

## **New Zealand Trip - December 2 – 12, 2013**

### **Fred's Daily Blog**

Early start as we met at the airport at 6.30am. All the parents left quickly and we headed off for coffee and breakfast at those reputable (?) airport outlets. Now, some had had breakfast already but a second breakfast called quite a few. Phil's girlfriend had talked him out of coming on the trip, so we were a party of 6 for the adventure in the land of the long white cloud.

Tom watched 'Planes' and 'Happy Feet' while Marcel preferred looking for shows with hot girls and then that kids' pig show. Morgan slumbered and James sat resolutely. After a shortish flight land appeared. Not in Kansas anymore! NZ has mountains, heaps of them all with little snowy hats . Australia is so flat! Across the South Island and over the Cook Straight into beautiful sunny Wellington.

Found our vehicle, found the hotel and went for a walk. This city has hills! In Warbuton, my town, they boast of one of the steepest roads in Victoria. Wellington has Warburton covered a thousand times. It felt like we were in a time warp as the houses are somewhat quaint as they hug the hills. We found the centre of the city and had dinner in a hotel with a sign out the front stating 'Earthquake prone building' Now given that Marcel was worried about earthquakes it was kind of funny, even though the daily quake at 7pm didn't actually happen.

Back to the hotel and Tom was keen for a swim in the pool. Tom, Ethan, Marcel and I hit the pool where, with a Chemistry professor from Auckland, we had this great game of water volleyball. James and Morgan chatted in their room. Finally to bed.

Couple of things

- ~ James found the guest laundry within 5minutes of arriving
- Morgan discovered lifting your tray whilst your food is still on it on the plane doesn't work
- Thomas is as 'happy as Larry' although I couldn't find Larry anywhere.

Until tomorrow  
Fred

## **Day 2**

Breakfast was a feast. Yes you can have anything. Yes just help yourself. 2nd / 3rd breakfasts are fine. After filling up we hit Wellington and found the cable car and went for a ride. A quick walk around the wharf and back to the hotel for the Lord of the Rings tour.

We are now settling in and getting to know each other. Every newsagent we lose Morgan in search of wrestling magazines, Tom is always thirsty, Marcel is the greatest at everything and James is always looking for washing opportunities.

So The Lord of the Rings tour took us to "Wellywood" or Peter Jacksonville where he seems to have purchased an entire neighbourhood of old factories and plane hangers. What isn't owned by Peter is owned by Weta the creatures and special effects company. Weta was the LoR company but also made District 9, Tintin, Avatar (most expensive movie!), King Kong, and is currently doing The Hobbit plus a hundred or so other movies and TV shows. Anyway, we went first to the Weta workshop where we watched a film and then got up close and personal to Urikai, Gandalf, Gollum and some trolls. We also did the Weta workshop tour - unbelievable the toys and things they had hanging around. They had miniatures of cities and apparently all their miniatures and bigatures are stored

around Wellington - although it isn't planned as yet they could do a wholly interactive journey from the Shire to Mt Doom - big opportunity. After Weta we went to a few locations where film scenes for LoR were shot. Played out a couple of scenes and finished the tour on top of Mt Wellington looking out across Wellington.

Time to hit the road to our destination of Porangahau, about 3 hours away, where we were to stay at a farm owned by an Interchange friend, John, and his brother Paul. We left at 5.30pm, had a short stop for food and were looking forward to being in Porangahau by 9pm.

Didn't happen. First off we got lost - not just lost but totally lost. It's kind of remote and empty of all but sheep. So with fuel running short I began mentally preparing the guys for a sleep out - regaling them with tales of sleeping under the stars like the Fellowship did - this was our own middle earth adventure! James told me off – "I'm not here for adventure I'm here on a holiday!"

So when the dirt track we were on dissolved into a farm gate we were getting a little worried. So we hit the GPS on the phone ... no reception. We went back the way we came and threw a Hail Mary pass on this road. It didn't end up as a farm gate but the track got narrower and narrower as it climbed into a forest. Pitch black now, hedgehogs, possums and rabbits crossed our path as we flew along at 30km/hr. With some relief we saw a sign - Porangahau 45km - OK so it's now 11pm and we can still make it today!

So we found Porangahau - now where is the house? "Well what's the address" I was asked - note to planning department - get the address of where you are going. All is not lost I reckon I can find it ... OK there is a light on over there so might be time for a directional assistance Samaritan. Luckily there are only about 100 people in the district and this person knew Johns brother – where we were to stay. We got directions to the farm and headed off.

Found the farm and headed off down the driveway. Lights!!!! - but no only a woolshed with a light left on, kept going and there was a little house, car outside but totally dark. So, do we have the right farm, can I remember his name (I think it's Paul) do they have big guns??? OK nothing for it but to knock and hope for the best. I stood behind Ethan and knocked on the door ... nothing, wandered around the side - no other door and the dog wasn't keen to let me pass. So what to do - knock harder?? We did and finally woke up not Paul but John himself - "you're not supposed to be here til tomorrow." Well technically it is tomorrow - but I let that slide as we were relieved to be safe at last. Down to the beach house and we all hit the sack pretty quickly.

Cheers  
Fred

### **Day 3**

After the adventures of the previous day we all had a sleep in followed by a long and lazy breakfast. We started a jigsaw (Peters World Map - do you know how much sea there is!!). Finally we got moving and we went to visit the longest place name in the world. It means 'this Mauri chief who went to this hill and had to fight this other chief and his brother got killed so he sat on the hill and played the flute in his memory'. All in one word!! Anyway it's pretty long. Then we went to this massive beach with heaps of driftwood where we paddled in the surf - bloody cold!!

One of the strange things here is getting used to the idea you can run through long grass without watching out for snakes. When walking through the bush you can look at the scenery rather than

where you are walking. But it's really hard to do. So conditioned are we to look where we are walking, it is a real challenge.

The guys needed a shop fix so we stopped at the local dairy - a couple of L&P's and chocolate fish and we were kiwi-ised!! Marcel is under the mistaken belief that L&P is alcoholic so he's right into it.

Happy hour at the pub was calling – Morgan's favourite time of day. We met Jeff, Aussie Pete, Dockie, Paul and co. Apparently jugs are half price between 5pm & 6pm and all the farmers and locals meet for their daily chat, have a drink and by 7pm they have all gone - pub shut by 8.30pm. By 6.30pm we went back to the house for a great feed of fish - freshly caught schnapper - delicious!!! A walk down the beach after dinner - still cold! A bit of a gallop on the sand to work off the dinner. Back at the house we had a pow-wow about what's on the agenda. The whole town seems to be involved in the visit. We have poddy lambs, canoeing, visit to a Mauri Paa, sausage making, netting for flounder, canoeing, fishing, shearing ... but tomorrow we head to Napier - the Art Deco capital of the world.

See ya  
Fred

#### **Day 4**

Up early to get to Napier. The day started sunny but soon clouded over. Another huge breakfast - sausages, bacon, eggs. We rebelled and had lettuce and tomato as well. And so to Napier.

Napier was destroyed by an earthquake in 1930 and the whole city was rebuilt in the style of the times. It's a pretty funky place. We had a cafe fix and the wandered around the city centre, then went up the bluff for a view of the city and port. The old Napier jail was open so the guys went in to have a look around. Had a late lunch and as the rain was falling steadily, headed back towards Porangahau. On the way we popped into HoHepa homes the big disability centre in Hawkes Bay. Also went up Te Mana peak for a view but could only see cloud.

Back to Porangahau for roast pork and vegies. James is in heaven as the washing is piling up and he got to do 2 loads, tomorrow is culture day ... til then  
Cheers  
Fred

#### **Day 5**

Culture Day greeted us with full sunshine. First stop was a shearing shed where we watched the shearers at work and the wool tossing and bagging. The shearers averaged 1min 20 seconds per sheep.

Then we were off to the Mauri Paa, a sort of meeting area for the local Mauri families. It's all about remembering their ancestors and the stories of the local people. These stories were told through wood carvings - they had the gunnels of a canoe which has all the stories carved into the side. No ordinary canoe however - 80 paddlers and enough room for 180 people - massive!

Time for a swim in the surf. This is the Pacific Ocean and the waves roll in from Chile. Ethan, Tom and I got in whilst the others chilled on the beach. Now Marcel was hoping it was a nude beach and all

the talk about a nude beach must have convinced Morgan. I turned around to see Morgan running Guy Leech like in his birthday suit into the surf. Luckily being so remote there was no one around. Did I mention how cold it was? Morgan experienced the brass monkey effect but soldiered on. We all got smashed around by the waves and boogie boarded until we began to freeze.

Then onto the river where we had kayaks to play with. Morgan went around in circles, Tom finally got a handle on going forward and Marcel found his new role as chief rescuer. After an hour or so of pulling people out of the bank, teaching people to canoe and watching big fish jump around the kayaks we retired to the country club.

Porangahau is not a metropolis and the idea of a country club was a little bizarre. But there it was and so we played golf, Tom got 27 on the first hole. Marcel was telling me he was Tiger Woods - more style than substance. After golf we retired to the pub for a drink and a pub meal. They just don't make parmas here much to Tom's disappointment. James commandeered the juke box, and Tom danced. Marcel challenged everyone to pool and Morgan talked to anyone and everyone.

I was chatting to Paul – John's brother, local farmer and identity - I was asking about these turkeys I kept seeing in paddocks - I assumed they were farmed but apparently they are just wild. New Zealand has no predators bigger than a hawk. No foxes, wild dogs, nothing that can kill you, no mossies, no real flies, snakes, spiders - heaven!! This is real Footrot Flats country with flounder, mullet, salmon and whitebait in the river and wild turkeys, rabbits, sheep, cows and horses everywhere. Paul has never brought fish or meat in his life. Just hunts, fishes and farms. There are also these community gardens where vegies are grown for everyone who contributes.

Life is pretty good!

Til tomorrow  
Fred

## Day 6

Our last full day in Porangahau and we have a feast of options. It looks like the sea may be calm enough to go fishing, or we could go land sailing if it's too big a blow, quad biking or to see sausages being made. First off though a quick dash to the shop -100km round trip, so don't forget the milk!!

Fishing is the preferred activity, so down to Wongahu beach for the boat launch. We arrived before the boats so killed time by hitting golf balls on the beach. Oh oh - wind is up - not just a breeze but a wind we could hardly walk against. Sand was sand papering us - hitting golf balls was getting harder. Tom was resolute. Unfortunately the blow killed off the fishing. So we walked around to the point to watch the craypots being lifted out of the holes. By this time the wind was worse so we huddled around the corner. We decided to go for it and headed off for the bus. James abused the wind the whole way. Now to get back to the bus there was a little stream to cross - about ankle deep. On the way down people took off their shoes and socks. This time they just went for it. Tom walked through the stream, stood on the other side and told me his shoes are wet. "That's strange" I said- Tom replied "It must have been the water!"

So no fishing - alas the guy who was taking us fishing was also the one with the quad bikes. We missed the sausage making - so next option was the land sailing ... sadly no go as the council has banned it. Starting with so many options and we ended up not actually doing any of them. As the wind was blowing a gale we decided on a quiet day. James did some washing, Morgan cooked and

did dishes. They are all keen to go down to the pub for happy hour today to say goodbye to the good folks of Porangahau.

After saying farewell we headed back to the house for pasta and salad. A walk on the beach and an early night. Tomorrow we are off to Wellington again.

Bye  
Fred

### **Day 7**

Day 7 began with a big breakfast of home made sasauges, bacon, eggs, mushrooms - meat lovers paradise. We then headed to Paul's farm and had a look around at his dogs, horses, woodwork shop and vegie garden. Paul leases most of his farm out now but keeps himself busy breaking and retraining horses, being the local animal butcher, wood artist, training sheep dogs, traveling and volunteering around the district. We went up the top of his property for these amazing views of the river and beach.

So next we checked out the fire station. The guys had a ride around the town in the fire truck with the siren going. Marcel tells me they attended a fire and put it out - not bad in a few minutes!

Time to say goodbye to John and Paul and hit road to Wellington. On the way we had to stop at the Tui brewery – Morgan's favourite place. Morgan and Marcel brought a couple of souvenirs. Next stop was Stonehenge!! Now this was a little weird. These guys who have a love of Stonehenge have rebuilt it in New Zealand. Not a copy of the ruins but a full working model complete with a slaughter stone! There were pictures of Druids - apparently a lot of them in NZ - and witches and wizards (Wica's). The guy we were chatting to was an astronomy nut but also liked astrology a little too much. Anyway we chatted a while and decided against doing the tour. He then told us about a haunted house on the hill. On our way out we spotted it. Sure would be spooky on a full moon!!

After that slightly weird detour we hit the road to Wellington and the Hutt Valley hills - the wind was up and this road is a little scary. One lane hugging the mountain and every time you go around a corner you're in danger of being blown off!!

Finally made it to Wellington - it was living up to its name 'Windy' today. It's actually hard to walk against the wind. We had dinner at a Venetian bacardi (Italian tapas) which was interesting for the guys. Sharing small plates of food was a challenge for them but all worked out well. Really windy now, so back to the hotel for a swim in the pool.

Over dinner we talked about our favourite things so far...

Tom's was canoeing.

James' was doing the washing at John's.

Marcel's going on the fire truck & to the pub to play pool and meet the locals.

Morgan liked a little bit of everything but especially the pub.

For Ethan it was the Weta workshop and

I loved swimming in the Pacific Ocean.

Cheers

Fred

## Day 8

Early start today as we had to catch the ferry at 8.30am. Breakfast at the hotel and the off to the ferry terminal. The ferry from Wellington to Picton is sensational. Today was not windy and the sun kept making appearances so the trip across Cook Strait was very benign. Marlborough Sounds were spectacular as we cruised through. Found a few houses that would suit me as well!!!

We have been playing 'horse' for much of the trip and every so often Tom will call out "horse" and laugh. This has become a theme of the trip and Tom delights in teasing everyone else.

From the ferry to the train. The Coastal Pacific runs down the west coast to Christchurch. Pretty spectacular trip!! Although at 6 hours it's a long trip.

Once in Christchurch we had to collect the vehicle from the airport. Didn't count on it being so far. Got the van, found the hotel and headed downtown to find food. Goodness - I thought the city was largely recovered but it was still a disaster zone. We got to the city centre and we thought we were in a zombie movie. It was empty. I found a non zombie and asked him where the food places and restaurants were. He pointed to a large empty block and said it was there but there isn't really one in the centre anymore. He suggested a couple out of the city. So we walked around the centre - being careful to watch out for zombies - they have been really creative with shipping containers but it was really quite sad to see. Anyway we finally found a tapas bar and got some food.

Tomorrow it is jet boating and horse riding. Other things being considered are the thermal pools and rafting.

Till tomorrow

Fred

## Day 10

Day 10 began with the obligatory huge breakfast then we parked in the gardens and walked through to the city. Spent a while just looking at the fish in the Avon - big trout - and then climbed some trees.

The guys wanted to go on the earthquake tour and check out what has happened since the 2 large earthquakes hit Christchurch. The rebuild is being done with a revolutionary building product ... wood! It seems that as wood flexes and moves it enables buildings to withstand up to a magnitude 9 earthquake. The other product they are using is foam, they sit the buildings on foam which enables them to move.

After the tour we went into the city centre to the container zone and finally found people there. Had lunch from a container cafe and wandered around the centre.

We then headed off for a gondola trip up the old volcano that created the Littleton and Akoroa peninsula. The trip was pretty spectacular and the views from the top took in Christchurch city and the plains, to the mountains in the distance.

Marcel has been a little worried about earthquakes and it's fair to say that Ethan and I haven't helped to discourage this. On the gondola Morgan began to chime in and was telling Marcel what would happen if there was an earthquake while we were on the gondola. Apparently it would come

off the cable and bounce off the rocks and roll right down the hill into the estuary below. This prompted a million questions from Marcel - it was kind of funny as Morgan kept winding him up.

Warm day so we headed back to the hotel for a swim. Tom, Ethan, James and I swam whilst Marcel and Morgan just chilled watching TV in their room. Dinner at a noodle house and an early night after a walk around Riccarton.

Head home tomorrow.  
Fred

## **Day 11**

Our final day of the holiday. So the big pack up and then we had a couple of hours to kill before we needed to be at the airport. James wanted to go to the gardens again and the others thought the air museum would be good. Most had run out of money by now so free stuff was the way to go.

So a quick walk in the Botanical Gardens, a revisit to the air museum and we headed off to the airport. I suggested the guys only buy a snack as it was likely we would be fed on the plane. We sat around the airport and chatted about the trip. This is what people said was best...

Morgan loved everything but especially the jet boating, horse ride and the Porangahau pub. James loved staying in Porangahau doing some washing, the Botanic Gardens, swimming and hanging out together. For Tom it was jet boating, jet boating, jet boating ... oh and swimming was good too. Marcel liked jet boating and the fire station best but would like to stay in Porangahau more. Ethan loved the Weta workshop, jet boating. swimming and teasing Marcel!

Time to go through security and to say goodbye to Ethan as he was staying longer and then onto the plane. Virgin flight - have to buy your food, only entertainment was on your own device. Another \$40 for a late lunch. That's why the tickets were cheap!

Thanks to my traveling companions - it was fun.

Fred

THE END