

Day 14: Friday 15th June 2012 Queenstown to Franz Josef – 404km, 5:00hrs

As soon as it became light we headed off at around 8:30am retracing the road out of the city and through the valley to see one of the aircraft taking off and making its way through the mountain ranges.

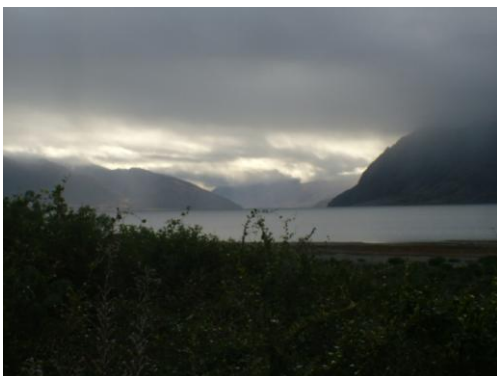
Instead of turning left we took the same road as yesterday out past the bungee jumping and Gibbston Valley Vineyard and it appears this district is good for vineyards as it is sheltered from the winds. The road however is narrow winding through small valleys and open farm lands with very few passing lanes so we held a few cars up from time to time.



One of the places recommended to stop and view is ‘Roaring Meg power Station’, but having worked on T3 power station construction at Talbingo on the Snowy Mountains Scheme, this tiny infrastructure is more like 1 of the generators from Blowering Dam Power Station so we kept driving.

There are two routes to Wanaka, one on the west side of Lake Dunstan, a manmade lake for power generation, and the other on the east side and passing through the town of Cromwell. We decided to stay on the west side of the lake travelling through the food and fruit bowl of Otago region. Being out of season all the apple, stone fruit, cherries and berries trees and bushes as well as the grape vines were bare.

On our way into Wanaka we past the Wanaka Airport where the hold the warbirds of Wanaka Air show every two years and the museum there of aircraft, military vehicles and other historical artefacts would be worth the time, but unfortunately we had no time as we are on a tight schedule to reach the Top 10 Holiday Park at Franz Josef.



Bypassing the township of Wanaka we headed for Lake Hawea where we could stop of morning tea at one of the rest areas along the road.



We found a great little spot looking out on to the mountains that were covered with a frosting of snow and just as we noted there were no birds, a hawk flew toward the motorhome as though to say there are birds around but the weather is far too cold to go flying.

There is a narrow neck of land that separates Lake Hawea and Lake Wanaka, same scenery, same beautiful wide, deep and clear lakes. You can go fishing for trout in the lakes any time of the year, but you can only catch, tag and release trout caught in the numerous streams.

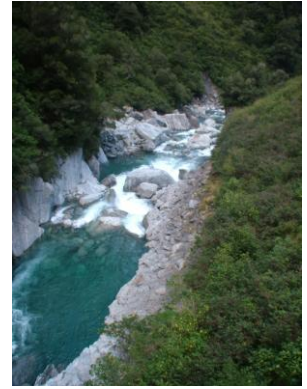


The road again rose up into the mountains requiring constant gear shift changes, pulling over where ever possible to allow the cars behind to pass, some would toot and wave acknowledgement, other would just take off.

Driving along the road our Tourism Radio told us about ‘Fan Tail Falls’ and how during the peak of the rainy season the water volume is so great the water looks like a fan tail. At it is only 2 minutes off the road we decided to stop and have a look and although the waterfall was small, it looked spectacular.



One stretch of the road is called the ‘Gates of Haast’ where there is another of the numerous one lane bridges that has arrows to show who has to give way to the oncoming traffic. Rushing under the bridge is this waterfall cascading over these huge boulders, one can only imagine what the waterfall would like when the snow season is over and the snow is melting.



The road fell away steeply with many near 360 degree turns down to 35Kmph which slowed our progress somewhat, but the scenery made up for it. Finally we hit the valley floor and there were patches leading into Haast where the dust whipped up by winds coming down from the Mark range blew dirt from the river banks across the valley and in parts blocked out the visibility of the road.

When we crossed the Haast River Bridge we started looking for a place to stop for lunch and found 'Knights Point Lookout' that looks up and down the west coast. Today the seas were clam, the winds were light, blue sky and picture perfect. It is claimed that along this stretch of coast wood from olden day sailing ships that were shipwrecked off the Victoria Coastline in Australian still drift on to this coastline.



The highway leaves the coastline and goes back inland past a salmon farm, many holiday locations, walking tracks, streams, small lakes, open country, winding mountain passes, cattle, sheep and deer farms, quite a mixture of natural bushland and farming ventures.

Back again on to the coastline at Sandy Beach before once again heading inland toward Fox Glacier and Franz Josef Glacier. We stopped in at the Fox Glacier and unfortunately I decided to take the road to the viewing area, wrong move as we could see across the glacier valley floor the winding road that takes you out to the glacier itself. Having backtracked and taken the next road out to the parking lot we soon realised that the walk to the glacier in fading light was not worth it. What was interesting though were the sign posts that showed where the glacier was and how it has melted away to what it is today. I am sure that if New Zealand was to introduce Julia Gillards (Prime Minister of Australia) carbon tax that would solve the melting of the ice and in fact, would start the ice age.

By the time we reached Franz Josef Glacier just after 4pm the sun was going down and realising it was a 1.5 hour walk out to the glacier Robyn took her time and I started to jog. A good workout jogging across the rocky glacier floor following the walking track sign posts but with the cool breeze blowing in your face it was invigorating. The disappointing part when I reached the end of

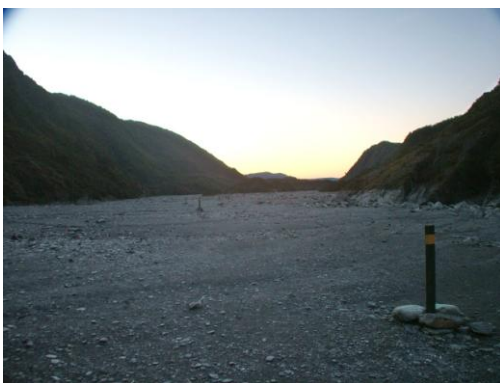
the track was the sign posts and roped off area which prevented you from even seeing the base of the glacier. Nothing like the glaciers I saw in Alaska whose faces are over 100m high with huge chunks of ice breaking off and falling into the bay making a deafening roar and causing small tidal waves.



As I set out along the walking track (running track for me) I passed one of a number of waterfalls, this one the most spectacular. Seems the closer I got the further away it appeared and not being very fit, had to jog, walk, jog and then run again. The jumper and jacket I was wearing wasn't needed but no time to strip them off.



Arriving at the fenced off area at the glacier face you are met by these signs warning people not to get any closer, what a disappointment as you cannot see anything. Can I suggest you take a trip to Alaska and take the Alaska Railroad from Anchorage to Whittier through the Anton Anderson Tunnel for an afternoon cruise to Prince William Sound where the boat takes you right up to the wall of the glacier you can "hear" the glaciers move (creak and groan) as well as see the brilliant blues in the ice and see huge sections break away and crash into the sea with a deafening roar, something I will never forget.



As you can see the sun is setting and I have all this distance to get back to the track that weaves it way back to the car park. By the time I got back it was dark and Robyn was not happy at me for taking all that time to go right out to the face of the glacier. She thought I would only go a short way along the track and was about to launch a search party to find me ... 'not happy Jane'. Not much was said as we drove along the highway through the township of Franz Josef and on to the Top 10 Holiday Park.

It was now 6pm and pitch black when we booked in and found our way to 103 and backing in it was hard to see the bank at the back of the parking bay but Robyn gently roared out to stop, so guess

what, I stopped. The facilities at the holiday park are well laid out and with no trees, we have television reception, pity we can't watch a NRL or AFL game given its Friday night.

We had stocked up on food and just as well as the township is over a 1Km away so here we are after tea writing our diaries and working out if we are going to go to Arthur's Pass and stay at Jacksons, or continue along the coast road to Greymouth and on to Westport, decision decisions.