

Chronicle III

February 17. This morning Helen Thompson drives us to the train station in Springfield. We are going to take a scenic train ride through the Southern Alps while Dean drives the van across the island by another route. We will go through Arthur's pass to get to the other side. The view from the train is splendid. On the curves we can see our train in front of us.





The mountainsides are ablaze in the red flowers of the *rata* trees.



When we disembark Dean is there to take us through Greymouth and then north to *Punakaiki*. *Punakaiki*, is made from *puna* for a *spring* (blowholes) and

kaika meaning *to be in a heap* (pancake rocks). When the waves come in at high tide the formations produce impressive blowhole geysers. The view along the coast on the way to Punakaiki reminds me of the Pacific Northwest coast.



The pancake rocks are a unique formation, said to span millions of years but without a clear explanation geologically.





Along the way, while stopping to view the coastline, we see a friendly *weka*. Many naïve (non-native) persons think the weka is a kiwi, but the weka is diurnal and the kiwi is nocturnal and they don't really look alike. Both are flightless and the weka can run fast.



We spend the night nearby on the beach.





Some samples of beach nephrite were found on the beach above.



Limpets and periwinkles attest to the rugged nature of life in these rocks.



February 18. In the midmorning we go to *Paparoa* National Park, just outside of Charleston which is north of *Punakaiki*. *Paparoa* may mean *tall (roa) lake (papa)* but I am uncertain. We are between the west coast of the South Island

and the *Paparoa* mountain range. Ancient sea beds rich in calcium carbonate have been uplifted by plate tectonics and high vertical walls exist alongside river valleys. High up the wall of one area are limestone caves rich in calcite and aragonite. First we drive to the UnderWorld Rafting office near Charleston. There we don wetsuits and board a bus. The bus takes us to the Nile River. There we board a narrow gauge Nile River Rainforest Train.



The train is open air and takes us through primeval rainforest on the banks of the Nile river. We acquire inflated truck tire inner tubes of large size and then climb up 110 steps built into the side of the cliff face. We arrive at the entrance to the cave high above the river. Wearing miners' helmets with electric lights we enter the enormous, unmodified cave system with its calcite stalactites and stalagmites.



We find our way to a cave lake where we lie on our inner tubes looking up and float down the cave lake/river with our lights out and only illuminated by constellations of tens of thousands of glow worms.





This is both surreal and peaceful. We tube out a dramatic exit into a lost world. We raft down the Nile river to the beginning of the trail.

Later in the day we go to Franz Josef, a small town on the coast near the Franz Josef glacier. Along the way we hike a short trail. Lynn poses in front of flax plants and a *rimu* tree.



We stop for ice cream at the Pancake Rocks Café.



Lynn manages to lose her credit cards and only discovers it that night. Mild panic sets in. The next day we stop by the Café again and they have found the cards. The scenery along the way is amazing.



There is a museum in Franz Josef with another kiwi exhibit and we see another active kiwi in the near dark.



We get a helicopter ride up onto the glacier and step out for awhile with our buddy, Randy. I spoke with the young pilot who grew up in Franz Josef. He says he will never buy a house there. They are on the same fault line as is Christchurch and the disaster of February 22, 2011 still resonates in Franz Josef.



We move on a short distance to Fox Township and check into our new digs. By comparison to the posh establishments we have grown used to experiencing this is said to be a Motel 6. The town is very small and dedicated to outdoor activities. We see our first Kiwi lawnmower.



February 19. The next morning we go to see the foot of Fox Glacier. It would require a two hour roundtrip hike to actually reach the bottom of the glacier from the parking area. Although retreating throughout most of the last 100 years, it has been advancing since 1985. In 2006 its growth reached a meter a week.



Trail guides control access and make sure that hikers are relatively safe on the glacier.

