

Day 3: Monday 4th June 2012 (Public Holiday - Queens Birthday)

The alarm sounded at 7:30am, finished off the crumpets with butter and jam for breakfast, made our coffee from bottled water (at least you could drink it this time) and prepared for Waiheke. With breakfast out of the way we headed for the jetty to catch the 9am ferry to Waiheke Island where we had already booked our rental car to dive ourselves around and see the sights.



Again the weather was picture perfect, sunny, no clouds and slight breeze making it very enjoyable to sit on the top open deck to view the sights of the ferry terminal, the city, harbour bridge, cargo docks and the Royal New Zealand Navy base as we headed for the Devenport to pick up some passengers. Heading out across the bay the slight swell made the 45 minute cruise very enjoyable, we might have even got a little sun and wind burn.



Passing through many islands along the way we finally made our way into the bay and the ferry terminal on Waiheke Island.



When we arrived on the island we headed for the vehicle booking agent where we completed our paperwork, showed our Queensland licenses before heading across the car park to pick up the hire car.

The snazzy little blue automatic ‘Imprezor’ had a few dints around the body work in the front, rattled and made noises as we drove along the road, but the freedom to go where we wanted to go was worth it. Houses on the island are very expensive. We were told there are a couple of houses around the \$27 million mark for sale if we are interested. Just like in Auckland there is a vast difference in housing standards and living conditions, some palatial with beautiful views of the bay while others are cramped into gullies or on steep hill sides where the house would barely see the sun. Most of these dwellings have poky steep drive ways (more like tracks) or parking areas up on street level, either way they must be a handful to navigate when wet or frosty (black ice).



We stopped for coffee at a little coffee shop in the centre of Oneroa township which had magnificent views across Oneroa beach and the small bay where several yachts were at anchor. Because it was a public holiday there was a surcharge but the view made it all worthwhile. The disappointing feature that spoiled our coffee and view were the number of people who smoke in the outside area of the cafe and the number of people with dogs that are allowed to sit at their owner’s feet while they sipped their lattés and so delicately devoured their scones or cakes. There were a few cooked breakfasts but the majority of the people were out for an exercise walk.

Time to start exploring so into the car that has a predominant ‘Keep Left’ sticker on the dashboard (for international drivers) as we head for Palm Beach, a quaint little sandy beach tucked down under the hilltops.



As we headed off to the next beach we took a right instead of a left and ended up on the other side of the Island.

Never mind, we were planning to visit the west side of the island on the way back. The island is dotted with vineyards prominently marked on the map so you don't miss them for wine tasting, purchases and something to eat.

Right out on the point of the west side of the island is Te Whau Vinyard with a view back to Auckland City. Although the vineyard was closed for the long weekend, there was a 4 wheel drive track at the top of the farm so we snuck in to take a couple of photos.



Just up the road from the vineyard we spotted a couple of black and white alpacas grazing in the paddocks. They were relatively tame as we approached them, guess they felt safe being on the other side of the fence. The black alpaca blended into the trees so there was no point in taking a photo.



No matter where you look around the island the scenery is magnificent like this picture looking across Anzac Bay, Putiki Bay and Kennedy Point on the North-West tip of Waiheke Island stretching back toward Auckland overlooking the Te Whau vineyard.



As we don't drink much wine we didn't see the point and were more interested to view the country side and head out to Stony Batter a World War II gun emplacement that never fired a shot in anger.

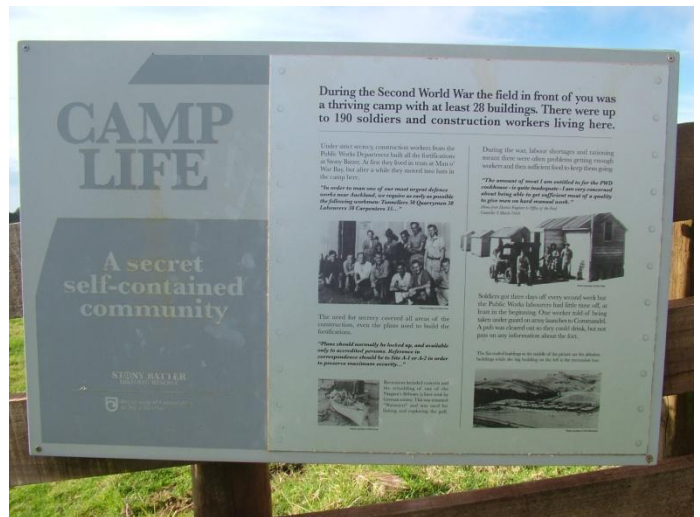
Along the road we saw these country farms with the most perfect trimmed hedges, they must have an automated machine to do this as no human could spend the time or have the patient to get the edges and heights so even.



The narrow bitumen roads soon gave way to dirt as we headed past sheep farms, vineyards and open fields of cows and bulls. The scenery was so pretty we drove slowly looking at the views and occasionally stopping for a camera shot or two.



There is a 1km walk from the Stony Batter car park up a slight hill before heading down the other side toward the tunnel entry. On the way you pass a number of signs that tell of the camp life and the secluded environment the soldiers endured during their stay.



When Robyn went into the office to pay she was met by this little old lady who could hardly walk but was keen to have her first visitors for the day, unlock the steel doors to the tunnel and give us two torches we hired to see our way along the tunnels. We headed into the maze of tunnels that take you to the three gun emplacements, but as we only wanted the 1 hour walk we followed the red numbers with each number there was some historical information to read on the tour guide brochure we were given when we paid our entry fee. The tunnels reminded me of the inlet structure at T3 power station where I spent 3 great years, the only disappointing part though was all the steel doors that lead out to the turret emplacements were locked as they have experienced a deal of vandalism and now had to rebuild rooms that stored the cordite and shells etc. The picture on the far right was taken looking back down the steep stairs with Robyn at the bottom shining her torch up at me.



After wending our way back retracing the red numbers we walked up on top of the grassy hill side where people can view the empty gun turret emplacements. The three turret emplacements and air vents are visible from on top of the hill but of course the only things left are the concrete bunkers and shafts where shells were hydraulically lifted to the gunnery crew.



Standing on top of the gun emplacements and viewing over Cactus Bay and Owhiti Bay on the left and then Hooks Bay to the right one couldn't help wonder how peaceful this part of the country is. The sheep keep grazing, the farmers go about their work, and the visitors come and go to view this part of history. As one can see in the picture of the right (above), one wonders about the thinking of the politicians behind the decision to establish the military post in the first place, who the farmers reacted to their part of the land, the Maori how treasure their land so much, and finally the construction crews and the soldiers themselves.



After viewing two of the emplacements we took the dirt track back to the car park and start heading back to the ferry. Along the way we stopped in at the 'Man O' War' beach and winery (no we didn't have any wine tasting). The bay must look so beautiful when the tide is in but looks very shallow so not sure about the jetty.



The last beach we called into on our way back to the ferry and returning the hire car was Onetangi Beach which seems to be the most popular beach as it has a corner store and the tour bus drives along the beach front. There are many holiday homes, B&Bs and I guess people who make this beach their home all year long. I think this is the sandiest beach of all the ones we saw and is a dead end except for the track that goes down to the beach.



If I was living on the island it would be a tossup between Onetangi beach and Palm Beach, but then the price of land and houses would stop that.

We planned to go back to Auckland on the 4pm ferry but first we had to fill up the car at the BP garage. After filling up (\$20NZ) we headed for the car rental depot, handed over the key and walked down to the ferry terminal.



By now there was a long queue of people wanting to go aboard the 4pm ferry, seems this is the most popular time to leave and it was packed, even the top deck was near capacity.



We don't know why, but the ferry seemed to be like the slow boat from China making its way back to drop off passengers at Devonport. People were sitting on the jetty fishing and while a couple of fish might be classed as regulation size, we saw a number of fish being court that were certainly undersized and should have been thrown back instead of going into the bucket.

By the time we pulled into the ferry terminal in Auckland it was getting dark but decided to go searching for an internet cafe to check our emails. At \$2NZ per hour the Internet cafe is the cheapest of them all even though the room was cramped and more than warm. We and headed back to Countdown to buy another couple of frozen meals to heat up in the microwave for tea, how very exciting. The television in New Zealand is dead with the only show worth watching being the Australian Junior Masterchef competition from last year. This episode was where the kids were in Disneyland and the final 8 were chosen to go through to the next round. Tomorrow morning we had decided to have breakfast in the hotel as we knew that we wouldn't get any food on the JetStar flight to Christchurch.