

Day 16: Sunday 17th June 2012 – Drive from Greymouth to Nelson via Murchison – 309km, 4:00hrs

Waking up to the sound of the surf was amazing and although the temperature was on the cool side, there were no frosts in the holiday park, just the cool breeze coming down from the mountains behind.



Then there was the beach, well if you like smooth rocks you have a beach, can just imagine clearing a space the layout your towel and lay down to sun bake. Strange to be standing on the beach and looking at the snow capped mountains in the distance.



As we headed into town along the highway we passed the memorial to the men who lost their lives at the Coal Peak Coal mine when at 3:44pm on the 19th November 2010 an explosion killed 29 miners and contractors with only 2 miners surviving.
Time to stop, reflect and pray for those who lost their lives in this tragic explosion.



I will never forget the images on the television as the community came together in hope, only to have their hopes dashed as time went by. Their names, age and country of origin are engraved on the monument. The methane explosions ripped through the mine on November 19 2010 killing 29 miners working at a coalface 2.5 Kms inside.

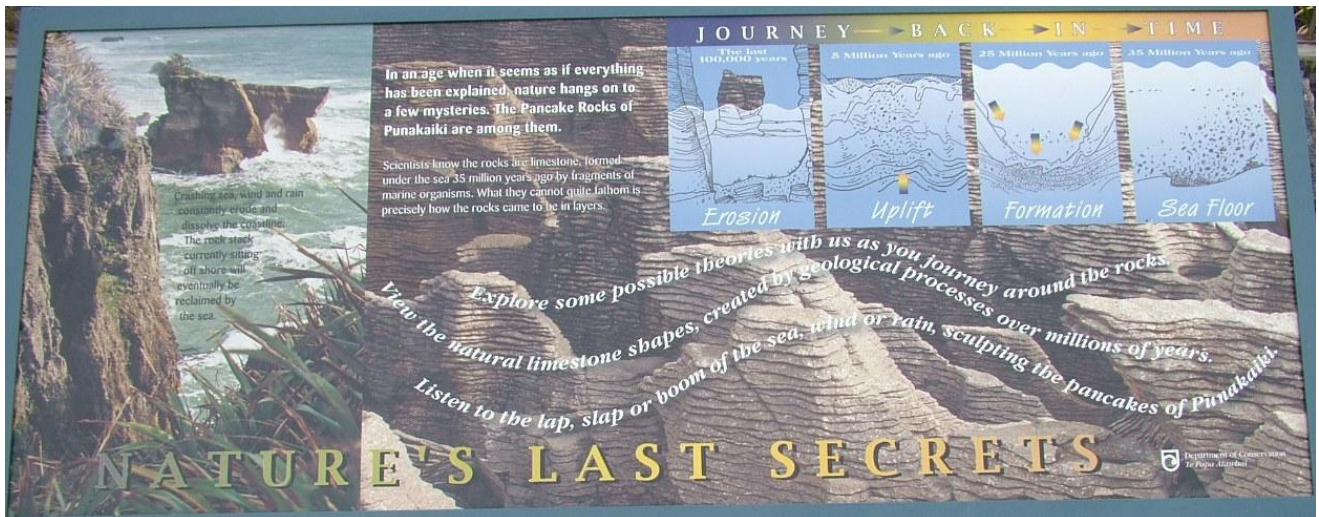
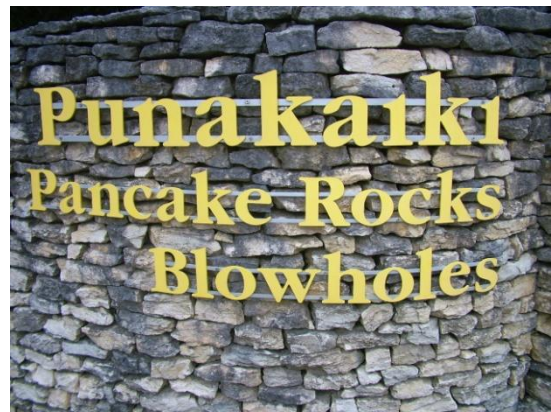


The sale of Pike River mine to state owned coal company Solid Energy has been welcomed by the West Coast community as a "giant step" towards retrieving the bodies of the 29 miners, trapped underground since the explosion in November 2010.

The Inquiry also heard that the Pike River Mine families recently asked themselves whether it was "time to let go" but were as determined as ever to get their men back.

Heading north we stopped at the Punakaiki Pancake Rocks Blowholes, a truly unique event going back 35 million years ago as marine organisms fragments, formed from the sea bed, lifted up as limestone layers around 5 million years ago and with the sea erosion over 100,000 years ago.

What is not known is how the layers were formed. Although we were there around high tide, we missed out seeing the blow hole in action.



The famous Pancake Rocks and Blowholes are just a 20 minute loop walk from where you park your vehicle on the main highway at Punakaiki. Looking like giant pancakes the curious limestone formations are especially spectacular at high tide in a westerly sea.



They were formed 30 million years ago from minute fragments of dead marine creatures and plants landed on the seabed about 2 km below the surface. Immense water pressure caused the fragments

to solidify in hard and soft layers. Gradually seismic action lifted the limestone above the seabed. Mildly acidic rain, wind and seawater sculpted the bizarre shapes.



The highway took us north toward Westport passing through many small historical gold mining towns, some back in the 1800's had upwards of 4000 miners and families living in them. The coastline is made up of stones and grey sand, not very inviting, but very picturesque.

Just 7Km short of Westport we turned inland heading east, ending our journey up the Westland and headed for the Tasman region. What surprised us was the snow lined mountains this far north, but then we saw that there are a couple of ski fields, Mt Robert and Rainbow up in ranges inland from Saint Arnaud in the Travers and Saint Arnaud Ranges.

The highway follows the Buller River passing through scenic reserves, gorges, open cattle and sheep farms, frost, and ice along the side of the road and coating small ponds. During many of the stages the winding road had bends down to 25Kmph and in some stages, traffic lights operate where the road goes down to one lane only.

At Hawks Crag the roadway has been cut into the side of the mountain and there is an overhang, very scenic especially with the Buller River crashing into the band as it twists and turns making its way to the Tasman Sea.

Hawks Crag is a prominent landmark in the Lower Buller Gorge, where the road has been cut into a cliff that drops into the Buller River. In 1955, two elderly prospectors, Frederick Cassin and Charles Jacobsen, made the first discovery of uranium on the roadside, about a kilometre downstream. The area is made up of a rock type called Hawks Crag Breccia (pronounced 'bretcha') – a mass of angular fragments, probably formed by floods near a mountain range where rock was being eroded rapidly. At the time it seemed a most unlikely place to find uranium, so had been overlooked by prospectors.





Along the way we stopped at New Zealand's longest swinging bridge, but when we saw it would cost \$5 each just to walk from one end of the bridge to the other and go one different walks ranging from 30 minutes to 1 hour we decided it wasn't worth the expense, so hopped back into the motorhome and kept heading for Murchison for lunch.



The highlight of the walks is the famous White's Creek fault line, which was the epicentre of the 1929 Murchison earthquake and where the ground instantaneously rose more than 4.5 metres (nearly 15 feet). Before completing the Loop Walk, visitors may sit and listen to an audio presentation featuring human-interest stories of the 1929 earthquake.



Murchison is another small mining and timber town and just out of the town limits we stopped at a roadside park for lunch looking out at the open cattle and sheep farms with the snow capped mountains in the distance.

Today however the streets were deserted; the people had more sense and stayed indoors.

Murchison is near the western end of the "Four Rivers Plain" recognised as the "Whitewater Capital" of New Zealand, nearby rivers include the Gowan River, Mangles River, Matiri River, Glenroy River, Matakītaki River, Maruia River, and the Buller, with many excellent whitewater runs along its length.

All along the highway to Nelson the road twists and turns up and down the ranges, all the time checking behind to pull over whenever possible to allow the cars to pass, however there are not that many passing lanes.

Finally we were back on flat land heading for Richmond and then into Nelson, known as the centre of New Zealand. We got there with enough light to walk around this beautiful city whose city centre streets are lined with trees and raised crossings where pedestrians have right away, not like in

Queenstown where the traffic have the right of way and they use this right without concern for pedestrians.



We made it into the Nelson City Holiday Park as the light was fading and pleasantly surprised to see the trees around the parking bay have been trimmed so we have television tonight.

While the temperature is much warmer to what we have experienced so far, you still need warm cloths and a heater turned down low. Not long after we set up home it started to rain, hope it's gone tomorrow as we head off to Picton and down the east coast to Kaikoura Holiday Park.

