

Day 10: Monday 11th June 2012 187km, 2hrs 30mins via Southern Scenic Route State Highway 99

This morning when the alarm went off at 7am the moon was shining, stars and a few clouds in the sky signaling a great day. By 8:30am we were ready to hit the road on our journey to Te Anau following the Southern Scenic Route up the west coast of the South Island.



By the time we started out along Route 99 the weather had changed and the rain and strong, very strong no I would rate it as extremely strong winds had returned making driving a little tricky when gusts of wind would hit the side of the motorhome when there was no wind breaks.

First of the noted towns was the seaside town of Riverton-Aparima is the oldest towns in the South Island established in the late 1830's and became a thriving area for pastoral and agriculture, flax milling, sawmilling, goldmining and boat building. The port today is used for fishing and while we would have liked to hop out and have a walk around looking at the monuments and taking photos of Taramea Bay and the lake, the rain, wind and freezing conditions changed our minds and as we crossed the bridge, kept driving.

The next phase of the drive to Colac Bay took us along the coast line where the wrought seas, extremely high winds and driving rain meant more time was spent concentrating on keeping the motorhome tracking on the highway and either slowing down or pulling over where ever possible to allow cars banking up behind us to pass. A couple of suggestions for the motorhome include having a camera at the back on at all times and not just when the motorhome in reverse, as well as having a windscreen wiper and washer to keep the rear window clean. All these little things we are noting day by day to make sure when we purchase our own motorhome it has these features.



The key feature of Colac Bay is its surfing, although the pebbled beach didn't look too inviting and wonder how the surfers walked across the beach, maybe they have those rubber booties.



In the town centre there is a large statue of a surfer riding a wave and the information about the town says it is known for the pebbles and sandy beaches, well I say the pebbles but someone must have hidden the sand.

All along the coast line the poor sheep where trying to find shelter from the cold and driving wind and rain, none of this lot had been shorn and still had all their wool. The windy conditions must be a feature of the coastline as the trees are bent at angles of up to 90 degrees and while there are many signs letting you know about all the little beaches, today was not the day to venture down to the water's edge.



One place where we did brave the conditions was McCrackens Rest with its viewing platform of Te Waewae Bay but couldn't see Solander Island a former volcano.

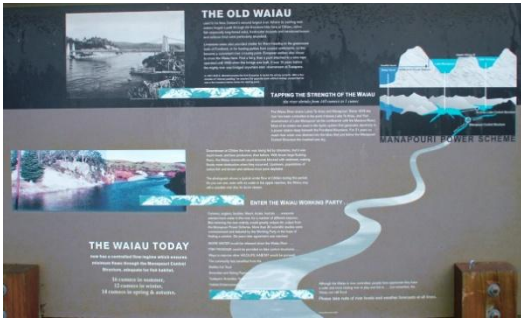


The rough surf with pounding waves were magnificent and also the rain had stopped but not the extremely strong winds. We quickly headed out to the platform, took the obligatory photos, turned around and were blown back to the van.

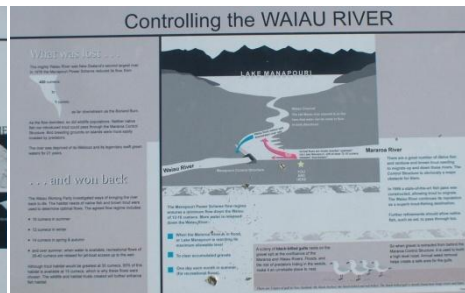
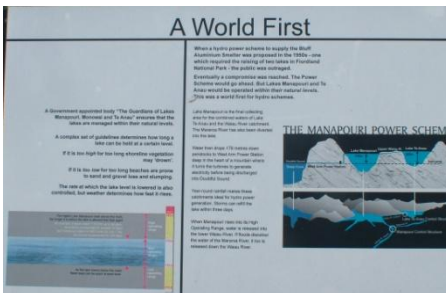
Our tourism radio told us about Gemstone beach just down the road where any gems you find you can keep, but we were not interested venturing down the narrow track given the wind, rain, rough surf and high tide and not knowing if we could turn the motorhome around. There are a number of cribs located down at the beach where I guess during the summer month's fishermen stay there and enjoy the life.

Finally after heading west with the rain and extremely high winds blowing in from the south west we turned north heading up the west coast. As if someone had turned off a switch, the winds dropped, the rain faded out to light showers and then fine weather and the driving became more pleasant. The countryside changed going back to rolling hills, green paddocks, sheep, cattle and deer farms, the trees were upright as well. Timber getting seems to be the main industry around Tuatapere and if you had time you could visit the historical Bushman's museums housing the machinery used from the earliest of times by the timber cutters. Tuatapere is also referred to as the 'Sausage Capital of New Zealand, but as we drove through the town we couldn't see any significant markings so we kept driving.

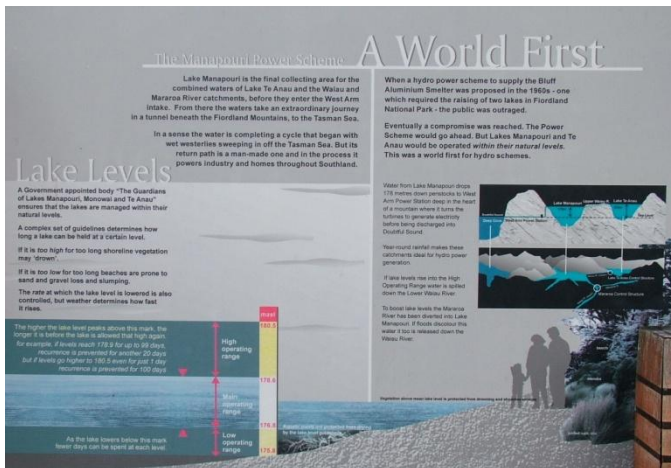
The next stop was the Clifden suspension bridge and although the tourism radio and all the brochures say you could walk across it, large concrete barricades on either end of the bridge stopped any attempt to venture any further. With the sun out, no rain, no wind time to turn on the gas and have smoko. We also tried the satellite television in the motorhome and to our surprise we picked up more channels than was available back in Dunedin, the last time it worked. This is something we will need to investigate when we buy our own motorhome to make sure that there is as little interference as possible and you can get Foxtel i.e. pay TV.



Smoko over we continued into the mountain country where snow covered most of the peaks and if we stopped at every location that provided a Kodak moment we would have never made it to Manapouri. Along the way there are signs off to lakes such as Hauroko (the deepest lake in New Zealand) and Monowai but we thought that as we would be seeing many lakes on our journey up the west coast we would continue on to Manapouri. There are a number of wetlands along the road with boardwalks that would prove very interesting to view the bird life during the right season but we did stop at the viewing platform explaining the West Arm Hydro Electric Power Station originally designed to supply power to the aluminium smelter at the Bluff back at Invercargill. What they were not allowed to do was to flood the whole region to make the lake to feed the generators, so they have control gates strategically located along the river to control the water flow, very sensible and would keep the Greenies happy.



The original plan was to raise lakes Manapouri and Te Anau but there was such a backlash from the public that it was decided to build a series of control gates that would allow the lakes to remain at their heights but the water levels would drop 187 metres down to the power station, that way enabling the power station to be built and save the flora and fauna. There is a bolder in Manapouri that shows what the water level would have been if the original design had preceded. What a devastation that would have been, thank goodness for the protestors in the 1960's and the ingenuity of engineers and hydrologists to design an alternative.



We drove into Manapouri and made our way down to Perl Harbour where tour boats and private boats can be launched and tour boats take people all corners of the lake.

We headed back into Manapouri and stopped along the road for lunch and sat outside at a picnic table admiring the magnificent scenery of the lake, the mountains with their snow caps and the tranquility.



After lunch we took a stroll down the track to Frasers Beach where the water was lapping onto the foreshore reminding me of Lake Talbingo even though this lake was much larger and deeper of course.

Leaving Lake Manapouri we headed on into Te Anau the launching point for visits to Milford Sound.



After parking the motorhome in our allotted parking bay, plugging in the electricity and turning on the gas we took the short walk into town. The wind coming off the snowy mountains make for chilly winter conditions but certainly kept people off the streets.



Te Anau is such a beautiful town and while most business close for the winter, one can imagine how busy it is in the summer.



Couple of things to do, go to the local shop to replenish the motorhome and was amused by the name of the street, 'Wong Way' I wonder if it was named after Penny Wong? If it is I am sure Australia will allow her to take up residence in Te Anau. After checking our emails at one of the local Internet cafe we headed back to the motorhome to cook tea and get ready for our 8:15am pickup time at the Te Anau Top 10 Holiday Park for our Go Milford day trip tour to Milford Sound and the Southern Discoveries Cruise on Milford Sound that includes a hot BBQ or Buffet lunch onboard the cruise vessel.



The only disappointing point about the Te Anau Top 10 Holiday Park so far was the luke warm shower, otherwise I was say that this holiday park is the best so far, even has an ice machine, the only one we saw in all the holiday parks. We even have television tonight and as it would have it, we heard about the high winds and storms in Western Australia and the weather in Brisbane. We will set the alarm for 7am for tomorrow as we certainly don't want to miss the tour even though the weather for tomorrow is expected to range from 0 degrees to 12 degrees with snow flurries.