

NEW ZEALAND 2025 - PART XIV

QUEENSTOWN - WĀNAKA - HAAST - FRANZ JOSEF - HOKITIKA - ARTHUR'S PASS - PUNAKAIKI - WESTPORT

We passed through New Zealand's most inland village on the way to our next base camp, Queenstown on the shores of Lake Wakatipu.

Outdoor and adventure tourism is central to the Queenstown economy. It reminded us a bit of places like Aspen, Vail, and Breckenridge in the Colorado Rockies. Activities included skiing, snowboarding, jet boating, white water rafting, bungy jumping, mountain biking, skateboarding, tramping, paragliding, sky diving and fly fishing.

Our niece and future husband exchanged formal marriage proposals (or whatever the protocol of the day for marriage is now) on the shore of Lake Wakatipu just north of the town proper just a few weeks ago. We thought of renewing our vows in the same spot but...

We found a Situation Room with great views for coffee, pastries, chocolates and all the food groups necessary for surviving Queenstown.



Lake Wakatipu



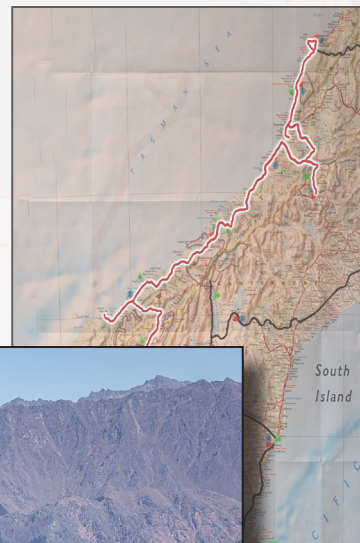
This was tempting but I didn't try it. I did do a little research in case I was still interested when we got back home but so far there is no nearby dealer... yet...



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We left Queenstown after five days of exploring the area by a back road though the small community of Arrowtown. First we had to drive up into the hills where we got great views back to Queenstown and Lake Wakatipu. We also got a feel for how one might fly into Queenstown as the flight path was over the same pass we took.



At another stop along the way we learned about another invasive species issue in New Zealand, *Wilding Conifer Trees* (typically Douglas-fir, Contorta / Lodgepole pine, Scots pine, European larch and Black / Corsican pine). As can be seen in the photo to the right, in just three years they can really take over an area. They have all been introduced from outside countries and had no natural forms of control allowing them flourish at abnormal rates and overtake the native plant species affecting all plant, animal and bird habitats. There are active efforts to mitigate these issues.

There were several places to pull off and enjoy the views.



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We spent a week at our next stop, Wānaka, another popular ski and summer resort town similar to Queenstown but to us more laid back, relaxed and less commercialized.

Along with the rest of the Queenstown-Lakes District, Wānaka is growing rapidly, with the population increasing by 50% between 2005 and 2015. In winter, Wānaka is an excellent place to see the Southern Lights. Another trip will be necessary for us to see that.

Wānaka is where our travel agent extraordinaire Christina Brockie of New Zealand Fine Touring has her office. We were able to meet her face-to-face after several years of long-distance eMail travel planning. I first noted her company in 2018 but it was not until 2021 that we started developing our itinerary with Christina. Christina's company had some month long itineraries, but we wanted a much longer one, 5 months, and with many more stops than the typical month long ones they had already set up.

Many of the stops we added focused on where there might be birding opportunities that we identified with several books and various web sites. We would communicate these to Christina and she would take care of finding us the kinds of lodging we preferred, tours and further activities. Over time we developed a 5 month itinerary covering the North Island, South Island and Stewart Island.

We had always planned to take cruise ships back and forth from the USA to New Zealand. These typically take about 3 weeks on cruise ships repositioning from and to the northern and southern hemispheres during fall and spring.

When we happened on a longer cruise that went to many places we had never been to and several on our bucket list we decided to take that one to New Zealand. It took 2 months getting there rather than the typical 3 weeks so we decided to adjust our travels by reducing our New Zealand time from 5 months to 4 months. We had plenty of time to adjust our New Zealand itinerary as lodging, car rentals and other activities had been planned but had not been booked yet. Still, Christina had a lot of work to do to adjust to our changes and was most gracious and willing to do so. Most often we just reduced several of our stays from 7 days to 5 days and cut out the Stewart Island portion. This left us with pretty much the same itinerary.

During our trip there were no major issues and only one or two minor issues that never affected our travels and could be dealt with via eMail and/or messaging via their own special APP. Once ticketing for the ferry had an issue but it was taken care of immediately at the ticketing window with a quick phone call to Christina's 24/7 help desk.

In our travelogues we try to avoid anything that might be akin to advertising, but if you have interest in traveling in New Zealand we recommend Christina. The little box below with her information is click-able to get to their web site.

Christina Brockie, Sales Manager
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New Zealand Fine Touring Ltd
+64 3 443 0812 | christina@finetoursgroup.com
12 Sir Tim Wallis Drive, Wānaka 9305



Lake Wānaka

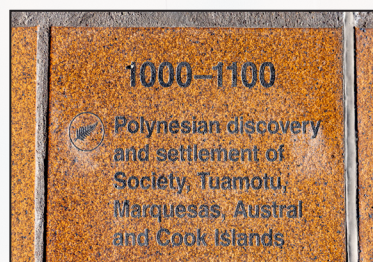
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That Wānaka Tree, a willow growing just inside the lake and a famous Kodak Moment tourist attraction, was no longer "just inside the lake", but high and dry during our visit due to the Lake Wānaka's low water level. I found another tree nearby and choose to make it the famous *That Wānaka Tree*... at least for the duration of this travelogue. The original *That Wānaka Tree* is in the color photo below and is not my image, but from Wikipedia.

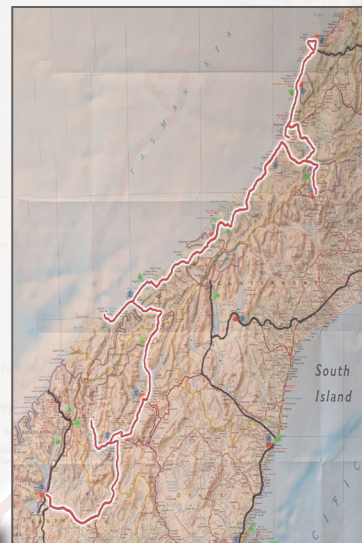


Along the Wānaka waterfront walk is a very interesting history lesson. For quite a distance there are tiles in chronological order depicting New Zealand and world historical events.



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1864

- Wool became New Zealand's largest export in the 1860s
- Thomas Anderson built the Way-Side Inn at Kidd's Gully

1893

- New Zealand first country in the world to grant all women suffrage (right to vote)

1865

- Native Rights Act gave British citizenship to all Māori, giving effect to Article Three of Treaty of Waitangi
- Joseph Lister pioneered antiseptic surgery

1930

- The Wanaka Tree started its life as part of a fence in the 1930s and grew into a world-famous tourist attraction
- Last raft of logs from Makarora to Clyde

1939

- WW2 started in Europe. Germany and USSR invaded Poland
- New Zealand declared war on Nazi Germany on 3rd of September

1959

- Chinese Gooseberry renamed 'Kiwifruit'
- Antarctic Treaty signed by 12 countries

1963

- Blood transfusion to unborn child in New Zealand first in the world

1972

- Equal Pay Act in New Zealand gave equal pay to men and women for the same type of work

1997

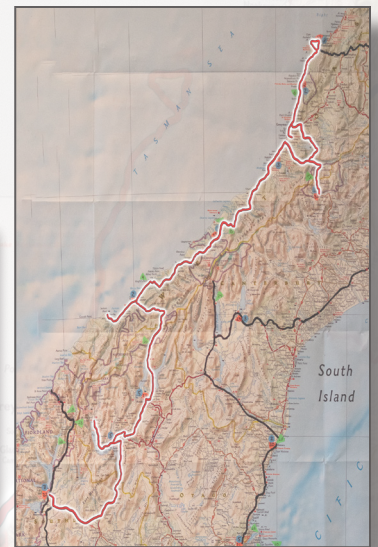
- Jenny Shipley became New Zealand's first woman Prime Minister



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We took a few hours and explored The National Transport and Toy Museum, one of the largest private collections in the Southern hemisphere. It displays a huge collection of 'stuff' including over 650 vehicles, a couple dozen aircraft and 100,000 toys plus thousands of miscellaneous 'stuff'. Owned and operated by just one family, the collecting began in the 1950s. We felt they had cornered the market on all manner of 'stuff' and a family group 12 step program for uncontrollable collecting might be in order.



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A few birding excursions, some more great food, some atomic coffee, a few more walk-abouts and our time in Wānaka came to an end and we headed north over Haast Pass for the west coast of New Zealand's South Island.



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Our first stop on the west coast was Haast, but only for a couple nights. Outside of some nice birding and beach walks, we drove to this famous end-of-the-road place called The Cray Pot on Jackson Bay, at the very bottom of what can be driven to on the West Coast. We had a nice seafood lunch while being pestered the entire time by those famous sand flies. They were so thick we probably inadvertently ate a few with our seafood.



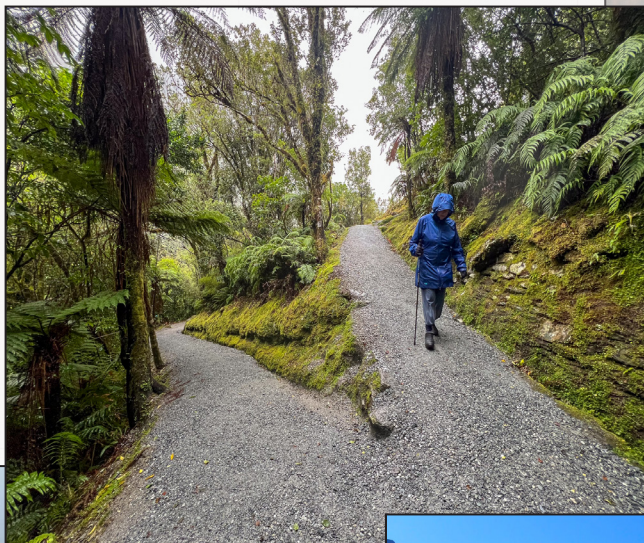
All along our west coast travels there were many photo opportunities for *Lazy Spirit* (clouds in hills and mountains) images.



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We stopped at Franz Josef for three nights. The weather was wet and cool but we enjoyed it anyway. We had scouted out a nice location via Google Earth to place a small amount of my Mom's ashes we had brought with us (she had traveled with us often and did so on this trip as well). It was a short wet hike to where there is an overlook up a valley to the Franz Josef glacier. On a clear day it is a beautiful very alpine view and one we were sure my Mom would have enjoyed.



On a clear day this is the view.



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We finally made it to Woodstock, albeit too late for the music by about 56 years.



We saw many sandfly repellent road side stands along this part of our trip. This gave us a clue of what to expect when we exited the car or even rolled down the windows. Some places had more than others, but we found them plentiful along the entire west coast of the South Island... and then some.



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Our next stop was Hokitika where in January, Hokitika beach hosts the Driftwood and Sand Festival. The festival involves members of the public and a sponsored artist constructing sculptures out of beach debris. We were here a bit late for the festival but there was still sculptures to be seen.

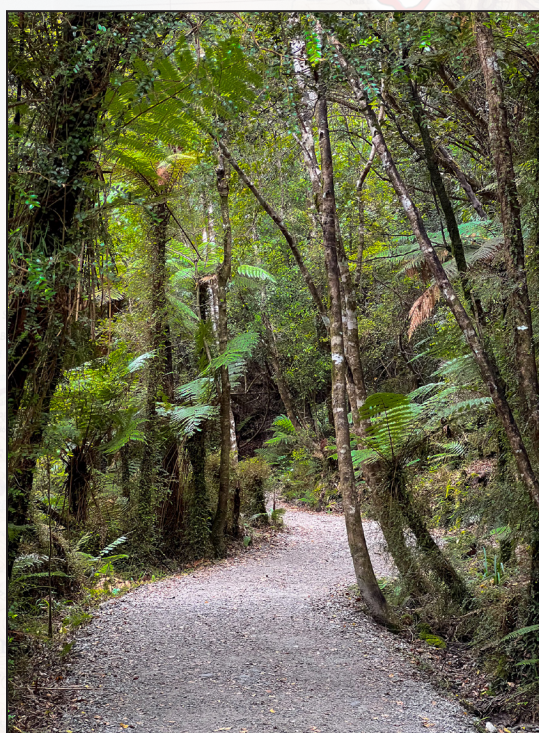
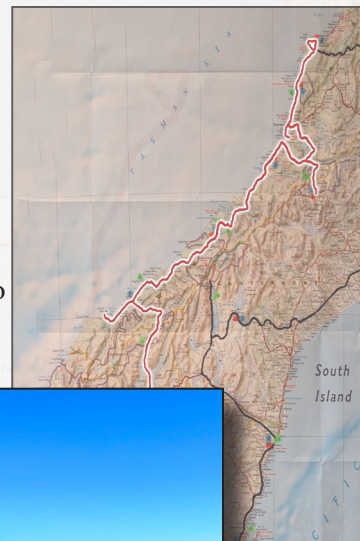


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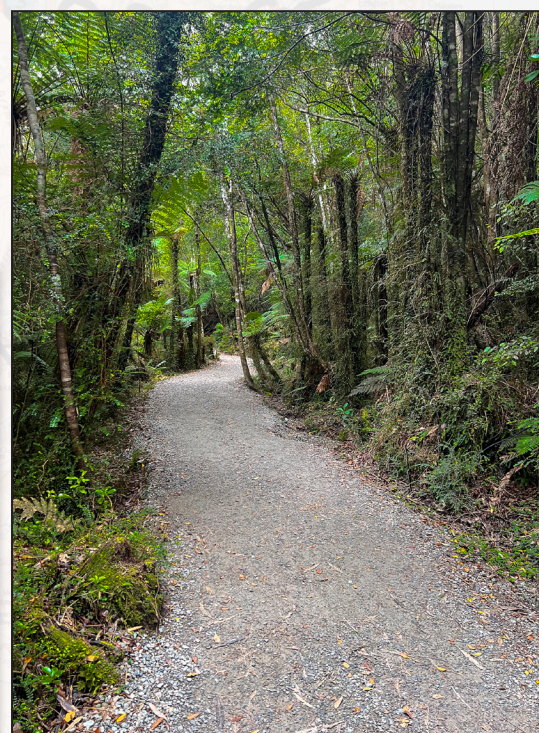
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We thought that this treetops walkway near Hokitika would provide us some good birding but we didn't find many. There were good views and we got to watch some zip lining activity but not so many birds as we had hoped.



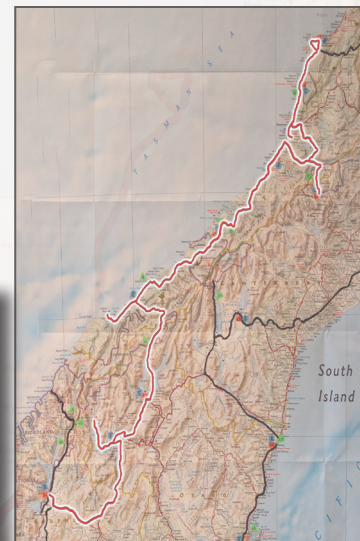
We took a short hike to the Hokitika Gorge for more birds and interesting things to see. Again, there were more interesting things to see than there were birds.



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We had our first experience at a kind of restaurant where you cook your own food on a very hot piece of stone. We felt the price was a bit steep since we had to do the majority of the work ourselves, but the food was well prepped, our cooking efforts supervised and the results very tasty. We would try it again... even as unpaid immigrant staff (albeit documented immigrants).



On our way to our next base camp, Arthur's Pass, we stopped to explore Otira Stagecoach Hotel. It was originally the Terminus Hotel and built in 1902.

Known as one of the best hotels on the West Coast when built, it was built to serve the pioneering community at the end of a railway line and was the last Cobb & Co Stagecoach post for New Zealand

In 2015, restoration work on the hotel began. As well as yet another of New Zealand's very unique collections of "stuff", there is also a cafe / restaurant and a few rooms for lodging.



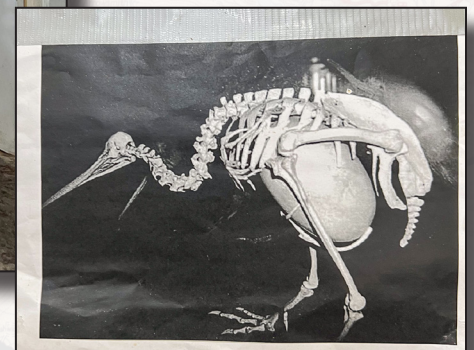
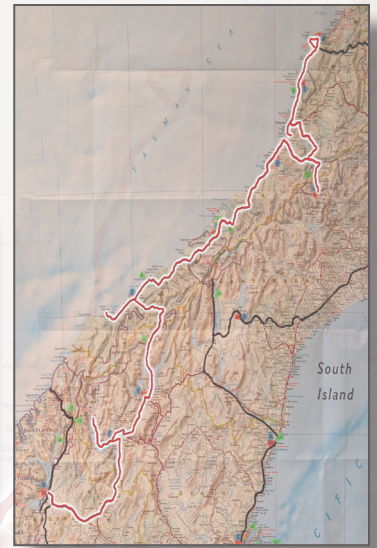
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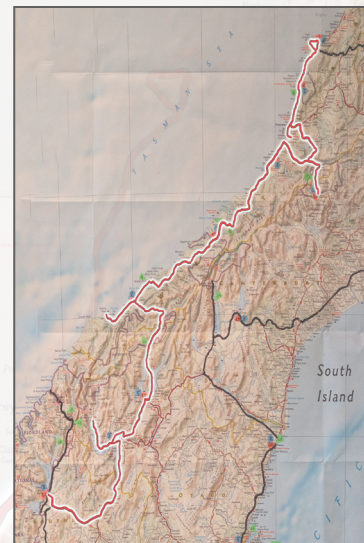
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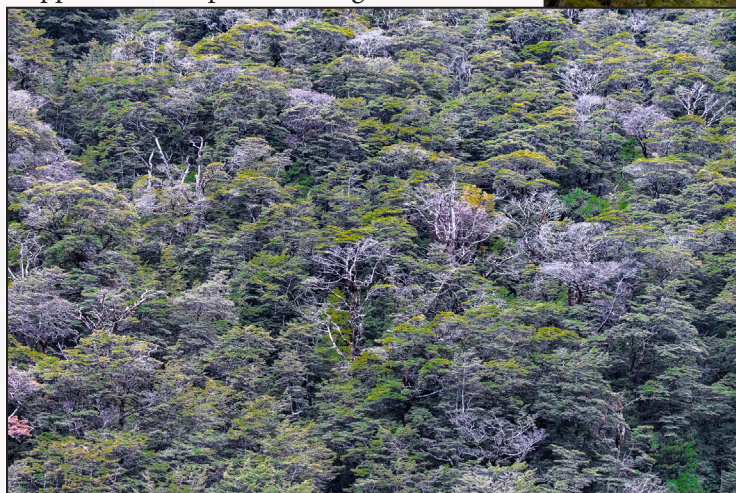
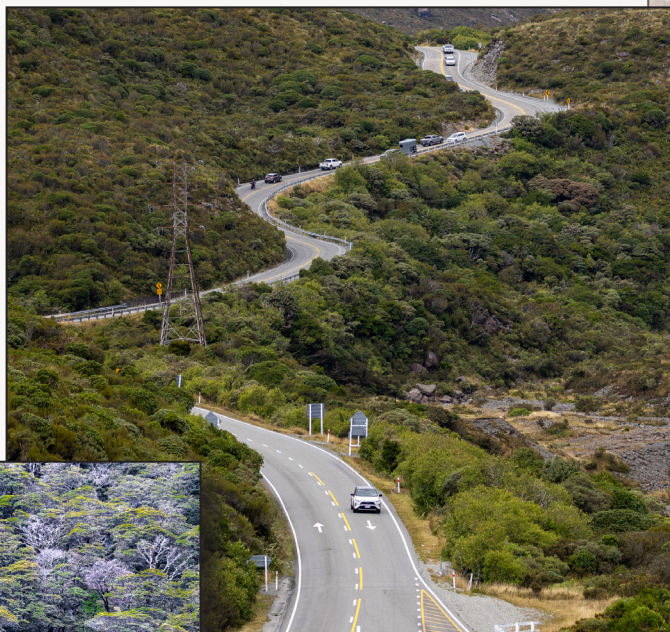


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We drove on to our one-night-stand at Arthur's Pass, finding some enjoyable bendy bits of road to get there. At Arthur's Pass we easily found the local Kea birds. Renowned for eating the rubber bits on cars, in particular wiper blades, we survived all the Arthur's Pass Kea carnage while getting some great views of them (and as I have said, bird photographs will be in a future *Flying Pig Adventures* travelogue).

The weather was cool and wet at times, but the rain was either light enough or stopped for a couple of birding adventures.



On our way from Arthur's Pass to our next lodging in Punakaiki we passed back thought Greymouth to visit the nearby Shantytown Heritage Park, usually known as Shantytown. Opened in 1971 it has many re-created historic buildings making up a 19th century gold-mining town. We enjoyed looking in all the buildings, had a nice lunch and then continued our drive north.

In my youth I worked in a print shop with much of the same equipment as this, albeit the 19th century.



Shantytown has a jail and one inmate still hanging around. I peeked in to say *Hi* but got no response.



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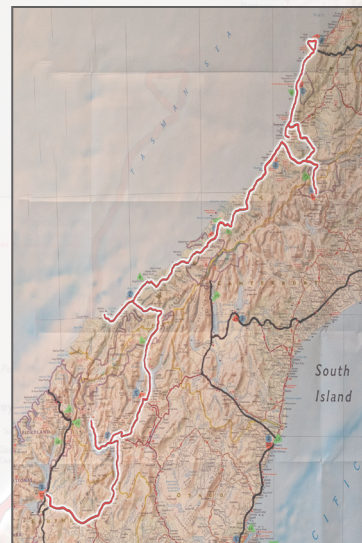
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We passed back through Greymouth for the third time on this trip, stopped and found a manhole cover we had not seen on the prior stops.

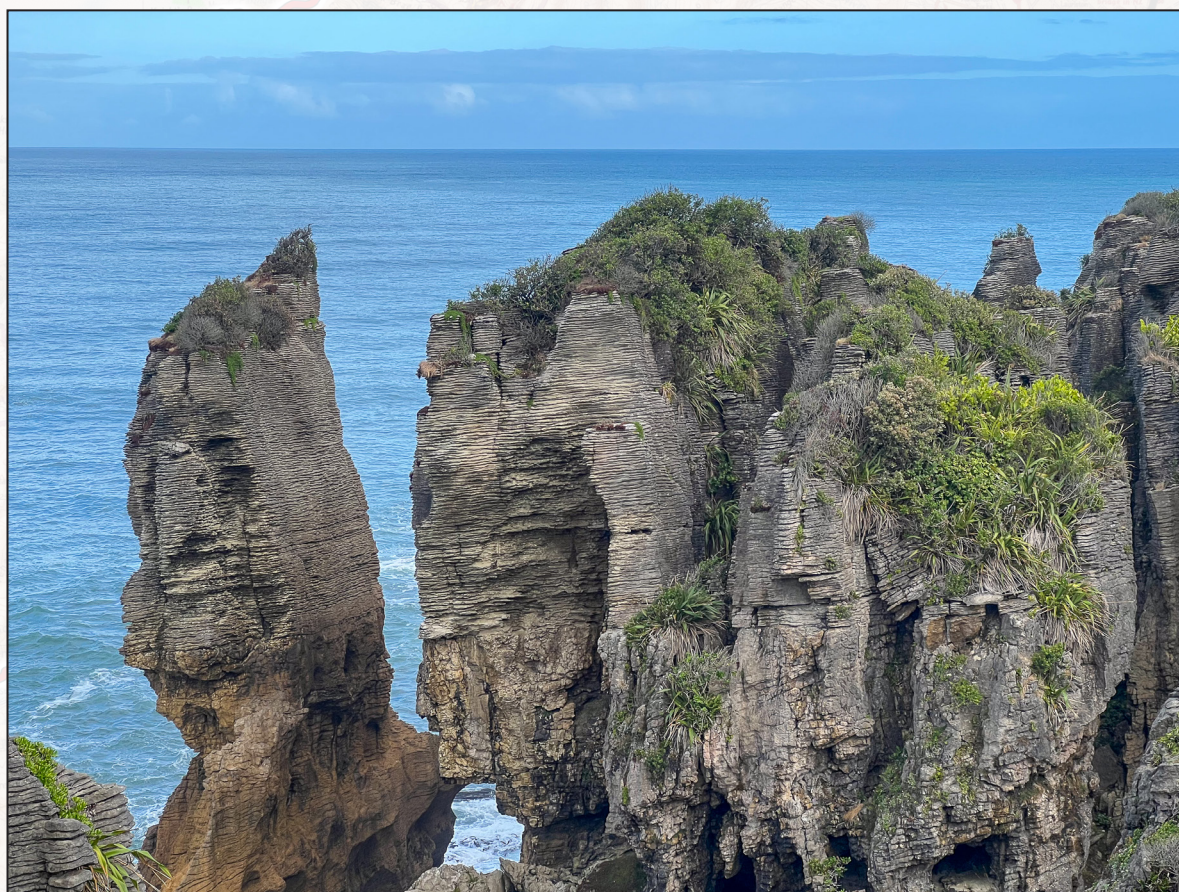
Before getting to our lodging in Punakaiki we stopped at Pancake Rocks and Blowholes to see the heavily eroded limestone formations.

The layering in Pancake Rocks results from a process called *stylobedding*. Under the influence of high pressure and compaction, small imperfections in the calcium carbonate that forms the limestone tend to aggregate in horizontal planes, in a process known as grain boundary diffusion. This leads to regular bands of stronger rock separated by weaker and more erodible mudstone rock. Thousands of years of rain, wind and spray have weathered the surface of the mudstone layers, leaving the limestone layers in relief.



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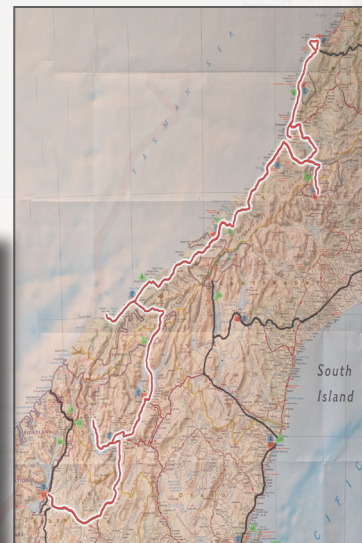
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In addition to the pancake rocks to see there was plenty of crashing Tasman Sea waves meeting the New Zealand South Island terra firma.



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Our lodging at Punakaiki was very close to the beach and provided easy access for a couple short walks along the beach. That is until the sandflies became more pesky than the views enjoyable, then we retreated to the local bar and restaurant.

Our next stop was Westport, the oldest European settlement on the West Coast and our last stop on our South Island west coast route. We spent the days in Westport exploring the area for birds and exploring the town. Westport is at the mouth of the Buller River with a great delta for bird habitat. Cape Foulwind nearby provided even more birding with some nice easy trails to walk.



View from Cape Foulwind looking south along the coast we traveled up.

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We left the South Island west coast wild seascape looking forward to exploring the northern, more protected parts of the South Island. We were looking forward to more mild, less wet, less windy, warmer and less dramatic weather. We really enjoyed the west coast and it's weather is a huge part of that... but were also ready for more Puget-Sound-like mild marine *influenced* weather rather than straight ahead in-your-face marine weather.



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