

Day 18: Tuesday 19th June 2012 Drive from Kaikoura to Akaroa - 261km, 3hrs30mins

One thing I can't predict in New Zealand is the weather. We woke up this morning to clear sunny skies with no wind, a gentle sea breeze and small waves breaking on to the shore. With that welcome to the day we set off for Akaroa via Christchurch which will complete our road navigation around the South Island.

For a while the road hugs the coast line and once again we could see the seal colonies on the rocky outcrops. The road now seems to level out more with only the occasional twisty and winding sections, tunnels for the cars and railway line and in places gum trees. Most of the countryside looked like the drive through the New England region in northern New South Wales (Australia).



As I said, you can't pick the weather and as we drove closer to Christchurch the fog or low cloud (take your pick) started to get thicker and block out the sun. Robyn set the Tom Tom to follow the main roads skirting Christchurch past the International Airport until we joined the Highway 1 where we started our journey around the South Island only this time, we were driving in fog and not snow.

Turning on to Highway 73 we set our path for the little village of Akaroa and if the fog hadn't blocked out the scenery completely, I would guess that sheep farms would look spectacular. Somewhere on our right were lakes and wildlife reserves, maybe we will see them on our drive back along the peninsula road.

Earlier I was talking about the open roads; well we were in for the steepest winding sections of road we had ever encountered in our whole journey. At times I was back into first and second gear and the fog didn't help. Or maybe it did help Robyn as she couldn't see over the side of the cliffs. There were no places for cars to pass and thankfully there were no cars behind so I could concentrate on the road or should I say bitumen track.



All of a sudden we burst out of the fog into the sun as we reached Hilltop Summit at the height of 476m. On one side all you could see was fog and nothing else and on the other side we were looking down into Barrys Bay part of Onawe Harbour. What was even more spectacular was the fog cloud rolling over the mountain range down into the valley below. While it was breath taking, I could only take little glimpses as the road down into the valley was just as steep and winding.



Finally we reached Barrys Bay so with this spectacular view we decided to pull over and have lunch even though the smell of the kelp was a little strong. If we had driven on a little more the views would have been even more stunning however we have had our lunch and pushing on the Akaroa.



The road went up and down, twisted and turned and we came in to the French inspired village of Akaroa with houses right up into the sides of the mountain ranges and street names in French. We drove through the narrow streets to Main Wharf to get our bearings before driving to book in to the Top 10 Holiday Park up on the side of the hills overlooking Akaroa.



Once parked, electricity plugged in and gas turned on we could look around and take in the magnificent views out the back of the motorhome and from the picnic table conveniently located next to the parking bay. Although this holiday park has the most spectacular views of all the holiday parks we stayed in, the management hospitality and amenities wasn't as good as any of the other holiday parks. Guess you can't have everything.



After a cuppa and bit to eat we headed down the walking path into town. The steep walking track is a mission as the wet greasy dirt and leaves could result in slipping over. Of course a bigger challenge will be walking back up the steps to get back to the holiday park.

The history of Akaroa is very interesting. Around this time there were no French colonies established in the Pacific. Approximately 60 French whaling ships were making the regular crossing between France and New Zealand for the lucrative whale trade. Oil from New Zealand whales lit the lamps of Parisian streets. A French annexation of the South Island of New Zealand, an area a quarter of the size of France, with only about three or four thousand Māori inhabitants, would have been perfect for French needs.



Walking around the village steeped in history going back to the 1800s many of the historic building still exist and the street names in this predominant French section are in French like Rue Lavaud and Rue Jolie. There are three historic churches in the town, St Peter's Anglican Church built in 1863, St Patrick's Catholic Church built in 1864 and Trinity First Presbyterian Church opened in 1886. The Onuku maorie Church opened in 1878 is 5kms away around the point at Onuke.

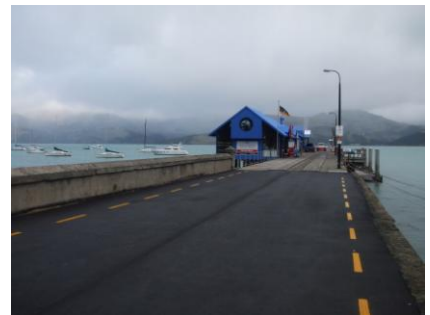


After walking around Dalys Wharf we stopped at St Peter's Anglican Church and since the doors were open we went inside and would love to attend a service to hear the imported pipe organ from England installed in 1869.



The French settlers had arrived in Akaroa ten years before the first Anglican church was built in 1851.

Among the church's treasures is a Communion Set with the Canterbury Arms and inscribed in Latin "For use in the Church of Canterbury". This set of paten and chalice is one of the sets that came on the First Four Ships which reached Lyttelton in December 1850.



With most of the buildings closed, it appears many shops close for the winter we walked up the flights of stairs back to the holiday park and sat outside on the picnic table next to the motorhome

and recuperated with a cup of coffee. We have decided that tomorrow we will drive into town, park the motorhome and continue our discovery walk of Akaroa.



We are gradually slowing down preparing ourselves for the return home and work next Monday, it is also a time to work out what food we have and need to keep us going until Saturday morning. In addition we need to do enough laundry to get us through as well, no point spending money doing all our laundry now, that can wait until we get home.

Sitting here at the kitchen table I am looking out the back window of the motorhome looking at the lights of the town of Akaroa below and the street and house lights up the side of the town, beautiful.