

Taranaki trip December January 2017/2018

For our New Year trip this year, Mike and I decided to visit Taranaki, an area of North Island NZ that we hadn't seen before. We drove from Auckland, the journey taking about four and a half hours due to the volume of traffic on the road. The route from Hamilton to New Plymouth was quite challenging, winding up hill and down dale for many a mile past fascinating dune-shaped hills. When we first saw the coast we thought we'd reached Dover because of the startling white cliffs.

The standout landmark of the area is the magnificent Mount Taranaki, a perfect cone shaped volcano, not extinct but dormant since it's last eruption around 1854. According to Maori legend it was once one of a group of seven mountains centred around Lake Taupo, but Taranaki lost his love, the beautiful mountain Pihanga, to the great chief of the mountains Tongariro, from whom he fled West to where he stands today, a lonely sentinel dominating the district for miles around. When we first saw the mountain as we approached New Plymouth, the summit was wreathed in cloud, as it often is, but we were lucky enough to see it in all its glory during the first three days of our stay.

Day one Thursday 28th December

We reached our accommodation about 4:30, a small self-contained apartment underneath a privately-owned house. Mike had made curry from the turkey leftover from Christmas day and we enjoyed this for our first meal here. Afterwards we drove a little way out of town along the coast to a place where we hoped to see the sunset but, as in Tonga, a bank of cloud along the horizon swallowed the sun before it reached the sea. However, a dramatic cloud formation above Mount Taranaki was lit a spectacular orange by the sunset afterglow.

Day 2 Friday 29th December

Today we decided to see what the wider Taranaki area has to offer. We drove south towards Stratford, following any interesting signposts along the way. We had a quick look at Lake Mangamahoe and then drove on to the North Egmont Visitor Centre on the lower slopes of Mount Taranaki, a good vantage point from which to see the mountain and the Taranaki plains below. We enjoyed a coffee in the visitor centre and bought Peter Gossage's book *Battle of the Mountains* with his beautiful illustrations, which we'll give to Emma if we can bear to part with it.

From there we drove on south to Stratford, a typical New Zealand town made unique by its many references to the Bard. We then drove back towards the mountain's southern slopes to see some interesting rock pools (Wilkie's Pools) and



Hazel & Mike and Mount Taranaki



a waterfall (Dawson Falls). It was a tough uphill track through the forest to the pools, but the path was a good boardwalk and the view was worth the effort. Mike did a rather perilous scramble over the rocks at the end to get some good pictures of the higher pools.

By this time it was almost 4 o'clock and we were just in time for a refreshing cup of tea and custard slice at a little cafe in Eltham before we set off on the return drive back to New Plymouth.

It had been a long day and we didn't feel like cooking our own dinner so we made a booking at Arborio, a pleasant, modern, Italian-inspired restaurant in the centre of town where the food was good but the portions over generous.

Day 3 Saturday 30th December

I had booked a fishing trip for Mike as his Christmas present but when he got to the harbour for the 6 a.m. departure they didn't have him on the booking list despite him confirming by phone the day before! They offered to take him out at 11 o'clock so we went back to the apartment to catch up on some sleep and then went into town for breakfast and a little sightseeing. One of the stand-out landmarks is the award-winning Len Lye Centre, a very modern building which houses a contemporary art museum. It is made entirely of shiny stainless steel in a wavy design, which produces some interesting reflections when you stand in front of it. Another of Len Lye's artistic contributions is the Wind Wand, a 48m kinetic sculpture situated on the Coastal Walkway in the centre of town, one of New Plymouth's most famous icons.

We then drove to the Fitzroy end of town to see the spectacular Te Rewa Rewa bridge. Bringing to mind both a breaking wave and a whale skeleton, the award-winning bridge is a pedestrian and cycleway across the Waiwhakaiho river at the end of the coastal walkway. While Mike was out on his delayed fishing trip, I decided to get some exercise and walked about 2 km along the coastal track from the town centre, rewarding myself with a well-earned ice cream at the surf club before turning back.

Mike came back from his fishing trip with a creditable haul: two sizeable snapper and several gurnard, which were promptly buried in sea-ice in the cool-box to preserve them until we got them home. One of the snapper made a most enjoyable evening meal, which refreshed us enough to go out again, to see the Festival of Lights, an annual event which transforms Pukekura Park into a fairyland of light-installations. By the time we got back, I had recorded over 12,000 steps for the day on the Fitbit Mike bought me for Christmas!

Day 4, Sunday, 31st December (New Year's Eve)

The day dawned overcast and damp so, in search of indoor entertainment, we set off to drive south along the coast to the Tawhiti Museum at Hawera, stopping off on the way to visit the



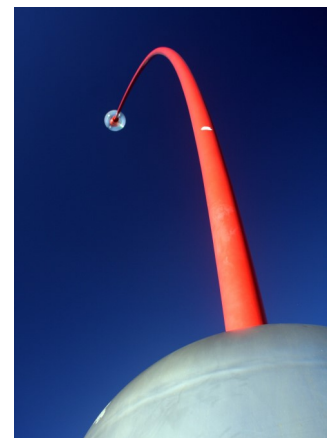
Wilkie's Pools



The Len Lye Centre



In reflection



The Wind Wand



The Te Rewa Rewa Bridge

Historic Cape Light and Museum at Cape Egmont. This is a replica lighthouse, built to house the 1850s Fresnel Prismatic Light which originally powered the Cape Egmont lighthouse. It also houses a tribute to renowned physicist Sir Ernest Rutherford, who spent his childhood in the area, at his father's flax mill. The original lighthouse is still in place a little further down the Taranaki coast, at its western-most point, but it is now fully automated.

We reached the Tawhiti Museum in time for lunch in Mr Badger's café, before spending an engrossing couple of hours browsing the fascinating dioramas – all crafted by owner, Nigel Ogle - of past life in the area. Many of the displays include life-size wax figures, modelled on local people. (The old dear snoozing on a bench by the waterwheel is the spit of my dear mum!) Other exhibits include old farm machinery and vehicles, a fully functioning water wheel, as well as a series of displays depicting the Maori wars of the 19th Century. The property was originally a cheese factory and some of the exhibits provide an interesting insight into early methods of cheese and butter making. We didn't have time to check out the Traders and Whalers attraction, nor the Bush Railway. We'll just have to go back for those!

We returned to the car just as it started to rain, and had a wet drive back to New Plymouth, where we checked into the Copthorne Hotel, which we had booked so as to be within walking distance of Salt, the restaurant where we were to have New Year's Eve dinner. The dinner was a 6-course degustation menu with matching wines, which was most enjoyable. Both Mike and I had made an effort to smarten up for the occasion, only to find most of the other diners very casually dressed!

We could find no New Year's Eve festivities to end the day, so returned to the hotel, where I crashed out from all the wine served with the meal, failing to see in the New Year for the first time in ages!

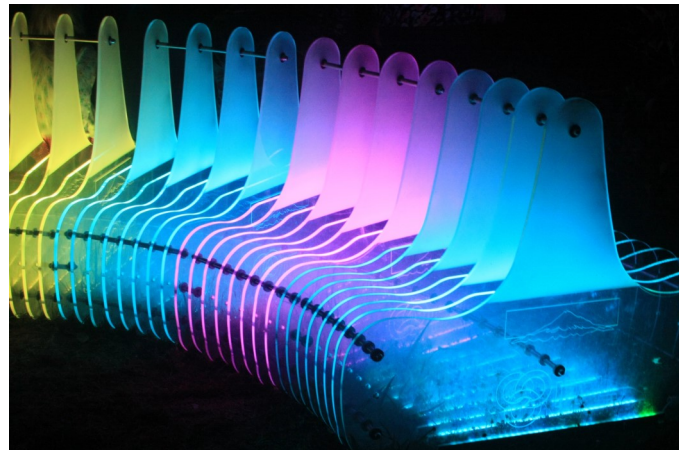
Day 5, Monday, 1st January 2018

We had originally intended to spend another day in the area, but it was pouring with rain and we expected most of the indoor attractions to be closed for the public holiday, so we decided to start back home. (We were also concerned to get the fish home while they were still fresh!)

It proved to be a rather wet drive, but we got back in about 4 ½ hours, glad to be home again with happy memories of our Taranaki trip to look back on.



The Festival of Lights



Seat Of lights



Cape Egmont Lighthouse