my journal.

Hey, how bout that? Youre a menial job!

Chapter 4 - Day 7 - Queenstown

Tuesday 2nd November

Headed out to Queenstown today. Bit of a drive from Te Anau, which was quite pleasant, but nothing on the trips we've done in the past little while. Near Te Anau, we passed through a section of unsealed road, and a tour bus coming the opposite direction (very quickly) showered us with a spray of rocks, one of which hit the windscreen and cracked it. I cracked the shits then (Heh, see my juxtaposition of cracked with cracked? Genius.), because the bus was seriously travelling way too fast for the road.

Fortunately, the car's a crap-heap anyway, and our travel insurance will cover any insurance excess, but honestly, if that had've been my car I would have wanted to smack the bus driver.

Coming through the valley we passed a film crew who were doing something, but we didn't see anyone famous. Shame, and I was just hanging out for F. Gary Gray's autograph. What was funny is that we passed a road sign that said "Warning - Film Crew" as though stopping traffic for a film crew was a common enough occurrence to warrant its own road sign. Wonder if that one turns up in the NZ Ls test...

We got to Queenstown and found our accommodation (at the top of yet another steep hill). Damn it's nice. Queen bed (always good), HUGE room, recently renovated bathroom, our own private kitchen, lounge, TV dining table... Wow. For \$60 a night I reckon you'd be hard pressed to beat it.

Unfortunately, walking into our accommodation was the high point of the day. I hate Queenstown. The lake and scenery and so forth is quite nice, but everything about it is designed to make money. You feel like you should be obliged to go bungy jumping and paragliding and jet boating and every other thrill sport under the sun. It's a place built to exploit tourists' money. The ugly malls, the tour buses, the masses of expensive hotels. It's sickening. Everything is designed in this town to suck more cash out of you. It's a town that has now become a tourist attraction itself, and so it can only grow by coming more and more commercialised, more plastic, more tacky, more consumed by greed and money and the chance to suck one more dollar out of the poor sap who happens to pass within range of its filthy jagged claws.

I'm a socialist at heart.

Two points hammered this contempt for beauty into my skull today. Firstly, we caught the gondola to the top of the mountain today, which, in all fairness was pretty cool. At the top though, once you leave the ugly, soulless money vacuum which is the skyline precinct, home of yet another overpriced restaurant and godawful souvenir shop, you come across a welcome Department of Conservation sign. Now we've become quite attached to the DOC signs. They pepper the coolest places we've been so far, pointing out the interesting things to see at Mt Cook, in Fiordland, around the Catlins coast etc. The fact is however that this supposedly free walk is only accessible to the general public after paying the NZ\$19 price for a gondola ticket.

The second, and I think more appalling thing is the Shotover Jet. This is the Jetboat Company that runs through the gorges formed by the Shotover River. We went out to their launch point to see the boats going past, and found a sign, saying "All water users are forbidden from using the Shotover River without the permission of Shotover Jet Co Ltd".

Honestly, who owns a river? Ok, I can understand its for safety (those boats go pretty fast), but the gorges and rivers should be something that's shared, not something to be exploited. You didn't create the river, Shotover Jet Co Ltd, what right do you have to claim it as your own for your own filthy profits?

I hate Queenstown.

So today we also went to Arrowtown, a historic gold mining village, which was meh (if you know what I mean). We also decided to make a proper meal seeing as though we have a proper kirchen (despite the fact it was more expensive, more time consuming, and created more washing up than getting takeaway would have).

Tonight, we went to an Internet caf<1> in town, where we downloaded the almost 2Gb of photos weve already taken to CD. Yeah, we've taken masses of photos. The guy running it was cool, although we did get charged for our time, even though we hacked their payment system. Honestly, worst internet caf<1> security system ever.

It's late now so I'd better go. We've got an early start in the morning, and its already midnight. Bye journal.

Chapter 5 - Day 8 - Wanaka/Haast

Thursday 3rd November

Started the Second Week of our holiday today. We left Queenstown, much to my delight, and headed out to Wanaka. There's a local microbrewery there, and I wanted to check it out, but we drove past it without realising. However, we stopped in the town at a bottle shop, and I picked up two of their beers anyway. That's all I really wanted to do.

On the way back to the car I got a cheer of "Go Leeds" from one of the workers at the back of the supermarket. I think it was because I look like a Yorkshireman, although I was also wearing my Leeds United top, so who knows what provoked it...

Our main objective in Wanaka, however, was to go to <http://www.puzzlingworld.co.nz/> Stuart Landsborough's Puzzling World, an attraction dedicated to puzzles, illusions and general trippiness. This included a room entirely tilted on a 15 degree angle, a room of famous faces that followed you around, a room designed to destroy perspective so you look twice as tall standing in one corner as the other, and some of the best holograms I've ever seen.

This included a hologram of a microscope where at the right angle you could see right down the lens at a magnified microchip, and a whole heap of animated holograms which were also very cool.

Puzzling World also has a huge wooden maze. The objective of the maze is to reach the towers at all the 4 corners, then return to the entry point. It supposedly takes 30min to an hour to complete. I did it in 16 minutes, because, y'know, I'm great.

We had lunch then headed up towards Haast. We stopped at some great places along the way, such as the Blue Pools, which were these vibrant blue pools (funnily enough) at the intersection of two rivers, which had a bank through the middle that you could walk right onto the corner of. Fantastic. The walk to them also had the best swingbridge I've seen so far. Which just seals the deal.

We also saw a number of waterfalls, which were quite good, but mostly, there was too much mist and drizzle to get any great views. A shame, because the Haast Pass is meant to be quite spectacular.

So we got to our accommodation at Haast quite early (which, I might add, was great - best accommodation yet, and the guy was really funny and friendly. Wilderness Backpackers - if you're in Haast, check it out - tell 'em Jez sent ya, yeah...) and decided to watch one of the many movies they had available (for free - rock the hill on). We saw <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0199626/> In The Cut, which I didn't particularly like, but could respect as a film.

So on it is... To the glaciers tomorrow...

Chapter 6 - Day 9 - Fox Glacier (Take 1)

Fri 4th November

Right now, we're halfway through our holiday. How convenient that today happened to be perhaps the most pointless day yet.

Today was the day we were booked in to go on our [Heli-hike on Fox Glacier](http://www.foxguides.co.nz/helihike.asp), but when we awoke to grey mist and persistent drizzle we were pessimistic about the chances of it happening.

We drove through the clouds to Fox, which included travelling over NZ's longest One Lane Bridge - honestly, what's with all the one lane bridges? It was quite a nice trip, but honestly, would have been spectacular in the clear days.

Our accommodation in Fox is...hard to classify. It's kind of nice, but it's got a really unwelcoming feel to it. Kinda the opposite of Te Anau, which was kinda crap, but very welcome and homely. I don't think I like it. And we've got two days here.

Anyway, after checking in very early, we went to the guides. Yes, the 12 o'clock helihike was cancelled, but they were putting on a 3pm one, as it looked like the weather was clearing.

We went back to have a nap in our room - we've become quite the supporters of napping since doing [polyphasic sleep](/viewblog?CATEGORY=262144) - which reminds me, we were having a conversation about what travel would be like on polyphasic sleep - if you'd have to pay for overnight accommodation. It would be a fascinating experience.

Sorry, that was a bit rambly, wasn't it?

So, short story long, the 3pm one was cancelled as well. The 3pm one was cancelled as well. The 3pm one was cancelled as well. The 3pm one was cancelled as well. The 3pm one was cancelled as well. The 3pm one was cancelled as well.

(And they say comedy is dead)

We booked onto the earliest one tomorrow hopefully it's clear.

So instead, we decided to drive to Franz Josef Glacier (about 30 minutes up the road - an hour in our crappy hirecar, which I might add has developed an even more worrying engine squeal sound as we travel into NZ's least accessible region. Well done! Next time we're not going with Hi, I'm the Fucking Dodgiest Car Hire Place in the World! Fuck Off Customers! Co Ltd.) to walk to the terminal face.

Donning our big jackets, we braved yet more persistent drizzle and tour groups and walked through the moraine-filled valley to the face. It was really spectacular, all

cracked massive ice towering above you, but the drizzle meant we couldn't take as many photos as I would have liked.

As Naz said, today probably would have been better spent if we stayed at Haast another day watching movies in bed. Shame, really.

Chapter 7 - Day 10 - Fox Glacier (Take 2)

Sat 5th November

Well, today we were going to go on the glacier, no matter what it took.

We also intended, weather permitting, to see the sun rise at Lake Matheson, which is supposed to be quite beautiful. However, when we awoke at 5 or so, we still had a thick layer of cloud cover (which besides destroying our Lake Matheson plans boded ill for our heli-hike), so we climbed back into bed and slept until it was time for our 9am helihike.

Of course, the cloud was still hanging around like Ramsay, so the hike was off, and we once again postponed it to the 12pm one.

By 12, the cloud was breaking up, and there was a fair bit of blue blue sky around, but still not enough to get that pesky heli off the ground. We resigned to going on a half day walk instead, and booked on the 1.45 hike.

On Fox Glacier We returned for the hike, got our equipment and so forth (unfortunately, my raincoat smelled as though it had last been used by a very large hairy sweaty Albanian woman in a sauna), and caught an old style bus out to the start of the walk to Fox Glacier. Our guide, Grant (pronounced Gr-ah-nt to rhyme with aunt - no that's "Ahnt", not "Ant" you American dick) took us up the walk to the front of the glacier, pointing out interesting things along the way, such as a boulder lying in the moraine valley, and the track of destruction through the bush behind it, that had fallen in the past month or so.

Eventually, we reached the glacier, grabbed our Alpenstocks, strapped our crampons (heh, funny word, reminds me of the big block of wood my Dad used to have for crushing aluminium cans that he invariably referred to as his "tampon" - it was one of those great repressible memories of my childhood when I proudly told my teacher at school that we have a tampon at home that we use to crush cans) onto our hiking boots (boots, ay?) and started climbing onto the ice.

Despite the fact that the lower part of the glacier is quite dirty, and covered with tumbled rocks and so forth, it was an awe-inspiring experience.

Glaciers are amazingly dynamic landscapes. We walked over the top of ridges in the ice, between glacial walls, up curving pathways cut in the ice face, it was amazing. You can just sense the immense weight and volume of ice below you. It was a humbling, sometimes frightening, but fantastic journey.

Gr-ah-nt went ahead, chopping out parts of the temporarily created pathway with his ice-pick, and we followed his trail. The idea was that if all the guides cut out a part of the track on each walk, the track would get recut many times in a day. In fact, there are 3 other good reasons I can think of for his ice picking display: firstly, a path strewn with freshly cut Frosty-boy style ice shavings is easier for us to make out in

the surreal world of ice, secondly, because the fresh ice gives a little more grip than the solid mass, and is less likely to induce (crampons or no crampons) slippage, and thirdly, coz it provides a constant reminder that you're standing on a huge, massive block of ice.

The ice on a glacier is remarkably smooth. You run your hands along what appears to be a rough surface, and feel a glassy, sheeny smoothness. It's a weird experience.

There were two German guys on the hike who brought along a beer to drink at the summit, something I wish I had've thought of.

Anyway, it was an absolutely amazing experience, better than anything I've done in NZ yet - better than Milford Sound because you really felt like you were interacting with the environment I can only dream of what a helihike would be like. Maybe next time...

We returned. Had dinner, I tasted another beer (Wanaka Beerworks Brewski Pils), then I wrote this.

Fun hey?

Chapter 8 - Day 11 - Greymouth/Westport

Firstly, what's with "ay"? As in what New Zealanders add to the end of statements? *Not* questions requiring your affirmation, such as "Wow, what a great view, ay?" or "Chateau Mouton's 1987 vintage lacked the depth of character of the 1985, ay?", but simple statements that more often than not are in response to someone's question. For example:

Gr-ah-nt: I'm doing a mountain guiding course.

Jez: How long does that take?

G: About 10 years, ay?

[**J:** Yes, 10 years, that's right. Coz I just asked YOU, idiot.

Or

Car Guy: Have you guys tried Hell Pizza (sorry, Hill Pezza)?

Jez: No, what's it like?

CG: it's really good, ay?

[**Jez:** Yeah, really fucking good. I had it last night and was lying to you about never trying it. Good thing you didn't fall into my cunning trap! You're a fucking genius mate!]

What a busy day today. (or should that be "fat a busy day today?")

Unfortunately, fate decided to urinate liberally on us today, as we awoke to clear, cloud-free, helicopter friendly skies. If we'd only left one day later! Damn you, universe!

But unfortunately, it was up the coast for us today, so we took a short jaunt westwards to get a view of the mountains - and our first ever look at Mt Cook! - then headed north.

After some fairly twisty roads, we got to Hokitika, home to Jade Carving, Glass Blowing, and the elusive ruby rock - the only place in the world it is found. Jade looks so yummy, it looks like a really delicious lolly that I want to put in my mouth. Ruby rock looks even better. And bits of ruby rock and jade together? Bliss!

Of course, today being Sunday, most jade carvers were resting at home (or leading brewery tours), so we saw little of their craft in action.

On it was to Greymouth, largest city on the West Coast, and home to NZ's "original craft brewery" Monteith's. According to our guide to NZ, bookings for brewery tours were "essential", so we rang from Hokitika and left a message on their answering machine.

There were only four other people on the tour (2 Americans and 2 Brits - from Yorkshire, neither of whom commented on my Leeds shirt - obviously York City fans), so I guess that means we were pretty safe anyway.

Our tour guide was cool. She was a studying jade carver who's weekend job was leading the Monteith's tours.

After a brief tour of the brewery, which seemed far more like a real brewery and far less set up as a tourist attraction, we were sat down at the bar, and taken through the beers one by one. This was a much better setup than the Speight's tasting, where the first was poured for you, but in order to try the whole range you had to ask the guy for each in turn.

Of course, I ended up drinking my own samples, plus most of Naz's (she was driving), and on top of that, after the formal part of the tasting, there was 10 minutes of "open bar" time, where you could step up to the taps and help yourself to more of whatever and however much you liked. Needless to say I took advantage of the fact, as did Mr. American, and we both ended up pretty tipsy.

I have to say the Monteith's range is pretty good, and the beers are damn drinkable.

Anyway, after a little drying out, we continued our northward slog. The road to Westport from Greymouth winds along the coast, giving you some fantastic rugged seascapes. It's like the Great Ocean Road in Victoria, with the rock formations out to sea and everything. A fantastic drive, and something really unexpected.

Our next stop was Punikaiki Rocks, these strange layered rock formations on the coast. The rocks themselves are fascinating, but the high tide swell creates some amazing effects, with blow holes, arches, huge sprays on the cliffs and so forth. This was absolutely brilliant, one of the best things I've seen so far.

After 4 toilet stops to allow me to purge all that Monteith's (you'll be glad to hear that only one of those four involved a roadside stop and jog to the bushes), we eventually got to Charleston, and a lovely little attraction called Mitchell's Gulley Gold Mine. This was a preserved turn-of-the century working gold mine, complete with mine cart track, a working stamper battery, and a maze of tunnels to explore. This was truly fascinating, and it was great that you got to really explore the area yourself. There were no real limitations as to where you could go, it was up to you to poke around the shafts with your torch and find the cool things.

Really cool.

Don't worry, I know it's been a long day, but I've only got one more thing to talk about.

Right near Westport, is the edge of coast known as Cape Foulwind, home to a permanent colony of seals. We headed out, and got some great shots of the seals, but we were well ready for a rest and some dinner, so we headed into the town.

Now, honestly, what is it with NZ calling a motel a "motels"? Tonight we stay at Westport Motels, which is an oldish, but quite nice place where we have our own kitchen, and a decent sized room.

Westport's quite a nice little town. Better than Greymouth anyway. A bit sleepy on a Sunday afternoon, but generally pleasant.

After some shopping, we'd just about worn out our last reserves of energy, so Naz had a nap (and continues as I write). Now it's my turn for sleep.

Chapter 9 - Day 12 - Blenheim

Big trip across the island today. We left Westport reasonably early, and drove inland towards Blenheim.

The road, for the most part, follows the Buller River, and there's some pretty cool scenery along the way. Unfortunately, this also included New Zealand's Longest Swingbridge, for which there is a disgusting Capitalist admission fee. Viva la Revolucion! Red Power and so forth.

Making few stops along the way, we reached Blenheim, where we checked into our accommodation, (which is very nice indeed) then made the intrepid journey to some wineries. Now, as we all know, I'm not much of a wine drinker. Me poison be beer, (or a good bottle o' rum, yarr), so the prospect of doing wine tasting freaked me the hell out somewhat.

To counteract this, we decided our first trip would be to Montana, the largest winery in the region, so hopefully we would be able to melt into the crowd of tourists' faces. They also ran an hourly winery tour, which we thought would be good. Especially considering we've been on two brewery tours so far.

Things, however, started to go awry when we discovered that we two were the only people on the tour. We resigned ourselves to the fact, and followed our guide around, while she talked about things, and we tried to look knowledgeable.

Here is the distinct problem between wine wankers and beer wankers: wine wankers are bigger. I have a certain inkling that the problem is that the naissance of the Australasian beer wanker has been a relatively recent event (unlike in, for example, the US, where there is a quite well developed beer wanker subculture). Wine wankers have, however, had time to develop their wank to a fine art.

Once you're a wine drinker, you're meant to be a wine appreciator, you're meant to know what you like, why you like it, how to differentiate good and bad characteristics and so forth. All these things are fine, but require a certain amount of experience and knowledge.

When you say you're a beer drinker, however, people don't expect you to have anymore knowledge than the fact that a half pint is smaller than a pint (tricky), and perhaps how much a slab of tinnies costs at the local bottleshop.

All this is made painfully clear when you do both a brewery and winery tour. On a winery tour (especially, I suspect, on one where you are the only tourists), you get grilled on all aspects of your wine experience, what are your favourite grape varieties and why, your familiarity with the range of this winery, the process of winemaking, etc. Etc...

Compare this with the brewery tours, on which, if asked whether they preferred ales or lagers, most people would say "aren't they the same thing" (or worse "neither, I like

beer"). Hence, no questions on beer wankery, no pressure, no challenging your beer knowledge (much, of course, to my dismay, chortle, chortle).

As another example, wine wankers have developed an extensive vocabulary of ways to describe wine. This is, I assume, to allow them to identify instantly any wine poseurs (such as myself) who happen to find themselves in their midst. Anyone who strays beyond the standard vocabulary is shunned. ("This wine is most definitely bootilicious" - a curse on you and your descendants!)

Sure, there are some standard terms we beer wankers utilise, but if someone wants to say "Hey you know that scene in Rambo - First Blood where he jumps into the tops of the trees and has to slow himself down by raking his arms through the branches and ends up covered in lacerations? This beer reminds me of that", hell, let them. It's at least as comprehensible as something like "hooded oaked tannins blended with a subtle soup<4>on of underripe maraschino", or something.

Uh, anyway, before I started that tirade, I was taking about Montana. Yes, yes, power to them. They can sell wine to wine wankers.

After that, we sought out Cloudy Bay, makers of my favourite wine Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc. Of course, this being my favourite wine doesn't tell you squat, because I tell you WHY it's my favourite, but it seemed reason enough to go anyway.

As it stood, going to Cloudy Bay was fricking scary as, ay? Very small counter where you got to really interact with the person pouring you tastes (oh goody!), so you could discuss with them in detail (yay!) the characters in each wine you liked and didn't like. I liked their 2005 Sauvignon Blanc, and their Chardonnay, and was ambivalent about their Pinot Noir. I could easily have freaked out and started blurting out rubbish about it being influenced by Germanic peasantry or something, but I held my tongue and ran away as soon as I'd had my samples of their range.

We then went to the much less scary Mud House, which actually had some very nice wines, and was patronised by two very drunk middle aged Wellington men (who had obviously seen <http://imdb.com/title/tt0375063/>>Sideways and taken the movie very much to heart). Mud House also did tastings of olive oil, schnapps (heh, I love it when someone pours you a Cock Sucking Cowboy and calls it "butterscotch schnapps, with a layer of Irish cr<75>me" - you can see the look in their eye that tells you they know what it's REALLY called), as well as a range of vinegars and salad dressings.

Anyway, we stopped doing the rounds after that, and after a brief stop at a brewpub to taste one of their beers (yay! Beer tasting), a joyless search for the well thought of Pink Elephant Marlborough Brewery (it closed down, shame), I decided that after such an epicurean afternoon I should have takeaway pizza for dinner.

Must dash now. You know... Important stuff to do and all. Business meetings and so forth...

Chapter 10 - Day 13 - Across Cook Strait

Today we bade farewell to the South Island, as we caught the ferry to Wellington.

We left Blenheim very early and headed to Picton, the town from whence said Ferry leaves.

We picked up a Marlborough radio station on the way, and I discovered to my horror that Blenheim is pronounced Blennem, not Blen-high-m, after I spent the previous day proudly showing off my talents at kiwi place name pronunciation. ("Bart's teacher's name is Krabappel? I've been calling her Krandall! Oh, I've been makin an idiot of myself")

The boat you go on is huge, a fact that hits you most as you drive your car into this monstrous hulk of a cargo bay, then head up a ramp to yet another monstrous hulk of a cargo bay.

Most of the interior of the ship is done up very nicely. There's even two movie cinemas piping in movies (ok, well something resembling movies - they played Freaky Friday and A Cinderella Story).

I instead spent most of the voyage on the outside decks, braving the freezing winds to keep our GPS fix alive, and watch the scenery.

NZ really isn't that big. You realise that fact once you notice that you can see the South Island very easily from the North Island.

The first thing I noticed about Wellington as we pulled into the harbour is that it's a real city. It's got skyscrapers, and traffic jams, and a harbour (ok, not strictly necessary, but reminiscent of my most familiar city). You have to pay exorbitant prices to park in the city, and even then you can't find a park.

It's great! But after a week and a half of mostly rural settings, it was a bit freaky to find yourself back in the big smoke. I kinda felt like one of those bumpkins who stands in the middle of the road gawking at a skyscraper (7 stories high - about as high as a buildin' outta grow).

Cities are stressful, and our crappy maps were, well, crappy.

Anyway, today was the opening of the new NZ parliament, which meant that guided tours of the place were cancelled. However, we did get to see a 12 minute video presentation on the restoration of parliament house - the guy at the tour desk was very cute "No tours today, but we have a 12-minute video. Would you like to see it?" he asked eagerly, and then when we said yes we would see it he looked ever so delighted, as though no one had ever said they'd like to see the video before.

Anyway, there was supposedly going to be some amount of pomp and ceremony at 1pm, when the bigwigs started arriving for the official proceedings, but unfortunately

our (exorbitantly priced) parking expired at 1, so we had to leave. (we drove past on the way out and saw little of any consequence happening anyway).

One point I'd like to make is the fact that the NZ parliament was crawling with police today. Not just regular let's-stand-around-chatting-and-look-like-we're-working police, but bomb squad guys checking under cars with those little mirrors on telescopic poles and stuff. The stupidity of it was that while we were sitting happily in our room watching the 12-minute video presentation, police came in and checked all the corners of the room, in the pot plants and so forth, yet not once were we or our bags screened for bombs or anything.

Of course, I equally called the Australian system "stupid" when we visited Parliament House in Canberra and had to be subjected to a thousand scanners, metal detectors, background checks, facial recognition software, "AREYOUATERRORIST???" and so forth. It does just strike me as funny though that you wander into the middle of the building surrounded by police, and the guy at the desk just goes "Hi there!" and gives you a "Visitor - Not Terrorist" sticker.

Our accommodation was ok. Kinda weird. It's so old fashioned. Almost to the point of anachronismia (not a word? Should be) it reminds me of like the boarding houses you see in WWII movies.

We then headed out to Te Papa, NZs recently opened national museum. It was supposedly very good.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that it is marketed as being both "free" and "more like an amusement park than a museum", the parts of the museum which seem amusementparkian cost extra.

That's not to say the stuff we saw wasn't good. There was heaps of stuff to see, but nothing that truly gripped me and got me excited in a "I'm a 8 year old boy discovering SCIENCE!" kind of way.

(The possible exception to this was a computer game about immigrating to New Zealand, where you had to make life choices for immigrants with different ethnic backgrounds - e.g. the Samoan immigrant should join a Netball Club rather than the Catholic Church - and make their life good).

(The definite inclusion in this "lack of grippedness" was this bizarre film about people chopping down the forests of New Zealand, only for the wood to get its revenge by turning up in people's houses as **pieces of furniture!** Whoa! Don't freak me out like that!)

Another quick point I'd like to make is about earthquakes. A great deal of today was spent witnessing Wellingtonites patting each other on the bum about how great they are because they've worked out ways to avoid earthquake damage to buildings. Here's a smart idea, dickheads: Don't build a city on a faultline! Idiots. I had little sympathy for the whining: "Wellington residents have it tough living on one of the biggest faultlines in the Southern Hemisphere". Now only 50% of your buildings fall down every time there's a tremor? Wow, you're my fucking hero, Wellington.

That was a bit intense, wasn't it? I need someone sitting next to me going "calm down Jez", when I start to rant, hey? Let's try and rephrase that:

"Oh Wellington, you're ever so clever",

said Acorns, the Happy Squirrel. Wellington's such a clever, clever city for working out how to avoid the tricks of nasty Mr Earthquake. Mr Earthquake shook and rumbled and grumbled, but Wellington was too clever and had triple reinforced their buildings with industrial grade steel i-bars and multistory oscillation dampening technology.

When Mr Earthquake found out about this, he was very angry and grumbled and shouted even louder, but no-one in Wellington could hear, because they'd all gone off to have a tea party in the dingy dell with Mr Rabbit and Flappy the Magical Ox.

Christ.

Chapter 11 - Day 14 - Taupo...

And the boring southern North Island

Wednesday 9th November

Today we got breakfast included in the accommodation, so we went to the kitchen where it was served. The guy serving (who I think was the owner) had a chat to me about the NRL. Nice guy, although he did bear an undeniable resemblance to John Merrick.

Started out earlyish today, to get to Taupo in time to do all the stuff we wanted to do.

Set off on the road out of Wellington to a lovely familiar sight: peak hour traffic. Ah, I got all nostalgic thinking about sweet gridlocked Sydney. I also wanted to work out whether it was possible to match up suburbs of Sydney with suburbs of Wellington. Like, where's the rich suburbs, and the hardcore dodgy suburbs and so forth. I think our accommodation would be in the Wellington equivalent of say, Glebe or Annandale. Inner city suburb in the process of being gentrified, but with a great deal of pokey little run down houses around.

Anyway, the road to Taupo was notable for 3 reasons. Firstly, you get striking views of the North Island's largest mountain (whose magnitude is emphasised more than those in the South Island because it appears very isolated rising out of the relatively flat land above it - the Southern mountains all appear in huge ranges).

Secondly, it is heavily populated. On the South Island, you see very few towns, and when you do they often consist of little more than two houses sitting together, but the North Island seems to be far more densely populated.

Thirdly, it completely bypasses Palmerston North. In itself, this is not such a bad thing, but I wanted quite much to see what I believe sounds like the most boring city in New Zealand. So, given that this was the reason for our visit, we didn't think a detour to see it was worthwhile.

Taupo is quite a nice town. It's a bit touristy, but not in a "I'm gonna flog all your money" kind of way. It more feels like a relaxed holiday area where you can just chill.

We went to visit the local waterfall Huka Falls not much of a fall, but a huge volume of water gushing through.

Then we went to my first taste of geothermal activity, Craters of the Moon, a park rife with steam gushing out of the ground at various places and intervals. It's not intrinsically spectacular, but it's something I've just never experienced before, so it fascinated me, just like those first snow-capped mountains.

We also had a look at Taupo Bungy, and despite some quite persistent cajoling from Naz I didn't garner the courage to do it. Despite my love affair with amusement park

rides, I can't get over the feeling that something that lasts 15 seconds and cost 100 dollars must be intrinsically dangerous.

We went to the Pak'n Save to buy some stuff for dinner and cooked it in a very busy kitchen here at our accommodation (which is fine, but in the lower half of the accommodation spectrum). A guy in the kitchen asked the room at large the trivia question on the inside of his Tui cap, and I got it (only coz Naz actually got it, then wouldn't yell it out - the answer was *Santa Monica*)

Anyway, long day tomorrow. Better get some sleep before I hear another barrage of fireworks.

Chapter 12 - Day 15 - Rotorua

One of the busiest days yet today, and the 3rd last day of our holiday. It's been really good, but I'm glad it's almost time to go home.

We left Taupo after breakfast and headed towards Orakei Korako, a geothermal area between Taupo and Rotorua. You drove to one side of the Waikato River, and were taken by boat to the park itself. Apparently, part of the BBCs Walking with Dinosaurs series was filmed there.

It was really very cool, with a much better range of things than craters of the moon. There were geysers, bubbling springs, boiling mud, plenty of steaming holes, huge silica deposits, and a wonderful cave with a warm pool at the bottom. The legend was if you put your left hand in the pool and made a wish, it was **guaranteed** to come true. Unfortunately, the water was so clear at the edge it was very difficult to tell where the land ended and the water began, so I stepped into the pool without realising. I did get to make my wish, however.

Anyway, Orakei Korako was cool. Quite peaceful, and quiet, and not very commercial or filled with tourists. Most of the time you felt like you has rhe place to yourself.

We then headed onto Rotorua, firstly to another geothermal area-slash-Maori cultural experience-slash-kiwi house.

On the way we stopped at some more boiling mud, which is really quite cool (no really), despite the concept of it being, well, mud.

Rotorua's quite a nice town. Unfortunately, it constantly smells like burning sulfur, which I'm sure is something you could get used to. I mean, you could get used to not having any arms or legs and living at the bottom of a ditch too, doesn't mean I want it to happen though.

Te Puia, the next place was also very interesting, although it was more light on the geothermal activity. We got to see their Maori carving and weaving school, before seeing two kiwi birds(!) - they're bigger than I thought they'd be, and having a bit of a look at their boiling mud and geysers.

We also saw a Maori concert, which, for all my "this is such a rorted tourist trap setup" scepticism, was very interesting and entertaining.

After that we headed to Rotorua's 3D Maze, much in the same vein as the one at Puzzling World. I actually think this one was slightly better, or at the least a bit more confusing. Naz beat me at it this time around, although I did finish it. Unfortunately, once you've been beaten, you lose some of the will to compete, and it takes a long time to finish the rest of it.

Whatever.

Anyway, after that, we took a trip out west to the Agrodome complex (heh - it reminds me of the Angry Dome from Futurama), where you could go [Zorbing](http://www.zorb.co.nz). I hadn't decided whether or not I was going to go, but we thought we'd have a look anyway.

For those of you who don't know, Zorbing involves getting inside a huge rubber ball and getting pushed down a hill. That's all, really.

We watched some people for a bit, then decided, yeah this was worth doing. The maniacal cackles of people coming out of the balls was enough to convince us.

I asked the guy what he recommended. He said a Hydro-Zorb, which involves throwing about a bucket of water into the ball, then getting in and sliding down a zig-zag path to the bottom. It was a hot day, and the water sounded cool so I went for it.

And damn it was fun. I bet whoever came up with the concept couldn't even imagine how much fun it would actually be to do. Until they did it of course.

It's been likened to an "extreme water slide", but in reality, it wasn't even really comparable to a waterslide except that "it's wet". You have absolutely no idea where you are or what direction your going in, there's just constant motion and movement, as you slide around the inside of the ball. You laugh so hard all the way down. It's an unbelievable amount of fun.

Of course, I had to have a second go, and on seeing my reaction, Naz decided she'd go too.

So after we were well shaken, wet and laughed out, we got back into our squealy car and headed towards Hamilton. We had a fair amount of difficulty finding our accommodation (not the least because we'd had a long, tiring day), and when we got there we wished we hadn't.

Our room was alright, but the place seemed to be populated by people who spent most of their lives hanging out in front of cheap accommodation drinking cheap beer and swearing randomly. The kitchen was filthy when we went to make our dinner which made my Chicago Pizza Company: Joey "Beefs" Meatlovers Pizza less palatable.

Nothing, however, summed up the feeling of the place better than the collection of books on the bookcase in the kitchen. They included such titles as The 1964 Almanac of the Soviet Union, The 1954 Lone Ranger annual, and a charming volume entitled "An Illustrated History of Firearms".

Joy.

Chapter 13 - Day 16 - Waitomo Caves

Friday 11th November

Today was the day for our caving adventure. We had a hearty breakfast of pig meat, and set off south to Waitomo Caves.

After a reasonably uneventful car ride (although passing through one town, I learned that Otorohanga is possibly the coolest name to chant over and over) we reached Rap, Raft and Rock, the caving company we went with.

We met the 4 other members of our group (a Scottish girl (sorry, lassie) and 3 English guys - small group), and our tour guide Brian (a former house painter), and headed off. Oh yeah, skydiving in Taupo is *cheap*. Wish we'd done it.

I managed to palm off the question from the Brits ("What's an Aussie doin' wearin a Leeds United shirt?", "It's lightweight and quick drying"), although I did manage to call football soccer. Stupid me.

We got equipped with our gear (2 part wetsuit, abseil harness, battery pack, helmet, headlamp, welly boots, carabiners, etc.), had a brief abseiling lesson, then headed towards the cave.

The first part was one of the trickiest parts, where you had to swing out off a ledge and over a deep canyon, trusting everything to your harness. The abseil from there was pretty easy, although I took it rather slowly (I blame it on the beautiful view you got all the way down), and Naz caned it down. She's a speed machine when gravity's on her side.

At the bottom were two cave entrances and a river flowing between them.

Once we were all down the bottom we grabbed an innertube and made our way upstream for a while. We then got to switch off our lights, and float back to the start on our innertubes, gazing up at a roof filled with glowworms. Quite beautiful.

Let me make a point now. I reckon I have mild claustrophobia. In actuality, I get nervous in places where I can't get out, or where the exit is not accessible. Someone told me that technically, this fear is agoraphobia, but what it's called doesn't really make a difference.

For example, I remember when we went on Concert band camp to Jenolan Caves and went on a cave tour, I got a bit anxious when we were in the bowels of the caves, knowing the exit was far away, and the path to it was unlit.

I had some trepidation about going deep underground (and especially about the "optional squeezes through rock crevices"), but as it turned out, the situation was such that it didn't invoke my fears.

Firstly, the way to the exit is obvious - You just follow the river. Even though you can be in deep darkness a long way from the surface, you know how to get out. Secondly, the "optional squeezes" (which were more like "compulsory squeezes" in reality), really just took you through the same path as you'd just gone, only up higher through the rocks.

Our guide was good they obviously have a nice little set of tricks - they bang their innertubes on the water very hard to make a massive echoing bang (sounding like a popped innertube) as soon as you start rafting in the darkness for the first time (in fact, it's apparently to scare away eels - we only find this out later of course). Also, about halfway through, they sit you down up on a rock ledge for some tea and chocolate, and once you're done, he goes "look behind you, that's where you're going through now" indicating this tiny hole in the rock.

Anyway, the final challenge was that you had to rock-climb up the hole you abseiled down at the start. Something which was easier than it looked - good, considering it looked impossible.

Overall, it was really good, and I'm glad we went with that company (of the many in Waitomo Caves). It was great to have a small group, our guide was really good, and it was a very unique experience.

Naz and I then went on a fantastic walk near Waitomo village, through some caves and gulleys, which gave some great cave views and waterfalls. To some extent it was like a little microcosm of a lot of the things we've seen elsewhere. Even some pancake rock formations like at Punakaiki. Ooh, and we spotted a silver fern... Sharp eyed us, hey?

Then it was on to Hamilton, the town we're ostensibly staying in, although we're well on the outskirts and had yet to visit the town proper.

There were two points to our visit. Firstly, to see the Hamilton Gardens which are apparently very good, and secondly to try out [href="/viewblog?ID=267">Hell Pizza](/viewblog?ID=267) - as recommended by car hire guy (, ay?).

We drove around aimlessly for a while (Editor's Note: that was originally written *dor a wjile*, which totally looks like Dutch or Flemish to me. That's all), hoping to bump into one of the (5) Hell pizza joints in Hamilton, before giving up, and heading to the tourist information centre to ask them.

Eventually we found it and got to try it. In all honesty, it was really, really good pizza. The best pizza I've had all trip (and I've had a LOT of pizza on this trip). However, it's still 3 times the price of a standard Pizza Hut/Haven/Dominos, and while they did really get a meatlovrrs pizza close to the pinnacle of the art, it still wasn't 3 times as good as a standard one. I'd eat it again though.

We then went to the gardens, which were really beautiful. They were also huge, taking up a massive space along the bank of the Waikato river. We went through the themed gardens, which had such names as the Japanese Contemplation Garden, Chinese Scholars Garden, Italian Renaissance Garden and American Modernist

Garden. They were all really well designed and presented (except the Modernist, which looked like a bad parody of a 60s Kubrick sci-fi set), and the time we spent there was really nice.

It would have been good to see a bit more, but we'd had a long day, and even as I write this, my body is craving sleep. Smleep now for Homer.

Chapter 14 - Day 17 - Auckland

And so to the final day of the trip.

Saturday 12th November

Last day of the holiday today. It's a bit of a relief. It's been great but I am looking forward to getting home.

So today was the time for our day in Auckland. We started out, and got to the outskirts by about 9. We went to two lookouts which gave views over greater Auckland, although we only climbed to the top of one, Mt Eden, which was a tough climb, made tougher when we realised there was a road which went right to the top.

Choice view though.

We then wiggled our way into the Auckland CBD, and after some cruising about, found Princeton, our accommodation for the night.

We parked illegally, and checked in, asked the (unhelpful) guy where to park - "What? Hmm oh like on a sidestreet somewhere? *shrugs*". Whatever.

We eventually found a \$11/day parking station, but the machine you used only took coins, so we brought the stuff back to our room, got some change and headed back. We then discovered the parking today was only \$3, so we didn't need the change, but that was cheap, so it didn't really bother us - street parking was like \$4/half hour.

The accommodation here is very very weird. In reality, it's accommodation for Asian students at Auckland Uni. They just hire out the extra places to backpackers. This means that, for example, there's a kitchen in our room, but no utensils or anything for cooking (no, not even knives and forks or plates or glasses).

Anyway, we headed into the city, and found Oportos! First NZ Oportos experience (see the review [href="/oportos_view_store?store=59">here](/oportos_view_store?store=59)). It wasn't very good though. Definitely not on the higher end. Extra mayo my ass.

We then caught a ferry to Devonport nice place, but very much like Manly. Whatever, Auckland, why don't you get your own ideas instead of just copying Sydney. Harbour Bridge, Centrepoint (I mean Sky Tower), give up.

Devonport was nice. North head had a whole heap of tunnels and stuff to explore, left over from the war days.

We returned to the city after having a Tip Top icecream, and got hit by the weirdest storm I've ever seen. Eventually we got tired thought, so we came back early and ate all the food we can't take back to Oz. Sooo much food. I also tried muesli with yoghurt and salad dressing.

Oh yeah, I spent nearly all today talking in an Irish accent. This also involved talking to the reception guy at our accommodation, ordering Oportos in an Irish accent, and getting our ferry tickets. When Naz begged me to go back to Australian, I found myself slipping back all the time. Weird.

3am start tomorrow. Better bed now!!