

Day 21: Friday 22nd June 2012 The Grand Tour and prepare the motorhome for return to Kea Saturday morning.

The morning of the rescheduled grand tour something Robyn and I have been looking forward for a while so we were awake before the alarm and ready waiting outside the holiday park well before time in the freezing cold, yes there is a frost and ice on the benches. A coffee vendor drove past and said you look as though you need a coffee, however we declined as we didn't know when the bus would arrive.

The tour bus arrived and in total there are four on the tour plus the driver the Kiwi driver who has also lived and worked in Australia including the Sunshine Coast, two French and us two. Once the other two had been picked up in the city we headed out to the Avon River for a punt on Avon.



Once we had been seated in the punt we were handed a hot water bottle and blanket to keep us warm. It was very relaxing as the punt made its way up the Avon with the mist coming off the water and the various varieties of ducks and swans went about their business on the river and bank without any concern for the punt.



We made our way under several bridges as the Avon made its way through Hadley Park until it was time for the punt to be turned around and because of the flowing water, the trip back to the jetty was much faster.

Back on the bus and we headed out toward Sumner, a beach side community and all along the way we could see the devastation of the many earth quakes that hit Christchurch. There are vacant blocks of land, land with piles of rubble, buildings in various stages of ruin, buildings and houses that don't even look as though they have suffered any damage at all.



Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament before the quake (right) and how it is today (above).

The 2010 Canterbury earthquake a Richter magnitude 7.1 earthquake on 4 September 2010. The earthquake on 22 February 2011 was a 6.3 Richter magnitude. The February 2011 Christchurch earthquake collapsed the two bell towers at the front of the building and destabilised the dome. The dome was removed and the rear of the Cathedral was demolished. Whether the Cathedral is to be restored or demolished is yet to be decided.

The roads on the drive to Sumner have buckled, have dips and troughs, speed limits reduced to 30Kmph in parts, containers along the side of the road to prevent further rocks falls from the cliffs spreading across the road.



At Redcliffs there are houses perched on the cliff edge, some at peculiar angles, and others with the front or I guess it would be the back of the house totally missing and exposed to the elements. The school has been closed for all that time and unless the cliffs behind stabilise, they will remain closed.

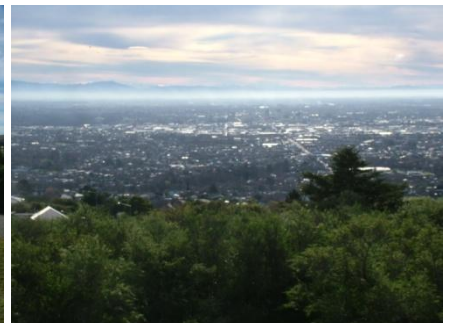
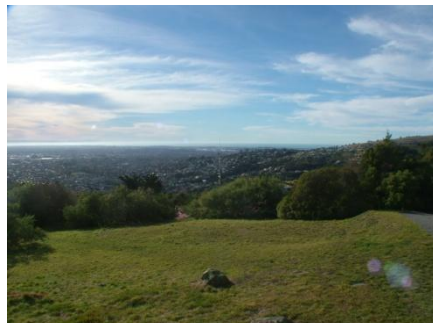


We heard on the news where people are still being told to leave their homes, flats and apartments as the building inspectors come through and continue their inspections and condemn the building because of the structural faults. This is going to go on for years with whole suburbs being wiped out and bulldozed never to reopen again, very sad.

As we drove into Sumner you can see the rebuilding taking place to restaurants, cafes, businesses, apartment blocks and houses while others stand empty waiting for something to be done or started. We walked around the little township with its magnificent beach and see how popular this spot would be in the summer months. Even the rock (middle) has been closed preventing people from walking through the hole in the rock as it is to unsafe.



With the gondola closed because the mountain still hasn't been declared safe, we drove up to a lookout that overlooks Christchurch. Here you can see how Christchurch spreads out from the sea inland spreading north, south and west with mountain range in the back ground all covered in snow. Today there is low level white cloud making it very beautiful, we have certainly picked the one of the best days for the tour as they predict heavy rains starting Saturday evening.



There is a great looking building on the hill behind the lookout called **The Sign of the Takahe** built like an English manor house that was a popular restaurant and function centre with a reputation to match.

Unfortunately it is also closed due to building regulations and their website <http://www.signofthetakahe.co.nz/> says they hope to open again by the end of 2012.



Arriving back in the city our next tour was of Hadley Park, 80 hectares of trees from all parts of the globe, gardens, hedges, manmade ponds, the Avon River wending its way on the west edge. We know this is winter and we were not expecting too much, how magnificent would it look during the Spring when all the trees have leaves, flowers ever where and the whole park coming to life.



The hour long journey in the little electric vehicle with excellent commentary by our guide in every educational, just every now and again the cold breeze from the east would chill us down, even though we had a blanket across our knees.



Our last stop in the grand tour was to the red zone with the bus parking as close as it could. Here our guide left us to our own devices and all of a sudden we both thought it was a letdown. Having been charged for the whole tour that would normally feature a ride on the gondola and tram ride through the city, we were told where the bus stop can be found on the other side of the container shops.

Walking across the bridge the full impact of the devastation hits you as you can hear jack hammers, see cranes and trucks and workers demolishing buildings while the majority just sit empty in various degrees of ruin.



There are barricades and security at various check points letting workers, machinery and trucks in and out of the red zone. It will be many years before anything can be built as the demolition is slow to prevent further collapses.



The New Zealand Government has come under fire for not spending the money allocated for rebuilding more quickly and in particular in trade training. But when you see the ghost town and the careful demolition that must take place, no point in rushing in to train people if they can't start rebuilding.





Just outside of the red zone in container city where a number of the business owners had re-established their businesses inside modified and modernised shipping containers, at least they have their business up and running, not many tourists or people buying anything, but there are sightseers wandering up to the barricades to take photos before walking through the laneways between the shipping containers.



Making our way to the bus transit centre we caught the number 14 bus that would take us along the road outside the holiday park. We kept an eye out for the Caltex service station and the Salvation Army store as a guide to know we were near our bus stop. Didn't take long before we were back in our van to warm up, have lunch (even though it was 3pm) before planning our next move.

First thing to do was to go online and check in for our flight back to Australia tomorrow, this we did in the Internet cafe, emailed the information to reception and they printed it out for us. Last check of emails and online newspapers back home before our money ran out then back to the van.

The time now was around 5pm and while it was a little early, we walked up the road to the fish and chup shop for blue cod and chips for tea. As we got back to the motorhome darkness had set in but the van was nice and warm. We should have only ordered one serve of chups (chips) as there were so many it could have fed four people.

Tea over, showers and time to start packing and sort out what brochures we will take home and what ones we will dump. Out of the many we have only kept a couple as most of the information you can find online.