

ActiveSteve's Blog
2007/2008 Fiji and New Zealand
Stephan Meyer

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NEW ZEALAND PREP GOING WELL

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2007

(POSTED ON: SUN, 2007-11-18 20:52 BY STEVE)



Hey gang! I just thought I'd bring you all up to speed on how my trip preparations have been going. As I sit here writing this post, I realize that in 14 short days, I'll be heading to the airport for my four month trip-of-a-lifetime to Fiji and New Zealand. Although I've been saying all along that I'm not planning my trip in any detail, there is still a fair amount of preparation to undergo in order to make sure that all the loose ends are tied

up. In this post I'll try to give you folks a sense of what's been happening on my end. I've also put up a folder of pictures on flickr to show you some of the stuff in detail. Head on over to [the flickr folder](#) to see them. On with the tale.

For just a sampling of what's been happening, it's been more than just planning for the unknowns. I've also been making sure that I had a few good times with my friends and Jody before leaving as well. As such, I've managed to head out to a great Halloween shooter party with some of my adventure racing friends. I've been to a wedding where a lot of people I haven't seen in a while were. Also, there has been the obligatory disc golf days, as well as a couple different poker nights, one at Matt's, and one out at Calabogie at Jim Doucette's property.

The Calabogie Poker night was also a prime time to try out one of my new purchases. The Big Agnes Seedhouse SL2 tent that I'll be sleeping in for a lot of the next 4 months. Even though it was already early October, I decided it would be as good a time as any to try it out. The only downside to this was that it was destined to be below freezing at night. As a result, I had to take a heavier sleeping bag than I will for NZ, but it would be the same procedure for setting the tent up, and seeing how much room there would be. In spite of the cold weather, I'm happy to report that this little abode should work splendidly for me on a long trip. I was even able to fit the tent, sleeping bag, and a thermarest into one dry bag, so I know I'll have a dry bed no matter the outdoor conditions.

The other major physical preparation work that I've had to undertake involved stripping down my bike to its bits and pieces in order to properly de-grease everything and check everything over to figure out whether I'd need new parts or not. This was a good idea regardless, especially at the end of the racing season. In the end, I changed and/or replaced quite a few things including the brake pads, rotors, gear cables, pedals, handlebar grips, seat, a new bell, safety mirror, and had the rear shock re-sealed. On top of those things, I've also installed a few things to make my trip more enjoyable, such as a handlebar bag, touring tires, and rear rack with trunk. I also put a ton of reflective tape all around the bike to make me more visible.

Also, to haul all of my stuff around, I bought a fancy-pants trailer. If you want to see it and read more about, head over to the [Burley Nomad page](#). I had originally planned to buy a trailer once I landed in New Zealand, and had even lined one up in advance, but in the end,

I ended up finding a great deal locally at [The Cyclery](#). Someone had ordered this trailer in last year, and never picked it up, so it had just been sitting around taking up space at their store, so they were happy to sell it, and I was happy to take it off their hands. My only fear was whether or not I'd be able to pack it in with my bike.

The only way to find out was a test run. I had lined up a sweet bike box which I'm borrowing from Jim, which has quite a bit more room than my box, and is easier to pack up. Once I finally got that home, I tore down my bike and started packing up the various pieces into the bike box. I was thrilled to find out that I was able to fit the trailer in the box as well, once it was broken down into pieces. The only downside is the weight. I think the whole packed box weighs in the neighbourhood of 80-85 lbs. Hopefully Air Canada won't be too hard on me. The trouble with flying and the new baggage regulations, I'm only entitled to one piece of luggage apart from my bike box, so I really had to stuff everything in. I also had to buy a new duffle bag as my checked bag, which will double as the 'trunk' for my trailer. Once it's loaded up, it'll weigh the full 50lbs that I'm allowed to check free of charge.

I won't even bother getting into all the little things that I've been picking up here and there for the trip. Granted, I'll be able to find pretty much anything I'd possibly need while on the road, but it's just easier for me to land and be able to get right down into the touring. I've tried to keep the costs to a minimum, but quite frankly, this is really my once in a lifetime trip, so I hadn't planned on cutting any corners.

Apart from all the 'durable' goods that I've been putting together, there were also the official details that had to be taken care of. Not the least of which was the Visa that I found out I would need in order to stay in NZ for a period of time exceeding 3 months. I thought I was good for 6 months, but that was incorrect! Luckily, I filled in my forms, and thankfully, living in Ottawa meant I could go in person to the NZ High Commission to submit the paperwork and pay for the VISA with cash, ensuring it could be processed fast. I've already gotten it back. Whew. I also had to book my Fiji vacation in advance, since I won't be biking there, but just trying to chill out all over the islands. I ended up booking a trip with Awesome Adventures Fiji on the advice of a friend living in Queenstown at the moment. If you'd like, read all about the [Lazy Threesome Package](#) to see what I'll be up to for my first week.

Well, I'll sign off for now. My apologies if my posts have been a bit boring of late, I promise things will pick up once I'm on the road doing 'interesting' things, rather than hastily throwing together my little stories in the evenings when I've got a little downtime. I spend all day writing as well, so it's not always appealing to write a blog post. Anywho, I'm looking forward to the next two weeks, and the good times ahead. There are still a few fun outings to go, including a little get-together at our place, and a season closing disc golf game with the boys. Till then, have a good time, and remember, if you want something, plan it out, and go for it!!

LEAVING ON A JET PLANE

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2007

(POSTED ON: SUN, 2007-12-02 23:14 BY STEVE)

Well, the bags have been packed, re-packed, weighed, and re-weighed. I'm now at my maximum allowable size and weight for pretty much everything. It's after 11pm the night before I fly out for Fiji, and it still hasn't sunk in. What am I embarking on? What will I discover? How will this change me? How will this bring me closer to my own realities? I have no idea, but I also have absolutely no fear. My life thus far has been as rewarding as



anyone could possibly hope for. You could say that I have everything I need right here. And yet, this idea to get away and undertake an adventure on my own has been germinating within me for as long as I can remember. I already wish that I was going for longer, even though this is the longest trip I've ever taken, and I will be doing it all on my own, while Jody minds the ranch.

My hope is that I'll drag as many people as I can along with me on my journey through this website. I hope to be able to fill you all in with my exciting, or boring tales, as well as share some of the sights from my trip, and show maps of where I've been going. With today's technology, staying in touch has never (in theory) been easier. Jody and I played around with Skype Video today trying out our 'lifeline'. Whenever I'm connected, I should be able to video-conference with her. The miles apart will seem to disappear, if only for a few minutes, hopefully helping me get through the tough times on the road.

It's been a long year of anticipation, and the time is finally here for me. I purposefully didn't map out a route of any sort, and hope to pretty much fly by the seat of my pants the whole way. As the saying goes "The journey *is* the destination." I have no appointments, no pressing engagements, just me, my bike, and time. Taking the bike should prove interesting. As I've mentioned, the bike and trailer pretty much forces me to get everywhere on my own. Backpacking in many ways is much easier for travel. I'm wholly dependent on my own power to get places. There will no doubt be days where I regret it, but I know the sum of the parts will be greater than the whole.

I'm feeling pretty philosophical at the moment about all this, but I really need to get some sleep. It was a little weird celebrating Christmas today, but also pretty fun. One of my gifts was a DVD Jody got for me called "[Asiemut](#)". It's a film shot by two Quebecers who biked 8000km from Mongolia to India. Very fitting film to watch before I embark on this trip, and a film that has definitely sparked my excitement. Thanks Jody!

Also, thanks for all you folks that made it out last weekend to my Bon Voyage party. You can have a look at [some of the pictures at flickr](#). It was great to see everyone that I could before heading out. Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, Happy Valentine's Day, Groundhog's Day, and Easter! I'll see you all in April 2008!!!!

LONG LAX LAYOVER...

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2007

(POSTED ON: SAT, 2007-12-08 04:43 BY STEVE)



Well, here I am, blogging to you live from the very boring LAX Terminal 2 lounge. The time here is 19:21, which is already 22:21 your time. I left for the airport in Ottawa quite a while ago already, yet have many more miles to journey before I get to Nadi, Fiji. My flight leaves here at 22:15, and it'll be after 6am on Wednesday before I finally reach my final destination. To get there, I travelled west only. You know what the funny thing is?

Well, to get to LA, I've travelled "back" in time 3 hours, but the further I fly west, I'll eventually flip forward in time, landing on the other side of the international date line. Weird stuff, isn't it? Let's flip back to earlier today, and you can catch up to my journey thus far.

Sunday night was the final supper for Jody and I together, and we opted for a nice cheese fondue with a bottle of white wine. All day, Jody had been warning me of the approaching snow storm, promising to dump us with at least 20cm of snow. However, when I finally turned in around 11:40pm, there was no sign of a big storm, but only a bit of freezing rain. Perhaps it would pass by us? Not so lucky. Upon waking up around 8am the next morning, I was greeted with a massive dump of snow. Oh yeah, big dump. Schools were all cancelled, and the roads were a mess. Not a great way to start the trip. Flights had been cancelled and delayed all over the place, mostly the Toronto and Montreal flights though. Luckily, I was flying through Chicago, and it looked like my flight would be on time, given that it wasn't leaving until after noon.

Jody and I put our backs into it, and fully shovelled out the driveway so that we could get out. No small feat. Luckily, I had packed the bike box and my big duffel in the car the night before, so there were no problems or delays there. We hit the road, and were surprised that although our street was complete shit, the other roads weren't too bad, and as a bonus, there was little traffic, as we had already missed rush hour. Once at the airport, I had 3 hours before flight, but there was no one on duty until 10am, so we just stood around waiting. When I finally checked in, there were a few tense moments as I waited to see if the bike would be taken. In the end, it was, although it cost me \$85. As the check-in lady said, "Merry Christmas United Airlines", when I told her it was much more than Air Canada. On the plus side, my bike was accepted, and apparently is checked all the way to Fiji at least. Sweet.

Getting through security was relatively uneventful as well, and once clear on the other side, I gave Jody a quick call from a payphone to let her know all was well. The Ottawa to Chicago was reading on-time, and then "departed" all while we were still waiting. Apparently they wanted to get their numbers up for on time departures in spite of the fact that we were definitely delayed. We left about an hour late. Luckily, I had about a 2 hour layover in Chicago, which should give me an hour to change flights. In the end, that flight was also delayed (as well as ultra-full), putting us almost another hour late to Los Angeles. Luckily, my layover here is still about 5 hours, hence this post. I've already eaten a crap

sandwich, and am just charging up the batteries on my UMPC and my iPod in a dark corner.

The Chicago-LA flight, although full, wasn't too bad either. I had my traditional window seat, and just listened to tunes until the movie came on. "Stardust" was the selection this time. Not a bad movie. Got a thumbs up from both Ebert and Roeper. Sienna Miller is in it, as well as Clare Danes and Robert De Niro. It's been compared to the Princess Bride, which I can sort of understand, but it has a few darker aspects than that. However, it was a good flick, and I'd recommend it too. I have no idea what equipment I'll be on next (like that Kev?), but I've got my fingers crossed for an in-seat entertainment system. I know I'll at least get some free booze and food this time. The last flight didn't have any free food, in spite of going across the country. I ended up spending \$5US on a snack box to tide me over.

While here, I opted to walk around the sprawling airport and all its terminals rather than take shuttle buses. Much better way to spend my time between flights. I visited the cool space-looking structure, where the 'Encounters' restaurant is located, but it was closed. It was still kinda neat to see though. As it turns out, I'm pretty sure this is my first time ever in LA. Not sure I need to return really. That's about it for now, I realize this post isn't too exciting for you, but it's given me a chance to do something to kill a bit of time. Guess I'll get back to music and Sudoku now ;-) Hope everyone's doing fine.

I've decided to extend this post until at least I arrived in Fiji, since that's a logical stopping point, get it? Hee hee. Anywho, after finishing off with my wait in LAX, I finally got to board the last flight of my journey until next week. This was an 11 hour flight from LA to Nadi, Fiji, overnight. The flight. Although not full, didn't allow me much rest. I was in a window seat, but had a seat-mate with me, meaning I couldn't sprawl out. Also, there was very little room to recline, so essentially, I got only about an hour of sleep in total. As I write this, I'm at the end of the first day, and have yet to take a nap, although my dorm-mates are taking one as I type ;-(.

I also have to relay a sad piece of news thus far. Upon arrival in Fiji, I got my duffle bag okay, but my bike has not arrived. I've decided not to sweat it, since I've got a week before I really need it. My guess is the baggage tag wasn't stuck on well enough, and the box is somewhere in transit. Here's hoping anyway. The baggage guy pointed to stacks of luggage explaining that they were all from the day before flight, so it happens a lot. All I know is if I don't have it in a week, I'll have to start worrying, and making phone calls to United Airlines. D'oh. Anyway, since I'm not worried about it, neither should any of you. I've already got far too many tales to share with you about day one. So move on to the next post :-)

A LIFETIME IN A DAY

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2007

(POSTED ON: SAT, 2007-12-08 04:44 BY STEVE)

Wow! What an amazing day I've already had in Fiji, and with no sleep either. Our flight landed at 5am this morning, when I promptly found out I had no bike, and would have no way to track it over the next week while I was out in the Yasawa Islands. Oh well, what can you do, right? I went to the tourist counter to get my tour vouchers. Everything else was in order, which meant I could at least move on with my life for the next while. From here, the day got really awesome, read on friends...



As I sat waiting for my shuttle bus, I picked out a few people that I recognized from the flight. Then, our particular hostel's shuttle came, and 7 of us boarded it. Once we got to reception, 2 couples were peeled from the lot, leaving 3 of us, who are now sharing a dorm for 8 people. Andrew from Toronto, and Stephanie from Sweden. Andrew is here for 2 weeks, Steph for 48 hours. Due to her schedule, we decided to get cracking on stuff in Fiji.

Although complete strangers, we hit it off well as a little group, and once back in the dorm, all took quick showers, and vowed to stay awake and make the most of the day we had. To those ends, we decided right away to forgo taxis and busses, and to walk from our hostel to Nadi town centre, a few km away. It was only about 7:30am, but the street was already busy with people going about their daily routines. We welcomed the chance to soak in the local culture, and wandered around for quite a ways before finally hitting the town. We were all pretty taken with the McDonalds early in the walk with the Bula sign on the way in.

Along the way, people were very friendly, yelling greetings or asking if we needed a taxi or such. One kind fellow, not a taxi, passed a few times, and offered us a lift to town, or the beach, telling us how far it was (it wasn't). Although we were tempted, we opted not to go with him. As he started to pull away, he motioned to me and also asked if we were looking for smokes, or weed. He wouldn't be the only one to ask, and luckily they weren't aggressive, just trying to make a buck I guess. In case you're wondering, we declined. How stupid do you think we are??

Once in Nadi, (pronounced Nandi BTW), we trolled the shops, not planning to buy anything, but admiring the handicrafts. Although people definitely wanted our business, they were nowhere near as aggressive as in Peru or Argentina, so we didn't mind too much. We made it to the end of town, where there is Fiji's largest Hindu temple, and proceeded to go for a guided tour of the property, and learn about some of the gods, etc. It was really cool, and we also learned a bit about the struggles of Fijians, especially over land, which they never get to own, and also about some of the struggles of the Hindus, which number between 10 and 20% of the population. Although none of us were very religious, we certainly enjoyed the experience.

After temple, it was time to think about next steps, and what to eat. We ended up at a curry house, and had a great meal there, with all the trimmings. Although not cheap, it also

wasn't that expensive, and the atmosphere was great. Once our bellies were full, Andrew and I turned our attention to the matter of beer, and Fiji Bitter in particular. You see, the Fijians are nice to a fault, and we were told by the hotel staff no less, to just buy water and beer in town, as it would be cheaper.

To maximize the cost savings, we sought out a grocery store, to not only look for beer, but also a towel for Andrew, a pen and notepad for Steph, bug dope for Andrew and I, and some more water. We found everything that we needed except for the note pad. The beer was pretty reasonable, running \$3 for a quart, where at the hostel it was \$4 for a regular bottle. We bought a dozen to enjoy today as well as in the coming couple days on the tour. Yum.

To get back to the hostel, we opted to take the local hop-on busses, which only cost sixty cents, rather than the \$4+ of a taxi. It was great. We conversed with the locals and enjoyed the open-air bus. We were all amazed how fast it was getting back when you didn't have to walk along the baking road. Once back, we were sure it was late afternoon. Nope, turns out it was only around noon. Even after playing around in the pool for a while, snapping pictures and enjoying a beer, when we returned to the room, the clock said only 1:30!! Damn, this was turning out to be quite a long day. However, we were bound and determined to stay strong.

Our next adventure was to head to the beach down the road, which the hostel told us would only be about a 10 minute walk. A far cry from the hour estimate one of the folks on the street told us! We took the chance, and found success. It really was pretty close. Also, the neat part was that this was a 'locals' beach, not a tourist beach, so we saw all the townfolk enjoying the water. We started taking a nice beach stroll, and I decided to hit the surf to try out the water. Oh my god, I've never in my life been in water this warm. It was actually hot. I have colder baths sometimes. And super-salty too. It was nuts. A little Fijian boy saw me, and decided to swim out to me.

We started communicating however we could, and I took his picture and showed him. Soon after, his mom, I assume, and sister, and the father, as well as another woman were on the beach with us. We started talking, and were having a great time chatting with them and learning a bit about their culture. Before I knew it, Stephanie had the idea that we should build a sand castle with the kids. What a great idea it turned out.

We spent the next probably hour and a half on the beach in the blazing Fijian sun playing in the sand, expanding the concept, and laughing and having fun. At one point, they also weaved a basket from a palm frond, as well as made a fan. It was a very surreal experience for us. Here we were, totally jet-lagged, yet enjoying life in a whole new way with these Fijians. If you've ever needed to see people that are completely content with what they have, these people epitomized that view. It was very refreshing and humbling. I don't think I've ever had such a great time building a sand castle.

When we finally decided we had to get out of the sun, it was difficult to say goodbye. The kids wanted to play more, but we were simply zapped by all the hot sun burning our tender white skin. We headed back to the hostel, and that's where I'm at this moment. I'm contemplating having some supper, then we'll probably play some pool and have a couple more beer before turning in early.

Thus far, I can definitely say this is shaping up to be the trip of a lifetime, when in the first day on no sleep, I've already connected with humanity in a way that I haven't in a very long time. I close by wishing you all the best, and promise to try and keep up the writing, but the experiences might start overwhelming me at times, preventing me from writing

everything out. Then again, maybe it's just a 2-quart, jet-lagged consciousness leading me to write this out ;-). Either way, hope you're all well!

A DAY MAKES A DIFFERENCE

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2007

(POSTED ON: SAT, 2007-12-08 04:45 BY STEVE)



Well, when I last wrote, I was telling you all about my first day in Fiji and the experiences that it held for me. Everything seemed to be going swimmingly for me, in spite of the fact that I had minimal sleep in the first 24 hours. Day two broke early for me, and I took a stroll around the hostel in the early morning light, after heavy evening showers. I felt pretty good, having finally gotten a night's sleep, and was looking forward to hitting the

Islands that were the main part of my Fiji adventure. On my stroll, I happened across the marine forecast to Fiji. Uh-oh. Cyclone warning. Cyclone Daman in particular, the first such storm hitting Fiji for the 07-08 storm season, which had just begun. The forecast called for rain for the next few days. However, as I would soon find out, that was just the beginning of my troubles for day 2. Read on for exciting news from days 2 and 3.

The first bad sign was that Stephanie, our Swedish roommate, had come down with a sickness of sorts. She had been ill since early in the morning, which worried Andrew and I, since we'd pretty much all eaten the same things the day before. However, I felt fine so far. After getting my things organized, I went down for my included breakfast. It wasn't too spectacular, consisting primarily of toast and orange juice. I had plenty of both, and would see them again later in my trip ;-(

Before boarding the bus for the marina, I'd hoped to get news about whether or not my bike had arrived at the airport, but ran out of time to make the phone call. The tour organizers said they could place the call from the boat, so we'd look into it later. Fair enough. I also had a stroke of genius while standing in the grocery store. I convinced the store manager to allow me to swap 3 of my now-warm beers for some ice cold ones. Man I'm smart! I also took some cash out of the ATM, after learning that the little islands are cash-only, and that I'd probably need money for overpriced water and beers.

Andrew and I boarded the boat, but he got off shortly after the ride started, as his tour dropped him off at one of the first Islands, whereas I was heading to the far north Islands, where the movie the Blue Lagoon was shot. Of course, the far north also coincided quite nicely with where the cyclone was. I noticed a headline in a newspaper which stated that the cyclone danger had passed. Nice. I started to question that however, as the ocean was getting rougher and rougher as we kept going. Before long, people were starting to look a little green around the gills. I was sure that it wouldn't afflict me, as I grew up on the ocean, right? Well, I spoke too soon to myself, because I soon started feeling a little crappy myself. However, I don't think it was motion sickness, because it was a general malaise.

Eventually, I bottomed out at some point where the swells were about 10 feet high. I just made it to a head in time to expel the contents of my stomach, the very same toast and

orange juice that I'd enjoyed earlier. Yuck. I immediately felt better however, and was sure that I'd make a speedy recovery after that. All told, the boat ride to get to my resort shuttle was over 5 hours in length, and boy did I want to get off by the end. Finally, it was time to board the shuttle boat to the island I was staying on. That in itself was a mild adventure too, with the swells making the 15 minute ride feel pretty dramatic.

Back on dry land, our Fijian host family were ready to serve us a late lunch. Unfortunately, I was totally unprepared to eat, as my malaise had gotten even worse. I headed straight to the washroom as soon as they mentioned where it was. Our main host was a gay Fijian by the name of Queen. Quite entertaining. After the meal time, I retreated to my sea-side Bure, located all of 3 feet from the ocean. Boy was it windy and loud. Apparently on our side of the island, it's always windy. Queen popped in on me later to give me a hot cup of water with ginger root to try and get me on the mend. I could barely move, but promised to drink it all. And I did, eventually. My two other bunkmates opted to nap the afternoon and early evening away as well.

We were roused for supper once again by Queen who said everyone was waiting for us. I felt a little bit better, so decided it best to try and force some food and liquids into me, even though they weren't quite staying down. After the meal, we had a little bit of entertainment when there was a national anthem singing contest by all the guests. As luck would have it, my bure, consisting of 3 Canadians, won the contest, and got a prize of a sleeve of Oreos and tin of peanuts, which we shared with everyone. After that, people just sort of milled about in the main hall chatting, playing cards, and drinking beers and water.

Conversation eventually turned to the weather, where we discovered that we were in fact in the path of the cyclone after all, and that it would likely hit between midnight and 3 am, if it would hit at all. Some guests were quite concerned, but by looking at the Fijians attitude towards it, I decided it shouldn't be a big deal. It would likely consist of a great deal of wind and rain, but nothing too dangerous. Of course, being literally a few feet from the ocean swells wasn't too reassuring. I made my way to bed by about 9:30pm. Before turning in, I made sure to pack up all my things, in case we had to be herded into the safest structure in our area, which was the plan in case things went bad. One of the resort guys was going to stay up and monitor the conditions as they progressed.

My roommates had opted to stay up and get drunk with a few Scottish lads, and they came back quite a bit later, and quite a bit more merry. I guess that's one way to prepare. It was amazing how much the wind was howling and the rain pelted us all night. There were definitely a few tense moments, but for the most part, I slept through it. When I awoke at 6am, the sea was still in turmoil, the rain coming down, and the wind howling. But it had definitely abated somewhat. So, I decided a swim was in order!

And what a warm swim it was. I was amazed. I'd decided to wear only my swimsuit for the next couple days, as I'd just be wet most of the time anyway. So I ran around wearing only my shorts and toting my camera. It was great. No one else was really up anyway, and I couldn't get to sleep again anyway. Queen eventually came to the shoreline, and took a video of the crazy Canadian with his mobile phone. Yup, even out here, they have coverage! Once I got tired of that, I headed back to the bure, and got the other two guys up in time for breakfast. On the other side of our bure were a couple ladies from the Farroah Islands as well, and the group of us decided to head over to the blue lagoon after the meal, since it was low tide. At high tide, you have to cut through the island on a very muddy path, but at low tide, you can just follow the shoreline.

We gathered up some snorkel gear, and another girl from England, and started the trek. It took about 30 minutes, and we were amazed at how dead calm it was on the other side of

the island. As I write this, the wind is still blowing fierce on our side of the island, but at the lagoon, it's as calm as calm can be. Once over there, we swam out and snorkelled in the waters, and it was great. I was amazed at just how many little corals there were, and the abundance of fish. They were everywhere, and not the least bit concerned about us either. We probably spent a good hour and a half there, and I snapped some pictures underwater with my camera as well. A great little (free) excursion. We trudged back just in time for lunch.

I've since had another little nap, and am now just killing time in the afternoon. The weather still isn't much to brag about, so most people are sticking to their dorms or bures. I don't mind one bit though, since it's still a sight better than shovelling snow. Hee hee. I spend one more night out here, then move on to another island, and spend two nights on a boat. Should be interesting. Hopefully the sea dies down a bit. I'm not sure when any of you will get to read these posts. I have a feeling it won't be until I'm in NZ. Either way, hope everyone is doing great!

CYCLONES, SICKNESS, AND SUNNY DAYS

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2007

(POSTED ON: SAT, 2007-12-08 04:46 BY STEVE)

Well, another day has passed, and certainly not any less interesting than the past few for me. It seems that wherever I go, interesting things will follow me. When I last wrote, I was reporting from the Sunrise Lagoon Resort, where we had been storm stayed as a result of the cyclone that had just passed through. Well, not only were we stuck there, the boats travelling between the islands had actually been cancelled as well, so even if I wanted to go somewhere, there was no way for me to move around anyway. Not only that, but my nagging illness wasn't going away either, and it seems to follow me in waves, with hours of feeling okay, followed by hours of feeling totally crappy. Those crappy hours are increasingly annoying, and has resulted in people offering me all sorts of medications and remedies from their homelands. I've accepted a few, but none seem to actually be doing me any good yet. Besides that unfortunate stuff, read on for more tales of fun from Fiji with ActiveSteve!



Most of yesterday was spent lounging, after the snorkelling at the Blue Lagoon. By supper, my stomach pains had grown so intense that I literally couldn't eat or drink anything, and that was really getting me down. By the end of the meal, one of the staff offered me a massage and a hot water and ginger concoction again, and I took him up on the offer. I suppose in the end, how many chances will I have in life to go for a full body massage from a Fijian anyway right? I was taken to a seaside hut, and was worked over with coconut oil for almost an hour, feeling like I was pure oil by the end of it. Sadly, it didn't stop my stomach pains, but the ginger tea felt okay as well. Once that was done, I basically went straight off to bed for another solid night's sleep. This time, my roommates didn't stay up late drinking. We had been told that boats might be cancelled for another

day, and that had us sort of bummed, as we wanted to get off our little island and see some more of the Yasawas.

As luck would have it, dawn the next morning broke clear skies and warm weather, with virtually no wind. Things were finally looking up. I also felt a little better in the stomach area, and decided to make the best of this new day. I had breakfast with everyone else, then had to decide very quickly on whether or not to visit some underwater caves right after eating. I decided yes was the right answer, after all, this trip is all about doing all the fun things, not just some of them, right? These caves were supposed to be something quite special, that not even a lot of Fijians had seen, who was I to turn down that opportunity.

Long story short, I made the right call. The water taxi took about 30 minutes, and the scenery was gorgeous the entire way. We saw some of the other spectacular islands that make up the Yasawas, and soon found ourselves at the island where the caves were located. Due to the fact that the last two days had been pretty crappy, there was a bit of a backlog of tourists wanting to take the tour, so there were huge groups. While that meant we could only see the two outer caves, it was still mighty spectacular. Eventually, I'll have all the pictures posted. Once again, the waterproof camera was golden. One cave entailed us swimming underwater to get to it, and the built-in flashlight helped me and other navigate the pitch black cave. I snapped a bunch of fun pictures.

Back out in the main cave, I also took part in a ritual the locals do, which is to try and climb as high as you can up the cave wall, then dive off it into the dark water. I got up pretty high, and was a little leery peering down at the water. But, when you've got 25 or so people counting down from 5 for you to jump, what can you do? It was truly a rush, and I definitely didn't regret it. Of course, the water is at least 20 feet deep, so I was in no danger. A local was even higher than I was when he jumped, and made it just fine. After the dive, it was back out to our waiting water taxis, and then back to Sunrise for a final meal and to wait for the shuttle back to the main boat. I was slated to spend the next 2 nights aboard a boat, but I found out then that the boat was still on the mainland due to the cyclone. Oops! I needed alternative accommodations, and pronto.

There were a few recommendations, and I opted for a place called the Korouva Eco Resort, on one of the larger islands. It boasted a fresh water pool, and seemed pretty inviting. After 2 days of no showers, except for a dribbling of salt water from a tap, the fresh water sounded very appealing. Once aboard the big boat, I got them to make the arrangements, and I was off. From what I can see so far, it was the right call. I'm writing this from my dorm, and while it's very hot here, the place is heaps nicer than my first resort. There is a large deck, music, pool, nice beach, and some trails heading into the island. I think it'll do just fine for a night. I've already met a bunch of nice people here, and the pool? Divine! I think it's really going to be about the little things on this trip :-)

They also have high-speed Internet supposedly here, so I might finally get to post some of these stories, although the pictures will have to wait. Tomorrow, I'm still supposed to get on the cruise boat, so that should be fun. Oh, and the bike? Still no word, I'll have to check on that tomorrow if I can. Either way, no sense worrying about that now, is there? Well, I'm sweating up a storm now, and have limited battery power, so I'll sign off for now. Hope all is well in the chilly white north!

PARADISE FOUND

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2007

(POSTED ON: THU, 2007-12-13 17:13 BY STEVE)



Well, after a slow start, things are truly humming along now on the Fijian Islands. Unfortunately for me, this leg of the journey is almost over, and it's back to the mainland tomorrow night. However, that still leaves me almost 24 hours on one more island. Oh geez, I just realized that I haven't written in a couple days though :-). So of course, I do have some additional stories to share with you all about my last couple days in the South Pacific. The weather has definitely done a complete about-face, now that Daman has left Fiji for good, with limited damage having been inflicted. I've realized that if I try to write about every last thing that happens to me while I'm away, you'll probably all get very tired of reading my stories, so I may have to try to

shorten up some of the adventure-log stories. However, much as I write for all my readers, I'm also writing for me, and this serves as my travel journal as much as anything else. That being said, read on if you'd like to catch up with ActiveSteve!

As I mentioned, Korovou was a pretty sweet little resort that I was at a couple days ago, and it even gave me the opportunity to pop 4 blog posts up on the site, so for that I'm thankful. However, that was pretty expensive and slow, so this post likely won't be up until New Zealand, as with the pictures as well. The next morning at that resort, after an INCREDIBLY hot and sticky night, I got up early and headed straight for the fresh water pool to 'freshen up'. It was a good start to the day. I also realized that for the first morning, I wasn't rushing off to the loo to take care of plumbing problems. Sweet, perhaps I'd turned a new leaf. At breakfast, after realizing it was Sunday, we were all invited to attend a local church service on Naviti Island, which we were on. I hadn't planned on it, but after seeing that most of our little crew were heading over there I decided that I might as well too. This would prove more beneficial than I would have thought.

The service was conducted mainly in English, and was pretty nice. There was a bit of raising the roof, with a nice little trio singing with some good electronic accompaniment. The service leader also took the time to thank us personally for attending, and we got to mingle with the locals as well in the church, exchanging blessings, etc. The point of the sermon that day was that you have to (obviously) trust in God, but also that you can put all your problems on him, and he'll take care of them. So, I silently passed my bike woes on to him. It couldn't hurt, right?

After the sermon, we all congregated (get it?) back at poolside, and enjoyed the beautiful warm weather exchanging addresses and contact information. A few different people were also heading to NZ next, and we hoped to try and get together at some point while we were there. I also scored a calling card to use while there from a couple heading home. Sweet. By lunchtime, I cracked open my last quart of beer that I'd lugged from the mainland and enjoyed it in what I'd call perfect conditions in the South Pacific. Now I finally understood why people actually come to these islands. It truly was paradise found now. The time however came that I had to board yet another water taxi bound for yet another destination

to make yet another full new group of friends. It's amazing how every single day starts anew with seemingly best old friends, then you leave them, and start the process again. This kind of trip really puts you in contact with a large group of like-minded people. But I digress. Today I was off to Wana Taki, the cruise ship. Yippee!

The boat ride was less than an hour this time, and on the boat, I asked the tour company to once again check on the status of my bike. They tried to put a few calls in to the mainland, but were unable to connect, and told me to check back in from my next boat, the Wana Taki. Fair enough. In some regards, I didn't really want to know, as I feared it would be bad news. Once the cruise ship was in sight, we got taxied once again to our new floating quarters. Boarding the boat, it was again a fresh batch of faces, with the initial shyness that comes with it, but once again, people sought other people, and by lunch, we were all mingling and a friendly group. Here an Aussie, here a Scotsman, here some Americans, here some Germans, here an Italian, you get the idea...

After eating, there were a couple Danish ladies and an English girl that wanted to go kayaking, and as they were tandem kayaks, I joined them. We had fun paddling around on our own, found a deserted beach, and swam among the fish and the coral. Turns out this area was great for snorkelling and diving as well. Intriguing. There was a dive master on the boat too, I made a mental note to look into scuba diving. Once we wrapped that up, it was back to the boat. Apparently, there had been a call for me at the boat. The news? My bike! It had arrived in Nadi, and was waiting for me at the airport. Strange coincidence, wasn't it? I told everyone there the story about going to church, and that God took my problem for me. You be the judge whether it was coincidence. Either way, I was one happy camper. Might as well celebrate, right?

Well, how to celebrate? Read on for a special post next how I did that....

KAVA FOR HIRE

MONDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2007

(POSTED ON: THU, 2007-12-13 17:14 BY STEVE)

So, just how does one celebrate the return of a prized possession when floating around in the South Pacific on a boat anchored off shore? Well, apart from doing high jumps off the third deck, there were other options. I could of course drink my face off, but that leaves one feeling a little under the weater, and since I had already decided to do a scuba dive the next morning, that was out of the question. However, a German and Italian fellow each had a great solution. We decided we should try to source some authentic Fijian Kava. For more info on this, I would implore you to do a Google search on it. There is quite a bit of history and lore to Kava, and I had to try it, and the only way is for a Fijian to prepare it for you. Read on for more about this exciting tale of narcotics on the high seas, complete with the stealthy delivery.



We made some quiet inquiries to the cook about whether there was an option to get Kava, as we had noticed a large traditional Kava bowl on a top shelf by the bar. We were later

informed that for the low price of 30 FJD, we could get a kilo, which would last easily an evening. That meant roughly 8 CDN dollars out of my pocket to try it out. We were in. Arrangements were made, and as darkness descended, a boat was sent out to a nearby village to acquire the crushed root which is used to prepare it. After supper, we had a table prepared for us, with the large Kava bowl in the center, and a Kava chief installed himself and started preparing the first bowl.

Kava is prepared the following way. Fresh water is poured into the bowl. Probably 2-3 L. Then, the powder is put in a cloth sack, like cheese cloth. This is then kneaded in the water with the hands, turning it a milky color. This is worked for a little while, at which point the liquid is ready. Then, two little bowls are used to measure and pour out helpings. You go around the table, each person drinking a bowl, until everyone has had one. You then relax and socialize for a while before the next bowl. This is repeated until all the kava is gone, which can take many hours. In this time, you are learning about your neighbours and guests, and forming bonds. Before each bowl, you do a single cupped-hand clap, and exclaim Bula! After downing the bowl, you do an additional 3 cupped-hand claps.

So what does this kava do, and what's the deal? Well, as I mentioned, it's a narcotic. A little like novacaine maybe. It causes your lips and tongue to tingle, and supposedly, if you drink it in large quantities, your whole face can go a bit numb. Well, in spite of literally drinking it for 3+ hours, yours truly never really did notice any great effects apart from a slight tingle occasionally. And the taste? Well, it looks like dirty dishwater, and the taste is similar. Best comparison is probably just earthy water. After all, it is a root, not thoroughly cleaned, filtered by a cloth, then drank. It was nothing to write home about, yet here is a whole post about it. I'm very glad I got the opportunity, and even though I was worried it wouldn't be as authentic, my concerns were laid to rest.

We had started the ceremony with most of the group involved, with 13 or 14 of us, but eventually, most people drifted off to either just hang out in the back of the boat, or to watch movies in the air conditioned (!) sleeping cabin. In the end, it was 3 of us, and the entire crew of 7 men drinking it up. Well, everyone except the cook, as the Chief from his village had forbid any villagers from drinking with tourists while working. At one point, a few of them were playing guitar, ukelele, and singing. I brought out my penny whistle and egg, and we had some fun just making some music in the dark night while drinking the kava. Five stars for authenticity yet again.

So that's the tale of the Kava, and how the little Canadian that could drank down 18+ bowls in 3 hours. One for the memory file for sure.

SCUBA DIVES AND CRAB RACES

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2007

(POSTED ON: THU, 2007-12-13 17:15 BY STEVE)



Howdy all again. I'm going to have to try to write briefly this time, as I just noticed I'm down to 40 minutes of battery life, and on the islands, there certainly isn't really reliable power, so I'll cap off the rest of my day's stories with the past 18 hours excitement. Once again, the sun is killing me out here, and re-applying every few hours is the norm to avoid the super-extreme Canuck burn! The highlight for the day has to be my

introductory scuba dive, which I splurged the 120 FJD to do, having to actually dust off my credit card to pay for. Had it been cash-only, as most of the events are, I couldn't have done it. I was not disappointed, and have now decided that I should definitely get PADI certified at some point, as the feeling is phenomenal. Read on...

In spite of having been up pretty late for the Kava ceremony, I still managed to be one of the first up in the morning, and promptly slapped on a dallop of lotion all over me, in preparation of another blazing day in Fiji. I didn't jump right in the water this morning, but I knew I'd spend plenty of time in it later. Also, did I mention the "Steve Twist"? That's the name everyone gave to my dive of the day before in which I dropped the 15 feet to the water and landed flat on my back. Painful beyond belief. Anyway, once everyone got up, the divemaster briefed us and we headed to a nearby island resort where the dive shop was located. Since there were 7 of us first-timers, we split into two groups, and I was in the second group.

To pass the time, I followed the first group into the water for a while, snapping some underwater shots of them in their gear trying out all the moves. It was already very hot, and the sand literally burned my feet in seconds. Now I finally understand why Fijians are also fire dancers and walkers as well. They must have soles that are an inch thick to walk on all that sharp crushed coral and hot sand. However, I'm digressing. I think I'm just a bit tired sitting here writing all these posts at once while enjoying a couple beer on a breezy island.

Diving. Fantastic. Saw some cool stuff, including an octopus hiding in coral, some lion fish (3), and some puffers, as well as thousands upon thousands of other types of fish in their native environment. I was absolutely blown away by the amount of diversity in the ocean around here. We only went down to about 12m, but that was plenty to get the taste of things. I think some day I'll take a weeks vacation in the Carribbean or something, and take a full-time PADI course. It's awesome to swim like a fish and be able to breathe underwater.

Once the dive was over, we went back to the cruise boat for a last meal, and some more swimming and lazing until the yasawa flyer boat was to pick us up and take me to the next island again at 2:30. It was hard to say goodbye again to the new group of friends I'd made, but that's the way the water flows down here. Only one night left, on the South Sea Island, which is only a half hour from the mainland.

This place is absolutely tiny. You can walk around the island in less than five minutes. However, it boasts a little freshwater pool, volleyball court, combo dorm / welcome house, and staff quarters. Since arriving a few hours ago, I've gone snorkeling yet again, played a bit of volleyball, had a shower, eaten, and taken part in crazy games. The crazy games? Well, we did some hermit crab racing, then some orange passes games, and things like that. A little silly, but good way to break the ice with the group. Speaking of which, time for me to sign off and join some of the crew here to talk about my kava ritual of last night, as they are asking. Cheerio, and take care all! BTW, my crab did not win. Boo.

FAREWELL FIJI, TIME TO WORK

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2007

(POSTED ON: THU, 2007-12-13 17:19 BY STEVE)

Hey gang. How is everyone? Hopefully you've been enjoying my little posts that I've put up so far from Fiji. As my title implies, I sort of treated the Fiji portion of my trip as the true 'vacation'. From here on out, there will definitely be some hard work to take care of. Namely, hauling myself, my gear and my bike over thousands of kilometers of hilly roads all throughout New Zealand. While I'm certainly extremely excited about starting this adventure finally, I must admit I'm also a little apprehensive after speaking to loads of people coming from NZ. What have I gotten myself into by doing this by bike? Either way, now isn't the time to dwell. Do or do not. There is no try, right? Anywho, this post will serve as my final thoughts on Fiji, along with the flight to NZ and customs stuff. Read on dear patrons...



My final day in the Yasawa Islands was spent on South Sea Island, which as I mentioned was an extremely small island, just off the coast of Nadi, Fiji, about 30 minutes by boat. The morning started right away with an extremely bright and hot sun. Looks like during summer in Fiji, you're either battening down the hatches for cyclones, or you're cooking in the sunshine. All my arm hair has already gone light blond in a mere week of sun exposure. I imagine when I get back to Canuck land, I'll look like some kind of weather-beaten beach bum! Cool. Anyway, due to the size of the island, I wasn't sure I'd be able to fill my day with much excitement. I was also getting a little antsy to get back on the road to start the bike odyssey.

As soon as I finished breakfast at 7am, I headed to the dive shack and grabbed a paddle, PFD, and kayak. I hit the surf, and did several laps of the island and then ventured a little further out into the waters. I stopped paddling for a bit, and pointed myself out to the open waters and imagined what it would be like to be stranded in a little boat in a big ocean. It was very unnerving. I pray I'm never out in the middle of the ocean in a rescue raft. It would not be fun. After my castaway experience, I headed once again to the dive shack, this time for mask, fin, and snorkel. Early day is the best time for snorkelling as it isn't ultra hot yet, and the boats haven't stirred everything up too badly. I spent probably an hour

and a half exploring all the coral reefs, swimming among the thousands of fish again. As always, this was a cool experience. My only problem was that I had no hat or shirt on, and although my back was lathered up with lotion, I hadn't put anything on my noggin, so today I'm sporting the latest in bright red head designs! Oh well, it was worth it.

Once this was all done, it was still only about 9:30am, and the boat out wasn't leaving until 5:30, so I still had an essentially full day ahead of me. I hung out at the pool for a while chatting with some Americans who were on their way home after spending about 8 months in Australia. I also took some time to pack up my stuff, and just generally chill out and have a couple drinks. Although time passed slowly, it was eventually lunchtime. Once my belly was full, I finally cracked open a couple of my NZ books and a map, and plotted out my next couple weeks in NZ. I think I'll do the far north of NZ first, as it isn't quite full summer, so it won't be too hot up there yet, and then I can head south as things get warmer. That was when the Asian invasion happened. The divemaster had warned me it was Korea day, but I didn't really know what that meant. Well, I found out around 1pm, when about 80 Koreans invaded the island totally. Did I mention it was a tiny island you can walk around in 4 minutes? Yup, peace and quiet were no longer an option. I packed up my books and map, and joined the Americans who had started a game of Monopoly. Turned out it was a good way to kill time, so I watched them for a while.

After games, we hit the pool, again, and then the volleyball court. I managed, to the horror of everyone, to dive for the ball directly into a pile of coral bits. Ouchy. First blood was all mine. One of the Island staff sort of laughed, but said it really isn't worth diving into the coral to get the ball, it was only a game after all :-). What's a little action without the excitement though, right? All these things passed the time, and we were finally boarding the shuttles to get back onto the main island hopper boat bound for the mainland. Once aboard, I was reunited once again with other travellers I'd met over the course of the week, and we caught up on our latest resort experiences. Back at the marina, I made my way to the travel office to get my bike, which I was now responsible for carting around. That was pretty annoying, but I was awful glad to finally have it back in my possession. They thought I'd have to hire a van, which would have cost quite a bit, but I managed to sweet talk a courtesy bus driver into loading it on his bus and hitched a free ride back to the airport. I figured it'd be easier just to leave it at the airport overnight. For a mere 6 FJD, it was in guarded storage. That was the best idea, as I had to catch a 6:55am flight next morning anyway, and didn't want to fight trying to find a truck to take me back early from the hostel.

I grabbed a cheap cab back to the hostel, had a nice warm meal and got to re-packing my bags for the 3 hour flight to Auckland. I was getting up at 4:30am, so I wanted to get to sleep nice and early. Two things worked against me. It was friggin hot as hades in our room, and the 4 others in the room were up much later getting things ready. At least 2 of them were on my same flight though, so I didn't have to worry about waking them up in the morning. My alarm went off far too early, and I stumbled around in the dark getting things ready to go. I shared a cab back to the airport and retrieved my bike, then worked on getting checked in. Wouldn't you know it, my duffle was over-weight now, and they were frowning at the bike box, as they weighed that as well, and said it might have to go as cargo. A little kindness and patience from me though went a long way, and everything got checked and not a single penny was paid. Sweet! I stayed with my bike until it was officially handed to the baggage loaders, so I felt satisfied I'd see it later today. I bought a stamp for a postcard I picked up, and headed through security. There was only an hour till the flight, so I just sat around after changing my remaining 35 FJD into 26 NZD.

And so that finds me here, high over the South Pacific on my way to Auckland, where a friend is picking me up. I'm a little concerned that customs in NZ will take a bit of time, as they are extremely protective of the biosecurity measures. I had to tick a few 'Yes' boxes due to my bicycle, hiking shoes, etc, which they need to make sure aren't carrying in contaminated soil. Lucky for me, I bought pretty much new everything before leaving anyway, so it'll probably just be a matter of waiting in a line. New tires, new shoes, new tent, etc. etc. No crusty poison dirt on my boots!

So, Fiji, what to close with on my thoughts on Fiji. Well, I think that a 1 week stay in the Yasawa Islands was plenty for me. I had a wealth of experiences up in the Islands, seeing both large and small islands, some with amenities, some without. I got to do Scuba diving, lots of snorkeling and kayaking, met lots of new people, suffered with food poisoning, weathered a cyclone while a few feet from the raging ocean. Yup, it was definitely a month's worth of experiences crammed into 1 week. Could I have spent longer? Maybe, but like most travelers with wanderlust, I was ready to bid adieu when the time came. The people were very hospitable, and unlike many other poor countries I have visited, they didn't seem as aggressive in their panhandling and tourist-money grabbing as I've experienced elsewhere. We were always greeted with warm smiles and music, but without the expectation that you open your wallet. They seemed to just generally want to expose us to their country and way of life. That was nice and refreshing. I didn't get to experience a whole lot of the mainland apart from my trip into Nadi Village and the Hindu temple, but that wasn't a big part of my trip. Were I to return, I may tour more of Viti Levu by visiting the Coral Coast and Suva, but I got what I wanted out of this first week.

Yesterday, sitting in a chair on the beach staring at the ocean and feeling the warm breeze and hearing the water lap up on the shore, I was struck by something. I'd only been on the road for 7 days! I'm merely scratching the surface of this trip. I'll be gone for the next additional 3.5 months, with many more things ahead. It was a rather odd feeling. Will I truly start to miss home and the comforts it brings? It's hard to imagine, since everything will be so new and exciting, but I think the possibility exists. Will I discover I can't bear to return to the structured life of work, home, and responsibilities? I guess that's a possibility too. The only certainty I feel is that this trip is indeed what I needed at this point in my life. When this one is over, I'm sure I'll already be thinking ahead to the next chance I might have to do an extended departure. Maybe a year next time? Who knows? Mongolia to Tibet, into the Himalayas and through Asia perhaps? The world is a big place for a wanderer with adventure on his mind all the time. Don't get me wrong people, I miss you all dearly, but I still feel connected to everyone through the words I write for you and pictures I take for you to enjoy as well. But remember, you've gotta dream big, and go after that.

FIRST DAY IN NZ

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2007

(POSTED ON: THU, 2007-12-13 17:20 BY STEVE)



Huzzah! I've finally made it. Well, actually, I've already been in NZ for over a day now, but am only now finally getting a chance to write up a little post about it. My flight yesterday went very smoothly, not a single complaint from me. I was supposed to be picked up at the airport by Greg's brother Kevin, so wanted to make sure I got through customs quickly and efficiently. As my last post mentioned, NZ is very tough on their

biosecurity measures, so I wasn't sure that things would go all that smoothly upon entry. However, my fears were laid to rest, and I actually made it through in record time. I actually think it was one of my fastest customs checks of my life, especially considering all the gear I had. I was also blown away by how quickly my bike made it to me in the luggage area. I had barely gotten my duffle off the conveyor belt when a side door opened up, and a fellow rolled in the box. Sweet. Anyway, read on for the rest of the past 24 hours excitement.

Once clear of customs, I had to wait a few minutes for my ride. He'd been counting on a bit of a customs delay, so wasn't quite there right away. I didn't much care though, since I was getting both a ride from him, as well as a place to stay. Not a bad deal, and also gave me a place to get all my stuff sorted out before I hit the road this weekend for real. Of course, the first thing that I noticed is the fact that they drive on the other side of the road. I immediately tried to get in the wrong side of Kevin's car, to which he laughed. I'm sure I'll be an expert by the time I get back, but there will no doubt be a couple of awkward moments in the meantime.

We headed straight to his place so I could offload my gear. Luckily, the bike box just fit in the back of his Subaru, so that worked out well. Kevin and Hollie have a little 2 bedroom place, and I was lucky enough to get the guest room, even though there was also another person staying there temporarily. Apparently, I had been given the green light before the other person, so I got the room :-). After dropping stuff off, we hopped out for a bite to eat at Wendy's. I had a Big Kahuna Burger, which has a chicken filet, bbq sauce, cheese, bacon, and a huge slice of pineapple. Sounds odd I'm sure, but it was quite tasty. Although menu prices look high at first, they always include all taxes, and there is no tipping, so with the exchange rate, prices are actually quite reasonable.

After lunch, we popped over to Kevin's parents' house, so that I could take advantage of their Internet connection (Kevin doesn't have one), and make use of their VoIP line, which has an Ottawa number, to call Jody finally. Internet connectivity isn't as great as we're used to. Upload speeds are tedious at best, which means uploading photos is going to be rather problematic I think. As you've probably seen, I managed to put a few pictures up, but kept losing my connection. I also had a hard time chatting with Jody, but I think it was due to my picture uploading as well. I did get to check my emails though, which was nice. Then, we played some Nintendo Wii for a bit. Kevin's mom came home, and we were invited for

supper. We went out to pick up the steaks and potatoes, and I picked up a bottle of wine to offer up as well. Monkey Bay Sauvignon Blanc. It was tasty.

The BBQ was outside and we had a great meal, and some great conversation as well. Kevin's dad is the Chief Operating Officer for one of the broadcasters down here so we talked shop for a little while, and I learned about the NZ broadcasting system as well. Oh, and did I mention that I built a crib as well? Yup. I did. Greg and Elaine are spending the holidays here with Maya, as well as Greg's sister and her baby as well, so there are all kinds of baby things that have to be done over at that house, and I volunteered to put together a crib while Kevin ran some quick errands. It was pretty easy though, not like building a bar! As you can see, the first little while was a bit lazy, but it was nice. I also had a chance to finally get a good shower, shave, and cut all my various nails. I definitely felt like a new man yesterday.

Today was the day to get the ole bike and trailer put together, and run the bike through it's paces. I got up at a reasonable time of 8h30, and set about doing a load of laundry. It was a sunny day, so I got to hang my clothes out to dry in the NZ sun. I learned something else today. The NZ sun is powerful. Damn powerful. You see, NZ has a very close proximity to the hole in the ozone layer, so getting burned badly is extremely easy. I already learned that in one day. I hadn't put cream on my legs, and in the process of biking, burned the tops of my legs quite badly, even though it was a bit overcast.

Speaking of biking, I put on my first 50+ km in Auckland today. I took a few hours to get the bike all set up this morning, making sure everything was tight and running well. The transit didn't cause any damage, so the Epic was rearing to go once I was ready. I popped on the GPS, grabbed some cash and my NZ LP book, and hit the roads. First stop was a café for some food, then it was off to the waterfront, and subsequent exploration of various corners of Auckland. The city is quite sprawling, so I didn't even cover that much ground. However, with over 48 volcanoes in the city, there was no shortage of hills to try my luck at. I can see that this trip will have some challenging parts to it.

Oh, if you are curious about my bike route, I also put together my first official map of the trip, which you can check out by clicking on the maps tab on the website. I'm still working out all the timing bugs, so I'm not sure the times will be correct, but the route and the pictures certainly are. I think I should have changed all the times at once, rather than camera, then GPS, then computer, etc. etc. That'll all get sorted out eventually though.

My relatively short day of biking today was a good starter for me. I have to get used to driving on the left, and learn the peculiarities of NZ driving, of which there are a few. That includes some rather stupid yielding the right of way laws that only exist in NZ. There are also many roundabouts. And while I'm completely comfortable with them, the fact that we are on the wrong side and go the other way around them kinda messes me up a bit. I'm happy to report I had no big mis-steps today, in spite of riding some of the very busiest streets at rush hour. I think I'll get the hang of it pretty easily.

Well, I see it's already after 11:30pm, so I should probably turn in. Sadly, I still didn't get a chance to post my recent entries online, so that means when I finally do, there will be a plethora of blog posts for y'all to read! I'm doing my best. At least I have all the stories written, it's just hard to get them posted due to my limited connectivity. Goodnight from NZ, hopefully there'll be more to share shortly.

2ND DAY BIKING IN AUCKLAND

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2007

(POSTED ON: MON, 2007-12-17 01:20 BY STEVE)

Friday had me in Auckland for another day. Freddy, Elaine and Maya were getting in early that morning, and I had told him that I'd stick around to catch up a bit with him before I took off on Saturday for the real adventure. Even though they rolled in very early, I planned a few other things to do to fill up my day, since it would be my last Auckland touristy day before hitting the dusty trails. My first problem in the morning was that I had no



way to get a hold of them. Kevin doesn't have a home phone. Not a problem for a resourceful lad like me though, I just got set for my day, then biked over to their parents house where they were staying. Luckily I had the address, so I found my way. I rolled in around 10am. They had just had a little nap, so my timing was relatively good. I stuck around for a little bit, posted some blog entries, then headed out alone for downtown again, read on for what I did. You can also check out the map that I threw together as well.

It was another beautiful day, so I decided that I might as well head up the Sky Tower, which still remains the tallest tower in the Southern Hemisphere. Now, admittedly, the CN Tower is still much taller, but given the Auckland skyline and surrounding volcanoes, it was certainly nothing to sneeze at. Before heading up, I found a nearby bike shop, where I picked up an orange safety flag for my bike. As a bonus, the guys there said I could leave my bike with them while I did the tower thing, which would be safer than locking it up. Good deal by my estimation! Buy a flag, get free bike sitting.

At the tower, I first bought a Budget Backpacker Hostels card for \$45, which gave me \$8 off tower admission, as well as \$20 of calling card calling, and numerous other deals for backpackers. I also popped into an ATM to take out my first week's allowance. Hopefully it lasts. Although the tower offers a few daredevil stunts like the sky jump and sky walk, I opted to simply go up to the observation deck, as well as the extra 9 floors up to the Sky Deck. The views were outstanding, and if you find yourself in Auckland, I highly suggest stopping in and up! I also endorse my next stop.

After Sky Tower, I picked my bike up again, and headed down to the waterfront to buy a round trip to Devonport, a 12 minute ferry crossing. No charge for my bike either. I had a half hour to kill, so made my way back to the Hobson West Marina, where the REALLY big and beautiful boats moor. I lusted after a few of the 85 ft yachts, until eventually a crewman came out of one to get something from a car. I cornered him and asked how he got to be crew. He said he was an engineer, and went to Spain, where a lot of these boats pick up crew, so he lucked into the gig.

I also asked if they get out much, since some of those boats spend lots of time docked. Ironically, he said they just came back from Canada, Victoria specifically. We chatted about Canada, and I told him I'm from the east coast, and he said the first mate was actually from Halifax. Also, the owner was Canadian! Which Canadian you ask? Well, none other than the old owner of Tim Hortons. Small friggin world, isn't it? I got the

feeling that I might have been able to get a tour of the boat, but I had a ferry to catch, so I bid the lad adieu, and rolled back to the ferry. Funny story, eh?

Anyway, Devonport. This is one of the points just across from Auckland, and served as a naval base and watch post for many many years. My best comparison of it would be something like Citadel Hill in Halifax, but on steroids in some respects. North Head is where the main base was, and there still remains tons of things to explore all over that piece of land, and it's pretty open to you to explore. Luckily, I had a flashlight, and was able to even do some tunnel exploration, where the munitions were stored, etc. There were also some remaining guns to check out. And of course, like most high points in Auckland, this area is home to two volcano cones at least as well. So of course, I did plenty more climbing on the bike today. Both Auckland maps show that I ascended over 2km. They seemed fine, but I'd soon learn better.

After Devonport, I hurried back to Kevins to grab a quick shower, as I had been invited for a BBQ at the Friesens that evening. We had corn on the cob, burgers, salad, ice cream, and a few drinks. It was another great meal, and allowed me the time to post all my pictures to date, although they had to be compressed to get it done. Hope you like them. We also played some more Wii, but Freddy and Elaine were pretty bushed. Eventually, everyone went to bed, and it was just Kevin and I. I sort of forced him to stay a little longer so I could finish my uploading. Thanks Kevin! Then it was off to bed for us too, as I had my trip to start the next day!

FIRST OFFICIAL DAY OF BIKING

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2007

(POSTED ON: MON, 2007-12-17 01:21 BY STEVE)



Saturday, Dec.15 was to be the official departure of ActiveSteve from Auckland to points unknown. Well, I sort of knew some points that I would hit. My first little while will be spent in the Northlands of New Zealand, as far as Cape Reinga, the northernmost point of New Zealand. Some say this area holds the most challenging biking, and if I could make it there, I'd make it anywhere. However, before I went

anywhere, there was the matter of getting things packed up. This would prove to be a little more challenging than anticipated. I awoke shortly after 8:30 on Saturday, and dragged Kevin out for breakfast before starting the packing. Read on for my exciting first day.

Well, my trailer had seemed so massive when I picked it up, and I had visions of oodles of extra room for all my things held safely within it. Well, I don't know if it shrank in the meantime or something, but I had a rude awakening when trying to pack it. The massive duffle bag I had sort of fit in it, but there wasn't room for all my things in it as well. So, I had to get to work on slimming the load. I got rid of a bunch of my clothes, of which I had only a little to start with. Next to go were running shoes, a running bottle, and a day pack (I had 2). Once these things were stuck in my bike box, I was able to sort of get everything in

the trailer, and cover it up. Well, except for my Pelican Case with all my fragile electronics!

Good thing Jody got me that thing for my birthday. I've ended up having to keep it strapped to the top of the trailer, exposed to the elements. Luckily, it's made for just such challenges, so I feel pretty comfortable having it out there. In fact, it's already taken some damage, but that's for later. Once all things were packed and lashed, I was ready to roll. Kevin took a quick shot of me for posterity, and I rolled out of Cranbrook Mews for at least a couple weeks. I know it'll sound obvious, but the first thing I noticed was how damn heavy it was to haul that junk around. I've already decided when I'm back in Auckland, I'm stripping more weight. Next to go will be my camp stove, pot, place setting, and fuel cans. I just don't think I'll ever be that far from being able to get take-away. Even if I am, I'll get food I don't have to cook. I'd ditch the sleeping stuff, like tent, sleeping bag and thermarest, but those I still think might come in handy.

Anyway, back to the bike ride. Since I had a slow start, I decided that the first day would take me as far as a place called Helensville, a mere 60km away from Auckland via the back-ish roads. It was the right call. Even getting out of Auckland was pretty annoying and challenging. I had to go all the way to downtown, then take busy streets out to a bike path leading out of Auckland. After a while, I lost the path, and had to ask for help finding my way. Ironically, the road biker I ran into is a fellow who splits his time between Toronto and Auckland, and owns the Italpasta Racing Team. He's also great friends with Kiwi Mike, who is a well-known Ottawa chap at the Cyclery in Ottawa. Again, small world. He led me out for a while, then pointed the right way to take. A wave and a thank-you and off I went again.

Shortly after finally clearing the Auckland hurdles, I was on the 16 heading to Helensville. There, I discovered the joy of hills. I kid. It's pure misery when you're hauling so much weight. Granted, the grade on these hills ranged between 8 and 11%, so I did have a reason to curse. Also, as many have pointed out, the roads are narrower, there are no shoulders, and drivers aren't always so nice. I've been told now that North Island in particular can be hellish. I agree. I've already had it up to here. I've also already managed to wipe out and flip the trailer. However, that wasn't anyones fault but my own. I was biking along a steep street, when there was these sort of two curbs on either side of the lane, presumably to act as some sort of passing barrier. Somehow, my left wheel of the trailer hit the curb, and then managed to flip over, this caused a chain reaction, pulling me down into the street. Ouch.

The worst part was trying to recover the bike. With all that weight, it is very unwieldy to get the trailer back upright. A driver was nice enough to pull over and was going to offer help, but by then, I had the trailer back up, and waved them off, telling them I was okay. Physically, I was, and as a bonus, I learned a bit more about how to control my load. However, I now had a little tear in the trailer fabric, little chunks taken out of my Pelican case, and a damaged wheel skewer on the trailer. It looks a bit out of alignment now too, which really sucks. As you might imagine, if you have a 2 wheel trailer, having one wheel not track straight is a real drag, literally! Oh well, I pounded it into as straight as I could, and kept on going.

Helensville seemed to take forever to get to, and by the time it did, I was definitely ready to call it a day. I'd only traveled a bit over 60km, but with that weight, it was very hard work, the stats on the map tell the story, and has lead me to reconsider my overall game plan. However, I'll give it another few days before fully deciding what to do. My stay in Helensville was great, for 32 NZD, I got a shared room to myself, in a place more like a

bed and breakfast. They also had a Spa, so I had a beer and a soak later in the night. I got some groceries, and made a mini-feast for myself to refuel. Tomorrow is a new day, and I have to push harder to see how things go. Anyway, I'm tired, so time to go to bed.

Driving on the wrong side of the road is also going very well for me BTW, I have no problems anymore. I'm being careful, so please don't take my above little misadventure as me being risky. I have as many safety features going on as possible, and when traffic gets particularly hairy, like with big trucks, I'll sometimes stop biking and wait for them to pass. I've decided a wipe out at high speed going downhill would truly suck. Well, onward and upward, talk to you all soon, virtually.

ANOTHER DAY, A LOT MORE HILLS!

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2007

(POSTED ON: MON, 2007-12-17 01:22 BY STEVE)

Okay, so another day of biking is in the hole. I crammed in an astonishing 76km into this day, trying to make up a little perceived lost time, but have decided that I can't really make up any lost time. There are just far too many biking challenges up in these parts. After a heavenly sleep in Helensville, I slept in until 8am. I had a 7am alarm, but when it went off, I was soooooo cozy, that I opted to bump it by an hour. It was a good call. When I finally got up, there was a nice breakfast basket waiting for me in the common area. Two yogurts, two little bags of cereal, a banana, a kiwi, and some bread and jams. Talk about a power breakfast. I ate it all save the Kiwi. I also had some extra groceries from the night before, and decided to just take them with me as road snacks. Read on for more about torture day #2.



After consulting various maps and guides, I still had no idea where I would end up this day. There were no BBH hostels in the range I was hoping for. There was one, but it was a bit too close, and the next closest one is still another many kms from where I write this. SO where am I? Kaiwaka. Not really mentioned in any of my books, but it had a hotel, right when I needed it. I saw another massive hill looming, and just didn't have it in me after 6 hours of struggling through the hot day. It was also already 5pm again, and on Sunday, everything closes up early, so if I didn't stop, I might not get fed, and that simply wouldn't do. Anyway, I guess I should rewind a bit.

Helensville. Yup, left there around 9:20 with high hopes. I'd been warned that I'd have a challenging day, but looking at various profiles, I certainly saw a few big climbs topping out over 200m, but that didn't look that bad on paper. How wrong could I be. Once again, when you factor in a 70lb load, all conventional biking wisdom flies out the window. Also, pain is amplified, and I'm already battling a bad knee on my left leg which has me concerned. I guess tomorrow I may have to start my pain medication already :-(I'd hoped to avoid Vitamin I for as long as I could, but this is just too difficult.

What else can I really say? Well, the scenery is certainly beautiful, and I've seen lots of cows, sheep, dogs, chickens, etc. It certainly is true that once you're out of Auckland,

things get rural very fast. However, seeing as I'm not that far out of Auckland, it seems as though all the Aucklanders were out for scenic drives up the coast. The roads were total shit. Too many aggressive cars, crazy motorcyclists, and huge trucks for a wee lad from Canada used to a nice wide shoulder. By the end of the day, I was secretly wishing they'd all crash. Terrible thought I know, but the amount of effort I had to put into each km was just that great. I swear what would take them 10 minutes to do could take me up to 1.5 hours! My average speed today was a measly 13km/hr. I'm not going to get anywhere that way. If this post sounds a little negative, it's just my current state of mind.

Let me put the day in perspective. I got up early, packed up my gear, then hit the road. I spent the entire day battling my body, my bike, my trailer, and the traffic in the searing heat. At the end of the day, my reward was a roadside hotel which cost me 50 NZD. I'm all alone, and sitting in my room writing this post. My knee is in searing pain, and I just looked at some upcoming ride profiles. Tomorrow will be relatively okay, then the day after that, I have a climb easily twice as high as any I've done!!! I was expecting some kind of truly zen-like experience, but I just haven't gotten it yet. Now, I was warned this was the toughest biking in all of NZ, but it's really getting me down. I'm seriously contemplating ditching the bike when I return to Auckland, buying or borrowing a backpack, and doing the rest by bus / hitching. After all, I'm supposed to be here enjoying the trip, not suffering the whole way. That wasn't the goal. The notion of biking it is very romantic, but it's just not practical.

Okay, I know, my tone sucks. It's only day 4 in a row of biking, only two of which have had a load, but just try to picture it in your mind, then make it about 5 times harder. I'm no wimp, and I don't give things up, as anyone who knows me can attest, but this is wearing me down. By the time you read this, I'll probably have more posts, and things may change, so who knows. One thing for sure, I'm definitely paring more weight down in Auckland. Everything that can be jettisoned will be. I'm also going to investigate more destination biking, not biking to bike. After all, with these efforts, I just have no time to do anything but bike. Maybe I'll do 1/2 and 1/2. Bike the North Island, backpack the South Island. Nifty idea. I'll hold on to that for now.

Now where was I? Oh, does it really matter. I think you've got the idea how the overall day went. You can check out my map to see the journey of pain. Weather was good again today, but they're calling for rain over the next couple days. Ha ha. Can't wait to see what that does to my spirit ;-). Anywho, I'm off to re-pack my things, so that I'm set to go early tomorrow morning. I'm also planning a strategy where I take a full hour off in the middle of the day to rest. I think what I really need is some more substantial human contact as well. The last 2 nights have been very solitary, and although writing this out is therapeutic, talking to other people would help. Sadly, Internet is still pretty much non-existent to me. Hopefully when I hit somewhere with a population of more than a couple hundred, I'll find something. Good night people. Rest easy in your cozy winter wonderland!

47 POSSUMS

MONDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2007

(POSTED ON: MON, 2007-12-17 01:23 BY STEVE)



Catchy title, isn't it? That's the number of squished possums I counted today on my 80km journey. They were in various states of decomp, some looking very fresh indeed. I'm happy to say that I didn't run over a single one myself. Although I bet I could inflict some pain on the little varmin. It's easy to understand why they are a target. They all but wiped out Kiwis in New Zealand, and the department of Conservation actually

encourages motorists to attempt to hit the possums wherever possible. And it would appear that the overzealous NZ drivers have taken that to heart. Well, regardless of the roadkill, my day was considerably better today than it has been in the last two, in spite of it being my furthest day in the saddle. Read on for a little bit about my happy day cycling in Northern New Zealand.

My last tale, which I wrote up later last night, was rife with dismay and unhappiness. I'd had a pretty rough go of it, and really needed to vent. However, I decided that today was in fact a brand new day, and I should face it with renewed determination. I had the profile of my days ride, and apart from a few steeper hilly sections at the front end, the latter part of the day was actually relatively flat. I got up at 7am this time, and was on the road by 8am, in order to maximize the slightly (very slightly) cooler morning while I tackled hills. Weather was uncertain as well, and I hoped to cover max ground before any rain hit. I also popped an Ibuprofen first thing to take care of my nagging leg pain.

The motel I had stayed at wasn't open for breakfast, so I opted to bike the first 8km to Bryndyrwyn on an empty stomach. Once there, I stopped at a tea room and had a huge breakfast of two eggs, two "bacons", two sausages, two toasts, and two hash browns. I couldn't even finish it all, but that would certainly fuel me for the day, right? I bumped into a kiwi who had also cycle toured with a trailer, and said the hill in front was the worst he'd had. However, that was on the SH1 motorway, and I was branching off to the SH12 at that spot. I'd had enough of the "401" of NZ. I think that also made my day better. Even though drivers were still annoying at times, there were far less of them to contend with on this secondary highway. This made the pedalling more peaceful, which in turn leads to happy thoughts. I said hello to many cows and sheep again, as is customary as I bike past their blank stares.

I faced each hill with purpose, and found they weren't nearly as bad today. I also vowed not to go more than 2 hours without at least a snack of some description, which helped. That, and more hydration was in order. All those things contributed to a much more positive experience for me. Before I knew it, I was in Ruawai and it was lunch time. Cool. From here on out, it would be a totally flat ride to Dargaville, a mere 28km further. I stopped for a Powerade, a water, a Cookie Time cookie, and a sandwich. As I was enjoying it, I encountered another cyclist touring. A crazy older German, with tons of gear including fishing gear. He was genial enough, but I didn't really feel like spending days riding with him. He got an ice cream, and wanted to ride together after lunch. I said sure. However,

when we started biking, I had the mean satisfaction that he told me to go ahead, because I was too fast. I found this hilarious, because we were only doing between 16 and 18km/hr! But of course, we were both loaded with about 60lbs of gear, me in a trailer, his lashed all around his bike, making it less stable. I bid him goodbye and happy trails, and carried on alone.

The pedaling seemed lighter and easier, and I actually enjoyed myself. That's not saying it was without the effort, but it was definitely nice to have some flat ground. My mind started thinking about how I could change my trip to make sure I can do everything I want, without killing myself to get everywhere. I've come to the conclusion that I should try to bike to basecamps, then take buses to nearby attractions, since NZ isn't that big. For example, I could get to one town in 2 days from here, and from there take an all inclusive bus tour which would take me to Cape Reinga, Dune boarding, 90 mile beach, etc., all in a day, saving me probably 4 days of biking. I'm gonna have a look at some maps and see if this style will work.

As I approached Dargaville, I had a great vista of all the approaching weather. Earlier in the day, I had spotted rainstorms, but they were limited to one area, and far off to my left, so I was relatively unscathed. However, heading into Dargaville, I could feel the wind pick up, and saw nasty clouds around most of me. It was obviously about to come down, and I was hoping to get to a hostel in time. I had toyed with continuing on to the next BBH, but it wasn't for another 30km, and I figured that would make me unhappy, not to mention a lot wetter. Best to break the leg into 2 like last time. Also, Dargaville is a relatively large center in the Northland, so I'm hoping to find some Internet to post these stories for you all. I'm sure the pictures won't make it up, but you can at least read the tales, and maybe see my maps.

I found the Greenhouse Backpackers Hostel, and checked in around 3pm, giving me time to write this, shower, and hopefully get some groceries, all before the time I've been finishing my rides. I'll definitely be getting up early again tomorrow to try and finish early in time to relax. Tomorrow also holds my biggest challenge, a 400m peak, twice any other, with some huge climbs. I suspect my average speed will again be way down :(Oh well, that's the life of a touring cyclist right? Cheers mates, I'm off for a beer.

RIDING WITH THE ENTS

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2007

(POSTED ON: THU, 2007-12-20 17:26 BY STEVE)

Wow! What a day. This was truly a day of the biggest so far. I'm not even sure where to start with this one. I had the steepest ascent today. The longest descent, the most rain, the longest ride, the slowest average speed, and so on and so on. But you know what? It was a great day all told. I think it's almost safe to say that I've gotten over my earlier apprehension, and I'm now ready to get on with this trip. Realistically speaking, it has become clear to me that the body is really an amazing thing. I have had to allow myself a little extra time to adapt to 'life in the saddle'. Although it's



only been four real days with the weight behind me, I'm definitely feeling more at ease. I hit a top speed of 62km/h today going down a hill, what a thrill. But of course the thought of wiping out at that speed with all the weight is quite scary too. Oh well, taste death to live life, right? Anyway, read on for a little extra detail about what made today pretty cool and special for me.

I started the day with a quick breakfast, then set off as I often do it seems, with no real hard destination in mind. Looking at a map, there seemed to be a few options, one which seemed a bit ambitious (which is where I ended up BTW), and one which seemed more realistic. By the time I had gone to bed, I had decided that when the morning came, I'd decide whether to keep heading north, or cut across to the East to Paihia. Well, it seemed sunny as I woke up, so I opted to go North, and I'm glad that I did. It was really a fantastic biking day.

Leaving Dargaville, I soon came upon a few minor hills, but knew that it was only a prelude for things to come. I had certain goals in mind for getting to certain places, which would help dictate whether to stop or go on. 20km may not sound like a long way, but when you're going 6km/h up a hill, that can be a long time. Also, food places often close at 6pm, so I have to keep that in mind when making my decisions. Well, progress was going well, and I stopped for my mid-morning snack on time. Sadly, I had to forego an extra breakfast, as the tea house I had hoped to stop at wasn't open yet. So I just kept rolling on. Before I knew it, I had entered the Waipoua Forest of Kauri Trees.

Kauri Trees are the giants of the NZ landscape as far as trees go. The sad part about them is that they have been forested to all but extinction, and it is only due to the second world war that logging was stopped. This forest is a conservation area which has the greatest remaining number of the trees for us to look at. Think of Cathedral Grove in BC to get an idea. Although, I think the biggest tree here might be bigger than in BC. The King of the Forest is about 2000 years old, and rises 212m. I have a picture of the placard which explains all the details. Perhaps someone would care to compare this tree to the biggies in Cathedral grove. Either way, it was very humbling and impressive.

I biked through several Kiwi areas as well, but didn't see any. That's not all that surprising though. I was also blessed with a massive dump of rain. It was intermittent throughout most of the day, until near the end, when the heavens absolutely opened up on me. Didn't bother me a bit though, as overheating when climbing 400m hills is not a comfy feeling. I'm sure the views would have been better with a bit of sunshine, but I wasn't complaining. Oh yeah, another decision was made for me in the forest as well. There was a campground I thought about camping at, but when I arrived at the gate, the road was closed, so I had to keep moving, since camping anywhere else in the forest reserve is a big no-no. That meant pushing on for another 35km. It's quite something else when you spend a solid hour climbing one hill, only to descend the other side in about 5 minutes. That's what happened on the big hill today for me! It was nuts. Luckily, the views while grinding my way up were pretty impressive, as the massive forest was all around me, alive with the sights and sounds. Traffic was pretty light as well, and seemed to drive more responsibly in the reserve. Thanks for that!

Once out of the forest, I had that long nice descent, then was greeted with a few smaller climbs. However, after almost 6 hours biking already, it was a bit tiring to say the least. Especially the last climb. It was absolutely the steepest climb I'd done to date. I got off and tried to push up at one point, but that was even harder, since I lacked the mechanical advantage, and the trailer kept wanting to roll backwards, so on the saddle I hopped again, gritted my teeth, and kept mashing the pedals. I tell, you cresting that hill in the pouring

rain, and looking over into the harbour below where I'd spend the night was one of the sweetest feelings yet.

The drama wasn't completely over yet though, as the first hostel I tried was fully booked. Luckily, there was a neighbouring town only 2.5-3km away, and they had rooms for 20 NZD available. Sold. The strongest rain yet greeted me as I pedalled the little hills between the two towns, and at one point, my pelican case tried to fall off the back of my trailer again. Luckily, I had the foresight earlier to tie the handle separately, so it couldn't go anywhere. Sadly, I've now put in a few extra tears in the side of the trailer where the tie-downs attach to the trailer. I'll have to try and find a place to get it repaired in Auckland before I take off again. I'm also determined to re-pack everything so that I can fit the suitcase in the trailer instead of tied hap-hazardly to the top.

Well, that's about all the energy I have tonight to write out my story, so I hope you've enjoyed it. My entire nightly ritual seems to take about 1.5 hours, by the time I upload all my picture, re-title them, create the custom maps, and then finally write my stories. It's a nice exercise, but I'm not sure I'll always have the time to do it. Enjoy them while I do :-)

ANOTHER LONG DAY... WITH REWARDS

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2007

(POSTED ON: THU, 2007-12-20 17:27 BY STEVE)



Howdy folks. So, another day, and another 86km into the bike ride. Actually, it was a little more than 86km, since I went to the grocery store after finishing my day's ride. I could've just had take-out again, but I decided it would be better to pick up some fresh fruits and veggies to munch on, along with the requisite pizza. However, I'm getting ahead of myself yet again, you're probably more interested in what happened today anyway. I

did in fact change my original plans of heading to the absolute north of the island by bike, and opted instead today to cut across the middle of the Island in order to reach the Bay of Islands, which are a beautiful part of New Zealand, and where I decided to spend at least two days. Read on.

After a very sleepless night in Opononi, I tried to get up at 7am, but didn't drag my butt off the couch until 7:30. Couch? Yep, I actually slept on a couch in the hostel on account of the fact that my room-mate for the night was a heavy snorer, and was keeping me up. So I went out to the common area and crashed out on the couch. From there, I was able to hear the rain come down all night. Heavy for a lot of the night as well! I could only imagine what the morning would bring :-)

Well, actually, when morning broke, the sky had let up somewhat, and it wasn't raining. It was still overcast, but there wasn't rain. I set to work packing up my stuff again, which is getting to be a fairly regular ritual for me. I was on the road by 8:40am, a bit late, but still a reasonable time. I really had no way of knowing what the day would bring for my route, because the roads I was taking were not in any of my cycling books. So, I couldn't check

out the profile. I was hoping for not too many hills, but was fairly certain there would be a fair number of them, as always.

I wasn't disappointed at all. There were a fair number of little hills, as well as a couple real doozies. However, I was also blessed with a fairly long flat section as well, so I could just veg out and spin the pedals for a while. Unfortunately, I was having another off day on the bike, and wasn't all that happy to be out there. When I finally made it to my lunch stop, I had put on about 53km, and didn't want to go any further. However, I also knew that I didn't want to stay in that town, as it had pretty much zero to offer. So, I forced myself to keep going. On the plus side, I did hit a new maximum speed. According to the bike odometer, I hit over 70km/hr on one of the hills. Crazy, isn't it?

I kept going, and at one point, pulled over to a gas station to ask about my route choice. A nice lady there pointed me to some back roads to make my way to the Bay of Islands. The route she recommended was supposedly the best one for bikes, as it had the least number of hills. I was sold. I didn't see the other routes, but this one still had its share of hills, I'll tell you that. However, I got a bit of a second wind, and decided to make the best of a miserable biking day. When I got back onto the main roads, the sign said that there was only 14km to go to Paihia. Hooray! I think the real reason I was looking forward to this stop was that I've decided to take a rest day here. Maybe even two. There's lots to do up here.

Tomorrow, I'm booked on an all-day bus trip that goes up to Cape Reinga, takes us sand-boarding, as well as to another forest, and to a café for lunch. From here, I can also take part in any other number of thrill-seeking adventures like jet-boat rides to Hole in the Rock, etc. I'll make up my mind whether or not to take an extra day or not depending on the weather. Apparently they've been having some pretty crap weather here. However, I've assured everyone at the hostel that I'd be bringing in the good weather, so here's hoping to that. Once I checked in to the Pickled Parrot, I met a couple Dutch guys, and we headed to the grocery store to pick up some beer and pizzas. And that leads me here, writing up a hasty blog post so that I can wrap up my laundry.

I've now had a chance to shower, shave, clean up, eat and even do laundry, and it's only about 7pm. Alls well that ends well I guess. I'll leave you all at that, as I've got better things to do than be glued to my tiny laptop. Take care all!

TO THE END OF THE NZ WORLD!

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2007

(POSTED ON: THU, 2007-12-20 17:28 BY STEVE)

Glorious Day off to report to you all. I have so many great memories out of my long bus trip. I dragged the GPS along again, but I've appropriately labeled it as being a Bus Trip, not bike ride. Of course, if you thought I'd actually [covered over 450km](#) in a day, you'd be crazy anyway, but I did want to show where I went. Essentially, I've capped off my Northern New Zealand adventuring by taking the bus tour. I've seen Cape Reinga, 90 Mile



Beach, another Kauri Forest, and a few other cool sights. I body surfed in the Pacific Ocean, and reflected upon where the Maori spirits leap off into the ocean, to complete their journey into the afterlife. Read on for a little more about the whole thing if you care to. I'll try not to make you all jealous :-)

The day started exceptionally early for me, with my alarm going off at 6:15am. The bus was picking me up an hour after that, and I wanted time for a quick little snack, and time to throw my things together for the day. THE night before wasn't too late for me. I had a quart of NZ Steinlager on the beach with a few people from the hostel, and marvelled at a glorious sunset, and the prospect of a beautiful day. As it would turn out, it was the only nice day they've had here in about 3 weeks, so everyone was quite excited about that.

The bus was only a few minutes late, and when I boarded, it was fairly empty. However, as it turned out, there were only 15 people on our tour anyway, which was great for all of our stops. Also, we were on a pretty much brand new bus, so there were no worries about it breaking down at any point in the day. Our driver doubled as our guide as well, but let me tell you, he was fantastic. He had just the right amount of chatter, and just the right amount of peace to enjoy the sights. He was extremely well versed on many of the legends, and filled us in on as many of the stories of the land and the people as he could. It was a welcome change from my biking days, when I see things, but have no idea about their significance. I definitely learned a lot today. This only further cemented my decision to try to bike to central places, then take in local tours and local sights with groups. I think I'll get more out of it this way.

We started our day by visiting another Kauri forest. It held some big trees, but not as big as the one I saw a couple days ago. Still an impressive sight for sure. The roads to get to this one were twisty, steep, and gravel, so I definitely wouldn't have done it on my own. After the forest, we wended along the coast, checking out several bays and harbours along the way until Tea time. This was our chance to pick up some food, as there would be no other amenities for the next 5 hours. We were told that for the last house on the north tip, it's a 1.5hour drive each way to the closest grocery store. So, at the café, I picked up a sandwich and a cookie for lunch. I actually still had some other food in my bag, so that should do me.

After Tea, we headed directly to 90 mile beach (which is actually 90km, there are several stories about the name), as it was low tide. The funny thing about this "beach" is that it is officially a highway in NZ, with posted speed limits and everything. As it is made of sand, it has the distinction of being the oldest highway in the world. Also, since each tide change causes it to be 'resurfaced', it is also the newest highway in the world. Pretty cool, eh? There are some precautions to be taken on it though, as if you get stuck, and the tide comes up, your car will actually be swallowed up by the sand, which happens every year I think. Also, you really shouldn't take any vehicles except for 4 wheel drives on it. As it happened, our 'bus' was a converted truck, and had no problems whatsoever, even crossing the little rivers and the quicksand.

The destination here was to get us to the giant dunes for sandboarding. Sweet as. It was my first time doing this, and I got the hang of it very quickly. I even won the International Sandboarding Championship while there. My prize, other than Canadian glory, was a special shell which had been picked up from the beach earlier. There are a couple pictures of me boarding, but I couldn't take any on the trip, as it is far too sandy for cameras! It was definitely a memorable and fun stop.

From the boarding, it was off to the main attraction, Cape Reinga. This is the furthest point in NZ. Note, it is not the Northernmost point, but the furthest point by road (and easy

walking path). Cape North is the actual furthest point north. However, only marginally. Anyway, Cape Reinga is said to be the final destination for Maori spirits. They travel the length of NZ in order to cast themselves off into Spirits Bay. The legend says that if they have been good, when they jump off the cliff, they sprout wings and fly to their heaven. If they have been judged bad, they simply glide a little bit until crashing into the ocean. Powerful thought indeed. The land is joint owned between Gov't and Maori, another long story, and we had to respect certain things up there. One being no food is to be eaten on the path, for fear it may distract the hungry spirits heading to the jumping point.

We spent about 45 minutes there, which gave me a little time to explore, but not much, as there are many trails up there, including a nice 8 hour trek. I wasn't disappointed with my time up there though, as the weather was absolutely perfect. The guide said there is basically no way we could have had better weather, and it was tons better than anything they've had in the past 3 weeks. What luck I had, eh? I certainly think so. I'll chock it up to being a little reward for my hard biking in the past week.

After Reinga, it was off to body surfing in the Pacific, then to afternoon tea (and bus wash) at a Kauri shop. The surfing reminded me a lot of Tofino, in that it was the Pacific, and we had to watch for riptides. We only had 30 minutes there, but it was enough to have some good fun. The Kauri shop was also a lot of fun, with some amazing wood furniture on display. There were pieces there ranging in price from hundreds of dollars up to 36,000 USD! Needless to say, I only bought an ice cream for 2.50, and a brownie. At least they won't weigh me down for the next couple months.

The last stop was fresh fish and chips, of which I obviously didn't partake, but the fish was essentially straight from the water, gutted, then put into the fryer. The other tour go-ers all agreed it was fabulous. I did at least treat myself to the chips, and they were certainly tasty. Oh, yeah, that and I had a little beer I picked up at a grocery store to wrap up the day. All in all, a splendid experience. I got back to the hostel, and everyone else was also gushing about their various adventures of the day. They're all just having some supper while I type this up. Then, I'll give a quick slide show, and we'll probably head down to the beach. Not even the murder that happened in town last night can hamper the mood! Oh, did I not mention that? Yeah, I guess it was some locals, and there was a stabbing. No worries, it wasn't violence directed at tourists. Lucky for that, because Paihia is essentially nothing by hotels and hostels!

Well, that's it for me today, this 20th day of December. If you're reading these posts, don't hesitate to drop a comment. It always makes my day when I check in and see some words from you guys. Cheerio till later.

RAINY RUSSELL AND PARTYING IN PAIHIA

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2007

(POSTED ON: MON, 2007-12-24 23:36 BY STEVE)



Hey folks. Nothing much to report for this blog post. I decided to spend an extra day in Paihia, as I wanted to visit Russell, which has some significant history attached to it. What's the point of touring and biking all the time if you can't take a day off for yourself every now and again, right? Well, that was what I did for myself. There was only one hitch with my day off. It rained. Scratch that, it poured! When I awoke, it was actually not too bad

out, so I got my things together and headed down to the town. I hit an Internet café for an hour and a half, putting up a couple posts and some maps, but of course you already knew that, didn't you? So what else is new this day? Tune in.

The night before, I'd actually sort of headed 'downtown' for a little bit. Well, actually, I headed to the beach with a few Dutch guys for a couple beers by the moonlight while listening to the waves wash up on the shore. After that, I started to head back to the hostel, with the intention of possibly popping into a bar for another drink or two. As we were walking by a place called Beachcombers, I heard some live music emanating from it. I couldn't help but pop in, and what a great idea that was. Another bloke stayed with me, and we stayed till the end of the music, and even chatted with the band guys. It was a lot of fun. From there, we hit another club quickly, but things wrapped up there at 1am, so after that, I went back to the hostel for a good night's rest. As a result, I didn't get going till around 9am.

As I mentioned, after finally getting moving, I hit the town a little bit, and after that popped into a takeaway for a sandwich and some chips. Yum. Then, the rain started. It was very intense rain too, not just a little drizzle. I ducked into a tour office for a little while, hoping that it would clear up, but it didn't. At the first break, I finally had a chance to dart back to the hostel to drop off the computer, and change into my swimsuit and rain coat, since the rain was that bad.

I ran to catch a ferry to Russell anyway, since that was my reason for staying. Shame about the weather, but I guess after the perfect day at Cape Reinga, I couldn't complain. When the ferry finally reached Russell, the rain actually abated a bit. How fortuitous. I managed to walk around the town and actually get a pretty decent view of the harbour and Paihia in the distance. Although the sky was still broodie, it was pretty nice. I also popped into a Department of Conservation building and watched a video on Kiwis. Then I walked up to Flagstaff Hill to check out the monument, as well as a giant sundial. However, due to the clouds, it wasn't actually working :-)

Russell is a pretty little town which has both the first Church in New Zealand, as well as the first licensed Pub in New Zealand. It was also the first capital of New Zealand. Of course, it doesn't make it very old, since New Zealand really isn't a very old country overall. It was all very fine and dandy, but the entire tour of Russell took me about an hour and a half, so it certainly didn't require too much time to see it all. By 5pm I was on

another ferry heading back to Paihia. For supper, I had a pizza combo at a local pub with one of the hostel workers, and we chatted about all sorts of things, before heading back to the Pickled Parrot for my last night in town. I was turning in early in order to get on the road again on the bike for my next port of call. I ended up watching a movie with some of the other hostel guests, then turned in. I actually ended up having a 4 bed dorm room all to myself that night, so I had a good nights rest.

As for the next day's ride, you'll have to read the next post to find out about that. It's late now, and I have to get to bed, but I have a lot more to write. That's the sort of thing I'm worried about. All day riding, then trying to do a couple things leaves me no time to write these posts. Oh well, I'll try to get something written up tomorrow for y'all. Take care till then...

GLOW WORM SIGHTINGS

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2007

(POSTED ON: MON, 2007-12-24 23:38 BY STEVE)

Hi Folks. I'm a post behind, so the next two posts might be slightly shorter than what I usually write. It isn't that I don't love you all, it's just that biking all day is hard work people :-). Yesterday was sort of a long day due to not just the biking, but the activities and excitement that followed the push to Whangarei. There were some interesting attempts at getting lodging, and some impromptu hill-climbing feats that I hadn't



intended in order to finally secure a place to lay my head for the evening. However, as always, everything worked out for the best for me, in spite of extra physical effort. You'll read all about that in a few paragraphs. As usual, I've put together a little [map](#) with some pictures that you should probably check out, and after that, come on back for the stories of the day.

Leaving Paihia sort of early on the 21st of December, my destination was picked out to be Whangarei, which is the largest city in the Northland of New Zealand, with a booming population of 45,000. That may not sound like a lot to you, but let me tell you, when I finally landed there, it sure seemed like a massive metropolis. After all, I hadn't seen traffic lights for the better part of a week, so finally having to stop and wait at a light seemed incredibly annoying. So did all the traffic and the 'hustle and bustle', which makes up a city. The actual bike ride between Paihia and Whangarei was really uneventful in every sense of the word. Of course, you've probably already realized that from the map, right?

There were two sights off the road I was on that might have been interesting, but I just didn't have the legs to do the extra distances. Those would have been some caves, and some famous toilet place. I kid you not. Toilets. Some fellow designs them, and they are world-famous. Now, this thing I did want to find, and in fact did go off the main road and followed the signs, but couldn't find the place, and got tired of searching, and just returned to the main road. I've noticed that in NZ, it's sometimes quite hard to find your way around little towns, particularly when you don't have a decent road map. I only have tourist maps,

and they lack the detail. Of course, my computer has highly detailed maps, but it's really not worth booting up to use. I just asks local if I'm really looking for something.

Anyway, back to Whangarei. I reached it in pretty good time, and it was still relatively early in the afternoon. Somewhere around 2:30 in the afternoon. I went right away to the big hostel in town, which is four floors of residence-like accommodation. I didn't particularly want to stay there, so I used their phone to call a few other hostels. Sadly, they were all booked. So, I tried to get a room with the Mural, the major hostel. First, they tell me the prices are up from what is listed in the 2008 guide! Ok, \$23 instead of \$20 isn't a big deal. That was the listed price for 'share rooms' which have only up to 4 beds. However, they tried to stick me in a 16 bed dorm. Oh yeah, and did I mention this place is also a bar? It was Saturday night, and directly below this room would be a DJ till very late. You can just imagine what that would be like, trying to get up early the next morning, or even sleeping for that matter. So I went back, and asked for a true share room. They informed me the price for those was \$45! What? I argued, showing them the listing in the book, and they countered with the fact that it was under new ownership. That's the second new owner since the last guide. Not a very encouraging thing. I finally asked for my money back as politely as possible, and secretly vowed to spread the word to all never to book at the Mural BBH Hostel in Whangarei. Did you get the message? Don't do it! Unless you want the look and feel of a drunken frat house, complete with a bar below you. If that's your bag, then by all means, but their attitude was pretty shitty too.

So, what's a guy to do now? All the other hostels were booked! Well, one of them also had listed a tent site, and was located close to glow-worm caves. I decided to roll the dice and head that way. The problem was that I didn't realize it was 10km out of town up a crazy set of mountain roads. That's not to mention the insane driveway leading to it, which was downhill, meaning I'd have to somehow get back up it. Another mistake I made was not getting food. On my way out of town, I figured I'd just head back after checking in for some chow. Well, after all the crazy climbs, and an hour of extra biking, I nixed the idea of food. When I finally got there, the owners were more than happy to let me set up my tent for only \$15, letting me use all the facilities. Sweet. After all, it was great weather at this time, and I truly did get the best view of everyone. Also, they sold me a can of beans and 3 pieces of bread for \$2. Not too bad eh? Along with that, they gave me a laminated map of the Abbey Caves, where there are glow-worms, and is directly beside the property, with a walking trail leading to it. Not only that, but they provided helmets, aqua-socks, and headlamps if you needed it free of charge! I was truly excited.

I got busy setting up my tent, which kept trying to blow away while I set it up. I ended up putting a ton of extra gear in it to weigh it down. So why was it flying away you ask? Well, simple. Yours truly somehow doesn't have any tent pegs with him! I have no idea where they are. Perhaps in Madawaska, perhaps in Auckland, perhaps at home. Jody? Are they at home? My hope is that I stuffed them into my running shoes, and they are waiting for me in Auckland. However, that didn't help me. Again, the owners were quite helpful, they were heading into town, and said they'd look for and pick up some pegs for me at the 'Warehouse', a home depot-like place. Lucky me. They came through, and for \$5 I now have 10 heavy steel pegs to go with my ultra-light tent. Ha ha. Also, the tent needs 13 to be truly set up. Oh well, at least I was no longer blowing away, and the fly wasn't touching the tent. Thanks guys!

While they went to town, I convinced a couple of dutch ladies that they should join me in the caves, since we had been advised not to go in alone. It was now 4:30pm, and we needed 2 hours to get through them, which would put us almost at 7 before being done.

Luckily, it stays light here till about 9pm right now. They decided they only wanted to do the first cave, which was relatively dry, and skip the longer second cave. I told them it was fine, and that I'd do the other one alone. Later, they offered to wait, but I told them to just let someone know if I was gone over an hour.

So, the caves? They were amazing. I was exhausted from biking all day, but not to the point that I couldn't get into some serious spelunking. With all our gear on, and me with an extra light, tools, and camera, we headed out. It was literally a 10 minute walk from the hostel to the first cave. We clambered in, and I gave the women a bit of help, but they managed pretty well on their own. They'd never done any caving, and were a little apprehensive. However, after we got in further and turned out the lights, the cave walls and ceiling lit up like stars. It was full of glow-worms! I've never seen it before, and was totally blown away. I wish I had a decent picture, but it was impossible to capture, and flashes kill them, so my feeble attempts didn't yield anything. Just believe me when I say it was pretty special. We all agreed it was a great idea. We made it to the end of the cave, where there was supposed to be a way out. I was able to scramble and push my way out, but there was no way for the other women to do that, so they doubled back, and I circled around outside to meet them back.

We walked along to the second cave (Ivy Cave), and I bid the two ladies goodbye, and took my extra gear with me and headed into the depths. I'd been warned that I'd get wet to my waist in this one, but with all the recent rain, it was more like chest-deep in spots. And quite chilly. I got a free mud-bath, and walked on all sorts of squishy things. I also think several eels brushed up and slithered around my legs, which is what the owner said they probably were. I'll be honest, it was a bit scary at times, being all alone in there, but I pressed on all the way through this long cave and finally found my way out. I felt like I truly accomplished something, and overcame a fear of sorts. This was confirmed when I got back and the owner assumed I hadn't got through but turned back. He said most people don't get all the way through, especially alone. That made me feel pretty good about it. Anyway, it was really a special place, and I'm so glad that the chance string of occurrences led me to that place, in spite of all the foibles.

And as far as the food goes? Well, again the Dutch came through for me. They had been cooking for a while, and had way too much food, so they offered me some of their 'tortilla' and garlic bread. This type of tortilla is the kind made with potatoes, eggs, herbs, etc. It was awesome, and I was very grateful. To repay them, I did all the dishes. I then worked a bit on my computer while I fought tiredness, then half-watched a movie that others were watching. It was a Woody Allen flick "Match Point". Kinda weird, and made me angry because I wanted to go to bed, but had to see how it all ended. I finally hit the sack (literally) around 11pm. My early rise might be thwarted. On to the next post to see how that went!

LOOKING VS. SEEING

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2007

(POSTED ON: MON, 2007-12-24 23:42 BY STEVE)



Hi folks. I see you're all back to read the next installment in my ongoing saga in New Zealand. Thanks. I'm happy to provide everyone with glimpses into my psyche and what I'm doing, why, and what it all means to me. This installment sees me biking from the Little Earth Hostel in Whangarei to the coastal town of Mangawhai Heads and the Coastal Cows Hostel. First thing I did before leaving this morning was to check whether or

not the hostel would have room, so that I'd know whether or not I'd have to keep moving. Huzzah, they had room, so now I didn't have to rush to get there early, but could just roll in when I rolled in. That makes a big difference to me, and came in handy today. Actually, the owner even said if he wasn't here, just to let myself in. Well, as I write this, I've been here alone listening to tunes on the stereo, and working away, after having eaten. No owner has shown, but I showed two other couples around the place. Too funny. Anyway, on with my story of the day, and don't forget to check the [map](#) :-)

So just how did I get up this morning? Well, not very nicely. I awoke very early to the moanful sounds of cows, which were making some pretty interesting sounds for 5am. I tried to keep sleeping, but that got difficult when the heavens opens up and started pouring on me in my little tent. So much for the good weather I had been told to expect. Luckily, the tent was very good at staying waterproof, so at least I stayed nice and dry. Of course, that meant I'd have to pack up a wet tent, which is never an exciting thing. As a result, I stayed in my sleeping bag a little later, waiting for the rain to abate. It did actually stop, which was nice. So I set about putting all my things in the dry bags, and transferring them into the garage where I had stashed my bike and trailer. I also solved another little problem by convincing someone to drive my bag up to the top of the driveway. Now, that might sound strange to you, but it was the right thing to do. I could barely bike up the hill with no weight, that's how steep it was!

I was all set to go now. I said goodbye to the Little Earth hostel, and started making my way back to the town of Whangarei, which I had to pass back through in order to get back on the main road. I stopped at a grocery store for some muffins and fruit for breakfast, and grabbed a little extra food for the road. After that, I unfortunately had to get back on the main road, the dreaded SH1, for most of the day. This is not so much fun. Oh well, soon enough I'll be in the less-traveled roads, and can forget all about the rushy Auckland drivers! Hee hee.

As the map shows, there was very little on interest for the first while. That was until I hit my lunch-time destination of Waipu, which was also where I got to get off the main road again. Yay! The first funny thing I noticed was the sign that said One Hundred Thousand Welcomes. The next funny thing I saw was that I was on Nova Scotia Drive. The next funny thing I noticed were signs for the Highland Games in January. How very odd... I put it in the back of my head, and found a bakery. I love these places, they always have displays full of things for bikers to eat. I had a great chicken and mushroom pie, along with

a peppermint chocolate square for lunch. As I sat outside eating it, I had the standard gawkers checking out my ride and trailer, and smiles crossing faces as they realized what I was doing. It's funny, on the road, they always seem to hate you, but once they stop and say hello, I think they realize that I'm a nice guy :-). At one point, a fellow stopped and chatted quite a while with me, so I asked about Waipu and the connection to NS.

As it turns out, Waipu was settled by Scots which had first gone to Nova Scotia, and wintered there until February, when they decided it was too cold, so seven ships were loaded up from Cape Breton, and they set sail for New Zealand, and Waipu is where they ended up settling. As a result, they still have ties to Scotland and Nova Scotia. There were even NS flags flying in some places. It was pretty surreal, and warmed my heart a bit. I stopped into a museum and chatted with someone for a bit there as well. Once back on the road, that's when the title of this blog post came to me. The man I had been speaking to was waxing about tourists in their camper vans with A/C on, and their favourite music playing. He said that what I'm doing is far better, because I'm really getting to smell, taste and touch the land and the people. I sit outside cafés and strike up conversations with curious locals. He's completely right of course. So, I thought of it slightly differently. Those tourists are looking at NZ through their windows. However, I'm actually SEEING it. Does that make sense? Well, on the bike, it felt pretty deep.

Once out of Waipu, I kept on trucking, even though the tug of the Scots was begging me to stick around longer. I'm glad I kept going though, as there were some great coastal views on my way. Of course, it meant more hills and valleys to get to the vantage points, but it was neat. There was one memorable beach, Lang's Beach, where there were bona-fide surfers playing in the water, in the glorious sunshine. I had high hopes for the next hostel, imagining it might be on a surf beach. To save the suspense. It isn't, although it is walking distance to a surf beach. You just can't see it from here. I guess that sort of real estate is reserved for the rich and well-to-do.

Before I made it to Mangawhai though, I had my first bit of mechanical failure. It's funny, as I'd just been wondering if I'd be able to get myself out of any jams I got in. I was grinding up yet another hill, and tried to drop into the smallest chainring. The chain dropped and my cranks just spun free. I tried to get it back on by back-pedaling and front pedaling, but with no luck. So I reached down and put it back on, hoping to roll on. Well, I noticed that the gears seemed to be skipping a lot. I stopped and had a look, and saw that my chain was totally wrecked. There was a link that was at about 45 degrees to the next one (twisted). That's a problem, I don't carry a spare chain. What to do? Well, I pushed the bike and trailer to the top of the hill, and found a grassy patch, and unhooked the trailer. I then dug out my tools and thought how I could fix this. In the end, Swiss Army to the rescue. I used my multi-tool, which has a sturdy set of pliers, along with a chain breaker. I held one link with the chain breaker, then torqued on the other link with the pliers until it sort of straightened out. Once back on, I cleaned some of the gunk out of the pulleys and chain, and re-lubed everything. It seems to be working okay now. However, I think Santa might have to bring Steve a new chain before too long, because that one is just begging to break for good now.

After that little bit of fun, it was a short 8km or so into my final destination. When I got there, no one was around, so I set myself up, had a shower, and explored the village a bit. I also picked up a full roast dinner in town for 13.50NZD. Roast pig, potatoes, kumara, parsnips, carrots, peas, and gravy. I also got some 'crackle', which is the crispy outside of a roast pig when done right. The shop owner let me try it, then packed me up with a bit of it on the side. This is the special part, and not everyone gets it, but for a cyclist, this salty

treat is divine! It was a great meal, and I ate it all up in a hurry. Now I'm just chilling out, listening to tunes, and writing this. I've also realized that I might start getting screwed on accommodations, since things are apparently booked solid starting tomorrow. Damn. Better get on the horn and try to find a way around that. Hope everyone is doing well. I just realized tomorrow is Christmas Eve up here. Crazy! Adios.

SEASON'S GREETINGS FROM OREWA BEACH

MONDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2007

(POSTED ON: MON, 2007-12-24 23:45 BY STEVE)

Wow, I can't believe it's actually Christmas Eve. The lack of snow has really got me a bit confused about the whole Christmas scene over here. Sure, there are decorations around towns and even some hostels, but without a blanket of the white stuff, and the need to wear a toque outside, it just doesn't quite compute with me. Regardless, the day was fantastic for me again, although there was a certain amount of suffering as always, but there were some chance encounters and great views which once again made any temporary pain worth enduring in the long run. Check out the [map](#) for some pictures and the route. The maps will probably be the best place to see pictures for the rest of this trip until I return. It just isn't practical to try and upload lots of pictures unfortunately. Anywho, enough about that, on with the tale.



I managed to actually get up nice and early this morning at Mangawhai Heads. That was in spite of being up sort of late talking with a swiss couple who moved to NZ. He has dreams of opening up a hostel, so it was interesting to chat with them about their thoughts. He also had an amazingly harrowing story from a few days back. He was out playing in the surf (at the same beach I was body surfing at a few days ago), and got pulled out by a riptide. Long story short, he was minutes away from death when finally rescued and had to be airlifted to a city hospital where he stayed for two days. Crazy true story, eh? Anyway, I did get up at 7am, and was ready to hit the road shortly after 8am. I had the plan to get to Orewa, but had no accommodations booked, so wanted to get there as quick as possible to try and secure a spot.

I hit the road with heavy feet, and got set for another day grinding away. I stopped not far up the road in order to try and use a pay-phone to book accommodations. While standing there, another tourer rolled by, then turned around and came to chat. It was Robbie from Oregon. We chatted for a little bit, and learned we both had pretty similar touring plans. However, he planned to head to Auckland, and I was stopping 40km short tonight, so he took off down the road. I headed off shortly after, taking a left turn. Well, a little later, we ran into each other again. He had missed the turn, and had to double back. We decided to ride together for a while.

Well, a while turned into about 30km, all the way to Wellsford, where we then stopped at a café for a late breakfast and more chatting. This Robbie fellow pretty well tore the legs off me. He was a really strong biker. Of course, it helped that he was a retired semi-pro

(category 2) bike racer. We got along really well, and hopefully we'll hook up again somewhere further south. By then, I'll have shed a bit of weight, so maybe I'll be able to keep up with him ;-)

Sadly, at Wellsford, we parted ways. I decided to stay on SH1 and take that towards Auckland. My biking book advised that taking SH1 into or out of Auckland is not for sane cyclists. However, I figured that it wouldn't be too bad on account of it being Christmas Eve. Most traffic would be traveling North out of Auckland. My plan worked out pretty well, with my lane being not too bad. It wasn't without its harrowing moments though, as there were some major construction points, where traffic bunched up quite badly, and I had nowhere to go. Let's just say it was rather interesting. No worries though, I'm completely fine. Unfortunately my chain problems continued to plague me and I had to stop at a couple more inopportune spots to do some impromptu repairs. I'm definitely investing in a new chain, and will beg a shop to let me do a full cleaning and tune up of my drivetrain before too long.

I got to my end destination of Orewa Beach around 3:30pm. The final stretch of roads to get there were really twisty and windy, and steep hills. It was very exciting. However, every now and again, I'd glimpse off the side of the road turquoise waters. I knew I was getting somewhere pretty special. Right before the hostel, I went by one such beach, and was duly impressed. I finally got to the hostel, and wouldn't you know it, there was no room at all. However, the owner was quite willing to hook me up with a tent spot for only 16NZD. Done deal. The nice thing is that I'm only 40km or so from Auckland, so I can relax tonight, have a nice Christmas breakfast, and then roll into Auckland. I've secured my crash spot again in Auckland, and will even get to go to a full day of Cricket action on boxing day.

Orewa Beach is beautiful! I walked to a grocery store for my Christmas Eve meal, and was absolutely blown away. I've definitely chosen a primo spot to spend the night. Christmas morning I'll get to check out a beautiful sandy beach. Tonight, I had a nice meal of Chicken, Potatoes, carrots, peas, a can of pineapple slices, some cheese, a desert of a cream donut, and a nice bottle of NZ wine. Sweet eh? Although the hostel is full, people are sort of doing their own thing, although I'm now getting pulled into a conversation with a South African and an American, so perhaps I'll socialize with them instead of typing all night. Until next post, take care all! And fondest Christmas wishes from the lands down under.

SOGGY 60K ON CHRISTMAS DAY

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2007

(POSTED ON: TUE, 2007-12-25 16:55 BY STEVE)



Merry Christmas all! As I'm writing this post to you all, it's actually Boxing Day over here in NZ. As you've probably seen, I managed to get some blog posts as well as some pictures up on the ole Internet for you all as a Christmas present. I've had the good fortune of finding myself in Auckland for Christmas day, and as a result, I was able to rudely impose yet again on the kindness of the

Friesens. I tell you what, it certainly made my Christmas a little merrier over here, seeing as I'm all on my own. I even got to partake in a proper Christmas feast, rather than just another microwave meal with some sides that I prepare myself in a hostel. I've put together a little [map](#) of my ride yesterday, along with some pictures as always, so feel free to check those out. If you care to, I'll also spin another little yarn about the days ride. Read on.

I awoke at about 6am to the sound of... nothing! Yup, I actually managed to avoid getting rained on overnight. This truly was a Merry Christmas for me, since I would likely be able to put the tent away dry for a night. This is a big deal to the touring cyclist. I decided to nap a bit more, and stayed in my silk cocoon until 8am. I'd been up till 2am the night before, when a group of Germans and myself stayed up and celebrated Christmas with a few bottles of beer and wine. Nothing too crazy, just hanging out. It was pretty fun. Once up, I moved around pretty slowly. The sky was quite grey, so I did have some concerns that it might start raining any second. So, I put everything in dry bags to get ready for the ride. I ate my breakfast of yogurt and a giant scone, and was on the road just around 10am

The first part of the ride was great. I had been told to avoid the SH1 highway, but since it was Christmas Day, I took my chances. As it turned out, things really weren't that bad. If anything, the traffic seemed to be just a little bit more courteous today. That was fine by me. A day when people aren't trying to run me off the road is a good day for sure. Not far down the road, the road did start getting a little more hectic, as I was heading towards the main part of the motorway, which I believe is the only divided multi-lane road in all of New Zealand. Bikes are prohibited from using it though, so I needed an alternative road. Problem was, I really had no maps at all of this region all the way back into Auckland. Luckily, there are gas stations, so through a combination of asking questions and sneaking peeks into road atlas books for sale, I pieced my route together back to Devonport. I only made one little flub. However, this has taught me something else. I've decided to ditch some of my books to trade instead for a compact road atlas, as it will be the most useful. My new reference section will consist of my two Peddler's Paradise books, my Lonely Planet New Zealand book, and an atlas. I'm getting rid of Cycling New Zealand by LP and Tramping NZ by LP.

Once I got to Devonport, it was a short ferry ride across the harbour, then about a 13-15km ride to Kevin's house. As I waited for the ferry, the skies got more grey, and the wind started picking up a bit. I decided to put the covers on my bags and throw on the rain jacket just in case. However, spirits were high, as I was almost back at my start point, where I could purge all my weight, and catch up on a few things. As I rolled off the ferry in Auckland, the wind had really picked up, and it started just a few drops of rain. I started the final push, and was in fairly high spirits. Then it REALLY started getting stormy. I'm talking massive winds and super hard driving rain. I was soaked to the bone in no time flat. It was by far the worst weather I'd biked through yet, and that's saying a fair bit. I couldn't help but laugh about it. Instead of a snow storm, I had a massive rain storm. Oh well, at least I got precipitation of one sort :-)

While I was biking along Tanaki, a car honked at me and pulled over up ahead. How odd. The even funnier thing was when I saw who it was. It was Greg, Elaine, and Greg's dad just driving home. This was a one in a million encounter, but lead to a very generous offer. I was invited over for Christmas dinner at the Friesen's. Now, I'm not kidding when I say that it was never my intention to impose on anyone for Christmas. But after the crazy rain storm and everything else, I could think of nothing better to do, so I graciously accepted. This made the rest of the ride a little more enjoyable.

Once at Kevin's, I set about trying to clean up my gear, and sorted laundry, etc. Today, I've also done my purge, and have probably gotten rid of up to 10 lbs. of weight, which is fantastic. We had a great Turkey dinner last night, and capped the night off with an exciting round of Cranium, WOW edition. There are new challenges in this one, like team spelling, and a puppeteer style game that you have to move someone like a puppet, and team-mates have to guess what it is. That was a lot of fun, and I'm extremely grateful for the warm hospitality I've received while in Auckland. Thanks for much Friesen family.

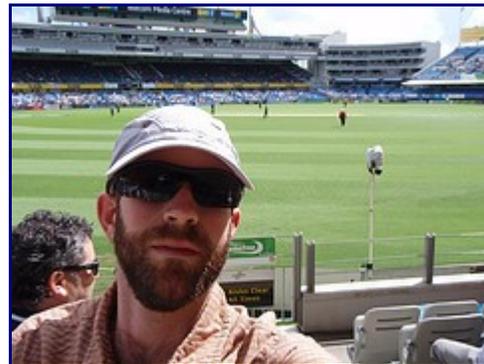
Today we're off to the wickets for a full day of Cricket. NZ vs. Bangladesh. I'm fortunate again in that they had a spare ticket for the corporate box, where we'll be sitting in the lap of luxury, including food and beverages. Pretty nice way to spend a day off isn't it? After this, I'll be heading off to the Coromandel peninsula, and from there, hopefully heading towards Rotorua, where I hope to be around New Year's. It'll take me 2 days to reach Coromandel, then probably 3-5 days to get to Rotorua. Stay tuned for plenty more exciting stories from the road! Till then, have a safe and happy Holiday season.

OF CRICKET AND WICKETS

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2007

(POSTED ON: SAT, 2007-12-29 02:50 BY STEVE)

Howdy sports fans! Notice how I've finally added a date to the first part of my post? A few people have mentioned that they'd like to know when I write each of my blog posts, so I am now complying. Basically, I've written a post every single day, but I realize that you'd probably still like to know the exact dates, so there you go. This post will be relatively brief, as there was basically only one thing that I did all day long on Boxing Day. I went to a 1 day Cricket match! That's right, I got to spectate an International cricket match between Bangladesh and New Zealand. I'll be the first to admit that I know pretty much nothing about Cricket, but I was very willing to learn, so I was quite excited to be able to do this on my day off of biking.



After the pouring rain the day before on Christmas Day on my way in to Auckland, I was more than willing to kick back and relax on my day off. Sadly, I still had to get up early in the morning in order to do a load of laundry so that I'd have clean clothes the next day when I resumed my touring. I got that in at 8am, so that I'd be ready to leave the house around 9. We were first going over to the Friesen family house, which gave me a chance to finally upload a few more pictures onto the Flickr site. You're all welcome :-). The coin toss was at 11:30, and NZ won, which meant they got to choose the starting batting team. They chose Bangladesh to go first. We were set to get to the stadium by noon, when the match would actually start.

Of course, we weren't just sitting in the nosebleeds this time. No siree, as a result of Rick Friesen's position, he was actually able to get us the TV3 corporate box for the game. As a result, the box was entirely composed of family and friends. Not only that, but we were also lucky enough to get all of our food and drink included in the box too. Huzzah. A day

of no spending for a traveling cyclists is a great thing. Of course, I'd end up spending all that saved money the next day anyway, so it was kind of a wash, but still very appreciated.

One of the people in the box was a friend of Kevin's by the name of Raj, who is a self-confessed cricket freak, and lives and breathes the games. I plopped myself next to him so that I could learn from him throughout the day. First thing I learned was that the other common form of cricket is called a test match, and it is a game which lasts 3 days instead of just one day. Insanity. Considering just the one day can last up to 8 hours, I can't imagine spending an entire weekend watching it. However, I really enjoyed watching the game. It has a pretty good flow, with something always happening. There is pretty much no game interruptions, and play is continuous. Because the game lasts all day, you can easily ignore the game for a while, chat with friends, drink and eat, and join in watching the game and still haven't really missed anything. Too funny.

In the end, NZ won the match, which was pretty much not in question. I could go into full detail about the mechanics of the game, but that really isn't the point here. If you really want to learn about it, I'm sure Google will be able to help you out. I feel very confident about my knowledge of the game now, and think that if I went to another game, I'd have no problem following the action. When the game was all over, we headed back to the Friesen household to hang out. There was some talk of a Cranium rematch, but that never happened. There were various video gaming camps, as there is both a Wii and an Xbox 360 currently there. I opted to just work on the computer, and to have a look at a few maps to decide where I'd be heading the next day. I was bound and determined to break free of the Auckland comfort grip as soon as I could.

It's far too easy to get sucked into the good life, with a bed to sleep in, food easy at hand, laundry, TV and games. However, that certainly isn't the purpose of this trip, so I was only taking that single day off this time. My rough goal is to head around the Coromandel peninsula in the next few days and hopefully end up in Tauranga for New Years. Not sure if I'll have connectivity at that time or not, but hopefully I can post a few things up before then. Either way, keep smiling and having fun, I know I am.

LATE START, LONGEST DAY AND HOT SPRINGS

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2007

(POSTED ON: SAT, 2007-12-29 02:51 BY STEVE)



Hi all. I hope everyone had a good Christmas and Boxing Day. I don't know about anyone else, but as for me, the day after Boxing day it was basically back to work. I left the comfort of Auckland and hit the high road. My goal was to get up and basically leave as soon as I could, since I had mapped out a fairly long day of biking, clocking in at around 90km including some rather large hills along the way. However, as with the best laid plans, things don't always go as planned. I was fairly effective the night before in sorting my gear

out, but I hadn't fully packed it, leading to a bit of a delay in getting out the door. Read on for the rest of the day, and check out the [map](#).

One of the main reasons for my delay was related to the fact that I absolutely had to get a new chain for the bike. After two days of troubles, I knew it was not going to be very long before I had some serious problems. The day before, we had scoped out a bike shop near the Friesen's house, which opened at 10am. That was my destination. I had hoped to be pretty much ready to go before that, so I could do what I needed to the bike, then be gone. Before that however, I invited Hollie and Kevin out for breakfast, which was just a little thing at a café. I had a great little pie as usual, and a little square. We ate these by the water at St. Helliers, which was quite nice.

On the way to the bike shop, I also brought my bottle of fuel, in order to return it for a refund. When I got to the gas station, they initially weren't very amenable to this proposal. However, with my charming good lucks and great attitude, I did eventually get the man behind the counter to exchange me my fuel bottle for a 10NZD BP coupon, which I could use in the future for anything. Of course, I already knew what I wanted. A good atlas, but they didn't have one.

Anyway, off to the bike shop, where I again had to use my Jedi powers in order to convince the people there that they should allow me the use of their tools and repair stand in order to tune up my bike and install a new chain. Of course, it didn't hurt that I spent about 75NZD there on the chain, some lube, and some grease. I even got them to throw in some rags for me. I tell you, I must be one charming fellow, because he said they don't normally allow anyone back in the shop. Hee hee. Goes to show you what begging and the charm offensive can accomplish.

After the tune-up, I raced back to Kevin's, and had to repack a few things before finally hitting the road. Sadly, it was almost noon already. Oh well, no time to waste, I put foot to pedal and got to work. It actually seemed to be going quite well. The dropping of weight turned out to be a massively great thing. I definitely had a little bit of extra power, which was a welcome thing. At one point, still in Auckland, I was a little turned around, but then I saw a BP gas station. Perfect timing, I rolled in, found a nice road atlas, and was on my way. Huzzah.

The road I was traveling on was pretty decent, although there were definitely some large hills to conquer in this day, as you can see by the overall ascent in my map. As the day wore on, it got later and later, but I was still making good time. My only concern was the fact that I didn't have a place to lay my head for the night. I hadn't been able to find any hostels en-route. However, there was a campground near where I was hoping to end up. Not only that, but it boasted Hot Springs. Hmmm. Intriguing, I just hoped they would have a tent site left for little old me.

Once I got closer to the Firth of Thames, I saw the reason I was doing this route. After coming down from one of the large hills, I saw a beautiful site. Lots of hills, and lots of water. And a windy road to lead me around it. Cool. As I was starting to get tired, I came across a German couple who were sitting in the grass admiring the view. They looked pretty worn out, and I stopped to chat with them. As it turned out, they were heading where I was heading, but they had started further back than I had. But it was their first day on the bikes, and I truly felt for them. I told them not to despair, and that whatever they were feeling, I had already gone through it, so I knew things would turn around for them. They had actually made a reservation at the campground for a room, and said if I was totally stuck, I could bunk with them. Cool. However, I told them I hoped to get my own place, and so I took off down the road, leaving them to rest a bit longer.

By the time I rolled into Miranda Holiday Park and Hot Springs, my odometer read almost 100km! It was my longest day to date, but I still felt relatively good. However, due to the late start, I didn't actually get to the park till almost seven. As luck would have it, there was one tent site left in the campground, just for me. The price was 19NZD, but that included use of the kitchen, a TV lounge, the hot springs pool, etc. etc., so it really wasn't bad. Also, since it was so nice out, I decided to try my tent in its other configuration, as a FastFly, where you just set a groundsheet, the poles, and the fly. It's a breezy way to sleep, and only recommended when there are no bugs. Lucky for me, there weren't too many bugs to worry about.

After my shower, I ran into the other couple, who had successfully finished their day, we sat together for a while, as they ate their supper of takeaway food. They were even kind enough to offer me a beer, which I gratefully accepted. We made plans to hit the hot springs just a little bit later. The pool was quite nice. It wasn't super hot, but still quite warm and relaxing. Looking back on the day, I decided that ditching the weight was a very good idea. The hills didn't seem quite as bad, and my average speed seems to have gone up by about 1km/hr, which is huge to me.

Well, that's it for now. I'm a day behind in my posts, and want to write about the next day too! Take care all.

JUMPING HIGHER IN COROMANDEL

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2007

(POSTED ON: SAT, 2007-12-29 02:52 BY STEVE)

Today was another day of firsts for ActiveSteve. It was the first day that I got to jump on a trampoline. Yes, I nearly killed myself in the process, but that's just par for the course in my world, isn't it? I kid of course. I didn't get hurt or anything, but I did have some near misses. The other first of the day was this was the first day that I biked on the Coromandel Peninsula. I had originally been unsure whether I wanted to do this section of NZ, but after today, I'm quite glad that I did. The scenery is very nice, and the roads were uber-cool. A drivers paradise. Maybe not a cyclists' paradise, but I still enjoyed. Read on for a little story about it, and the [map](#) too!

When dawn broke on my little shelter in Miranda, it was a welcome thing. The temperature dropped pretty low last night it seemed. Of course, I was sleeping in the nude of course in my sleeping bag, but my head was a bit chilly, so I had to really tighten down the hood part of my sleeping bag to keep the chill out. Luckily, there were no bugs to annoy me, so I slept pretty well after the hard bike. My alarm went off at 7am, and I was ready to get moving. Once all packed up and trailer ready to roll, it was just before 8:30. I was expecting another pretty long day, but with an early start, figured I could unwind at the far end.

I skipped breakfast and did a quick 30km to Thames to have a bite to eat. While there, I also booked a dorm room at a hostel. That way, even if the going got tough, I didn't have to be there at an early



time, and I knew I wouldn't have to set up my tent in the rain or anything if the weather turned. Well, my concerns were unwarranted I had another gorgeous day of biking, and once I actually got on the Coromandel Peninsula, the road I was following was amazing. It reminded me of places like Cape Breton and Newfoundland. The road wound its way along the coast, at times merging into a single lane, as crazy NZ drivers around me jockeyed to get by. I paid them no mind however, and just focused on what I was doing.

I enjoyed a peaceful lunch at km 60 on a hilltop overlooking the Firth of Thames, and the hill which was waiting for me after I was done eating. From 63-75, it was essentially a hillfest. If you look at my map, and see the total ascent. It was basically all found in that section, where there were 3 different hills to tackle. On the plus side, after they were over, it was just a flat finish to Coromandel, and the Tui Lodge Backpackers. I arrived to find another cyclist setting up his tent. Ralph from Holland, who was getting there via the North part of the peninsula. There were also a couple German girls, Kiki and Kati, who've been here for a week. The four of us have been hanging out since I got here, heading to town for Ice Cream and groceries. Ralph and I cooked ourselves a big feast of sausages, pasta sauce, pasta, and garlic bread, with fresh tomatoes, peppers and mushrooms. We also picked up some tasty beers to enjoy.

Tomorrow we might ride together for a while as well, until our paths diverge. Oh yeah, and of course there was the trampoline. There is a big one in the yard here which we used for a while. Let me tell you, it's tiring work jumping up and down and doing silly tricks. Well, I better sign off, to get back to the jigsaw puzzle we started. I've also learned of a shortcut to my destination tomorrow via a gravel road, with Shortcuts for Shorter Days?

SHORTCUTS FOR SHORTER DAYS?

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2007

(POSTED ON: SAT, 2007-12-29 02:53 BY STEVE)



Hi gang. Here I am, back to report on another lovely day in the lands down under. Due to a good bit of luck and some advice, I was able to shorten my biking day by about 24km, and still make it to the same destination. However, in order to do this, I had [to take the fabled 309 road](#). Intrigued? Well so was I, which is why I decided to give it a whirl. Let me describe it in this way. It was basically my own personal Bolivian Death Highway! Okay, certainly not

quite as extreme as that famous road, but it was something else, let me tell you that. Of course, I didn't have the luxury of only going downhill, so I had to climb a nice long ascent up a twisty dirt road with dropoffs beside me, before descending it on the other side. I was quite glad that I'd brought the full suspension bike today. Read on for a bit more about this day.

I did my utmost to start my day early anyway, but that sort of fell apart. Especially after last night's puzzle marathon. Ralph, Kati, Kiki and I got sucked into doing a 1000 piece puzzle. Hey, what else were we going to do on a Saturday night in Coromandel Town? Luckily, Ralph and I had picked up a 6-pack of Steinlager, so we had a bit of a feeling of a

Saturday night. We stayed up until 1am, when we put the final piece into the puzzle, and congratulated ourselves on a job well done. Kiki was going to put it back in the box, but I wouldn't let her. Not till all the other guests admired our handiwork :-)

So, although the alarm went off at 8am, I didn't roll out of bed till 8:30, and by the time I had eaten, re-packed and done some bike work, it was almost 10am. I had also been half waiting for Ralph, as he was going in my direction for the first bit, but then he wasn't ready, and wouldn't be ready for another hour. He wasn't going as far, so I opted to just get going on my own. Just 4km from the hostel was where I had to take the turn-off for the 309 road. It was another 4km or so along that 24km road that it turned into an unsealed road. From then on, it was a rather interesting bike ride, with a lot of loose gravel. Things are a little bit different with a loaded trailer. Whenever my front wheel would hit a patch of rocks, it would really try to pull me down, so several times I'd have to stop just to keep the bike from slipping off.

Of course, this road was definitely not without it's merits, as there were several cool sights such as Waiau Waterfalls, and the beginning of a trek up a 520m mountain called Castle Rock. Of course, time being of the essence, I didn't climb it. On the plus side, I had managed to book a tent site for the night in advance, so I didn't have to worry too much about the time. The climb along the dirt road was very long indeed, and sweat was just pouring off me. At the top, I took a well-deserved quick break and had a granola bar. It's really the little things :-) After that, it was the start of the descent, and what an interesting one that was. Normally, I get to make up time on the downhills, but due to the road, I had to really slow down quite a bit. The road was limited to one lane in many cases, and oncoming traffic didn't seem to have much compassion for little Steve. Luckily, I made it out in one piece, and with a grin on my face from the experience. I wonder how some other cyclists fare on that road with no suspension and heavily laden racks of gear. I would imagine there have been a few interesting tales.

Once off the 309, I hooked back up on the 25 to head towards Tairua. After a little bit, a camper van slowed as it was passing and yelled at me. It was Kiki and Kati from last night, who were heading elsewhere for a few days, and saw me biking. It's always a nice feeling to have a familiar face cheer you on as you bike! By now, it was after noon, and I was plenty hungry, so I decided that the next place I found that had food would be where I'd eat my fill. Enter the Coroglen Tavern. A bar in the middle of nowhere. Quite nice however, and filled with bikers on day trips. Secretly, I'm sure they were laughing at my 'cycle', but I chatted with a few of them just the same, about my trailer, and the way of the road. I think they were relatively impressed overall with my journey, but I'll never know. I had a great cheeseburger and an order of fries, along with my requisite Powerade. Yum! Delicious. Just what I needed to fuel myself to keep going.

Once my belly was full, I got back on my trusty steed, but not before slapping on another layer of sunscreen. Have I mentioned how insane the sun is down here? It's nuts. I've already gone through one big bottle, and have still gotten burned a bit. Oh well, I should come back all nice and brown, with bleached hair for you all to laugh at! The biking wasn't too bad, until the last 10km, when I once again hit a giant hill. However, knowing it was the last one of the day made it somewhat bearable. I climbed and climbed, until the top, where I was rewarded with a fairly sweet view of the lands below. Tairua is a nice spot I suspected. Before long, I hopped back on the bike for the fast descent into town.

Once in town, it was pandemonium, this place if FULL of vacationers mostly from Auckland I suspect. All the B&Bs, motels and hostels are quite full. I'm sharing my own little patch of grass with at least one other person. When I checked in, I didn't get a very

friendly feeling from the lady showing me around, but the place is nice enough. She seemed rather put off by a biker, and cheerfully informed me that it was the busiest day of the year, and 'the book' said you shouldn't bike today. Whatever. As I was sitting here, writing this, she came through with another couple staying here, and I noticed she gave them tons of extra info, like telling them about local sites and hikes, as well as pointing out BBQs. For me, it was just, here's the bathroom, kitchen, TV room, "although I'm sure you'll just eat your pasta and go to bed". Nice, right? I'll show her. A bunch of Germans I met earlier just showed up, so I'll probably enjoy some more beers tonight. They were the group from Christmas, and are staying here until New Years.

However, I'll be back off tomorrow, heading towards Waihia. Time to sign off, the sun is shining, and the beach is calling. The tide is low, so I'm hoping I'll be able to hike to a nearby summit to take in the views before grabbing supper and a few drinks. There is also pay wireless access here, so hopefully you'll see this post in almost real time! Hope everyone is doing well, and I'll hopefully be talking to some of you soon! Cheers.

ch will knock almost 20km off my trip tomorrow, which means a much shorter day. Hooray. It also means I should have no trouble getting to my New Year's destination.

Take care all, hope everyone is getting excited about 2008, I know I am, even though I have no plans other than biking yet! I'm hoping to scale a small mountain on the actual New Years day, but that's about it.

GOLD MINES AND GREAT HIKES

SUNDAY. DECEMBER 30, 2007

(POSTED ON: TUE, 2008-01-01 04:42 BY STEVE)

Hi friends and well-wishers. ActiveSteve here, ready to fill you in on another exciting day in paradise. As I write this to you, there is a cool breeze blowing through my tent, and I'm writing by the light of my headlamp and screen. Yup, I'm camping once again, as there were no places to check into with a bed. Aw crap! I just lost an entire friggin blog post that I had written, and I really don't feel like rewriting it from scratch. It's late and I'm now



tired. As a result, I now present you an abridged version of my previous post. My apologies, but that's what happens when technology screws with you. As usual, check out the map tab for the [route](#) of the latest day, and read on for a few more "nuggets" about the day. Enjoy.

First, back to last night. As the tide was low, I hiked across the bay to trek up a nearby peak for amazing 360 degree views of Tairua, the bays and harbours around it, as well as the Coromandel range of mountains. It took longer than I'd hoped, but it was well worth the extra effort. I left around 5, and didn't get back till after 7. However, I did find time to pick up some takeaway. Second round of chips for the day, this time paired with a chicken burger. I've got to start specifying that I don't want beet root and onions on every burger I get though, I'm really not a fan. After eating, I hung out with the Germans as they played

Jenga, Dropdown, and Connect 4. Also, one of them made banana cake, of which I had a piece. Yum.

The stars were out in full force, which was amazing, but I still managed to hit the sack somewhere around 11pm. I slept relatively well, and got up around 7:30, and on the road by 9. I had to take the time to clean my bike thoroughly, after the dusty route 309 choice of the day before. I also did some drive-train tuning, and fixed some nagging problems I'd been having with my rear dérailleur. Hopefully that would lead to buttery-smooth shifts all day on my route from Tairua to Waihi. The early morning ride was pretty sweet, with a full sun, but a bit of breeze to keep me a bit cool.

However, that breeze didn't last nearly long enough, and before long I was sweating buckets. Especially as I was heading up the steep inclines of the day, of which there were a few. Oh well, just another day in the life of a cycling tourist, right? I made it to a town called Whangamata around 11am. I'd been hoping to call Jody all day, as I'd promised her a call that morning. However, the hostel phone was a cordless one, and it had run out of batteries overnight when someone forgot to charge it. My plan in Whangamata was to find a phone, as well as inquire about lodging in Waihi. I went to the info center, and was chatting with a lady there when I got a tap on the shoulder. It was Ralph from a couple nights ago, He'd followed my route, and caught up to me here. Too funny. As a result, my phone quest didn't occur. Instead, we had a quick food break, then decided to ride together to Waihi and find a campground.

Ralph was much quicker than me on the uphill, so on the major climb of the day, he says he actually waited about 20 minutes for me! Isn't that nuts! I guess I'm just not a climber. At least on the downs and flats, I had no issues. Unfortunately, it's really all about the uphill in this country, so I fear we may not ride together too long. We plan to ride for a while together tomorrow, but I have a tentative place to stay (with strangers) in Tauranga, whereas he doesn't know where to stay yet, so we'll probably part ways for a little bit anyway.

Having a biking partner was fun for a change, and we rode into Waihi together, and hit the info center there to talk about lodging. There was also a gold mining museum on premises that we briefly checked out, as well as an open-pit gold mine next to it. It was a bit of a strange feeling being in a mining town, and reminded me of my youth in Westville, a proud coal-mining town in years gone by. As it turned out, the Waihi Motor Camp was pretty much our only option for rest, so we headed there. For 20NZD each, we had tent sites. Well, that's a bit of a stretch, as space was at a premium, and we had to make do with whatever patch of grass we could find. It'll do though.

After setting up camp, we went out hunting for food and drinks. Not an easy task on a Sunday night in NZ, as I keep finding out. All the cafés and pubs were closing down early. We really wanted a real meal, not just takeaway, so we made a few inquiries of locals, and were pointed to the RSA place. RSA stands for Returned Servicemen Association.

Essentially, the Legion in NZ. Weird, right? Well, the hall had tables laid out, most of them reserved by locals, but there was a table open for us. Beer was cheap, and the chef had a good rep. There was a choice of 4 mains, which you then garnished yourself with veges and sides. I got butter curry chicken, and it was awesome. We ate like kings with the locals in their Legion Hall, and were very impressed. We'll be keeping an eye out for more of these places. Definitely not your typical place to eat, and we really liked it.

Afterwards, it was off to find a grocery store, to which we'd been given directions and opening hours to by someone at the RSA. How lucky for us. We hadn't seen any on the way in, and being on foot now, didn't want to wander too long. However, we found what

we needed, and stocked up, before heading back to the camp to pour over maps, discuss touring itineraries for the next little while, as we drank big beers and ate chips. It was a very congenial thing. We also wandered over to the farm animal section of the park to see pigs, sheep, chickens, ducks, roosters, chicks, etc. It was a funny dichotomy, having the loud annoying drunk kiwis next to the peaceful animals looking for food. I can only imagine what the sheep think of all the commotion!

Anywho, now that I've reconstructed a lot of what I'd said in my earlier lost blog post, I'm going to crawl into my silk cocoon for the night, although sleep might be hard to find, since the youngins next to me just pulled out a guitar. I can't believe I'm not joining them, but tomorrow is another day of biking, and I'm saving my party hat for New Year's Eve. I'll stay up late and maybe get silly then. What have I become eh? Ciao for now, sleep cozy in your home beds, and cast a thought to roaming Steve in his Big Agnes tent in a different spot every night. BTW, love the comments, keep 'em coming. I read them all, but don't get to reply too often.

BIKING FROM WAIHI TO TAURANGA

MONDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2007

(POSTED ON: TUE, 2008-01-01 04:46 BY STEVE)



Hi Gang. Wow, time flies doesn't it? I'm already another day behind in my blog posts, so I'll have to be somewhat brief as I prepare this little monologue for you all. The last post was coming live from my tent in the middle of Waihi, the mining town. Well, this one is coming to you from the comfort of a beautiful home in Tauranga, where I'm spending New Years thanks to some contacts I received by way of my sister in Saudi Arabia. Thanks Sis! This post will focus on my ride to Tauranga, and the next one on the activities I did in the past day and a half. As you know, there is a [map](#) already up on the website, so check it out. I've also now had the opportunity to upload all of the pictures I've taken to date on this trip, so please feel free to view

them all on Flickr.

Ralph and I both got up at a good time, with the intention of getting on the road by 9am that morning. By our calculations, Tauranga should only be about a 55km ride, so we hoped to make good time and be there by the early afternoon, in time to enjoy the rest of the day and perhaps even do some celebrating at night. However, as he had to find a campground, and I had accommodations, we knew that we'd probably once again part ways, and perhaps rejoin each other later in the journey. We were lucky that morning in that our tents were actually quite dry, and not dew-covered as usual. This meant packing up was easier than normal, and let us get out on time.

We set out at a pretty good clip. Ralph let me lead to set the pace, as he no doubt could go much quicker than me if he so desired. It was a nice gesture, but as a result, I pushed myself pretty hard. This was the first time that within 2 hours, we'd covered 42km! It was definitely a fast day. Part of me was just looking forward to the day off, so I didn't mind

pushing a little harder. Also, the next little bit will be shorter days with more breaks, as I get to some interesting places like Rotorua, Taupo, and National Park where the Tongariro Crossing track is.

The scenery along the route was fairly typical, so I didn't really bother taking that many pictures on this ride. Also, at that pace, I had to focus a bit more on the biking and the traffic. We got to a town called Katikati, and ended up passing another touring cyclist. Once we stopped further on, he caught up, and we chatted a bit. It was Bernie from Edmonton. A fellow down just for about 4 weeks, and essentially doing it to get in shape. He didn't have any great tourist plans, but focussed on getting to places. Of course, this wasn't really our goals, so we didn't plan on biking together. However, our paces were pretty much the same, so we now had three cyclists charging along the roads.

We pulled into the Tauranga area just around 1pm I think, and headed to the info place to get information on campgrounds as well as for me to make a call to my contacts. That is where we parted ways. Bernie and Ralph actually both headed to the same campground, which was the only one with any room left. Tauranga is a well-known spot for New Years Eve it turned out, so all rooms were full around the area. That might work out for me, as I'd hoped to have a nice New Year's celebration. I made my call from a phone, and was off to meet Cynthia and Mike Manion.

Their house is beautiful, and had a stunning view of the bay and Mount Maunganui, which I planned to climb the next day. Cynthia and Mike were overwhelmingly kind to me, offering me food, a great room with ensuite, as well as use of their phone, Internet connection, and laundry facilities. I can't express my gratitude enough for this. It has certainly made my day off and indeed my kick start to 2008 that much better. Thanks a bunch Cynthia and Mike!

After a quick lunch, Mike took me on a brief car tour of the area, as he had some errands to run, and since he's lived here most of his life, had lots of stories to tell me about the area. It was also nice just getting to spend time with a real kiwi family and learn more about the similarities Canadians and Kiwis share. It turns out, there are quite a few such similarities between our cultures. It certainly wasn't hard to find common ground or topics of conversation, which is why it has been tricky getting to a blog post. I'll save the rest for my next post on New Years Eve and the 1st day of 2008. Take care!

HAPPY NEW YEAR FROM THE FUTURE

TUESDAY, JANUARY 1, 2008

(POSTED ON: TUE, 2008-01-01 05:10 BY STEVE)

Well, I'd better get used to starting to type out 08 instead of 07, since the new year is now upon us. As I write this, I've already spent an entire day in 2008, and am indeed looking forward to getting to bed and resting, as tomorrow it's back on the bike for a tough slog up a very long hill up to 500m to get to Rotorua. Luckily, I don't have to stress too much about it, as I've already booked accommodations, as well as deciding to spend



3 nights in Rotorua, since it is basically one of the major tourist locations, and a center of sorts for Maori culture, which I'd like to learn a bit more about. However, this post isn't about tomorrow, even though it comes to you from the future :-). Read on about my day off in Tauranga, as well as my New Years experience in this charming city.

So, New Years Eve, what to do...? Well, since I was staying as a guest at a house in Tauranga, I figured a house party was out of the question. Not for lack of space or music, or alcohol, but really, I knew no one around here anyway, so I figured I'd just tag along with Cynthia and Mike to the downtown area after supper, then just wander off and explore on my own. I'd already been told that across the bay in Mount Maunganui was where the real action happens at new years. Hordes of younger Kiwis flock there and get into all sorts of trouble. So much so that the Police erect special temporary holding pens for them when they get out of control.

This year was a slightly slower year, with only a little over 350 arrests all told over there I think! They've cracked down a lot as in years past there have been riots, and a lot of violence. Sounds like a cool place to ring in the New Year doesn't it? Well, the crowds for the live music over there were the biggest ever, but there was limited violence. Either way, I opted to stay on the tamer side of the bay. There was still a good number of bars available for me to visit, with a slightly older demographic, although no less enthusiastic. I checked out a few bars and had some delicious dark beers on my rounds. Normally, you can drink in public in NZ, but here, from Dec. 26th to Jan. 5th, there is a liquor ban. The bar I ended at for New Years was a place called the Cornerstone Pub, and had a live band, and wouldn't you know it, at minutes to midnight, they busted out "The Final Countdown" by Europe. I was a bit homesick for Rob at that moment. Mainly because I had no one to share this with, and was a bit of a loner in the corner. Regardless, at midnight, there were still plenty of people willing to wish me a Happy New Year.

After the countdown, and finishing my beer, I made my way back to my temporary home, and was in bed by 1am. Next morning, I got up and started a load of laundry and going through all my stuff again. I was then off to Mount Maunganui to check out that side of the bay, and scale the namesake peak over there. Nothing too big though, only 252m. Just a nice New Years hike. To get there, I biked the 10k over, without a fully laden bike. What a difference. I've definitely gotten stronger legs now for the hills. Thank goodness. The hike up was magnificent, and everything I hoped for in order to welcome new year. And no, I made no resolutions, apart from biking more hills, with more wind and rain ;-)

At the top, I hung around for about a half hour, checking out the para-gliders, and fine views from the top. I wrote out a postcard for Jody as well, and just generally relaxed in the sun. After a while, I headed back down via a different, cooler trail which has exposed cliff sections. Way more fun, and still with good views. This lead down to Maunganui Beach, which is the supposed surfing capital of NZ, and where they are working on a large artificial reef project. The waves weren't very high today though, so no big pro surfers there for me to snap pictures of. Bummer. It was still nice to just saunter along at a snails pace to try and truly take a rest day. On my walk, I bumped into none other than my Dutch friend Ralph, who was basically doing the same as me, and had in fact been on top of the summit at exactly the same time as me, but we didn't bump into each other. Crazy, eh? I guess I'll never shake him!

We both decided a New Years Day beer was in order, and cycled back across to Tauranga, and the Crown and the Badger for a couple pints of Speights Dark. It was a great day for a patio beer. Ironically, he had also been at the same bar I had been at the night before. We're also both heading to Rotorua tomorrow, although he's camping, and I've got a hostel

booked for 3 nights. However, I'm sure we'll see each other. We opted not to try and rendezvous for the bike tomorrow, as with the extreme hill action coming up, I think he'd rather bike his own, faster, pace than wait for me all day. I'm a bit jealous of him at the moment, as he is taking a full year to do his trip, although he hopes to work as a teacher here during that time as well.

After another quick ride as we searched for Ice Cream and groceries, we split up again, with me returning to the Manion home. Once again, I was spoiled with a great supper to fuel me up for the road. It helps that they are leaving for China for 3 weeks and needed to get rid of some food. I also worked on the bike for a bit, lubing and greasing and checking tensions and pressures and what have you. Had to make sure the ole girl is up for the challenges in the coming weeks. I've vowed to keep a closer eye on all the bike workings, as I've realized this type of touring really does put a strain on a bike.

Anywho, it's off to bed now, with visions of long climbs dancing in my head. I wish you all a wonderful and happy new year, and hope that everything comes out the way you want it to for 2008! I'm thinking of you all, and will do my best to keep filling you in on my progress.

FINE DAY OF BIKING

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 2, 2008

(POSTED ON: THU, 2008-01-03 06:14 BY STEVE)



Howdy gang! I hope everyone had a brilliant New Year's Eve and New Years Day celebrations. As you would have read in my last post, today, it was back on the road for cyclin' Steve. My destination for the night was Rotorua, which is one of the major tourist destinations in New Zealand. Basically, in the South Island, it's Queenstown, in the North Island, it's Rotorua. As such, I have pre-booked 3 nights in the "In the Zone"

backpackers hostel here. I'm in a 4-bed room, with 2 other guys, one of whom is here only to bike. So, what's so good about Rotorua? Well, heaps I guess. The whole region is basically a hotbed of Geothermal activity. You can't walk far without tripping over hot springs and the like. Also, it is a mountain biking mecca, having hosted the world mountain biking championships this year. And lastly, this is the prime area for Maori culture. So, as you might guess, I'm wondering if I need a third full day here as well. Read on for more about my ride into town, and first evening here. Check out the [map](#) too.

Even though I stayed up pretty late last night working on blog entries and map uploading, I still had to get up early this morning in Tauranga. Since my host family was heading off to China, I had to be up early enough to throw the sheets into the wash, and get myself all sorted out. Also, I hoped to hit a bike shop on my way out of town which opened at 9. I had no troubles getting up and ready, so I was at the bike shop just before 9. Unfortunately, they weren't ready to let me in. In fact, the owner didn't show up even by quarter after, so I left. I tried to find another shop, but they were also closed. Oh well, time to hit the road. By 9:20 I hit the road in earnest.

I had been pretty apprehensive about this ride, as it was going over 500m in elevation, which could mean some pretty big hills. However, as it turned out, the elevation gains were over very long distances, not short ones as usual, so getting up there wasn't too bad. Sure, the average speed was suffering, but at least I wasn't suffering along with it. There was only one tricky bit in the ride, which was a gorge. Basically, huge elevation loss, followed by a huge elevation gain. Yup, lots of hard pedaling to get there, but with the slightly overcast skies, things were definitely not that terrible. Overall, the ride in to Rotorua was pretty nice, and I enjoyed myself, knowing that I would once again have a couple days of lighter biking ahead of me. Well, that is unless I do some heavy mountain biking while here.

I arrived in Rotorua and my hostel just before 2pm, which was very good timing. That included stopping for a bite to eat and taking on rest stop to eat some food after the long climb. The problem with that was that there was no one at the hostel to let me in. I rang the bell over and over, and no one came to answer. So, I ended up just chaining my bike to a post, and heaving my gear over a fence into the hostel courtyard, and left on foot to do a little recon. I went to the town tourist center, and loaded up on brochures. At 3, I headed back, and was let in. Grabbed a shower, and took a walking tour of the city.

This place is very neat, and unlike any other place I've been to in the world I'd say. I walked to the government gardens, then along the shores of Lake Rotorua, to a Maori village, which was nice and quiet since it was the end of the day. It was pretty neat, from there, I headed over to a town park, which is crammed with hot springs and all kinds of bubbling muds. Crazy. I tried taking some shots of the bubbling waters, but who knows if they'll turn out. Some of the bubbling mud was very mesmerizing, but I did eventually break free and walk back to town. From there, I found the Pig and the Whistle, a semi-famous pub in Rotorua which is in an old police station. Sadly, apparently Jan.2nd is a public holiday, so everything had a 10% surcharge as a result. It made for a pricey meal and beer, but after saving a few pennies in the last couple days, I decided to spring for it anyway, and enjoyed it.

After reviewing all the pamphlets and talking to the woman running the hostel, I've decided to do some self-guided local touring rather than forking out big bucks for a bus tour. That way, I'll have more money for my night entertainment, which tomorrow will consist of a traditional Maori Hangi, as well as ceremonies and stories about the culture at a village not far from here. I'll be witness and probably take part in a Hakka, and other traditional things. I'm quite looking forward to that. It's not super-cheap, but totally worth it I hope. Anyway, I'm probably going to turn in early this evening in order to be at the tourist info place to book my Maori experience at 8am, before heading to some cool geysers and geothermal places. I'll fill you in on all that tomorrow after I've done it!

FILLED WITH CULTURE

THURSDAY, JANUARY 3, 2008

(POSTED ON: THU, 2008-01-03 06:16 BY STEVE)

Hi friends! ActiveSteve here again. Well, you might start thinking that I'm getting lazy with all these days off, but you know what? I came here to experience New Zealand, not just thrash myself biking all around it, so that's just what I'm doing in Rotorua. Today was my day full of cultural experiences of the Maori civilization. It actually started a little last night with a self-guided city walking tour I went on that took me to a Maori village in town. Today, I continued that theme by going to Te Whakarewarewa Marori village, the Rotorua Museum, which had oodles of Maori stuff, as well as my evening at Mitai Maori Village for a concert, nature walk, and traditional Hangi meal cooked by Maoris. Although I'll probably keep the post relatively short, the experiences were nothing short of remarkable, and memorable. Or at least I hope they'll be. Tomorrow, I'm sticking around, and planning to do some serious mountain biking in Whaka forest, where the Worlds were this year. After that, off to Taupo. Check the [map](#) and read on for more.



I let myself sleep in a little bit, but not very long. I wanted to be at the tourist center shortly after 8am to book my Maori Hangi and concert ticket for the night, and I knew the center gets very busy in the day. So I threw on some clothes, walked over and booked my ticket before breakfast. The bonus of booking at the i-Site was that I got a free admission to the Rotorua museum which I planned to attend anyway. Bonus! Back at the hostel, I grabbed some breakfast, loaded up a day-pack, and stripped my bike down a bit for some local riding. First stop of the day was supposed to be Te Puia, a Maori Village.

When I got there, I was informed it was 50NZD to get in, in spite of the fact that LP told me it was 25NZD. Of well, Lying Planet strikes again. It struck a few times here in Rotorua. Mitai was listed as 75, but cost me 92. The Rotorua Museum was supposed to include the Blue Baths museum, but now that's a separate 5 charge. Now this. Curses. Luckily, the ticket person told me about another place to check out. Whakarewarewa Village, just down the road, with the same geysers, and only 25NZD. Sold. Hopped back on the bike and headed over.

Included with admission was a guided tour if you wanted, and Maori dancing and show. I decided to tour mostly alone, but now and again, would be close to tour groups, and would listen to the various stories they told. That way, I avoided the big groups, but got a lot of the information. I also caught a bunch of the show, and watched the main attraction, Pohuto, a giant geyser that goes off 20+ times a day, a couple times. It was really cool. I also took a couple nature walks which took me around several more hot baths, and mud pools, as well as some of the main hot water sources for the area. I even ran into Ralph, my Dutch friend again there. Too funny. Once again, however, we had slightly different itineraries and only talked briefly. We're both planning on doing some MTB tomorrow here as well, so I'm sure I'll have the one in a million possibility of seeing him in the network of trails in the woods here.

After the Village, I headed back to town for the Rotorua museum, which had a great 20 minute active movie about the history of Rotorua, including shaking seats, stars in the ceiling, etc. etc. It was quite well done, and gave me a lot of the background about how Rotorua was a tourist spot for a long time, particularly for it's renowned baths, which were a hit in the early 1900s, but very difficult to maintain due to the minerals in the water. The museum was also the actual site of the baths, so I got to look into some of the inner workings of the baths, such as the pipes in the basement, and the original bath fittings for some of the rooms. It was very interesting to see what passed for 'vacations' back in those days. Like 3 weeks of having treatments 5 times a day such as electro-shock baths. Crazyness!

I spent probably 2 hours in the museum before heading back towards the hostel, grabbing a Shawarma on my way so that my stomach wouldn't be empty before the Hangi later that night. I had a quick shower, then was whisked away by bus to the Maori Village of Mitai up the road from Rotorua. This experience was very unique, as the villagers welcomed us to their lands, explained their various dances and rituals, including the description of the Moka, their tattoos. They also took us on forest walks, and treated us to a recreation of their warriors arriving by Whaka (canoe) to the village. We also saw glowworms. Of course, the main point of the trip was the Hangi, a traditional Maori meal prepared underground with hot rocks or steam. Our hangi had chicken, lamb, potatoes, and sweet potatoes. They also had vegetables, salads and scrumptious deserts made for us.

I had been warned some hangi aren't particularly tasty, but this one was awesome. I loaded up with two helpings of everything, then had deserts. I'd highly recommend this place, even though when I went, they had a packed house, with many hundred people in attendance. However, even with these numbers, they managed to get us through everything in an orderly fashion, without too long of a wait. I've just gotten back from this trip, and it's about 11:30 at night, but I wanted to get through this blog post, so that I wouldn't be too far behind tomorrow. Hope all is well with you all, and I'll be checking in again soon!

PUTTING THE MOUNTAIN BACK INTO MOUNTAIN BIKIING

FRIDAY, JANUARY 4, 2008

(POSTED ON: FRI, 2008-01-04 07:34 BY STEVE)



Hi everyone! Well, although in the strictest sense of the word today was a day off, the effort I put into my day made it anything but a true day off. Today, I decided to try my hand at some of the great mountain biking that surrounds Rotorua. On the plus side, I have now at least justified bringing my full suspension mountain bike with me to New Zealand. It was an amazing day on the trails, I'll say that much. There were just so many of them, and in so many different grades of difficulty. If it weren't for a certain minor medical condition, I'd consider staying an extra day just to do more biking on the sweet sweet singletrack around

here. For a [map](#) showing where I went biking, along with a few pictures from the day, you know what to do. For more info, just read on.

All right, just so that I don't keep everyone wondering too long, just what is this medical condition you ask? Well, to put it delicately, my nether regions are killing me! Specifically, my butt. I managed to develop some sort of rash today while on the flowing trails. I'm not sure what from. I guess a combination of working too hard and sweating, combined with repeated friction and jostling. Long story short, sitting on hard surfaces is a very tricky affair. To write this post, I had to go out and drink several beers just so that I could actually sit for a while :-). As a result of this irritation, I've been convinced to only go about 30km down the road tomorrow, and camp overnight at one of the local thermal areas, where I can take advantage of a good soak in the pools. You see, even on my days off, I've been pretty hard on my body, and I really need a true rest and recoup, so hopefully that'll help before I head to Taupo.

I've been looking at the map, and I'm pretty sure I'm fine to take an extra day to get to Taupo. I really can't sit on a saddle much as it is, so that day is just going to have to work for my schedule, isn't it? Anyway, enough about my stupid problems. The problem is, I can't stop thinking about it, because it hurts more than you can possibly imagine. I just put a whole pile of special cream I got from the pharmacy on it, but it really isn't helping much. Oh well, whatever. You're probably all more interested in hearing about my riding today, aren't you? I know I would be. Fine, let me tell you about it.

I started my day not too early, leaving the hostel around 9:30 to get some breakfast over at the Fat Dog café. I had a scrambled egg meal, with hash browns and toast. This was supposed to keep me going until late in the day, as all I brought with me to the trails was a bag of mixed nuts, and two granola-type bars. That and 2.5L of water. I'd stripped my bike of all un-necessary things, in order to make it more trail worthy. It was great to bike without all the extras. I made my way to the trailheads and started exploring. For 5NZD, I'd picked up a map at a bike shop showing all the trails. This was an invaluable piece of equipment to me. It also helped that the network of trails was quite well marked, especially when it came to the entrances and exits of the trails.

I started in earnest at 10:30, and spent over 6 hours in total on the dusty paths. It was just such an amazing network out there. These trails were the smoothest trails I'd ever seen in my life. When I say that I hucked and flowed all day long, I'm not kidding. The flow on these trails was phenomenal. You'll also notice that I climbed more today than any other day yet. This was mostly over the 40 or so km I spent in the trails, as the road to and from the trails didn't have much of a gradient. I was well over 700m on some of the trails, which took me to the very peak of the Whaka forest. It was most excellent.

Guess who else I crossed paths with in the woods. Yup, none other than my Dutch friend Ralph, who had rented a mountain bike for the day in order to take advantage of the trails. Too funny. These trails are massive by any stretch, so running into him was pure dumb luck, but I wasn't that surprised. We chatted briefly, and made plans to meet up for beer later in the day at a Belgium pub. I then spent another 3 hours riding my little heart out. I was totally beat by the time I made my way out. However, as you can see by the picture, some of the views were spectacular.

On the way to the hostel, I stopped to pick up a large bacon double cheeseburger pizza from Domino's for under 11NZD. Great deal for a starving biker. I took it back to home base, and swallowed 5/8ths of it, then showered, cleaned up and re-outfitted my bike, and ate the rest of the pizza, while drinking a couple beers. Then it was off to the pub with Ralph. We had a pint each of Belgium, then wandered the town of Rotorua on a Friday

night. We opted for Ice Creams instead of another beer, then sat outside a pub listening to a band. It was around 10pm, and Ralph was heading back to his campground. I instead headed back to the Brass Bar to listen to the band. It was a great time. I had a few beers, just listening to them play. They are in fact still playing as I type this. I can hear them from the hostel, which is about 50m away. However, it is already well after 1am, and I still hope to get out in the morning at a reasonable hour.

I guess the take-away point of this post is as follows. My butt hurts, but I had a great day of Mountain biking in Rotorua. Tomorrow I'm off to soak my weary bones in some thermal spas somewhere between here and Taupo. Life is grand, and always interesting. Hope yours is too!

PASSIVESTEVE GOES TO WAIKITE THERMAL POOLS

SATURDAY, JANUARY 5, 2008

(POSTED ON: MON, 2008-01-07 02:35 BY STEVE)

Greetings from a well-rested and soaked PassiveSteve. Yes, today has certainly been one of my most inactive days of this trip thus far. However, it has been far from a boring day, and I'm definitely glad to finally take a 'personal day' to recharge mind, body and spirit! So just what makes this day so passive? Well, for starters, I only biked 30km, and I only left Rotorua around 10:30am. The late start was not only due to my short riding distance, but also my late night listening to live music. I've only headed a bit south of Rotorua to an area known as Waikite, where the Te Manaroa Spring is located. This is the largest single source of boiling water, which puts out about 40-50L of 98 degree water per second. Even though it was a short day, I've still put together a little [map](#) for you to look over, with some pictures of the thermal pools at my campground. Read on for more on this quiet day.



The road to Waikite started off sort of annoyingly. I was on the main highway for the first part, and there were lots of cars, campers, and trucks. I've come to grips with the fact that the next couple weeks will be very busy, as a result of Kiwis all taking their summer holidays at the same time. However, by the time I get further south on the North Island, and most definitely on the South Island, I'll have the roads more or less to myself. Or at least sharing them with Ralph, who is my virtual riding friend. Even though we don't always sleep in the same spots, we seem to end up together quite a bit. We're camping together again tonight, but will supposedly part ways again tomorrow, perhaps meeting up to do the Tongariro Crossing together, and perhaps not. We just never know. Either way, he's been good company for almost a week now!

After a little bit on the main road, I turned off to take some back roads to the campground, which were infinitely more enjoyable. My butt was already quite sore, so I was pretty much looking forward to only a short ride, and then an opportunity to take in some hot

baths and apply more cream to see if I can get things under control. This back road was not too bad, with some climbs of course, but nothing too severe. In my 30km, I only climbed about 800m. Upon arrival at the campground, I saw Ralph setting his tent up. He'd apparently gotten there only 20 or so minutes before me. The cost for this oasis? A mere 16NZD, including use of all the hot pools while we stay here. We've already gone for two different sessions, are about to have some supper, then plan to do another soak after we eat. I also hope to get up early enough to do a quick soak in the morning before hitting the road for Taupo.

I've already made bookings for Taupo, and it looks like this might be the start of some real fun stuff. I was reading through Lonely Planet, and I think I might do a combo of a skydive, a bungee jump, and a jet boat excursion. It's a lot to pack into one day, but this is the world capital of skydiving, so I simply must do that. There's pretty good discounts if you do the skydive before 9am, which gives me lots of time to do the other two activities as well. After Taupo, there will be some serious overnight tramping as I set out to do the Tongariro circuit in about 2 days. Yup, the activities are starting to pile up, which means so is the money outlay, but I'm still way under budget, so I'm going all out babies! Time to do the real cool stuff, right?

Well, since it was a short day, I'll keep this as a short post, and sign off here. Tomorrow is a new day, and hopefully my butt problems will have sorted themselves out a bit, as well as my stiff knees. There will be a lot of physical activity coming up, and I need to be in top shape. Don't worry too much though folks, I'm taking good care of myself. Why, there's even talk about a nice bottle of wine with supper. They say wine is a healthy thing to drink, no? Hee hee. Take care all!

MOUNTAINS FOR BREAKFAST, FREEFALL FOR SUPPER

SUNDAY, JANUARY 6, 2008

(POSTED ON: MON, 2008-01-07 02:36 BY STEVE)



Hello everyone. Well, the day of PassiveSteve is over, and today it was back to donig some real work, as well as starting to do some of the real exciting stuff. Of course, I'm talking about the fact that I did a great skydive this afternoon, complete with a 45 second free-fall, after hurling out of an airplane at 12,000 feet. Can you say sweet? Of course you can, and so did I! The jump was almost a bit of an afterthought in my day, but I'm awfully glad that I did it, in spite of the fact that it was anything but cheap! Before I finish the story of how I came to be crammed into a tiny airplane high above Taupo, let's roll back the clock to this morning at Waikite Thermal pools campground, shall we? Check out the [map](#) and read on for more details.

After a rather difficult night trying to sleep in my tent, I awoke to find that my tent was quite soaked from dew. This was yet another learning experience for me down here. You

see, it turns out that sleeping on the ground mere feet from an extremely hot thermal spring means there is a pretty big temperature difference between the ground and the air, which leads to a lot of dew. It took almost an hour of drying out to get the tent into a dry enough shape that I could put it away. I was also late getting to bed the night before on account of a van filled with 5 Frenchmen that showed up pretty late in the evening, and were just starting their barbecue at 10pm. This was about the time that Ralph and I were finally getting back from the hot pools.

Every night they drain the hot pools and allow them to refill naturally from the thermal springs. We hung around as they were being drained, and chatted with the people doing the pool maintenance. They actually don't close the pools at all for the campers, and there aren't even any night watchmen or anything, so we could basically just play around in all the empty pools all night if we wanted to. We did for a while just for kicks, as there was very little else to do. Oh yeah, and before that, we actually met a kiwi Olympic athlete. He was a track biker that competed in the 1998 Olympics in Korea. Pretty cool.

Anyway, back to my wet tent. I finally got it all dried out, and repacked and was ready to hit the road at pretty much 8:30. We left together, but didn't stay together long. Ralph was headed to another thermal spot before heading to Taupo, whereas I was going directly, to poke around and make bookings. Well, just outside the camp, we were faced with a very difficult climb. It was very steep, and tough to get up. Ralph took off at his normal high pace, and it was the last I saw of him, although he later admitted it took a lot out of him too. I guess that's what you get when you have to cross a mountain range first thing in the morning. The Paeora Range to be precise. Luckily, the rest of the day was mostly flat until the end, so I was able to do some active recovery, and had a decent ride, even though it was only a 60k day. I'm quite enjoying these shorter days.

I stopped for breakfast in a little town called Reperoa, where I noticed the sign / sculpture in the middle of a roundabout. It was the familiar forms of swimming, biking, and running. Ah yes, of course! I was actually on the Ironman New Zealand course, and would be for the majority of my ride. You see, it's a double loop bike course from Taupo, so the 45km stretch I was riding was half the loop. It was pretty cool, plus I saw many riders on the road in training for that race. There were also road markings with the IM-dot symbol and distances so I always knew just how far I was from Taupo. It was a nice feeling. Although I likely won't be doing the race, I can at least say that I biked the bike course. Neat-o! :-)

Apart from these little things, the ride was a bit unremarkable. I guess I've gotten somewhat numb to rolling farmland, hills, and looming bigger hills on either side of me, not to mention the drivers around here. It was definitely a fine ride, but it's starting to feel a bit like a work day now sometimes. Don't get me wrong though, a bad day on the bike still beats a good day in the office by a long stretch! Arriving in Taupo, I found out that the back road that I had taken actually intersects my hostel quite handily, so rather than going to the tourist center or to get food, I decided to check in. I'm in a 3-bed dorm, which is nice, except that one of the roomies is a total Mr. messy. Nice guy, just very messy. Oh well. At least I've got my little part of the room to myself as usual.

After cleaning up, I headed out to the tourist info center to scope out activities. The weather wasn't too bad today, but called for more of the same, and maybe worse tomorrow. The combo I was searching for no longer exists, and the only closest one was almost 500NZD, and included a helicopter ride. I didn't want to commit that sort of money if the weather wasn't good, so decided to just book a skydive, and bike out to the other spots tomorrow to see if they would be interesting. There are also MTB trails, and a good hike close by, so I'll have lots to choose from. While I was there, the lady asked if I wanted to

go right away, and called a local drop zone. They would be by in 30 minutes to get me. I signed up, as the weather wasn't too bad, and I didn't want to miss my chance.

So there I was, on a yellow shuttle bus heading to the Taupo Tandem Skydiving club for my first-ever freefall and tandem dives. Not too shabby. I'd be heading up to 12,000ft, and have 45 seconds of freefall. Insanity. My jumpmaster was a fellow with over 9,000 jumps to his credit, and is a 2 time NZ champion diver. I felt pretty much like I was in good hands. The beauty of the tandem dive is that there is virtually no instruction, they just load us all like sardines into the airplane, and we take off. I was loaded last, and would be the first out, but since I'm so light (58kg today, according to them), I would have a long flight. Although nothing can compare to your first jump, it was still really amazing to do it again, especially getting to do some rolls, and watch the plane fly away as I fell to the earth at terminal velocity. The 45 seconds "flew" by so fast that before I knew it, we were under canopy. Andy was nice enough to hand me the controls, so I flew us around for a while, taking in all the great scenery. There was a bit of cloud canopy over 'Mount Doom' (Mount Tongariro), but we saw other nearby peaks, and the Lake itself was just gorgeous. I'm still smiling from the jump hours later, and purchased a 20NZD DVD of the day for fun, as it had a few shots of me, and showed what I saw from the air.

Blah blah blah. I think I've said enough for this post. Time for a Steinlager, and some chilling time. Tomorrow holds more adventure no doubt, and hopefully an Internet connection so that I can post this story ;-) Later y'all!

JET BOATS ROCK!

MONDAY, JANUARY 7, 2008

(POSTED ON: MON, 2008-01-07 02:36 BY STEVE)

Good day folks. Well, another day has passed here in summery New Zealand for me. I spent a full day in Taupo exploring the sights by bike, and boy, am I tuckered out once again! Remember how I said that I don't really take days off? Well, today was another prime example. I ended up putting almost 70km on the bicycle yet again, although I didn't have to lug my trailer around with me this time. There are a number of things to do around Taupo, but I just concentrated on the things on and around the main river. This includes a bungee jumping zone, waterfalls, a dam, jet boating, and rapids that are controlled by said dam. I didn't do the bungee jump this time, but I did have some other fun. You can look at my [map](#) and read of for more tales of excitement from the land down under.



I dragged my butt out of bed by 8:30am, and was on the road before 10am. First stop was to hit a post office to mail something off, then it was on to the Bungee Zone via a bike trail along the river. The bungee site is actually pretty close to the hostel, and I could have walked there, but I was continuing on from there to the other attractions. I forget the exact height of this jump, but the number 37m jumps into my head for some reason. I watched a number of people do their jumps, but I wasn't convinced I had to do it here in Taupo. After all, the real high ones and famous ones are in Queenstown, so I'd definitely be doing it

there. I certainly wasn't scared, I just thought I should wait for the best ones. However, I kept it in mind in case I didn't do any other exciting things this day.

From the bungy zone, I carried on along a hiking trail by the river. Unfortunately, it was walkers only, no bikes. Of course, I later found out that there was indeed a bike trail higher up the slopes of the river, but only after I spent probably an hour hiking up to the Huka Falls. Damn! What a loss of time... However, the walk was nice, and the river was really beautiful. There was a group of kayakers on the river, which is a brilliant color, and seeing them below was really nice. Once at the falls, I admired them for a bit, then headed to some mountain bike trails in the "Craters of the Moon" area. So called as a result of thermal activity, and the fact that there were cave-ins leading to sunken mud holes resembling craters. Personally, when I finally did come across them, I wasn't that impressed.

However, the mountain bike trails, although not that well marked and me with no map, were really fun! These were more what I'd consider classic cross country trails, with a lot more roots rocks, and challenges than the trails I ran at Rotorua. I kept thinking what a great site this would make for an enduro-style race over 24 hours or something. I also thought some of the trails by the river would make excellent sections for an adventure race, or even an off-road triathlon. However, I'm just a tourist, and tour I must. I hadn't planned or dressed for too long in the trails, so I shortly departed for a quick sandwich at a nearby café (where Heli-tours depart from), and was back on the road towards some other attractions such as the Huka Fall Jet boating.

This was another thing I was unsure about, but after watching the boats a bit, and convincing myself that I should do it if I had any interest, I plunked down my 95NZD and put on my life jacket. Again, since I'm all alone, I was slotted on the next boat out. Sweet. I'm glad that I did this. Overall, the ride was about 30 minutes, but had a lot of 360 spins, and plenty of high speed. We had a good pilot, and we got really close to the Huka falls from the water. I also learned that 4 times a day, the dam downriver is opened, to allow the rapids to take shape below, reportedly the deepest and gnarliest ones in New Zealand. Next opening was in about 50minutes. Unfortunately, I was on the wrong side, and had to bike back to the falls, then along a trail all the way there to make it in time. Well, I could have taken the highway, but that would have been sort of annoying. So instead, I rushed off in hopes of making it there in time.

My timing was excellent. I had just enough time to get there, lock up my bike, and run off to the viewing platform at the mid-rapids point. I was there when there was about 4 minutes left till they opened the flood gate. At the moment, there was only a trickle of water, and I really didn't know what to expect, although the dark water marks seemed to indicate the levels would get pretty high. Once the gates opened, I expected a big surge. Well, nothing happened. As it turns out, there was a fairly large basin above which first had to fill up, then a secondary one as well. It took probably 10 or more minutes before the real action started happening. However, once it did, it was quite amazing to see. The level did indeed rise in a big way, and the trickle became an insane pile of frothing whitewater which even world-class experts wouldn't dare try to navigate. I was very impressed. And glad to have come to take in this free spectacle.

After the 'show', I got back on my bike and pedaled back to hostel central, which is where I'm writing this. I'm hungry, but I'm trying to get some laundry done. Once that's done, I'll head downtown to seek out some food and an internet connection to upload my latest adventures. Hopefully you'll be reading this post very soon! Hope everyone is well, and that the warm weather in Ottawa is lifting spirits :-)

RAINY DAY RIDING

MONDAY, JANUARY 8, 2008

(POSTED ON: TUE, 2008-01-08 01:26 BY STEVE)



Hi folks! Well, this should probably count as the shortest post thus far, as it was a very uneventful day for me. I woke up, it was raining, I got on my bike, it was raining. I pedalled for 3 hours, it was raining. Got to the hostel, it was raining. Yup. Rain city over here for the day. As a result, my little [map](#) has a grand total of 3 pictures, one of which you see here, and 2 of which were taken at pretty much the same time. There just wasn't anything to photograph for you! Sorry! In spite of that, I'm now in Taurangi, and feverishly planning out my next several days, in which I will truly be out of contact completely with the outer world. Yup, I'm planning to (along with Ralph) take a stab at the Tongariro Northern Circuit, as well as summitting both

Mt. Tongariro and Mt. Ngurahoe. You might know this area more as Mount Doom from Lord of the Rings. Read on for a little bit more.

The ride between Taupo and Taurangi was a short 50km ride, which was mostly flat except for one big climb about 1/3 into the day. For the most part, the road just followed Lake Taupo, which I'm still on. You see, Lake Taupo is the largest body of water in New Zealand, and is actually a volcano cone. Then again, what else is new, right? All of New Zealand is volcanoes, right? :-)) I hit the road by 9:30 this morning, after a pretty crappy night of sleep. A group of backpackers decided to spend the night on the deck directly outside my window drinking and laughing till all hours, so I couldn't sleep. Luckily, I don't really need sleep right? For my part last night, I just had a couple beer and watched Anchorman with a few other people, and tried to turn in before 11.

Once here in Taurangi, I focused my attention on planning out my Tongariro bid. There are a lot of different options for long hikes here, and most people here choose to do only the Tongariro Crossing, the most famous 1 day hike. As a result, I decided I'd far prefer spending a couple nights up there, using alpine huts and fast-packing up the summits to avoid any of the big crowds. It'll be some long days hiking, as most people do the circuit in 4 days and not 3. However, Ralph and I are both in good shape, and we won't be carrying too much stuff with us. I'm sure I'll take a bazillion pictures.

The weather is the biggest wild card in this part of the trip. You see, this is an alpine environment, and the weather can literally change from one minute to the next, including frost and snow options. As a result, I have to at least bring all my warmest gear and wet weather gear, as well as a complete first aid kit, and emergency shelter options. Should be interesting to get all that to fit in my 30L Salomon pack, but I'm pretty confident I'll be just fine. The main thing to remember is not to get too cocky in this kind of multi-day treks. People can, and do, die every year up there. I decided going at it with Ralph was my best option, for safety, and the company as well. Let's just hope he doesn't hike like he bikes, otherwise, I'll be huffing and puffing all the way. However, I think I might be the stronger hiker, so that might be nice. I'll let you know in a few days.

Anyway, that's all there really is to say for now. I'm off to meet Ralph for supper and to plan some logistics, then I'm going to try and upload some pictures so that I have empty memory cards for the hike. Hope all is well, and let me tell you, I'm pretty stoked about this trip. I just hope my leg problem subsides. Oh yeah, didn't mention that did I? My leg is in major pain mode right now, with me having actually been unable to pedal with my left leg for quite a ways today. Every time I tried pushing down on it, major pain went through my leg. I've picked up some gel to try and soothe it, and we'll see how tomorrow goes. The biggest challenge is that tomorrow, we have to climb from 368m to over 1100m by bike in 50km! Yikes. Here's hoping for a good day. Ta ta.

ON THE ROAD TO MOUNT DOOM

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2008

(POSTED ON: MON, 2008-01-14 23:48 BY STEVE)

Howdy winter folks! ActiveSteve here, reporting from Tongariro National Park. Today's [bike ride](#) was more or less a highway to heaven sort of thing. It was a steady all day climb, where we started at 380m, and ended up at 1140m, in a little place called Whakapapa Village, which is near one of the busiest ski areas in the North Island. Of course, it being summer over here, the town is a little more deserted. Basically, anyone who



is up here is here for one reason alone. To do some hiking in the National Park area. Were there not so many clouds hanging out right now, I'd have a pretty splendid view of Mount Tongariro and Mount Ngauruhoe. Not to mention Mount Ruapehu, the tallest of the lot. So, what's up now you ask? Well, read on and I'll spin you a little yarn.

The ride today was a relatively short one, at a mere 54km. However, as previously mentioned, it was a pure uphill slog to the village of Whakapapa, where we've got a cabin for tonight, as well as for Saturday Night. We're in the midst of sorting gear and trying to pack 3 days worth of hiking gear into our little day packs. Not a small feat, considering we need to pack all our camping gear in case something happens on the slopes of Mount Doom. We're fairly certain we shouldn't have any problems, as there appears to be a window of 5 days of good weather, but you never know in an Alpine environment.

It was a fairly hot ride over the final 6km, which took us up a relatively steep pitch to the village. Once there, Ralph and I secured our hut passes for the next two nights, and consulted with a few people on our chosen route. We were told there should be no issues, and that we'd probably have clear weather and that the huts shouldn't be full, so we might actually get bunks. You see, in the height of the season, a hut with say 24 beds will be filled with about 50 people, doubling up in beds, sleeping on the floor, etc. etc. They're first come first serve, so you take what you can get. Seeing as we're trying to do a 4 day trip in 3 days, we'll be hiking longer days, which means we may not be the first ones at a hut. I'll let you know on the return.

The route we'll be taking takes us around the two smaller summits, and will give us a chance to summit both of them if the weather is okay. Speaking of summits, these are not

regular mountains either, they are all active volcanoes! Yup, the third peak, Mount Ruapehu last erupted on September 25, 2007! We've actually decided that the day after we get back to Whakapapa, we'd like to do a summit climb of that peak as well. By combining a chairlift ride with some hiking, you can do it in about 5 hours return. We'll wait and see how the weather is, and how tired we are before we make a final decision.

Anywho, after getting the little details sorted out, we're now sitting in our cabin deciding on gear selection. We're both very excited to be doing these hikes, as you can probably tell. There's a chance we won't quite get the spectacular views that you see in the postcards, but at least we'll be here doing them, right? I'm sure I'll remember the overall experience regardless of the overall weather situation. That's about all I have to say for the day. Gotta finish getting ready, and get a good nights rest. We found a nice spot tonight for a pasta feast, and finished off with Ice Cream. My belly is full, which is a good thing. No fancy food for us the next few days. My diet will consist of nuts, some instant noodles, granola bars, oreo cookies, crackers and dip, and some beef jerky. Huzzah. We're already planning a big meal upon our return. Take care all, you're all with me as I tackle the big hills!

SCALING PEAKS IN SUNSHINE

THURSDAY, JANUARY 10, 2008

FRIDAY, JANUARY 11 2008

SATURDAY, JANUARY 12, 2008

(POSTED ON: MON, 2008-01-14 23:49 BY STEVE)



Good day to you all! Well, it's been several days since I wrote a blog post, primarily because there was no way I was going to lug a computer around with me on the highest peaks of the North Island. Not that I'm not loyal to you all, it's just that there wasn't going to be any power anyway, and I really wanted to focus on the hiking and the sights. Let me tell you right off the bat, I was not disappointed in any way with my decision to

spend 3 days in Tongariro National Park doing the Tongariro Northern Circuit with Ralph. I'm not sure how I can actually write a blog post that does any justice to my experiences in the past couple days. They are just so numerous and awe inspiring that it's really one of those experiences you'd have to be there for. The pictures are probably the closest thing, and those will have to wait until I send a CD of the full-resolution pictures for Jody to post for everyone. It was just that good. In any case, you can for now check out two maps for days one and part of day two before the GPS batteries died. What follows are a few more of my thoughts on the experience, and what lies ahead for me.

As mentioned, the GPS batteries obviously didn't last the entire 3 days. They usually only last about 12 hours, so I knew I wouldn't have a complete map. However, the most important bits were covered, and I have plenty of pictures from all 3 days to share, so there are lots of media forthcoming. From my Suunto watch, here are a few of the statistics of the days, basically, time spent hiking / climbing, and the ascent and descents.

Day 1: 6h 55m, Ascend: 1131m, Descend: 945m, Max: 1436m, Min: 1082m.

Day 2: 7h 13m, Ascend: 1706m, Descend: 1628m, Max: 2226m, Min: 1324m.

Day 3: 5h 05m, Ascend: 786m, Descend: 1112m, Max: 1867m, Min: 1070m.

Of course, those are just numbers. What do they all mean? Well, for starters, my legs currently feel like I ran a marathon. For an example of the foolishness, today was supposed to take a regular hiker about 8 or 9 hours. We did it in 5 hours! Does that give you an idea? We were going at a very quick clip to say the least. This doesn't mean that we weren't taking the time to enjoy it, we were just hiking pretty quick and playing fast and loose with some technical descents. We were in our element and having a great time. Such a great time in fact, that we've decided that tomorrow we're going to hopefully summit the highest peak on the North Island before heading out on our bikes for the next town. Yup, next stop, Mount Ruapehu at 2795m. We're currently at 1136m. It's completely doable, especially by taking the chairlift to 2000m. Wish us luck. But now, about the Northern Circuit.

The main trail takes you around and through the peaks of Mount Ngauruhoe and Mount Tongariro. During the circuit, we pass through many different ecosystems, from desert like scapes, to forests, to tussock fields, as well as lots of volcanic geography. As you may know, Lord of the Rings used the places nearby as the Plains of Gorgoroth, Mount Doom, Mordor, and Ithilien. The scenery definitely did not disappoint. The other two days of trekking, we pressed equally hard in order to do all the main trails, as well as do several of the side trips such as Upper and Lower Tama lakes, which are volcano crater lakes, Taranaki Falls, a beautiful waterfall area, an old historic hut, as well as Soda Springs, a mountain spring. Oh yeah, that and scale the sheer sides of Mount Ngauruhoe and the rocky path to the summit of Mount Tongariro.

Another highlight of this tramp was getting to experience the pseudo famous Kiwi hut system. Basically, we bought a pass each for 2 nights' accommodation in huts, which are bunk houses. You don't make reservations or anything. It's first come first served, and you cram as many people in as you can. Our first night was at Oturere Hut, normally a quiet hut. There are beds for 26. Well, about 40 showed up!!! Needless to say, it was very cosy, with bodies strewn all over the floor and even the front porch, as well as others in tents. Luckily, the second night, our hut only had 10 people for 22 beds, so we all had lots of room. There is no rhyme or reason to how busy a hut will be. Ralph and I were fortunate enough to get bunks both nights, since in spite of pushing hard each day, we were done by 3ish both days. This was to give ourselves time to cook a half-decent meal, and get to bed early so that we could get hiking by the early morning light. Who'd have thunk I'd be up before 6am, and on the trails by 6:30 of my own volition, eh?

Clearly, the big day for us was day 2, when we decided we do both of the summits. We were up early, pushing hard to beat any possible crowds to Mount Ngauruhoe. Now, most people don't actually climb it, as the sides are very steep, and it's a straight push directly up a massive scree slope, except for a few rock bands to scramble up. The sight of it is very daunting, and we had our doubts, but as you get on it, and start pushing, before you know it, you're high above the dome floor. Looking up and down, it's mighty impressive. But the view from the top is outta sight. This is an active volcano kids, so there is steam coming up from the top, and a massive crater at the top. We did a crater walk, and had spectacular views all around. Although the climb usually takes 2 hours, we made it in 1 hour. Oh, and the descent? Well, let's just say my 15 minute descent was the stuff of legends ;-) I plowed full bore into the scree and slid / skied all the way to solid ground. It was an amazing rush unparalleled by activities you have to pay for!

The pictures from the top show you the snow line as well, and where we slid on the snow as part of the descent. However, once at the bottom, it wasn't time to rest. Nope, we had another peak to tackle. Mount Tongariro. This climb was a more classic climb, basically following a well-worn trail to the top. After Mount Doom, this one didn't have quite as good a vantage, but was still a cool feeling. We snacked and stayed up there for about 10 minutes, before getting back to the work of descending to our second hut, Ketetahi, which is located by a thermal springs area, and is directly in a danger zone for volcanic activity. Cool. At that hut, there was a radio, and that was where I first heard that Sir Edmund Hillary, a Kiwi legend, and the first person to summit Everest, had died that day. When? Well, about the time that we were summiting Mount Ngauruhoe. That left me with some pretty powerful feelings as well. Here I was, perched 1400m above sea level, looking out at an amazing vista, after a day of claiming 2 summits, when a man like Hillary passed away. I immediately declared that the tramp for the next day would be in Sir Ed's memory. This was met with agreement by several other hikers, and approval from Kiwis as being a noble thing.

That night was a very nice sleep, and getting up this morning, Ralph and I had a fire under our butts. To start the day, we had a long climb back up to the main part of the Tongariro Crossing, then had to do the entire crossing in the opposite direction as the flow of traffic. As this was Saturday, and a beautiful day, the crowds were amazingly thick, even early. At one spot, called the Devil's Staircase, we were leaping and bounding down hundreds of meters of lava boulders, dodging tourists left and right. It was incredibly thrilling, but is the dominant reason our calves are killing us today. In 3 short hours, we'd covered the distance from Ketetahi Hut to the head of the Tongariro Crossing, which is pretty much a whole day hike for some. All that was left was the final tramp from Mangetepopo Hut to Whakapapa Village. The signs warned of this taking 5 hours in bad weather.

This was yet another completely different terrain. We had tussock grass up to our armpits, and lots of other vegetation crowding all around us, as we followed a trail that was as much a ravine / ditch as it was a path. There were countless river crossings, all dry for us. We could easily see how this would be a nightmare in bad weather. I guess the whole thing basically becomes a swampy wasteland with raging rivers interspersed. However, once again the gods of the mountains were with us, and in spite of having clouds, we had a great trek. We capped the whole thing off by having fries and a beer at the closest café to the end point, which had opened only 20 minutes before we arrived, just before noon!

Whew! What a rush. I know I'm forgetting to tell you about a million things, but there's just so much floating around in my head. Like Alpine Showers, which is the light cleaning we'd do each night with freezing stream water. Or how about the loud, annoying, snoring fellow in the first cabin who was rude and hogged mattresses? Or what about the first sight we had which was Taranaki Falls. Or even upper and Lower Tama lakes, which were each spectacular places with generous views of the surrounding peaks to share with us. Or what about Red Crater, the absolute coolest thing I think I saw, with a really neat fissure. Oh boy, there's just so much. I'm too excited and overwhelmed. Oh yeah, and tired. It's almost 9pm, and I've done the maps, and titled all the pictures, but I have to get some sleep to prepare for Mount Ruapehu, the next adventure.

So, what's next, you ask? Well, I've got the bug, and have decided to take a bit of a fast forward. I'm going to head south from here to Wanganui, but then probably take a bus to New Plymouth, which is by Mount Taranaki, the second highest peak in the North Island. I've decided it must be mine as well :-). I'm still doing well with time, and I'll still make South Island before February. That way, on the way back, I can loop up the East Coast of

the North Island to see Napier / Hastings, and other places I'm told are nice. South Island is getting closer, but I've made no firm plans there yet, although I've met many people with ideas on what to do while there.

And what of Ralph and I? Well, we'll be together till at least Wanganui I think, at which point we'll probably part ways. We've made fairly agreeable travel partners, but as with most solo travelers, we do each have our own paces, and at some point, we have to go our own ways and forge our own paths. It's been a lot of fun, and we got along superbly during the tramping. It was certainly fun to have someone who wanted to push like I did on the hiking, and shares a similar world view. Well, that's it for me for now. I hope you've enjoyed my rambling, jumbled thoughts on the Tongariro Northern Circuit, and if you're ever down this way and have a few days, I highly recommend it. It helps that I had great weather though :-). Hope you're all doing well, and stay tuned for more from ActiveSteve as time permits.

CEILING OF THE NORTH ISLAND

SUNDAY, JANUARY 13, 2008

(POSTED ON: MON, 2008-01-14 23:51 BY STEVE)

Yeeshaw! I did it! I reached the highest point in the North Island of New Zealand. Yup, Ralph and I achieved our goals yet again on another glorious day in Tongariro National Park. We managed to summit Mount Ruapehu, through the aid of both a car, and some chairlifts. Hows that you say? Well, the start point was 6km up the road, very much uphill, so we decided to hitch-hike up and back instead of biking. Also, rather than try to



scale the entire vertical distance by foot, we took the park people's advice and paid 20NZD for the chairlifts to take us up to 2000m, leaving us only an extra 700+m of vertical to climb. Our plan was to be on the first chair at 9am, and be back in Whakapapa Village around 1pm, and in National Park Village and the included spa by 3pm. Read on for a bit more of the day, and check out the [map](#). Sadly, the GPS was paused at some point early in the climb, and I didn't realize till much later, so a lot of the pictures are in the wrong place. Sorry, but that's the best I can do for now.

Everything was pretty much on track for us, and we were on the road fairly early in the morning, so that we could try and catch a ride up the hill in time for the 9am chairlift ride. The first car passed us by, but the second one stopped and gave us a lift. We had our tickets and were first in line at 8:47am. We were on the first lift up, after having chatted briefly with a guide in the souvenir shop about the route to take and what to do on top. There were two chairlifts, and the end of the second one was at a café overlooking the whole valley. It was a nice place to stop, but not for us, we got right on with the task at hand.

We climbed, scrambled and slid our way up the vertical meters, crossing some water, going up snow, scree, and lots of volcanic rock. The path wasn't always easy, but we didn't expect it to be. We'd been told that with our current feats on the Northern Circuit that we

should be able to get to the top in about an hour and 15 minutes. We took only slightly longer than that, mainly because we weren't 100% certain of the route, and had no map. We just looked up, and tried to pick the best lines. Happily, we got to the top without incident, and the view was worth every effort. Oh yeah, we also got to stop at a porta john way up in the mountain. Not sure why it was there, but we used it just to say we did.

Once at the top, we spent quite a bit of time exploring the crater and surrounding features, including an emergency shelter. It was a bit eerie being up there, as they tell you all the time that the mountain can and does erupt at any time and with no warning. The last such eruption was on Sept. 25th, 2007, at which time a guy sleeping in the Volcano monitoring hut was almost killed. He lost a leg and has had over 20 operations to date. We think we actually saw his discarded pant leg in the hut at one point. Very odd and unsettling. Nonetheless, the adventuring was a ton of fun, and we kept going around the crater trying to climb to ever higher peaks. The official altitude of Ruapehu is 2795, but we didn't reach that peak, but we were at about 2750m. The top of Ruapehu is quite a large area, and has several different peaks.

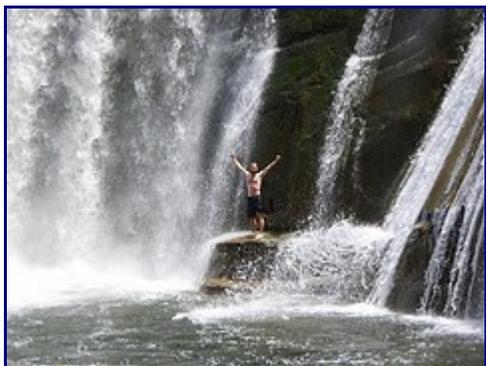
After having our fill of the top of the North Island, taking pictures and having snacks, it was time to head down. The best way to do that? Well, slide down the scree as best as possible, then take the steep snow patches and slide it. This was a wild ride, and got us pretty soaked, but a hell of a way to get down. It took considerably less time! Once back at the café, we laid wet stuff out to dry and got sorted out again. From there, it was two more chairlifts down to the main parking lot. From there, we started walking back to Whakapapa Village with our thumbs out. We were passed by several cars before finally being picked up. We managed to get to the village only a little later than hoped. We had a quick lunch, then got our gear re-packed for the final 16km ride to National Park Village.

Luckily, that ride was mostly downhill, so we made good time, and were able to book our spa time for 4pm. Basically, it's just a hot tub, but it was a heaven-send with our weary bodies after spending 4 days doing lots of hard hiking. We had a great meal up the road, and are now getting ready for tomorrow's 70km or so trip down the road to a middle-of-nowhere place. I forget the name, but it's about halfway between here and Wanganui, the next major stop on my journey. All still going well, and the bike felt okay after several days off. Now for a snack, and off to bed. Laundry is done, and I'm clean once again. What a life I live, eh? Talk to you all later.

FROM HIGH UP TO DOWN LOW

MONDAY, JANUARY 14, 2008

(POSTED ON: MON, 2008-01-14 23:52 BY STEVE)



Happy Monday to you all! As you've probably noticed, I was unable to post anything last night. This wasn't because my hostel didn't have the facilities, but rather because according to the manager there, the Internet was down all across New Zealand. That's too bad, because I was hoping to get you caught up on my exploits. However, as I now find myself in essentially the middle of

nowhere (Raukawa Falls), I still won't be able to post anything. I have high hopes for tomorrow however, as I'll be in a town of over 40,000, so surely they'll have fixed the Internet there, right? Hee hee. Well in spite of that, my trip continues, and I have a new post to write for you all. Today Ralph and I bid farewell to Tongariro National Park, and made our way (mostly downhill) to the Raukawa Falls Adventure Centre, which is a YMCA camp, but also has cabins for independent travelers. We got a cabin for 15NZD each. Not bad. The location isn't too shabby either, with some really cool falls nearby, as well as a flowing river behind our cabin. So, read on for my little story, and don't forget to check out the day's [map](#). With the return of reliable power, I can give you an accurate map now :-)

In spite of all the hard hiking in the last few days, the biking today wasn't all that bad. Of course, it helps that the route was predominantly downhill from National park, as will tomorrow be, since we're heading from the mountains back down to the Tasman Sea. From 1137m to 37m in 2 days. Boy, does the air down here ever feel heavy ;-). Our journey today was pretty much all on the No.4 highway, which is a nicely sealed road, with not as much traffic as the main highway. We quite enjoyed the scenery as there were nice rolling hills all around us, and as you got further, you could still see Mount Ruapehu in the distance behind us, which was nice. We did the first 35km pretty quick, then stopped for some late breakfast in a little town.

That little town also was the location of the closest grocery store of any description to our stopping spot. We had the foresight to buy food for tonight, as we knew there would be none here. Other cyclists have apparently not been as smart, and have had to starve for the night in Raukawa Falls. Anyway, back in the town, I had a nice bacon and egg pie, and a fresh slice of chocolate cake to keep me going. Yummy. I'm really enjoying this whole 'eat whatever you want' diet that I'm on. Of course, tonight it'll be a simple meal of instant noodles, a few cookies, and a snack later of crackers. Tomorrow I'll have a nice big meal in Wanganui.

Back on the road, there was a sign warning of storm damage over the next 50km. That seemed a bit ominous, but for the most part, there were no issues with the road. There were only a few spots where there were washouts which had left the road reduced to one lane. I get the distinct impression they don't hurry to fix these problems, as there seems to be only one main highway of concern in the North Island, the No.1. and all other roads just don't have enough traffic to warrant a whole lot of maintenance. Either way, it was fine by us, and in no time, we were in Raukawa Falls. By no time, I mean a mere 3 hours. An extremely short day considering we covered 65km! I also managed my fastest average speed on a day at 22km/hr. That was just fine by me, as I think my legs can use a little recovery time anyway.

Once on sight, we decided to head straight for the river, and ultimately the falls a mere kilometer along a trail. We had some fun swimming around the falls. I was quite surprised at just how powerful the pull from a waterfall is, and how much current they cause. Ralph had some trouble trying to get to a platform in the middle of the falls, and opted to do some cliff diving on the side instead. I pushed on, and managed to make the platform, and had fun diving from there. It was a pretty fun experience, another free fun day for us. After being sufficiently cooled off, we headed back for some showers and snacking. Now we're just lazing around in our little bunk-room as it's too hot outside. Later, we plan to check out the ropes course here, and see if there's some sports equipment we can borrow. You see, this is a YMCA camp, and there are plenty of kids around here too. It's a neat spot to spend a night, and not a fortune. In fact, it's impossible to spend money here, as there is nothing

to buy. We already got the most expensive accommodations! That's good though, as we are both low on cash, since there have been no bank machines since Turangi, which was almost a week ago. We're each on our last 100NZD. Luckily, tomorrow, we'll be able to enrich ourselves again.

Well, that's about it for my tale today. I'm going to get back to enjoying the day. Hope all is well with all of you. One and a half months down, two and a half to go. My how time flies. Maybe I'll never come back. Jody, interested in moving to NZ? Hee hee. Later y'all.

BACK TO THE TASMAN SEA

TUESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2008

(POSTED ON: MON, 2008-01-14 23:53 BY STEVE)

Hi gang! Wow, another day has gone by, can you believe it? I just heard that some of you are wondering where all the posts went. Well, don't worry. As you can see, I've been keeping up with my end of the bargain, but the NZ Internet it not living up to its potential yet! Hee hee. At any rate, I, your humble scribe, am still hard at work. Both on the road and off the road, so I bring you yet another story in the life of ActiveSteve, even though



you haven't seen any for days on end :-). Today I was heading from Raukawa Fall, the YMCA camp, down to Wanganui, [a shortish 60km ride](#) taking me to the Tasman Sea, and closer on the route to the south Island. As mentioned earlier, I've booked a return bus trip to New Plymouth from here, in order that I may check out the Eastern Coast of the North Island, and Mount Taranaki in general. This is not in any sort of violation, as I'll still be biking from north to south on my trip, but otherwise, I would have to spend at least 4 days (2 up, 2 back) just to check out that town, and I wasn't about to do that. Anyway, read on for a little bit about today and Wanganui.

Once again, we were treated to blue skies as we woke up. We've really been spoiled of late it seems. There is word of sour weather further south, like Wellington, but it hasn't materialized up in Wanganui yet, so I'm sitting here in a stifling room in a hostel as I type this up for you. The ride today was yet again a predominantly downhill day, but let me tell you, it wasn't without its little challenges in the shape of several short, steep climbs. Have a gander at some of the map pics, and you'll see. Oh, and BTW Kevin, I did figure out how to make them show up chronologically, so from now on, the drop-down list will be in order of pictures taken. Nice, eh? The scenery along the way was nothing short of great from my perspective. There were lots of stunning hills, and glimpses into true rural NZ life, such as a sheep shearing station.

Of course, with a sheep shearing station comes sheep trucks. And with sheep trucks? Well, sheep smells of course. I've decided the nasty part of these trucks is the pungent odour of sheep urine that seems to hang in the air even once the truck has moved on. Too much information for you? Tough. I have to live with it, so I'm putting the mental smell-memory into your head too. Since Ralph and I were heading directly through rural areas, there were no services at all along the way today. We thought there would be a little

breakfast in a place called Kakatahi, but the most we found of that village was a school. Oh well, press on was the only option. As usual, Ralph had the energy to burn on the uphill, so I told him to go ahead. This left me with a bit of solitude for a bit.

As a result, I opted to take a little break on a river bridge for a little bit before the last big climb of the day. Well, as I pedaled up the hill, who should I spot, but Ralph waiting for me at one of the scenery stop-spots. I felt bad, as I'm sure he had waited quite some time. Oh well, we have to ride our own paces, even if we are traveling sort of together. I was feeling pretty bagged today, and Ralph was also fighting a bit of a cold, so I was in no hurry, given that we weren't going that far. It was a bit of a gamble, as I had no reservations, but it worked out just fine.

Once in Wanganui, I got all settled in to my room, and made arrangements for the next several days. After that, it was time for a stroll into town to check out the 'nui. All in all, a pleasant place as far as I can tell. They seem to be doing okay for the tourists here, and have lots of options for food and lodging, as well as sights to see, in spite of just being a pretty small spot. I visited two museums of note. For my brother in law Patrick, I went to a restoration sight for a tram, which ironically is being overseen by a chap who was born in Smith's Falls, then moved to Florida, fought in the Vietnam war, then ended up in NZ. Now, he's the project manager for restoring Old No. 12 tramway, the first tram in NZ. He has a website, which I'll pass along to Patrick at some point. Slow work, but pretty neat.

The second museum was a paddle steamer restoration, which was the first Paddle Steamer in NZ, and one of the few remaining in operation in the world. It had actually been sitting on the bottom of a bog for 40 years before being risen and fully restored to its former glory. It was quite impressive to survey all the photos of the work. I'm no big transportation buff, but I certainly appreciated both of these projects undertaken by 'locals' to boost the tourism in the region.

My other stop was a war memorial atop a hill. One way to get up? Take an elevator which is reached via a 200m tunnel into the hill, then a 66m elevator ride for 1NZD. Pretty spiffy. At the top, you're treated to great views of the entire town, as well as views all the way to the South Island, Tongariro National Park, and Mount Taranaki on clear days. Unfortunately, it wasn't super-clear today, but at least I could see all the town, which was neat. Tonight, I'm thinking of taking in a movie just for kicks, since my bus isn't until later tomorrow morning, and I feel like some fresh popped popcorn! That's it for me for now. Hope all is well in Canada, and keep those comments coming ;-)

TAKING A FAST-FORWARD TO NEW PLYMOUTH

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 16, 2008

(POSTED ON: WED, 2008-01-16 01:08 BY STEVE)



Hello from the west coast of the North Island! Today I really did a day off. I took a bus from Wanganui up to New Plymouth. The ride was about 162km, which meant biking there and back would have taken at least 4 days, time which I simply can't spare if I hope to be on the South Island by February. However, I did want to come up this way and take the time to check out Mount Egmont / Mount Taranaki.

Yes, the second-highest peak on the North

Island has two names. One is the Maori name, and the other is left over from when NZ was colonized. Nowadays, most people are referring to it as Taranaki, which I think is the better name anyway. Of course, there is more to this region than just the massive volcano which acts as a stand-in to Mount Fuji in the movie 'The Last Samurai'. If you want to learn a little more, just read on, and don't forget to check out my ever-so-useful [map](#) that I put together.

New Plymouth is one of several villages that are all around the base of Mount Taranaki. It is, however, by far the largest one, and acts as the unofficial capital of this province. New Plymouth is a significant deep-water harbour, so it does a fair bit of shipping between Asia and NZ, as well as Australia. As such, the economy here is pretty good, and there are some very beautiful houses, as well as a well-developed waterfront in the town. There are a number of museums, which I hope to check out a bit on Friday, and some parks as well. And of course, there are many different walks available for people to try their luck on.

Personally, I came for the main event. Tomorrow, I plan to get up around 6am, and hitch-hike up the road to North Egmont, where the main trail up Mount Taranaki begins. It's about a half hour drive, but to get a shuttle out would cost about 40NZD return, and would only get there around 8am, and not bring me back till 4:30. The forecast calls for good weather in the morning, followed by clouds rolling in in the afternoon. I'd really prefer to get the mountain more or less to myself in good weather. They say you need about 5 hours up, and 3 hours down, but I'm sure that I can bag it in less than that. I'm hoping for 3.5 hours up, and 1.5 hours down. We'll see though, won't we? Either way, I still have to be prepared for almost anything, so I'll have a bit of weight with me. I'm also climbing alone, although I've been told it's not too dangerous, with the route fully marked. I'm sure some of the other climbs I've been doing are trickier. However, over 60 people have died summiting it, so I'll definitely respect the mountain as I climb. Wish me luck. Once that is done, I'll have summited all the major peaks of the North Island! Hooray. I doubt I'll have as much luck in the South, with the major peaks being quite technical. After all, Sir Ed did his training on the peaks in the South Island for his Everest climb!

Hmm, I suppose I should try and talk up the trip to New Plymouth a bit. However, there's not much to say when you're on a bus, listening to music as the world passes you by. There were definitely some big climbs, but they mean nothing when you're being driven. I booked a cheap bus, which only charged 38NZD return. It's the White Star line, and I'd call it the equivalent of a Chicken bus in NZ. It was a very small bus, and quite old, with a

driver to match. There were only a handful of other passengers, by the looks of it Kiwis saving a buck from the main bus line, Intercity. I didn't strike up any conversations unfortunately, and the whole thing was pretty boring. The one thing it made me realize is that I couldn't do that sort of trip for 4 months. You'd get everywhere too quick, and not know what to do with yourself. You also don't get the feel for the terrain as much I suppose. However, being a practical man, this was definitely the right thing to do.

On the plus side, there was no shortage of stunning views of Taranaki on the way. So, even if the weather does turn sour, I was treated to something not everyone gets to see. Taranaki with cloudless slopes! Here's hoping my morning journey will be equally beautiful. It would be great if I could see all the way to my friends Tongariro, Ngauruhoe and Ruapehu!

Once I got to New Plymouth, I did my standard wander around the city getting some provisions, as well as a tasty Ice cream. The shoreline is nothing short of fantastic, with the occasional crashing surf to watch, and a good boardwalk with people milling about. I have a feeling I'll grab my big beer and have a stroll down there later tonight. This stretch of beach is known as Surf Highway 45. Due to Mount Taranaki, there is an almost circular land mass, which means that no matter which direction the wind is coming from, there will always be a good break somewhere within an hour of here. Of course, I'm no surfer, but it still doesn't mean I'm not impressed.

That's all for now from me. Shortish day with not a lot of excitement yet. After my climb tomorrow, I plan to head to the local park where there will be some live music as part of the TSB Bank Festival of Lights. Take care all, and here's to another exciting adventure for ActiveSteve tomorrow!

TO THE TOP OF TARANAKI!

THURSDAY, JANUARY 17, 2008

(POSTED ON: FRI, 2008-01-18 02:08 BY STEVE)

Hello hello hello. What have we here? Some curious readers? Well, I guess the post and picture really don't leave all that much to the imagination, do they? You already knew that I was planning on summiting Taranaki today, and, well, I did. And rather quickly at that. I had all sorts of concerns vis a vis weather, time to climb, clouds rolling in, finding a way there, and so on and so forth, but yet again, things worked out splendidly for the little cyclist that could. I'm super-glad that I tacked on this side trip on my North Island touring schedule. As it turns out, the weather was brilliant for my climb, and everything was great. I've put a [map](#) up on the ole blogosphere for you to check out. Yep, there's a lot of pictures to go through, but hey, they're worth it. The stats are for just the climb and descent part, not including the drive up to the mountain, in case you are wondering. For more details, read on.



Last night, I had made some inquiries if anyone was heading up to the mountain, as I didn't feel like forking over 38NZD for an inconvenient shuttle. As it turns out, a German couple

were going, and planning to go very early, so I begged them to make room. They did. Yippee. I only needed the drive up anyway, as I was pretty sure I could hitch back easily. The next morning, it was only the guy, but we'd also convinced a Swiss guy to come up before we headed to bed the night before, so we were still three, and we hit the road just after 7am. By the time we were on the trail, it was about 8am, and my plan was to push hard to get to the summit as quick as possible in case clouds started coming in. The time estimates for this tramp are 7-8 hours return, so I knew it wouldn't be a complete cakewalk.

For the first little bit, I was assessing the other two guys to see if we could climb together. I could tell pretty quick it would be a solo bid. This was okay with them, as everyone has to go their own pace. In the end, neither of the other two made it to the top, so I'm glad I broke off when I did and headed off alone. Well, alone wasn't quite true, I passed about 15 other climbers on my way up, and when I arrived there, there were two coming down, and another 3 already up there, so I didn't have the place all to myself, but it was still pretty peaceful. My time from parking lot to summit was just over 2 hours, a far cry from the 5 or so they predict. I wonder if I'll pay for that in the quads tomorrow? My round trip was a little more reasonable, at 4:40, as I did goof off at the top for quite some time.

While up there, I actually summited the two main peaks, the main one, which is the Sisters, is a relatively easily climb to the top. It is the true peak at 2519m, and the Maoris ask that you don't actually climb on the very peak point. I respected their wishes. For kicks, I decided to tackle the Sharks' Tooth as well, which was the second peak up there, which presented a bigger challenge. I actually had to do some real-ish rock climbing, where there was some risk of plummeting to some pain if I wasn't careful. I got a good jolt out of that, and the view from there across the other way was worth it. Not to mention that no one else had done that peak, so I had that one all to myself. I think it was only 10m lower than the other one. Pretty sweet, eh?

To get down, there were some more scree slopes to slide down, which was fun as usual, but meant getting shoes full of trail mix yet again. I made it to the bottom of the scree area and stopped to empty my shoes. Ahhh, much better. From there, I made it back to a lodge less than halfway up the vertical climb. At that point, I could take the standard road down, or take a longer tramping track back. Which did I choose? Why, the tramping track of course. I'm always up for a little extra challenge. The heat and my speed started taking its toll on me as I made my way down, and I definitely felt tired already. I guess I'll sleep well tonight.

When I got back to the visitor's center, the Swiss fellow, Thomas was already there. He had turned back after the snowline, and came back down for food and water. He hadn't carried enough stuff with him I think, as he looked quite beat. We waited for almost 2 hours for Albert to come back down, but we never saw him. I decided that hitchhiking was a better option, especially when I saw a guy I had talked to on the summit get in his car. We stuck our thumbs out, and were picked up right away for a ride. He took us all the way back into town, where we changed into swim trunks and headed to the local pool for some aquatic fun. Mountains in the morning, swimming in the afternoon. What could be better? I got to high-dive, low-dive, tarzan swing, play on floatie things, and soak in a hot tub. It was a great end to the activities.

However, the fun doesn't stop there tonight. Shortly, I'll be heading out for some free music, and the Festival of Lights in a local park. Hopefully, I'll be able to locate some kind of beer while I'm on my journey, and maybe food, as I just realized I'm starving! I've earned it, considering I've only spent 6 bucks so far today for all this fun! Crazy, isn't it? I'll call it a post for now, and try to get this one up quick for you all. Tomorrow is a pretty

slack day. I'm spending most of the day here, as the bus doesn't leave until 5pm. I'll hit the parks, and maybe the beach for a bit. Then, back to Wanganui to pack up for the bike ride to Palmerston North the next day. Till then, you stay cool!

SPENDING THE DAY IN NEW PLYMOUTH

FRIDAY, JANUARY 18, 2008

(Posted On: Fri, 2008-01-18 02:09 by steve)



18/01/08

Hello again folks! Well, as I mentioned in the last post, today I spent the day in New Plymouth, as my bus wasn't leaving for Wanganui until 5pm tonight. As a result, I predicted a fairly boring, lazy day. Well, I wouldn't say that my day was boring at all. I ended up taking a bit of a road trip with a German couple to see a neat natural feature known as the 3 Sisters. Those of you looking

at the picture and subsequent ones that will eventually get posted will note that they are not unlike Hopewell Rocks. You would be correct. They are indeed sandstone formations which arose over a long period of time as a result of erosion and big tides. This is a spot you can only visit during low tide, so we had to time our arrival correctly, which we did. I didn't bother bringing along the GPS, although I wish I did. I'll try to put some sort of map together, but no guarantees. Either way, read on for a bit more about my past 24 hours in New Plymouth.

Let's turn the clock back slightly to last night first, shall we? After my successful climb of Mt. Taranaki, and the fact that I was in no hurry the next morning, I figured I deserved a little R&R right? Well, New Plymouth is currently hosting the Festival of Lights, in which one of the local parks is completely done up with various colored lights in the trees and fountains, and there is free music, so I wanted to head there. I also convinced several other people to join me. Before that, I had to eat though. Thomas, one of the guys who went with me to Taranaki that morning was heading to the grocery store, and I tagged along. I picked up some tasty breakfast supplies, as well as a pizza, and a nice bottle of red wine from the Hawkes Bay region. It was a Cab/Merlot and quite good, but I forget the name. Sorry.

Back at the hostel, I popped my pizza in, and cracked open the wine. I offered it around, and Ulli, a German girl with Albert, took me up, so at least I didn't have to drink the whole thing alone! They were working on a puzzle as I ate and drank. Once set, we headed off downtown, with visions of beer and lights in our mind. The park was quite fun, and we checked a band out for a while, before heading to a grocery store for some beers. After the show, we had a little fun when we were asked if we'd like to help put some scooters away. Can you imagine? Someone actually handed us scooter keys to drive around, in spite of our beers in hand. Kev, you'd have loved it, we didn't even have to sneak them away. Too fun.

After that, we wandered back towards the hostel, but not before the four of us popped into an Irish bar for some Kilkenny and Guinness. There was talk of trying to get a spot in the 100 pint club, but we didn't think we could pull it off in an hour :-). Back to the hostel for a

nice rest, before getting up very late at 9:30am just in time to pack up and check out for 10am. Then, Ulli, Albert and I piled into their car for the hour or so ride to the Three Sisters. I was pretty glad, as there was no way I would have made it up there in this trip otherwise. The beach walk was a lot of fun, and passed the time away quite nicely. Once back in the car, we only made one more stop to photograph an offshore Natural Gas platform. As it turns out, Taranaki Region is a big supplier of NZ's energy needs, hence why New Plymouth is known as the "Pulse of the Energy Province". Glad I learned something!

To further my education, and to kill the last couple hours in town, I ventured off to the local museum, which was free, and learned more about Taranaki and its surrounding areas. There were some very good displays on Maori culture, as well as the development of Taranaki, and the gas exploration history of the region. Very cool free entertainment. I also went back to the waterfront to check in on the rock sculpting contest. Yup, that's right, sculptors from around the world were working at their craft, where the works will be judged and eventually auctioned off. A lot like the Ice Sculpting in Winterlude, only more permanent! It was a very impressive display, and I'm sure Jonz would have been most impressed. I'll put some pictures up when I get the ability!

Well, that pretty much sums up my free day in New Plymouth and region. I'm typing this up on the bumpy bus ride back to Wanganui. I only get in at 7:40pm, so I'm pretty sure there won't be much new to talk about later. Hee hee. I plan to just return to the hostel, and get organized for tomorrow's ride. Oh yeah, and hopefully post this! To summarize, my choice to make this side trip was completely the right call, and was a nice distraction from biking again. The next 3 days will be full, long biking days, taking me to Wellington, where I'll spend a few days before finally landing on the South Island. I'm really looking forward to it. Hope you're all well, and feel free to drop me a message some time, would ya?

DAY TO FORGET

SATURDAY, JANUARY 19, 2008

(POSTED ON: SAT, 2008-01-19 01:15 BY STEVE)

Howdy everyone out there in ActiveSteve Land! Let me just start off by saying that this blog post will be short. Possibly really short. I'm just too burnt out right now to write any great stories. Yes, you'll still get a [map](#), and you can read the statistics, but they, along with the pictures, only tell a bit of the tale of the day that I had today. My journey took me from Wanganui, meandering south through farmland to end up in Palmerston North, a University town. Massey University to be precise. It's the biggest University in New Zealand, so I thought I'd check it out. High-level impressions, not all that much to see, and surprisingly dead for a Saturday. Maybe it picks up later in the night. I probably won't be awake to find out. For the brief history of my ride and reason I'm tired, feel free to read the next couple paragraphs :-)



WIND! F*cking heaps of WIND! Not just any winds. HEADWINDS! All the way. ALL THE WAY! Sustained winds of probably 30km/hr with gusts probably to 50km/hr. The terrain really wasn't bad at all. Only a few smaller climbs. All through rolling farmland. This ride could have easily been done in 3.5 to 4 hours. It took me over 6! Get the picture? Since it was farm land, there was absolutely no escaping it. My only respite came on a pee break where I stood behind a road sign for relief, and then my lunch break in Bulls. Where did I eat? McDonald's for the first time. I just didn't feel like socializing at a café. I was totally exhausted and just wanted to eat and be on my way. I still had 30km to go! I tried being positive, but it just wouldn't work. So I cursed the wind aloud. Repeatedly. And I challenged it to blow me over. It almost succeeded a few times. Sometimes, you just have to accept a shitty day and be miserable about it I guess. Positivity was hard to find :-(I decided it was Karma, as I neglected to make a donation at the museum I visited yesterday, which was a complete mistake on my part. I always pitch in a couple bucks.

I also met another Canadian, but he was going the other direction, and crossed over to chat, and comfort me in my time of anger. Easy for him, he had a super tailwind, and was probably rolling along at 30km/hr. However, he was really nice, and said he'd had his share on the South Island. He was from Calgary, and has been on the road for 4 years I think! Crazy.

End of the ride had me in Palmerston North just after 4pm. By the time I showered, changed, and headed downtown, everything was shut tight like Fort Knox. Streets dead, only a few people milling about, along with the usual disillusioned youth. BTW, there are a LOT of these youth everywhere, and they can often be somewhat dangerous. I think my beard keeps the muggings in check. That, or my stench. Either way, I did have one close call in Wanganui, but luckily I was in front of a police station while I was being accosted. Anyway, enough about that. I'm staying in a hostel called Grandma's Place tonight. And it really is, including the Bourbon-perfume wearing elderly woman who checked me in after I called her from wherever she was. She had summer teeth (some are here, some are there), and was definitely in the middle of whiling away a Saturday with some juice. Nice enough lady though, and she isn't on-site, so the night should be okay here. I'm the only one in a 4-bed room. The place is decorated like Grandmas too. Everything short of plastic on the couches. Old furniture, old linens, really old fixtures. But, it was only 22, and has made beds, and is virtually empty tonight, so I plan on having a very early and quiet night, so that I can get back on the windy road!

Tomorrow I plan to ride on South towards Otaki Beach, and hopefully camp there if the weather is okay. I fear that the wind may stick with me all the way to Wellington, and if so, will definitely be up for another couple hard days. Oh well, I knew what I was getting myself into, didn't I? For fun today, I started planning how I'd get back to Auckland later. Rent a Car? Take a bus? Take a train? Bum rides? Buy a Car? I think my best option might be renting, especially if I can do it one way. That way, I still have freedom. One guy I spoke to recently was renting his for only 24NZD per day, including insurance, and with unlimited km! Kinda makes me wonder why I'm biking. I've heard tales of other cyclists giving up on their bikes and going that route, and have even met a couple of them. Of course, that just makes me more determined to make it all the way South on my own. It'll be a great accomplishment, and that way I won't let any of you down!

Hmm, well, look at that, I wrote up a few more paragraphs than I thought I would! I guess it was just good therapy. I'm off now in search of food, and I think there's an Internet gaming spot not far where I can use a computer. Grandma doesn't have Internet, as you might imagine, and I have to check mail to see if I have a place to stay in Wellington yet.

I'm guessing my tent by the beach will lack Internet tomorrow as well, so that's another reason to pop over to the local Internet house. Take care everyone, and may the wind always be at your backs!

MAKING A RUN FOR THE COAST

SUNDAY, JANUARY 20, 2008

(POSTED ON: SUN, 2008-01-20 20:56 BY STEVE)



Greetings webospherians! So, what to tantalize you with today? Kinda hard to make a really good story out of today's activities. Basically, I got up, got ready, and pedaled my little heart out to get to the coast while the wind was more or less in my favour :-). Yup, that's right, upon waking up, the wind had essentially done a 180 while I slept, and I awoke to another brilliant day with the winds either at my back or from the side for most of

the ride. This was most welcome, as you may imagine, especially after yesterday's debacle. As a result I'm in a better mood, and invite you to check out the [map](#) and my pictures. I even came across my namesake as you'll see from checking out the shots! My ride was about 77km, and took me from Palmerston North to a place called Otaki Beach, which is along the Kapiti Coast. Tomorrow, I'll be in Wellington, with only a short bit of biking (about 30km) followed by a recommended commuter train for about 50km. Read on for a little more about my day.

Last night in Palmerston North pretty much went the way I expected. After my posting, I made my way to an Irish Pub for supper, where I was one of 5 patrons at the time. I had my double shank meal with a nice little Speight's Dark, then ducked out to get to the grocery store to pick up some brekkie. The town was still pretty much dead, with no great parties emerging. Then again, it was still before 9pm, so I guess that's not really a fair judge of the town's excitement level is it? Back at the hostel, I was thinking of watching a little TV, as Saving Private Ryan was on, but by the time I was ready for that, the guy had switched to some other show which looked boring. So instead, I read a little of the old Lonely Planet, and checked out some maps for the South Island. After that, it was bedtime by 10:30.

Next morning, I got up, still finding myself alone in the room, this was a nice change as I could make as much noise as I wanted, and spread my gear around as I repacked. Sweet. Had my breakfast, made a quick phone call, and was off before 9am. The ride was pretty plain by NZ standards, as I was basically just pedaling through flax farming country for most of it. However, the roads were pretty flat, and I had a nice view of a mountain range on my left for a lot of the ride. As usual, the cows and sheep kept suspicious eyes on me as I pedaled by, at times singing aloud, and other times just talking to them. Well, it's only polite to say hello, isn't it? I'm in their house after all! Traffic was heavier than I had expected. Don't know where they were all heading, but then I discovered that Monday is actually a provincial holiday, so a lot of people were out for long weekends. There was

also an exhibition and an organic-fest going on in Levin, my lunch spot. Maybe they were all going there?

For lunch, I treated myself to some fried chicken and chips. Yum. I tell you, it sure is going to be hard to stop eating all this junk when I get back to Canuckistan. After lunch, I merged back on to SH1, my least favourite road due to its heavy traffic on single lanes. Oh well, soon I'll be on South Island roads, which promise to be altogether quieter. After 20k on that, I was in Otaki the Rail Town. Taking a right takes you first to Otaki Village, then finally to Otaki Beach. Otaki has a lot of outlet shops, and I actually tried a little shopping. One of my 2 T-shirts is totally thrashed (somehow got singed in a dryer), so I need an upgrade. Sadly, even in the outlets, the brand-name junk was 30NZD at the lowest. I'm trying to get a tech-T obviously, not cotton. Found a cheap biking shirt, but I don't need that.

Anyway, at the campground, I was scraping the bottom of the barrel. The owner at reception took pity and made sure she found me a spot of grass for only 18NZD, but I'm on a small triangle of grass next to both a utility shed and the parks transformer. Oh well, at least there was plenty of room for my stuff, and I'm conveniently located close to the exit for a quick getaway! They also have a nice restaurant here, so I had a good meal there of pasta and garlic bread along with a cherry coke at supper. Yippee! Now I'm writing up this post, after which I plan to pack up my tech gear, then grab my big beer and head back to the beach. I was there earlier, and it's pretty nice, and has a good view of Kapiti Island, which is a bird and wildlife sanctuary. As I'm on the west coast, I'm sure there will be a really awesome sunset to enjoy. I may even bring my harmonica with me for a little entertainment. As this is truly a 'family' campground, I haven't run into anyone to talk to or hang out with. No biggie, I also enjoy the solitude sometimes.

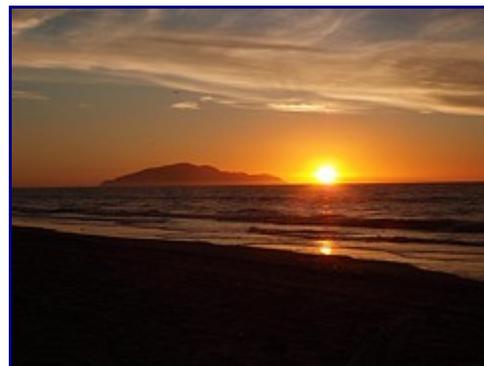
Well, that's all there is to say for now, as the sun is starting to dip behind the building next to me, which is my cue to get moving. Hope you're all well, and next stop is Windy Wellington, the Ottawa of New Zealand. I'll virtually see you all again soon!

SUNSETS AND SUBURBAN TRAINS

MONDAY, JANUARY 21, 2008

(POSTED ON: TUE, 2008-01-22 16:47 BY STEVE)

Hi folks. Greetings from windy Wellington! I know I'm a day or two behind in posts, and I'll try to rectify that for you now. The posts won't really be super-long, so hopefully they'll be in bite-size format for all my ADD friends ;-). After Otaki Beach, my next main stop was Wellington, which is of course the capital of New Zealand, so in that regard, not unlike my own current hometown of Ottawa, Canada. As such, I figured there would be a



number of different things that I'd likely do there that I wouldn't be doing anywhere else. I was also looking forward to a couple days with less biking, as my knee is starting to bother me more again. It's really annoying, as it seems that no amount of ibuprofen does anything for it, neither does my gel that I bought, or massaging it. Oh well, as long as I can keep

pedaling, it'll just have to wait until my return, right? Ha ha. Anyway, I put a little [map](#) together of the trip into Wellington, including the time on the train. Yup, my first NZ train. Read on for more.

As you'll probably see from the pictures now up on Flickr (thank you reliable Internet connection), the night before, I had an incredible sunset on the beach at Otaki, which I shared with my big bottle of beer, and my little harmonica, which I did my best to coax nice sounds out of, so as not to embarrass myself around the other beach-goers. I spent probably an hour sitting on a stump on the beach, watching all the phases of the sunset, from descent to setting, to clouds, to dusk. I think it's the first time in my life I really just sat there and watched a full sunset. I guess sometimes, you just have to stop and take the time to enjoy something like that, right? Well, I did, although being ActiveSteve, I can't be sure I'll have the patience to sit through too many of those. But, as I was on a sort of remote beach with nothing else to do, that was my free entertainment for the night!

I awoke the next morning to the unfortunate sound of falling rain on my tent. Damn. I hate when I have to put the tent away wet. Oh crap, that reminds me, my tent is still wet, I better go unpack it. Hang on a second....okay. Now that's been taken care of. So, I reluctantly got up, and packed up the things inside my tent. Luckily, it stopped raining while I was doing that, so I was able to shake the tent dry a little bit. I stuffed everything into my trusty little yellow trailer, and rolled on out of Otaki Beach. Well not before devouring a cheese scone and can of sliced pineapple I'd picked up the day before.

Back on the road, I shortly found myself on the SH1 highway, the main artery of the North Island. It was a public holiday, so traffic was actually quite heavy for a Monday, as people were heading back home from their long weekends. There were also a lot of heavy trucks. Of course, it was still only one lane in each direction, with not much of a shoulder. That sealed the deal for me. I decided I'd take my book's advice and stop in Paraparaumu to grab a train into Wellington for the last 50km, which goes around some pretty big hills that I would have otherwise had to bike. That made my day's biking only about 30km, but I wasn't complaining. Once at Paraparaumu, I sweet-talked a tourist info lady into letting me use her computer and Internet connection to check my emails. Then it was off to the train.

Hmm, train. Well, that's a bit of a stretch I think. The train consisted only of two cars, as it was a holiday. I was concerned about my chances of getting my bike on. However, the conductor was nice enough to open up the space behind the drivers cabin, and we fit the bike and trailer in, with him even helping me lift the trailer in. The total price for my 50km subway trip? 13NZD. 9 for me, and 4 extra for bike and trailer. Not too bad. The ride was pretty nice, and I got to ogle at the hills I got to miss. I smiled. I don't really love having to do hills all the time down here. I'm no hero, I just wanna get the job done.

Once in Wellington, I made my way to tourist info to get a bead on the address where I would be staying, and it was only about a kilometer from the city core, which is awesome. Of course, it is on Mount Victoria, which meant a hill. However, it wasn't a huge one, and the payoff is a bed to sleep in, free Internet and laundry, and great hosts in Travis, Rachel, and Ben. Thanks guys. The house is sort of like Scrubs in real life. Everyone in this house (the 4th, Matt, is away, hence my bed) is either a doctor or nurse, and they're all pretty young. I didn't think anyone would be home, but Travis and Ben both were, so I got shown around, and got to unpack and get settled in. That's why I got all my pictures up for you. I spent most of my first day just catching up on all that stuff.

Travis had stepped out, but when he got back at around 6pm, we headed out for some supper, then off to the Botanical Gardens with a couple of his friends to check out some live music, which was a Cuban / Latin Jazz fusion sort of band. It was pretty good stuff,

but with the rather poor weather, the crowds weren't too large, which was nice. This park reminded me of the New Plymouth night, as Wellington also is having one of these festival of lights, where they decorate the park for the occasion, and have lots of free shows. It was certainly a nice way to spend my first night.

Next day was to be my Welly touring day, and you'll just have to read that post to hear about it. Till then, you stay cool!

GETTING CULTURED IN WELLINGTON

TUESDAY, JANUARY 22, 2008

(POSTED ON: TUE, 2008-01-22 16:49 BY STEVE)



So, I just had my first full day in Wellington, and I must say, I'm quite cultured now! As this is the capital, there is definitely lots of cultural experiences to have here, so I took advantage of several of them. I've been getting late starts here, as it's just so nice to be able to listen to some music, play on the computer, watch TV, use the Internet, do laundry, etc. Funny how you miss even the domestic things when you're on the road.

Well, the other reason I've been a little slow here is that the weather hasn't been super. Have I mentioned the possibility of a cyclone in Wellington? No? Well, that was yesterday, with winds gusting up to 130 km/hr. Travis, the fellow who's place I'm staying at, and is a lifelong Wellington resident, says he can't remember Wellington ever being under a cyclone warning. Crazy isn't it? This is my second one in 2 months though, so I guess I'm pretty used to them myself. Ha ha. Anyway, read on for a little more about what I did for the day in Wellington and don't forget to check out the [map](#).

Once I finally got out of the house, I headed straight up Mount Victoria, which is basically in the neighbourhood. The summit is 196m, and the views from the top are supposed to be the best place to take in views of Cook Strait, Wellington, and the Hutt Valley. However, as a result of the clouds and blustery weather, my views were limited mainly to the city, but that was still pretty nice, as I could orient myself from there. While on top, the winds really started to pick up, and at one spot, I could hardly stand up against the wind. It was pretty crazy. I couldn't help but wonder if the laundry I'd hung up in the sun before I left the house would still be there when I returned.

From the mount, I trudged down into town to grab some quick food, and on my way saw a sign for a barber shop in the back of another shop. I walked to the back, asked how much for a #4 shave of my head and face chop as well. The fellow said for me, only 10NZD. Sold. So, as you saw in the flickr picture, I am no longer scary bearded Steve. Sorry Kev. It was fun while it lasted, but this new do might encourage some people to be less scared of the smelly biker ;-)) I certainly feel a little naked on my face as a result, but that's okay. At least now I don't have to eat leftovers after every meal, and I don't have the hair curling into my mouth anymore.

After food and the cut, I just embarked on a bit of a walking tour of town, hitting a lot of the sights, and making mental notes for where I'd like to return. There are lots of museums,

so picking the ones to visit is key. I also took in a one hour guided tour of the NZ parliament buildings here. Most of my activities are not on film, as they wouldn't allow cameras to a lot of places, so I have little to share in the way of photos. You'll just all have to come here yourselves to see them. I also did a bit of shopping along Lambton Quay. Or rather, browsing. I'm looking for a shirt to replace my wrecked one, and think I found one. I'm going to return today and try to barter and get a better deal than what they are asking. Stay tuned for the result.

I also visited the civic gallery, which is a free art gallery featuring different artists all the time. It was nicely laid out, but sadly, I already forget who the artist was that I checked out. I'm sure the Internet could help me out, but I'm too lazy to look it up at the moment. Another cultural thing I did was check out all the theatres for possible shows. I ended up buying a ticket to a show called Paua at the Downstage Theatre, one of Wellingtons longest running professional theatres. There was a mad deal going on where the ticket only cost me 20NZD, and included a talk-back session after the show to discuss whatever you wanted to about the show.

The show itself was kiwi-written and concerned kiwi topics. Essentially, it was like watching a CSI / Tarantino film in real life, with a high body count, lots of action, forensic detective work, and plot twists. So what was it about? Well, poachers becoming the poached. The main topic was about poachers that are stealing Paua from the NZ waters and selling them on the black market for profit, and thereby hurting the overfishing industry. A vigilante starts killing the poachers, and even the police get involved, when a detective actually joins up with the vigilante to help, but then takes things too far. It was very clever, and very much made just for that theatre's design.

The stage itself was most of the theatre, and they used space all around the audience, which was seated all around a central pit area, which you saw in pictures. The pit served as water, a bar, press room, etc. etc. While other areas of the theatre were used for action sequences such as cops abseiling from the ceiling or climbing up the walls. I really enjoyed it, and stayed afterwards to hear people's thoughts on the subject, as well as questions on the production. What I found most surprising was the stunts the actors were performing. I couldn't help but think that in Canada they wouldn't do some of the stuff due to the danger and being unionized in Canada. However, it was great to see. The one funny story is that the director explained that while they are all very safe, and know their way around safely, the same is not true of the audience. Apparently, on opening night, a woman from the audience fell into the pit in the middle of the floor, in spite of the safety barrier in place around it. Man, people sure are dumb, aren't they?

So, there you have it in a nutshell, my cultural day in Wellington. Today I'll be doing more cultural stuff, visiting probably the Wellington Museum, as well as finally tackling Te Papa, the New Zealand museum. I'll also try to fit in a visit to the tram museum if I can. I gotta jet now, as yet again, I'm running late. It's already past 10:30am! Take care.

ANOTHER CULTURAL DAY IN WELLYWOOD

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 23, 2008

(POSTED ON: WED, 2008-01-23 05:27 BY STEVE)

Whew! Well, another day in Wellington has blown by. Hee hee. Like the pun? Actually, the whether today was far better than yesterday, so I have no complaints. It was only a little windy, but apart from first thing in the morning, the day was very sunny, and as a result, there were much more people out milling about today. I essentially retraced my footsteps from yesterday, except that I went up a cable car as well, and didn't go up Mount



Victoria this time. Consequently, I didn't bother with a GPS map, so you'll just have to check out the pictures directly on flickr instead. Coincidentally, all of my pictures from the entire trip thus far have been put up now, so do feel free to check them all out. You can just click the link in the right column with the little pictures. It's already quite late at night, so I'll keep this post short so that I can post it, along with the remainder of my pictures before I head off tomorrow. Read on for a little more about today.

Yet again, I got a slow start, opting instead to do some quick video skyping with Jody, as well as writing up some blog posts. I also finished the work of grooming my beard. I'll be honest, I already miss it a bit. It was sort of my defining feature for a lot of people that I'd met up to now. Oh well, I'll have another good one within a couple weeks I guess, and I still have over 2 months to grow it back, so it should still be a sight to see if I grow it all back. This time, I'm thinking of going with the big chops though. Who knows :-). Anyway, by the time I got all my domestic chores out of the way, it was almost 11, and the sun was shining brilliantly. I'd made plans to meet someone for lunch who I had emailed, and we were meeting at 1:30, but before that, I wanted to check out the Wellington Museum, and see about a shirt.

Well, the museum was pretty cool, but the shirt was a no-go. They'd sold it yesterday, so I missed my chance. Oh well, I'll have to hold off now until I find something I really like. It could be a while, given that I'm heading to the more remote South Island next, but who knows. The Wellington museum, like most museums here, was free. I love it. Donations only. I spent about an hour there learning more about Wellington's past, and checking out some cool multimedia displays. By far the best one was on the 3rd floor, and was a holographic show recounting two Maori legends. I was totally impressed with the quality, and even took a few pictures of it. I was the only one in the room, so I got to move around and get really close to the display. Check it out.

From there, it was another walk across town to meet Michelle for lunch. We just headed to a Subway, and chatted for about 45 minutes on NZ, and some possible sights. Got a couple more tips and repeats of some old ones, but basically, discovered there was nothing additional for me to bother sticking around for another day for, so I'm definitely on my way tomorrow. Just a matter of what time. I've even already booked my first South Island hostel. I'll be staying in Havelock, population 670. Yup, it's only 35km from Picton, but on the way to Nelson, so it puts me closer to the action. Still haven't planned out the South Island yet, but there will be time once I get there.

After lunch, I headed to the cable car to take me way up to the Botanical gardens once again. I checked out the cable car museum, which was basically just two cars to look at, then walked around the park a little bit before heading back to town. It was time for the main event. Te Papa, which is sort of the Museum of Civilization, NZ style. It's a pretty big museum, right on the waterfront, and I think they spent something like 375M on it. Needless to say, it was a bit overwhelming, but quite well laid out. I spent just over two hours wandering through all the various exhibits, and was surprised at how much of the history and legends I already knew as a result of my travels to date in the North. Good on me, as they say.

By the time I left, I was already running about an hour behind when I said I'd be back. Travis and I planned to head downtown to eat and maybe check out some music. Luckily, he had also been running late, so it was all good. We went out for some great Indian food, then went to a bar called Sandwiches. Yup, Sandwiches. However, it might as well have been called Birdland. There was a jazz quartet just getting ready to play when we arrived, and man, were they hot. It was awesome music, and a nice way to cap off Wellington. Well, that, and a couple pints of beer. We stayed for about an hour and a half, then came back here, as he has to work tomorrow, and I'm hoping to hit the road for the ferry early enough in the morning.

So, that's my second Wellington day in a nutshell. Good fun, nothing too active, and now ready to hit the high road once again and concentrate on the task at hand, which is getting to the tip of the South Island. There's a long journey ahead of me yet, and I'm ready to embrace it once again ;-). It'll probably be a while before I can relax like this again, so I just hope I rested up enough. It doesn't really feel like it at the moment, but that's life! Ta ta for now, and hope you're all enjoying my daily updates. You know, it's a lot of work putting all this together. Who loves ya? You know I do!

SPECTACULAR SOUTH ISLAND

THURSDAY, JANUARY 24, 2008

(POSTED ON: SUN, 2008-01-27 03:19 BY STEVE)



Well, I've finally done it. I got on a ferry and made my way to the spectacular South Island of New Zealand! I'm not really ahead of schedule, but I'm also not behind schedule either. I'm pretty much right on time ;-). Isn't that nice? You see, you can't really worry about schedules when you haven't created one to follow. Tee hee. I'll have a good 8 weeks to explore down here, and from what I've seen so far, it looks like even that might not be enough, especially if the first 35km of biking over here is any indication. As per usual, I've put together a [map](#) of my days journey. Note that this map also includes the ferry crossing on the map, but the statistics I've put up reflect only the biking on either side of the crossing, so the numbers are accurate for the biking. Check it out, and read on for more about another great day in the saddle.

Well, I've finally done it. I got on a ferry and made my way to the spectacular South Island of New Zealand! I'm not really ahead of schedule, but I'm also not behind schedule either. I'm pretty much right on time ;-). Isn't that nice? You see, you can't really worry about schedules when you haven't created one to follow. Tee hee. I'll have a good 8 weeks to explore down here, and from what I've seen so far, it looks like even that might not be

The first big decision I had today was what time to catch a ferry. There aren't that many options, so it basically boiled down to whether I'd get up early to catch an 8am boat, or catch the 10:35. Well, I opted of course for the slightly later one, which gave me some extra time to get things packed, and to get a good night's sleep, which was more important for my knee. The ride took a little longer than I had anticipated, so it was definitely good that I opted for the later boat. I should also point out that this is no cheap ferry. For me plus the bike, I handed over 77NZD! Yikes. Guess I'll have to scrimp the rest of the day...not! Luckily, my hostel was only 20, and I had a cheap lunch and supper. The weather today has been fairly outstanding, with mostly clear skies, a bit of a wind, and sun.

The Wellington side was just a ride through the city, so nothing of any note to fill you in on. The ferry ride itself was pretty smooth, but I was amazed at how much you could feel the bigger swells even in a big boat like the one we were on. Food was, of course, horribly overpriced, so I had to forgo my original plan of eating while on the boat. I also didn't have my computer to work on any posts or stuff. However, I did take my atlas, and biking guide with me, and spent some time getting acquainted with the routes of the South Island. I've decided to head down the west coast, which is definitely a weather gamble, but will have the better scenery. The east would have been flat and safe, but not likely as rewarding. I plan to go all the way to Invercargill, then figure out what the plan is depending on how long it takes me to get down there.

Even before docking, the journey revealed that I was definitely going to have some pretty spectacular scenery to bike through, even today, and I haven't even gotten to the Southern Alps yet! The Marlborough Sounds area is a very beautiful area, and in some ways not unlike the west coast of Canada. Perhaps a little more mountainous right at the coastline, but geographically similar. As a bike, I was lucky enough to be the first person to roll off the ferry, which was pretty sweet. I needed the head start to try and get away from all those crazy drivers! To get the best chance, I decided to stop at a café/bakery and grab some lunch, to let all the ferry traffic die down.

After lunch, I headed straight for a scenic drive which headed due west from Picton, rather than following the predictable route of going south to Blenheim. I'd booked a hostel further west, in Havelock, in order to put me closer to Nelson for tomorrow. The scenic route was definitely the right decision as this road was spectacular. I had a hard time not just stopping and gazing at the views and snapping picture after picture. If this is a sign of things to come down here, I'm going to be spoiled. I won't have time to think about the aches and pains or hills and winds, I'll be too busy staring at the beautiful views. Of course, with good views and coastline, it's also going to be difficult choosing where to stop to do some kayaking and tramping as well. I've already decided to spend at least two nights in Nelson, and hopefully do some kayaking in the sounds, or in Abel Tasman park. I may also opt to go a little further northwest before heading south, in order to do some tramping.

The road I was on was twisty, mildly hilly, and was clinging to the sides of the slopes along the coastline for most of the way. I was surprised a few times at how seemingly more friendly the drivers down here were already. I was serenaded by a car of people singing Oh Canada, and was also cheered on a few times. Even the road works people smiled, waved and said hello to me. Cars actually slowed down and passed me carefully too. It was a very welcome change. It was probably more because this was strictly a tourist road, but either way, it made the riding that much more enjoyable.

Havelock itself, in the words of a kiwi, is a one horse town, and the horse is missing. I think the population is between 400 and 600, but it still manages to have a couple backpackers, as well as a couple Inns and B&Bs, as well as several cafés and a little

grocery store. Amazing. So, I managed to find some breakfast food, have a reasonable meal, and even finish off with ice cream. The walk around town took all of 20 minutes, including side streets. The hostel is not bad, and I'm in a 6-bed room, but I'm only sharing it with James, a fellow from England. Tomorrow will be much different, as Nelson is fairly large, and has tons of backpackers, and most of those were already full when I called. Luckily, I found a spot for the next two nights for only 22 NZD in a brand new building that was recommended to me for its soundproof rooms, and great lounges.

Well, that's pretty much it for me today. I'm going to turn in soon, as I've got a pretty strenuous day ahead tomorrow. The distance is only about 75km, but will take me over a couple really big hills. One of them will be about 375m of vertical gain, which is a fair bit on the bike. It's been a few days since I put in a full day on the saddle, so hopefully my legs will co-operate with me and get me there in good time. Luckily, it looks like the weather will stay good for at least the next couple days too. With that, I'll sign off, and go to bed dreaming of great days biking on the South Island. Two more months of the grind before I get to take a real break ;-) Adios, amigos.

THE ROAD FROM HAVELOCK TO NELSON

FRIDAY, JANUARY 25, 2008

(POSTED ON: SUN, 2008-01-27 03:20 BY STEVE)

Greetings all! Your humble narrator is back once again to regale you with another tale from the land down under. Today was another great day for me, as I managed to get all my biking done by just after 1pm! That was in spite of pedaling 75km, and having to climb up two biggish hills. I don't know if I'm getting more in shape, or if it was the days off the bike or what, but I really felt good today. Perhaps it was also the good night of sleep that I had. Whatever the reason, I'm in a good mood today, and have already planned a full weekend of fun for myself here in Nelson. Yup, even though I've only been biking a day and a half, I'm spending 3 nights here, so that I get 2 full days. However, it is with good reason. Read on to hear more, and don't forget to check out the [map](#) and pics for the day!



I went to bed around 10pm last night, after stuffing myself with a burger and some spicy wedges, followed by some great ice cream for desert. By 7am, I was up, and got my things ready for what I thought might be a long tough day. By 8am, I was on the road to Nelson, along the coast of the South Island. As it turns out, Nelson is a major tourist destination for all sorts of reasons. There is good tramping, great kayaking, biking, wineries, a market, and so on and so forth. I was actually lucky to find a bed. I had to call 4 different hostels the night before in order to find a vacancy, and now, the place is completely full for the next 2 nights, in spite of having 70 or more beds! I'm in a 6-bed room, and it's only 22NZD. Gotta love the hostel life.

On the road, I was soon getting sick of logging trucks, they are huge, loud, and create a nice wind when they whizz by at top speed with only a couple feet between me and them.

Stupid traffic. Luckily, there wasn't that much traffic otherwise, and most of the drivers were courteous. I happily rode along with the sun at my back, and a mild head wind. Nothing too bad. I embarked on one of the long climbs and before I knew it, there was another cyclist next to me. Just a guy out training. However, he was chatty, and we had some pretty good conversation. He'd done some Ironmans, and knew some of the greats from New Zealand, including some top adventure racers, like Richard Ussher and Nathan Faavae. In fact, it turns out that he was Nathan's roommate in the past!

So, after a bit more conversation, he told me that I should actually give Nathan a call, and that he'd probably love to hear from me. Imagine that! I might get to meet one of my adventure racing idols from New Zealand. Nathan now puts on his own races, and I'm hoping to get the chance to take part in one of them. That'll be the main reason for my phone call, but hopefully he'll be up for beer and a chat later on. Apparently he just lives down the road from Nelson, so it could be possible. Wouldn't that be awesome? So, there's one reason to spend an extra day in Nelson.

What are the other reasons? Well, I've already booked a full day of kayaking in Abel Tasman park, and they're picking me up from my hostel on Sunday. Saturday there is a really great market here, and I've also booked a half day brewery and winery tour. Yup, I get to sample some of the local wines, and chug back some frothy yummy beers too! Not too bad eh? Apparently from here, you get to see some of the more boutique wineries rather than the big commercial, industrial wineries closer to Blenheim. That sounded pretty appealing to me, which is why I signed up. So there you have it. Saturday and Sunday are already full, which leaves me with Monday to get back on the road.

Another advantage of staying here is that I can head directly south. My other option was to bike further north to get closer to Abel Tasman, where I was going to hike and/or kayak. However, now that I can do that from here, it saves me probably a day or two of cycling anyway, which means I'm not really spending more time here, I'm just picking a more efficient way to see what I want :-)

Umm... what else to say? Well, Nelson is a pretty nice town from what I can see. I'd compare it to something like Kelowna, only bigger, and with kiwis everywhere! On my ride today, I actually only stopped one time for a snack and a quick pee break. Normally I would have stopped for lunch, but there just wasn't any pressing need. I didn't feel like I needed to, so I just pressed on. It was nice to finish early, and be able to plan out a fun weekend. I took one other sort of stop, but it was actually to do a quick hike along the Pelorus River, to a suspension bridge. It only took about 10 minutes return, and rewarded me with a pretty sweet little view of the river and fun times jumping on a suspension bridge all by myself in the middle of the woods, without anyone to tell me not to! Hee hee.

Well, that's all for now folks, I hope you all have a great weekend, and find something fun to do as well. I'll raise a glass to each of you tomorrow on my wine tour. I'd say I'll bring some back, but I'm pretty sure that they wouldn't survive the bouncy journey in my little trailer, so the chances that I buy any wine are fairly slim, unless it's to consume that night. Bu-bye for now!

SAMPLING MIDDLE EARTH BEER

SATURDAY, JANUARY 26, 2008

(POSTED ON: SUN, 2008-01-27 03:21 BY STEVE)



Hey Gang! Well, this post has no accompanying map to go with it. Let me just get that out of the way right now. My apologies, I just decided that I didn't need to drag around my GPS all day today. At one point, I thought that it might have been a good idea, but by then it was too late. So there you have it. Either way, I had a pretty good day today, even though I didn't stray too far from Nelson itself. That's okay though, as there is plenty to see in the immediate region anyway! I took a bunch of pictures, but they may not be up at the same time as this post, so you might have to wait. Sorry. Hee hee. Anyway, read on for a little story about my day here in sunny Nelson.

Today was a complete lazy day. In fact, it's not even over being a lazy day. I may very well go watch a movie tonight, since there's not much else to do, unless I go out to a bar again, and frankly, I don't think that's a great idea at this point in my day. Main reason is that I've been out sampling beer and wine most of the day as it is, and I have to get up pretty damn early to catch my 7am bus out to Abel Tasman park. Nelson is a pretty tough town, let me tell you. There's a lot to do, and it seems that I'd like to do it all. I could probably spend an extra 4 days here, but I'm not. Which means I need to squeeze everything into the short time I have here.

So just what did I do today? Well, I started out by getting up and heading to the local market, which is known pretty much all throughout the Southern Island apparently. This is a market much like the one we're used to in Fredericton. They have food, clothes, crafts, etc. etc. Yup, there's even a guy who makes models out of empty beer cans, just like we know in Freddy Beach. While there, I had some tasty Bratwurst, Crepes, and wandered around for over an hour.

After the market stop, I took the hike to the Centre of NZ. This hike was longer than I had planned, and took me to the top of a mountain in the area. From here, there was an excellent vantage point of all of Nelson, and the nearby surrounding areas. I could have spent an hour there, but I had to get back to the hostel in time for my shuttle pick-up for the wine tour. There were eight of us scheduled to be on this tour, and it was destined to be a great one. Luckily, this was slated to be a groovy tour, which meant that instead of visiting 5 vineyards, we'd visit 4 vineyards, as well as a brewery!

Once on the tour van, everyone on the tour got to know each other pretty quickly, as there were only 8 of us. Our driver was an energetic lady that was quick to point out everything that she could, as well as make us all feel comfortable. Later, I found out there was another bus, but it was larger and had many more people. Although we linked up with them at the end for the brewery, I preferred being in our little group. We felt like a happy little family, if only for the afternoon. The wineries that we visited were each a little different from the other. Our first stop was a small winery, as well as being the site of the only organic vineyard on the South Island. Each stop we got to try 5-6 wines, so by the last stop, we

were all getting along splendidly :-). The last stop was the smallest vineyard, which is just a small family affair. They not only grow grapes, but olives and various fruits, so we got to try out some olive oils and chutneys while we were there as well. It was quite nice.

The final stop of the tour was the Harrington Brewery. Here, we got to sample beer after beer for about an hour. It was a little crazy in there, as we combined with the bigger tour. I set myself up behind the counter with the drivers / servers, so my glass was always full, and I got to choose some of the beers. I've got to say, I'm really starting to enjoy stouts and porters on this trip. As a memento, I got a 1.2L bottle filled with a stout for only 6NZD! Of course, I really had no need for it, and it's still sitting in the fridge here at the hostel. Oh, and did I mention the claim to fame for this place? They were given a lucrative contract to brew beer for Lord of the Rings. As such, they are the Middle Earth Brewery too. They brewed a 1% beer for the filming, as they didn't want drunk hobbits wreaking havoc on the set. Anyway, in all the Prancing Pony scenes, the beer they were drinking was from my little brewery. Cool, eh?

I should probably mention the best part about this wine tour is the fact that we didn't actually have to tour the winery. We just showed up and were given tastings. This is a big change from the Argentina Wine Tour Jody and I took, where each place wanted to actually make us tour the facility. In that case, we canceled half the tour and just bought bottles of wine. However, this time, it was all about the wine, not the process, so there were no disappointed campers!

Well, to close off my day last night, I ended up going to see a movie. If you get a chance to check out "Death at a Funeral". I recommend you do so. It's a brit movie, so I'm not sure if it's playing in Canada or not, but it was pretty damn hilarious. I was really glad I chose to do that rather than join one of my room-mates at a pub. It allowed me to be back at the hostel and in bed by 11pm, to get some sleep before Abel Tasman. For more on that trip, read my next post! Cheers.

PADDLING IN THE PARK

SUNDAY, JANUARY 27, 2008

(POSTED ON: SUN, 2008-01-27 03:23 BY STEVE)

Good day to you all! Although I'm pretty bagged at the moment, I think I'll try to throw together my blog post right away, as I don't think I'll be any more awake tomorrow after a long day in the saddle with some big climbs to tackle. Today was a nice change for me. I spent the entire day paddling a kayak in the Abel Tasman National Park. And I do mean all day. I was up at 6am, and didn't get back here until 7pm, just in time to go buy some



delicious Chinese food for supper, and get to work on preparations for leaving Nelson after spending 3 nights here! I was blessed with yet another great day of weather here, although I fear that will soon grind to a halt by the look of both the sky and the forecast I just saw on the TV in the lounge here. Sounds like only light rain here though, not full-on showers as I

was worried about. Anyway, read on for my post, and check out my [map](#). The stats on it are just from the paddling and hiking, not the bus trip there and back.

Abel Tasman is one of those parks that everyone raves about that has been to it here in New Zealand. As such, it was difficult to have to make the decision that I'd just spend one day there. I could have hiked probably for a week there, and not seen it all, but then my mission would be in jeopardy, wouldn't it? As such, I decided that I'd get off the saddle and the legs for a day, and put my back and arms into action by paddling. I think it was a pretty good idea, as it allowed me to see the coastline quite nicely, and also get to know some different kinds of people. You know, paddlers, not bikers or trampers ;-) BTW, in case you're wondering, I never did get in touch with Nathan Faavae as I'd hoped. There was no answer at his place, and I chickened out today after getting back. I just figured it was too late. I'll still look up his races and hopefully get to do one, at which point I might meet him. Anyway, back to the paddling.

I was picked up pretty much on time, and we were on the road shortly after 7am for the park. The ride there was about 80km, so that would have been a full day at least from Nelson by bike. The bus we were on was quite the tank, and handled like crap I'd say. I would have loved an extra little nap time on it, but that was near impossible. Either way, I was fairly excited about getting to go out on the water, so I wasn't too let down. Getting to the HQ, I learned I'd be in a group of 7 paddlers doing our trip, and would have 2 guides. Not bad. The trip we were on is listed as the longest one day kayak trip they offer, so I hoped that meant we'd all be paddlers. Well, of course that wasn't the case, but it was just fine anyway. I ended up getting paired with one of the guides, as we used tandem kayaks. The odd guide out had a single boat, and he was just getting ready to be tested tomorrow to become a full guide himself.

We had a great day on the water, and got to explore plenty of nooks and crannies, as well as be tossed about like corks in a bathtub on a few of the ocean passages we had to navigate. We got to see a bunch of seals sunning themselves and playing in the water, which was cool. At one point, we also saw some rays underwater near a sand bar. Unfortunately, I didn't get any snapshots of that, which I wished I could have. Our lunch stop was on what was supposed to be a relatively deserted beach, but it turned out to be rush hour for all the kayak tours, and our little beach was soon over-run by a myriad of small tour groups. It was kind of funny. While there, we made a side-trip by hiking up to a lookout which looked down on the beach, this was probably one of my highlights actually. We also played an old dutch game called whirling windmills, which I won!

Back on the water after lunch, some people were starting to get a little tired of paddling, so the pace stayed pretty tame. The guide, Josh, thought it would be funny to just let me do all the paddling, and at one point, another 3 boats were trailing off our boat, and I was the sole paddler. Apparently, this was supposed to be training for me. It was fun for a bit, but got pretty tiring after a while, which is probably why I'm so bloody tired now! That, and I have to bike 84+ km tomorrow, and climb up to a 700m peak. Yikes. Luckily, I've already made my reservations, so I don't have to rush too much, and the place is actually called a bike-packers, and they cater to cyclists. Fun, eh?

Anywho, back to the paddling. Towards the end, we started having a pretty substantial tail wind, which got the guide pretty excited, as it meant he could use his secret weapon for our last leg of the trip. A Sail! Yup, we had a sail that we could all use as a group, by rafting up together, and holding it up to catch the wind. Well, I got the short straw again, as I had to hold the windward corner of the sail with my bare hand, and had to move myself as far forward as possible. So, I was hunched way over, and as a result of the kayak position, got

tons of water coming in through my skirt, so that I was sitting in a nice soup by the time the ride was over. Oh well, it was still pretty cool, even though it was pretty tiring hanging on to the sail in that position for so long. By the time we got off the water, I was pretty chilly, and was happy to hop in a quick hot shower out there before boarding back on the bus for the return journey. Once again, I tried to get some shut-eye, but it was once again impossible!

That's pretty much all I have to share about my day in Abel Tasman. A longer time would have been preferable, but even my snack of Abel Tasman was much enjoyed. I definitely feel the need to move on now. It seems that now that I'm on the South Island, my mission has become clearer, and the sense of purpose is higher in my mind. There are definitely more stops on the road south, but I do want to make some progress, so expect the next few days to show some good forward momentum on my side! Take care all, and remember, I'm always glad to hear from you guys!

OF ATOMS AND HILLS

MONDAY, JANUARY 28, 2008

(POSTED ON: TUE, 2008-01-29 23:18 BY STEVE)



Well, what a fine day to you all! At this very moment, I find myself at the end of a long day in the saddle, with a sore butt for reasons I'll reveal in just a moment. I'm listening to some great tunes on a record player of all things, in a farmhouse on a 400 Hectare farm of sheep, goats, pigs, and cows! I'm hoping to buy some fresh sausages in a little bit if the hostel owners ever show up! Yup, the sign said make yourself at home, so I have. I had a nice

shower, and found the record collection. Matt and Rob would be most impressed. I've got limitless choices of classic rock and a good record player for the evening. The view is pretty awesome too. So far, I have the whole place to myself. Not bad for 20NZD. Of course, I'm really in the middle of nowhere, and the place is called the Hu-Ha Bikepackers, so you know it caters to cyclists, which is a nice change. It's in a good location for bikers, as to get here was a full day's ride, but there's nowhere else really close, so it's an ideal cyclists stop, but not for car travelers. Anyway, read on for today's tale, and check out the [map](#).

Hmm, I just noticed they have a guitar here as well, so there's a good chance that later on I'll sit out on the porch looking over the land around here and strum a little bit. For now, this just seems like a little slice of paradise to me. Thank goodness, as today was pretty exhausting. It was a really hot and sunny day, and I think I may have dehydrated myself a bit. I'm drinking like a madman right now so that I won't cause too much damage tomorrow. If you look at my map, you'll see the climbing was 'only' 1353 meters, but in the heat, and the fact that they were straight climbs, it was pretty tiring work. I get the feeling that kayaking for the full day yesterday may also have had a slightly detrimental effect on my day as well. Well, regardless, I got through it, and am still smiling. In fact, I feel pretty great about the whole day looking back on it.

I started by getting up and ready to be on the road by around 8am. Of course, I had to make a stop on the way out of town, as I didn't have any food with me for breakfast, so I stopped at a bakery for a bacon and egg pie, along with a fresh blueberry muffin. Yummy! I really appreciate all the bakeries and cafés that they have all over New Zealand. I'll miss them once I'm back in Canada. Yes, Canada, I've heard it called that more than once around here. Anyway, once I was sort of fueled up, I hit the road. The first long bit was actually quite flat, so it was good pedaling. However, I got a little worried when a gas station said it was the last fuel for 200km, and then I saw a dairy say last dairy for 100km! Needless to say, just to be safe I stopped in the dairy and got some lunch stuff, as well as some Powerade, just in case. Turns out there were a few more food options, but it was good to be ready in case I was low on energy.

Another interesting stop on my ride I almost missed. I was chugging along, and for some reason focusing on the views to the left. All of a sudden, I glanced right and noticed a large memorial to Sir Ernest Rutherford of Nelson! Yup, it was his birthplace, right there by the side of the highway. I hit the brakes, and crossed the highway to have a better look. It was a really well-done memorial, with a sort of atom-like structure where you ascend up semi-circular walkways as you learn about various stages of Rutherford's life. At the center, or apex, there was a statue of young Rutherford. A lot of the panels also had buttons that if you pressed, there would be spoken stuff from various parts of his life. Quite interesting, and I spent longer there than I would have if it was just a plaque or something. Further down the road were also signs to different schools Rutherford went to. I only cruised by his primary school. So there you have it, in case you didn't know it Ernest Rutherford was a Kiwi, and was knighted.

After this nice distraction, it was back to the task at hand. I'm really starting to dislike the word saddle now for a couple reasons. One, and the most obvious one, is that I spend a lot of my time on one, and in spite of it fitting me quite well, it is still a chore day in and day out when I'm on it. The second reason is that a lot of mountain passes are not at summits, but rather are called saddles on account of how you cross mountains. Today had two such saddles, the second one being the Hope Saddle, at 634m. Sure, may not sound like a lot, but you try biking up that with 65 lbs or so of gear! It certainly wasn't the end of the world, but any ill thoughts I had vanished when I finally got to the top, and proceeded to the Hope Observation Point, another steep uphill gravel bit that took me to a car park, and led to a little walkway.

That walkway took me to Hope Summit, and to some amazing views along with it! I had my first view of the Southern Alps from up there. And since it was a sunny clear day, I had a pretty good sight of some of the nearer peaks of said Alps. I had to linger just a bit longer up there and take it all in. I got that feeling of understanding why I was doing this after all up there! Again, I had the place to myself, so it was easy to take it in. It's amazing how many people just whiz right by places like this on the roadside. I'm certainly glad I took the time and effort to go to the very top. After all, I knew the rest of my ride would be downhill to the hostel, which was only a few km away. However, I knew it was unlikely that I'd bike back up that hill after passing it.

Oh, so why did I say I have a sore butt? Well, that one's an easy one. Upon returning from my summit walk, I headed over to my bike, where I noticed several Yellowjackets buzzing around. Well, no big deal, as I've seen plenty of bees, wasps and hornets on my journey thus far. I hopped back on the saddle, and started pedaling away. OW! What was that? I felt a burning sensation in my left cheek. Apparently, I had pretty much sat on one of the little buggers, and he didn't much like it, and retaliated with a nasty sting. I'm not sure what

he did, but even two hours after the fact, my butt still hurts in a big way. I don't know if the stinger is lodged in there or something, but I've been unable to do anything to relieve the pain. Methinks it might be a rough day sitting on that all day tomorrow. Oh well, I guess those are the hazards I have to put up with, right?

Well, I think I'll have to sign off with that. It's still a beautiful day outside, and I should probably look at taking advantage of it! The owners finally came, and I procured a couple sausages for two bucks to go with my supper. Fresh from the farm. They have quite a few animals here on their farm, so these are from their own creatures. Cool, eh? I was also told about a couple nice walks on the property that I'll probably check out after supper and while the sun sets. Jo told me about a trail that ends at a marker point, and essentially gives you some 360 degree views. What could be better to end my day, eh? Well, a beer would be nice, but you can't have it all. So, off I go to cook and explore. Apparently, I'm the only one booked in tonight so she said she hoped I didn't mind entertaining myself for the night. Guess I'll be spinning tunes all night for myself. Sweet!

WAITING "PANS" OUT

TUESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2008

(POSTED ON: TUE, 2008-01-29 23:19 BY STEVE)

Howdy hi folks. ProspectorSteve here, reporting in for another tale from New Zealand. Well, I only feel like a prospector as I'm in a ghost town / mining town at the moment. In fact, what I'm really in is my tent, in a bug-infested field on the site of what was once the main street of Lyell, a gold rush town. Nowadays, it's a DOC (Department of Conservation) campsite, where you pay 6NZD in an honor box to camp overnight. There's a tap, and an outhouse. Did I mention the bugs? The sandflies to be precise. Everyone warned me about this place, but I laughed it off. They weren't kidding! My latest hobby has been to rack up the bodycount in the tent each time I open the tent. Needless to say, they are winning the war, and I've resigned myself to staying in my little nylon fortress rather than risk life and limb outdoors. Probably best anyway, as I'm not feeling well, and a good nights rest might help. However, I've gotten ahead of myself, read on for the day's events, and check out the [map](#) for some fun pictures!



Early this morning, I left sun-drenched Glenhope for the mining town of Lyell, 84km away. To get there, I'd be passing through the Lower Buller Gorge, which has a rich history of both gold mining, as well as earthquake disasters. I'm really starting to get the rural sense of this trip, and things will probably stay that way for a lot of my time left here. Towns are small, and far apart, and amenities like power, phone and Internet getting scarcer to find. For tonight's meal, I had to pick up stuff in Murchison, the halfway point. However, with no stove, my supper consisted of a cold pie, a big banana chocolate chip muffin, chips, an apple and banana, and some water. Gourmet, of course! I don't mind, as long as I'm stuffing enough calories into my belly, it really doesn't matter whether I eat warm or cold food, it's so bloody hot all day it doesn't matter.

Hot, yes, hot, it turns out that cycling in the middle of the mid-day heat in a gorge can be a rather dehydrating experience for a tired, semi-sick cyclist. Yup, today was a tough slog. Although the general trend was downwards, there was no shortage of little climbs all throughout the day to keep me busy and wear me down. When I finally got to the town of Murchison, I took a well-deserved rest and ate a nice meal, as well as strolled town and generally stayed out of the sun for about an hour. I knew Lyell held no real excitement, so I figured I'd take my time getting there.

Hmm, just the ticket, as along the gorge, there was a place with New Zealand's longest swing bridge (suspension walking bridge), and some walks in the woods where you can pan for gold, as well as a flying fox. I decided I'd call in there, and kill a bit more time. Admission was 5NZD to take the bridge, and if you wanted to take the flying fox back across, it was 25 for regular style or 35 for "Supaman" style, where you jump and fly in a full body harness. I didn't buy either ticket, but asked if I could get a discount. Well, the lady at the main entrance told me to go see Pete up in the tower and sweet-talk him in to a deal over there, away from the tourists prying ears.

I tell you, bartering and begging is far from dead in the world folks. I managed to charm my way into a 15NZD Supaman ride! Yup, less than half. Once again, I've proven a silver tongue can get you good deals on the road. Did I mention my t-shirt? In case I didn't, I also smooth talked my way into a tech T-Shirt with New Zealand on it for only 25, down from 30 that they wanted at a big store. Try that at Wal-Mart! Hee hee. Everyone loves a great deal, don't they? I know I do! Impressed, aren't you Kev?

Anywho, as I mentioned, this whole area was the site of New Zealand's biggest gold rush back in the day, and as a result, many towns sprung up capitalizing. Shame about the fault lines though. Yup, in 1929, there was a huge earthquake that pretty much wiped out half the towns. By that time, most of the easy gold had been picked out of the rivers and ground, so most towns didn't bother rebuilding. Lyell was one such town. At its peak, it boasted 6 hotels, and many shops, all precariously perched on a cliff. Now, there is virtually nothing left but a couple concrete pillars. Well, that and a cemetery and some other odds and sods, which I got to check out on a nature walk I took after my hasty in-tent supper. At least the bugs can't keep up when you walk fast in the woods. It was a creepy kind of walk, with almost jungle-like foliage all around, and I was all alone at dusk. Kinda fun, but not much to write about. It was nice to stretch the legs though.

Well, I'm sleepy now, and since I have no power, the old battery is running down on charge. Okay, not really, I still have half a battery, plus a full other one, but I just don't feel like typing anymore ;-). I enjoyed my mining day, even though I don't feel too super, but I figured I'd get a bit run-down at some point. Hope you're all doing well, and tune in next time for another exciting tale from ActiveSteve!

BACK TO THE COAST FOR RECOVERY

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 30, 2008

(POSTED ON: TUE, 2008-01-29 23:20 BY STEVE)



Hi gang. I'm back again, writing a story for you even though I'm still a little under the weather! It's nothing super-bad, just a sort throat and general tiredness, which as you may imagine does make my 5 hours of cycling each day a little challenging and exhausting. I chose to take a route today that would take me right out to the west coast, to a place called.... Westport. It's a town of about 4600 people, but has lots of cafés and a supermarket. It was only a 65km ride, and I got in just before 1pm. This gave me the chance to do laundry, buy some supplies, eat a lunch, and then hopefully catch up on my Internet and stuff. I'm hoping to wrap up all my chores by 7pm or so, so that I can maybe just watch a movie, and snack, then hit the hay early. I'm

not taking a day off, so I hope the extra rest will give me the boost for tomorrow's ride. Luckily, it's another relatively short day, so that's in my favour. As usual, I've got a little [map](#) put together for my faithful followers, and some pictures to amuse you. Today's ride was good on scenery, but that's about it. You've pretty much seen it all, so I held back on taking too many pictures. Read on just the same...

This morning was an exercise in pure torture. I'd hoped that the bugs would be sleeping in, but I awoke to find literally hundreds hovering between my fly and the tent. I guess my heat and moist breath attracted the throngs all night. It would not be an easy pack-up this morning. I tried to pack as much in the tent as I could, but eventually I had to step out. HOLY CRAP! These guys were unstoppable (well, especially when you have no repellent). I quickly decided breakfast would only be consumed once far from this camp. To pack the tent and trailer up, I had to pick up things one at a time, and do a sort of run and dance in a big circle to keep the bugs at bay. Any time I stopped for more than 10 seconds, there would be about 40 little buggers on my legs and arms. I'm not making this up!!! I've got the little red spots to prove it! I was out of there by 8am, but knew I'd be stopping down the road for my muffin, banana, cookie and chips. Yup, chips for breakfast. Why not? It's food, right?

At first, I thought today would be a little cooler and easier on my body, as it was fairly overcast. However, that turned out it was just in the gorge where I was sleeping. Before too long, the sun broke through and started attacking me once again. It truly is an intense sun down here. I've already gone through one and a half big bottles of sunscreen on this trip. And I mean big. 400mL size. As a result, I don't have that deep brown hue that some bikers get, but I'm okay with that.

Today was again a gorge ride, only this time, I would be in the Upper Buller Gorge. There were pretty much no attractions along this route though, so I opted to not stop at all on the road to Westport, apart from the breakfast stop, and another re-salting stop where I chowed down on more crunchy salty snacks. Yum, my favourite. Westport is a pretty nice little spot, and I bought a bag of microwave popcorn even for tonight. Well, that, and a 2L bottle of beer I picked up from a brewery. Oh, and I got them to give me a free bar towel. Once

again, my persuasive ways pay off. I told the guy about my bar, and he rummaged around and found me a bar towel from their old brewery name and gave it to me for free with my 2L of dark beer. I also got a slight discount on that. I paid only 9NZD for 2L straight from the tap. Imagine, under Cad\$7 for 2L. I don't even care if I drink it all, it's still cool to buy. Popcorn and beer, what could be better when you feel like crap? Well, juice maybe, which is what I'm pounding down now in preparation for my beer :-)

Hmm, I realize this post is pretty much rambling and going nowhere. Can you tell I have a little extra spare time? That and the fact that the day was pretty dull? As a result, I think I'll cap the post here, because I wouldn't want to waste anyone's time with my jumbled random thoughts. It's Wednesday night, why don't you all go out, get 2L of beer, make some popcorn, and watch a movie too? I think I'll watch Oceans 12, as I haven't seen it, and they have it here at my hostel. Cheers!!!

SHORT DAY TO PARADISE

THURSDAY, JANUARY 31, 2008

(POSTED ON: SAT, 2008-02-02 02:52 BY STEVE)

Hi gang! Well, it's hard to believe, but yet again I find myself a day late in my blog postings. Sorry folks. The main reason for this is that I'm still not feeling 100% at the moment, but more accurately, it's because I've been a bit lazy. Basically, once I get done with titling all the pictures, and creating the custom map, I sort of run out of steam.

However, I'll do my best now to fill you in on yesterday and today's details. I started the day



yesterday in the little town of Westport, and made my way out to the true West Coast, and down along to a village called Punakaiki, home of the world famous Pancake Rocks and the Blowholes. Upon arrival here, I decided that this was basically paradise for me, as I'm right on the beach, surrounded by great limestone cliffs, and have some great walking tracks. As a result, within 5 minutes of getting here, I trudged back to the office and plopped down a second night's payment. I've decided that rather than stop in Greymouth, I'll just blow past it and head straight to Hokitika, another 40km down the road. Capital idea I figure. Anyway, read on for more about the ride, and don't forget to check out the [map](#).

The weather pretty much immediately promised to be another scorcher, so I decided that taking my time might be okay. The road down to Punakaiki had very little in terms of civilization. By the looks of my map, there was one place I might be able to pop in for a break, and that was a place called Charleston. Luckily, the entire distance was only 65km or so, which meant a relatively short day in the saddle. I had an option of stopping in a place called Tauranga Bay for a seal colony, but after realizing it would add probably another 15km to my day, I decided to skip it. After all, I had already seen some fur seals in Abel Tasman.

Once fully underway, the road seemed like it would cooperate with me. The riding was generally flat, with only a few undulations. Although I felt a little crappy, My average

speed still seemed to be pretty good. I didn't actually get underway until after 9am, allowing myself some well-needed rest. Even with the late start, I still managed to get to Charleston by 10:30am. A little early for lunch, but I still decided to take a load off and have a steak and mushroom pie and some pleasant conversation with a delivery guy who was there reading a paper. He gave me some trip tips for the west coast, and confirmed that Greymouth was a place I could skip. The pie was delicious, the conversation illuminating, but I had to be moving on, so off I went.

After a little further down the 'coast road', I finally saw what all the fuss was about. I came around a bend in the road, and there it was... the West Coast! And what a sight it was. The surf was huge, and the waves breaking on cliffs far below me. I had one of those moments where I realized why it was that I do this stuff. I just had to stop and take it in for 10 minutes. It was a hot day, and the road had been far from flat to get here, so there was a good reason to pause here. I was pretty much awestruck. I immediately knew that the route choice of the west coast was the correct one for me.

By this time, I was only about 15-20km from my end goal, so I slowed my pace even further. As I progressed along the coast road, I came down from the high passes and ended up right beside the ocean, which meant there were quite a few beaches to stop and oogle along the way. I'm not sure if it was the cyclone off the coast or not, but the waves coming in were pretty massive! I remembered the Lonely Planet's advice on the west coast. Under places to swim, it just said "Don't even think about it." I could see why. The riptides were obvious even to a casual observer. There was no way I was going to venture more than ankle-deep in this water. However, it did make for an impressive sight while cycling.

The scenery certainly helped me forget about my worries and my failing health, and I was just able to enjoy the ride for the time being. Before I knew it, I was in Punakaiki, and checking in to a beautiful hostel right on the beach. They even bake fresh organic bread and muffins on premises for sale. This would turn out to be a blessing, as there was no where to buy food around here, and I had nothing to eat. As a result, I bought a loaf of bread, and some baked beans from the owner for supper. There was a tavern, but I didn't really feel like eating out.

Since it was early, I had the time to check out several of the local sights on the first day, including the pancake rocks and blowholes at high tide, which is the best time to see them. I also had some more speleological fun after supper, in the Punakaiki Cavern, which is a 130m tunnel system just up the street from the hostel. I dragged a couple other people from the hostel with me, and we had a pretty fun time poking around in there. There were even some glow worms to entertain us in the dark. Oh, and did I mention the outdoor Spa tub on the beach? Yup, I got to soak in the hot tub as the sun went down, watching the waves crash on the beach. Now can you see why I chose to spend two days?

I think I'll leave you all with those thoughts, as I still have another post to write up before I go to bed tonight. Please don't hate me because I'm in paradise. As I keep reminding Jody, the road to get to these places isn't always that easy, so I think I deserve it to a degree! Anyway, hope you're all doing well, and I'll check in with y'all again soon!

AN EYEFUL OF ACTIVESTEVE

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2008

(POSTED ON: SAT, 2008-02-02 02:53 BY STEVE)



Happy February everyone! I barely realized that today was the start of another new month down here in New Zealand. As a result, I've celebrated by running around naked in the Tasman Sea! Yup, it looks like I may have to change the rating on my site for mature audiences only. Sorry folks, I just had to do it. I wasn't sure when I'd have the opportunity to do my naked mile, but today, an opportunity sort of presented itself on a deserted cove and

beach for me. This was another one of my famous 'rest days', where I get up and spend the day hiking and biking for fun, rather than purpose. There were several hiking trails around this area, and great beaches, so that's what I did today. I carried my GPS around with me for a lot of the day, so I have another [map](#) for you with lots of pictures to check out. As well, if you'd like to hear more about the origins of the thumbnail you see... read on!

The first thing I decided I would tackle today was a 4 hour loop track that would take me along a couple of the local rivers, and take me through the sub-tropical rain-forests of the area. The track was relatively easy, and it actually only took me about 2 hours. Go figure. Nonetheless, it was a great little hike, and I got to hike through some pretty sweet limestone cliff gorges to get through it. I also had to do a river crossing, but it was only thigh deep, so I was fine. At one point I started passing all sorts of people dressed in button-up type shirts, and that's when I finally clued in that this wasn't a true tramping track, but more of just a walk. Oh well. Probably just as well to aid in my active recovery for the day.

Once I finished the track, I headed to a café for a plate of wedges and sour cream, along with having had a couple slices of my super bread that I bought from the hostel. Once done with the lunch, I was ready to tackle another track, called the Truman Track, which takes you again through the rain-forest like terrain, but pops you out on the rugged coastline. It was a short track, and I coincided my journey with low tide, which gave me the opportunity to do some cragging and shore walking. My hostel owner had mentioned that if it is low tide, you can get to some more obscure beaches and coves by navigating through some caves and pseudo-tunnels in the area. I was all game for that, and set on my way.

Of course, this is the scene of my little photo that I took and posted here. In the third cove/beach, I had the feeling that I was alone enough to warrant me frolicking a bit in the buff. Now I'm no nudist, but there's just something liberating about running around in nature with no clothes on, isn't there? Now, those of you astute enough may wonder what I was doing running into the riptide. Well, fear not, I didn't actually venture into the water, because that would have basically been suicide. It's just that dangerous around there. However, I had my fun, and put my clothes back on in short order. Partly because I wasn't the only one around there! Yeah, another couple from the hostel had been given the same 'secret tips', and were there at the same time as me. However, they had left, and I risked it before someone else showed up.

After my fun times, I headed back to the hostel to get all my gear lined up for tomorrow's ride, and to fetch an ice cream and Powerade. I also made plans to go for a beer with an Israeli cyclist that I'd met earlier in Nelson and who ended up at my hostel at the same time. Instead, we ended up picking up a 6-pack at the local tavern and enjoying them in the Spa. Afterwards, we headed back to the pub for supper, and now I find myself here just after 10pm finishing off the rest of the beer and writing this post. And you know what? I'm tired of writing, and should head to bed, so I'll sign off now. Hopefully I haven't traumatized anyone too much with my risque picture ;-) Hope all is well in the chilly world of Canada. Don't worry, you've only got about a month and a half left of winter! Later kids!

RAINY START, SUNNY END

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2008

(POSTED ON: SAT, 2008-02-02 02:54 BY STEVE)

Hi folks. I hope you're all doing well, and feeling better than I am at the moment! You know, it really sucks when you get a summer cold, doesn't it? Right now, I'm feeling absolutely miserable as I write up this post. I have full intentions of finishing it up, grabbing a bite to eat somewhere, and going straight to bed where I may listen to some music for a while before I [hopefully] fall asleep early. Today was actually a really good



day on the bike, in spite of the weather, but tomorrow, thanks to some boneheaded mistake by me and some pre-booking, will be my first 100+km day, ending up somewhere to camp hopefully. Yup, I mis-read my guide book, and missed a 30km distance marking. Oops. I got excited, and pre-booked my ice-climbing day on Fox Glacier for Feb. 5th in anticipation of getting there in 2 days, and already paid 50% for it. So, that means I'll just have to slug it out tomorrow and ride a long day. Hopefully the weather will be similar to today's, which blessed me with a tailwind. Read on and check out the [map](#) for all the gory details!

I awoke this morning to the sound of roaring rain. Yup, the 'wet' coast was living up to expectations for sure today. The rain was driving hard, and was making it rather unattractive to get up and pack up my gear, load up the soggy trailer, and hit the road. There was one slight blessing however. The winds were northerlies, and we were heading southwest, which meant we'd have a tailwind. We? Oh yeah, I met up with an Israeli cyclist named Jossy, and we were heading the same way, so decided to ride together. Ultimately, he decided to keep going 30km down the road, and I stayed here. The further spot would have meant 2 days camping in possibly bad weather, instead of one good night in a hostel and one night camping. Given my cold, I think I made the right decision in spite of the extra distance I'll have to do tomorrow.

Anyway, back to the ride. We were out on the road before 8:30 and pushing hard through the wet weather. First stop would be in Greymouth, a mere 45km away, so we knew we'd have a chance to thaw out and fill our stomachs once we got there. The road leading there

was likely a spectacular coastal highway, but all we really saw was rain and fog, with a bit of coast, and some shrouded cliffs. Of course, you can see that by my pictures, can't you? The lack of scenery made it that much easier to just concentrate on spinning the pedals. I'm sure being soaking wet didn't help my cold any, but what choice did I really have? I'm really having a runny nose quite badly now, so perhaps that means the cold is already passing through? Here's hoping. No beer tonight for sure :-)

Greymouth lived up to all expectations, which were pretty low. Grey by name, grey by sight today. I guess it's probably not fair of me to say that, given that I essentially just passed through, but there wasn't any real reason to spend the night there. Best to just keep making forward progress into the southwest of this magnificent country, where more mountains, and glaciers and adventure await me. We probably spent around an hour and a half in town, warming up and drying up a little bit while eating some hot pies and deserts. We also popped into a couple cycle stores to do some browsing, and the tourist info center, which once again confirmed moving on was A-Ok.

We originally thought we'd spend longer, but we opted to just hit the road, as the next 40km would be relatively flat, and fast, so we knew we could make good time. Before leaving Greymouth, Jossy put on a hat, long pants and was essentially all bundled up. I had to laugh. Even funnier was the fact that shortly after we left Greymouth, the rain ceased, and it started getting really hot. We had to stop to take off some layers. The weather around here really can change in the blink of an eye. The tailwind was a heaven-send, and we were cruising along at a great pace. Before long, I got to the Birdsong Backpackers. Jossy had been ahead, but was nowhere to be seen.

I started settling in, when Jossy finally showed up. He'd been paying no attention, and just blew straight by it, and rode another 1.5k into town before realizing it. On the plus side, he stopped to pick us up each a steak pie for a snack. By now, the sun was high in the sky and it was HOT! I was perfectly content to call it a day after the 82km. However, Jossy hemmed and hawed for a while before finally canceling his night at the birdsong and decided to ride on south. He has a lot less time than me though, as his flight departs Feb.18th, and he wants to have more time in the south. As it stands, I'm making quite good time as well, but don't feel as though I'm rushing at all, which is a good thing.

So that leads us to right now, which is just around 6:30pm. I'm getting a little peckish, and plan to venture the 2-3km into town and find some grub and some breakfast at the supermarket. The only other memorable thing today, for me specifically, is that I had to bike past the starting point for the Speight's Coast to Coast. Some of you know I had really hoped to do that race, and it takes place about a week from now, but I had to settle for just looking at posters, and seeing the start at Kumara Junction. Oh well, someday perhaps! With that, I'll sign off for now, and wish you all pleasant days, and no colds.

AHEAD BY A CENTURY

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2008

(POSTED ON: TUE, 2008-02-05 21:36 BY STEVE)



Hello everyone out there! SuperSickSteve here reporting again, this time from his sick bed. Yup, I'm still going downhill. Today, I've had a nice little fever and aching joints and running nose and plugged throat all day! It's really fantastic! Not! In spite of this, I managed to post my longest day yet, clocking over 105km on the bike to get to Whataroa, where I'm reporting to you live from a caravan, or RV if you will. Yup, for 23.50 (I

got a deal) I have a little aluminum box all to myself for the night. Two beds, a toaster, a water pot, and electricity. Sadly, no Internet. However, given the on and off pouring rain and the cold temps outside, I'd say I'm doing all right despite the fact that I'm in a little tiny village along the glacier highway. Today was a good riding day for the first 75km or so, then it got really tough for me. Not just because of Mount Hercules, but due to a group of cycle tourists known as Pedaltours. Read on for more, and check out the [map](#).

Waking this morning, I kept hitting snooze over and over again. I felt 100% horrible, and really didn't want to get up. I was looking for some excuse to stay in bed, but eventually got up anyway. I peeked out the window and saw it was overcast. That settled it, I'd have to go, because it was prime weather for putting in a good run. I got ready in double time, and was on the road at 8:05am. My head felt as foggy as the skies overhead, but my legs seem to know just what to do anyway. Round and round they went, clicking off kilometer after kilometer. The weather co-operated for its part, keeping me cool and free from killer sun. I said a quiet thanks, and kept going. My plan was to stop as often as necessary to keep up the steam, eating and drinking lots. First stop was Ross, a gold mining town 30km away. Pulling into town, it was chaos. Cyclists everywhere! There was a group of 5 'real' cycle tourers heading the other way, and a van full of 'tourist' cycle tourers getting set for a day of biking. I ducked into the café to pick through what was left of their pies, and found a steak and cheese, and had a brownie to go with it. Yum.

I was in no mood to chat too much with anyone, so I only answered questions sparingly while I munched on my food. As quick as I could, I left town again, aware that the 'tourists' would be on my tail soon. I assumed they'd catch up, pass, and that would be that. After all, they had real road bikes, with no weight whatsoever, and were starting fresh. Well, on a hill further along, they finally caught up, and one guy said "That's it, you'll get stronger." It kinda burned me, and I retorted "I've been at this two months, I'm already strong". With them in front now, I grabbed the draft, and cycled myself and my 70lbs of gear in time with them. I had virtually no trouble keeping up. In fact, on the next few hills, I ditched a few of their group, and stayed with the stronger riders. Eventually, the guy sort of looked back surprised and said "Okay, I take it back, right now, it looks like you have the strength of ten men". I was vindicated. However, I didn't drop off, and stayed with them for a long time.

About 20km into their day, they stopped for a break, and by break I mean their support vehicle filled up their water bottles and gave them snacks, etc. etc. Nice. I fished out a

peanut butter sandwich and topped off my bottle with some spare Powerade I had with me and I took off ahead of them. It was the last I'd see of them for a loooong time. So, it would appear that I've had the first inkling of the power that I'm starting to develop from all these hills. And this was on a really bad, sick, long day mind you!!! At about the 70km mark, two of them caught back up to me. They were the 'seasoned' riders. They said they cut their break short to chase me down. Now I know I'm sounding smug here, but on such a crap day, it was nice to feel powerful. They were actually pretty nice guys, and I drafted off them for another while, chatting about riding and touring. They talked about their luxury accoms and great meals, etc. Of course, they are paying somewhere around 350NZD per day! On the steep hills? They get driven up if they want! I was talking about some of my rides in the north Island, and they were surprised, saying they got carsick just driving the roads. Ha ha ha.

By this point, my tank was starting to dry up, and I had to stop for my lunch and a well-deserved hour off. I wished them the best, and slowed a bit as I got to Hari Hari. I went to a café for lunch, where I pretty much collapsed over my chicken burger and wedges. I was sort of out of my body for a bit, and laid down on a bench for 20 minutes to recoup. I drank a pile of water, and didn't leave until I felt better again. After all, I had another 30km to go, including Mount Hercules as I alluded to. In actuality, the hill wasn't that bad, but coupled with my state, my speed was hurting now. The pedaltours bus passed me at one point, laden with about half of their riders skipping the climb. After all, they were riding almost 120km today. Double ha. No gear, all the support they need, and they still cheat. Oh well, I guess if you only have 10 days that's one way to do it.

I realize I'm not saying much about the scenery, but there's a pretty good reason. With the clouds and rain and fog, there really wasn't much to see other than the trees to either side, and the distant, shrouded mountains. I get the feeling that the view would have been pretty good, but I may never know. There were some pretty cool river crossings, and I could feel the presence of the Southern Alps on my left, but I'll have to wait another day to finally see them. At supper, I went to a bar and checked out the news and weather, and it looks like I'll be getting some perfect weather for my ice-climbing adventure in another day. Reading the paper, I also happened across an article talking about Saudi women gathering signatures for a petition that seeks to give them the right to drive, and they are apparently hoping the Sultan will issue a royal decree by year's end. I couldn't help but wonder if my sister's name was on that petition. Was it sis? If not, you'd best get on that :-)

Okay, I'm tired and dizzy now, so it's off to bed for me in my mobile home. I feel like white trash. Sweet. Tomorrow is a big day, as it's double glacier day. I'm 32km away from Franz Josef glacier, where I plan to spend a few hours in the mid-day exploring. The, it's another 23km to get to Fox glacier, where I'm going to stay for probably 3 days. Franz Josef is by far the more popular one, but that's all the more reason to stay at Fox instead. Less crowds, smaller groups (I'm in a group of only 4), and great views of Mt. Cook apparently. I have another day to get better before the ice climbing, so I plan to go easy tomorrow. There's only 55km total, but rather large climbs to tackle, so it'll not be easy by any means. Hope you're all doing well, and I'll check back in another day.

WELCOME TO GLACIER COUNTRY

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2008

(POSTED ON: TUE, 2008-02-05 21:37 BY STEVE)

Good evening friends. ActiveSteve reporting from glacier country here. Yup, I've made it about halfway down the west coast already, and find myself at Fox Glacier. Although the day was short on paper, it was nothing short of a barn burner in reality with the nutty hills I had to tackle towards the end of the day, after a couple hours hiking around the Franz Josef Glacier. The weather pretty much didn't co-operate for most of the day either, with clouds yet again obscuring any chance I might have at some spectacular Southern Alps views. Regardless, it was still a fun day, allowing me to get a later start than usual and stopping at the Franz Josef glacier for a while. I've put together a [map](#), which includes the hike at Franz Josef, which you can check out. Hopefully this time, all the maps are up. Last time I had Internet, I couldn't get any maps up.



Early in the morning, I woke up in my little caravan to the continuous sound of rain on the roof. It didn't really get me too excited about getting up, loading the trailer, and cycling off in the watery roads. Consequently, I didn't finally get on the road until around 9:30am, which was just fine by me. After all, there was only 32km to the Franz Josef glacier, and after that, about 25km to Fox Glacier. I was planning on getting to Franz by lunch, and then hitting the road again by 3pm for Fox. The road to get to Franz Josef was fairly uneventful, with the grey skies not giving me much inspiration. The main climbs would come after Franz Josef, so it was only little climbs to that point.

After getting to Franz Josef village, I asked what was the best way to kill a few hours, and was told to just hike up to the terminal of the glacier, and maybe do some other little trails around there. Sounds good to me. Only thing was that to get to the trail head meant biking up 4km on a dirt road. D'oh! It wasn't super-bad or anything, but with the non-stop campervans going by, it got a little bit frustrating. Luckily, the hikes made up for it. When I finally got closer to the glacier, I was treated to a short window of better weather, and as you can see, there were even blue skies overhead for a bit. However, it was literally just a hole of blue sky. As I was walking away, the clouds had already plugged up my hole. Too bad. A girl at the hostel here showed me pictures from later today, and it was really impressive with snowy peaks around it. Too bad I didn't see that, but I'm hoping that tomorrow will be a gorgeous day on the ice. Forecast definitely looks good, so my fingers are crossed that I'll finally get those spectacular views I paid for!

Depending on the weather, I'll decide whether or not to stay an extra day here. Apparently, there is a lake nearby that provides really impressive reflections of Mount Cook and Mount Tasman. Known around here as mirror lake, it was a place that many people have told me that I shouldn't miss. One way or another, I will get over to it. However, the main event for tomorrow is Ice Climbing on Fox Glacier. Yup, I paid the big bucks for one of the top glacier experiences, short of taking a helicopter ride up that is. No doubt my post tomorrow will be a little more interesting as a result. Because of this, I think I'll bid you all good

night, so that I can rest up for the big day. I'll be out there all day, and still don't feel 100%, so I need to get some more beauty sleep :-). So until tomorrow, take care folks!

TACKLING THE FOX

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2008

(POSTED ON: TUE, 2008-02-05 21:38 BY STEVE)



Chilly hello to all you folks out there! Well, once again I find myself knackered as I write to you. Yup, that's right, it was another busy day for ActiveSteve here at the Fox Glacier village. My feet and legs are sore today not from biking, but from all the gear I had to wear today while I was out on the dangerous ices of the Fox Glacier. I spent the whole day on the ice, and learned to ice climb. Well, in truth, there really wasn't all that much to learn, as Ice Climbing is pretty much exactly like rock climbing only you're on ice instead of rock. So, as a result, I already knew how to tie on and off, belay, and all those sorts of things. However, I had to get the hang of using Ice Axes and Crampons, which was a hoot. Read on for a bit more about my exciting

day on the glacier. There's a [map](#) too, but I have a feeling it'll be pretty meaningless, as it was in my pack hidden away most of the day, so I don't think locations are correct. Sorry!

I got up this morning around 7am, in order to be at the Fox Guiding offices before 8am. I had paid up all my fees the day before, so I was good to go. There were only two other people in my little group, and they were in the café waiting, which is where I first met them. Leah from England, and Maria from Germany. They seemed pretty keen on the day, and were pretty fit looking, so I figured that the day wouldn't be too hard on us. They were friendly enough, and before too long our glacier guide met us in the café and led us to get our climbing gear. We got helmets, hard boots, harnesses, crampons, gaiters and an ice axe. I was also 'volunteered' to carry a climbing rope since there were only a few of us. We had a pretty short briefing and were off to the ice. The road was only a few kilometers, and before we knew it, we were on the trail to the glacier.

To get up to the glacier involved a bit of uphill hiking, which was made a bit difficult by the fact that we were wearing big heavy plastic mountaineering boots. It's a lot like wearing ski boots, to give you an idea. However, once on the actual glacier, and after having put on the crampons, the situation was a little better. In fact, I dare say that life was infinitely better on the ice with the crampons and boots on. It's really amazing how you can move on the ice when you've got those things strapped onto your boots. It didn't take too long to get the hang of them, and to start trusting them to get us where we wanted to go. Our guide Jeff was a really good guy, taking the time to make sure we were comfortable with what we were doing up there. I guess that's a good thing, considering that a glacier can be a fairly dangerous place to be playing!

Another interesting side note about Jeff. He's been all around the world, and lived through some fairly hairy situations. Take for example the time he was climbing in the Himalayas. Can you guess when that was? Well, here's a clue. Into Thin Air. Yup, he was up there

during the same time as one of the deadliest summers on Mount Everest. He wasn't on Everest at the time, but on one of the nearby peaks, the 6th highest in the world, and was trapped up there during the bad weather. He actually met a lot of the people from that summer like Andy Hall, and his team. Crazy, isn't it? He's been guiding for a long time, so I felt pretty safe in his hands.

The coolest part of our trip has to be when we actually descended into a crevasse and then climbed back out one at a time. You don't get to do that every day of your life and live to tell about it, do you? Well, now I can say I did. I'm really glad that I did this trip, as it offered just as much thrills as any other high-energy ride or skydive or bungy, etc, etc. The plus side of it was that I was in the middle of the splendor of nature while doing it, and also learned some new skills that I hope I'll get to use in races some days. You never know, especially if I do a winter race in Iceland or somewhere like that. Tee hee.

We were up on the glacier well past the time when we were told we'd be heading back, but it was because we were allowed to do a couple extra climbs while we were up there. I in particular was keen to keep climbing longer, since I still had lots of energy. For most of the climbs that we'd set up, I'd first climb it using two ice axes, and would then switch over to using only one axe to make it more challenging.

Well, that about does it for now, I'm off to watch a bit of a movie, then tackle a new day. I've decided to stay an extra day here, so that I can catch up on laundry, email and phone calls back home. Day after, it's back on the road, and the next little stretch will be pretty remote, with barely any villages between here and Wanaka! Oh well, it's always fun to get back on the road. See you later, alligators!

HAPPY WAITANGI DAY

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2008

(POSTED ON: TUE, 2008-02-05 21:39 BY STEVE)

So, what is Waitangi Day you ask? Well, it's a national holiday here in New Zealand. Sort of like Canada Day, but not quite. There aren't massive celebrations everywhere, but it is a significant date for Kiwis. This is the day the Treaty of Waitangi was signed by the queen, which recognized the land claims and rights of Maoris. Of course, things are still not settled for Maoris, so as a result, there is not much celebrating, but rather, a fair bit of

protest on this day in certain parts of the country. However, it is still a federal holiday, which means food places all charge 15-20% extra if you want to eat. Ha ha. Guess I'll be eating noodles and peanut butter sandwiches today! At any rate, I'm still in Fox Glacier township right now, enjoying an almost complete day off. My only activity was about 25km of biking and hiking, to check out the stunning views of the Southern Alps from here. The rest of the day is hopefully for laundry, Internet, phone calls, etc. etc. Yup, I'm resting and getting ready for the next few days. Read on and check out the [map](#) for a bit more info.



For starters today, I didn't even set an alarm. It's the first day of my whole trip that I think I didn't set an alarm. In spite of that, I was still up by 8:30am. There's just no point in staying in bed when it's a sunny day and you're in the shadows of mountains. Looking outside now, it's a good thing I did get up, as clouds are rolling back in again. I'm resting today because it will be another tough slog tomorrow. I'm heading down further along the coast, and there are few places to stop, so I've decided to press on about 120km to get to a place called Haast. After that, it's on to Haast Pass, my Alps crossing point, with one more stop until I hopefully reach Lake Wanaka. Originally, I thought I'd take 4 days to get there, but I think I'll shoot for 3 days. By then, I'll almost be in Queenstown! Can you believe that?

Anywho, after getting up, it was back on the bike for a quick ride to Matheson Lake, also known as Mirror Lake, in the hopes of seeing the Alps reflected in the lake. At some points in my hike around the lake, there were reflections, but at the best spots, there were some breezes already, which made the water ripply. Not the optimal mirror conditions unfortunately. This in no way spoiled the magnificent views though, as the pictures will attest to. I took my time strolling around the lake, and stopping to contemplate my smallness in the universe. Mountains really are amazing things, aren't they?

My only other destination for the day was a spot called Peak Viewpoint, which was a spot down the road where you can really get a good view of the mountain range, and there is a device there which identifies which mountain peaks you are looking at. Unlike Matheson Lake, which attracts tour buses and lots of people, this spot was more distant, and only visited by a handful of people. As such, it was much more peaceful, and I hung out there for quite a little while, learning the names of some of the other peaks in the Southern Alps. Of course, I've already forgotten them, but it was fun playing with the mountain finder.

Now that I'm back at the hostel, I'm thinking that I might check out the movie 'Touching the Void', which is a real-life story of ice / mountain climbing, where one guy had to cut another guys rope in order to save his own life. Apparently a really good movie, and in light of all the mountains and my climbing yesterday, where we actually talked about that movie, I'm keen to see it. I've got a few beers with me to celebrate Waitangi day, so why not, right? :-). However, first things first. Off to find a decent Internet connection to be able to upload all these oodles of posts and maps to satisfy all of your collective curiosity. Enjoy your day, and I'm not sure when I'll be able to post again for you all. Probably not until Wanaka. So, three or four days time. Hope you can wait!

APOLOGIES FOR THE DELAYS

(POSTED ON: FRI, 2008-02-15 00:37 BY STEVE)

Hey gang. Just thought I'd make a quick blog post to let you know that I'm alive and well, but sadly, the blog posts haven't been uploaded. On the plus side, you can check out the hundreds of photos that I've managed to upload while in Queenstown.

Rest assured, I've already got 4 posts and 4 maps set to go, but it'll have to wait. At the moment, I'm in Glenorchy with just my day pack, about to do a 3-4 day tramping track called the Rees-Dart, along with the Cascade Saddle. Normally, they say it takes 4-5 for just Rees-Dart, but my plan is to do the main track in 2 days, and tack on an extra day to do a high alpine pass called the Cascade Saddle.

As you might guess, I have no computer here. When I was trying to upload the latest posts and maps, there was a problem with my server provider's facilities, so the site was down

periodically. Hopefully that's straightened out, and when I get back to Queenstown, I'll get the posts up, and maybe have another one for you to enjoy. Till then, enjoy all the pics!

WRAPPING UP THE WEST COAST

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2008

(POSTED ON: SAT, 2008-02-09 23:50 BY STEVE)



Hey gang! Your humble narrator checking in once again. Another day has passed, and what a doozy it was for me. As you will note by the [map](#) that goes with this post, I've put another 121km on me, my bike, and the little trailer that could. Yup, it was my longest day yet, but it seemed like the thing to do, as there was virtually NOTHING between Fox Glacier and here, Haast. There was one café at a Salmon Farm early on, but that was it. It was all

biking, all the time, with only the briefest of pauses to have some PB sandwiches for lunch. I thought there might be somewhere to get more water, but nope. For the whole day, I only had about 1.8L of fluids. Yikes. Good thing it was mostly overcast. Oh, BTW, I forgot to mention it, but I'm now well over 2500km into my trip on the bike! Cool eh? Read on for a little more about this challenging day, and don't forget to look at the [map](#) :-)

Last night, I mentally prepared myself for a long day on the bike. As with any long race or training day, if you acknowledge it will be a long time, it really doesn't seem all that bad. You just have to keep going, knowing that you'll eventually get where you want to go. To cap off my rest day, I drank a couple cans of beer, had my bag of popcorn, and watched the movie "Touching the Void", a real-life story of a pair of climbers that have a bad day in Peru, and one guy has to cut the rope holding up his partner who has a broken leg in order to save himself. Guy drops into a crevasse, but somehow lives, and the movie is all about his fight to get out and back to the basecamp. VERY amazing story if you haven't seen it. This was a nice way to end my time at Fox Glacier. I was in bed around 11pm, and got up at 7am. On the road before 8:30am.

Thankfully, while the sun was out and about, I was mainly sheltered along the roads where I was biking the first part of my day. In fact, I even had on my arm warmers and jacket, because it was that chilly. That was nice for a change. However, all things come to an end, and eventually, I wheeled my way back into the sunshine, and gradually removed the layers, until I was once again sweating up a storm whenever I was pointed uphill and pulling the load behind me. The road I was following was mainly flat, with some undulations here and there to keep me on my toes. I knew that the only real climbs of any note would come later in the day, at Knight's Point, a series of 3 hills about 200m each.

My first little break came at a place called Bruce Bay, where I pulled out a sandwich and chatted with a Kiwi who was standing by his campervan. He pointed out that the bay was full of dolphins, and pointed out a few. Sure enough, you could see all sorts of dorsal fins and dolphins playing. I even had the good luck of seeing one do a huge arcing jump out of the water. It was really cool. I was tempted to strip down and go swimming, but feared there may be some strong rips and that would be the end of me. I contented myself to

watching them play. As I was about to pull out, I saw a whole peloton of bike riders go whizzing past on the road. Turns out it was just a group of friends who were doing a 5 day tour from Christchurch to Queenstown. They were on the exact same route I was for the day, Fox to Haast. I caught them at a break they were taking a km up the road from Bruce Bay, which is where they told me this.

I headed off right away, as they took their break. I expected them to pass me within 10 or so km. Well, would you believe that I didn't see them again until a few km from my end point? Meaning 70km later?? Methinks they took an extra break, and took a nice long lunch, which I did not, because they certainly weren't going slow. When they did pass, there was no way I could even draft off them. These guys were real riders. Tomorrow, they are going from Haast all the way to Wanaka, over 140km, whereas I plan to stop at 80km. I saw them again at supper and talked with them for a while. I was invited to Wanaka with them for a housewarming party, but sadly, I can't see that happening. It's just too far. They joked about hooking my trailer up to their support vehicle. If that actually happens, I'll be in Wanaka tomorrow, but somehow, I doubt it :-)

I was also caught up to twice by a German cyclist as well. He was on a mountain bike too, and had passed me right at the start, and then later in the afternoon. He had taken a longer break than me as well, which is where I must have passed him. He had a good beard. Wild looking. My new beard seems to be slow in coming in, and I don't look nearly wild enough, but give me another month. And as per Kev's wish, I haven't touched it at all. No trimming, cleaning or anything! The second time the German caught me, we rode together for a while, until we got to the base of the three big hills, then I told him to have fun, and carry on, I'd be going slow. Off he went. What is it with the other cycle tourers that bury me on the hills? I take comfort in the fact that it's only a very few of them that actually maintain my pace on the other sections anyway. I've met lots that go slower, walk some hills, and don't always go as far, or worse yet, take buses :-). However, it's clear that I'm still not the über-biker I'd like to be. Boo.

Apart from these little distractions, and the occasional car and campers, I was very much all alone on the road today. There were long stretches of nothing. Just forests crowding in, or cliffs towering above, or water somewhere near me. I sang quite a bit today for entertainment, and as usual, talked to my friends the cows as I went by. They say that on the West Coast, you can truly feel small and be put in your place in the Universe, and I think I got a bit of that sense today. There was lots of time for introspection. Anyway, did I mention the forests? Some of them were very cool, and nearly impenetrable. I kept wondering if it would be possible to stage an adventure race around these parts, as I'm almost certain you couldn't actually get through the overgrowth out there. Crazy.

Tomorrow I turn my back to the West Coast, and will be veering into the Southern Alps to make my transition from coast to inland via Haast Pass, the lowest of the alpine passes of the Southern Alps at under 600m. The funny thing is that a couple days later, I'll be crossing the Crown range of mountains at an altitude of almost 1200m on the highest highway in NZ to get to Queenstown! The road I'll be traveling on tomorrow was only completed in 1965. I'm always sort of amazed at how 'new' a lot of things are in New Zealand. Well, that's it for me for now. I'm off to pre-book my hostel in Wanaka, as I've been told by many that I "have" to go to the Purple Cow Backpackers. I'm also going to check into some Mountain guiding companies in Wanaka to see if I have any chance of summiting any big peaks in NZ. My guiding friend tells me to be prepared to fork over 4-7k NZD to climb the 'real' peaks down here, so I'm not sure I'm willing to spend that

money, but I'll ask around to see what my options are, as a lot of the guiding companies are based in Wanaka. Wish me luck, and I'll let you all know!

TURNING MY BACK TO WESTLAND

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2008

(POSTED ON: SAT, 2008-02-09 23:55 BY STEVE)

Hello friends from around the world. Today I made my way over Haast Pass, the lowest of the passes from west to east over the Southern Alps of New Zealand. Whew, it had some tough parts. Although the overall pass was only 564m, the first section was a killer, as everyone I encountered has agreed. I'm glad that I opted to do it in 2 days rather than only one, as now I can enjoy a leisurely ride in to Wanaka, and hopefully be there by mid-day.



I'm hoping that once there, I can find a bar televising the Coast to Coast race, and I'll then proceed to drink and cheer on all the local athletes rather than competing in it myself :-). I chose to play a bit of a tourist myself today, opting to do all the side trails on the way to Makarora, in order to break up my day and not finish off too early, which believe me, would be boring here in Makarora. Know what's here? Nothing. Just the 'resort' I'm staying at, and a DOC information center, which I spent 40 minutes at already chatting about tracks around here. Anyway, read on for a bit more about the day and what it held for me. I also have a pile of pictures on the [map](#) for you to check out.

The day started out pretty awesome once again. I've decided I should stop saying the days started great, because, that's just in comparison to a day at the office I suppose. The worst day on the bike is still better than a day spent in a cubicle working, don't you think? I digress, back to the story at hand. The skies were clear and sunny once again, but there was definitely a chill in the air once again. I donned the arm warmers and jacket to ward off the cold yet again, and headed down the road. For the most part, the road leading up to Haast Pass was a normal NZ road. Undulating, with lots of little ups and downs, but nothing too crazy. The true climb didn't start until around kilometer 50.

Long before that however, my friends the cyclists caught up to me somewhere around km 30. They were flying today, going along at about 32km/hr. As they passed, they told me to jump on the back and get the draft, which I did my damned best to do. I lasted maybe 2km, probably less. To put it in perspective, when they caught up to me, my average speed was only 15km/hr, so I effectively doubled my speed to keep up with them. I soon figured out that if I kept that pace, I would not have the steam to carry on for the whole day, which was still going to be over 80km in total.

The views along the way were plenty captivating. There were lots of overhanging bluffs, rivers, valleys, mountains, etc. etc. to keep me distracted from the fact that I was torturing my body yet again. There were no really interesting sites until I started the actual climb, after which, they came fast and furious. There was quite a few waterfalls right along the road to check out and little trails to follow as well. This road is only a little over 40 years old, and was built during the depression era for starters, but never completed until much

later due to lack of money and the challenges of building in such a terrain. I'm glad they did build it though, because otherwise, I would have had to back-track quite a ways to get to another pass :-)

After the initial crazy climb, things became much more gradual, and the climb was actually more enjoyable. Once at the actual pass, it was a little anticlimactic, as there was only a little carpark with room for a couple cars, and a small plaque to commemorate the pass. However, there was a summit trail which was to take about 30 minutes, and I opted to hike it, with my new friend Martin from Dresden, Germany. He's the guy I met yesterday, and we met back up at the peak. We hiked to the top, and were glad we did, as the view was pretty choice. Much more so than the pass, where you were just in trees. From there, it was mostly downhill to Makarora, a mere 18km away. Only one more real stop, which was the Blue Pools, which are some really sweet crystal clear blue waters along a river where you can often see some massive trout. However, it was the wrong time of the year, so all we saw was some clear water. However, it was still beautiful, until the sandflies found us. Then it got pretty annoying, so off we went.

Now I'm nice and cozy in my 'resort' dorm. There are 10 beds in my dorm, but last time I checked, I had the place to myself. It's not that there is no one else around, as there is actually a whole tour bus full of little kids staying at the same place, but they were put into other dorms, thank goodness. I hope it stays this way, as I actually wheeled in my bike to keep everything nice and dry in case of rain. Well, that about does it for today, I'm off to enjoy a handle at the local bar, which yes, is part of the resort. Happy hour starts in 20 minutes, and there are 3 other cyclists joining me for a drink before bed. I'm excited about tomorrow, as I'll be in mountain guide territory, and able to go to some real grocery stores for the first time in over a week. Yum, fresh produce! Take care all, and I'll check in again soon.

TWO LAKES, ONE PURPLE COW

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2008

(POSTED ON: SAT, 2008-02-09 23:56 BY STEVE)



Hi gang! Tired Steve here, reporting from the shores of the beautiful Lake Wanaka. Boy, I think I need a day off from the bike. Today was a mere 64km, and only had about 860m of climbing, but I just felt tuckered out when I finally got here at the Purple Cow Backpackers. I was expecting a pretty easy ride today, so maybe that was part of the problem. I was greeted by a bunch of small, sometimes steep annoying climbs that seemed

to sap all my energy out. Luckily, the views were pretty decent the entire way, so I was able to ignore the constant pain and sore muscles for most of the way. As usual, I've got my [map](#) put together, and some pictures for you to check out, so please do so, and read on for more about the day's ride.

Last night I actually had a pretty good night's sleep. I was the only person in the 10 bed dorm, so that was quite nice. I had my bike right next to me (well, not in the bed, but close

by), and was able to get up and take all the room I needed and make all the noise I wanted to for a change. Normally, I have to be a little bit quiet so as not to disturb the other people in my hostel room with me, but since I was all alone, there were no fears of that. I was on the road once again by 8am, and was heading straight to a café that was 5km down the road. That was my first bad news of the day. They were closed. D'oh! No breakfast for me. Too bad. Luckily, I had several bars, some crackers, and a bit of peanut butter left. I also found a forgotten banana in one of my bags, so I guessed I'd be alright for the 4 hours or less ride for the day.

I grudgingly kept pedaling, and put some good mileage on for starters. The terrain was just undulating, with great valley views to amuse me. Then, I got to Lake Wanaka. That's when the road started making more significant climbs up and down in order to follow the steep hills that surround the lake on all sides. I went up one climb called the Neck, which is basically a climb to cross from Lake Wanaka to Lake Hawea. This only took me to 415m, and didn't seem so bad. However, once on the Lake Hawea side, the hills kept coming, up to the pinnacle climb, a climb up to 475m by my estimates. I didn't remember seeing that one in the profile map of the day. Had it grown overnight? Either way, it beat me down, and I took a nice break at the peak of that one, enjoying my crackers and peanut butter, a chocolate slice, and some pizza crackers. Then the Tour buses came. Two of them chock full of shutterbugs. I had to laugh when they wanted to take my picture, but I obliged them, and answered as many questions as I could. Bus tourists always seem quite fascinated by us cycle tourists, well, the older bus tourists that is. The backpacker buses mostly ignore you, as they are all secretly jealous of the freedom we have!

I rode all day alone, mostly my choice. Last night, I went out for a beer with 3 other German people, including Martin, who I'd cycled with most of the day. I mentioned at one point that I enjoyed cycling alone, and he took it to mean I wanted to be alone. Oops. I said that wasn't really the case, but at any rate, they were getting started a little later than I was, so it worked out that I was alone anyway. But it is true, I seem to prefer cycling alone, so that I can talk to the animals, sing out loud, and just generally be left to my own thoughts. However, by the end of the day, I'm definitely in the mood for human contact. I guess if I was riding with others all day, I just wouldn't feel as sociable at the end of the day, does that make sense? Anyway, that's the way it is.

After the torturous little hills were over, I was basically at Wanaka. Wanaka is a town of only 4500, but has a pretty big resort town feel to it. It is the little cousin to Queenstown. Basically, you go to Queenstown for your adrenaline fix, then go to Wanaka for the outdoors fix. After all, this is the gateway to Mount Aspiring National Park, and is the location of the headquarters for most of the mountaineering companies. I went to call in on them, but unfortunately, they are all closed over the weekend. I think it's a sign that I don't need to spend thousands of dollars on a guided summit trip after all. I've re-thought my plans, and decided instead just to do another longer tramp once I get to Queenstown. I'm thinking of doing the Rees-Dart Track, and tacking on the Glacier Saddle Route, which is a bit more challenging and leads you to some spectacular views. I'm also planning on doing a 10-hour trek tomorrow around Wanaka that summits two peaks, but unfortunately, the weather sounds like it'll be shit, so I'm not likely to see any great views, but get to enjoy all the misery of a long hike ;-)) I think I'm a masochist, as that's my idea of a day off!!

Anyway, not much more to report. I went to the tourist info place, and the DOC offices in Wanaka, and walked around the whole town to get a feel for it, and I really like this place. I'd like to spend a few weeks here, and do extensive hiking in Mount Aspiring Park someday, but not this time! I think I'll move on on Monday, through the rain, to get to

Queenstown. Hmm... I better let Julia know that I'll be showing up sooner than expected! Hope she's been keeping tabs on my progress. I thought it would be the end of February, but I'll be showing up on the 11th! This way, I'll get to do more biking around the South of the Island, as well as follow the Catlins coast, and maybe even cycle towards Mount Cook. Here's hoping! Hope you're all doing well, I'll check in again tomorrow.

TACKLING PEAKS AROUND WANAKA

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2008

(POSTED ON: SAT, 2008-02-09 23:58 BY STEVE)

Hi gang. Well, here I am, about to tell you about my day off in Wanaka. Not exactly a true day off, as I decided to tackle the Skyline Track, a hike that takes you up two mountains to some great 360 degree views of the whole area, and is supposed to take 10-11 hours.

Well, I don't know what the people that take that long are doing, as it took me less than 4 and a half hours. Of course, that is moving time, as my total time was more like 5.5 to 6 hours, with my snack and picture breaks. Still, as you can imagine, I was going a bit fast on my way up. I can't help it. My biking legs just want to climb mountains faster these days I guess. Anyway, I'm getting ahead of myself as usual. Feel free to check out the [map](#), and the pictures, as well as read on to hear a bit more about my day in the hills.



For starters, the weather wasn't what I'd call ideal summiting conditions. It was overcast when I got up, and things only got worse throughout the day. The trail start was 6km out of town one way, and 10km out of town the other way, so taking my bike to the start wasn't really a good option, and I didn't feel like booking a shuttle bus. So, as you might guess, I opted to hitch out to the start, and then back to the town when I was finished. As usual, I was picked up on both ends by locals. It's always nice, since you get to chat with them for a bit, and learn a little bit more about the area. Before I knew it, I was at the trail start. Another fellow was about to start as well, a gentlemen from Ireland. I left before him, but not by much, and he was basically my shadow all the way up to the first peak, Mount Roy. I was very impressed. We passed probably 10 other climbers on our way up. Every time I looked back, I could see him working his way up, even jogging a few sections. Of course it's not a race, but I felt like I had to get up first, so I did. I waited for him at the peak, and we chatted for a bit.

Apparently, he always does things pretty fast and hard, as all his friends back home said. He likes to work up a sweat, and I'm sure he did, because I was soaked. Of course, by now, the rain had started as well, and we both had to break out our jackets. His plan was actually just to do the first summit, and then descend and walk back to town, which is the Mount Roy track. Mine was to carry on to the more challenging sections of the Skyline Track, and finish it. I was a little worried, as the weather was deteriorating, with heavy cloud cover and rain, and the signs warned the next section was an exposed alpine section. However, I decided to press on an turn back if needed. This next part was by far my favourite, and I actually think it was more thrilling in this weather. I was walking the knife edge of the ridgeline, with pretty substantial drops on one side or the other at any time, with nothing

but clouds below. Thankfully, they have actually poled the route through this section now, so I could usually just make out the next orange marker which would help me keep my bearings.

Mount Alpha, the second peak, took me 30 minutes from Mount Roy. Sadly, there was no view afforded to me. However, I was still loving the hike, so I accepted this as the way things would be for the day. It didn't stop me from taking pictures, as you can see. Another 20 minutes after Mount Alpha, I ran into a group of 4 hikers that were coming up from the other way. It was actually the crew that had given me a lift to the start point. They were very surprised to see me there, and with how fast I got there. They thought that I must have run. I swear I didn't though. That only came later :-). We chatted for a bit, then they were off. I ventured off track here for a bit, going up another little peak, hoping the sky would clear, but no luck. Had another sandwich, and started my way back down towards the creek that would lead to the end of the track.

I gotta tell you, going downhill hurts much worse than going uphill does to me. My knees and calves were screaming as I made my way down slowly from 1600m back down to the valley below. This section was where I decided to do a little light jogging to train a bit. Any sort of flat sections I'd break into the AR jog-shuffle, since I wanted to be back by a certain time to make some phone calls and book some stuff for tomorrow. The last part of the track was all on a farmer's land, and I saw sheep, cows, rams, and even deer! What fun. In all honesty, I'm not a big fan of coming across a group of cows on my path. They're big animals, and if they chose to take a run at me, I'm pretty sure I'd get the worse end of that encounter. Luckily, they are usually more scared of me than I them, and they run away. I'm always amazed how fast cows can run when they want to. When I come across Bulls though, I do my best to give them a very wide berth.

The end of the track was quite funny. There was a little gate built into the fence where you crawl through, and then you're just ejected onto the highway. There's no car park or anything. On the plus side, I was able to get hitchhiking, and in no time, was picked up by a kiwi couple on the way back from a wedding in Queenstown. They were listening to Arcade Fire, and saw my Canadian flag and picked me up. I guess it pays to be a Canuck at times. Tonight I'm off to the movies again I think. I was told it's a must do here. The theatre is like a lounge, with old couches, sofas, recliners, etc. There's even an old car that you can sit in if you'd like. The projector is actually a wick-burning light source thing, and there is intermission. If you pre-order food, it comes at intermission, like Curries, or fresh cookies or hand-made ice-cream. Sounds like a nice treat for my post-workout evening. Tomorrow, I'm booked for a full day of canyoning, where I get to abseil into and behind waterfalls, and do cliff jumps and slides, etc. etc. Should be fun. Till then, take care.

PLAYING IN THE CANYONS

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2008

(POSTED ON: MON, 2008-02-18 15:47 BY STEVE)



Hi one and all! Whew, another full and exciting day to report on from Wanaka. I spent the entire day wrapped up in neoprene and bouncing off rocks and in waterfalls as part of my Deep Canyoning experience. Yup, I forked over the bucks to be able to play in the canyons all day long. There were some great abseils, slides, jumps, and so on and so forth. I've tried to put together a [map](#), but all you'll really see is the route we drove to get to the canyon, and then all the pictures will be on one dot, as I didn't have the GPS in the canyon with me. The risk was too high of breaking it. However, I did risk dragging in the camera, and that worked out okay, as you'll see by some of the sweet shots. So, read on, and check out the [pictures](#). I'll

probably also get them up on Flickr, as I'll have access to Internet full time for a few days in Queenstown.

This post will probably be a touch on the short side, as there isn't really a whole lot to tell you about the day in general. When I got up, the weather was on the overcast side, which was basically perfect for my purposes. My plan was to do the canyoning on a day that wasn't too spectacular, so that I'd be riding the Crown Range road on a day with better views. The shuttle pickup wasn't until 9:15am, so I had time to run a few errands in town before they picked us up. They were actually a little late, and picked 4 of us up at 9:30. We were picked up by two women, Bronwyn, my guide, and another guide who happened to be the owner as well. We were in a minivan, and were told the ride was 35 minutes to the canyon. The drive was the same road used to get to Mount Aspiring National Park, and is unsealed for a good chunk of the way. That didn't slow her down though. We were flying along at 100km/h in spite of sheep and cows grazing a couple feet away and with no fences. The thrills were starting early!

When we got to the site of the start, we just pulled off the road into a rutted path, through a farm gate. Not much to see here, just some trees. However, if you paid closer attention, you could see a creek snaking from the trees. In actuality, in the trees, the mountain splits open, and the canyon is all along the mountainside here, making its way up the mountain. It was really off the beaten path. There was no building or anything here either. All the wetsuits and shoes were just hung in the trees, where they stay year round. They only keep the climbing gear with them in the office in Wanaka. The whole company has only 5 guides, two of which are the owners, so you know you get a good, personalised experience. Anyway, we grabbed all of our gear, and slung it over our shoulders for the steep climb up the mountainside to get to the spot where we drop into the canyon. The sun came out, and it was pretty hot going up the hill.

Once at the put-in spot, we suited up. Swimsuit, with thermals on top, then wetsuit socks, wetsuit bottom, wetsuit jackets with hoods, another neoprene cap, and finally shoes. We were covered in anywhere from 5 to 10mm of neoprene all over, and felt like the Michelin man. At least I felt safe in my rubber cocoon. We got a briefing on abseiling, which I was

pretty comfortable with anyway. My group was just 3 Irish people, and me, along with Bronwyn our guide, and Dave, who was the other owner, helping Bronwyn with the first section, as she'd never guided it before. Before long, we were abseiling into the canyon, and getting set for the next many hours of ropes, water and fun.

The first section of our trip is called the Big Nige, and had us abseiling down some pretty crazy terrain, with waterfalls crashing on our heads as we abseiled. It was a lot different from what I'm used to on fixed ropes. Here, you're getting beat around, and have to use slightly different techniques, such as turning around and just sliding on your bum down the rocks as you feed the rope through. I felt like a total amateur on the first one, but gained more confidence as we went. Probably my favourite point was on the third abseil, which was a pretty long one to a big pool below. I got to the start of it, and Bronwyn said, you can abseil, or jump. What? It was about 10m (30ft) up, and scary as hell, but I said I'd jump. Every now and again you need a leap of faith right? Well, it was probably one of the scariest things I've done yet. You've got rocks all around, a waterfall, and one little pool to land in at the bottom. Bronwyn told me not to think about it, just do it, or I might hesitate, and that's when things go wrong. So I stepped off. Sploosh! What a rush. I was buzzing for a while after that. I'm the only one of 6 of us that day to jump. Well, apart from Bronwyn, who clearly loves her job.

Other cool parts of the canyon had us sliding down smooth (and sometimes bumpy) rocks, and doing various jumps into pools. There were some opportunities to play in waterfalls, and to try some bouldering while other people were on the ropes. There was a fair bit of waiting involved, but there was always rocks and water to play in if you got bored, which I didn't. However, I was starving by the end of the day. We'd had no food or water since breakfast, and didn't get out of the canyon till after 6pm! However, the other guide had set out a little picnic on a big rock with fresh veggies, cheese, bread, cookies, tea, etc, for us to eat once we got out of our gear and changed. We wolfed it down and were heading back and in to town by about 7pm. Once back, I picked up some breakfast stuff, and then went for Indian food at a takeaway place. More delicious Butter Chicken.

Next day I was going back on the road, so I took some time to tune up the bike and get all my gear sorted. It was a later night than I'd hoped, but it was a great day, so I have no complaints about that! Tomorrow it's onto the Crown Range road, which is the highest highway in New Zealand, and off to Queenstown, where I'll be staying with Julia and Mark for a few days while I figure out my next steps. Stay tuned for a story about that road!

TAKING THE HIGH ROAD TO QUEENSTOWN

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2008

(POSTED ON: MON, 2008-02-18 15:49 BY STEVE)

Hello again blog-watchers. I'm writing this post to you from the adventure capital of the world, Queenstown! Yup, I made it to Julia's place in one piece, after a nice challenging bike ride over the Crown Saddle via the Crown Range road. The weather was overcast to sunny for most of the day. The weather around here definitely changes in the blink of an eye it seems though. One second it seems



like it's going to rain down on you, and the next, the sun is beating you into submission. Crazy Kiwi weather. Now that I'm in Queenstown, I'll be able to utilize all of life's modern convenience like Internet, phone, laundry, etc, but the problem is that there is so much to do here. I've already spent all my petty cash, and am a couple days behind my blog posts, so I'll have to try to be brief, although you all know just how terrible I am at being brief, don't you? At any rate, check out the [map](#) and [pics](#), and read on friends.

The ride from Wanaka to Queenstown was a mere 77km on the map, but took me over the highest highway pass in New Zealand at 1085m. Luckily, I was approaching this road from the correct side, as the gradients were fairly gradual over most of the day, gently climbing until the last few km before the saddle, at which point things got quite a bit steeper and painful. I passed 4 separate "chain bays" where cars put on their chains in the winter to get over the pass. Luckily, at this time of year, all is clear, and since there was no rain, it was pretty much smooth sailing for me. I passed through a historic town called Cardrona, where there are ski hills, and I've got to say, the nicest roadside bathrooms I've seen in my entire trip so far. You see, most towns have public toilets, but they're in various states of not-niceness. These ones were spotless. I'm sure I could have eaten off the floor. I stayed extra long just because of them ;-)

Another attraction I was looking forward to on the road was the world-famous bra fence, where there are hundreds of bras adorning a fence, a kiwi take on the famous shoe fences of the world. Sadly, some time in the last couple years, they were taken down I guess. All my books mentioned this fence, but it was nowhere to be found. Too bad. No pics of that to show you. Kev, did you guys happen to see this wonderous sight? I suspect not. So, the greatest thing I had hoped to see didn't appear, so I just kept rolling on. Once again, there were really no services on this road anyway, so my only stops were to eat sandwiches and snacks to keep me energized while I got over the pass. The top was a bit hairy at times, due to poor roadsides, and stupid drivers passing too close. I had what I'll call an "I hate motorists day", and ignored them all at lookouts.

Coming over the saddle however, I was greeted with the splendid views of the entire valley below, where Queenstown, Frankton, and Arrowtown are located, as well as some great mountain ranges including the Remarkables. Once again, this was a view worth all the effort I had put into getting up the pass, and brought a smile to my face and a lightness to my load. I had left a little later that day, as Julia would be at work until 5pm, and I didn't want to show up too early in Q-town with nothing to do but sit around. When I finally got there, I stopped into the iSite to ask about a few activities, then found Julia's place. She hadn't mentioned that it was located high on a hill at the top of some amazingly steep roads. I had to bike a longer way until I found a way to get up the road that wasn't as steep. I'm not joking. The roads going up were that steep. It would be impossible to bike up with the trailer. Also, her place was set off the road, up another hill, and there were construction cranes blocking the access, so I literally had to scramble up a steep hill with one thing at a time to get it up to their place. I dumped all my gear in her backyard at around 3pm, changed on her porch, and headed back into town to kill time.

Queenstown is a really nice town. Amazingly, the population is still under 10,000, but it looks like a pretty big town. I guess that's due to the fact that the tourist population is huge here. There are tons of motels, hotels, backpackers and bed and breakfasts for people to choose from. Luckily, the place is picturesque enough to get away with it. However, with this comes some massive construction projects going on all over the place. I think the place will double in population in the next few years easily. Anyway, that's enough for now on this post, I've got a couple more to write, as well as maps to put together, so off I go. Bu-

bye. I should mention though that Julia and Mark are awesome hosts. Mark loves cooking, so I've been spoiled with great food, and great company as well. We'll be heading out to town later to take in the nightlife. Bu-bye.

PSEUDO REST DAY IN QUEENSTOWN

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2008

(POSTED ON: MON, 2008-02-18 15:51 BY STEVE)



Hey gang, well, I made another valiant attempt at taking a rest day in Queenstown today. My legs were just basically shot from all the riding, hiking, canyoning, glacier climbing, etc. etc. I haven't given myself a proper rest day, and I've decided that Queenstown, with its myriad of adrenaline-filled activities will serve as a vacation point for me. For the next few days, all the activities I'm undertaking are very low on the

physical scale, but high on the adrenaline scale. I'll be shuttled to various places to do all sorts of expensive things that involve me jumping off things, riding in high-speed vehicles, etc. However, for the first day, I thought that I'd just get sorted out, do laundry, catch up blogs, book activities, and just generally sit my butt on a couch. However, as is often the case with ActiveSteve, I made it a good bit of the day, but eventually, my itchy feet made me get up and head into town. No map today, but read on for a little about what I did, and hopefully the [pictures](#) will be up shortly.

My day started out with the best intentions. For starters, I slept in until 8:20am, and didn't shower right away. Instead, I started uploading pictures to Flickr, and then made some phone calls back home to check in and let people know how I was doing, although there isn't much doubt how things are on my end, since the blog pretty much tells the whole story. I contemplated putting a movie in to watch, but I find it too distracting if I'm working on the computer. So instead, I just cranked away on the computer. Well, that and I spent quite a bit of time using Skype Video to chat with Jody. It's always nice to see her face whenever it's possible, which isn't all that often given the state of the Internet around here :-)

Eventually, hunger and my desire to get my adventure activities booked got the better of me, and I grabbed a shower while doing my laundry. Once that was hung to dry, I trudged down 'death hill' to downtown to grab a bite and look into my money-related activities. In no time flat, I had spent about 700 NZD!!! Can you believe it? Well, I booked the AJ Hackett 'Thrillology' of 3 bungy jumps, then Skippers Canyon Jet boat ride, and finally the Shotover Canyon Swing. I had to book it all at once in order to plan out the timing of all the events over the next couple days. As it stood, I had to start right away, and within an hour, I was due up at the top of the Skyline Godola for the Ledge Bungy jump! Fair enough. The less time I spend thinking about it, probably the better. So off I went, up a very cool gondola ride to some amazing views of Lake Wakatipu and the surrounding mountains. It was a bit overcast, but still relatively clear views, so I was suitably impressed.

Now, I've got to tell you, I thought this bungee thing would be a piece of cake for me. Well, it wasn't. Not by a stretch. Even getting harnessed up and everything, I had no apprehension whatsoever. I felt completely safe and sound. However, then it came time to actually step up and jump off a ledge situated 400m above Queenstown to fall 43m while held by a bungee cord. Sounds easy, doesn't it? Well, the problem is that everything in your body rejects the notion that it should head directly towards rocks and trees below a perfectly fine wooden platform. I had decided to try a fancy jump called the flying squirrel, which is where you run fast and jump off, grabbing your ankles as you jump, and eventually just let your arms go straight. That's where things went wrong for me.

The instant before my feet left the ground, I sort of freaked out in my head. Rather than gracefully grab my ankles, I went out with all my limbs flailing and cursing. In my gyrations, I somehow managed to, get this, get the cord between my legs. When I reached the end of the cord... well, lets just say the bungee experience was severely impacted when my twig and berries were violently crushed by tightening bungee cords. I was in mortal pain dangling at the end of the cord. Not a good first jump. Thank goodness I have two more to perfect my craft. Once up top, the guys said they cringed when they saw what was about to happen. It took a good long time to walk off that one, let me tell you. I made a pit stop to make sure everything was still attached, which it was. Whew.

While still at top of the mountain, I decided to try my hat at some luge runs as well, which I must say were super-fun. I ended up sweet-talking my way into getting three luge runs for the price of two, as the girl working the ticket booth was a fellow Ontarian, so I convinced her she should give me an extra free run. After all, they force you to take the beginner run before you get to try the advanced course, and I really just wanted to do the advanced run twice. The carts you use are very easy to use. You pull back to go, and pull back even more to apply the breaks, and just turn the handle left and right for turns. It's really not a luge you might be thinking of, but more of a cross between a toboggan and a go-kart with no motor. Just check out the pics to get the idea. Happily, this event was pain-free, and was a really fun way to zip around at the top of the mountain. There was a separate, free chairlift just for that.

Once I'd had enough of the mountain top, I headed back down, and returned to home base, where Julia and Mark were arriving back from work shortly. We had some delicious Alfredo prepared by Mark, before Julia was headed off to play some pick-up Ultimate. Mark and I joined to watch with a couple beers, rather than play ourselves. My legs were still in no shape to run, not to mention the lingering pain in my nether regions from the infamous bungee experience. We stayed out there till it was dark, then returned to watch an Ottawa Senators - Boston Bruins game that was recorded and sent to Julia by her dad. Sadly, the Bruins won by a score of 4-1. Boo. Either way, it was a great day for me, with plenty of pseudo-rest to help me recover. In a couple days, I'll be trying to do a 4-5 day hike in 2 days. So, enough for this post, I've got another one to write! Then I'll be caught up. Sadly, it probably won't be written until another day has gone by!

GETTING ADRENALIZED IN QUEENSTOWN

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2008

(POSTED ON: MON, 2008-02-18 15:52 BY STEVE)

Wow, look at that kids, it's St. Valentine's Day! Well, I can't say I'm doing anything romantic at all to mark the day, but rather, chose to hurtle myself over a canyon and fly through the same said canyon in a jet boat.

Later on tonight, I believe my hosts and I will be doing somewhat of a pub crawl around Queenstown. Lucky for me, they don't really celebrate Valentine's Day, so I'm not really intruding. Otherwise, I would've just found my own entertainment for the night elsewhere.

Today is another pseudo-rest day, with the most I'm doing physically is walking to town and back to get shuttle buses. The legs are recovering nicely, and I think I'll be back on track with another day like this.

Lucky for me, that's exactly how I planned it out! Hee hee. Anyway, for today, I put together a [map](#) showing where I did things, but they are not my typical biking maps. Read on, and check out the [pics](#) too.



So, just what did I end up doing today you ask? Well, to get the day started out, I was booked to do the Skippers Canyon Jet Boat tour. There are actually quite a few different jet boat companies, so the first thing I had to do was decide which one to take. In the end, I turned to local knowledge to help me out. Julia and Mark had taken the one that I booked. The main reason I liked it was that it included a wicked 4-wheel drive trip through the skippers canyon road, which is another one of those roads that reminded me of the Bolivian Death Highway. This thing is supposed to be two lanes, but you definitely wouldn't want to meet an oncoming car in a lot of the sections. I'm sure you'll agree when you browse through the pictures. The road itself took 23 years to build by pick and shovel during the gold rush years of the Central Otago. At one point, 5000 people lived in Skippers Canyon, but that number is down to 30 or so now. It's really not a great road to drive down.

The other cool part of this jet boat trip, which itself was quite short, was that the shores of the canyon are literally littered with reminders of the gold rush era, complete with old dredgers, and various bits and pieces of rusted metal put in place to help in the quest for gold. However, for a time, the payoff was indeed quite huge for those who were willing to hunt for the gold. After the jet boat ride, which was good fun, we got back on our little bus and drove a little further to walk out and check out one of the old bungy sites, called the Pipeline Bungy. It was a cool spot in the canyon, and would have been a great spot to jump for sure, but now that the Nevis Highwire site is in place, AJ Hackett saw no reason to keep it in operation. It was just too tough for getting people to and from.

Once I returned to town from the jet boat ride, I had a couple hours to kill before I was due to board another bus for the second attraction, the Shotover Canyon Swing. To pass the time, I first went to the DOC offices to look into the hike I want to do. It turns out the recent rain has made the first part pretty boggy, and they were recommending no one set out on it today. D'oh. Hope it dries a bit in the next two or so days. I also looked into how I'd get there. The only shuttle place I found wants me to pay 43NZD each way for the trip.

Yuck. Locals assure me there should be almost no problem getting at least to Glenorchy by hitching, which is what I plan to do.

After getting all that info, it was food time. There was really only one option here. I headed straight to Fergburger, a place highly recommended by everyone I seem to meet in New Zealand who has been to Queenstown. They all say you have to go to Fergburger. It's sort of like the Works in Ottawa I reckon. However, after dining there, I think the Works is still a bit better as far as the selection available. Don't get me wrong, it was a very good burger, but I think it was built up just a little too much by everyone to a level it just couldn't attain. Either way, my belly was full and ready for my next activity.

I reported in for the Canyon Swing, and was weighed, and I started browsing which style I would use for doing this ride. The Canyon Swing is just how it sounds. They drop you off a platform 109m above the canyon floor. From there, you freefall for 60m, before swinging in an arc for about 200m at a speed of 150km/hr. While the height isn't as high as the Nevis Bungy, the freefall is apparently longer. Nevis is 50m until the bungy starts to slow you down, whereas this has an extra 10m before you arc. Either way, I was in for a hell of a ride.

I was a little concerned about the ride after my terrible bungy experience the day before so I looked long and hard at my options to see what had the least likelihood of causing me injury, yet was still thrilling. I ended up choosing the Indian Rope Trick, which is where you are suspended off the platform, then you hold a rope, at which point they pull the pin from the contraption. From that point, you hold on to the rope for as long as you can before dropping into the freefall. The record is 1min.5secs. I was told if I broke it, the second jump was free. Right on. Sadly, the sweat and sunscreen on my hands, along with the awkward position meant that I missed the record by 1min. 4secs. Yup. One lousy second is all I lasted before slipping off into the drop. However, it was a helluva lot of fun. As usual it didn't last long enough, but I'm still glad I did it.

There were 6 people in our little group, and it was just as fun watching others go as doing it yourself. A couple of the girls opted to go for a second swing, and try something different. One of them was strapped into a lawn chair, and then tipped off backwards into a few spins. Very cool. Another did some kind of upside-down, headfirst dive type of thing. Another good one to watch. The pictures and DVDs were pretty cool that they made as well, but at 45 bucks, I just couldn't bring myself to buy it. I remember the experience, and I have a few pictures, so that's just going to have to do!

After the fun was over, it was back to the house here, where I'm writing this up as I have a beer. We're having rack of lamb tonight, then heading downtown to see what's happening. It's actually getting pretty cool out tonight, so there's talk of wearing pants. Crazy. Apparently, we're on the downswing of Summer now, and it's going to start getting cooler again. Damn! Hope I'm not stranded on Stewart Island in the ice :-)

Well, that's all I have to say about today, as I've just written 4 posts, and am getting a little tired of writing, so I hope you've enjoyed it. Check back later for more, and don't forget to visit [flickr](#) for hundreds of pictures that I've managed to upload here in Queenstown. I should be all caught up soon.

DOUBLE SHOT OF ADRENALINE

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2008

(POSTED ON: TUE, 2008-02-19 03:26 BY STEVE)



Howdy sports fans! Well, now that I'm back in Queenstown after a few days of hiking, and before I head back out on the road, I guess I should fill you in on the last few days of adventures that I was on. Last time you heard from me, it was Valentine's day. After a delicious meal of Rack of Lamb prepared by Mark, we decided to hit the town for a few hours of up-to-no-goodness. The only problem is that it was pouring rain. So, in order to get ready, we decided to have a bottle of wine and a few beers before heading out. That worked out okay, but the problem was that I had to get up early the next morning to head out for some bungee jumping. Yup, adrenaline day 2 was all about bungee jumps! I was heading out to the Kawarau Bridge for the original

commercial bungee jump, and then to Nevis, a high-wire bungee which is the highest in NZ at 134m. I put together a little [map](#) of the day, to show you where these are, and there are also all kinds of [pictures](#) up for you to look at. Read on mates!

There really isn't all that much to say in this post about the jumps. These two were part of the 'thrilllogy' that I had signed up for, where you get to do all three of the AJ Hackett bungee jumps in Queenstown. You've already read about my Ledge bungee experience and Canyon Swing, so by this time, I should be a pro at this sort of thing, right? Well, not exactly, as it never feels natural to throw yourself off manmade structures into the void, but off I went anyway. First thing in the morning I checked into Bungee HQ to get weighed and to wait for my shuttle bus. All in all, there were 7 of us that were doing multiple jumps that day, so we were sticking together for this jump and then taking another bus together to the Nevis site.

The drive out to Kawarau was pretty uneventful, but the view of the bungee site was pretty cool. That bridge was rebuilt just for the purpose of turning it into a commercial bungee site, and now they've also added on a bungee center, where they have a museum for all things bungee, as well as taking people behind the scenes. However, that wasn't included in our package, so we didn't get to see behind the glass doors. Oh well, we were getting the real deal anyway. In no time flat, I had my 'boarding pass', and was headed up to the bridge. As it was early, I was one of the first jumpers, and there was very little crowd gathered. A nice french fellow strapped me all in, and before I could say 'shit', I was on the edge and jumping off, or rather falling off. I had requested a 'water touch', but they told me there was a good chance I wouldn't make it, as I was too light. They were right. I put my hands up as if to dive, but didn't make it. Too bad. I saw others get dunked pretty far down, and it looked fun. However, since it was a little chilly, I didn't mind too much.

One of the guys in our group also decided he would go naked. I'm not talking about doing it for a free jump either. He just wanted to go naked. And you know what? He did. I'm glad to say that I didn't actually catch it. However, I did see him do the walk of shame back up the long walkway totally buck. Good for him, but I just didn't have the nerve to do it. He was pretty pleased with himself too. I treated that jump as a warm-up for the big time at

Nevis. I decided I'd buy the DVD of my jump from Nevis, and wanted to make sure that I had a good dive. Kawarau was altogether too short of a jump, so I was looking forward to Nevis, in spite of the terror it would no doubt inspire. So, off to the bus for the next jump site.

We got on the Nevis bus, and were back on our way. On the way, the driver entertained us with a CD of Flight of the Conchords, the New Zealand duo that reminded me of a cross between Jack Black and the Arrogant Worms. Of course, it couldn't really change the fact that we were driving up a really steep road up to a canyon, where there would be a gondola ride to a suspended sky pod which we would be jumping out of shortly. At the top of the road, we were greeted with the sight of a little hangar, which served as the Nevis HQ. Outside the back door, danger awaited us.

It wasn't long before we were putting on our full body harnesses for the ride over to the pod. The jumpers would be going in order of heaviest to lightest, so I had the opportunity to watch a lot of other people jump before me. They looked really cool doing it, but I couldn't help but notice that we were a long way up in the air. D'oh! We still did the jump from the feet rather than the full harness. It was just there to tie us in to the gondola and as a safety measure up in the pod. When my name was finally called, I suddenly felt pretty nervous. They stuck us in a chair that resembled a dentists' chair to get ready, and that's when it hit me. As I was waddling to the edge of the pod, my stomach was doing flips. Of course, I had done this to myself, by looking down, it's really scary. However, when they finally did the countdown, I had no choice but to go for it. Luckily, on the playback, my form was pretty good. I was really pumped once I hit the bottom of the jump many seconds later. It was definitely one of those moments where you tasted death, but then felt full of life.

They pulled me back up, and I had the hugest grin on my face that stayed on for quite some time. We watched a few more jumpers, then were shuttled back over to the HQ where we were treated to free hot dogs and drinks. The video was awesome, so I bought it. So ended the second of my thrill-seeking days. To cap off the day, I hastily packed a day pack full of stuff to tramp over the next three days. I also made a little sign for the hitch-hiking, and hit the road. This night, I'd be in Glenorchy, and the next 3 days I'd be hiking the Rees-Dart Track, as well as the Cascade Saddle. Of course, you'll have to read the next post to hear more about that. Till then, you kids stay cool.

REES-DART ADVENTURE CHALLENGE

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2008

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2008

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2008

(POSTED ON: TUE, 2008-02-19 03:27 BY STEVE)

Wow! Well, I'm back from another great weekend of tramping in the wilds of New Zealand. This time, I was tackling the Rees-Dart Track, as well as tackling on a full-day hike to the Cascade Saddle and back. Normally, they rate this as a 4-5 day tramp,



but I was doing the whole thing including the Saddle side trip in 3 days. Perhaps that'll give you an idea of why I took a day off when I got back. The third day was definitely a killer, and took me 9 grueling hours of hiking to finish off. However, I'm getting a little ahead of myself, and I'm aiming to fill you all in on at least some of the details of those three glorious days. Read on for the details, and check out the maps ([day 1](#), [day 2](#), [day 3](#)) and the pictures ([day 1](#), [day 2](#), [day 3](#)). The day 3 map is highly abbreviated, as the batteries were dead fairly early that day. Oh well.

I'm calling this weekend trip an Adventure Challenge as I definitely felt like I was doing an adventure race at times. I even ended up naming some of my stops CPs and looking forward to the transition zones to do different things. The first leg of the challenge was actually in Queenstown, as I had to catch a ride from Q-Town up to Glenorchy, as well as find rides to get to the trailhead. I left in the late afternoon, hoping that someone would be headed that way for the weekend. My first ride was a couple of Swiss guys who were only going halfway to a lookout. All told, it was a pretty good place to stop, as the view was breath-taking. Unfortunately, I then had to walk quite a way before finally being picked up again for the rest of the way by a Macedonian jumpmaster who worked at a drop zone out in Glenorchy. He dropped me off at the holiday park, where I booked a bunk for the night. I ended my night by going to the local watering hole which was full of real kiwis drinking up and dabbling in karaoke. Wish I could've stayed longer there.

Next morning, it was back on the road trying to hitch the remaining 24km. Tougher than I expected, mainly because the gravel road leading to the trailhead has only traffic bound for the track which isn't a really big one. Luckily, I did get a lift right to the start by a couple that were doing it that weekend as well. Sweet as bro! I slung on the ole backpack, and hit the dusty road. Well, actually, it was a boggy road. When they said 'expect boggy conditions', they should have said 'bring your hip waders'. The Rees valley was a bit of a slog uphill, with many of the little creeks slightly swollen from the recent rainfall, and a lot of the ground soggy. The day's hiking was about 20km, passing one hut along the way, and climbing over the Rees saddle, a cool climb up to a mountain pass where you get a good look at the valleys below and the mountains ahead. From the saddle, it was a marked route only to the Dart Hut where I was staying. The route was a cool one, with lots of exposed cliffs and tricky footing, just what I love. However, the scenery made this outstanding, with roaring rivers below, and mountains all around. What could be better.

Even though I had only left after 10am, I made it to the hut by around 5pm, so it took just under 7 hours for what was posted as a 10-14 hour trip. Cool. However, I was a little pooped from the trip, and looking forward to my supper. Unfortunately, I didn't have a stove to cook anything, and had to bum a stove, pot, fuel, and utensils from a nice hut user. Luckily, there was one such user, and I got to eat a warm meal. This is a good thing, because otherwise, all I had to eat were trail mix, granola bars, some chocolate, energy bars and cheese and crackers. There were about a dozen or so other people staying at the hut, and it turned out that most of them were also planning to climb up the cascade saddle the next day, because the weather was looking like it would be fantastic. D'oh! In order to get a head start on the masses, I decided to head out early the next morning.

Well, early for me meant only 8am, but it was still early enough to be on the trail before anyone else, which really surprised me. Happily, since I'm also a bit quicker on the trails, I got to the top and had an hour up there all to myself. The weather was gorgeous, with no clouds, so I had most impressive views of the Dart Glacier, Mount Aspiring, the Matukituki Valley, and tons of other great sights. I ended up taking an 8 shot panoramic picture which will hopefully turn out nice. While up there, I chowed down on some

delicious peanut M&Ms, and some trail mix while dangling my feet over the 1,000m cliffs. Yup, that's how far I would've dropped. Almost a kilometer. Crazy, isn't it? And they say bungee jumping is crazy!

As it was still relatively early in the day, I thought about doing another side hike to a glacier, but it would've added an extra three hours onto the hike after getting back to the hut. Instead, I opted to explore the valley floor a little bit longer, and to check out the glacier snout a little bit, as well as some of the amazing waterfalls coming down from the hanging glaciers. As I was crossing the very wide glacier river area and craning my neck up skyward, it occurred to me that with the warm weather and beating sun, pieces of those hanging glaciers could actually come crashing down. Needless to say I was a little weary, and didn't stick around there too long, especially when I saw some of the previous extra large chunks that had dropped down in the past. Yikes! I made my way back to Dart Hut, and rather than hiking further, I stripped down to my skivvies and had an alpine shower. Basically, I submerged my body in the glacier-fed river for a couple seconds to cool off and take a layer of sweat and sunscreen off. It was long enough. It took a little while for the radiant sun to heat me back up.

That night was a repeat of the night before, where I bummed a stove off someone to make my supper, and I loaded up on all the extra food that I could spare, to make my load lighter for the next day, which would be the longest hike that I took. I also met a girl hiking who came from Hawaii, and we played cards (speed) until the sun went down. Thank goodness for that, because otherwise, I'd basically just have been sitting around waiting for it to get dark. If you've ever done a multi-day tramp, you'll know what I'm talking about. You're too tired to do any hiking, and there's very little else to do in a hut alone, so you just lay down, and wait for dark to sleep. I repacked my stuff in order to be able to hit the road before 8am the next day. I wanted to get a head start so that I could make it to the road end in time to hopefully catch a lift to Queenstown.

The third day of hiking started off quite well for me. I was on the trail by around 7:45am, and the weather was just right. It was cold, and a little overcast, so overheating wasn't going to be a problem for quite some time. The trail was predominantly downhill, so my pace was pretty quick. However, as the time wore on, and I emerged into some grassy plains, the sun came out bright and strong, making things tougher. I felt pretty well hydrated, but at the end of the day, I realized that I hadn't drunk nearly enough. The scenery was more great mountains and valleys, mostly behind me now though, as the trail takes you out of the mountain range by following the Dart River. Again there were some cool creek crossings, and an even cooler rock bivy.

What's a rock bivy you ask? Well, this was a really huge rock that had space under it for sleeping, and had obviously been in use for many decades on this track. There was a little windbreaking wall built up in front of it, and a cooking spot, and there must have been room for about 8-10 people to comfortably sleep in there sheltered from the elements when needed. Generally, it's used in winter when the water is too high to cross a certain creek, but this day, I used it to take off a couple layers, eat a snack, and put on sunscreen. It was one of my only breaks of the day. The second came a couple hours later at the next official hut on the trail, where there was a helicopter. Not sure what it was doing there, but they didn't pick me up when I tried hitch-hiking :-). Kinda wished they had, because from there to the end, it started to feel like more of a slog.

My pack was starting to feel heavy on my shoulders, and my stomach was telling me that it wanted something more substantial in it than granola bars. Sadly, I had nothing to offer it at the moment, so it would have to wait until Q-Town. Sadly, that was still some distance

away. This is when I really started treating the trek like an adventure race leg. I willed myself to keep moving fast, and ran all the downhill sections, and didn't take breaks. Uphill I kept the pace very steady, and my timer reminded me to eat and drink periodically. I kept saying, "just make it to CP6/TA2, then you can take a longer break and recharge. That was at Chinaman's Bluff, a parking lot at the end of the trail where I hoped to catch a lift.

When I did get to Chinaman's, it was both a great feeling, and a little concerning. I was out, but there were no real cars that would be able to drive me that I could see. I paused long enough to fill up a water bottle, and to change into some dry socks and my 'travel' clothes instead of my spandex shorts and tank top. One car left with two people in it, but they ignored me completely. So, it was back on the road. I hiked, and hiked, and hiked some more. It was probably another 7km or so before I finally got picked up by a guy who had passed me on his way in. He was just scoping the area out for the next day, and had room for me. Sweet. He took me all the way to Glenorchy, where I dropped off my intentions form (form to tell authorities you got out safe). Then, I bought a twix bar and a bottle of Powerade, and was back on the road. Happily, it was only about 6 minutes before a really friendly Kiwi fella picked me up and took me all the way back to Queenstown. I was totally exhausted, but very happy at my weekend tramp. However, I decided that rather than try to leave the next morning, I'd take a day off to recover, which is why you're reading this and have all those pretty pictures to look at over on flickr!

If you ever get the chance to hike the Rees / Dart tracks, I'd definitely say go for it, but you might want to budget an extra day. If you don't get the chance though, you can at least have a look at my pictures. Well, till next time, you stay classy world!

NO NEWS FOR TODAY

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2008

(POSTED ON: TUE, 2008-02-19 03:29 BY STEVE)

Just thought I'd let you all know that for the first time in the entire trip, there are no pictures, or maps, or really any stories to tell you for the day. Yup, I took the day off. Fully. I did laundry, did lots of Internet-y things, ran some errands in town, and even hired a movie to watch. Popped up some popcorn, and watched it in the late afternoon before the kids got home. Once Julia and Mark got in, I took them out for some Mexican food for supper. Tomorrow, I start the day with a ride on the historic TSS Earnslaw, a coal-fired steamer to get to a gravel road that will take me to the Mavora Lakes where I plan to camp for the night. Day after that, on to Te Anau, and my day trip to Milford. However, you'll read about those things in due time, so there! Hope you all enjoyed your day off for Family Day as much as I did for my Recovery Day!! :-)

D IS FOR DISCOUNT... AND DISASTER!

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2008

(POSTED ON: THU, 2008-02-21 23:18 BY STEVE)



Catchy title, don't you think? Don't worry too much though, the disaster wasn't catastrophic, but it was certainly frustrating. Of course, you'll have to read more of the post to find out what I'm talking about, as I don't want to give it away just yet ;-). Today marked my return to the road by bike after a week of not cycling! Hard to believe isn't it? Well, at least I was still quite active with my time, and had a very enjoyable time in Queenstown staying with

Julia and Mark. Thanks a ton guys, it was awesome, especially our Valentines' threesome! Ha ha. Get your head out of the gutters people, we just went out on the town and called it that. Anyway, I'm sure you're all anxious to hear what my day had in store for me, aren't you? My route today took me from Queenstown to a place called Mavora Lakes. Yeah, go ahead, try to find it on Google maps. I know it's there, but I'm not sure it'll show you a road. Luckily, you can see my route on the [map](#) if you care to, check out the [pictures](#), and read on for more.

To start with, the road I chose to use to get to Te Anau is only accessed by taking a passenger boat, the TSS Earnslaw, or Ernie as the locals call him. Ernie is a coal-fired steamer ship that sails on Lake Wakatipu. So, it would be a touristy / historic beginning to my day. Ernie was built the same year as the Titanic, but is still going strong. First sailing is at 10am, so I had a bit of time before heading down in the morning. Luckily, I was only going about 55km down the road from the other side, rather than try to make it all the way to Te Anau. Turns out that was a good thing.

When I got to the wharf, I was very surprised to see a veritable armada of bicycles already there. How odd. A couple days ago I checked in there, and they told me there was no need to book a spot, as there's always room. However, I was definitely worried now. I was doubly worried when the ticket lady told me there was no more room for bikes. D'oh! That's when a kind fellow stepped up and said I was with their group of 12. As it turns out, they had booked in advance for 12, but had only 11, so they had one spot for me. Sweet. And the sweetest part? I got in on their group discount, so I paid under 30NZD rather than 34NZD for me and Epicus (yup, finally gave my bike a name. The total book title will be "Steve, Epicus, and the Nomad Kid".) I happily wheeled my gear onto the already crowded boat. In the end, they also let another group of cyclists on, so there were literally bikes everywhere. Ours were crowded into the 'museum' section of the boat, AKA the bow compartment.

10 sharp, and we hit the water at full steam ahead. Literally. I watched the poor bloke below in the engine room shoveling coal to get the steam up. Nutty. Very hot job by the looks of things. Also watched the engineer running around fiddling with knobs and valves here and there. Quite neat I suppose, as they're doing it exactly the same way as they have for the past 90+ years. I even got in on the little tour that they were giving during our short 1 hour trip and learned a bit more about the boat. Queen Elizabeth has been on it, as well

as President Clinton and Hillary. Neato. Before too long, we were docking at Walter Peak, and wheeling our bikes off the boat to hit the road.

The road? Well, a gravel back road that avoids all the stinkin' tour buses that head from Queenstown to Milford Sound and the highway. There was no traffic on this road. Then again, it wasn't much of a road either. The first couple kilometers were hell. The road was apparently being graded, so there was a thick layer of various sized rocks all over the place, making biking very tough. I had to stop to re-tightened a trailer wheel on the way. I started out with the group of touring cyclists, but was fairly soon on my own. Another Swiss couple were also cycling alone, and they were close to me for a while, but I lost them as well. It's not that I was rushing, I was just going my normal pace. Groups are always slower. At one point, I passed the grader, and this was a welcome thing, as from then on, the road was much easier to navigate, although it was still definitely slower than pavement.

I biked on and on, weaving my way around the bigger rocks and taking in the scenery all around me of mountains, lakes, gorges, etc. etc. It was definitely a very cool road, and I felt for a while like I was in the Altiplano of Argentina or something, as I had to climb a big hill (230m in 3km), and at the top, I was at over 700m, but there was this huge plain before me that stretched off for ever. It was after this climb that I started realizing that I was almost out of water, and still had a long way to go. Did I mention it was a bloody hot day? No clouds, and the incredibly hot NZ sun beating down on me. It didn't help that I was staring down a seemingly endless straight gravel road off into the horizon that I knew I'd be following.

Luckily, the road went slightly downhill, and I had a tailwind, so I made the best of it, and sucked it up and kept going. This carried on for quite some time, and I knew that I'd be fine, and make it to the campsites before collapsing, but I was definitely a bit dehydrated. And that's when my little disaster struck. I was just pedaling along the gravel, bouncing around, when all of a sudden, the trailer lurched, and I was thrown off the bike. Looking back, I saw immediately the problem. I was down a wheel!! Yup, my left wheel had completely come off the trailer in mid ride. Damn. Guess I'll have to fix that. Well, actually, I already have by the time you read this. The problem was a result of my previous trailer flipping instances. Actually, earlier in this day, I forgot to mention that I actually flipped the trailer two other times and fell off the bike too :-). I was trying to get onto a horse track that looked smoother than the road, but it was up a bank, and my approach angle was wrong, so the trailer flipped. Ironically, on my attempt to get back on the road, the same thing happened but in reverse. My ego and inner thigh were a bit bruised, but at least no one saw. No doubt that didn't help my wheel situation, nor did it help my precious banana chocolate-chip muffins which were unfortunately crushed.

Anyway, once the wheel was re-installed, I was very relieved in another 5 minutes to be at the turnoff for the campsite. Unfortunately, the campsites were spread over many kilometers, and even worse for me at the time was the fact that the camp self-registration box was all the way at the back of the park, meaning I had to keep biking further than I wanted to. Oh well. I guess that's the life of a traveling cyclist, right? On the bright side, the best camping spots were deeper in the park anyway. The first spot I checked out lacked running water, and the lake access there was very muddy, making swimming hard. My new spot is great. I have running water across the lane, the washroom (well, long drop toilet) quite close, and I'm close to the boat ramp, so I was able to go for a refreshing swim and cleanup before setting my nylon house.

I'm taking a risk tonight, as I've set up the tent without the fly. This is a risk for a couple reasons. First, it's probably going to be friggin cold tonight since I'm in a valley at some altitude. Secondly, I'm not sure what the forecast is, but if it's rain, I'm pooched! However, on the plus side, I have amazing views from the inside of the mountains to my right, and in the morning, I won't have a wet tent to contend with, only a slightly damp groundsheet. It also means I can pack up quicker, which is a plus, as once again, the sandfly population at this park is also quite remarkable. Meaning, it's insanity. I'm happy to just sit here, take in the views around me, and write this post for you guys. However, it's starting to get chilly now, so I'll sign off, and slide into my silk cocoon for the night. After all, it's getting dangerously close to 9pm, the cyclists' bedtime! Ha ha. Take care all, and I'll check in again from Te Anau.

RIDING THE GRUMPY ROAD TO TE ANAU

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2008

(POSTED ON: THU, 2008-02-21 23:19 BY STEVE)

Hello folks, I'm happy to report that I'm safe and sound at Bob and Maxine's Backpackers in Te Anau.

Although there were no major mishaps to report on the way here, and even though most of the route was downhill, that's not to say that the day wasn't without its little challenges and frustrations. More specifically, I'd have to say that most of the day was full of challenges and frustrations. I've put a [map](#) together to show you where I was, but as you can see, there weren't all that many [pictures](#) taken, for the simple fact that the road I was on was utter crap for what I was hauling. Check out the [map](#), and read on for more details. I fear the story won't be all that long, as it'll be too painful to recall :-)



For starters, I'm happy to report that my little experiment in setting the tent up without the fly was a winner. Although, I did have several dreams that it was pouring rain, causing me to wake up in a panic, and even get out of the tent to check things out, and make sure there weren't rain clouds on the way. Happily, there weren't. Also, when I got up the next morning, there was indeed no condensation to worry about. All I had to do was put the tent away, nice and dry. However, there was no lack of bloody sandflies waiting for me in the morning. In fact, there were literally hundreds buzzing just outside the mesh, hungrily awaiting my exit from the mesh fortress. I could tell I'd have to move quick to get packed up or risk losing a pint of precious blood. I did as much as I could from inside the tent, like eat, get dressed, etc.

When it finally came time to pack up, I had a plan formulated, and executed it as best as I could, and was relieved to be ready to go in fairly short order. Then I looked for my sunglasses. Hmmm, not on my head or with my helmet. How odd. Oh shit! I remember where they were. Still in the tent. I managed to fold them up with the tent. Sadly, that meant unpacking almost all my duffel bag again just to get them out. This time, the little buggers got to me. Damn. Curse my stupidity. But at least I would have protected eyes and

wouldn't have to squint. Yay me! On my way out of the park, which was several kilometers, I saw the other cyclists, and stopped to chat with them for a bit. I also found out that I actually could have paid my fees at the park entrance, rather than going all the way to the end. Damn. Oh well.

Just before getting back on the main gravel road, I slapped on some sunscreen. and the other folks passed by me. We played cat and mouse for quite a bit of the day, until we finally got back on pavement, at which point I was able to be more efficient. However, before that pavement, there were some issues to deal with. Mainly, the friggin road. I vow I will never ride another road like that with a two-wheeled trailer. In fact, after today, I've pretty much convinced myself that I won't tour with a two-wheel trailer at all again. I think it'll be a Bob Yak the next time.

So why am I so dis-illusioned? Well, it was 37km of pure misery for me. This road was no normal gravel road. The spot where cars drive was okay, because it was well worn and relatively flat. However, my little trailer has wheels that are too wide for that. The result? Well, on this road, it meant I was essentially dragging a damn boat anchor the entire way. Ever try biking through deep, fine gravel? Well that's what it was like, and I wasn't liking it one bit. I liked it even less when it caused me to wipe out a couple times. I even pitched a little fit at one point, kicking gravel and cursing. It wasn't pretty. However, there was no other way out of it other than pedaling on, so I did that, and eventually made it to the main highway. Thank goodness.

From here, it was only about 35km to the hostel, and I really wanted to get there, as my level of angst was far too high for such a hot day once again. Luckily, I had extra water on board, and I used it to full advantage. I also stopped for a couple extra food breaks. Even though it took me longer than I would have liked, I finally made it to Te Anau. It was still only about 3pm, so I had time to get settled in and check the place out. However, I really didn't do much other than check out the hostel, grab some food at a bar, and pick up food for my day trip tomorrow to Milford Sound.

I've gotta tell you, the hostel I'm staying at, Bob and Maxine's, is awesome. I spent quite a bit of time talking with Bob, who is also an electrical engineer, but is now building his second house, after also having built the hostel we're staying in. He also has a great workshop full of tools, so I actually took advantage of his offer for me to use things I might need. I cleaned my bike fully from top to bottom using brushes and a hose. I also greased a lot of the bolts, and tightened up the bolts. I also finally took the entire trailer apart to try and fix the axle on the bad wheel in a vise grip. I think I've improved things a bit finally, but only time will tell, right?

That's about it for today, It's after 9pm, and I have to get up nice and early to catch my bus to Milford sound, where I'll be enjoying a nature cruise. Unfortunately, the weather has been changing here, and it looks as though we'll be in for a spell of rain. However, that's not all that surprising for Milford Sound, as they get rain something like 320 days of the year! Till then, take care, and I'll tell you all about Fiordland tomorrow.

MAGNIFICENT MILFORD

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2008

(POSTED ON: FRI, 2008-02-22 00:54 BY STEVE)



Hello all, and welcome to another chapter in my ongoing adventures. This day's story is brought to you by the word Fiord, and not Sound. More on that in a little bit. Essentially, this was another rest day. Not that I necessarily needed it, but simply because I'm in Te Anau, and this is where the only road that heads out to Milford Sound starts and finishes, and I wasn't going to come all the way to New Zealand without checking out the world famous Milford Sound! As such, I had booked a coach and cruise trip while I was still in Queenstown a few days ago. This was a bit of a gamble, since I didn't know what the weather would be doing, but things worked out just fine, as you'll find out if you read on. As per usual, and I'm sure I don't even

need to mention it anymore, you can check out the [map](#) I put together for the day, as well as hopefully some [pictures](#) that I'll try to get up on Flickr. Read on, mates!

I had to get up extra early today in order to be ready for my bus pickup. The first problem with that was discovered last night, when I noticed my voucher said I'd be picked up at Rob and Nancy's. The problem with that is that I'm at Bob and Maxine's, which isn't near to the other place. A quick phone call to the head offices sorted that out, and I was assured I'd be picked up at the right place. That was good news indeed. So at 6:45am I was awake, and decided to take a shower to start the day off right. Delightful. After that, I was outside waiting for my bus, and chatting with Bob and Maxine, who were also up already. I got picked up promptly at 7:50am, and we were on the way. I was the last person to get picked up, so there wasn't a ton of room, but there was a free seat next to Trish from Calgary. She was traveling with her parents seated behind us, after having been living in Australia for over a year. They were very nice, and it was also nice to be seated with someone closer to my age group, as most of the passengers were silver or no-haired! I had decided to book a nicer coach and cruise than the standard backpacker experience, so it cost more, and therefore, the demographic was slightly shifted :-)

Demographics aside, there isn't a single thing that I would dare complain about this entire trip though. Once again, I'm sure I made the right decision by not biking out to Milford. For starters, it probably would have taken me two days to get up there, and two more to get back, so right there you can see how I'm a smart guy right? Well, not only that, but the road leading out there can be quite treacherous, with seemingly billions of tour buses whipping around every corner. Also, taking the bus allowed me to get some excellent commentary along the way, filling me in on a lot of things that I would never have been able to piece together had I been on my own. However, trying to take decent pictures from inside the bus proved to be rather taxing, so score one for the bike-bound traveler. At least when I see a shot, I can guarantee to get the best chance possible to snap it. Not so in the metal box. However, the driver / guide stopped at a few of the choice spots along the route to let us get out and snap shots. Very nice of them, even though we were on a schedule.

Arriving at Milford Sound, I was delighted to find out that I'd be on the Milford Mariner, which is one of the nicer boats out there, having a mast and sail rigging, and also delighted to hear that I'd be getting on and taking off right away, rather than wait a half hour like some other people. Also, on arrival, I'd be getting right back on the bus to go, unlike the other people again. Why? Well, because I booked the Nature cruise, which goes further and lasts longer. Also, it was nice because there are far too many sandflies at Milford Sound, and really nothing to see at the parking lot anyway. To give you an idea, one of the spots out there is actually called Sandfly point. Get the idea? Not fun. Luckily, they don't follow you out into the water for some reason. I boarded the boat, and we were pretty much underway in no time flat. Before we had even blasted our horn, I had made my way to the wheelhouse and started talking to the skipper. Very nice chap, along with his crew, and I spent some time in the cabin checking out his gear and asking questions. The boat is pretty much full automated as far as systems go, but he's gotta keep an eye on them. Seven days on, seven days off, and he does all the cruises in the day, including the overnight cruise.

On the subject of all the elaborate sail rigging? Well, for starters, it cost them about 700,000NZD to get all set up. And the result? Well, this boat can't sail! Not one bit. There's no damn keel or center board! Some kind of major oversight on their part I suppose, but the skipper told me that just shows you a bit about the idiots running the company. Ha ha. With 3 masts and a load of rigging and sails, all they actually set up is a Genoa right at the bow, but only let out to a half-reef, and only so that the tourists can snap pictures. However, it does make it look like a nicer boat overall, so who's to complain, right? So why no keel? Well, although the fiord (yes, they spell it fiord, not fjord here) itself runs hundreds of meters deep, the harbour at Milford is only 3-4m I think. Anyway, blah blah blah, I'm sure only a handful of you are truly interested in the sailing aspects, right?

So, back to the cruise. I wish I could put it into words, but there's really not much point in trying. Just check out the pictures. It's far better to see than to describe. Either way, it was spectacular. Cliffs rising directly out of sea level to hundreds of meters above our heads. When you sail in close, you can't even try to take a picture, because it's just too high up. We passed extremely close to the waterfalls of the area, because the cliffs don't just rise out of the water, they continue straight down, so even though you're 2m from 'shore', the water is 200m deep! Very cool. We saw New Zealand fur seals, a penguin, but no dolphins. Too bad. We sailed all the way out of the 'sound' to the Tasman sea, went out a little into the sea, then circled back to the harbour. We were out in the water for a good 2.5 hours I'd say, and had a great running commentary most of the way. This tour was better than the 'scenic' cruise for a few reasons. First, longer trip, second, cooler boat, third, English-only commentary which went into much more depth. This was the explanation from the skipper, who knows all the tours, and said I picked the right one. Yay me. Oh yeah, by the way... Milford Sound? Huge misnomer. These are not sounds, but fiords. There's a difference. Look it up if you'd like :-)

Once back on land, it was back onto our happy fun bus for the ride back to Te Anau. However, we didn't just ride straight back. Rather, we took our time in order to check out all the views and sights we couldn't on the way down due to time restrictions for getting to the cruise. Oh yeah, I should also mention that going from Te Anau was the right call. When we arrived, there were only about 5 buses. By the time we were leaving, there must have been 45 buses there! It looked like a busy airport terminal. So anyway, we rode back, stopping periodically to see more and learn more. The Homer tunnel was a pretty cool thing, having taken 20 years to build through the Homer Pass mountain. It's 1207m, and has a pretty steep grade. It's only one lane, and has traffic lights at either end, that change

every 15 minutes. Another cool stop was the Chasm, which are some natural rock features that were worn down over thousands of years to become smooth and contoured, as the pictures might show. Hard to describe.

All in all, I give my day 5 stars on the worth-it scale. Even though it was built up quite highly, it didn't disappoint. I was awed by the natural beauty, as well as the sheer stubbornness of man that it must have taken to build a road out there. Up to 60 years ago, the only way to see Milford was to take the Milford track to hike out there, taking 3 days out, and 3 days back. Now you can fly or drive easily in 15 minutes to 2 hours. Ironically, if you want to take the track now, the guided treks are booked out up to a year in advance! A year! And it'll cost you 2200-2500NZD! Crazy eh?

Well, tomorrow, it's back on the road. I don't know where I'll stop yet, having not properly researched it yet. I'll pick Bob's brain later tonight, as he goes to Inver-Vegas quite often, and can probably tell me of a few choice spots to check out on my way. I plan to be in Invercargill by Sunday night, and have even been lucky enough to secure a place to stay with a friend of a friend of a friend :-). Gotta love Kiwi hospitality! Till then, I hope you're all doing well, and that the cold weather isn't getting you down. Adios amigos.

ANOTHER CENTURY LATER...

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2008

(POSTED ON: SUN, 2008-02-24 06:15 BY STEVE)

Welcome back to my world folks. Well, another day is in the bag, but I'm feeling great today! The ride from Te Anau to Tuatapere was over 100km, but I was happy the entire way today. The road was generally downhill, and there was a nice tailwind for most of the ride. I can't stress enough just how nice that is. There was only one hill of any concern, a 200m climb called Jericho Hill. Apart from that, it was just undulating terrain the whole way. My little [map](#) is up and awaiting your inspection. along with some shots for the day. Overall, I didn't take too many [pictures](#), as the scenery was generally not that remarkable. It was nice, but nothing out of the ordinary or really different from what I've been seeing for a lot of the trip. Farmland and rolling fields with sheep and cows. Yippee. Read on for a little more detail on this great riding day.



I didn't have the greatest night's sleep to start things off this morning. First, I was up later than I wanted to, in order to get all my latest pictures uploaded, as well as all my posts and maps. So it was around 11:30 before I turned in. Then, the Taiwanese couple in our dorm room were quite late coming in, and made a ton of noise getting things ready for their next morning. To cap things off, the Taiwanese fellow snored up a storm, forcing me to get up in the middle of the night and club him with a pillow. It worked. He rolled over and started the process over again, giving me a window of opportunity to try and fall asleep. These all made me a little draggy in the morning, and I didn't hit the road till around 8:30. Bob and Maxine also wanted to chat a bit before I took off, and take my picture. Maxine even gave

me a nice NZ fridge magnet to take home. I tell you, you won't find better hostel hosts anywhere in New Zealand. They really made my two nights in Te Anau feel comfortable. I snapped a picture of them as well, and I was off.

Of course, before finally heading out of town, I popped into Miles Better Pies to pick up a Chicken Satay Pie for a snack later on in the morning. Lonely Planet was on the money when they said I should stop in here to get a pie. When I finally did have it, it was divine. The lady at the counter was right when she said I'll wish I had bought two. Oh well, it was too late, as I was already in Manapouri by that time, 20km down the road. This was the first stop on my trip, as this is where boats leave for the cruises in Doubtful Sound. I obviously didn't do a cruise, but I did go to the waterfront and the wharf, which was a bit off my path. I was checking into tours of the underground power station at West Arm, only accessible by boat. Sadly, the tour, costing 61NZD, only leaves once a day at 12:30 and doesn't return until 5pm, making it a touch complicated to bike an additional 80km in the same day!

So with heavy heart, I skipped the 'electrifying' tour of the power plant, and got back on my bike for the onward ride. I wasn't too broken up about it, as I really hadn't planned on doing it, just thought I'd check. The ride was going so well anyway, that I figured I might as well just keep on rolling. The skies were slightly overcast, keeping the ground level at a great temperature. Not too hot, not too cool. Coupled with that wind, I had no problem just cruising along at around 20+km/hr. I knew that somewhere around km 50 I'd start Jericho Hill, which was the only feature of the day to cause me any strain whatsoever, but even that wasn't too bad. The work I had done on the bike and trailer were paying off, as it seemed mostly effortless to glide along. People seemed pretty cheerful today as well, with lots of friendly waves and room on the road. It helped that I was travelling the Scenic Southern route, frequented primarily by tourists, and no trucks. I'd be able to go minutes without passing another soul. Perfect time for polishing up my singing :-)

By the 90km mark, I was in the area of Clifden. I can't call it a town, as there wasn't anything really there to qualify it as such, but on the map, it had seemed like a pretty large and significant place. It wasn't. Luckily, it was only 15km from Tuatapere. It was also the site of the Clifden suspension bridge, which I pulled off to check out. Fairly ancient suspension bridge built in the old days. It was a nice distraction on the trip, especially considering from there I'd have under an hour to my destination. With the good time I was making, I actually arrived in town before 3pm! Pretty good considering the late departure and distance traveled that day. The bad news was that accommodations might be a touch tricky. There was a motorcross thing going on this weekend which had all the rooms booked in town, and at the backpackers, a stupid Stray Bus (annoying backpacker bus) was taking up all the extra space. Well, Big Agnes to the rescue. Since I have my tent, there are always options, and I'm now set up on a grassy spot, waiting for the pending rain. Luckily, I have full access of the backpacker place, a grocery store, bar, and café across the street, and I'm right on the road for Invercargill in the morning. All this for only 12NZD. Not bad. Of course, things might get a bit rowdy tonight. I may just adopt a 'if you can't beat em, join em' attitude tonight. After all, it's Saturday night, and I had a great day on the bike. Tomorrow is 'only' 86km of riding, and I end up at someones house, so I'm in no real rush.

Hmm, I think that's really all I have to say at the moment. Sometimes a shorter post is good right? When there's more to report on, I'll make a longer post. Awesome, it's not even 6. However, the motorcross guys are starting to trickle in, so I might as well make myself more scarce around here. Scary people these motorcross types. However, they're not real bikers. I'm the only real biker in this town tonight, right people? Perhaps I can win their

admiration with my excellent abilities to consume beer? Nah, not even worth trying that. Take care all, and talk to you later! Oh yeah, and why a pie picture with the post? Well, Jody was complaining that I'm always talking about these pies, but never take any pictures of them. So now you have one! Two actually. Now I just have to convince her that we should open up a NZ Pie shop in Ottawa. I'm sure we'd be rich, but perhaps not everyone wants to eat two per day like I do while biking here. Ha ha.

DEEP IN THE SOUTHLAND

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2008

(POSTED ON: SUN, 2008-02-24 06:17 BY STEVE)



Well kids, things can really change overnight around here. Yesterday, the riding was seemingly easy, with great weather and good wind. I was in very high spirits for the evening, and decided to stay up a while and have a few beers with all the motorcross people. After all, they were going to be up late and making noise, so there wasn't much sense in trying to go to sleep early anyway. I also figured that the next day would be a

pretty easy day, as I was only heading a little over 85km, and the trip was supposedly pretty much downhill. That meant I could have a somewhat lazy morning, and not have to be on the road right away. However, to add to the issues related to staying up late drinking beers, it also started pouring while we were still all outside on the front deck. Not nice. Luckily, I had the foresight to put my bike, trailer, and most of my gear under a protective roof so that it was kept nice and dry. Anyway, read on, check out the [map](#), [pictures](#), etc.

So, like I said, to get the night underway, I first headed to the pub to get some grub. Food for me? Chicken Schnitzel, served with a baked potato, pasta salad, and green salad. It was actually quite good, and while I was waiting for the food, there was time to pop 2 bucks in the jukebox and pick a few tunes to pass the time. From there, back over to the hostel across the street where I had a 6-pack chilling. I cracked one open and sat outside where the motorcross folks were seated. Halfway through that beer, I finally asked them if I could sit with them, as drinking alone is no fun. From then on for the rest of the night, I sat around with them, enjoying the warm evening and learning a bit about sheep shearing, motorcross, and Dunedin. Nice.

After crawling into my soggy tent, I fell into a fitful sleep as the rain kept tap tap tapping on the nylon all around me. Eventually I drifted off, and when I re-woke at 7:30, there was no rain. Huzzah! I set about taking the fly off the tent and hanging it up to dry. I knew it would take a while to get sorted out before leaving, as I wanted to dry the tent, the ground sheet, and fly. I was a little slow on the get go as well. By the time I hit the road, it was almost 9am. No biggie I figured. However, the weather had another little surprise in store for me with a little thing known as wind. Not just a breeze either, but a full-on wind.

On the good side, for the majority of the ride, the wind was either at my back or at my side. The gusts were up to 60km/hr, which made the going quite tricky when it was a side-on wind. I was certain a few times on the ride that the little trailer would be blown right over.

At a minimum, there were number of times when keeping control of the whole setup was quite unstable. I had to swerve in and out of the center lane on more than one occasion. That might be okay normally, but when there are kiwi drivers around, you don't want that to happen too often.

As far as the scenery is concerned today, it was more of the same as yesterday. Basically, farm country and rolling hills. With the challenges from the wind, I didn't spend too much time snapping pictures. It just wasn't possible. However, I didn't come back out along the coast once again, which made some nice spots to stop and take in the sights. This included a nice stop at McCracken's Rest where I had a nice pie for a late breakfast. Overall, I found the day sort of a challenge, and felt a little tired at the end of it all. Luckily, upon arriving in Invercargill, I had pre-arranged a place to stay through my list of contacts – sweet. When I arrived at the place, there was a fellow outside, but he didn't know anything about me or my arrival, as my contact hadn't told his roommate that I was coming. Oops. A quick phone call sorted it out, and I was soon enjoying a shower and some desperately needed fresh clothes.

Once I was out of the shower, Rajesh, my contact, was back from his work at the hospital, and before I knew it, we were off to Oreti Beach for a quick dip in the Tasman Sea. The wind was still howling hard, which made the beach trip a little annoying. You couldn't get out of the car without getting completely full of sand. Regardless, it was still a refreshing swim, and it was cool to actually go swimming in the sea facing the continent of Antarctica. Remarkably, the water was actually quite warm, but the wind made things not as comfortable. After the beach trip, plans were also made to have a BBQ at one of their friends' house, so we hit the grocery store and bought massive quantities of meat. We had enough to feed 20, but were only 8 or so eating it. Lamb, chicken, steaks, skewers, potatoes, salads, bread, etc. etc. Needless to say, I definitely got my protein fix for the day, so hopefully my muscles will be thanking me.

That brings me to my next steps. I haven't planned them. Not at all. I'm getting up tomorrow completely unsure what I'm going to do. I want to head to Stewart Island, but I discovered that it'll cost me at least 110NZD just for me to take a boat from Bluff to Invercargill. Then, I still have to get to Invercargill, and decide whether I'm staying overnight or not. Oh well, we'll keep that decision making for tomorrow morning. Till then, take care kids.

WANDERING IN WINDVERCARGILL

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2008

(POSTED ON: FRI, 2008-02-29 19:04 BY STEVE)

Hi gang. I bet you're all wondering what I've been up to, aren't you? Well, the truth is, today was very quiet for me indeed. So why was I so inactive? Well, the title of the post should pretty much give you a clue. It was windier than I could have ever imagined this day in Invercargill. Yesterday's winds were repeated again, and that pretty much put the [kibosh](#) on any plans I might have been



formulating to go to Stewart Island. Actually, there are a few reasons for me sticking around. Firstly, I'm tired, okay? Secondly, I was getting caught up on my domestic chores. Also, I had planned to leave for Bluff later in the day, but then decided that didn't make any sense. Accommodations were fully booked in Bluff and on Stewart Island, which meant I would have had to camp, and rain was definitely going to happen soon. Plus, I figured, why pay for a night down there, when I can just hitch down to Bluff for my Stewart Island day? After all, it's only 27km between the two. I could get up, and still make the first ferry, then catch the last ferry back and sleep in Invercargill au gratis both nights! That's really what clinched it for me. Anyway, read on for a little about my restful day. There's a [map](#), but it's pretty dull, oh and there are also some [pictures](#) over on Flickr.

Even though I was sticking around Invercargill, it doesn't mean that I did absolutely nothing! After tending to laundry, photo, blog, and map uploads, and some video skyping with the boss back home (Jody that is), I decided that I might as well see what the town had to offer. Sadly, it didn't take too long for me to realize that there was a reason Lonely Planet came up with clever ways to say it's sort of dull here. Other people had told me it's a good spot to kill two hours, but that's about it. On the plus side, it's definitely not touristy as a result, so you can't help but meet locals. For lunch I went to a spot called the Zookeepers café, and it turned out they sponsor a whole slew of bike teams, and had all sorts of memorabilia and cycling pictures lining their walls. Fun!

Once my belly was full, I decided I should probably fill up my brain too, and headed to a museum. No joke, I was trying to find anything to do to get out of the wind. It was tricky just walking outside! This was clearly a day for indoor pursuits. However, even that was hard to do in Invercargill. I don't want to sound down on them, but there really isn't much for tourism there. It's basically a crossroads for people coming from Milford Sound, the Catlins, or Stewart Island. In spite of this, I will say that the museum was worth the visit. Although it was dated and a bit tired with a lot of the exhibits, it still had some worthwhile exhibitions. Of particular interest to me was the wing called "The Roaring Forties", which was all about life on the Sub-Antarctic Islands. This wing was opened by Ed Hillary himself years back, and had some fascinating stories about the islands themselves, as well as some of the crazy inhabitation schemes tried over the years on some of them. Like trying to raise sheep on these faraway, desolate islands. Needless to say, these schemes didn't work out, but they make for some amazing history of the toughness of some people.

With the museum finished, it was back out to the windy, cold streets to see what I could see. I toured some of the lovely gardens in town, checked out an old water tower, and took note that the circus was indeed in town. Wonder if anyone from Invercargill would try to run away and join them once they headed out of town? Eventually, I made my way back to the house, where the good doctors were both home, each having their own power naps. Refreshed, they told me they were heading to the pool for a swim. Sweet. I've been hurting to get out to do some swimming. I tagged along and we went to the public pool which was pretty big, and subdivided for various activities. The three of us took a lane and swam for about 40 minutes. I can tell it's been too long since I swam. Looks like the pool will be calling my name on my return.

From the pool, we dropped into a movie store and rented a Jodie Foster movie "The Brave One", and popped into the grocery store to get some supplies. What supplies? Well, we were having TACO NIGHT!! Yee-haw. Anyone who knows me will understand why I was excited. With a little bit of team effort, we whipped up some amazing tacos to eat. My contribution was a salsa that I made from scratch, using tomatoes, red peppers, lemon, red onion, fresh parsley from the garden, and a few spices. It was a refreshing summer salsa

that I was quite proud of. Rajesh cooked up the chicken, and his room-mate whipped up some fresh guacamole and shredded the cheese. These were some damn fine tacos I tell you :-) We watched the movie while eating, and it was pretty good. By the time it was over, we were already well past 11pm, so it was off to bed to rest up for the next day?

The next day? Well, I was getting up early to enact my Stewart Island plan. Come hell or high water, I was getting to Stewart Island. I didn't even check the weather, as this was going to be my last chance this trip to go there, unless I stuck around Invercargill longer, and I didn't want to either impose on my gracious hosts, or sit around there with nothing to do any longer. To hear about my trip, you'll just have to read the next post which will fill you in. So there you have it, another lazy day for ActiveSteve. See ya!

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE COMPLETE

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2008

(POSTED ON: FRI, 2008-02-29 19:04 BY STEVE)



Good day to you all. Welcome to the Southernmost chapter in my Aotearoa Adventures. That's New Zealand to most of you :-) Today I would like to tell you a little bit about my journey by car and boat to Stewart Island, the Island off the south coast of the south island from Bluff. Yup, my main goal of this trip was to get all the way from the far north of New Zealand to the far south, and you can't get much further than actually

leaving the main island and getting onto one of the other smaller islands off the coast. Granted, there are islands much further south, but this was really the best I could do. Things got off to a bit of a shaky start for various reasons for the day, but eventually everything worked out, which it always seems to if you just relax and go with the flow. Check out my [map](#), [pictures](#), and of course read on for the gory details. Or at least some of the details. I'm going to try to be brief, as I find myself again 3 posts behind, which sucks when you're me :-)

The first real challenge of the day would be to get to the ferry terminal in Bluff. Yes, it's only 27km away, so I could have biked it, but then my bike would be unattended all day, and I'd have to bike back in the twilight at the end of the day, so I wanted to hitchhike. I got up around 7am, and made some little cardboard signs, and was on the road before 8am. The first ferry wasn't till 9:30, so I figured I'd be safe. Rides were slow in coming, but eventually, I was picked up by Ang, whose house I was at for a BBQ. She took me to where two roads meet on the way to Bluff. From there, it was another little bit before a local who works in Bluff gave me a lift. Sweet. I was down there around 8:40. First stop, bakery, then to the ferry terminal. I asked to get tickets, and was told it was full, and that I'd be fourth on the waiting list. Oh crap! I hadn't counted on that. As it isn't that big a boat, I thought I'd be screwed. At 110NZD, I didn't like the idea of departing two hours later on the next boat, but what could I do.

To kill time, I took a quick walk around Bluff, at which point it started pouring, so I headed back to the terminal. I was in luck, and eventually, I got my ticket for the first boat.

Guess someone bailed due to the bad weather. Huzzah! The ferry was a passenger catamaran, and she went pretty quick. The Fouveux Straight was quite choppy, and the ride was half the fun of my day overall. By the time we got to Stewart Island, the rain had stopped, and it looked like it might just be overcast. A quick walk to the DOC office helped me figure out which trails I should tackle in my mere 8 hours on the island. I opted to head to Maori Beach, by way of Garden Mound, and returning via Horseshoe Point, then carry on past town to Ringaringa Point and Wohlers Monument, a point further south. It was an aggressive plan, but as you might suspect, I made it. But barely.

Overall, I think I hiked around 27km that day, on varying terrain through woods, along beaches, around slips, and to some pretty spectacular vistas at various points. As I started hiking along the roads first (there are a total of 27km of roads on the island, and yet tourists still flock to rent cars. It was very funny seeing the same people in the same cars at all the same spots I visited on foot), the weather shifted, and before I knew it, I had to peel off layers and put on sunscreen. Yup, the sun decided to help me out yet again on a tramping day, and warmed me up and gave me some pretty good views. It wasn't perfect weather, but damn near. Getting to Maori Beach was pretty awesome, as they say that hike alone is 6-7 hours, but I did the round trip in much less. I had lunch out there (a cold pie and some fruits), surrounded by whale bones and sea shells in a little shelter. There was another little sun shower during that time, but it stopped again when I set out on foot once again.

Around Stewart Island, there is actually a great walk of 9 days duration, of which I basically did the first days hike and back. Had I more time, I might have done the whole thing, but I'm not sure I'd really need to circumnavigate this whole island to get a sense of it. I'm more than happy to have just done the day trip. At least I saw a lot of the island. From Maori beach, I made my way back to town via a couple routes, and passed a few other hikers on their way out. Arriving in town, I had about 2 hours left to make my next trip to Ringaringa point. My reason to head there? Well, it was just a wee bit further, and I wanted to make my offering as far south as I could.

Offering? Yep. Well, I've been carrying a little stone with me that I picked up in Cape Reinga, and has been with me on all my adventures thus far. The idea was to take it all the way south then pitch it into the ocean or ground as an offering for the Maori. I got the idea in South America, where when climbing mountains, you are supposed to take a stone from the bottom and leave it at the top as an offering for the Pacha Mama, or mother earth. This was my NZ version of that. The picture with this post is of me casting the stone into the bay from Wohler's monument area. I had mixed feelings doing this. It felt partly like the end of my journey, even though I'll probably do another 1000km or so before I finally rest in Christchurch. However, it was a cool moment, and I was glad to be able to enjoy it on my own at that spot. Sort of symbolic of my trip, of which I've mainly been on my own.

After the rock toss, I hurried back, just in time to grab some food at the grocery store, and check in for the last boat, departing at 6:30. Wouldn't want to miss that. The return trip was just as fun, with lots of rocking and rolling as we powered along. Glancing back at Stewart Island, I was amazed to see massive dark clouds, and what looked like torrential rains pouring down in the vicinity of Maori Beach. I felt sorry for the people I had seen pitching a tent as I left, but glad that it wasn't me. Arriving in Bluff, I hurried off with my little sign, in the hopes of snagging a ride with one of the passengers. However, even before they had time to get to their cars, a local couple heading to Inver-Vegas picked me up lickety split. I was very glad, and thankful. They insisted on driving me right to my doorstep even! Kiwi

hospitality I tell you. I was back at the house by 7:50, 20 minutes after arriving in Bluff. I probably wouldn't have gotten there that fast if I had my own car!

To end the story, I'll just say it was a great day, with lots of high points from my journey's point of view. Although the ferry was quite expensive for what it was, the ride was as thrilling as any jet boat or luge, so from that perspective it was worth it. It was also worth it to experience such a quiet, peaceful and desolate place as Stewart Island can be. Now I can say that I did it. I made it all the way to the deep deep south of New Zealand! Next day, it was back on the road, so I wanted a good night's sleep, but I ended up staying up too late again putting up the pictures for y'all. However, tomorrow is for another story, which you can read next! Adios.

CURIOUS IN THE CATLINS

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2008

(POSTED ON: FRI, 2008-02-29 19:05 BY STEVE)

Howdy gang, and how are you all doing today? Me, well, it was a soggy day for ActiveSteve. As such, you'll have to forgive me, but there aren't all that many pictures on my [map](#). You can still see my route and all the stats, but not much for entertainment value I'm afraid. For the first while, there really wasn't all that much reason to pull out the camera anyway. The scenery was just more rolling farmland, with sheep, deer and cows, much like the last few biking days. It was also really coming down, so I was pretty bundled up. Overbooties on, arm warmers, gore-tex jacket done all the way up with the hood over my helmet, and even my ski gloves to keep my hands warm, so as you can imagine, the camera wasn't in a ready state as it normally would be! All that being said, I guess I can fill up a couple more paragraphs with some info on my day and evening in the beautiful Curio Bay area of the Catlins Coast. So, read on, dear literati.



First clue that I'd be slow going was the fact that I didn't want to get out of my sleeping bag on the couch. Looking outside confirmed that it in fact was not going to be a nice day. Even though it had rained all night, it was still raining, and showed no obvious signs of letting up for me. As such, I was pretty slow pulling all my gear together and getting set to head out into the wet. However, in spite of my slowness, I still managed to forget some stuff in Invercargill, after I had locked the house doors! What had I forgotten? Well, not much, just my two water bottles filled with Powerade. D'oh. It was probably for the best, as they were starting to look a little grungy with some mildew or mold spores at the very bottom that wouldn't wash out. So, before even heading out of town, I tacked on an extra 5 or so km to find a bike shop to buy bottles, and coin phone to let Rajesh know. At least I talked the bike shop into a 20% discount on the bottles, which were 10NZD each! Had to have them though.

Once back on the road, it was a grudge match between me and mother nature. The going wasn't too bad, just rollers for most of the way along the road. In fact, as the day wore on, I felt better and better biking, which was a good thing since the overall ride was just a shade

under 100km in total. Just before I got to the sign telling me I was entering the Catlins coast, the rain actually took a little break, enough so that I put away the jacket and extra gear for a little bit to have a snack and snap some pictures as you'll see on the map. I also stopped for a feast of fries and a pie at one spot, and then a nice piece of chocolate cake at another spot. While there, I also booked my accommodations at the Dolphin Lodge Backpackers in Curio Bay. That meant the pressure was off for the rest of the ride. Yay.

After the main turnoff for Curio Bay, I stumbled across Niagra Falls, NZ-style. Don't get excited. There were no real falls. With the swollen creek, they just looked like a little whitewater. Ha ha. Good thing it was only 100m off the main road, otherwise I wouldn't have bothered. The next stop along this road was Waikawa. However, there was very little there other than a museum and a take-away wagon called Blue Cod Blues. Hmm, why did I know that name? Of course! This place is owned by the sister of the girl who's place I went to a barbecue at and who gave me part of a lift to Bluff! Too funny. I stopped in for a Chicken Burger and a chat with the owner. She was very friendly, and was amused that I knew Ang, and that I had stopped in. Truth is, I'll probably stop in again on my way out tomorrow, as there is NO FOOD down here at all! Other than a little campsite store where I bought some Ramen noodles for supper, and some cookies. Luckily they have ice cream too :-). That means two days of limited rations, but also of saving some coin.

After my burger, I pedalled the final 6km to Curio Bay, and the Dolphin Lodge Backpackers and.... Surf School! Hunh. Imagine that. Well, I'm not just imagining, so tomorrow, I'm booked for a 90min surfing lesson on a longboard. Fun eh? But that's for the next post. So what else is there around here? Well, Hector's Dolphins (only 6000 left) in the morning, Yellow Eyed Penguins (again, only 5-6000 left in the world), NZ Sea Lions, and an amazing Petrified forest! Cool stuff for such a small area. That evening, I headed over to the Curio Bay to check out the Penguins, they were funny cute little critters, but we couldn't get very close to them, as they are very rare, and fragile animals. Eventually, the cold got to me, and I headed back to the hostel for the night. Food aside, spending an extra night here is worth it for all the neat eco-stuff here.

Snug as a bug, I had a great night's sleep, and was ready for a day of adventure here. However, you'll have to read the next post to find out more about that. Later kids.

SURF'S UP IN CURIO BAY

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2008

(POSTED ON: FRI, 2008-02-29 19:06 BY STEVE)



Hey dudes and dudettes! How are you all doing? For ActiveSteve, the fun just never stops. I spent an extra day in Curio Bay, because there are a number of worthwhile things to see and do here, so why rush on, right? I think I already mentioned that there are Hector's Dolphins, Yellow-Eyed Penguins, Sea Lions, Petrified Forest, etc. etc. Also, in the surrounding areas, you can go to Slope Point, the Southernmost point on the South Island, as well as some other choice viewing spots of the rugged Southland coast and the ocean. Of course, to get to those, it's via gravel roads, and can take a while on a bike. As you can see from

my little [map](#), I did 70km, but my speed is very high. Why is that? Well, I must confess that I toured the area in a car, not on my saddle! I also finally took a surfing lesson and tried my hand at riding the waves on a longboard. For the full details on how I did all this, read on my friends.

Upon waking up in the morning, I took quick stock of the things I'd like to do for the day, and realized I wouldn't be able to fill up my whole day. That's when I decided that taking a surfing lesson would be a nice way to add a little extra fun to the day, and learn a new skill. Before asking about surfing, I decided to head straight to the beach, as I had been told that the morning is a good time to check out the dolphins playing in the surf. You can even go swim with them if you want to brave the cold water or have a wetsuit. However, it's not really that recommended, as the dolphins are quite rare, so DOC doesn't want too many tourists harassing them in the water. So I decided just to sit back and watch for them. It didn't take long, because just as I was cresting the hill on the way to the beach, I saw two of them jumping in the air! Cool.

Once on the beach, I made my way to where they were, and just sat down and watched for a while. It was pretty cool. Another fellow decided to go swimming with them, and put on his speedos and headed into the water. It didn't take long for them to start coming in close to him and swim all around him. That was pretty neat, and sort of made me jealous, still, I opted to just take some pictures. I was quite lucky at one point, as just as I snapped a picture, one of the dolphins made a perfect jump in front of him, and I caught it. It's not spectacular due to my distance, but you can still tell what it was. I told him that I'd send him the picture once I had a chance to upload it onto the web. Eventually, I decided that I'd seen enough and headed back to the backpackers. As I was walking, I almost ran right into a big Sea Lion on the beach. That wouldn't have been good, as they are known to attack when you get near. As such, I ended up having to clamber up a cliff to get back to the Dolphin Lodge.

Once back from my dolphin spotting, I asked Nick the owner about surfing, and he said that with the way the tides were, it would be best to go out at 6pm, and that there was one other person signed up already, so we would be definitely be going. That was Greta from Italy, who was sitting at a nearby table. I wandered over and said hello and we started chatting a bit. As it turns out, she had a car, and was looking for things to do to kill some time today as well. I convinced her that we should drive to Slope Point, as well as Waipapa Point for some cool views as well as Sea Lions. She was game, so away we went. We got along pretty well, so spent most of the day touring together, including a trip to check out the petrified forest at low tide at Curio Bay, and chatting with the DOC officer there for a while. At one point, I mentioned that I had no food, and she graciously offered to share some pasta with me after surfing. Sweet as! Now I was set.

Back to the lodge, and we discovered there were 6 of us now signed up for surfing lessons that night! Crazy. Nick recruited Ariel, a Hawaiian / Alaskan surfer girl (long story) who had just arrived to work with him at the lodge, to help out with the lesson. We were all given wetsuits and carried the beginner foamy longboards down to the beach to start our lesson. On the beach, Nick demonstrated the basics like paddling, and the 'pop-up', which is the trickiest part of catching the wave. Well, actually, the trickiest part is the timing. Unless you nail the timing, a whole host of things can go wrong, which they did over and over again for me. Most of the time, my problem was that I was 'pearling' my rides. That is, nosediving into the wave, and falling off. However, I'm a stubborn lad, and had no problem going out over and over again and trying. I caught a few of the waves quite well,

and rode them in to hoots and hollers from the others. It was definitely cool, and I'll have to do it again, maybe even before I leave NZ.

When it came time to head back in, I was the last to head back in. In fact, I didn't head back in at all. I stayed out in the water, as Ariel stuck out there with me some more to help me try to ride a few more waves. She was very helpful and was willing to stay out as long as I wanted. Although I had the energy to keep going for a few more hours, I didn't want to annoy Nick by keeping his board out, so I reluctantly rode back into shore to join the rest of the surf crew at the lodge. All that was left was to peel the wetsuit, have a shower, and go eat some food. What a great end to a great day!

Greta had cooked up some spaghetti, and I gratefully ate it all up. After I did the cleanup, a group from the hostel had decided to head over to check out the penguins, so I tagged along, and we all headed back over to Curio Bay to check out the cute little birds. As expected, they were back on shore, but the DOC officer this time decided we should completely stay off the beach, and stay on the viewing platform so as not to scare them too much. Fair enough, they're rare enough as it is, so I'll do what the ranger man tells me to do. Once that was over, I just chilled out back at the lodge for a bit till it was time for bed. Nick was nice enough to even give me the option to move to my own room, as there was an empty one, which would give me a quiet nights' sleep, and be able to get going in peace the next morning. Nice.

Well that's the end of my tale for the day. Stay tuned for another exciting chapter in my adventures.

SLOW WET RIDE TO OWAKA

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2008

(POSTED ON: FRI, 2008-02-29 19:07 BY STEVE)

Hello, all my global friends. Isn't it odd that I'm writing a post on the 29th of February? Good old leap year. Only comes once every four years, and this happens to be one of those years, so there you have it kids, my Feb. 29th post. Hopefully not too many babies are born today, as it would sure suck to only get presents once every four years, wouldn't it?

Lucky for me, I don't have a whole lot to write about today, as it was another one of the

now-familiar Catlins rainy days for me. Due mainly to my departure time, I basically had rain most of the day in some form or another. It was a bit frustrating, as it would slow down for a bit, and I'd try to take off my jacket, and then the rain would pick back up to full force, forcing me to put it back on. Oh well, I'm getting used to all the different types of weather and riding conditions, so it really doesn't bother me too much anymore. My ride today was from Curio Bay to Owaka, which is 1/3rd of the way to Dunedin. One more stop in Milton, and I'll be in Dunedin. Read on for today's story, and remember the [map](#), etc.

I woke up to the delicate sound of rain pitter-pattering against my bedroom window. Oh joy I thought. Oh well, I had sort of guessed I'd get rain, as the next couple days is calling for rain. In fact, the radio just told me that I may be in for some delightful thundershowers



for my ride to Milton. Yippee. Anyway, back at Curio Bay. I packed up my stuff and loaded the trailer in the comfort and dryness of the garage, which was great. I had no food for breakfast, so I just hit the road with the hopes of finding something before too long. I figured that either Blue Cod Blues or the Niagra Falls café would be open. I was in luck, as the Niagra Falls café was indeed open for business, so I had the 'Southern Boy' breakfast of bacon, eggs, a sausage, and toast. Yum. That would have to keep me going until Paptowai for lunch.

My speed seemed pretty sub-par today, as it did the other day. I'm not sure what's going on. I guess maybe I'm just a little bit worn out by this point in my trip. I'm still able to get the job done every day, but it does seem to take me a little longer than it should these days. Even though I was on the Southern Scenic Route today, I was not likely to get to see a lot of the great sights, as there were far too many clouds and fog to allow me to see it all. Not only that, but I was unlikely to try my hand at too many of the little side trails, as I was in no mood to take 30 minute walks only to see nothing. In spite of that there were a few choice views to be seen anyway, as you can see by the picture accompanying this post. The rain and fog actually made some of the scenery more moody and interesting.

The one unfortunate part of the day came when I got to Cathedral Caves, which is supposedly a spectacular place to visit at low tide. The problem for me was that low tide was 2.5 hours away, and I didn't feel like sitting and shivering in the rain waiting for the gate to open. So, I reluctantly pedalled away, knowing that I was leaving a pretty cool place without actually getting to see the best of the view. Well, I guess that's just another reason that I'll have to come back to this great country, isn't it? From this place, there were only another couple spots to check out, and unfortunately they were all waterfalls, and mostly 30minute walks away, so I skipped them as well. The only spot I checked out was Wilkie lake, which was a lookout point over a lake far below. It was pretty nice, but nothing that amazing.

I was relieved to finally make my way into Owaka, which is a pretty small little town, with no Internet to speak of, but the Backpackers is pretty nice and is quiet. I'm anticipating a nice quiet night, after having a feast of pasta, garlic bread and pineapples. That's it that's all for now, as my keyboard batteries are finally dying, and I have no more replacements, and there's nothing more to really tell you about anyway. Not a terrible day, but not a great day. I'm still here, and still pedalling, and that's the way things will continue for another few weeks before I finally hang up my bike shoes for a week or two and have a proper vacation. :-) Till then, stay tuned for more fun stories!

MELLOWING OUT IN MILTON



SATURDAY, MARCH 1, 2008

(POSTED ON: THU, 2008-03-06 02:47 BY STEVE)

Hello sports fans, and welcome back to another chapter in the ActiveSteve saga. Today's story is a familiar one folks. I woke up, it was raining. I cycled, and it rained. I got to my hostel, and it's raining. As such, I find myself with very little in the way of exciting stories to share with you at the moment. I assure you that this isn't a

result of my lack of desire to write a lovely story for you, but there simply wasn't all that much going on with me. However, I have, as usual, prepared a [map](#) for you, detailing my comings and goings, and I'm still prepared to give you an account of my day if you're willing to read it. The highlight of course was the fact that I finally was able to find an Internet connection and upload my latest few posts and maps. Sorry for the delay, but as it turns out, the world wide web hasn't fully made its way to the Catlins Coast yet. Anywho, read on for more about my enjoyable day.

As I previously mentioned, Owaka is a one-horse town, so luckily, I didn't have to go out and party on Friday night like I normally do down here. Hah! However, a few latecomers did arrive at the hostel to spoil the peace that Rainer (swiss cyclist) and I were enjoying. There were 5 people, all trying to find a place to have a fun weekend. As such, they were in a drinking mood, which didn't mesh totally well with my early to bed philosophy of the day. Luckily, they were pretty nice, and I managed to turn in anyway, although I was woken up a few times first by snoring, and also by them hooting and hollering as they played card games. Oh well, such is life.

I decided as a result to sleep in a little bit, seeing as I was only biking 55km for the day, and it was supposed to be raining quite heavily when we first got up, and let up a little bit later in the day. Once up, I had my lovely breakfast of yogurt, cookies, granola bars, and a banana, before packing up in the rain and heading out. Of course, then I found out what happens when there isn't rain around here, You get massive headwinds! Huzzah! I couldn't help but laugh out loud for quite a while. The last few days of cycling just haven't seemed to go my way at all. However, I'll soldier on, as I always do, until I reach my new goal of getting to Christchurch via Lake Tekapo and Twizel (and seeing Mount Cook).

The wind did eventually die down a bit though. You know what that means though, don't you? No? Heavy, Steve-soaking rains! My little Gore-Tex jacket is certainly getting a workout in the Catlins. It does keep the rain out, but on the flip side, literally, I'm still wet on the inside from sweat. But I digress. Who really cares about the degrees of wetness that I'm experiencing down here, right? After all, the wind chill is not -35 deg. C, so what do I have to complain about? On with the story.

Once again, there were a number of different walks and trails off the road, but once again, these were not right off the road, so I skipped the majority. However, I couldn't help but check out the Rail Tunnel Trail. This was a little walk to a tunnel through a mountain hand-picked years ago when there was rail line in place to deliver goods around. I had to battle my fears, as it was a spooky day, and I was armed only with a little bike light to enter this dark abyss of a tube all by myself. I'm happy to report that I did make it all the way through however. and was rewarded with.... well, just the light at the other end, and another plaque showing the original route of the train. Still a worthwhile distraction. After all, it wasn't raining in the tunnel.

After my little hike, it was a straight shot to the town of Balclutha, a crossroads between the main highway, which I would rejoin for the rest of the day, and the Southern Scenic Route. This was big enough to have a number of cafés and such, and I also found a place that had a reasonable Internet connection, allowing me to finally update you all with my past exploits. I stopped here for a little bit, enjoying a lunch of a Pizza Panini, with salads and spicy wedges. Yum! Gotta love the biker diet. While I was eating, Rainer also joined me, after having left Owaka a little later than me, but catching up. He only had a coffee, and was contemplating a few different cycling routes for later. In the end, we chose the exact same route, but didn't cross paths again, as I did my Internet thing for a while. We re-joined at the Happy Inn Backpackers at about the same time.

Upon arrival at the hostel, we were met by Tony, a very friendly Swiss gent, who has also travelled the world by bike, who asked us if we were flexible for our sleeping arrangements. He didn't think we'd want to share dorm beds with youngsters out for a good time all evening, so he offered us beds in the attic of the hostel. I think he sleeps up there as well, but I'm not sure yet. It turns out this is a great place, as the rain is right above our heads, making a pleasant pitter-patter on the roof. There's also heaps of room and has a smell that reminds me of attics of ages gone by. I still have a proper bed up there, which is nice.

I took the time to do some bike maintenance again, as all this rain is wreaking a bit of havoc on all the equipment at the moment. My rear shifter housing seems to be on the fritz a bit. Every time I click the gear changing mechanism, it doesn't spring back, I have to do it by hand. I tried taking it apart, but it was a little more complex than I anticipated, and I wasn't able to properly fix it in the rain behind the hostel. Oh well, here's hoping for better days. After cleaning up, I went to the grocery store for some supplies. I asked about any happenings in town, and was met with little laughs, and told there isn't too much in Milton. Fair enough, quiet night it is. Back at the hostel, Tony gave me a survey to fill out that BBH does once a year, where you can comment on all the hostels you've been in. That took a while, as I couldn't even remember all of them without checking my logs. He also kindly offered me a glass of red wine for being a cyclist. Yay wine! That'll go well with the bottle of Porter I bought to enjoy later.

Well, that's it for today kids. Tomorrow I'm off to the Edinburgh of New Zealand, Dunedin, home of the worlds steepest road, Baldwin Street, at 38 degrees. I'll try cycling it, but doubt I'll succeed. I thought there might be a place to crash, but I was unable to get a hold of the person I had contact information for. Not to worry, I've already booked into the Chalet backpackers, another place run by Swiss folks. There seem to be quite a few of those in NZ. Good on them, as they say. Have a great day, and I'll talk to you all again once I have more exciting adventures. Cheers!

WET ROADS TO EDINBURGH

SUNDAY, MARCH 2, 2008

(POSTED ON: THU, 2008-03-06 02:49 BY STEVE)

What's that? You're wondering why I say Edinburgh? Well, Dunedin is Edinburgh in Gaelic as it turns out, so my journey today was really to get to Edinburgh, not just Dunedin. As you can see by the picture, I had yet another very soggy day on the bike. In fact, this was the very worst day that I endured to date on the bike. I had to endure very heavy rains, cold winds, and numb appendages. For a while, I was actually concerned that I might end up with hypothermia. As a self-check, I kept singing to myself and talking aloud, to make sure I wasn't mumbling. Of course, I'm getting a little ahead of myself yet again, so why don't I start my story of the day from the beginning once again for you all. In the meantime, check out the [map](#) that I put together, and the pictures along



with it. My camera was literally floating in a pool of water within my jacket pocket between pictures. However, I went the extra step for you today. Enjoy.

I stayed up a little while the night before hanging out with some of the hostel folks, watching a bit of a movie as well as chatting with Tony the owner. He truly is a remarkable chap, having cycled all around the world. He had a number of photo albums lying around, and I enjoyed checking out all his pictures, particularly from his cycle trips into the Himalayas and Thailand in particular. He had a single speed bike for a lot of his tours, which was most impressive. He's clearly an adventurous fellow, but has now been living in New Zealand for 12 years, having set up his hostel, and seemingly running it single-handedly. He even insists on doing the dishes by himself for everyone. Crazy.

Anyway, the rain was pounding on the roof above my head all night, and in the morning, didn't seem to want to let up one bit. Once again, I slept in a little bit longer, in hopes that the rain would abate, but no such luck. I finally got up around 8:30, and had my breakfast while watching the rain come down in buckets. When it looked like it was finally slowing down a bit, I made a break for it. Of course, it was all for naught, as no sooner had I wheeled my trusty steed out the door did it pick back up right away. D'oh! The first 16km were on the main highway, and were fairly flat, so I made really great time. Then, it was time to turn off the main road back onto the scenic southern route.

Now, the wisdom of taking the scenic route on such a crappy weather day was questionable. It came into even greater question for me when a kilometer up the road I was faced with a formidable hill to climb. Seemingly straight up for 350m! As I was working my way up it, the weather seemed to intensify as well. I couldn't help but be reminded of wicked coastal storms. I eventually realized why I had that feeling. After finally cresting the hill, and coming down the other side, I was greeted by the sight of a violent ocean on my right. I would follow the coastline for most of the remaining journey to Dunedin.

The one saving grace for the day was the fact that the winds were at my back, and were quite strong. While it was keeping me somewhat cold, it also was propelling me forward at fairly high average speeds. This was good, as I didn't want to be out there one second longer than I had to be. When the chill was starting to get to be too much for me, I finally found a respite from the weather. A public washroom in Brighton, which had a door wide enough for me to get all my bike and trailer inside out of the rain. I took a nice break in here, taking the time to eat a bunch of food, and wringing out some of my clothes. A pointless exercise, but I did it anyway.

The rest of the ride was no better, and I became colder and colder. Luckily, I finally reached Dunedin, and all of its glorious hills. I wasted no time in locating the hostel and checked in to dry out. They were nice enough to let me take my bike and trailer into the building. Of course, it's going to take a couple days just to dry out unfortunately. However, I've decided to stay for three nights here, and two full days, so it'll have time to dry up a bit. I haven't fully decided what I'll do here yet, but the one certainty is that I'll be heading to the Speights Brewery for a tour and tasting, you can be sure of that! I'll probably also take a cool rail trip over gorges and viaducts that run from here. Finally, I'll have to challenge Baldwin Street, the steepest road in the world according to Guinness.

That's it that's all for now folks. I've had my shower, put on dry warm clothes, and had a feast of Thai food to keep me going. However, it's now time for snacks and beer, then a cozy night's sleep in my corner room with a view of the city. Great accommodations for 21NZD! Talk to you all again soon peoples! Cheers.

TAKING IN THE S(PE)IGHTS

MONDAY, MARCH 3, 2008

(POSTED ON: THU, 2008-03-06 02:51 BY STEVE)



Greetings folks. I'm back and I've got a couple new stories for you all today. I had the day off to enjoy some leisurely pursuits in Dunedin. Lovely city Dunedin is, and I suspect that it will be rather difficult to get back on my bike and start back on the road. However, I'll sort out that little bit later. For now, you might as well hear my tales of excitement in Dunedin. I did a number of things all throughout the city, and more or less stayed inactive for most of the day. I visited museums, shops, a really steep road and even a brewery to cap the day off. I put together my standard little [map](#), and there are some pictures there for you to enjoy as well, so read on friends.

To get things rolling, I decided to give myself a little extra rest in the morning before heading out. Although it wasn't raining too hard, it still looked like it might be raining just a little bit. First stop for the day was taking the city bus to head out to Baldwin Street, the worlds steepest street, according to the Guinness Book of Records. The bus was a quick 6 km jaunt down the road which cost around 1.80NZD. Once I actually arrived at Baldwin Street, the weather seemed to want to clear up. However, it was still quite cold, so I kept on my sweater and jacket. Since I was on foot, all I could do was walk up the hill. I feel like I cheated a little bit, as I should really do it on a bike. I plan to rectify that on my way out of town, at which point I'll be using the road to head out of town. Well, not Baldwin, but one perpendicular to it. As such, I decided not to buy the certificate until I've been able to try biking up it.

From the street, it was off to the Botanic Gardens, yup, that's right, I visited gardens. Wait till I tell you about the fact that I visited an art gallery! What can I say, I decided to get a little bit of culture on my day off. Anyway, I strolled the gardens for a while, admiring the various plants and gardens, including the Winter Garden, a rock garden, rose bushes, an alpine garden, a knot garden, etc. etc. It was actually quite a pleasant walk for such a day. On the way out of the park and back to town, I decided to wander through the University of Otago. Dunedin is actually a university town, which boasts having about 29,000 students. It was quite a funny area to walk through, as I strolled right through the student housing streets. I was amazed at the state that students down here live in. Then I realized that it was the first week of school, so they had just been through frosh week, and the partying that goes along with it. At Speights we were even told how the brewery has to brew an extra 50,000L of beer just for that week.

From the University, I carried on my walking tour heading back towards downtown, stopping at the railway station to check it out, and then off to the Cadbury factory. I didn't do a tour there, but I ran into a girl staying at the hostel, who was heading to the Otago Museum, as was I, so I tagged along with her. We wandered all through the museum, which had a cool display of bicycles, including a really funny 50's movie made with monkeys to instruct kids on the safety aspects of biking. I liked it so much that I wanted to

buy a copy, but unfortunately it was the only DVD version of the archival footage that they had. Too bad. Charley the monkey was hilarious!

From the museum, we headed over the public art gallery as well, which was a nice distraction for another hour. They had a Monet there, which had an explanation of some of the underlying elements that they had uncovered using visible light, x-rays and other things. The other displays were pretty good as well, with one really good sculptor whose exhibit I really dug. Unfortunately, I have no pictures of this to show you, as photography was strictly forbidden. Too bad. I can't even remember her name, but I know she was Wellington based, so that's a start, right?

The only other thing on my busy schedule for the day was a brewery tour at the Speights Brewery. I was under strict instructions to drink too much, which in retrospect was a bad thing, as I took that advice to heart. The tour started at 6pm, and was to last 90 minutes, with the last 30 minutes spent in the tasting room, which is where things took a turn for the dark side for me. The tour itself was actually quite good, The Speights' brewery is one of the only gravity-fed breweries in the world, which means that the ingredients are put in from the top down, and make their way to the brewing floor 6 stories below. I also learned about the origins of the phrase 'Skulling a beer', which comes from the viking days. Also a bit more about the Egyptian origins of beer, and the whole story of James Speight, the founder and brewmaster of Speights for a time.

Of course, the real story starts where we hit the tasting room. The first little while the tour guide was pouring the beers, but eventually, he turned over the control of the taps to us, which was bad news. I had met a few nice folks on the tour, and we had a good time pouring beers. One of those people was a girl from Ireland who was just getting ready for some cycle touring of her own. She was a cardiologist as well, so that was pretty interesting. Luckily, she, and a couple other lads from Ireland and a Swedish dude were all in the mood to drink, so we all headed over to the Speights Ale House to keep the party going. From there, we were off to another pub, but after that things get very foggy. Apparently there was a scuffle to determine who got to bike the bike to the next bar, and there was even a run-in with the police for running a red light on a bike with no helmet, which carries an up to 300 NZD fine. Nope, it wasn't me though. I was somewhere in the background at that point.

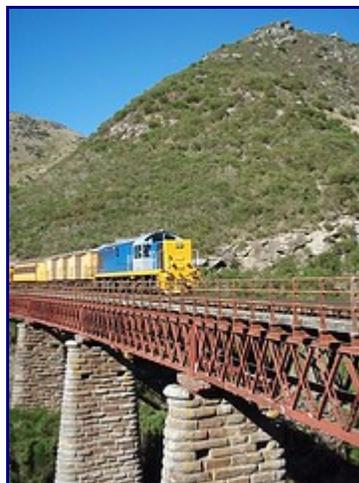
At any rate, there's not more to really say about the night other than it was nice to truly unwind for a night and make some new friends. The end of the night found me back at the hostel and a quick snooze on a couch before finally heading to bed. I had to get some good shuteye before the morning as I was off to the railway station for the Taieri Gorge Railroad, but of course that's a story for the next post. Till, then, take care kids.

HITTING THE RAILS FOR A DAY

TUESDAY, MARCH 4, 2008

(POSTED ON: THU, 2008-03-06 02:53 BY STEVE)

Hello once again from Dunedin kids! Today was basically another day off from the bike, and a day in which I decided to take a trip on one of the Worlds Great Train trips on the Taieri Gorge Railway trip, departing from Dunedin and heading into the wilds of the river gorge for a couple hours. I must admit, getting up in the morning was something pretty difficult to do with my slightly hungover self. Luckily, my plans for the day were pretty minimal, apart from the rail tour. That would be over sometime around 1:30, so I'd have the rest of the day to myself. I passed the time with a trip to the movies, since it's Tuesday and movies are cheap, and got my laundry all done. Also dropped back into the Art Gallery to kill some time, and had a bite to eat. Read on if you'd like a few more nuggets of info on my day and don't forget the [map](#).



The alarm yelled at me at 7am, and I felt far from a million bucks. I'd say I felt more like about a buck sixty-five. However, a nice shower, and a little vitamin I put me in a slightly better mood. I went downstairs to make some breakfast, and also cook up some bread to make sandwiches for lunch. I made it down to the railway station with a little time to spare luckily. My seat on the train was at the far front of the train in a solo seat, which was also right next to the Buffet car. The train was quite interesting, as it was a series of rail cars from the 1920s which were being used. Of course, at the front end, it was being pulled by a modern locomotive, to make things easier for the tourist load.

The rail ride was quite enjoyable, with loads of great commentary on the rail line, as well as those who built it and used it. Essentially, it was built for the purpose of helping get people out to the gold fields of Central Otago. The only downside to the day was the fact that I was the youngest on the train by about 20 years! Yup, apparently, classic rail tours appear to interest older people quite a bit more than the young people. Oh well, I know that if Patrick was in the country, he would have done the tour with me. Today, another use for the rail trip is to ferry cyclists as well up to the Central Otago rail trail, which is a multi-day riding trip over the areas of the railroad which have been torn up. I sort of wish I was doing it, but then again, there isn't much challenge, since it is just flat riding. The Irish lass from the night before was heading that way on Friday to do it, but it wasn't in my cards.

Once back to Dunedin, I passed more of my time by hitting a café for some tasty hot chocolate, after first dropping my laundry off at the hostel. They had a sweet deal where for 5NZD, they wash, dry, and even fold your laundry, leaving it on your bed for when you get back in. Sweet as bro! Before hitting the café, I stopped by another hostel to pick up the Irish girl, who was also looking for a way to kill the afternoon. We chatted over hot drinks about training, racing, and our respective lives, then headed to the cinema to see what movies might be worth seeing. We settled on 'Juno' which stars Michael Cera, Jason Bateman and Jennifer Garner. It was a pretty good movie, although not my favourite of the trip. I think the title still goes to Death at a Funeral. However, it was an acceptable way to kill a couple hours, and to enjoy my vice, popcorn.

After the movie, I bid Cliona adieu and good luck on her cycling, and headed back to the hostel to pack up my things for tomorrow's journey. I still have no idea where I'll be going tomorrow, but I'll no doubt stop at Moreaki, where I'll be checking out the cool spherical boulders of the area. I'd write more in this post about the rail trip, but I'm a bit on the tired side now, and need to get some sleep before heading out tomorrow morning on the next part of my journey. Hope you're all doing well, and keep checking back for more stories!

ACTIVESTEVE CONQUERS WORLDS STEEPEST STREET



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5, 2008

(POSTED ON: THU, 2008-03-06 02:54 BY STEVE)

EXTRA

Breaking news story just in this morning of March 5th, 2008. With great crowds of cheering supporters, ActiveSteve climbed the world's steepest street, Baldwin Street, in Dunedin, atop his trusty bicycle, Epicus, while the Burley Kid watched from below in admiration. This feat caused burning lungs and the taste of blood rising in the throat with the pounding heart rate, but the feat was over almost as quickly as it began. Onlookers were most impressed with this achievement, proclaiming aloud their respect for the task. Several

keen eyes were even more impressed by the fact that ActiveSteve remained seated for the duration of the entire climb, and choose to attack almost the entire climb straight on rather than weave. However, in the steepest sections, the traditional alpine style of climbing was adopted for a short section, by weaving left and right to ease the slope. To mark the achievement, a certificate was acquired proclaiming the feat. The onlookers, so impressed, were clamouring to become signed witnesses to the act, even though there was no such place on the certificate. A quick addition to the scroll by ActiveSteve made a fellow from Pensacola, Florida most proud to sign his name proclaiming the validity of the climb. With great smiles and satisfaction, ActiveSteve, Epicus, and the Burley Kid continued back on the road, ready to tackle more hills for the day, albeit at much lesser grades!

ENJOYING NATURES' MYSTERY

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5, 2008

(POSTED ON: THU, 2008-03-06 02:59 BY STEVE)

Greetings folks. Well, as you've already seen by the bonus post added to the site, I started my day with a rather taxing attack on Baldwin Street. Although my cycling day was to be 90km, I still had to give it a go on the way out of town, as it would be my only chance to ride up that street on my bike while in New Zealand. What a way to start my day! I was totally exhausted at the top, but had to bounce back quickly, as the next part of the ride was a



rather long climb up to around 500m to get over Mount Cargill, which is the scenic (i.e. torturous) way out of Dunedin heading North. The day was a hodge podge as far as weather, scenery and accomplishments go, so without any further ado, I invite you to browse my little [map](#) and to read on for a few more exciting details.

To kick the day off, I was greeted with blinding sunlight in the window. Huzzah! It looked as though I would finally get a day of good weather for biking. I realized that I haven't had a sunny biking day since Tuatapere! That's been a little while. Granted, I guess the seasons are changing in NZ, so nights will be cooler anyway, but sun would still be nice to warm me up as I ride out the rest of my cycling tour. Ok, so why am I saying this when I awoke to sun? Simple, the sun didn't last! It was a dream I think. As I was leaving town after the Baldwin climb, the clouds rolled in, the temperature dropped, and I could see rain approaching from behind me. D'oh! At least all of my things were finally dry from the extreme soaking that they got on the way into Dunedin. Unfortunately, the bike drivetrain has suffered a little bit, and the brakes were rubbing as well. Poor Epicus, she'll need quite a bit of over-hauling methinks before the race season. Stands to reason though, as I'm now well over 3500km on it this trip through varying conditions.

Anyway, back to the ride. Although the weather wasn't perfect, it was far from the gales of a couple days before. When it rained, it was more of a drizzle / rain, than a full downpour. However, it was cold enough that I had to stop to dig out my overbooties and my gloves to keep me comfortable. However, as usual, I was riding in shorts. Yup, not having rainpants has worked out just fine for me on this tour. Mind you, some people with knee problems swear by leg warmers, but for me, it's been okay. I had also hoped to stop at an Internet place on my way out of town to post some things, but wouldn't you know it, they weren't open, even though it was after 9am? By the time you read this post, I fear you'll be slogging through a whole pile. Sorry. Technology's a little behind down here.

The scenic route wound around many hills, and took me back to the ocean to ride along beside it for a spell as well. The chief reason for taking this route was the plain fact that SH1 sucks. Too many trucks, campers and inconsiderate drivers. I'm hoping to avoid it as much as possible till I get to Christchurch. That's not always easy though, as there are few alternatives, and a lot of them are unsealed. However, the scenic route is both much nicer from the traffic point of view as well as for the scenery. Go figure. The principal stopping point for the day along the route wasn't until close to the end of the day, at a place called the Moeraki Boulders, which are very interesting spherical boulders, along with some other

treasures made by mother nature herself. The bad news there was two-fold. Firstly, while I was there, it was the heaviest rain of the day. Secondly, I was there at high tide, not the best time to explore all the boulders, but at least you can still see some, as the pictures attest to.

I probably should have stopped along the way at a café or something as well, but frankly, I was actually enjoying myself on the bike, and just wanted to keep rolling. Besides, I'd made several peanut butter and nutella sandwiches, and still had half a bag of chips, so food wasn't that pressing. I made an exception when I was about 9km from the hostel. I saw a convenience store, and decided to pop in. A quick inquiry revealed there would in fact be no food or restaurants anywhere near the hostel, so I took the chance to load up on some stuff to eat that night. That was a good call by me, as Rainer, the Swiss cyclist who has been shadowing me several days now, didn't have that foresight, and had no food on arrival. Luckily, someone else had left a frozen pizza at the hostel, so he had that.

The Olive Grove is a sweet place. Scenery is nothing that special, we're just nestled in a valley that enjoys drier weather than Dunedin down the road. It's an organic farm, and the accoms are perfect for a relaxing night. Very quiet and peaceful. Rainer and I even ponied up a few bucks each to get a half hour in the spa pool here, which was just what I needed after my Baldwin bid! Although we have yet to physically ride together, Rainer and I have been doing the same route each day. In fact, I booked a bed for him this time, and we arrived only minutes apart, even though we hadn't seen each other all day, save for a moment when I was on Baldwin. Too funny. We haven't figured out the next ride yet, but I'm sure we'll be on the same route, as we're both heading to Mount Cook in the next couple days.

Well, I guess that about wraps 'er up for the day. Dunedin was a pretty great spot, but it was time to move on after three nights and two full days. I'm starting to get that feeling that time is running out, and I still have some things I want to do down here, so rolling on was necessary. Tomorrow, it's off to see the Elephant rocks, and take some back roads to a spot called Duntroon. Internet looks to be unlikely for at least another couple days, but I'll do my best! Cheers all, see you in under 4 weeks!!!

MORE GEOLOGICAL MARVELS

THURSDAY, MARCH 6, 2008

(POSTED ON: THU, 2008-03-06 03:00 BY STEVE)



it meant I had to take another 'scenic' route, which meant a whole pile more of climbing as well as twists and turns, narrow roads, and even a gravel section due to a slight

Hello rock-hounds. I have another day full of rocky miracle stories to share with you today I suppose. My trails today took me 87km from Waianakarua to Kurow, along the way passing some mighty impressive rock structures, including the Elephant Rocks, some Maori Rock Art, as well as some very amazingly shaped rock cliffs. Now I'm by no means a geological expert, but I certainly appreciated seeing these things, even though

navigational error on my part (actually turned out to be a distance shortcut, but the speed was much slower). To learn more about my day, read on, and to see just where I saw some of these cool rocks, don't forget to check out the map I've got up for you as well. Who loves ya, babies? Oh, by the way, big congrats out to Alyssa and Greg, as well as Trevor and Julie on their recent arrivals! Best of luck sleeping :-)

Last nights' sleep was extremely restful. One of the best I've had the whole trip. I think it had to do with the cool night air, cozy sheets, and the right firmness of a mattress. There was only Rainer and I in the dorm room, so we had plenty of peace and quiet. I suppose it helped that I'd pretty much worn myself out throughout the day, right? I set the alarm for 7:50, allowing myself extra sleep in the morning as well. Although I wasn't exactly sure where I'd end up, I knew that there would be fairly little to do in the evening, so showing up later would be just fine. I also decided that I'd wait for Rainer and we'd start the day together and see how that went. After all, we've been shadowing each other for a week or so now. He starts a bit later than I like to, so we weren't on the road until around 9:45.

By 10am, we were separated! I had stopped to take off a layer, as it was warming up already. He kept going, and that was the last I saw of him for the day. No idea where he ended up. Fair enough. Guess I should've just left at my earlier time. Catching up was a no-go, as I was having a few bike issues and had to stop to do some roadside repairs anyway, taking me about 20 minutes. By then, I knew I wouldn't catch him. Also, there were a number of different back road options for the days ride, and I had no idea which he had taken. I picked the one I thought the hostel owner had suggested, and vanished into the hills.

These truly were back roads. In the first 60km or so of the day, I probably was only passed by about a dozen cars. It was awesome. I even did the unthinkable. I put on my ipod and listened to tunes while rolling along in the pleasant high country farmland. It was only at low volume, and I could still hear everything around me, so I figured I was fine. It made the day quite enjoyable. Rather than just sing to myself, I had a backing band for most of my singing. Sweet! The weather was on my side today as well, the sun was bright and there were very few clouds. However, it still remained cool enough that I kept the arm warmers on. It appears as though the seasons have definitely started changing, as normally, this type of weather would have had me sweating buckets. It was a nice change. Guess I'll have to start wearing my cycling gloves as well, to keep fingers warm. After all, I'm heading straight back up into the Southern Alps the next couple days, up to Aoraki (Mount Cook).

The first rocky views were of some really magnificent cliffs of worn down limestone or something. I snapped a picture of an interpretive panel which can give you all the details. At any rate, these cliffs were worn so that you could see all the various layers of rock signifying millions of years of evolution. This is the path of the Vanishing Trail, which is a preservation society collecting samples from here and finding things like ancient bones and such. Either way, these cliffs were really neat in some spots. My pictures don't do justice, and I just plain didn't even snap some of the best shots as I was just cycling by in awe. They were also the canvas for a couple places where the Maori had done some rock art. The Maori are unique in that they have no written language, so even finding rock art can be quite telling to how the ancient Maori lived. My untrained eye could only see a few squiggles though, so I'm afraid I have no further insight on the ancient Maori ways. Cool nonetheless.

The next big geo-wonder are the Elephant Rocks. I can't really describe them all that well, but the map will show you a few pictures of them. They were really neat, as they were just

out there, in the middle of a farmers field. Unfortunately, they were also in the middle of an entire tour bus of Asian tourists, so I had to wait a bit just to get a moment to myself there. I can't blame them for stopping there, as this entire area that I cycled truly was a very neat ride, and would make an ideal side route for a tour bus rather than take the busy highways. After sitting for the obligatory contemplation for a little bit, and eating a Moro bar, which turns out is just a Mars bar, I rolled on to the crossroad town of Duntroon, where I had contemplated stopping for the night. However, one look around told me to keep moving on the 25km up the road to Kurow. Duntroon is a one horse town, and he was out in the fields I think.

I did manage to stop long enough for some lunch at the Flying Pig café, recommended to me by the last hostel owner for their pies. Sadly, they had only 1 pie left, and it was Mince, so I skipped it and ordered a la carte instead. Beef and Bacon BBQ Panini with Salad. It was quite yummy, and I finished off with a white chocolate and macadamia cookie, as well as a litre of water. That was just the stop I needed to refuel for the final 25km push. Luckily, the remainder of the trail was pretty much non-hilly, just steadily climbing, which was just fine. I was able to average around 20km/hr on this bit of road, which brought the smile back to my face. Perhaps it was the rehydration kicking in as well, but I felt great and was thankful for the great day on the bike. My faith has been restored in cycle touring again :-)

Pulling into Kurow, I could see this was a much better stopping place. There were numerous eateries, a couple hotels and motels, as well as a nice holiday park that has backpacker accoms. For 17NZD I have a whole bunkroom to myself so far. I was also told I could take my bike right in the room, so I'll be ready to roll early in the morning. Also.. they have Internet!! How crazy is that? Almost middle of nowhere, and I find a connection. Thank goodness, I can finally share my last almost week's stories with you all. As such, I'll sign off for the night, and start posting. Tomorrow, I think I'll be staying on a Merino Sheep farm just north of Omarama, but I might just push on to Twizel. All depends on weather, and what I learn from the locals about catching transport up to Mount Cook. The last couple days have been good riding, so here's hoping the trend continues. Soon I'll be tramping around the highest mountain in NZ. Wish me luck!

ON THE ROAD OF POWER

FRIDAY, MARCH 7, 2008

POSTED ON: MON, 2008-03-10 02:48 BY STEVE

Of all the possible hardships that a cyclist faces while on the road, I have to say unequivocally that the most damning thing for me is wind. There is nothing quite as frustrating as a constant force pressing against you as you try to make forward progress. It is even more frustrating when that forward progress is in an uphill trajectory. So begins and ends the entire story of my day. It was probably the hardest emotionally of almost all my days on the bicycle. I only covered 63km in the same rough time that it took me to



cover 93km yesterday! Boy, am I glad that I decided to add an extra 25km onto my ride yesterday, rather than trying to slog it out today. I don't think I would have made it. I really can't put the extent of my frustration into any words or pictures, so you'll just have to trust me on this one people! Anyway, read on and check out the accompanying [map](#) for my ride from Kurow to a Merino Sheep and Cattle farm 9km north of Omarama.

Okay, so we've already established that today was a windy one. So what else is there of note that I can share with all of you, without getting too annoyed by typing too much? You see, after a day like today, I'm always a bit grumpy, and don't feel like talking too much to people, or even writing my blog post. However, it can be therapeutic, and I hate putting it off, so here goes nothing.

Last night was pretty choice for me at the Kurow Holiday park bunkhouse. I was the only one there. I had a whole room to myself, and had a reasonable night's sleep. Of course, I awoke to the sound of wind whipping around outside my window, and I just knew it would be coming towards me most of the day, so it was important to get going. I packed up as quick as I could, but by the time I had eaten and dropped off my key, it was already 9am. Oh well, I was only going about 63km. Originally, I had visions of skipping past my booked lodging and going all the way to Twizel. Obviously that didn't happen.

The wind started right away, and for that reason I kept my jacket on, and had gloves on as well. I took more short breaks than I normally do throughout the day, just to try and find a wind-break anywhere that I could. The road that I took (the only one available) took me along several man made lakes that came about as a result of hydro-electric dam projects. All told, I rolled passed three different dams. The Waitaki Dam, the Aviemore Dam, and the Benmore Dam, which is the largest earth dam in New Zealand, and second only to Manapouri in generating capacity. Fun, eh?

The offshoot of these various dams is that there are a number of little towns all along the road, remnants of when the workers' camps were put up. At the height of each of these projects, there would be towns of a couple thousand close to each one, offering all the things that workers and their families would need. A lot of them have now been reduced to roadside towns with populations of under 200, but a couple still retain populations of over 1000, which in this neck of the woods is substantial. Unfortunately, I didn't find any of the dams offering tours, so short of snapping a couple shots of them, I wasn't able to stop in and visit.

The one nice stop I made was in the town of Ometata, which is the town leftover from the biggest dam project. There was a little café, and I called in for a delicious toasted sandwich and carrot cake. There was lots of dam memorabilia, including a commemorative book with lots of pictures of the construction of the dam. It was very impressive to say the least. I tell you, a lot of the places I've rolled past where there is a history of things like gold mining, dam construction, or kauri gum digging should cause us to take pause and appreciate what we have. These people lived impressively difficult lives toiling away to make what they could to get by. That's not even mentioning all the pioneers who created all the rich farmland. There are some crazy stories there too. So, with that said, who am I to complain about a little wind? I'm such a wimp now that I think about it....

Ahh, perspective is such a wonderful thing isn't it? I already feel better, and ready to face another day after that little side thought. But I digress. Eventually, after the rolling uphill ride, I rolled into the town of Omarama, another crossroad town with not much, but they had a grocery store where I picked up food for the night and brochures on how to get to Mt. Cook. I had some planning to do later. I was now only about 10km from my stopping place. Sweet. Of course, at my speed, that meant almost another hour though, didn't it?

Luckily, the road took me about 75 degrees to the right, so the wind became side-long instead of headlong. Not terrible. Omarama had another attraction too. Gliding. Apparently they have some of the best gliding in New Zealand, no doubt due to these wonderful winds that are nearly constant and predictable. They also have good sunsets apparently, and I'm hoping to catch one later tonight if I'm lucky with the clouds.

By the way, I was sort of expecting these winds, as all my books warned me about them, not to mention that a spot I'm heading to tomorrow clocked NZ's highest wind speeds at 250km/hr. Let's hope I don't encounter that tomorrow. So what is my plan? Well, I'm rolling the wind dice and pressing on tomorrow all the way to Lake Tekapo, where you get amazing Mt Cook and alp views. I'm booked in a backpackers located right on the lake, which has some great sights apparently, and several people had told me to go to Lake Tekapo. I've also booked a shuttle bus for the next day to take me to Aoraki, where I'll spend the night at the YHA there, and spend two days doing day hikes in the shadows of the Big One. Mueller Hut, Kea Point, the Hooker Glacier... hoping to see it all. It'll be nice to hike instead of pedal for a couple days. Then, it'll be back to Tekapo for the night, before continuing my journey to Christchurch. I think I'll arrive there on the 14th or so. Guess that means I might be there for St. Patrick's Day!

That's about it for my ramblings for the night. I think I'll go unwind in the living room with the other guests, and see if there's anything good on TV or if someone feels like watching a movie. I'll probably also stuff my face a little more to get my strength up for tomorrows ride. I'm doing over 80km I think, and if the wind is bad, it could take a long time. Wish me luck.

THE NAKED MILE

SATURDAY, MARCH 8, 2008

POSTED ON: MON, 2008-03-10 02:49 BY STEVE



Greetings all my bashful friends. As you can see by the picture, I finally had the opportunity to do my naked mile, a time-honoured tradition where the cyclist disrobes in a celebration of a long journey through nature. For me, it came somewhere after the 3800km mark, on the canal road between Twizel and Lake Tekapo. A unique set of circumstances allowed this to happen, one of which was my old friend, Mr. Wind. And in

case you are wondering, no one helped with the picture. If they had, it would have been much easier and taken me far less time to get the shot. Of course, for all the details, you'll just have to read more of this post, and check out the [map](#), where you can pinpoint exactly where I pulled this off. Enjoy!

After my miserable biking experience yesterday, I was a little apprehensive about the conditions for today's ride. As such, I made sure that I got up nice and early (making extra noise for the jerks that kept me up last night), and was on the road before 8am. I was even up before Tony, the owner. He got up while I was eating breakfast, but then went out to get the morning paper from the mailbox with his dog... a 3+km roundtrip! So, I didn't see him

again till I was leaving, when I passed him on the driveway. Conditions seemed like they would favour me today, as it was cool, and the air was very still. Too still I thought, but made the best of it. And the best of it I got for the first 25 or so kilometers. Great riding through the early morning. Up until just past Twizel.

Then of course, the wind resumed for me! Curses. I was already glad I started early, because I knew I wanted to get out of this as early as possible. I made it all the way to Lake Pukaki in a very happy mood though. I even stopped there for a little bit being thoroughly impressed by the brilliant colour of the lake, which is the result of Rock Flour, which are rock particles suspended in the water, which comes from glaciers much higher up. The sun was warm, the tourists were minimal, and the view was outstanding. Well, apart from the fact that you couldn't actually see Mt. Cook, as it was clearly raining / snowing over there. However, the lake was magnificent.

As soon as I got back on the bike and started making tracks, that's when it started again. I had chosen to try my hand at the Tourist Route, which is a road that hugs the lake for a while, before heading inland to follow the canal which links Lake Tekapo to Lake Pukaki, part of the hydro scheme up here. I tell you, this canal was very impressive. Huge earth walls containing this colossus of a river flowing from high to low between the lakes. Apart from the quite steep initial climb and the last climb up to Lake Tekapo, the road was dead flat. Had weather been more favourable, I'm sure I could have just flown the whole way. However, upon cresting the first climb to the head of the canal, it was insanity! The wind was nearly knocking me over. I almost cried and threw all my gear in the canal and hitch-hiked the rest of the way.

However, that would be silly, so I gritted my teeth, verbally abused mother nature, and started grinding my way along, trying to be as cheerful as possible, but not succeeding. I should also note that on this plain, there is no shelter. As a result of the near-constant winds, nothing much grows up here except tussock grass, and you can't hide behind that. Also, the canal was at a higher elevation than the surrounding land, so no hills or features to save me either. My only break came when I found a low-hanging sign warning of frosty roads being slippery. I pulled my bike and trailer in front of it, and hunkered down behind it to eat some food and snarl at passing traffic which seemed to wonder what the hell I was doing. It was one of those days that I hate motorists, because they just don't get it.

After my re-energizing wind snack of meat sticks, nuts, crackers, and almond bread, I had to face the music once again. Luckily, it appeared as though the canal may twist slightly away from the wind, so that I would get it sidelong for a while. That helped me raise the pace from 8-9km/hr all the way to 10-11km/hr :-). Not cool. There was nothing to do but just tick away the meters, and try to keep my mind off the wind. At one point, I came across the familiar wind-sock sign which warns of windy areas, along with an actual worded sign to the effect that very windy conditions may exist on this stretch of road. Sure, now they tell me! As I was about to roll on, a van coming the other direction swerved into my lane and stopped right in front of me. What the? I was in no mood to chat to a motorist, so I tried the ole stink eye.

However, this fellow was actually some sort of official dude. He stopped to tell me that he had just closed the gate at the far end, due to the wind conditions. He said I had two options. I prayed to all the gods that they didn't involve turning around and heading back. Nope, I could either cross over and follow the dirt road on the other side, which might have less wind, or just keep going, and he figured I could get around the gate. I opted for the road, and told him I'd just take it easy. He said they close the road now when it's too windy because cars have in the past gone into the canal! No joking. Of course, given the way

kiwis drive, I'm not that surprised. I guessed at my slow speed, and the fact that I'd now have the whole road to myself, I'd be okay.

Road to myself? Hmm... It took some time before I realized what that meant. Middle of almost nowhere, with nobody to come along, or so I hoped. What better time to do the naked mile? I waited a while just to make sure there would be no one. It seemed clear. I had also turned again, and the wind was now more back and side blowing, so my speed was finally more impressive. I screeched to a halt, and considered just how I'd pull this off. There was nowhere to lean my bike up to strip, and there weren't really any places to set up the camera. Road markers to the rescue! I was able to somewhat strap my tripod to the marker, then did a very comical dance to try and get naked. Easier said than done with gusts of 60km/hr+. If I wasn't careful, things would blow down a fairly steep roadside and onto who knows where.

Then, there was the problem of the wind moving the camera all the time. In the end, it only took a few tries to get a result that I was relatively happy with. It's not something I felt like doing for hours. I've gotta say though, it actually felt very liberating to be riding the bike Lady Godiva style. It was definitely a whole new feeling. All good things must come to an end though, and I got dressed again, with even greater difficulty, and moved on. Glad I can check that off my list of things to do while in NZ. Great story eh? Tell the world, after all, I just did. I needed a good airing out anyway. Ha ha.

With that done, I felt a new surge of energy, and was buoyed further with the knowledge that I only had about 15km to go, once more on the canal road, after crossing over the highway. Getting past the gate turned out to be a cakewalk, as there was a gap on the right side wide enough for me and the Burley Kid. Sweet. The last stretch was even more interesting from the wind point of view. There was no discernible direction for the wind, it just seemed to swirl and gust from every angle at various times. That made it a bit tricky to ride, but as you can tell, I made it out alive. Finally tackling the last climb, and back onto the highway, I was at last rewarded with the site of Lake Tekapo. What a sight to behold! It truly is a beautiful lake, much like some of our lakes back home like Lake Louise. Brilliant colours, and a sleepy little town. Population of Tekapo: 315.

I rolled into the hostel, and got checked in and settled in. There is apparently a nice climb up Mount John very close, but I just didn't have it in me today. Perhaps when I return on Monday I'll give it a go. For now, I have to get set for my side trip up to Mount Cook tomorrow. I'm all booked in, and will be staying one night up there, then returning here Monday night. Although I won't be biking for days, you can be sure I'll be punishing myself in other physical ways, like tackling 2 full day hikes in 1 day, and another one the next morning. Or so is my tentative plan. We'll see when I get there. Until next time, take care, and I hope you liked my funny little story.

HEADING TO THE HIGH COUNTRY

SUNDAY, MARCH 9, 2008

POSTED ON: MON, 2008-03-10 02:51 BY STEVE

Well hello all you cool beautiful people in the world. I hope you're all doing well, as I know that I certainly am. As promised, I didn't turn a crank at all today. No biking. Instead, I hopped on a shuttle bus bound for Aoraki (Mt. Cook). I'm presently in the TV lounge of the YHA in Mount Cook village.

Accommodations were almost non-existent up here, but I did score a nice bed in a 4-share room up here for 29NZD for the night. I almost ended up staying up here for a full week, but that's for the rest of the story, isn't it? I did plenty of hiking today, and plan to do plenty more tomorrow. The ride was fairly uneventful, save for the fact that I decided I made another good call by taking the bus here instead of biking and spending at least an extra 2 days doing so. At any rate, read on for the entire story, and don't forget the [map](#), and all of its' photo-y goodness.



I had a pretty good night's sleep to get things going on the right foot in the morning. I was a bit worried when a backpacker bus pulled up and emptied out a crowd of youngsters to stay at the hostel, and even more worried when 3 of them landed in my room. However, they were actually in bed before me, and were also getting up early, so everything worked out splendidly on that front. The van picked all of us up right on time, and we were on our way in no time. It was hard to tell what the weather would be like for us up there. There was definitely evidence of clouds over in the mountains, which was 100 or so km away from us, but there were blue skies everywhere else, so all I could do was keep my fingers crossed. Of course, I'd have two days to try my luck with the weather up there.

As we got into Mt Cook, I headed to the DOC office, where I was warned that the trail I had planned to start with was experiencing very high winds, like up to 80km/hr, which could mean some fairly tricky walking and footing. However, the other trail I wanted to do, the Mueller Hut Track, would be even worse, with very steep inclines on exposed trails. This was definitely not recommended, as I'd probably end up crawling they said. I'm saving that one for tomorrow, as the weather is supposed to get even better tomorrow. So which trails did I do you might ask? Well, all told, I did about 24km of hiking on the Red Tarns track, the Hooker Valley and Glacier Track, and the Kea Point Track, which I did twice due to weather. Between these and the Mueller tomorrow, I will have done almost all the day trails in the area, which is pretty sweet.

No sooner had I actually started my hiking did the rain actually start. It was an odd sort of rain, sort of half mist, half rain. Although it wasn't heavy, it was definitely getting me a little wet, so I had to put on the jacket, which in turn made me too hot. I ended up compromising for the rest of the day by just wearing a tank top under the jacket. Some people couldn't believe that was all I had on, as they thought it was freezing at some points. Mind you, I was moving a little quicker than the average bear anyway, so my body heat was up there. Kea Point was my first stop, and it was pretty much accidental, due to a wrong turn on my behalf. There was a sign, but I didn't properly see it, so I went straight

when I should have taken a right. No harm no foul, as I wanted to see Kea Point anyway. Sadly, at the first pass, it was quite misty, foggy and raining, so there wasn't much to see.

I re-routed, and headed up the Hooker Valley, which is a pretty sweet track with a couple fun swing bridges and takes you to the snout of the Hooker Glacier and Hooker Lake. The wind up here was absolutely ferocious! I ended up finding a little rock cave where I squeezed in so that I could eat some lunch a little out of the wind. I was wondering how long I should wait up here for the clouds to clear, but figured it might be a while, so after a little exploration, and admiring the big ice chunks in the lake, I turned tail and headed back down the valley. By the time I got back to the original turn-off, the skies had cleared quite a bit, and it looked like there would be a pretty sweet view of Mt. Cook. That's when I decided to head back up to Kea Point, which would have awesome views. I was right, and I was glad I went back that way. I had also met up with a few people from my shuttle bus heading up that way, and we decided to head to the village for tea / beers after that.

They had to catch the bus back to Tekapo, so I headed to the YHA to finally check in to my room. From there, I decided to tack on one final trail for the day, a supposed 2 hr trail heading up to 1100m for some absolutely stunning views of the whole Hooker Valley, Mt Cook, the glaciers, etc. etc. It only took me about 20 minutes to make the climb, as it was essentially steps the whole way up, so I used my big cyclist legs to just get up there quick. This hike was extremely worth it, and I highly recommend it if you are ever in the Mount Cook region. It's pretty easy, but delivers the goods. I also had a cool view of my hostel far below, which put the whole valley in perspective.

Once done with that hike, it was back to the hostel for a well-deserved shower, and then time to head off for some dinner. I found the nearby bar, the Chamois Bar, and had a delicious Chicken stroganoff with rice and salad, washed down with a Speights, and finished off with a chocolate sundae. Yum. Well worth it, as I'll need my energy back up for tomorrow's slog up to Mueller Hut. So how did I almost stay a week? Well, in the hostel, there was a sign saying they were looking for a Hut Warden at Mueller Hut from March 10th to 17th. I figured I could just squeeze it in. As soon as I saw it, I headed straight to the DOC hut to enquire. Sadly, they had just filled the position, so I guess I won't be doing that. Funnily enough though, they asked if I could do it the first week of April, or even if I'd be back next year, as they thought I'd be great for the job. Damn. Too bad. Would've made a cool story, non?

So there you have it, one day in Mount Cook done, and one more to go. I dragged the old computer along with me in order to stay ahead of the game before I got back to Tekapo, where I hope to upload the latest news. Up next, Mueller Hut, and hopefully good stories from that. Bye for now!

FOLLOWING HEROS' FOOTSTEPS

MONDAY, MARCH 10, 2008

POSTED ON: MON, 2008-03-10 02:52 BY STEVE



Well folks, today has to rank as one of the greatest days of my entire trip so far. That's saying quite a bit, because I've had 3 months of pretty great experiences to measure up against it. However, it was just one of those days when everything seemed to be going my way. I had a good night's sleep, the weather was fantastic, and I just felt happy all around to be up here in the Mount Cook National Park. The plan for the day was to do some

awesome hiking up in the mountains. I had planned just to head up to Mueller Hut and soak up the views there, but I also decided to tack on a summit by climbing up to Mount Olivier since I was already up there. After all, this was the first summit that Sir Edmund Hillary actually summited, so that should make for a pretty cool experience, right? Well it was, read on and check out the [map](#).

As mentioned, the weather as I woke up was top-notch. There were still clouds in the valley and high up on the mountains, but it was clear to me that those would burn off before too long, judging by the early light from the sun and the fact that it was blue skies high above. My only tough moment came when I realized that I had nothing to eat for breakfast, and there was nowhere to get any food before starting my hike. Oh well, the best bet was just to get going, right? I made a stop at the gift shop at the Hermitage as a last chance, and they had cookies and chocolate bars. I picked up one of each for the low price of almost 5NZD! Oh well, better than nothing.

I headed down the trail, with a lightness in my footsteps. I wasn't sure how long the trek would take, but I was ready to get it done in quick time, to make sure I didn't miss my return shuttle bus to Tekapo. It was 40 minutes before I made it to the turnoff for my trail, Sealy Tarns and Mueller Hut. From that point, it was pretty much a straight uphill hike. I had to climb from 760m up to 1940m, and it wasn't in a super-long distance, so you can imagine the kind of climbing I had to be up against. The climb up to Sealy Tarns was mostly on stairs built into the hill. After a little while, the stairs changed to rocky steps. Eventually I got to the first checkpoint, halfway up to Mueller Hut at Sealy Tarns.

It was still early in the morning, and my timing was impeccable. Sealy Tarns are a few more little pools of water up the mountain, and due to the time of day, the air was very still, and the water as well, which meant some pretty spectacular reflective views of Mount Cook and the other mountains in the region. I snapped a few pictures, and then was back on my way to the main attraction. The trail from here got much more exciting and challenging, and was a lot of fun. There were boulders, scree slopes and plenty of steep inclines. I was in my element up here, and scrambled up like a mountain goat. Before too long, I got to the top-ish of the trail, and saw Mueller Hut off in the distance, in a field of boulders. This is apparently the safest place for the hut, as it is off the avalanche paths, and high enough up to be safe.

I was the first person to get up there for the day. The other people left were leaving the hut, after having spent the night there. I didn't stop in there long, as I quickly decided that I wanted to keep going up to Mount Olivier, after finding out that it was the first peak that Hillary summited. The climb to get up there was along a rocky ridge with some great exposure on both sides. At one spot, I was crossing a very fine ledge with steep dropoffs all around. When the wind picked up, it was something else. I could see why they recommend this track only for those with some experience. This is where I drew first blood. I made a slight miscalculation in my footing, and started falling down. The only thing to do was break my fall with my hands, which resulted in a nice pointy rock puncturing my palm. Nothing too serious, just a little bit of blood to make me feel alive.

I finished off the climb, and was rewarded with some amazing vistas of the entire valley, the mountains, and the glaciers. I tried to imagine how Hillary must have felt on that being his first summit. I decided to just lounge around up there for a little bit, soaking it all in. It was a moment of pure enjoyment for me. Unfortunately, time was ticking, and I decided to head back down to Mueller Hut for a quick snack before heading all the way back to the hostel. As it turns out, my speed was pretty quick, and I had two and a half hours left after I finished off the hike. I had already checked out of the hostel, but I snuck my way in for a shower, some hot water to make noodles, and then hung out in the lounge working on the pictures and map for the day.

The shuttle bus back was fine and dandy, and upon checking back into the Lakefront Backpackers at Tekapo, I was happy to see there is only two of us in the room so far, and it looks like it'll stay that way. Sweet! Well, I'm off now, as I'm going to try to get these postings up, along with all the maps up to today. Hope you're all well. No idea where I'm finishing off tomorrow, but I think it might be a place called Geraldine. It's all capital letters on the map, so I suspect that it might at least have a few places for me to eat and maybe have a nice nights sleep. It's only about 90km away, and most of that downhill, so I suspect it might be a nice fun day for me, weather and wind permitting. Till then, take care!

MA NATURE DOES ME A SOLID

TUESDAY, MARCH 11, 2008

POSTED ON: TUE, 2008-03-11 21:19 BY STEVE

Hello friends! Well, after several days of challenging weather, what with heavy rains, crazy winds, cooler temperatures, etc., it would appear that Mother Nature finally decided to be kind to me and bless me with a remarkably nice day. It was back to the original days of my trip, with very hot temperatures, along with which comes the sweat. However, it was also the return of a glorious tailwind for a great part of my ride, coupled with a predominantly downhill day. Did you get a load of the ride stats on the [map](#)? My average speed was 21+ km/hr over a 90km ride! How sweet is that? Well, very sweet, let me tell you. Three days of biking to go after today. Crazy. I must say though,



I needed an easier day, as yesterdays summit bid has left my calves screaming today, again, much like I had run a marathon. Glad there are no stairs here at my hostel. When will I learn that boulder jumping down 1000 vertical meters is a bad idea? Probably never, as it's such great fun. Anyway, read on for the rest of my little tale. Not much to say, but I'll say it anyway.

Initially, I was rather concerned that I'd have a really bad day. You see, I ended up having to share my room with not only one fellow, but three of them. Two of which didn't show up until 1:30am, and were crashing and banging around before finally going to bed. Then there was the snoring and creaking of beds. I swear I only slept 3 or 4 hours total, fitfully at that. When my alarm went off at 7:20am, I made good and sure to make a fair bit of noise, and made sure they were awake. One of them blearily asked me if I knew what time it was, and I cheerfully told him it was 7:30. I hope they were as annoyed with me as I was with them. I know that's a terrible way to live life, but sometimes you've gotta help karma along. After all, I was basically all packed, so it was just general noise I made, just a bit louder than I normally would have. After 3 months of this, my patience has worn a little thin for these types. I'm looking forward to sharing my room with just one person, whom I can safely tell to be quieter :-)

Okay, enough about that. By 8am, I had gotten my key deposit back, and was on my way to the local bakery for breakfast and some road snacks, along with the grocery store stop. I stocked up for the road with a cheese scone, a steak and mushroom pie, two chocolate bars, and some expired Powerade at a good price (don't worry, expired Powerade is just fine to drink). For my breakfast, a tasty english muffin with ham, cheese and egg, finished off with a peppermint slice. Fully fueled, it was time to hit the cranks. It didn't take long before I decided the jacket was a bit much for the day. I kept the gloves and arm warmers on though, as my speed was such that it was a touch chilly. At some points, I was rolling along the semi-flats at almost 40km/hr! On the hills, I hit a maximum of about 74km/hr as well. What a rush. I was only slowed down by a few uphill chugs, as well as the occasional section where I'd be turned more into the wind, at which point the forward progress was seriously challenged. Boy was I glad I wasn't heading TO Tekapo today!

For the most part, this ride just carried me through first the Canterbury High Country, then down to the Canterbury Plains. In the high country, I was amazed at just how brown and dried out this land is. One farmer had told me that the price of livestock is the lowest since the depression, and that things aren't all that good at the moment. Where a lamb would have normally fetched 60-80NZD before, they are now only getting about 1NZD per lamb! That's pretty brutal I'd say. However, farmers are always locked in a struggle with nature I think. Another farmer told me he is reducing his sheep and cow stock and getting more irrigation to get grazing land just for the grass. He can get more from selling grass to other farmers than he can for the animals. There's farming lesson number 2, adapt or die. Enough about farming...

Hmm, sadly there really isn't that much else to tell you about today though. It was all farmland. I went by only one significant town, Fairlie, but since my time was so good, I just breezed on past. I took one stop at the side of the road to eat my scone while applying sunscreen and refilling my bottles, then a second stop, only 17km from Geraldine to eat my pie and a chocolate bar. That's where I had a chat with a British couple cycling. They had just left Geraldine after a late start in the day. I was already 74km into my day, and it was just after noon. We chatted for a little while, and it was too bad we were heading opposite directions, as we were getting along well, but such is life. They still had 74km to go to get

to Tekapo, most of it uphill, and a lot of it with headwinds, so I bid them good luck and we parted.

Shortly after that, I found myself in Geraldine. I haven't actually seen the township yet, as the hostel is up on a hill on the way into town, but I'm told there's not too much here anyway. Although it is a lovely town from what I can see. Nice houses, and a relaxed feel. Apparently it is a good area for crafts and artistry. Of course, I'm not about to start lugging around arts and crafts in my trailer, even if I am only using it another three or so days. Sorry Jody! The hostel I'm staying at is pretty kick ass. It's a converted maternity hospital, and only cost me 20NZD. That includes an awesome (at least I hope) breakfast of muesli, toast and jams, fruit salad, juice and coffee/tea! You just can't go wrong. Also, since I got here so early, I've had time to do my laundry and hang it to dry, as well as get this post and all the other stuff done before 5:30. Awesome. I can feel a very chill night coming on. There's a selection of movies here, and I reckon I just might have to prop up my weary legs and watch one tonight with a tasty snack.

Well, that's it from me. I'm off to the city centre to see what makes Geraldine tick, and hopefully find a good supper option. If not, rumor has it there's a good butcher with kebabs for sale in town. Hope you're all coping alright with the ridiculous amounts of snow in Ottawa, for those of you there. I mean really... over 85cm in 3 days? That's just insanity. Guess I'll have the chance to snowshoe and do some cross-country skiing when I get back after all. Must be hurting the marathon training for some of you as well, eh? Best of luck either way folks, and I'll be seeing some of you pretty soon!

HITTING THE SKI FIELDS

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12, 2008

POSTED ON: TUE, 2008-03-11 22:38 BY STEVE



Hi everyone... I'm back... again! Will I never stop posting and boring you with my stories from the road? Well, in a couple weeks, I suppose the answer will be yes, but for now, there are still a few more things to tell you about, since I'm still biking. I'm well over 4000km into this crazy journey now, for those of you who may be wondering. When I'm done, I'm hoping to be able to put together a 'super map' of all my NZ biking, along with a slew of interesting (boring) facts about my cycling. I know [Haggerty](#) is already salivating at the thought, but it'll take quite a bit of work to put it all together. Stay tuned. However, in the meantime, I present to you today's trip, a leisurely 80km ride from Geraldine to the town of Methven. Methven? Yup, I

knew nothing about it either, but it's quite a place, let me tell you. Check out the [map](#) and read on for all the details of this little ride.

I had a great night last night at the hospital for starters. No, not a real hospital, the hostel silly. Remember how I said it used to be a maternity hospital? Anyway, there were four of us in the room, and everyone was pretty quiet and turned in around the same time, which makes for a better night of sleep. Only one snorer in the midst, but he wasn't too loud.

We'd all spent the evening watching the Chronicles of Narnia, which was filmed in NZ, and I had never seen it. Not a bad movie, but I wasn't that impressed that I'll have to buy it or anything :-). I had my traditional giant beer as I watched it, along with a whole bag of chips. I sure will miss this eating style I've adopted on the road.

The weather in the morning was very promising again. I awoke just around sunrise, and it looked like it would be a pretty sweet day for riding. However, before heading out, there was the matter of the 'free' breakfast, which I was leery about. No need though, this thing was awesome. It took the hostel owner 2 trips to bring out all my food on trays. Very nicely prepared and laid out were my Muesli with fresh fruit, 4 pieces of toast, various spreads in little bowls, and my drinks, along with milk and sugar. It pays to check the web, as I only got this meal because their website said if you mention the web, you get the free breakfast. Sweet! The food was hearty, and just what I needed to get going. Before finally pushing off, I made arrangement for accommodations in Methven for the night, as well as in Christchurch for a few days, as I realized I'd be arriving on a Friday, and my chances of getting into the 'right' hostels would be slim. Luckily, I got what I wanted, more on that when I get there though :-).

On the way out of town, I popped into a bakery which is well known in these parts, in order to pick up some lunch. Can you guess what I got? Yup. A pie. Chicken this time, along with a fresh apple turnover. Again, did I mention that I'll be missing my dietary regimen when I get back home. I better learn the fine art of pastry making awfully quick in order to keep up my pie fix. With that little bit of commerce out of the way, I was free to ride on out and up from Geraldine. Yup, today was a pretty much full day of uphill, but you'll notice my total gain was under 500m! Thankfully, it was a long steady climb all day. When the winds were good, I had no problem maintaining a speed of 24km/hr uphill. How nice is that? I would almost have to call the day flat, which is a rarity. To me, hills mean up and down now, but steady uphill is just a flat day on a slope. Easy-peasy. Couple more days like this, and I'll be doneroo, apart from a few little rides I'll do from the train. Tomorrow will be the last challenge of any sort, with a gorge on my route. I plan to do some hiking there as well, so the day will probably be long, but worth it.

So, what about today? Just what did it have in store for me? Well, not a whole heck of a lot. The sun was out, but the air was still pretty cool, forcing me to yet again leave the gloves and arm warmers on. The scenery was, you guessed it, rural farmland. New Zealand truly does have a lot of this stuff you know. Sheep, cows, deer, and this time, for some excitement, a buck with a huge rack of antlers that I couldn't resist snapping a few pictures of. He might have been an elk come to think of it. I dunno, either way, it was something a little different to talk to on the road. There were almost no historical places along the way either. I did stop at one spot where there were some wire-framed sculptures of Moas, along with the story of moas, which is an extinct bird. There was also a roadside stop where there was a story of a Maori tree called the Singletree, famous throughout Europe eons ago, but that was about it.

There were some nice hills of course to look at, but sadly, the views of Mt Hutt, the main reason to come up this way, were non-existent due to smoke in the air from some fires somewhere around the area. That leads me to Methven. I took some back road to get into town (Pudding Hill Road), and on the way in, passed some amazing houses, huge, new, and expensive looking. In talking to the hostel owner here, it turns out a lot of these are the houses that farmers build when they retire. Apparently they live fairly frugal lives on the farms, but at retirement like to buy big houses. I also learned that Methven is the second fastest growing area in the South Island after Queenstown! Crazy. The main reason is the

proximity to some great skiing, hiking, etc. etc, and the fact that it is a bit more remote maybe than Queenstown. It certainly doesn't feel like a big place, but you get a vibe similar to Banff I guess. It's not that size yet, but I would suspect if it continues to grow, that's how it may develop.

The good news is, there is lots of accommodations, and they want your business. Take the Kowhai House, where I am staying for example. I paid 25, which is standard in Methven, but I get free breakfast, satellite TV, broadband internet (no uploading, although I bypassed by connecting direct to the modem - but somehow my flickr uploadr can't get my full pics up, boo), free towel, and use of an outdoor spa. Pretty awesome for a cyclist just breezing through. I managed to get all my posts and maps put up in the meantime, but sadly, the bulk of the pictures will still have to wait. Sorry.

My next adventure will be venturing into town to find some supper, and get some extra breakfast food, then settling into the hot tub with my giant beer and a snack probably. After that, perhaps some television. After all, it's not even 5pm yet, and I'm pretty much done all my 'chores' for the day. Tomorrow, I'll probably stay in a place called Darfield, as it's only 48km from there to Christchurch. I'm already looking forward to getting there, and moving onto the next part of my trip. Till then, hope you're all well, and I'll see you all in a little bit!

WELCOME TO SPRINGFIELD, NZ

THURSDAY, MARCH 13, 2008

POSTED ON: SUN, 2008-03-16 03:19 BY STEVE

Hello folks, I'm coming to you live from Springfield, NZ at the moment. I haven't located the Kwik-E-Mart or Moe's Tavern yet, but I plan to do some exploration after this post just to make sure they aren't here somewhere hiding. I must admit, I had no idea where I was going to lay my head down tonight, but as it turns out, I think I made the best decision in the end. So why Springfield?



After all, it's not even close to being on my route, and I had to bike uphill to get there. Well, there are a couple good reasons, first, I can say I stayed in Springfield. But secondly, and most importantly for me, it's 10km from Sheffield. I remembered someone telling me some time ago that Sheffield has the best pies in NZ, and what better way to spend my last meal on the road then eating the best pies in NZ while rolling downhill all the way to Christchurch on a scenic route? I couldn't think of any either, and that's why I'm in Springfield. Another option was Darfield, but I've since found out that the backpackers accommodations I'd read about no longer exist anyway, so I would've been out of luck. Anywho, read on for the rest of my story, and check out the [map](#) too.

I had a great night's sleep last night, mainly for the fact that I was all alone in the room. No one to snore or make noises all night. Also, the bed was quite cozy, and after filling my belly with pasta and garlic bread, I was ready for the slumber. When I got up, it was pretty overcast, and quite cool outside. It had been raining overnight, but that seemed to have passed, although the forecast said we may get drizzle for the remainder of the morning

still. Time would tell. I was lazy getting myself organized, as it was just so cozy there. I had a leisurely breakfast of cereal, toast, a banana and yogourt, and made a quick call home before hopping on the bike. Once again, I made a quick bakery stop, this time for steak and mushroom pie, and a piece of carrot cake for lunch.

My plan for the day was two-fold. Firstly, it was to make my way to my final destination, but also, I was going to spend some time hiking in Rakaia Gorge, where there was a walkway that went along the river and the gorge. Another couple cyclists had recommended doing the track, which had nice views of the river from high above. To get to the gorge, I basically backtracked for about 10km, although on a different road, before joining back up with the road I was on the day before. This was all uphill, and then a steep downhill into the gorge and across two bridges. I locked up the bike and my gear, put on my sandals, and headed off down the trail. I think if the weather had been a bit better, I would have been treated to views of some mountains as well as the river, but due to the overcast day, I was only able to check out the river, which was a brilliant colour just like Lake Tekapo. I'm not sure if I did the whole trail, but I came to a spot where there was a table and chairs on the other side of a fence, and decided to stop there, eat my snack, then return via the same route.

This table was clearly on private land, but it was so tempting that I made myself comfortable. Well, wouldn't you know it, a truck came through the field and a woman got out. I thought I might be in trouble, but when I asked if it was okay, she said absolutely. She was just dropping off a picnic basket for later. Turns out she guides horse treks down here, and this is where they stop to eat. She made me promise not to eat the food, then left me once again. I didn't eat anything, but I did pop open the basket to check it out, as you can see in the pictures. Looked tasty and fun, but not mine, so I closed the lid and shuffled back down the trail to my bike.

Of course, the next part was back uphill again, as I had to climb out of the gorge. Then, it was a gentle downhill roll for quite some time, before I had to make a turn once again, and this forced me to start heading back uphill again. All of these grades were very small, but you can still tell when you're going slightly uphill versus slightly downhill. The general scenery again today was the same as the past few days, so I've not snapped too many shots for you to check out, as they would seem a little *deja vu*. I guess that's sort of my theme on the bike daily now anyway. It's all become a bit repetitive. I'm looking forward to tomorrow, and the eventual ritual disembarking from the saddle in Christchurch. I dare say there is unlikely to be any fanfare, but after over 4200km of biking, I suppose I should feel some sort of sense of accomplishment and finality when I get off the bike.

I find myself with very little else to share with you about my day. It was a perfectly normal day for me, with nothing that really stood out. So with that, I'll close off this post. I get the feeling my writing has drifted to the more mundane now, but hopefully in my last two weeks I'll have at least a couple exciting adventures that'll get my fingers typing again! Till then, adios amigos.

ACTIVESTEVE LANDS IN JAIL!

FRIDAY, MARCH 14, 2008

POSTED ON: SUN, 2008-03-16 03:21 BY STEVE



Well, after over 4200km on the road, pedaling my little heart out, it's over. I've also managed to realize another one of my dreams, which is to spend the night in jail. In fact, it looks like I'll be spending 4 nights in jail in total for the crimes I've committed! Crimes you ask? Okay, I suppose I didn't commit any real crimes, in fact, I'm paying to stay in jail. Yup, that's right, I'm writing this blog post from my own cell at the Addington Jailhouse. This building functioned as a prison until the 1990's, but is now a hostel. I booked it a few days ago to make sure they'd have room for me, as it is a pretty popular place now. In fact, they got 1st place for a BBH hostel this size in NZ, and were also awarded 2nd overall for all hostels in Oceania! Pretty impressive eh? And yes,

it really looks like a jail, although a little more pleasant. They preserved one of the old cells as it was for comparison. I'm duly impressed, and happy to end off my cycling tour here. I booked one of the nicer rooms, a 4-bed share room, no bunks, which is double sized. For the rest of the details, please read on and check out the [map](#).

The day started off as good as a person could really hope for to finish off their cycling tour. The weather was overcast once again, but it wasn't raining, and it looked like it would just keep me cool for the duration of my short ride. My sleep in Springfield was fantastic, as I had an entire dorm room to myself once again, which allowed me the chance to curl up and have a decent sleep without distractions. However, even though I was all alone, I still woke up in the middle of the night for some unknown reason. I'm starting to look forward to sleeping in my own bed with no distractions whatsoever. However, that's neither here nor there, is it, you're probably just wondering about my ride.

Truthfully, there really isn't all that much to say about the actual ride. It was less than 70km, and it was all downhill, which meant really easy pedalling and good speed. The countryside was farmland once again, flat and uninspiring all the way. Of course, I did have my one important stop of the day, which was in Sheffield for the pies. I left the hostel straight away in to morning, in order to be there in time for my breakfast. I got there before 9am, but the place was already hoppin'. I went in and picked out two pies for sampling. Butter Chicken for one, and Country Chicken for the other (chicken, bacon, garlic and mushroom), along with a cream donut and chocolate slice for lunch. I went outside and ate the butter chicken pie along with the cream pie. Outstanding!

I went back into the store to chat with the baker about his excellent pies for a little bit. Apparently, they sell about 100 dozen pies every day. Impressive I'd say, considering this place is literally in the middle of nowhere. He was of the opinion that I'd stand to make a killing if I opened up a pie shop in Ottawa. Now all I have to do is convince him to take me in as an apprentice. This fellow has been all around the world perfecting his craft, spending time in France and England in particular. All I can say is that it paid off handsomely, as his pastry was outstanding. Once that was out of the way, I had to hit the road once again, but with a full belly.

I had a smile on my face pretty much the entire day on the way, knowing that it would be my last long day in the saddle. I don't know why, but it seemed that my butt hurt the most today of every day. I think it somehow knew that it would finally get a rest, so it decided to revolt a little bit. Before I even knew it, I was on the outskirts of Christchurch. All told, it only took a little over 3 hours to make it to Christchurch and to prison. Now I remember why I don't care so much for big cities. Getting into the town centre was a pain in the ass, because of all the stupid traffic and drivers crowding me on the roads. However, I made it in spite of the snarls.

It was barely 1pm when I got to jail, but luckily, they were able to process my inmate number and assign me to a cell. Initially, I was in a dorm with 10 beds, but after seeing the 4-share room, I decided that I'd much rather that for my next 3 nights. Luckily, I'd gotten off to a good start with the reception staff, and they were able to accommodate me, as well as hook me up with two towels instead of the requisite one. That way I'll have an extra towel for tomorrow for when I go to the hot springs at Hanmer Springs. When I first got into my new 4 share room, I was the only one there. However, upon return from the shower, half naked and wet, there was a lady in the room. It was Lindsay from Massachussetts, who was waiting to go pick up Becky from Delaware, arriving from Tahiti. They told me to write that by the way.

I first took a quick wander around town to first get my haircut, but not the beard (don't worry Kevin), then to check into train tickets for the return trip to Auckland. However, the train station was closed already, at 3:30, so I'll have to go online to try and book tickets. I'd do it in person tomorrow, but I've already booked my day trip tomorrow to Hanmer Springs, and then the day after to go to the Banks Peninsula, and Akaroa in particular. As it turns out, I may not even get to see all of Christchurch with all these side trips unfortunately. However, I will make it a point to make it out to the Botanic Gardens, which are supposed to be pretty good.

Anyway, I'm getting bored of trying to write a blog post, since it's Friday night, and I've just finished my bike odyssey. I think it's time that I did a little celebrating. Well, actually, I already started a little bit, as I had pint of Distinction Ale at the local Speights Ale House, in order to symbolically end the bike trip. Tonight, I'm planning to head out to the Sol District in order to check out some live Blues. Here's hoping there's something decent playing. So, I'll leave you with that, and wish you well in your own adventures. Cheers!

HOT SPRINGS AND BEER SCHOOL

SATURDAY, MARCH 15, 2008

POSTED ON: MON, 2008-03-17 03:31 BY STEVE

Howdy all! Hope you are all having a great day. I've been having a blast since I got off the bike in Christchurch. I immediately set off to book some day trips to get to some spots that I wouldn't have otherwise been able to see while on my train trip heading back up north. The first such tour that I booked was a Backpacker Tour of Hanmer Springs with an outfit called Way Out Tours. They only set up



shop this year, and they're targetting the younger demographic, by enticing us with the offer of Beer School. It was to be their last tour of the season, so expectations were high. Of course, to get the tour started, I had to actually make it out of bed, which proved to be a bit of a challenge, given that I actually didn't get to sleep until somewhere around 4am! Bars stay open pretty late, and we had ended up at a club called Fat Eddie's, where the 'Batmen' were laying some excellent tunes down. However, since I'd paid for the tour, I forced myself out of bed at 7am to get ready. A quick shower helped as well. Check out the [map](#), and read on for the full details of my adventurous Hanmer Springs Hangover Tour trip.

I was the first person to be picked up for the tour, at 7:45am in front of the hostel. I was greeted by Josh and Jimmy, the owner-operators of their little company. They looked a little tired as well, but were cheerful enough about the prospects of the day, and were looking forward to showing us all a good time, since it was their final tour of the season. I got onboard, and slumped down in my seat for a little bit as we headed into town to pick up the other guests. They were all picked up at the BaseX Backpackers, and they filled up the rest of the van. There were 9 of us, plus Josh and Jimmy. This is where I first learned of their marketing technique. Basically, the two of them head out to the bars at night, handing out brochures and trying to drum up business while partying with potential 'clients'. That's why they say they have an 18 hour workday, but they love their jobs. I suspect next year the business will just come to them, as they ran a great tour, and have what I'd say is a lock on their target market.

Once everyone was loaded up on the van, we hit the open roads bound for Hanmer Springs. This of course is one of the more famous hot pool areas of New Zealand, and although I hadn't planned on visiting, I was nonetheless keen once I saw this tour. After all, what better way to relax at the end of a long cycle journey than sitting in 41 degree sulphur pools? My body deserved it. On the way out to Hanmer Springs, we only made a couple quick stops. The first was to check out a cool rock formation known as Frog Rock, and to talk about some of the geology of the area. There was still quite a bit of cloud cover at this hour of the morning, but we could see that it would end up being a stunner of a day overall. Next on the road was a stop at a café for some breakfast food. Thank God! I could really use a delicious pie and a muffin to try and make my head feel better. I'd taken an Ibuprofen, but it just wasn't doing it for me. I guess I'm out of practice.

At the café, we got to know each other by finding out where everyone was from and what they wanted to be when they grew up. It was a pretty good way to break the ice, and before long, we were off once again. Next stop was at a place called Thrillseeker Canyon, where one company offers a host of stuff like Bungy Jumping, Jet Boating, Paintball, 4x4 rides, and even Clay Pigeon shooting. Although that one sounded interesting, I decided I'd pass on all that stuff. They were all on offer as something we could do later in the afternoon. However, I had already decided I wanted to go for a round of minigolf along with a maze. It was only 10NZD, and seemed like a good way to kill some time. I wasn't alone in that decision, as it turned out all of us but one person opted to do that. There was only one German girl who decided she'd rather go horseback riding while we golfed.

From thrillseeker canyon, our next stop wasn't going to be until we got to the hot springs, where we'd be spending almost two hours soaking away our worries. We arrived there shortly after the place opened, so it wasn't too busy yet with the hordes of tourists. Of course, since we were a group of 11, we sort of made our own little gang, travelling from pool to pool as one group, scaring away all the other tourists. I must say, it was heaps of fun. The sun was shining very hot, but our thoughtful guides even had big bottles of

sunscreen we could use to keep us from burning to a crisp. Nice touch guys! The hottest pool in the complex was a natural sulphur pool running at about 41 degrees. After a few minutes in there, it didn't seem all that bad, but the rotten egg smell sort of got on your nerves after a while. After that pool, we headed to a section of the pools which was more like a stream or a ditch, and all spread ourselves out in the shallow water and just chatted. It was a pretty awesome way to while away the time.

Once we were thoroughly soaked and felt ready to move on, it was time to go do some off-roading to make our way to the secluded BBQ spot that Josh and Jimmy had planned for us. Once there, out came the folding chairs, a table, and a bbq. The lads got busy preparing our salad and cooking up the sausages we'd be eating, while we poked around a little bit in the cold river. After eating, Josh taught us all how to cross a river properly when tramping. On the other side of the river, there was a rocky cliff calling my name, which I started climbing. It was rotten rock though, and it kept crumbling as I was climbing. At one point, I realized a fall from my height would be nasty, so I made my way back down to rejoin the others. Next stop was afternoon activities, so for most of us, it meant the mini golf. What a hoot that was! 18 holes of adventure golf, in 3 teams of 3. My team came 2nd, and I ended up with the 3rd best score. After golf came the maze, which was cool.

They had a big concrete maze built out there. But it wasn't just a maze, it was also a puzzle. You had to find all the clues on your way through the maze, in order to complete a secret phrase, which would in turn get you a reward at the completion of the maze. There were also a couple water challenges, and dark passages to go through. Considering what we paid for the whole works, it was a lot of fun I'd say. I was hoping to 'win', but when Daniel and I finally emerged from the maze neck and neck with the fully completed puzzle, there were already a couple other people out there. I'm sure they cheated :-). The reward: gold chocolate coin, which I promptly ate. Of course, all this was just the precursor to the real reason for the trip, the Beer School!

We walked from the golf place up to a bar (appropriately called Robbies!), where we each ordered a pint while waiting for Jimmy and the German girl coming back from their horseback riding. On their return, Josh pulled out containers of different malts and hops in raw form, and went through a series of beers for us to sample, explaining which ingredients were put in. We could sample the hops and malts as well, although I don't recommend chewing on hops. They're not tasty! At the conclusion of the lesson, we were also entitled to a free pint of our choice. By this time of the day, we were all getting along awesomely, and our entire group was having fun. Traditionally, from here, the tour concludes by you driving back to Christchurch, having a beer at a pub, and that's it. However, due to the fact that this was their last tour, and because we were all getting on so well, the tour had a couple twists up its sleeves.

Next stop on our modified tour, local supermarket to stock up on beverages for consumption in the van. Completely legally I might add. I'd been chatting with Josh about how they set up their company, and he explained all the certifications and tests they had done, including the fact that they had an onboard consumption licence allowing guests to drink while we were driven. Awesome. The ride back was a classic drinky drinky tour, with all the requisite stops for relief and general silliness. We played some games with a rugby ball at one spot, and at another place, Jimmy did a haka for us, the traditional Maori ritual. Also on the road, a few phone calls were made, and it was announced that if we'd like, we could join the lads at a house party rather than go to a bar. We'd make another grocery stop to pick up some food to BBQ and more liquid supplies should they be needed.

I quickly accepted the offer, as this is what my trip is all about, getting to know the locals, right?

A number of the other people decided to get out at their hostel instead, to shower and get ready for more fun later. However, all agreed we'd meet up at the Sinners and Saints bar at the BaseX backpackers later on in the evening. Four of us joined Jimmy and Josh though, and headed to that party. It was a typical house party, with loads of friendly kiwis to chat with while we ate meat and drank more goodies. There were a few surreal moments at the party, especially when the random superhero showed up. I still have no idea what that was all about, but you'll see the picture at some point. I was pretty amused however. I also took up my favourite party spot, plunked in front of the computer in the house selecting the music for the night. At some point, it was time to move on, and Jimmy was still ferrying us around in their tour van. We had to go to Josh's as well though, so he could change. From there, back to town and into the bar. The rest of the tour group were there as well, and we all hung out for a while longer before deciding to move on to another bar. This was another surreal experience, as on the walk there was a fire dancer doing his thing, while some guy heckled him telling him to catch the fire in his mouth. A ruckus ensued, and you'll see a nice picture of a fireball the guy sent the heckler's way. Too strange.

Final stop for the day was back in the same area as I was at the night before, but by that time, I decided I had to pack it in. Two hard nights made for a tough slog, and from the Beer school to the party van to the house party to the two other bars meant I'd had my share of tasty malted beverages. I hopped in a cab and made my way back to the hostel. After all, I had to get up early again the next morning to catch my shuttle to the Banks Peninsula and Akaroa. After the low sleep I'd gotten Friday night, I was hoping to get a little extra shut-eye. I'm not too sure what time it was, but it was before 1am at least this time. I quietly headed to bed, happy with another excellent day spent experiencing the true Kiwi life. That about wraps it up for this story, but I will say that if ever in Christchurch, I highly recommend you look up Josh and Jimmy and Way Out Tours, and sign up for one of their trips. You won't be disappointed! Till then, later gators!

VOLCANOES AND CHEESE TOUR

SUNDAY, MARCH 16, 2008

POSTED ON: MON, 2008-03-17 03:32 BY STEVE



Hello again, and welcome to another chapter of InactiveSteve's adventures. It's now been a full day since my cycle journey ended, but I'm still trying to fill my days with exciting things to do. Today's post is all about a day trip that I made out to the beautiful Banks Peninsula, and more specifically, the town of Akaroa, one of the only places in the world where the French and the English lived peacefully side by side in the days gone by. There is a history

of settlement there by both nations, and the little town that remains there is a very picturesque and charming area, well worth the visit I reckon. The weather wasn't perfect for my day trip, but at least it wasn't pouring rain. I sort of wish I'd been able to spend a

night there as well, and see the area in better weather, but at least I got to stroll around for a few hours, have a good meal, and sample some tasty cheeses later in the day. As a result of two days worth of accumulated hangover, it was a very low-key day for me, but you can still check out my [map](#) and the pics from the ensuing day. Read on and enjoy, friends.

I should be clear on one thing right off the bat. This was not a full tour like the day before. It was more of a scenic shuttle, dropping me off in Akaroa, then taking me back at the end of the day. There would be no wild stops or heavy drinking. Any doubt I may have had was put to rest immediately upon boarding the bus, and finding myself surrounded by more 'distinguished' tourists. Okay, they were mostly retirees, that's all there is to it. To be honest, it was a bit of a relief, as I'm sure my body couldn't have handled another abusive day. However, as it was the scenic shuttle, there were still a number of great stops along the 80km trip to check out things like a gallery as well as the excellent views from the volcano crater rim. Well, they would have been excellent, had it not been for the less than stellar weather. However, that's nobody's fault, is it. Banks Peninsula is quite interesting, as along the east coast around Christchurch, it's all very flat as a result of being part of the Canterbury Plains. However, upon heading to the peninsula, you are greeted by high hills once again, as the entire area was formed by two different volcanoes which were active millions of years ago, and shaped the land to be the way it now is. At one point, it was actually an island off the east coast, but time and erosion have made it a peninsula.

For its size, Akaroa had an astounding number of cafés and restaurants, but there was really only one place I was looking for. It was supposed to be called 'Fun Judy's' or something like that. It was where Greta, a girl I'd met in Curio Bay, had worked, and she told me I had to go there for pizza, and a chat with Stephen, the owner and her boss. I walked around trying to find this place, but nothing seemed to be the right place. Eventually, I pieced together what the issue was. It was in her accent when she had told me. I saw a place called Vangionis. And saying it aloud, I realized that was probably what she meant. I strolled in and asked if Stephen was working, and he was indeed there, cooking. Looks like I found the place. I then brought up Greta, and since he knew who I was talking about, I knew I had finally found the right place. It was a very nice little restaurant, and the whole time I was there, people were coming up to Stephen to tell him what a great meal they'd had. Sounds good to me. I ordered up a 'Helena' pizza in honour of my niece that I miss. It was ham, pineapple, tomato base, and blue cheese. It was simply outstanding, and I was extremely glad to have stopped off there for lunch. Nice story eh? Well, I was even offered a job from Stephen if I wanted to work for a couple weeks. He was short some staff for the Easter time. Sadly, I had to decline.

So what else did I do in Akaroa? Well, I just walked around basically. I headed up a place called Settler's Hill Road, the site of the original French Cemetery where the settlers were buried. Once again, I suspect the views would have been quite stunning, but as a result of the cloud cover, I couldn't see very far. I still enjoyed the walk however, and it took me back to the waterfront, where I watched a Ketch leaving with a load of tourists for a cruise. I also checked out a few other boats and tour options, but none of them really fit my schedule, and since it was overcast, I decided just to forego any 'extra' activities on the day. The only bonus treat I gave myself was an admission to the Akaroa museum, which for its size was a pleasant enough experience. There was a good 20 minute movie which went through the entire history of Akaroa, and there were some other good displays showing Akaroa over the years. The best part for me was learning of one of Akaroa's most famous sons. Frank Worsley, the navigator on Shackleton's Endurance expedition hails from there.

By the time I was wrapping up my museum touring, it was time to make my way back to the iSite to catch the return bus. Not before grabbing a tasty ice cream though. After all, we were in a region steeped in dairy history, so one can only assume the ice cream would be good. It was. The bus was right on time, and we loaded on, ready for a slightly different return route to Christchurch. We'd make one stop of note on the way, and that was at Barry's Bay Cheese company for some cheese samples as well as being able to look at the factory floor. Of course, they were done cheese production and were just cleaning up, but the cheese samples were quite tasty. I really enjoyed the rinded mature cheddar they had. Being unsure of whether or not I could travel with it though, I opted not to buy any to bring with me. Others bought some however, so I'm sure Barry's Bay Cheese did alright from our 10 minute stop.

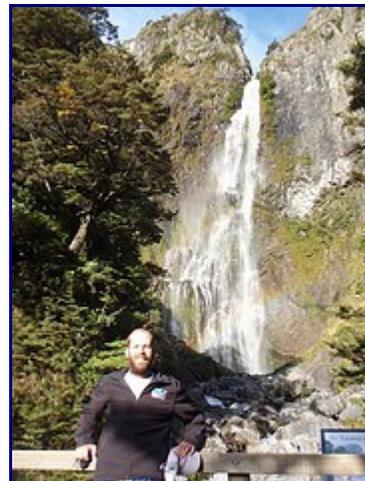
The rest of the trip was pretty uneventful, and I actually dozed a little bit on the bus. I even snapped a picture of myself doing so, which believe me, taking your own picture while you're sleeping is quite a feat :-). Okay, maybe I staged it, but I just had to show you that even ActiveSteve slows down once in a while. Ha ha. Upon my return to jail, I set about repacking my things for my next journey onboard the trains, as well as starting to upload some of the many pictures I've snapped since Invercargill. After reading this, you might as well head over to Flickr and check out the latest pics since Inver-Vegas that I managed to get up. The hostel had a deal where for 10NZD, you got 5 hours of time, which is pretty awesome, I also went out for some lack-lustre chinese take-out which was very close to the hostel. It was ok, but nothing too special. So ended my Akaroa day. I didn't go dolphin spotting or whale watching, just walking, eating pizza, and visiting a local museum. All told, it was a great way to spend my Sunday. Next up, the TranzAlpine train and an overnight in Arthur's Pass Village. I just realized it's St. Patrick's day, but I'm not sure there will be any way to truly celebrate in the mountains! Tune in next time, and find out if there was any Irish madness from the rails.

ONCE MORE, INTO THE MOUNTAINS

MONDAY, MARCH 17, 2008

POSTED ON: TUE, 2008-03-18 02:11 BY STEVE

Yes, I realize that it's St. Patrick's Day, and you may have been expecting an appropriately themed blog post from me as a result. Well, sorry to disappoint, but after the weekend debauchery, I haven't touched a drop on this, one of the holiest beer days. I just didn't have it in me. Rather, I was carrying on with my trip, now heading back into the mountains of Arthur's Pass. Tonight I'm staying in NZ's first hostel for the night, and tomorrow I'll be doing a full day of hiking before getting back onto the train bound for Christchurch. The journey today took me right from one coast to the other, in what would probably have taken me at least a couple days. The train was quite comfortable, but I've gotta be honest, doing nothing all day is a pain in the ass. I was nodding off several times due to lack of stimulation. However, I'm getting ahead



of myself. Do read on and check out the day's [map](#) for full gory details of the trip, and my attempt at physical activity at the end of the journey.

I had a really great night's sleep finally last night, after staying up only a little late in order to get some photos posted on flickr. Did you check them out? My other two roomies were already in bed and trying to go to sleep, so there was no trouble with people coming in and out at all hours. When the alarm actually woke me up, I decided to tack on an extra half hour, since I had very little to do other than put some stuff in my day bag and head out the door. I'd already packed up the big bag and locked it up for safe keeping while I was in Arthur's Pass. I even had a free shuttle to take me to the train station to make sure I made it on time. In the end, he was sort of late, and we were cutting it quite close, but it was still no sweat. At the station, it's very low-tech. The lady had a printed sheet with names that she'd check off, and then hand-write a boarding pass for you. No paper trail, no receipts or anything for me.

I headed down the platform and boarded my car. It was a packed train for the trip from Christchurch to Greymouth. I was sharing a table with 3 other people. An older English couple, and a Vietnamese fellow a few years younger than me. We made some idle chit chat for most of the rail trip, and it was fairly pleasant. Most of the way across the mountains, there was also some commentary being provided by the onboard staff, telling us stories of the various little towns we'd pass through, along with some colourful tales of some of the locals, like the fellow in the 30's who ran a car ferry, charging a princely sum of 1 Pound. People didn't think it was a fair price, and tried fording the river in their cars. When they'd get stuck, he'd happily offer his towing services... for 5 Pounds! Rumour had it he would also dredge the river, to ensure cars wouldn't make it! Then there was the story of the Auckland couple in the 90's, who noticed a motel / tavern for sale in Otira, and decided to put an offer on it, which was accepted, for the low price of 70,000. While signing the papers, they realized they had actually bought the majority of the town, including a row of housing, the municipal buildings, and the town swimming pool. They still own it all, and there is a rumour they recently turned down a million + buyout offer.

Those were the sorts of things that kept the trip rolling along and kept me interested most of the way. The scenery wasn't ideal for the trip, as there was pesky clouds over much of the trip. Also, it was virtually impossible to take any decent pictures through the windows, as there was a horrible reflection the whole way. There was a viewing platform, but it was 5 cars away, and the only time I tried to make my way there, it was super-crowded, so I didn't bother. The line crosses many viaducts and traverses 19 tunnels in the journey from east to west (well, and obviously also west to east). The longest tunnel being Otira tunnel, which at the time was the longest tunnel in the British empire I do believe. It takes almost 15 minutes to get through, and it boasts a one in three grade, which is quite steep. It has a clever system for getting rid of fumes, but it means after a train goes through, you have to wait 20 minutes for the next one to be allowed through, in order to allow the air to be flushed.

Coming out at the other end, the end of the line was Greymouth, a town I'd already been through on my bike, on a rainy day. This day wasn't that much better, but at least it wasn't raining this time around. I actually went back to the exact same place to eat lunch this time. I started at another place, but the person taking orders at the counter was so surly that I told her to cancel my order and that I'd rather eat elsewhere. In all honesty, I didn't travel half way around the world, cycle 4200km, and go for a nice train trip just to have someone be grumpy to me! Luckily, this has virtually never happened to me on this trip, which is amazing, considering there isn't tipping here! Anyway, my second try was a success, and I

even had a shamrock Swiss roll for desert, which was my only real 'green' option of the day.

After lunch, it was time to get back on the big train. This time however, the car I was put in was virtually deserted! There were only 5 of us on the whole thing. Plus, we were right next to the viewing platform car, so this time, I was able to freely pop back and snap some shots when I felt like it, and kick back in my group of 4 seats to listen to music and just enjoy the ride in peace. It was perfect. Shame the weather wasn't. In about two hours, we were back at Arthur's Pass, and it was time to explore a little bit. I headed straight for the DOC office to ask about tramps. There was really only one option, called Avalanche Creek trail. It's a 6-8 hour walk that I plan to do in about 5, which takes you up steep slopes to about 1840m, offering you some amazing views of the surrounding areas. They warned me that it might be windy, and advised me to fill in an intentions form if I go up, just in case. There are some pretty steep dropoffs in the area. I'm sure I'll be fine.

After that, I went to the hostel to see if they'd gotten my late-night email requesting a room. Luckily they had, because as it turns out, I got the last bed! Once again, things worked out for me, which I'm thankful for. I settled into my room, then decided to go for a walk, after the day on the train. I found a trail called Devil's Punchbowl Falls track, which was supposed to be about an hour. Well, it was more like a half hour, but it offered some pretty awesome views along the way, and the falls were quite nice.

I wrapped up my Arthur's Pass tour by calling in to the Wobbly Kea restaurant and bar for supper. Fresh chicken tortellini with a mushroom sauce and shaved parmesan on top. It was very delightful, and I even ate all the onions that surprised me by hiding in the sauce. After all, the little hiker needs his nourishment for the big hike, right? In summary, I'm glad that I came up to Arthur's Pass, and am looking forward to tomorrow's hike. I need some exercise :-). Till then, hope you're all doing great.

WITNESS TO THE WORST LUCK

TUESDAY, MARCH 18, 2008

POSTED ON: TUE, 2008-03-18 02:13 BY STEVE



Greetings from high in New Zealand at Arthur's Pass village. I'm in the café/store at the moment just killing some time before my train gets here to whisk me back to Christchurch. I've taken advantage of the time to book all my remaining rail travel, and just made the realization that this is Easter Weekend coming up. Looks like I might end my trip in the tent, as hostels are booked pretty solid for that weekend already. Oops.

Hadn't counted on that at all! However, that's the future, you're probably much more interested in the recent past and present, n'est-ce pas? Today was an absolute stunner of a day up in the mountains. I must have a tramping weather horseshoe up my butt, because yet again when I tramped hard and fast up into the mountains, I was rewarded with clear blue skies and some of the most magnificent 360 degree views I've had in my entire trip.

I've looked at my pictures, and sadly, they can not do justice to what I actually saw. In spite of that, please check them out, and the [map](#) showing you just where I went hiking.

Being a small alpine village with not much else to do but stay up here if you're hiking, the hostel was nice and quiet last night. We were all in bed quite early, and I was amazed that everyone from my room was up and about before 7:30, which made it nice and easy to pack up the gear, and get ready to head out into the hills. I decided to wait till after 8am anyway, just to be able to check out the mountain forecast, and to drop off my intentions form in person, as well as pick up a fresh pie from the café. All great ideas, wouldn't you say? I would. The forecast called for fine weather (remember, that's the absolute best they forecast!), with only a bit of a wind warning. Up at 2000m, they were warning of winds possibly up to 40km/hr. I decided I could handle that, and just watch my step at the summit ridge track, as warned. Worked fine for me, but read on for how it doesn't work out for everybody.

The track I was taking up was called Avalanche Peak track, which surprisingly goes up a mountain known as... Avalanche Peak. My return track would be via another route, the Scotts Track. I love it when I don't have to take the same trail up as down. Just makes for a more enjoyable hike I think. Both tracks were signposted as 4 hours up, and the return trip was called a 6-8 hr tramp. Yeah yeah, I was quicker for sure. It only took me 3:40, and I had extra baggage on the way down. Yup, keep reading, you'll get the whole story. I want to keep everyone in suspense for a while.

The track started pretty steeply up, and basically stayed that way for the whole hike. If you check out the map, you'll see the entire distance was only 8km, but this was all either steep up or steep down, so it made for a good climb. In no time, I was getting the great views down into the valley and the still mostly sleeping town of Arthur's Pass Village. One side of the valley (mine) was soon getting bathed in sunlight, but the other side was still deep in shadow. Also, in the valleys ahead, past Arthurs Pass itself, there was a ton of heavy white clouds in the valley, looking like whipped cream in the distance. It was a cool sight. I kept up a pretty good pace, and on the way up, passed only 2 other people. An Israeli fellow (let's call him Unlucky), and an English lady. After them, there was no one else, and by the time I reached the summit, it was clear I was the first up there for the day.

What an amazing view from up there. I'd have to say that it was surely in the top 3 of all the hikes and views that I've had in the entire trip. I was basically standing smack dab in the middle of New Zealand's great divide, with mountain ranges in every direction. There was also a cool hanging glacier in the same area, atop Mount Rolleston. On several occasions while up there, I heard really loud cracking and groaning noises coming from there. I was lucky enough to actually see one of the avalanches while soaking up the sun on the rather small peak. In time, I ended up sharing my little peak with 3 other people. The two I'd passed, plus an American fellow who summited before Unlucky. We were all just standing up there chatting together for a while.

Unlucky, being last up, decided to snap some pictures with his fancy D-SLR. He takes it out of the case, and sets the case down on the summit, turning around to snap the glacier. I was eating a sandwich, but the next thing I knew, I could see the camera bag starting to move. I yelled out ""Your Bag!" and made a move for it, but I was too late. We all watched in semi-horror as the bag slowly started it's tumble on a scree slope, gaining more and more speed, and tumbling hundreds of meters, and eventually out of sight. I had tried to stop it, but something in me realized if I lunged too far for it, I would have been the one tumbling. At first, Unlucky was sort of like "well, it's gone". However, after about 20 seconds, he simply said, "my passport". Oh shit.

That's when Unlucky decided he had to go after it. Now, looking back, perhaps we should have all made some sort of plan before letting him take off. However, it all went so fast, the next thing I knew, Unlucky was heading down the scree slope at top speed, having left his fancy camera and full backpack on the summit. Then we all realized there was no way he'd be coming back up this way. He did too, and as a speck in the distance he yelled back up to me asking that I take his stuff to him at the bottom of the trail. I said I would, and figured we'd meet on the track further, as it looked like the slope curved right, and might meet back up with Scott's Track.

I stayed up top a little longer, knowing it would take him a bit longer to make his way over that terrain with no trail to follow. Eventually though, I did head down Scott's track, which in itself was tricky enough. However, now I was juggling two backpacks and a water bottle in my hand. I had placed his fancy camera in my bag, as there was now no camera bag. Oh yeah, I also did him a favour and snapped some pics for him at the top, since he hadn't had the chance. The track down was tricky, and I slipped a few times twisting my ankles a bit, but luckily with my rubber ankles, it was no biggie. However, I didn't really love having the extra pack. I soon realized Unlucky wouldn't be meeting me, as he would pretty surely get cliffed out very soon after the scree slopes. There was not a good way down to be found anywhere. I scoured the mountainsides for any sign of him, but didn't see anything.

Emerging at the bottom, I tried to figure out my options. In the end, I headed straight to the DOC office, where I had to return my intentions form stub, which lets them know they don't have to send out search and rescue. I decided I had better tell them the story about the peak. They were a little concerned, and one officer remarked that the last time someone did that, they ended up dead. Then, just a couple weeks ago, they had to chopper out another person who went off the peak. Now I was a bit worried, but there was nothing I could do. I gave them all the info, including a picture I'd snapped of him at the last point we could see him, with a time stamp for the police. I also gave them his bag and camera. Luckily, he'd filled in an intentions form too, so we knew his name, and it turned out they already had his other luggage, so he would definitely show up there if he emerged.

From the DOC office, I headed back to the hostel to grab a shower, before heading back to check on the status. Before even getting there, the hostel manager let me know he had made it out okay, and was safe and sound. So all's well that end's well, but I think I've learned a lesson the easy way. Don't just bomb down a mountain without knowing the terrain, and at least having some food and water with you, right? I asked myself what I would have done, and unfortunately, I'd say I would have done the exact same thing he had, although I have a lot more confidence than the average bear when it comes to mountains and the outdoors!

Well, that's it for my exciting tale from the mountains, and I see by the clock on the wall that I should be heading back to the train station to catch the TranzAlpine. Tonight is laundry and re-packing time, as well as some more picture posting on flickr. Tomorrow I'm off to Kaikoura, and probably will do some whale watching or dolphin swimming while there, since that's what it's all about up there. Then, onwards and upwards to the North again. Can't believe I'll be home in 10 days! Boo. Hope you're all well, and we'll have to all get together for a beer once I'm back, okay?

ENCOUNTERS WITH NATURE

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19, 2008

POSTED ON: FRI, 2008-03-21 01:17 BY STEVE

The byline for this post would probably have to be "Camera Survived, GPS Didn't" Yup, that's right, after months of faithful service and helping me create great custom maps of all my cycling trips, my little Garmin looks like it can now officially be called dead. She fought bravely in the cold ocean waters, but in the end, it appears as though it suffered death by drowning. Too bad, it had always been waterproof in the past, but I think some of the



knocks it's taken on the road caused cracks in the housing, and the salt water rushed in and fried the thing sometime while I was frolicking with seals. Seals? Yup, I made my way to Kaikoura today, and the highlight has got to be swimming with New Zealand Fur Seals. Hunted to near extinction, but making a comeback. Of course, you'll have to read on for the whole tale, and you can check out a partial [map](#) of the day as well. Sadly, this will be the last map you see. Good thing I'm almost done. Looks like I'll be on the market for a new training tool now as well. Jealous Kevin? I've already come to grips with it, and I'm not that upset about it. It functioned great for a long time.

To get things going, the last night in jail was a quiet one for me. I spent most of the evening in the lobby area, working on getting my pictures uploaded to flickr as most I could while I had wireless Internet. I headed off to bed around 11:30pm, knowing that I'd have to get up at 6am the next morning in order to check myself, bike and trailer into the train station by 6:30 for the 7am departure. Unfortunately, I was in a 10 bed dorm room, so there was a fair amount of coming and going and various noises in the room as well. However, since I'm no longer on the bike early in the mornings with full days of physical activity, I'm not as grumpy about these things anymore. I made the best of it and had a reasonable night's sleep. When I left in the morning, it was still pitch black outside, so I actually had to use my little headlight for the first time in the entire trip. I got to the station, and headed straight to the platform, where a fellow told me where to load my bike. It was funny, as they all knew and were expecting me. Small trains around here I guess, with only one departure time each day.

I wasn't expecting this rail trip to blow me away, because we would be heading along the mostly flat way to Kaikoura, following the coast for a good bit. However, I was wrong, as I found this to be one of the most enjoyable rail trips I've taken, and certainly no less impressive on the scenery front than any of my other rides on the bike. You see, once we hit the coast, it was a brilliant day, with shimmering waters, and lots of pointy bits here and there where rocks and cliffs punctuated environment. The first hour or so however was pretty plain Jane. It was still dark out, which meant that on the plus side, we were treated to a stunning sunrise while in motion. I had the good fortune of being on the last car on the train. Why good? Well, this time, which isn't usual, they had a panoramic car on the back. So there was a couch lining the entire back of the car, and a full glass window in the back. I had an assigned seat at a table with two other older ladies, but as soon as the train started moving, I just headed to the back and stretched out on the couch. It was pretty nice.

Along the way, I chatted with various people on the train. I was in a good mood, and felt chatty enough and sociable, so I answered any and all questions thrown my way, rather than throw on earphones and ignore the world. I tried taking pictures, as you'll see in the map, but just like the TranzAlpine train, this one also had pretty strong reflections, making photography difficult for the most part. The ride to Kaikoura was a shortish 3 hour trip, so before too long, I was getting my bike out of its storage car, and pedaling my way to the Dusky Lodge, my home sweet home for the night. Since I was so early, I couldn't check in. I dropped off my computer, bike and trailer, and headed into town to explore and see about booking something for later that day. Basically, there were three options. Whale watching, either in the air or in a boat. That started at 130 and went up. Then there was swimming with the dolphins, starting at 150. The last option was a chance to swim with seals, for 75 (with discount). I looked into the other options. Dolphins was sold out, and whales didn't have me convinced. So, rather than do nothing, I headed to the seal swim place and plopped my name down for a 12:30 boat trip. I was the first person signed up, so we'd need a few other names to make it a go.

To kill time, I headed to the iSite to check into any other things going on. While there, I saw they had an audio-visual show available to watch for 3NZD about Kaikoura and it's natural history. What they heck, right? I had 20 minutes available, so I did it. I'm glad I did, as I learned a bit more about why whales are so prevalent here, and saw plenty of pictures of the creatures. So, I figured that would have to count as my whale watching trip. I even took pictures to prove it :-). Once back at the seal swim spot, I saw they had a roster of at least 6 of us now. so we were good to go. When we finally boarded the bus, we were already fully suited up in diving wetsuits (2-piece suits with hoods), and had a mask, snorkel, and flippers as well. The general idea is that guide boat would take us out to the colony, and we'd pop in the water on our own to swim with the creatures.

The great thing is that we were pretty much guaranteed a great trip due to the weather. It was hot. Fur seals, although usually more active in the nights, need to regulate their own body temperature, and the only way to do that on a hot day is to go for a swim, so there would be loads of the fun little guys in the water near the colony. That's a good thing, because you don't mess with a seal on the rocks, as they are very territorial, but in the water, they are quite docile. We'd barely gotten into the water when the seals started getting curious and showed us they were willing to play.

For the better part of the next hour and a half, I swam, rolled, jumped and generally frolicked in the frigid waters of the Pacific Ocean with the seals. Some of them were extremely inquisitive, and would swim all around me, showing off their moves. The best thing to do is mimic the seal, but these guys were just too good for me. That and the fact that I had so much buoyancy that it was nearly impossible to go to any depth in the water. I also had a slight problem due to my beard. It was impossible to get a full seal on my mask. I kept having to purge it and remove it as it would fill up with water. However, I didn't let that reduce my enjoyment in the least. As you might have guessed, I really enjoyed this. It's amazing just how graceful these fellas were in the water. On land, they're awkward blobs hopping on the rocks, barking like dogs, but in the water, they are completely effortless. I also got to watch them playing and fighting with each other. They really were like dogs, barking and nipping at one another. Nothing really violent, just having fun it seemed. However, it was clear I wouldn't want to get on the bad side of a seal.

Once done with the swim, it was back on the boat, and back to the offices for a shower, and to return all the gear. Once changed, I walked back to the hostel to see what was up

there. I could finally get into my room, and it was time for a proper shower. They also have a pool and spa for free at the hostel, so I figured I'd make use of those facilities. I made a quick trip to the grocery store as well to pick up a bit of suds to enjoy while I relaxed in the hostel. There was little else to do in Kaikoura, so I decided to have a lazy rest of day. I tried out the hot tub, which had some insanely crazy 'jets', which were more like little volcanoes in the middle of it. After another shower, I headed to the attached Thai Restaurant to have some supper. Thai Green Curry and an order of Spring rolls. It was extremely tasty, and while I was waiting for it, I joined a group of other people to sit and drink with them. Tony and Paula from Ireland, and Adele from Holland. As we were sitting there, we were also joined by a couple of Kiwi surfers, one of whom had been repairing a board for Tony.

The evening wore on, and we carried on drinking. At one point, a decision was made that we should head to Meatworks rather than a bar in town. What is meatworks? Well, it's a beach that the local surfers know. It's called that because of what happens to you when you fall off into the awaiting rocks. Anyway, the plan was now to call some people to join us and drive us out to the beach for a late-night party with bonfire on the beach. Sounded like a pretty good plan to me. A kiwi beach party was something I hadn't experienced yet. So, off to the late night off-licence to pick up some wine, and then to the beach, a 15 minute drive out of town. The rest, as they say, is somewhat history. There was lots of foolishness, as often there is. We were an international group of Canadians, Americans, Israeli, Dutch, Germans, Kiwis and Australians. Plenty of story telling and a big roaring fire. At one point, Paula also pulled out her flaming poi to do some fire dancing for us. That was pretty cool. Of course, I had to try my luck as well, and got a lot of laughs when I repeatedly hit myself in the arms, back and chest with the flaming orbs. Luckily, they don't burn too hot, and I wasn't injured in any way, so don't worry :-)

The only downside of this party was that in the end, sometime around 4am, there was no way back to the hostel, so we all just crashed in various vehicles. I slept in a front seat of a van for a couple hours. When I awoke, I realized I'd have to get back to the hostel, but wasn't sure how I'd do that. The rest of the crew were all asleep, and Tony wasn't about to get up and drive me either, since it was his day off. Eventually, a local fellow was getting up, and planned to head home, halfway between the beach and the hostel. I convinced him to give me a lift, as I had to catch my train, and he obliged. Thanks dude! I got back to the hostel just as others were waking up in my room. Oh well, looks like I paid 20 for a room to store my bag overnight. Ha ha. I don't regret a thing, as it was a pretty awesome night, apart from the rather nasty little hangover I now had. Beer then wine, never a good idea. I grabbed my shower, and went into town for breakfast at the bakery, before loading up for the next leg of my trip, Kaikoura to Blenheim.

Sadly, I must confess that I didn't see a lot on this part of the train trip other than the seat cushion beneath my head. I started out being awake, and trying to work on the computer, but I was just too beat to keep up the charade. I had moved to the back of my rail car again, where I had a whole section of 4 seats to myself, so that was pretty conducive to sleeping. Although not totally asleep, I was not really watching too much. I did pop up like a groundhog on a few occasions when the commentary mentioned interesting things, such as for the Salt Works, where they have these huge flat beds where they evaporate salt water to create salt crystals which are then processed for use elsewhere. That was pretty neat. The trouble is, now that I don't have the GPS, I don't feel obliged to snap a lot of pictures, since they can't be put on my cool maps anymore. Oh well. At least you know why there aren't many pictures of that rail trip.

Oops, I just realized I'm telling you about the next day, aren't I. I'll sign off now, and let you move on to the next post, which will pick up where I left off. See you in a week folks!

DEEP IN WINE COUNTRY

THURSDAY, MARCH 20, 2008

POSTED ON: FRI, 2008-03-21 01:18 BY STEVE



Greetings from Blenheim, the sunniest place in New Zealand according to the hours of sunlight it gets. I'm staying with a family overnight here, and it's just awesome to not have any snorers in my room :-). Today was a pretty relaxed day, most of which was spent hungover, yet I still managed to do a mini cycling tour of the wine areas here. I only did 32km, and only drank at one place, picking up a bottle for my host family as well. I also

visited what is by far the greatest aviation heritage center (not really a museum) you'll ever get the chance to check out. To give you an idea, the owner of most of the pieces is Peter Jackson, and the designers of a lot of the scenes was Weta studios, who did all the LOTR effects. Pretty cool eh? Read on for the full tale, but sadly, no map. All attempts to revive my GPS have met with failure. Boo!

As my last post already let you know, the train ride up to Blenheim was pretty much a blur for me. As was the bike ride out to Ann and Murray's place, located on the outskirts of Blenheim. They have an idyllic location in the farmlands of Blenheim, nestled around a bunch of different grape growers. They themselves aren't farmers, although for a spell, they were growing olives and making olive oil. I didn't get the chance to try theirs out, as they had none left. They sold that property off, and now only do hobby farming so that they have fresh vegies with their meals. Most of the stuff we ate, apart from the meat, was all grown in their garden. Tasty produce, that's for sure.

When I arrived there, Murray was there to greet me, and show me to my room. I had a patio door leading off to the back yard, with great views of the surrounding mountain ranges. Not too shabby if you ask me. We all had a bit of lunch once Ann got home, and got to know each other a bit. They were actually hosting a movie screening that afternoon for a club they are part of, so I had to make myself scarce. I was presented with a couple maps and suggestions. One was a guide to all the area wineries, and the other just an area map. Number one on the list was a visit to the Omasa Aviation Heritage Center. This place has only been open about a year, and houses an impressive collection of aircraft from world war I. All of the pieces are apparently owned by Peter Jackson, and indeed the entire facility is run as a trust of his. He actually owns an aircraft building shop in Wellington as well, where replicas are built. In the center, the planes are both originals and detailed replicas. A number of them are also still flight-worthy, and are taken out from time to time for special shows.

The admission is a bit pricey compared to other museums at 18NZD, but I didn't feel cheated in the least. One walk through will show you why. I spent several hours there, checking out every last memento and reading all the descriptions. The most impressive part

of this center were the amazingly realistic sceneries built around the actual planes. These were all meticulously crafted by Weta Studios, who were responsible for all the creatures and sets of LOTR. These guys know how to make things look real. Once they are up, have a look at the pictures I snapped in there (photography is permitted). They've also made sure that the lighting is very photo-friendly. I could go on and on about it, but I'll just leave it at the fact that when passing through Blenheim, make sure you visit that particular site. You won't be disappointed, I guarantee! There is even an amazing story of a Canadian posted in there, and his unbelievable dogfight where it was him against 60 Germans. Insane!

From the center, I got on my little bike and started pedalling around just enjoying the beautiful day and all the beautiful vineyards along the way. I didn't actually visit many of them, as I had one place in mind to get to. It was already after 4pm, and the majority of the places close between 4 and 5pm. I was heading for Highfield Vineyard, which has a tower as part of the vineyard, with great views over the plants. While there, I sampled some Reisling and Sauvignon Blanc wines. This area grows probably 85% Sauvignon Blanc varieties, and is best known for those. Once I had chosen my bottle for supper, I carefully loaded it into my backpack, and was back on the road, I thought I'd head downtown to check it out, but by the time I was back in the region where I was staying, it was already after 5, and the heat and hangover made me decide to just head back to my 'home'.

Once back, I had a nice shower, and started chatting with my hosts. We were having a BBQ for supper, and I joined Ann out in the garden as she picked out our sides. Potatoes, lettuce, chives, peppers, zucchini, cucumber, beans, hot peppers, they were all on the menu. For meat, we were having steaks and sausages. It was a wonderful meal in the backyard in the still evening and great temperatures. Who could ask for anything more? After the meal, I was working on captioning pictures while Murray and Anne read the paper. Before the end of the night, it was decided we might want to do a little stargazing, as it was very clear. Unfortunately, it was also almost a full moon, so the lighting was not ideal. Murray is a bit of an astrology buff, so he was able to point out a number of the points of interest and rhymed off a few facts while at it. We were disappointed that it was so bright, otherwise, we probably could have spent hours out there with the guide to the Southern Skies and the binoculars. However, since I was still wiped out, I was okay with just a quick tour, and then I was able to head to bed around 10pm.

Next day was to be a short ride of about 30 km to Picton, and then across on the ferry to Wellington for a night there, before I make my way up to Otorohanga, and the Luckie Strike Caves. More on that hopefully in a couple days. For now, that's all there is on Blenheim. Hope everyone has a great long weekend and super Easter, and don't forget to check back for more Steve stories!!

WINDY WELLINGTON RETURN

FRIDAY, MARCH 21, 2008

POSTED ON: MON, 2008-03-24 01:15 BY STEVE

Howdy folks. Welcome back. Today sadly marked my departure from New Zealand's South Island, on my return journey to Auckland, and ultimately my leaving of Aotearoa, after an awesome three and a half months. In order to make it a little more symbolic, I chose to ride my way off the island. I stayed in Blenheim last night, which is about 30km from Picton, where the ferry terminal is. My plan was to get up, cycle into



Blenheim first to see that a little bit, then make the final journey up to the ferry terminal in Picton. I had an awesome night's sleep at Ann and Murrays, and was up the next morning and sitting at the breakfast table with them by 8am. Of course, it was also Good Friday, which meant that most shops would be closed, so it was a good thing I ate with them, because finding a pie might have been tough :-). Read on for a little more info on my final day on the South Island. No really big stories, just a short narrative.

After breakfast, Ann headed off to church while Murray was baking up some fresh hot cross buns. Unfortunately, I wasn't around when they were done, so I didn't get the chance to sample them. Too bad, if the bread from the day before was any indication, I'm sure they were great. I re-packed my bags once again, and loaded up the trailer. The last couple days, I've been riding with my daypack rather than living out of the big bag, but with the longer bike ride, I decided to put it all back in the trailer. I finally left just before 10am, but not before Murray snapped a couple quick pictures of me all geared up. I wanted to leave at a good hour, even though the ferry wasn't until 2:25, as we'd just learned that there were Northwesterlies blowing, which would mean headwinds all the way for me. How fitting, don't you think?

First up was the ride back into Blenheim itself, which was a virtual ghost town due to it being a national holiday. The streets were eerily silent as I pedalled around town, checking it out. As Murray had put it the day before, basically, it's just a town. Nothing more, nothing less. There were a couple more scenic spots, like gardens and fountains, but for the most part, the core was lined with shops, as are most Kiwi towns, and there's an information centre for tourists. I needn't any information this morning, so after a quick stop at the bank machine to take out my weekly 'allowance', I left town via the SH1 heading North. There is apparently another back road, but it's a narrow, winding, steep, dirt logging road, one of the very few in my book called 'very difficult'. This clearly would have been a bad idea, so I avoided it.

I had barely gotten in ten pedal strokes when I noticed the headwinds blowing on me. They were indeed quite fierce at times. Although the terrain was generally flat to undulating, I was still forced to go into my smallest chainring to make any decent forward progress without straining too hard. After all, this was more of a 'ceremonial' ride, like the Champs Elysee on the last day of the Tour. I wasn't about to go all out just to get to Picton. I wanted to savour the ride. After this one, I have only one other ceremonial ride, which is the token ride from Auckland center to where I started it all; at Kevin's house. He offered to pick me

up, since I'll be arriving in the evening, but I declined as I have to finish this trip on the bike, not in a car, right? Perhaps it was also because of the nature of my day's ride, but I just wasn't feeling top notch today on the bike. Everything was mechanically working okay, but I felt draggy. However, the scenery was nice, and the sun was shining bright, so it wasn't an altogether unpleasant ride.

I took only one little stop on the way, as my tummy was rumbling around noon. I pulled over roadside near a farmers field where they were haying, or harvesting, I couldn't quite tell from my distance. I had some nuts, multi-grain snacks and crackers, washed down with clear Blenheim water. Admired the surrounding hills for a bit, and watched a lazy creek flowing to wherever it was flowing, likely out to the Pacific Ocean eventually. Once satisfied and feeling happy inside, I hopped back on and turned myself into a lazy creek of sorts, and just pedalled my circles, driving forward to the Strait. A few more little hills, and I crested with a view to the little town of Picton. I'd been hoping their bakery would be open, so that I might have a pie, but sadly, they were not. Instead, I had to make my way to the formulaic Subway to grab a sub for lunch before the crossing. It was 1:20 by this time, so I still had a little over an hour. To mark the fact that I was taking an ocean trip, I opted for a Tuna sub. First time I've ever ordered Tuna. I liked it.

I biked the final 500m to the ferry terminal and presented myself for ticketing, which I'd booked days ago. Hmm, they had no reservation for me. No record of it. That's not ideal. She checked a little further, and discovered I'd been booked for the following day, rather than today. Not ideal. Luckily, since I was a walk-on and not a car, and because the ferry wasn't busy for this sailing, she had no problems switching me to this boat without charging me. Well, apart from the customary \$15 bike charge that is. Back into the sunshine I went to wait the next 20 minutes or so without boarding. Chatted with a security fellow for a bit, who let me head down closer to the loading area if I wanted. With not much else to do, I rolled down to the Railmaster's hut (they load on rail cars as well sometimes), and watched the cars offloading from the boat. Normally, cyclists have to wait for all the cars to be on board, but after befriending another deckhand, he snuck me on before any cars got on. Sweet. I tied up the bike, and strolled the decks long before anyone else was on.

I should have taken more pictures of the empty boat, but I didn't. Crew were surprised to see a passenger on already, and I just said I'd been let on as a special passenger :-). I settled into where I figured would be a prime spot on the boat. In a back corner, just off the Club Lounge, which meant no through traffic here, and relative quiet for me to type some blog posts and watch the sea roll by on my massive window to the left. It was a stunner of a day, so the views were magnificent. Rather than get all tangled up in trying to snap the perfect picture, I opted mainly just to soak it up, although I couldn't help but get out and take a few quick shots of the last bits of land on the South Island. Once clear of the South Island, I could already make out the contours of the North, and things looked decidedly greyer up there. Pity.

I tried to spot whales or dolphins, but none were to be seen. The seas were fairly low, with swells looking like 4-6 feet at the most. I imagine things can get pretty spotty out there on some days. Even with the small seas, the boat was still rolling side to side a bit. Of course, it was nothing like the exciting ferry trip of Stewart Island! By 5:30 we were docking in Wellington, and I was belowdecks, ready at the bow of the boat to be the first passenger off the ship. The large sea door lumbered open to brilliant light, and blasting headwinds. Ahh yes, Windy Wellington. I rolled off the ship, and headed up the traffic ramp. The nice thing is that the headwinds quickly turned to tailwinds, as I was turning 180 degrees to

head downtown. Yippee! I was staying with Travis again, the same fellow I stayed with on the way down. I biked back there from memory, only making one small mistake. However, I got there to find the house dark and locked. D'oh! There was a little note telling me to call him on his cell. My kingdom for a phone sometimes.

I parked the trailer and set out searching for a phone, knowing it would be tricky, especially as almost no payphones take any coins. I went to a corner shop, and they directed me to the nearest phone. Of course, it was a card phone, so I fished around my wallet for all the various calling cards I've collected. The first few were either empty or didn't have enough credit for this call, as a call to a cell phone from a payphone is stupid expensive. Finally, I found one that told me I had 9 minutes remaining. Huzzah. I got through to Travis, and he let me know where he hid a key for me, and said he'd be back by 9, he was working at the hospital. Fair enough, that meant I could shower and settle in before he got home. I let myself in, and had showered, and was just uploading a few pics when he got home, earlier than planned. Plans had changed and he said he was meeting friends for a bite to eat then a movie at 9.

I joined in for the food, at Nandos, a great roasted/bbq chicken place, but passed on the movie. I decided I'd rather do a little more Internet stuff, then go to bed at a reasonable hour, since the train was leaving at 7:25 the next morning. As it was, I was still up when he got back, but I'd managed to upload a fair number of pictures to Flickr (you're welcome), and have a bag of microwave popcorn I'd been lugging with me, while watching some Discovery Channel stuff. All in all, a great relaxing night in Wellington. Thanks again Travis for all your hospitality. Since I'd already seen a lot of Wellington, there was little else to do anyway. So ends my voyage of the South Island, and begins my final trudge up to Auckland. Tomorrow I'm off to Otorohanga, where the day after I'll be spending pretty much all day deep underground in a cave system. Stay tuned for that exciting post!

RAILS TO OTOROHANGA

SATURDAY, MARCH 22, 2008

POSTED ON: MON, 2008-03-24 01:17 BY STEVE



Good morning all. I'm blogging to you from the rails between Wellington and Otorohanga. That will be my destination on the day, as tomorrow, I'm gong caving all day in that region, and luckily, the train line stops pretty close to where I need to be. It's the second last day of my trip, and the skies are overcast, with rain looking likely at some point. Too bad I'm camping tonight, isn't it? Luckily, tomorrow night, I'll be back in Auckland, so

I'll be able to dry the tent out and anything else if need be. Most of the scenery I'm passing through today is a repeat for me, so it's unlikely that I'll take too many pictures, although I do have to find a suitable one to go with this post, so I'll see what I can do over the next 9 hours. Yup, that's how long I'll be on the silver tracks today. It's a pretty significant chunk of the trip back to Auckland. Tomorrow I'll be left with a mere 3 hour journey to the heart

of Auckland. Read on for a few more thoughts on this 'training' day. Hee hee, 'training'. Get it? Clever, don't you think?

Hey, I'm back. I wrote that first paragraph early in the day, and now I'm at my final resting place, a holiday park right beside the world-famous Kiwi House, an Aviary and Rare Native Fauna and Flora center. Of course, I won't really have time to check any of that out with my tight caving schedule, but I'm certainly hearing a lot of those fauna making noises, seeing as the campsite is directly beside some of the habitats. Hope they don't keep me up all night. Anywho, back to earlier in the day. I was wrong on a few counts. Firstly, most of the scenery was actually new to me, as we weren't following the same roads I used a couple months ago to get through the North Island. Secondly, once we were almost in National Park, the weather completely cleared up, and we had blue skies above, and a hot sun beating down on us.

Most of the trip today I just listened to some good tunes on the iPod, which up to now I hadn't really used a whole lot, and watched the scenery roll by. There were some great views of rolling farmland, gorges, and cliffs. There are literally hundreds of bridges crossed by the Overlander, and some notable viaducts and tunnels as well. Once again, I was pleasantly surprised by the diversity of the landscape we were passing through. Getting this rail pass was a keen idea I've decided. Buses would have been cramped, and rolled by too fast. Also, I figured out that trains often have a far better vantage point due to the fact that their gradients can only be slight, so they start high up where there are great views, and slowly wind their way down to the lower spots. Renting a car would have sucked because I would have to do all the work, and be on the odd side of the road! So, train rocks. Plus, as a bonus today, they didn't charge me to load my bike, which is another 10 saved. Add to the fact that the campsite for the night was a mere 9NZD, and you've got yourself one heck of a cheapie day!

Our only stop of any duration throughout the day was a lunch break in National Park village where we spent about 45 minutes before getting on. Actually, it was a lot longer, as they had to refill a water tank, and did some other 'operational things' which put us 30+ minutes behind schedule. Of course, that wasn't such a big deal to me, as I wasn't really in a hurry, and didn't particularly have any big plans for my Saturday night in Otorohanga. Of course, at the time, I didn't know there were things to do. I've since then learned there are things to do, but I'll have to miss them on this trip. However, Bill, the park manager, did take me in his taxi to show me a 'top secret spot'. He took me to a remote corner by the fence of the Kiwi House, and showed me where the man-made burrow is, and told me there are Kiwi in there, so if I return in the dark, and have some patience, I should get to see one free of charge! I'm excited for that, as that would be a real feather in my NZ cap to see a Kiwi rummaging around the woods, don't you agree?

On the train, I had a nice little lunch of an egg, cheese, and ham sandwich, along with an Afghan Cookie for desert. Yummers. Ha ha. As you can see, there weren't many options on the big steel box, but at least there was plenty of room to stretch out and walk around, which I did on occasion while listening to an eclectic mix of tunes. As usual, there was some insightful commentary along the way about the history of some of the places, as well as the railway itself. The thing they were most excited about was this ?? Spiral. I forget the first name, but it's a crazy scheme of tunnels, cut-outs and curves to get you down from altitude on the volcanic plateau back to farmland level. It was neat, but very confusing, as with every curve and stretch, they would announce things about the left and the right, and what bits of rail you were seeing, where you were going, and where you'd been. The only

thing that helped me was that fact that at the front of our car was a 1950's aerial photograph of the whole thing. It's a technological marvel I'm told.

Once I got to Otorohanga, it was already well past 5:00pm, and I was concerned finding food would be an issue. However, I headed straight to the campsite to set up the cave (er, tent I mean), then headed to town to seek sustenance. Thank goodness for the Thirsty Weta. This is a bar / café, and they served me an awesome bacon, cheese and egg hamburger. Yup, egg. It was delightful. A side of chips and a beer to wash it down made a nice complete meal for ActiveSteve. Hopefully it'll be enough to keep me going on my full-day cave expedition tomorrow. I'm really excited about that, and am happy to report that I'll be followed by someone taking pictures of me all day, and they give me a free CD with all the images at the end of the day! How awesome is that. As long as I catch my return train, I'm good as gold. After supper, a little trip to a dairy for an ice cream and some morning snacks, and I was all set. Now, I'm just wrapping up my blog post as darkness descends. Soon, it will be kiwi-spotting time. Yippee! Wish me luck.

Well, that's all I care to write about for today, I'm too excited about tomorrow to carry on :-). Hopefully I'll be able to post about it shortly once I get in Auckland, and maybe even get the pictures up, but no guarantees on the pictures, since I'll need a reliable Internet connection for that, and I'm not sure Kevin has one yet. Toodles all, hope you're doing well. Only 5 days to go before I fly out, gotta make the most of it, right?

STRIKING IT LUCKIE

SUNDAY, MARCH 23, 2008

POSTED ON: MON, 2008-03-24 01:28 BY STEVE

No, that's not a typo in my title. I mean to spell it like that. Why? Well, because I spent the better part of today in the Luckie Strike cave system on a caving expedition being led mostly by me! Of course, if you've been following along in my stories, you were already aware that I had planned on caving today, so this will come as no surprise to you. If you haven't been following along, well then shame on you :-). After a good night of sleep at the Kiwitown Holiday Park, I was picked up my Emma from Absolute Adventures and whisked off to their cave system for a day of fun. From there, it was back to the train station for the final leg of my journey back to Auckland, and where I started my grand bike tour over three months ago. It was a bittersweet moment, and had some sense of finality to it. To read more about the caving and the final trip to Auckland, read on. Sorry, no maps of course, as the GPS remains dead. [No blog picture until I convert the pics from CD to my USB key, probably not till I get home]



Before even starting this day, I should report that I got to do a little bit of Kiwi spotting the night before. After Bill had shown me where to go see the Kiwi at night, I decided to head back there under the cover of darkness to see if I could see them firsthand. I'm happy to say that I did indeed get to see them! At least two different ones were trudging around in the

area of the man made burrow. They were funny to watch for a while. They just sort of shuffle around on the ground, looking for food I suppose. They apparently heard or noticed me, as several times, they would stick their long beaks through the slats in the fence and sniff around me. It was all rather comical, but also really cool to see these nearly-extinct birds going about their daily stuff live. It made my night, and I was happy to head off to my tent for some shut-eye in anticipation of the big caving day.

Things didn't go perfectly smoothly to start off in the morning. I was supposed to get picked up by 8:45am, but at 8:55, there was still no sign. I gave their office a call, and was told they should be there, and I double checked they had the right campground. I was at the Otorohanga Kiwitown Holiday Park, not the Otorohanga Holiday Park. Eventually I was picked up, and sure enough, Emma, my driver / guide had gone to the wrong park and waited there for 15 minutes for me before finding out I was at the other place. Oops. However, since I was the only client on the tour, I didn't think it would matter, since we could dramatically shorten all the safety talks, and we'd probably move quite quickly through the cave system.

Once at the HQ, I was issued two sets of thermals to wear, along with a stylish set of green overalls to wear. On the feet, a pair of neoprene booties and gum rubber boots, and on my noggin, a flashy orange caving helmet with attached light. I certainly looked the part, that's for sure. The trip we were going on was the 'Expedition' trip, which takes us to the far end of the cave system, and back again. Along the way, there is amazing scenery of stalactites, stalagmites, crystal pools, columns, curtain stalactites, waterfalls, lots of rocks, etc. etc. Normally, clients are in the caves for about four hours, to get to the end and back. The best part about these trips however is that the guide is empowered to make calls on what to do with the client. For example, for me, as I was very comfortable and familiar with all the gear, we forewent the safety lines on all the abseils, and there was no need to hand-hold on any of the rope sections. A lot of the passages you're quite high up in the cave on the way through, so you have to use cowtails and be clipped in to guide ropes in case of a slip.

Also, due to the nature of this trip, clients are encouraged to lead the group, rather than just be told to stick close and follow. As such, I was often at the front, and we'd just banter back and forth as I picked my line through the caves and jumbles of rocks in some cases. Sometimes, I'd choose the easy, obvious route, other times, I'd decide to do some scrambling around stuff. A couple times, Emma would ask me 'Where are you going?', as there would be a visible rope in one spot, but I'd just go elsewhere and free-climb around obstacles for fun. It was great. That was the whole reason I chose to use Absolute Adventures in the first place. I knew that they were more of an adventure-minded company rather than tourist-driven company. Most of the other caving companies around Waitomo, although they also offer fun trips, you are really just doing what you are told, and following a set path. Booring, right?

We got to the far end of the caves in pretty good time, where we stopped for tea and cookies in the cave. The other nice part about this trip? No other groups or people. It was just Emma and I, far in the depths of the cave, no other sounds or people. I asked what was in store for the return, and if there was extra stuff we could do, since the time wasn't a factor, and I was having fun. She assured me we'd have some great squeezes to get through, forcing me to get really wet and out of my comfort zone. Sweet. However, as it was still early, she also gave me the option to go exploring further in the cave, out of the path that the tours are generally conducted. Sweet. She ditched some of her own gear, and just took one safety rope with her, and we went scrambling off above a waterfall and through many more passages of varying size. Only a couple other guided clients have

gotten the chance to be down there, and for Emma, it was just as exciting as for me. Unfortunately, we did have to eventually turn back, without finding the end of the system. After all, I really couldn't afford to miss the train.

We doubled back, admiring the amazing cave formations along the way, until emerging once again at the waterfall. It was now time for the return trek back through the caves, this time following the stream all the way to the exit. Once again, I was put in the lead, and at several points along the way, was prompted to try some squeezes, very tight passages not for the faint of heart. On one of them, the most challenging of the day, I was told to follow this little water-filled squeeze to the other side. There wasn't even enough room for my helmet, so I had to take it off, float it in front of me, and wriggle on my belly in the water, with just enough room for my face out of the water to breathe, while navigating this little passage. I emerged to find that I had to keep going through another couple squeezes before finally emerging to the spot where Emma had gotten to via the 'easy' route. It was very cool, and I was very glad that I did it. I'm sure had I been alone, I would never have attempted anything like that, but with a guide assuring you it's do-able, you just have to push yourself.

The best part of the trip? The guide carries a camera and snaps pictures of you the entire way, so you have lots of good photos of you doing this stuff. Well, good might be a stretch. Given the nature of caving, it's hard to get good shots. It's very steamy when you stop, and the moisture in the air often yields grainy pictures. However, they are pictures nonetheless, and once you are done the trip, they burn them onto a CD for you free of charge! How awesome is that? Well, for the fellow with the website and a photo fetish, it's pretty awesome I can assure you :-)

We finally emerged from the caves into brilliant sunshine. It was amazing how hot it was when we stepped out of the caves. You don't really notice it when you're down there, but it was pretty cool down there. The two layers of thermals certainly kept me warm enough, but once that sun hit, I was boiling. Before we even started the trek back to camp, I had to peel off the overalls. It had been a great trip, and I'm really glad that I managed to squeeze in this adventure on my way back to Auckland. Sure, it wasn't the 'world famous' glow worm cave trips, or the 'legendary' black-water rafting (glorified tubing), but I got to see a remote part of a cave system that few have ever seen, and do it on my own basically. That's exactly the type of adventure I had been looking for, and Absolute Adventures delivered it exactly as I wanted it. I discovered that I have the ability to do this sort of thing, and wasn't too afraid of the confined spaces or dark, which I wasn't sure of before this trip. I learned a few new tricks for my arsenal as well, which always helps.

After the caving, I got to take a nice hot shower at their camp, which was a good thing, since I reeked of caves and sweaty thermals, and was on my way to Easter dinner in Auckland at Kevn's parents place. Yup, I scored myself another free meal, but not on purpose, it just worked out that way. I got a lift back to town from Emma, got my gear, and headed downtown to eat some food, as I really hadn't eaten anything for most of the day apart from the Cookie Time cookies, a muesli bar and some tea. Needless to say, I was a wee bit starving. I found a café that was open, and had a steak and mushroom pie, and a slice of chocolate cake. Delicious. From there, it was off to the train station to wait for my train. I got there 30 minutes before the train, but it ended up being about 30 minutes late. You'd think that with only one train a day, they might be able to get there on time, but such is not the case.

By the time we pulled into Auckland, it was 45 minutes late. Looks like I'd be late for supper, as I still had to bike the 15+ km to St. Heliers' Bay. Oops. Well, it was out of my

control. This also meant that it was dark for my bike ride. Luckily, there is a bike path along the water all the way out there, and the weather was pretty warm, with only a bit of wind. In case you're wondering about the train ride itself, there really isn't all that much to say, the way was fairly flat with not much in the way of scenery. I just sat and watched it go by while listening to music. Oh yeah, and had a couple Speight's Old Dark as well, seeing as they hadn't charged me for the bike, it meant I had a spare 10 to spend :-)

Arriving at Rick and Marg's place, there was a great spread of food for me to fill up on, which I was extremely grateful for. They were already getting to desert, but insisted that I just help myself to the food and eat with them. I had a chance to recount some of my adventures from the road, and in doing so, realized just what an awesome trip I've had down here. I have no regrets, and can say that I've done a lot with my time here. Granted, I still have a few days left, but it feels like things are pretty much done. I was thinking I may spend a day on Waiheke Island tomorrow, as well as overnight there. It's an island off the coast of Auckland which has great views and is a nice oasis away from the big city. I really don't have much else to do in Auckland, so that might be my best option. Who knows. I'll fill you all in once I decide. Till then, stay cool, and I'll see you all very soon!

COMPLETE DAY OFF

MONDAY, MARCH 24, 2008

POSTED ON: WED, 2008-03-26 00:46 BY STEVE



Hey Gang! Well, I'm here to report that I've taken an entire day off, for the first time in a long time. Well, okay, it wasn't a complete day off I suppose. I did laundry, I went to the movies, and I even did some shopping for NZ stuff that I wanted to take home. I also had a nice meal once again at the Friesen's house. All in all, a red letter day. I tried to sleep in, but after 4 months on the road, and getting up early everyday, it just wasn't possible. I was awake by 8:20am and was showered, dressed, and ready to face the day by 9am. Oh well. At least it gave me a chance to start getting organized for my return journey. I'd tell you to read on for more details, but there really aren't too many. The movie was 'Run Fat Boy Run'; I bought 3 CDs and a coffee table book. I played some Olympics on the Wii. That was about it. I also booked a hostel in San Francisco close to Union Square, and looked into my day trip to Waiheke Island for tomorrow. That's it that's all, nothing more to report :-)

LAST OFFICIAL DAY BIKING

TUESDAY, MARCH 25, 2008

POSTED ON: WED, 2008-03-26 00:47 BY STEVE

Hi folks, and welcome to the almost-last post from New Zealand! This post will be a bit longer than yesterday's, because I actually got off my butt and did something for the day. In fact, my plan had been to do an overnight trip, but as you will learn, circumstances conspired against me and it turned into just a day trip. But it was definitely a good one. I ended up grabbing a ferry to a place called Waiheke Island. It's a mere 19km off the coast of



Auckland, but in terms of pace and scenery, it's literally a world away. I had stripped my bike down to the basics, and was travelling with just a day pack rather than the trailer. What a treat. Also, I didn't have the rack on the back of the bike either, so I felt quite free pedalling along. Of course, I had the annoyance of a pack on my back, but compared to hauling 60+ lbs. behind you, it was pretty relaxing. Read on for the complete details of the day.

Again, I started my day just after 8am, as once again, sleeping in just didn't seem to be working for me. Oh well, I'm sure I'll get the hang of it again once I start working :-). I showered, and started packing my day bag, before turning my attention to the bike. In the process of removing some things from my bike, and trying it out, I realized that after over 4300km, it's really starting to show some signs of wearing. I had to tighten my cones to get rid of wobble in the back tire. I also noted again how the rear shifter no longer works properly. The brakes make noise, the cassette and chainrings are getting pretty worn, and so on and so forth. I have the feeling I'm going to have to put a few bucks into ole Epic before trying to tackle any big races this summer. Oh well, she deserves it, after such a great performance down here, right?

Once everything was finally set, and I was ready, I rolled out of the driveway, and stopped shortly after leaving to hit up a café for a bite to eat. Then it was off along Tamaki Drive, the waterfront road that leads all the way downtown from where I am at St. Helier's Bay. I got to the ferry terminals and was there around 10:30am, so I bought my return ticket, and was taking the 11am boat over to Waiheke. To kill just a little time, I wandered over to the waterfront iSite and got some tourist info on the island, and accommodation info. The lady there warned me to head straight to the island iSite to try and book accoms, as things were pretty booked out. I thought I'd be safe on the Tuesday after the 4-day Easter weekend, but there was a wrinkle with that. Apparently, schools and universities get the Tuesday off as well as a holiday. That makes this weekend the last big weekend for families. Oops.

The ferry ride was only 35-40 mins, and the water was pretty calm. I had hung up Epicus in the back of the boat, and she just swayed back and forth, enjoying the sea air while I sat in the cabin. Disembarking the boat, I headed straight to the iSite. The woman there called around to all the backpackers for me, but they were chock full already. There was only one she didn't get a hold of, as their office hours were wacky, and I just decided to roll over there later in the day to try my luck at lodging. I didn't hold out much hope, as this was the only BBH hostel, which usually fill up first. There was one place that had a room, but it

was 80NZD for the night. I made a note of where it was, and decided to check it out on my way cycle touring, to see if it would be worth it. Sadly, later in the day, I saw it wasn't. It's an 'eco-lodge', and was located in the middle of the island in a thickly grown-over valley. No views, and pretty spartan accoms. Not fancy enough for me to spend that kind of money when I have a nice place to stay back on the mainland.

So, just what is so cool about Waiheke Island? Well, it's a haven of wineries, olive groves, and artists. The island itself is the second largest in the waters surrounding Auckland, and has a population of about 8500, which makes it quite populace in NZ standards. However, these residents are spread over a fair amount of space, and are nestled in all sorts of nooks, crannies and hills. Oh yeah, I didn't mention it, as it pretty much goes without saying, but this is an island formed of volcanic activity. As such, there were plenty of hills to climb throughout my day of touring. Another nice thing they've done on the island is they've laid out 3 different cycle routes on the island, a 12km loop, a 25km loop, and a 70km loop. No, I didn't do the 70km loop, but combined elements of all loops to do about 50km on the island, combined with the 26 or so km going to and from Kevin's place, so I did about 76km on the day. I'll add it into my totals for the trip, but I have no map.

On my cycle tour, I visited a few wineries to sample their wares, as well as checked out several of the beautiful beaches they have on offer over there. I didn't make it all the way to the east of the island unfortunately, where there is a cave system for an old military installation, similar to Devonport, which I'd already visited early in the trip. However, the best stop I made on the tour was to the Wild On Waiheke Brewery and Winery. I stayed there for a bit chatting with the owner about his beers and general small talk. Of course, this time was also spent 'sampling' each of his beers a couple times. They were not fully licensed, so he couldn't sell me a beer to drink on premises, but he could give me a few extra samples. It was a cool spot. He even offered me a place to camp if I had a tent, but of course I hadn't brought that with me. D'oh! I bought a nice Matiatia Malt Beer from him for the road, and headed back to the roads.

I made my way back to the ferry terminal, and saw I could probably catch the 4pm boat back, but opted to wait for the 4:45 boat. I cycled to a reserve area, where there were volcanic rock cliffs, and just sat there, looking out at the bay and Auckland in the distance as I enjoyed my beer in the cool afternoon breeze. It was a good moment. One that I'll probably remember. The quick cat was just coming into the harbour as I was getting near the end of my tasty brew. I finished it off, and pushed my bike back up to the wharf to board the boat. The return ride was pretty much the same as the way there, only the winds had picked up a bit (northwesterlies). Back on the Auckland waterfront, it was clear there would be stronger winds heading back to Kevin's. That was okay though, as I was just going to take my sweet time, eat somewhere along the way, and hopefully not get back too early to their place.

My plan worked out pretty well, as I stopped in Mission Bay for some tasty supper at a place called Mecca. Satay chicken pieces in rice with some tasty veges as well. It was a good meal to cap off a nice day. However, just for good measure, I treated myself to the most decadent of ice cream at the Moevenpick on the corner, with their fresh, delicious Swiss waffle cones. As I was sitting on the corner eating it, I saw Kevin and Holly bike by across the street on their way back home after work. They had biked to work together in the morning. Well, at least I wouldn't beat them home. In the end, I got back to their place just after 7pm. We watched some TV for a bit, and were all in bed by around 10:30, me being the last one up.

So there you have it, one last mini-adventure and trip before dismantling all my gear and packing it up, which is what I'll start doing tomorrow, to make sure I have no problems on Thursday, rushing around to get to the airport in time. My flight isn't until 7:30 at night, but I have to be there 3 hours in advance, and with all my gear, there is a myriad of things that could go wrong while checking in, so I'll leave nothing to chance. Till then, I'll sign off.

PACKING UP AND HEADING OUT

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26, 2008

POSTED ON: THU, 2008-03-27 21:45 BY STEVE



Well folks, with mixed emotion, I find myself writing the blog post I've been dreading for a few months now. Yup, it's official. I'm definitely leaving this beautiful country after having explored its many nooks and crannies by two wheels for a long time. After my last cycle trip yesterday to Waiheke Island, I knew that it was time to start sorting all the gear out and packing it back up into the respective containers. I've been fairly careful

with my purchases on the road, so essentially, I'm leaving with pretty much the same amount of gear as I arrived with in this country so long ago. However, that doesn't mean that it will all fit into the baggage the way it is intended to. However, all work and no play make Steve a dull boy, so I did take a couple rest breaks and watched King Kong finally. After all, it's another Peter Jackson flick, so it's somewhat Kiwi in that regard. Anyway, read on for more info on my day of playing Tetris with my gear :-)

Although I had high hopes of a late day sleeping in, I was awake shortly after 8am once again. I guess I can't really complain though, as this is still something like sleeping in, isn't it? Tee hee. Before grabbing my shower, I decided I'd tackle the dirty job of dismantling and packing up the bike with all its greasy and dirty little parts. Luckily, I'd picked up a pair of surgical gloves in my travels that I'd been saving up just for such an occasion, so I donned them, got out my tools and started taking my good friend apart. Of course, the engineer in me doesn't mind dismantling and trying to optimally pack things up, so this was right up my alley, as I once again aimed to pack the bike, trailer, and several odds and ends into the box. Using a myriad of straps, I got the job done and had everything pretty much secured in there. I popped the top on and snapped a picture of my handiwork.

Rather than tackle the main bag packing, I decided to grab my shower, then wander out to find some food to eat for lunch. As I now had no bicycle to use to get around, my options were somewhat limited. I could head all the way down to the bay if I wanted, but I wasn't really in the mood to go all that way. So instead, I opted to just head up the road to the intersection of a few major streets where I knew there were a few eateries. I opted for a place called Kebabs on Maskell, a kebab place as the name implies. Call it shawarma if you'd like, as that's pretty much the same thing. I ordered a chicken kebab combo, with fries and a Fanta, and headed back to Kevins.

Popped in King Kong, and enjoyed my lunch. Outstanding Kebab I must say. I later learned that according to many people, they may actually make the best kebabs in all of Auckland! Imagine my luck finding that on a whim. Not only was the food good, but I was quite enjoying King Kong as well. I'm not too big a man to admit that I did in fact shed a tear during that movie. It was quite well done, and did display a good deal of emotion. Great acting by the leading lady, not to mention Kong himself. I didn't even notice the fact that the movie ran over 3 hours!! Geesh, where does the time go.

After the movie, back to packing, now the task of shoving all the remaining things between my big duffle bag and my carry-on luggage. As it turns out, that wasn't such a difficult thing to do, given that I've been living out of that bag for over 3 months now anyway. It was just a matter of adding in the extra stuff that I'd left behind in Auckland the first time around. I was all finished by around 5pm, and just vegged out and watched some videos on TV. I sparked up the Xbox 360 very briefly, but didn't feel like trying to learn any new games. I also busied myself by cleaning up the house a little and doing the dishes for Kevin and Holly. I had planned to invite them out for supper when they got home.

Instead, when they arrived, I was asked if I wanted to head over to Kev's parents place again for supper, given that it was my last night in Auckland. Who was I to say no. I graciously accepted, and we headed over there for the evening. We had a great meal and I enjoyed the company yet again. Boy, do I ever owe that crew a debt of gratitude for all they've done for me while in Auckland. It also gave me a chance to check on the status of all my flights, and give a quick call to Jody (at 5:20am her time!!) to let her know it was all systems go. All in all, not a bad way to spend my last night in Auckland. We drove back to Kevin's, and I had another great night's rest in the guest room. Tomorrow was the big take-off day, so I wanted to get a good night's sleep, as I rarely sleep on airplanes, especially when they have great in-seat entertainment options :-). Stay tuned for more on my last half day and the return journey.

D-DAY (DEPARTURE DAY)

THURSDAY, MARCH 27, 2008

POSTED ON: THU, 2008-03-27 21:46 BY STEVE

Hello folks, and welcome to the in-air version of ActiveSteve. The lights have been dimmed low as people try to get some shut-eye. I've got Stadium Arcadium cranked, as part of my in-seat entertainment. I just watched a most incredible movie called "Into the Wild", based on a true story and book by Jon Krakauer.

Absolutely remarkable. I'd say it was inspiring, but given that the lead guy dies after poisoning himself by accident by eating the wrong plant... well, you can imagine where I'm going there. However, his experiences up to that point were nothing short of soul awakening for me I'd say. SEE THIS MOVIE. Of course, it doesn't help my lack of desire to go back to the working world any more, but that's okay. I've wanted to see this movie for some time after being told by many people on this trip that I should watch it. However, I'm just a touch ahead of myself on the blog front,



so sit back, and allow me to roll the clock back a few hours and fill you in on my last half day in New Zealand.

I must admit, I'm going to have another slight problem with this blog post. I think it'll have to be a two-parter type post, as I'm actually going to have two March 27ths, and I'm not sure what laws of thermodynamics I'll have to break in order to write two stories for the same day. You see, my 24 hours in San Francisco will be mainly based on the 27th of March as well. Weird enough for you? Well, try being me in that case. To sleep or not to sleep, that is the question. I did manage to get a good rest again at Kevin's last night. I actually slept in past 9am this time, which was extra sweet. I guess it helped that I had nothing to do for the day. What did I do once up? Well, I showered, then I popped in the Transformers movie, which I hadn't seen. Detect a trend yet? Yup, ActiveSteve is digging watching the moving pictures the last couple days.

After the movie, I got my butt in gear and went for my last stroll in New Zealand by heading down to St Heliers Bay for lunch and a walk along the boardwalk in the glorious sunshine. It was a hot day with blazing sun. Nice to get that for one last stretch before heading back to cold, wet, Ottawa, don't you think. I had myself a reasonable meal of curry fried chicken pieces served on pasta with a Thai curry sauce. Washed that down with a Speight's Distinction Ale, then a fresh cream doughnut I picked up at a nearby bakery. I then proceeded to stroll along the waterfront, trying to be philosophical about my entire trip, but failing to reach any great mental insights to share with you.

Walked back to Kevin's and waited for him to come home to whisk me and all my gear to the airport. Thanks again, Kevin! He was right on time, and I was well within my 3 hour time limit at the airport. I was actually pretty much right on the nose 3 hours before flight time in the lineup. It was a good thing, as things weren't quite going to go my way for the return trip. Or at least they didn't appear to. I got to the counter, and proceeded to try checking in. Duffle bag: 23kg, the exact max for luggage. They asked me to load the bike on the scale. 40kg! Law apparently prohibits them from taking anything over 32kg. I argued for a while about special handling, asked for supervisors, showed paperwork, etc. etc., but all to no avail. I was told I'd have to re-pack. Kinda tricky with this sort of thing. However, I was willing to give it the ole college try, and was sent away with all my stuff to where there was a big scale.

I set about taking all my gear apart again, to see what I could stuff in my duffle bag. The one interesting thing I learned from Air NZ is that they don't have a special bike handling charge. Just a 2 bag maximum, no bag over 32kg total, and anything over 23kg charged at 5NZD per kg. You wouldn't believe what I was able to finally cram into my duffle and carry on as well. I got almost everything out of the box except the bike itself and the biggest parts of the trailer. The seat is even sitting in my duffle now. I could only get it down to 34kg, and my duffle up to 29kg. I wheeled everything back up to the line, and was given the next slot since I'd already been waiting. This person was a bit more understanding and empathized with me on my plight. She stressed on the phone that I'd done all I could, even though it was still a little overweight. The baggage boss ok'd it, and I was almost set. Just the matter of excess charges. Somehow, she got it down to only 60NZD, which is actually less than I'd expected to pay for the bike handling.

So, in the end, I got off pretty easy I guess. My next challenge will be checking into San Fran for the Ottawa flight, where this time they will want to charge a bike handling fee, as well as an overweight bag charge I suspect. I think I'll probably just pay the damn charge and be done with it though. I don't feel like trying to re-pack once again just to save a few bucks. I headed upstairs after finally waving goodbye to my big luggage, and proceeded to

do some last-minute souvenir shopping and money changing. I got rid of all except for about 70cents NZD. Not bad.

I'm now onboard my plane, a really nice plane, with kick-ass in-seat stuff. Tons of movies to choose from, as well as a wide assortment of CDs to choose from to listen to, which is what I'm currently doing while typing. There's even games, including Tetris to play while you fly. How cool is that? Next stop, San Francisco, for a 24 hour layover. I booked a hostel right off Union Square, so I'll be centrally located for my very short trip. I should at least get to see some of the sights in that time. I essentially have the afternoon and night to sight-see, sleep over, then head back to the airport in the morning to start another possibly frustrating few hours dealing with my over-size luggage. Oh well, that's what I have to go through to get back to those that I love I guess. I suppose I'd endure worse to get back to that, wouldn't you? I'll sign off with that, and will pick back up earlier today when I get in San Fran :-)

24 HOURS IN SAN FRANCISCO

THURSDAY, MARCH 27, 2008 ... AGAIN

POSTED ON: SAT, 2008-03-29 15:05 BY STEVE



Well, as promised, here is the second post for March 27th. I guess crossing the date line has its benefits heading in this direction. I've effectively gotten an extra day on my holiday! Yay. Of course, I lost that day on my way down, so all in all, there is a zero sum gain, but still, on the way back, it's nice to feel like you got an extra day, wouldn't you agree? The flight from Auckland to San Francisco went without incident, and in fact, we arrived in

San Fran 20 minutes early. How's that for a change? Transport that's early. Wow, I'm impressed. Shame I didn't get a wink of sleep on the damn flight. 12 hours of insomnia spent watching several movies, TV shows, and listening to music. I had a couple glasses of wine, but nothing too crazy. I wouldn't want to risk a hangover on my very short visit to San Francisco. Read on for a little bit more info on this little layover.

Upon landing, my first order of business was to figure out exactly what to do with my bike box and heavy duffel bag. There was no way I'd be lugging those downtown with me. The process for that dilemma involved what felt like kilometers of walking through the terminals, which wasn't fun with the heavy stuff in tow. I tried to get Air Canada to check it for me, seeing as I was under 24 hours from my flight, but no dice. That was a long wasted trip. I ended up having to pay 37USD to have them securely stored for a 24 hour period. Not the end of the world, and certainly better than keeping them with me.

Once the bags were stashed, I grabbed the BART train bound for downtown. For a mere 10.70, I got a round trip to a station only a couple blocks from the hostel. Of course, figuring out that it was 10.70, and how to actually get there and pay proved a bit of a challenge with the very surly person working in the transit booth. Very condescending. Oh well, welcome to big city USA I guess. No more friendly kiwis going out of their way to help you down here. Regardless, I'm a big boy, and I was soon being whisked to Powell

Station, close to Union Square. I was pretty beat. Got to the hostel, and checked myself in. At least it was only costing me about 24USD to sleep 3 blocks from Union Square. not too shabby. I was in a 4-share room in a back corner on the 3rd floor. I made my bed, and decided to lay down for a 40 minute power nap which turned into about 25 minutes by the time I actually fell asleep. Better than nothing, it left me refreshed enough to do a bit of light touring.

I left the hostel, and just started walking around, taking in the sights, smells and sounds of San Fran on foot, armed with just a little map and my camera. My overall impressions were quite good. Felt like a safer city than a lot of other large US cities, in spite of the fact that there was always a siren blazing somewhere nearby, and plenty of homeless wandering the streets. However, it was generally clean, with only some graffiti. I only made it to Union Square, China Town, the Financial district, and the waterfront by the Bay Bridge. The city was bigger than I thought for walking it, and in my tired state, I just didn't feel like hoofing it all the way to the Golden Gate bridge and Alcatraz. I'm sure I'll be back sometime, and I'll have to spend more than a single night there. Luckily, I'd also get the chance to check out the local nightlife a little bit anyway, as the hostel organizes a pub crawl on Thursday night, which I figured I'd jump on. I grabbed a traditional American supper at MacDonalds, and headed back to the hostel.

There was free wireless at the hostel, so I thought I'd jump online and do a few things in the lobby, also giving me a chance to meet people possibly heading out that night. Well, the wireless connectivity was spotty at best, but I did meet people in no time. Ironically, I ended up meeting a few different Kiwis of all things. I hit it off quite well with a guy by the name of Mark who was globe trotting to do snowboarding and work a bit, but is also keen on Adventure racing, and knew some of the same people I knew in the sport. We ended up chatting for quite some time, and that spilled over into the pub crawl, where we both drank some bevvies and just kept chatting with each other as well as other people we met along the way. He was catching a 1am bus to Tahoe, so he was leaving a bit earlier from the crawl than I, but I didn't stay out too much later myself. I was back and in bed shortly after midnight.

The crawl itself was okay. The bars we visited each gave us drink specials like 2.50 pints of Stella! However, these were all pretty much small places, and once our crew of about 25 descended on each bar, we made up the majority, so it was more like a moving private party rather than a chance to see the real San Fran nightlife. Too bad about that, but it was still a good time. I was happy enough to pack it in relatively early to get some sleep before the last leg of the trip back home. The nice part of a west coast stopover is that it lets me reset my internal clock, and I figure that by the time I land back in Ottawa, I should be pretty much accustomed to the time zone changes.

Well, that pretty much wraps up my slightly less than 24 hours in San Fran. In the morning, I had a great diner breakfast, which I must say was the one thing lacking in NZ. I had an egg, great hash browns, crispy bacon, and a short stack of pancakes for 4USD. Delicious, and just what the doctor ordered before heading back to the airport, which I'm currently sitting in typing this up with my extra time. Air Canada for the return journey dinged me 35USD for overweight bags, and another 50USD for the bike. Oh well, that's still 10USD less than what I thought I might pay, and at this point, I just want to get home. I didn't necessarily want to leave NZ or end the trip, but once you're actually in the travel process, you can't wait to get it over with. Just two more flights and about 10-11 hours, and I'll be home! Whew. See you all real soon...

FINAL CHAPTER IN THE STORY

FRIDAY, MARCH 28, 2008

POSTED ON: WED, 2008-04-02 20:14 BY STEVE

Good day and greetings from the land of snow and taxes, as my father put it. As some of you have rightly pointed out, this post is definitely a touch on the tardy side. I've been back in Ottawa for four days, and owe you all at least a few paragraphs to sort of close off this adventure of mine. I suppose part of my reluctance to write this final blog post had to do with wanting to absorb everything before writing my parting thoughts. Of course, on the



other hand, getting back home was a bit hectic, as I was anxious to get settled back in and come to grips with the return to my 'routines'. On that front, I definitely have a few things I can share with you all, as well as tell you about the last leg of my return journey. So if you're ready, kick back, polish up your glasses, and I'll try to entertain you or at least enlighten you on my brainspace for one more time :-). Be patient, as it will likely be a long post, but I suppose I have to do a bit of reflecting in this, the final chapter of my New Zealand adventure.

To close off on the actual transportation aspects of this trip, when last you checked in with me, I had paid my 85USD to get my beloved bike and associated gear loaded onto an airplane with me, and was off on the 8 or so hour flight to Toronto from San Francisco. Toronto would be my first point of entry back onto my native soil, and as such, I'd have to clear customs there before the final short 40 minute jaunt to Ottawa. The flight to Toronto was running a little bit late, so we left about 30 minutes late. Something about the flight crew not having arrived until recently, and not checking into the plane. This was also a very full flight, but I was fortunate enough to have an empty (middle) seat next to me. Of course, it wasn't really empty, as the fellow in the aisle seat was traveling with a 22 month old, who didn't have to pay for a seat, so after takeoff, the middle seat became the 'crazy zone'. This little fella was screaming, and being a generally typically ill-behaved 2-year old for the duration of the flight. I was incredibly glad that I had my in-ear headphones which block external noise, otherwise the sky marshals might have ejected me with a parachute somewhere over the US mid-west :-). However, as it was, I was able to enjoy another couple movies and TV shows, as well as my purchased food. Yup, even on an 8-hour flight, Air Canada in their wisdom has deemed that we plebs must buy our own food. However, for 10 bucks, I got a Quiznos sub, some Pringles, and a couple chocolate chip cookies. Not terrible I guess.

Arriving in Toronto, I had about an hour and 40 minutes between flights, which should be okay if I got through customs alright, and located my baggage. I was happy to get off that plane and my seat-mates, and even happier to see the familiar 'Welcome to Canada signs'. Hard to believe I'd been away for 4 months. I got in a relatively short customs line, and soon enough was face to face with a customs officer. She asked a few questions, including my employer. When I said Government of Canada, she responded about my '4-month government vacation' knowingly, as we share the same work benefits. She cheerfully

stamped my papers and welcomed me home. No fuss no muss, and I could tell by the card that she hadn't singled me out for a detailed search or anything. Sweet.

Next step was picking up my luggage to re-check to Ottawa. As I was clearing customs, the bags weren't able to be checked all the way through. After waiting for a while at the oversized luggage area. I realized there was a second such area further in the baggage hall, and a quick walk revealed that this was actually the place where my bike box was waiting. Whew! Although it would've been okay to not get it right away, I felt better knowing my gear was with me once again. I passed through the final customs checkpoint, and was re-checking my bag in no time. All that was left was to head upstairs and catch the connecting flight. I gave Jody a quick call to let her know I was in Toronto, headed to a fast food joint for some supper, then waited at the gate for the flight. Last flight was short and sweet, and I was soon descending to the dark, snowy terrain of my nation's capital, Ottawa. I was actually nervous about seeing Jody again after such a long absence. I'd even bought a box of Altoids, just so that I'd have fresh breath. Weird, eh? But she later admitted she too was a bit nervous.

Upon emerging into the waiting area. I scanned the sea of faces for Jody, but couldn't spot her, surprisingly. I walked around the baggage area for a while before finally seeing her, sporting a new red coat. I tried hiding from her while I approached, and finally popped up just a few feet from her. Huzzah. Reunited at last! Hugs and smiles all around, and it was time to collect my stuff, and beat a trail back to our humble abode. All the bags made it, and we were driving home within about 15 minutes. On the drive home I got my first sense of the amount of snow we'd gotten over the winter, and it was mighty impressive. However, the most impressive was pulling into the driveway, with the snowbanks around me over my head, and the road a very narrow version of its usual self, due to all the snow. I was floored by the snow quantity. Thus ended the journey, at the same place where it all began, with me lugging the big bike box back into our cozy house.

So, what to tell you from this point? Well, the weekend itself was spent mainly reorganizing all of my equipment and gear, as well as doing my laundry and re-assembling and tuning up my mountain bike as well as one of my road bikes for use on the trainer. I figured I should try to get back into training as quickly as possible, as already, the overwhelming feeling I was getting was one of laziness. I have the feeling this was mainly a reaction to the emptiness I was feeling knowing that I wouldn't be climbing any new hills in the next little while, and that the adventure was over. I won't say I was depressed about it, but there was definitely a set of emotions within me that had me a little down.

So just how else could I cope with these feelings? Well, after months of living an active life, and of learning just how little one can live off of, and claiming that consumerism is a tool of boredom to all who would listen, I went shopping!!! Yup, as the final pictures on flickr will demonstrate, I wasted no time in heading to FutureShop and picking up a brand new television. Not just any TV though. It was a behemoth of a set, at 46", the Samsung 4669F is an LCD HDTV thing of beauty, and I bought it without even batting an eye. I felt like there had to be a few changes in the house for me to not feel I was returning to the exact same thing I left, and this was my response. That, and re-arranging the bedroom a bit as well.

Another problem I have to deal with is the lack of any clear focus or goal for my training. I haven't decided to do any races in particular yet this year, and don't know how things will go for me on that front. The knee problems I alluded to in a few posts are very real, with my left knee in rather acute distress anytime I run anything over 5km at the moment. I know that I need to get off my butt and schedule a consultation with a professional, but I'm

rather concerned what the outcome will be. However, rather than fretting too much about this stuff at the moment, I've decided to just sort of ease my way back into training, and try to get into some sort of routine with biking, running, and swimming. I may take a much more laid-back approach to all this stuff this year, and just focus on fitness, so that I may be able to come out even stronger for next year's race season. After, all, I still need to run a Boston qualifier marathon, and plan to do more Ironman races in perhaps some more exotic locations, not to mention do some international adventure racing as well. These are all in the dreams, but there is nothing carved in stone at the moment. Hopefully I'll rediscover my focus.

As for final thoughts on New Zealand and the trip in general, that one is hard to put into words or think about. The big question I'm getting these days is 'What was the best part?'. There simply is no answer to that question. The whole trip was the best part! Every day brought new challenges and rewards. I discovered a few new things about myself and the world around me, and also learned a lot about a wonderful part of the world that I plan to return to a few times in my life. This was an incredibly challenging trip, and I think I met it head on and conquered everything it threw at me. I can't tell you just how refreshing this was for my soul. Yes, I work in a little cubicle overlooking Ottawa for a living, but that's definitely not who I am. A person is defined by the sum of their experiences I think, and this trip perhaps gives a bit of insight about me. I love freedom and independence, discovery, and hard work. That's what makes me tick. Some of this flies in the face of my methodical, detail-oriented engineering persona, but I've learned I'm also very open to whims and spur-of-the-moment decisions. After over 8 years in the working world, this trip came at a good time. Although it took 2 months to fully decompress from the accumulated stresses of years working (and/or being out of work!), the overall benefit to my mental well-being can't be measured. I'm completely relaxed and content with my place in the world. I hope I've come out of this a slightly wiser and more relaxed person. I feel like it, but only time will tell. One thing is for sure. I hope I won't be waiting another 8+ years before doing another similar trip.

Here ends the final entry of my tales from New Zealand. I'd like to thank all the people I met along the way for their friendship and insights, as well as all the people who either posted a comment on this website or sent me an email along the way. Sorry posting comments to this site has been so tricky. I know that 'captcha' thing makes commenting frustrating sometimes, but without it, my site would be overrun by spam. I know several of you have tried posting and failed, so I'm sorry. However, now that I'm back in the land of reliable Internet, feel free to drop me a real email using stephanrm -at- gmail -dot- com. Writing these stories every day of the trip was a challenge in itself, but it was great knowing people were following along around the globe, and now I have an amazing travel journal as well. My father is actually putting it all into one PDF document as well, and with this post, I think we'll be at about 205 pages. Perhaps I'll put that file up as well, should anyone wish to have a single document with all the stories. Thanks dad! That's it for me for now. Who knows when the next post will be. I think I'll be taking a bit of a 'blog break' until I figure some things out. Till then, don't forget to dream big, and then go after it!