

Day 20: Thursday 21st June 2012 Drive from Akaroa to Papanui, Christchurch – 84km, 1hr30mins and visit the International Antarctic Centre.

The fog was back as well as the light misty rain making it a little disappointing as we head out of the holiday park at 8:30am, the earliest we have ever set out on the next stage of our journey. The drive up the range and down the other side was slow, well at least for me as I didn't want to damage the motorhome so late in the holiday.

However, when we crossed the range the fog lifted so that this time we could see the cattle and sheep farms, the lakes, rivers and streams all the way back into Christchurch, something we couldn't see going out to Akaroa because of the fog. Last night there were 12 motorhomes in the holiday park and as we were going along the flat section the motorhome that was parked next to us caught up to us at a great rate of knots so I pulled over to let her pass. The mother was driving again so I guess that makes the difference.

As we headed in toward Christchurch the fog and clouds lifted, the sun came out making it a perfect day as we headed to the Antarctica Centre next to the International Airport. When we arrived at the car park there was a sign – free parking, well at least this was one saving for the day.

After having coffee in the car park we headed in around 10:30am and paid for the Express Day Pass which takes you to most attractions other than the 4D Extreme video and the Hagglund Ride, the vehicles they use to get around in Antarctica.



It is well worth hiring the iGuide to explain what each of the 25 stations are about. I won't try to explain everything in the centre, you need to visit yourself but one attraction I will talk about was the Snow and Ice Experience. There we were issued with rubber cover booties and snow jacket before entering the enclosure as there is real snow on the floor and an ice slide.



The temperature in the enclosure was -5 degrees C and after about 20 minutes the simulated category storm arrived. Being in the enclosure for all of that time we were already feeling cold and when the simulated storm hit the winds reached 50Kph and the temperature dropped to -18 degrees C. Although the simulated storm didn't last long, the deafening roar of the wind and the cold was very real. One can just imagine what the scientists, engineers, tradespeople; workers and volunteers

who go to the Antarctica are exposed too. I would love to be a volunteer to go to Antarctica one day when I retire.

We spent around 4 hours in the centre and thoroughly enjoyed the educational venture as it is fascinating the history from Godwana Land to the research currently being conducted on Antarctica as well as in the air above and the seas that surround the 5th largest continent in the world.

The penguin enclosure holds penguins that have been injured and some will stay permanently as they are too injured to be returned to the wild.



Although Robyn took her camera into the centre, the only way to explore and understand what is going on is to visit the centre and take your time listening, reading and observing the exhibits.

As we drove back into Christchurch Top 10 Holiday Park where our journey all began our thoughts went back to that first night, the rain and then the snow. How different the streets, parks and trees looked with green grass instead of snow and ice. The first parking bay we were allocated was directly un large trees and on a bend and you guessed it, no television reception.

We have to thank James, Jane and Jen out three hosts on '*Tourism Radio*' who have kept us entertained and educated about all the points of interest as we navigated our way around the South Island. The history of the Maori people, places, interaction with the Europeans, the key tourist places and activities to do in all the major towns and cities, when the road conditions change to winding and twisting bends, places to stay including the holiday parks, and when they are not talking, great music to listen to. I wonder if Australia has a similar tourist radio GPS system with the aboriginal heritage and culture and how they interacted with the European invasion.

After a walk around the holiday park we spotted a number of sites on bitumen that had no trees overhead so back to the office to see if we could move before the other vans started pulling into the park. We were offered bay 19 which was about the same distance from the amenities block, no tall trees and we could pick up television. Next thing to do was to check we were still booked in for the Grand Tour of Christchurch tomorrow and was told to be out the front of the holiday park at 8:45am tomorrow morning.

Having worked through our food supplies, we worked out the bare essentials required to get us through to Saturday morning and then headed to the Countdown up the road. There we found the fush and chaps (fish and chip) shop we will visit tomorrow night.

Just realised that today I never took any photos as I had taken all the photos of Akaora the day before and Robyn took her camera into the Antarctica Centre to take photos where they are allowed to be taken.

Tonight we are back in the best amenities block of all the Top 10 Holiday Parks we stayed in travelling around the South Island, they are neat, tidy and best of all – heated, a must for the winter months.