

### From Dunedin to Hokitika

## Once Deep Down South and Back

March the 14th, New Zealand: Dark clouds of thunder darken the sky behind the Pass. Cold wind blows directly in our faces, and we shiver – despite the strenuous way up the Pass. We get to the top of the Pass and the storm takes hold of us. We slip quickly into our rain gear and commence going down as the Antarctic storm hits us with full strength. Hail falls down painfully on our skin and the storm nearly takes our breath. We search for shelter behind a rock, the temperature is just 7 degrees Celsius. Welcome to Southland! The landscape is breathtaking, overwhelming – but the weather is challenging and takes almost all the fun out of cycling. But we comfort ourselves by thinking that this is not a short-term holiday where everything has to be perfect to balance our normal stressful routine but our real life, with all its up and downs. And in addition: don't you think plastic bags over our shoes look pretty stylish?!



#### Our Way

3522km, 27,342 vertical metres! In March we finally quit our straight forward route and turned to being guided without a definite plan - by wind, weather, and our mood. After indulging extensively in Dunedin's City life, the Otago Central Rail Trail calls us. The route to it leads over extreme steep hills - we were recommended to use the train but we would not listen!. The Rail Trail itself was lovely and flat surrounded by impressive landscape, but a really nasty headwind confronted us the whole time.

Thus 158 normally easy kilometres turned into a real pain! At the end of the Rail Trail we revived in the beautiful town of Alexandra. Then again over challenging hills we fought our way down to the Catlins, a remote and vast coastal strip in the very extreme south east of the South Island of New Zealand. A region where you might have four seasons in one day – like we experienced it.

But we survived and went to Slope Point, the southernmost point of New Zealand and finally arrived in Invercargill, the southernmost and probably windiest city in New Zealand.



Short break here in Invercargill for St. Patrick's Day, then we had to be strong Germans again! We rode directly to Queenstown, where at last we were rewarded with sunshine, warm temperatures and a homestay in Lyman and Olga's beautiful cottage. Our Christchurch Kiwi friends had advised us to travel to Doubtful Sound, but instead, weakened by wind and hills, we booked an organized bus tour to the wild and lonesome Milford Sound (a deep fiord of unique beauty) in the Fiordland National Park – New Zealand's largest national park and a World Heritage site. We sat in the bus with an enchanted and most delighted smile on our faces that no one was able to explain. A boat cruise led us through the fiord to the open sea, just great! After that, to balance that petrol-filled trip, we cycled over the highest road pass of New Zealand, (the Crown Range with 1080 vertical metres) to the picturesque holiday



village Wanaka, where we took some time off to digest all these experiences and awesome sights. After that the South Island's West Coast was waiting for us, with quite friendly weather for that region (which is also known as the wet coast). We made good progress, and indulged in the sights and smells of the lush rainforest reaching the sea and the two Southern Alps glaciers, Fox and Franz Josef. In Hokitika we again reached the shore of the Tasman Sea, separating New Zealand from Australia.



#### Intercultural Exchange

We keep on meeting and talking to a lot of Kiwis and therefore get to know many remarkable things about this country and its inhabitants. We liked especially a story about Murray Gunn, the youngest son of a family who lives all alone in Fiordland National Park. Murray had just turned 82 and had not left his wilderness



campground for nearly 20 years. To get some spice into his life he organized – with lots of advertisement and money – a nudist weekend at his camp. The response was very good, but on that weekend it rained heavily and it had to be cancelled. Deep disappointment for Murray!

The Kiwis ability of sharing our joy is overwhelming when they meet us on our tandem. A lot of them, especially our Christchurch Kiwi tandem friends, would like to travel with us straight away. Up to now we are quite a bit known around the island, somehow everybody seems to have overtaken us on the road somewhere. And we got the nickname “Harley Davidson of the Rail Trail”, in the Waipiata Pub our picture is even meant to be pinned to the blackboard. Awesome!



**Meeting the Animal**

Well, we thought that we had got really relaxed to this point in time. But in the Backpackers of the bigger cities we have the rare unfortunate experience of meeting the ultimate master of cruising. That species – let’s be nice to him and call him the “Cruiser” – describes himself as a freedom seeking adventurer and can be met on the sofa most of the time, lying there crouched with naked smelly feet and dirty hair under a thick wool cap. Either this species does not do anything, or watches the Simpsons at full volume and/or recovers from the night before. The “Cruiser” has a way with words: The alternative for bad weather (uncensored quote): *“If the weather is fucking shit, you gotta party.”* If we were to follow that mantra we would have been drunk the whole of the last two weeks... ! If the weather is becoming fine again he tries to get a lift to the next hostel, preferably

from naïve young girls with their own car, who are attracted by his animal charm. An existence of being slightly high and a determined willingness to mate typifies the “Cruiser”. But the “Cruiser” is not very popular with the other folks. This could be caused by his different type of digestion. In the morning, he likes to relive the drinks he had the night before by chundering in the toilet for everyone else to relive as well! This is not the way we like to be – if we were, our friends would not let us stay with them anymore for a visit! The watching of this “Cruiser” species, especially his mating, is not always nice, but still most entertaining in a strange sort of way.



This leads us to other more interesting animals: 500 pairs of eyes are staring nervously at us, then after 10 seconds, 2000 feet stamp away – sheep wherever you look, not very bright though, but we cannot get enough of these cute fellows. Especially the merino sheep are lovely with their thick wool that surrounds them like the coat of a king. We also are accompanied by a lot of huge cattle herds, which fear us a little but still watch us quite curiously. Furthermore, we meet lamas, deer, emus, rabbits, possums, salmon and uncountable birds - we cannot even name their species. We saw penguins in Oamaru - now we still hope to encounter dolphins. At the moment we are plagued by millions of the world famous Kiwi sandflies. Do not dare to be once without repellent: If so, you are full of bites (but as usual only the females bite...!) From Pete at the Bushman’s Centre in Pukekura (the west coast’s smallest town with a population of two) we learn: “Never kill a sandfly there will be 40 at its funeral”. More about Pete, Justine and their possum pies next month.



**What’s coming next?**

How will we spend our last month in New Zealand? Our time here has passed much too quickly, but there are still some wonderful things ahead of us: the “rest” of the West Coast up to Nelson, the return to the North Island and our possible route via Lake Taupo and the thermal area of Rotorua; and due to getting autumn here we are now looking a little bit forward to Hawaii. But for now we say:

(As the Kiwis say in the South Island)

**Good as gold!**

**Julia und Stefan**

*“Far better is it to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checked by failure...than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in a gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat.”* Theodore Roosevelt, 1899.



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