

Apex 40 Tour Report

June 1st - 15th 2011

45 Aussies, 1 Pom and 3 Kiwis (Driver Merv, Tina and myself) for 15 days; sounds like we would be outnumbered but no we can hold our own and what's more we did!

What a good humoured easy going lot they were, a real delight to travel with!!

Met up at hotel on Papanui Road and took those there on coach tour around the Cordon of Central Christchurch, one look at the ruins of Knox Church at Bealy Ave caused a complete hush which lasted all the time we were there and seeing the devastation, Tina and I had not been in this far before so were just as shocked as we traveled around the perimeter of the cordon.

Out to the airport to pick up more of the gang then a walk from the museum up Worcester Str to the river then around to see what remains of the Provincial Chambers was more than enough so back to hotel and a lovely meal with quite a few of the Christchurch Club joining us for the first of many evenings of fun and fellowship.

All on the coach next day and after a necessary side tour and backing up Devonvale Lane to show them all where we live (this was vital info for many of them at the end of the tour) and pick up my hearing aids away we went stopping at Cheviot for morning tea and Kaikoura for lunch.

Took them up Waterfall Creek to see 30 to 50 baby seals playing in the pool at the base of the fall, rather difficult to gather them all up again, everyone was fascinated.

At Seddon we met up with Les Rogers, Bill Yardley and would you believe it Brian Roach, these guys showed us out to Yealands Estate Vineyard where we had a tour around the amazing Eco Winery and of course a wee sample.

Les had at short notice organised a great meal at the Redwood Tavern and another fun evening as you can well imagine.

Out to Omaka Airport next morning and Peter Jackson's fabulous "Knights of the Sky" museum, well enjoyed by the gang and ourselves once more, then onwards to Havelock for lunch and over to Tahuna in good time for everyone to settle in and join together for the Meet and Greet Evening.

It goes without saying we all had a fabulous time over the AGM/Rort weekend, very well done Nelson, even if the weather didn't cooperate! All clubs put on short skits including the different Apex clubs, a lot of fun and new friendships.

After the Farewell Breakfast and fond goodbyes we climbed aboard the coach and away again, through to Murchison for lunch and down the Buller Gorge, stopping for photos and then a walk at Punikiki and the Pancake Rocks before arriving at the Top 10 Holiday Park where it was pouring with rain. I had told them they would have to get their own breakfast there as they had in Nelson but before Tina and I had time to get to our room several of the gang arrived to tell me that there were no plates, cutlery, toasters or kettles in the rooms.

Scratch head, Merv and I had a yarn, quick phone call then said we would go to McDonalds for breakfast, problem solved and at 8:00am, on the coach and excellent breakfast and service was had by all and very happy Mc Donalds owner as well! Did the Montieths Brewery Tour then on to "Revingtons" hotel for meal where quite a lot more Montieths was consumed ensuring another great night which finished up with port back in our cabins.

Next morning a short drive to Shanty Town, ride on the bush train and a little gold panning with most coming away with a tiny bit in a bottle, on to Hokitika, a look at greenstone carving and lunch then on to Franz Josef with Merv and I continuing with our commentary on all subjects, farming, geography, geology, plants, politics etc. Having asked if we were yapping too much the gang kept telling us to keep it up as they were learning so much, mind you so long as Merv and I "sang from the same sheet" they didn't know when we were bullshitting!!!!

What a difference in accommodation, from dog boxes in Greymouth to 5 star in Franz Josef, the hotel we were going to be staying in was closed for renovation so we were upgraded to "Te Waonui Forest Retreat", a beautiful place but as you can imagine very expensive to eat and drink there. Merv told us about "The Landing" about 2 mins walk away so most went there and had such a good time more than 40 of us were back the next night!

25 of the gang went for helicopter flights and 13 took the fixed wing "Grand Traverse", very lucky to do these wonderful trips in mostly sunshine as cloud came in as we all came back.

Drove and had a walk up towards to Fox Glacier next morning then went down past Lake Matheson just in time to get a beautiful clear view of Mt Cook then on again, stopped for morning tea at Salmon Farm then lunch at Makarora (best venison pies and carrot cake to die for) to lake Wanaka where we stayed at "Edgewater".

Some of the gang went to the transport museum while rest went to "Puzzling World" before heading to the Kawarau Bridge and Bungy Jump where our so called "friends" responded by challenging me to jump off the Kawarau Bridge, "our leader leads by example" they told the staff there and next thing I'm being lead away like a lamb to the slaughter.

"This is the original Bungy, never had an accident, only 43m down and there's water at the bottom so the guy soothingly tells me".

At this stage I got the picture and saw that the gang were going to call me chicken for the rest of the trip if I didn't so after signing my life away, then binding my legs together, putting on the safety harness, the terrifying moment of looking down and then diving, the gentle take up of the Bungy was such a hell of a relief which turned to pure elation once I was safely in the boat at the bottom and my legs were unleashed from the bindings.

Wow what a buzz!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Worst part was climbing all the way back up the canyon!

However I have the pictures, have done something that was never on my bucket list and attained "legend" status with them all, family think I'm crazy!!!!!!!!!!!!

That over we headed to Arrowtown for lunch, a look around this historic place and on to Queenstown.

Had 2 couples from the Invercargill 41 Club and 2 couples from Alexandra Club joined us for drinks and a meal, good company and lots of laughs made up for a very drawn out meal and not so good service.

A free morning for the gang to explore Queenstown and have lunch then back on coach and around to Te Anau, another hotel with expensive meals and drinks so we walked the ones who wanted to virtually next door to "The Moose", another great place, fast service, good, reasonably priced meals and ordinary bar prices which we had

discovered when we were there in February.

The manager said to me as we left on the 1st night "I never thought you lot would start singing, you can come back anytime".

So we did, most of the gang came back the next night, perhaps it was the Aussies finding out there was a happy hour!!!!!! 2 very good fun evenings,

Weather deteriorated as we went out to Milford Sound next day and the rain and mist came down when we were out on the boat, guess its just one of the moods of this amazing place and of course it made the waterfalls all start working so the trip was well worth while for the gang.

From Te Anau across to the Mandeville Airport and the Croydon Aircraft Factory and Museum where all enjoyed a browse around this great place then to hotel at Gore where 4 of the Gore Club came and had a snack with us, so good to catch up with these people all along the way and for them to meet their Aussie counterparts.

Onwards to Dunedin, checked in then drinks at bar where 3 Dunedin members came and took us to an Italian restaurant for a pasta and pizza meal in a grand old building, great!

Drove out round waterfront to Portabella then back over the "High Road" which made a few of the gang a bit uneasy when Merv told them he hadn't driven there before, only kidding a bit but it is a rather narrow, winding road for such a big coach. Back to the Octagon for morning tea then off to Oamaru to meet the Club there for lunch in the old Loan & Mercantile grain store, restaurant, wonderful food and what a great turnout from the Oamaru guys, as usual it was far too short a time and we were on our way to Timaru for our final night. Timaru Club had organised a venue for us to all together, fabulous meal then speeches and of course fine sessions, raised \$325.00 for the Earthquake fund.

A bit earlier start than usual as word had come through about the Ash Clouds so aimed at being back at airport in good time, didn't help, found when we got there only 2 were able to fly home so organised rooms back at hotel where we had started, some hired cars and off everyone went and then kept turning up at our place over the next fortnight. Not complaining, it was great seeing them all again, we felt sorry that some of them had to wait so long to get home.

Once more a terrific trip with a great gang, so many new friends, we even managed to get the names right by the end of the trip!!

Apex 40 gets a mighty big thumbs up and we are looking forward to catching up with them in Hervey Bay next May.

Thank you one and all for coming and those who came to meet us along the way we also thank and hope you all enjoyed the whole time as much as Tina & I did.

In continuing friendship

Derek Johns