

## Day 15: Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2012 Drive from Franz Josef to Arthur's Pass

One week to go and now we head up the 'Westland' i.e. the west coast of the south island. We headed out early again, having our routine set with the alarm going off at 7am. Looking out of our motorhome this morning there was a blanket of frost and ice puddles right across the holiday park. What a sight with clear skies, sun shining and no wind. All you could hear from time to time are the helicopters getting ready to take the sightseers out to the glaciers.



As we went through the dump station routine no water would come out of the water hoses as they were all iced up, lucky the water from the taps was still flowing so we repositioned the van so we could fill our fresh water tanks.

The road heading out of Franz Josef had windy patches and open roads but every section you came to where it was windy and there were forest areas where there was no sun the frost was heavy but by the time we went through the car traffic had dissipated the ice making our journey no eventful.

There is one stretch of road between Whataroa and Harihari that winds its way through scenic reserve after another with corners down to 25kmph and turns that have 270 degree corners.



Once you reach Harihari the country changes to open cattle and sheep country with lush pasture as it makes its way back toward the Tasman Sea. Every now and again you get glimpse of the blue sea and small surf, a contrast from the country we are leaving behind us.

The temperature is getting warmer and warmer, the sun is brightest and most powerful we have seen so far on our New Zealand tour. As we drive through the little town like Kakapotahi, Ross and Ruatapu the history of the Maori inhabitants with their hunting and carving jade together with the early European settlers for gold, timber and cattle is explained to us via the tourist radio, a magnificent device and will check out to see if one has been developed for Australian.

As we drove into Hokitika we were surprised at the size of the town, the dairy factory, jade carving and numerous other small industries that sustain the population. Having put 45 litres of diesel into the motorhome we headed out of town looking for a rest area for morning tea. Finally we found one where we had a look out over the beach, surf and the blue Tasman Sea.

Next stop was Kumara Junction, the gateway to Arthur's Pass and the road east to Christchurch but toady we are only going as far as Arthur's Pass. Last news we heard about Arthur's Pass was the day after we arrived in Christchurch when metres of snow blocked the access. Take a look at the You Tube clips of the train clearing snow off the railway tracks [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6acPX\\_00M9Q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6acPX_00M9Q) and gangs clearing the road <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0X6jQoEo0Aw&feature=relmfu>

The signs say the pass is not suitable for towing trailers, but kiwis must not be able to read as the number of vehicles pulling trailers, or trucks with trailers either shows the advice is wrong, or the locals know more than the traffic people.

Along the road we passed Jacksons a holiday park a place we had considered staying the night but Robyn thought the wind and the cold would not be very pleasant so the decision was made that after Arthur's pass we would go to Greymouth for the night.



As we wind our way up the pass the ice patches increase, the amount of grit on the road to give traction deepens and the incline of the road reaches 16 degrees, but all through it the good old Ford motorhome never missed a beat. As we drove along the railway linking the west with the east follows and then criss-crosses the road in several places and the one lane bridges give way to two land bridges. Luckily there were not many vehicles following us up the pass as at times we were slow, very slow but we wanted to take in the scenery instead of going like a bat out of hell. Maybe a number of the cars were heading to Christchurch for the All Blacks vs the Irish rugby second test tonight, the first to be held after the earth quakes two years ago.

At Death Corner we pulled into the lookout car park to take some photos when we notice two Kea birds heading toward the motorhome. We had been warned to keep your doors closed otherwise if the Kea get inside your vehicle they will destroy anything thing they can get their beaks into or around. Death Corner was named after a bus crash when a little girl got killed. As we headed back to the motorhome the two birds landed on the roof and it wasn't until we built us some speed they finally flew off.



Heading further up the pass we finally reached the township of Arthur's Pass 737 metres above sea level, a very beautiful small town made up of small cottages, a hotel, Internet cafe where the weather cam is located, the visitors information centre, the railway station and an avalanche shelter.



We had lunch in the railway car park looking out at the railway line and the mountains that are covered in snow, magnificent.



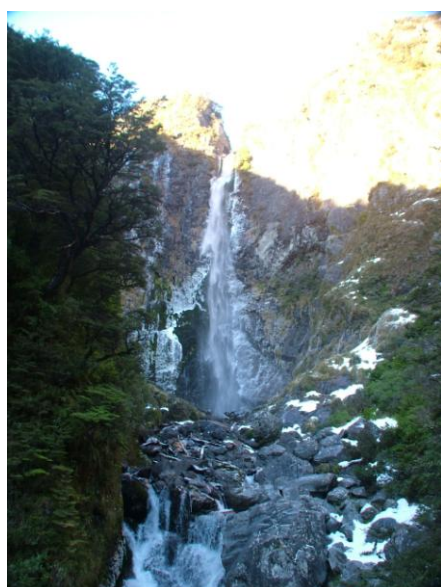
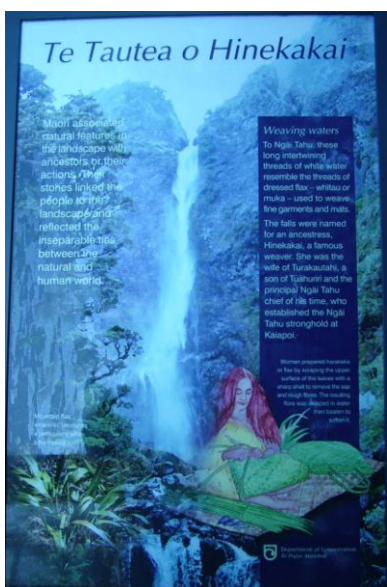
Arthur's Pass must be one of the most beautiful villages I have ever seen; only a few small houses, a pub, the railway station and the information centre.



After lunch we took the walk through the 30cm snow to Punchbowl waterfall, the shortest of the walks.



The snow in parts was up to 30cm deep and crunchy, a magnificent sound as you trudged across the snow toward the bridge leading to the waterfall. We soon found that in the shady places the snow turned to ice and was very slippery. Crossing the bridge for the one hour return walk the stairs got steeper and steeper and mixed with the ice patches was dangerous when you don't have the right shoes and ski poles to help keep you on your feet.



I went ahead as Robyn took her time navigating the steps and ice and three times is sat on my bum and slid down the icy patches as there was nothing to hang on to. Finally reaching the falls they were magnificent and worth the effort. The falls were named after Te Tautea o Hinekakai

resembling long intertwining threads of white water resembling threads of dress flax 'whitau or muka'.

Heading back to meet up with Robyn at one stage going uphill I went down on hands and knees as the shoes kept slipping and didn't make any progress.

When I reached to top of the walk going downhill was much easier and met up with Robyn on the bridge. As we walked back through the village we could hear what we thought was a cat bird but it turned out to be the Kea.



Heading down the pass is a little scarier than going up and in most places I was in 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> gear and in one bend back to 3<sup>rd</sup> gear from the 5 gear and 6<sup>th</sup> gear overdrive manual gear box. Lucky I had let the cars past before we went down the steep sections as there was no way I was going to go any faster to try to pull over and let them pass, bugger them, safety first.

When we hit (hit) the the flat country we could once again reach 90 Kmph as we headed back past Jacksons, turn right at the junction and head to 18Km to Greymouth. Strange isn't it that 800Km away we were in the snow at 737m, and now we were at sea level and was watching the sun set across the Tasman Sea. This is certainly a county of we headed for the Countdown supermarket to stock up on supplies before heading out to the Greymouth Top 10 Holiday Park located right on the beach.



An hour or so ago we were walking across crunching snow and slipping on ice, now we could hear the surf pounding on the beach. As it was too late to go down to the beach we will have to check it out in the morning.

As there were only four motorhome in the park we were told to pick which ever site we wanted so settled on a parking bay away from where a group of school kids were staying in several holiday park units but close to the amenities block.