

Day 17: Monday 18th June 2012 - Drive from Nelson to Kaikoura Holiday Park - 266km, 3hrs30mins - via Picton and Blenheim

Well it rained all night but as this is the only second night we have had rain during our holiday we have to be very thankful. As soon as there was enough light we headed off toward Picton but instead of following the highway to Blenheim via Renwick we decided to take the scenic route when we reached Havelock.

All along the way the road twisted, turned, and climbed the side of mountains, traversed into deep gorges and all the time it was raining with trucks and cars pushing you all the way. At every opportunity we pulled over to allow vehicles to pass, but at times I wasn't going off the beaten track. One blessing was there was no frost or black ice at any stage but never the less, the you couldn't take your eyes off the road.



I was pleased when we turned right at Havelock and headed along the 50Kmph Charlotte Scenic Drive all the truck and cars kept to the main highway.

When the sign says 50Kmph they are not kidding and while it is good for the passenger to look out over the Mahau Sound and Gove Arm my eyes were only focused on the next bend.

Even the tiny little settlements along the way like Linkwater, The Gove and Ngakuta Bay are absolutely beautiful but it makes us wonder what they do, how do they live or are they retired or maybe they travel to Picton for work?

Finally we turned a bend in the road and next thing we are looking down into Shakespeare Bay and Waimahara Wharf a timber logging wharf. Now we can see where all the timber jinkers (logging trucks) were heading along the highways.

Port Marlborough's Shakespeare Bay is a sheltered deepwater location ideally suited to forestry exports and other bulk products, with a 16-metre draft and 10 hectares of storage area adjacent the 200m long Waimahara Wharf facility.





As you drive down into Picton there is a monument of the side of the road the interisland ferries dock as the ferry passengers and vehicles between the two islands.



Looking at the map we found a lookout over the other side of the bay and headed there for morning tea.



As we boiled the kettle we could hear a sound like helicopters but it was the two ferries coming into port, how was that for perfect timing, so here we were up on the point wearing jackets and umbrella protecting us from the cold wind and rain watching the two ships dock.

The two ferries, Interislander and Bluebridge Cook Strait travel between Wellington and Picton with a cruising time of just over 3 hours.

With morning tea out of the way we set out for Blenheim, wine country but as we are not real wine drinkers, the tours of the cellars didn't appeal to us so we had not intent of parking and going for a walk. Once again there we were heading back into twisty winding up and down roads as well as open roads with vineyards or sheep farms, never a dull moment at the wheel. We only stopped long enough in Blenheim for petrol from the Z service stations that have full service, i.e. a person comes and fills your vehicle during the hours of 10am to 4pm. Lisa the concourse attendant told us that when Z bought out Shell, the main feature customers asked for was to have a full concourse service and they listened, hear that Australia?

After leaving Blenheim the road headed toward the ocean joining up at Ward Beach to be met by wild surf pounding on black sandy beaches with worn pebbles between the beach and the shore. We were feeling a little peckish and as we drove into Kekerengu we noticed a dirt track that leads down to the shore line, so that's where we decided to have lunch. While it rained intermittently and the wind was like the roaring 40s it was great to hear the rolling surf pounding on the black sand and rocky shore line.



After we finished and packed up Robyn spotted a fur seal rollicking in the waves and then along a fresh flowing creek. We walked down on the beach but when we got to close it took off and headed toward its mother. To our surprise all along the shoreline from Waipapa Bay until the road headed inland after Mangamaunu there are fur seal colonies on every available crop of rocks. After walking all sorts of tracks trying to find seals from Dunedin all the way to Westport, here were hundreds of seals in their natural environment within metres of the main road.



We drove into Kaikoura which was once a whaling station early so headed straight out to the wharf and on to the peninsula where in the car park we came across a seal colony where the crawl around the car park, sleep on the wooden walkways, and under the bushes. This is the closets we have been to fur seals and they let you know if you get too close as they turn and bark at you, time to retreat and they settle back down.



As we stood out in the car park looking over the Pacific Ocean we believe this is the coldest temperature we have so far in New Zealand with the Mt Lyford ski filed just 60Km away up in the snowy capped Seward Kaikoura Range, the wind chill factor made us freeze to the point we ran back to the motorhome to get warm. With the sightseeing over, we headed back into town to book into the Kaikoura Top 10 Holiday Park where once again there are very few motorhomes parked in this picturesque village. One can only imagine how bustling Kaikoura is during the spring and summer months, a place I certainly would like to spend a few lazy weeks even if they don't have a white sandy beach.

This whole area is renowned for their cray fish and muscles but in one part of town where there was a food stall on the side of the road overlooking the smell from the rotting kelp was so strong we couldn't understand why people were sitting out in the wind and cold eating seafood with the strong rotting smell of kelp.



With the Pacific Ocean We are hooked into the power, heater on, sheltered from the wind and will now settle down for the night, watch the news and see what the weather forecast is for tomorrow we head back toward Christchurch and on to Akaroa as our holiday draws to a close.

Time to download the pictures from both cameras and update the diary. With the Internet speeds being so slow and costly, I have not uploaded anything to the website at this stage and will wait until I get home.