

aotearoa (new zealand) with evie and marxe

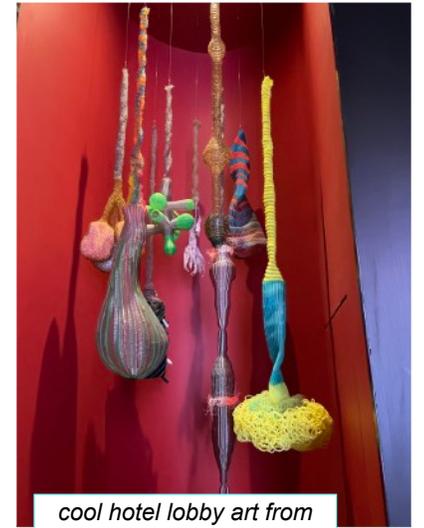
not going to take up space here with the pain-in-the-ass cancelled united flight or rebooking on air new zealand, etc. suffice it to say that we arrived in auckland about 20 hours later than expected. during the enforced layover, we did have fun in the holy cross cemetery and a great lunch in burlingame, a town just south of SFO. and i will now fly air new zealand anytime, anywhere. super nice people, efficient, and some nice perks, even in economy.

1 dec, friday

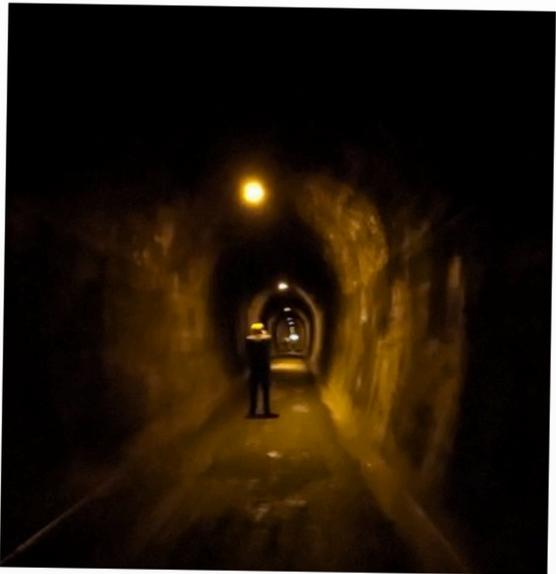
arrived 5:15am at the auckland airport, where they take customs declarations super seriously. require you declare hiking boots. we cleaned them the day before and said so, they let us right through. i get it though: gotta keep biological hazards away from the protected ecosystem. makes sense.

a very expensive cab brought us to the hotel where the tour group was meeting (atlas obscura, same company as my azores trip), which is where we had a reservation for the night before and cancelled and then uncancelled so we could run into a room right out of the cab, shower, change, feel human by 8:30am. met the group of six other travelers, and our guide, lee.

piled into a very roomy van and started through this beautiful beautiful place. stopped at Karangahake Gorge, 90 minutes south of auckland. stepping out of the van, honeysuckle practically jumped up my nose. so sweet. it stayed with us as we hiked through this loooong railroad tunnel (saw our first glow worms) and then back around the hill through the gorge. heard cars from the nearby road, but oh man, the scenery was amazing.

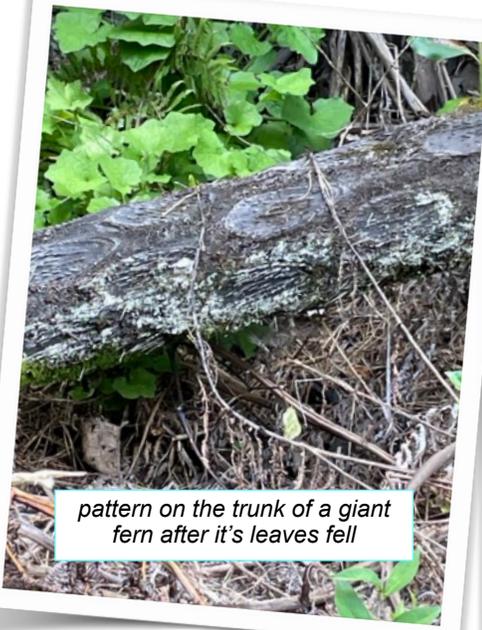


cool hotel lobby art from upcycled cleaning items



love love this wood color





pattern on the trunk of a giant fern after it's leaves fell



drove to waihi beach, where we had lunch and walked on the sand. cold pacific ocean water. soft sand.



going on very little sleep here

then on to Mount Maunganui, on the bay of plenty. love our first lodging, an apartment with a 280 degree view of the bay, town, and ocean — gorgeous.

hung out in the room, checked emails/social media, called satch. watched kids trying to row and a determined swimmer (wet suit) in the harbor. dinner over in town was pretty good. some sort of classic street rod event roaring past throughout. loud. even so, we became better acquainted with our traveling companions. lee reminds both of us of scott in his look and manner.

everyone greets us with kia ora (māori term for hello, life, health). and most signs are bilingual, (māori/english), at least on the north island.

walked a kilometer back to the apartment from the restaurant. long and very good sleep.

2 dec, saturday

our apartment came supplied with eggs, milk, tea and coffee, snacks, fruit, chocolate (!), and a clothes washer/dryer (whoo hoo!). marxe made himself breakfast with bacon and eggs and we brewed tea. had my own yoga session, looking out at that view.

this morning we learned to operate a tandem canoe, an ancient south pacific tradition. our māori guides, oceana and porrina, sat in the back and occasionally course corrected. we rowed across the harbor to their sacred mountain, mounganui, beached the canoe, and followed porrina around the mountain's base.



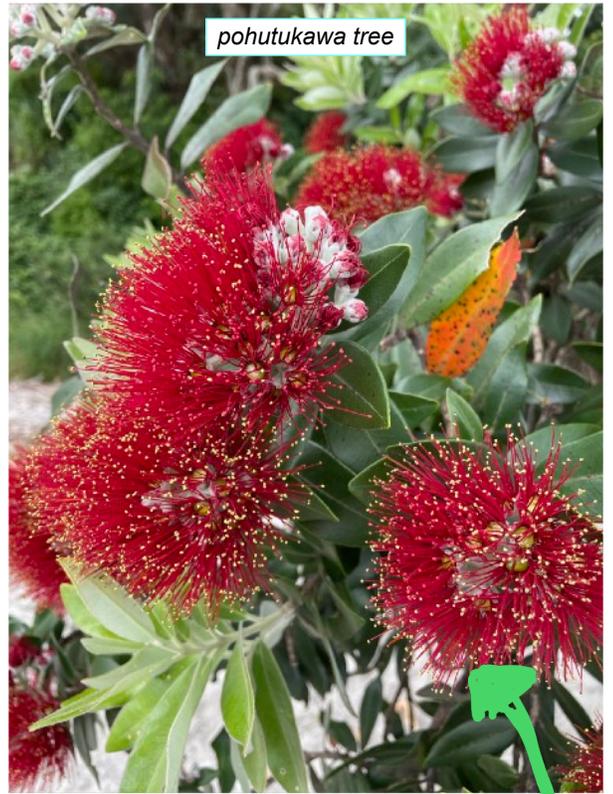
she told us of her ancestors coming to Mounganui, stories, and traditions. like the creek that was used *only* for giving birth and warriors returning from the sea; the sacred rock where the ancestors first arrived from various islands in polynesia; and the pohutukawa tree (white people call it the NZ christmas tree) with groups of red flowering stamens, where māori ancestors hung their dead so the birds and other animals could help the bodies decompose. eventually the bones fell and were buried.

marxe and i took our time walking around the mouna, rewarded with a penguin sighting and other cool birds.

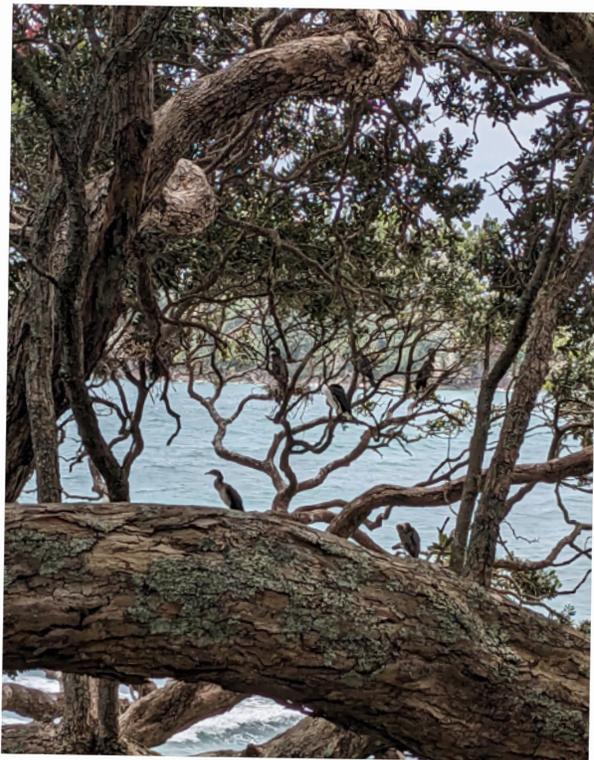
bad picture of a penguin



had a snack that i thought was lunch and then back in the boat to row against the wind across the bay to shore -- more food. sandwich and cake. and then walked back to the room.



reminds me of the bottle brush tree in our front yard growing up.



marxe couldn't fight off a migraine, so he stayed and slept while the rest of us went to Maketu, a 35 minute drive off the peninsula. we met dion waller, former captain of new zealand's famous all black rugby team. he now leads scuba and fishing tours around the area and hosts big bbqs at his house, so people can experience a māori feast. first he took us to an area where his ancestors landed, from which we can see Mounganui in the distance. talked about his ancestors' origin and how his tribe ended up at war with another tribe just to the north because the chief's son ate another chief's dog (more than 900 years ago).



dion had prepared an entire feast for us. every type of meat i think, clam chowder, fry bread, some salad, roasted veggies, and more meat. he insisted that i take a few plates of everything back for marxe.

really great discussions with dion's wife, sacha, and their two teen nieces, visiting from

hamilton, which is apparently the most boring place on earth. aside from the sports they play (rugby and a form of basketball). i'm still smiling about it all.



dion and his traditionally baked cake



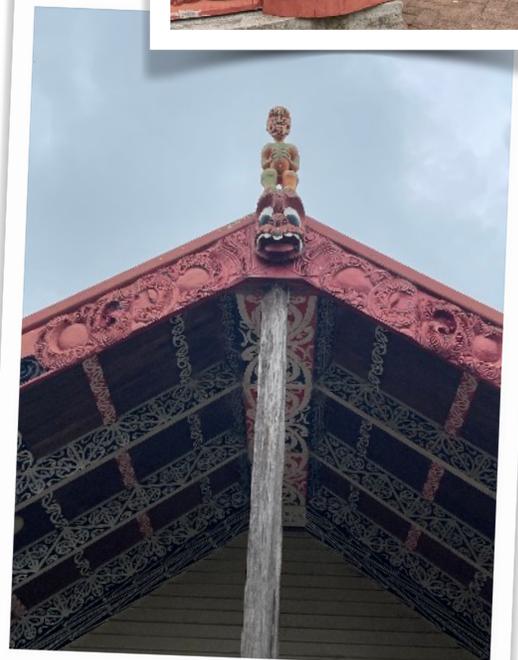
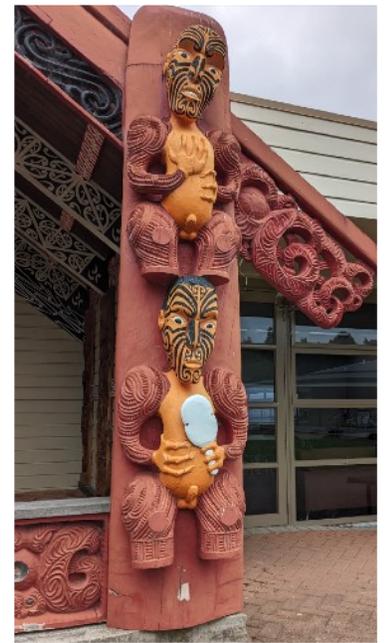
3 dec, sunday

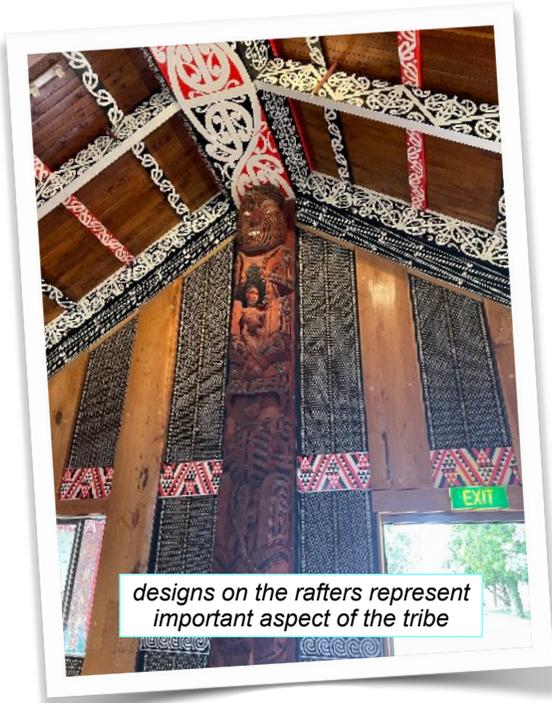
not used to it being sunday but it is. marxe made it through the migraine and enjoyed some of dion's meat for breakfast. i stretched. 8:55am, met the day's guide, les, downstairs. les knows an awful lot about māori traditions, as well as about the hills west of Mounganui. he brought us to a morae (tribal/community gathering point). gorgeous design and woodwork in the sacred whareniui (building),

alive and integral to the tribe. windows represent the eyes, the door is the mouth, wooden beams are the ribs. before entering, custom dictates that a council member, a woman, welcome us with a song that pays respect to the ancestors. after removing our shoes, women walk first into the whareniui, then sit behind the men. the tribal chief led a prayer and a song (about the living land and ancestors) and officially

welcomed us to their morae. the chief then led us from the sacred to the secular, crossing the courtyard into a community building. tea/biscuits complete the change. the chief talked with us about the tribe and told cool stories about their political process. they hold meetings for every important decision. a few years ago, everyone but one tribal

isn't this cool? black poplars delineate fields and serve as wind breakers. i love how they're so thin and tall.





designs on the rafters represent important aspect of the tribe

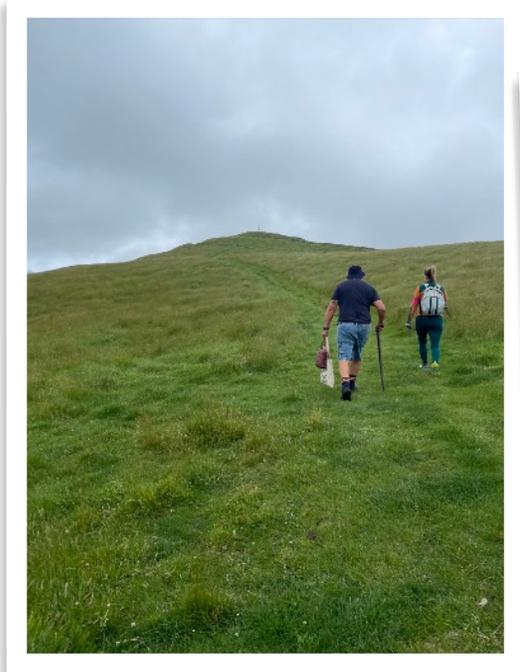
member wanted to tear down a particular building, but the one guy was an important elder, so the building stayed (a fire eventually ruined that section and much of the center, requiring an almost complete rebuild).



wearings from neighboring tribes, including one showing the fire that destroyed the building previously on this spot.

asked about their tattoos, so very cool. dion, les, the tribal elders, and others shared an array of designs, but the negative space is always a hammerhead shark. again, honoring the ancestors.

i wanted to listen to their stories for as long as they could talk, but we had to leave for a hike in the Papamoa hills. les, about 15 years older than me, led us all up the steep, beautiful hills at a swift pace, storytelling the entire time. like his version of the aotearoa (the māori name for new zealand, which means long white cloud) origin story where a husband and wife chase an octopus; and how the name



Papamoa references a family of whales. he also explained how the government land management agency emptied the wetlands below to create farmland, killing the māori's food sources, ruining their eel trade, and destroying many locals' livelihood. message received: leave nature. it knows what it's doing. time for us to adapt to her.

les had us taste a pepper-like leaf from an indigenous bush that numbed my mouth. he pointed out the ridge where his great great grandmother once lived. soaked it all in. gorgeous. so cool that les and dion and porrida and so many others know their direct lineage and how it ties to the land.

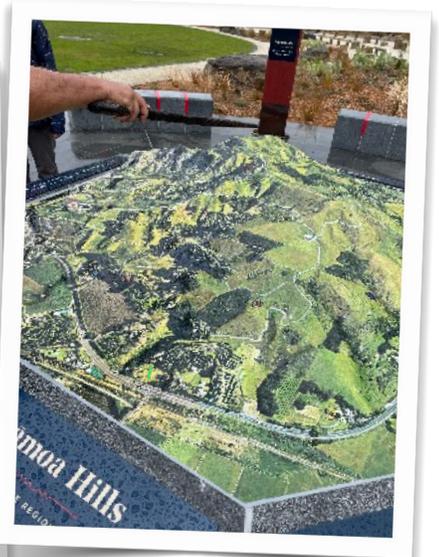
later, after a dinner we don't remember, we drove about 45 minutes and then kayaked up a river/stream to a very dark section filled with glow worms hanging from the river-side brush and trees. marxe and i shared a two-person kayak (for the first and last time — i was bossy and marxe was steering but the foot-controlled rudder didn't work as expected). oh, it was raining. we got soaked. and cold. but the glow worms put on a great show.

4 dec, monday

this morning, we left Mounganui and headed south to Murupara, again welcomed traditionally to a new tribal land. our māori hosts at the Kohutapu eco lodge performed the sacred ceremony accompanied by guitar. they held our snack in the main room of the lodge we all shared — a large warehouse-like building with three rooms on each side of a hall in one half and then the shared kitchen and toilets/showers in the other. doors to our rooms slid open, barn-style.

car pie = ok! taz, a passionate member of this iwi (tribal area), brought us to his 200 million

year old rain forest, where he knows seemingly everything about the trees and birds. he talked about his ancestors' relationship with the forest and how his grandfather is with him wherever he goes, kinda sitting on his shoulder. at one point, taz had everyone gather around a tiny clearing, get comfortable, and just be silent and still for a few minutes. truly lovely. i am struck by taz, who feels so strongly



diarama of the hills we just hiked



a huge totara tree



these giant ferns, called pungas, dot the rain forest



pretty. don't remember the name. and yes, i know i could look it up.



silver fern: irridescent underside, used as outerwear by the ancestors



red wood of matai trees

about others' understanding the importance of his culture and people, intimately aware of their surroundings and sensually attuned to the natural world. he knew the purposes of wood from each different tree. and this i will look up to remember, cause they were so important to him. rimu, tōtara, kahikatea, and miro trees. he also showed us peppercorns, moss, shrooms, differences in bark and what that was used for, etc. taz and his forest made me very happy. i loved this experience.



marxe eating at the waterfall

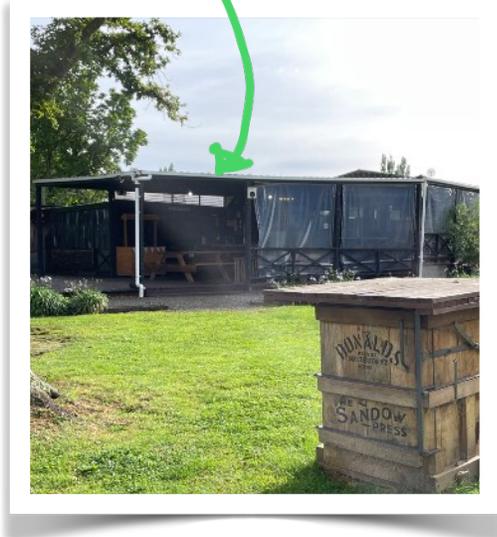
after the rain forest, we drove up the road a bit to a waterfall. broke out boxed lunches (veggie for me) packed from the lodge. on our way back there, we saw five wild horses. they seemed pretty happy.

an afternoon of māori cultural activities for us, on a covered patio. big rains, cyclone to them. it was like a tropical storm: some lightning, loud rain. power went out but we were all cool cause ina, a local māori woman

about marxe's age, was our activity leader. she was also



patio where we waited
out the cyclone.

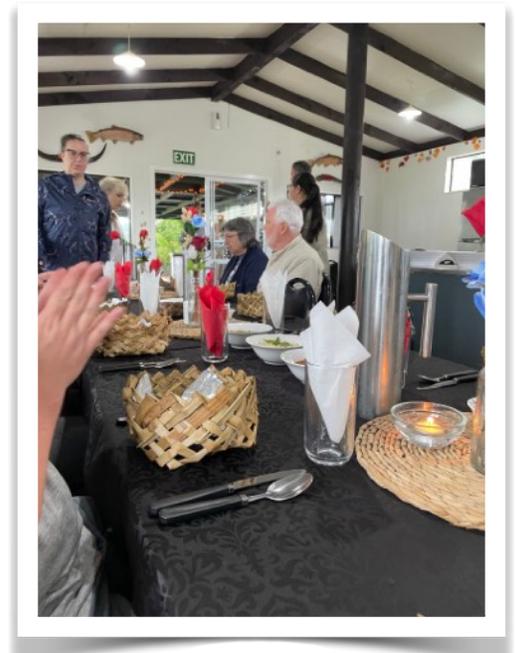


super interesting, as a person in addition to the things she had to teach us. like how to use a poi correctly, best local herbs for particular ailments, and all about the haka, which man, what a tradition to uphold. seriously. this is their religious ceremony that they share with others, but not religious in a church way. there are hakas for everything, from the birth of a baby to celebrating your period, to warning warriors to praising chickens. some are island-famous, many are just passed down locally from generation to generation. it's a beautiful form of poetry, really, with strong emotion and physical demonstration attached. and ina, gosh she is funny. she was completely surprised that one of our group, peggy, is a therapist and wanted to hear all about therapy. i didn't realize that nz's teen suicide rate is the third highest in the

world. ina explained the continuing presence of a 'tough' ideal among māoris; just ignore harmful feelings and push them down under the covers. which, damn, i understand. but there's also a huge meth problem (this is all according to ina) and it's gotten obvious that the current way of handling things could be a lot better. marxe stayed up late talking to ina, after dinner, i crashed.

anyway, ina and taz's haka touched me big time. if you haven't ever seen haka, go to this [link](#). they all believe so strongly in what they're saying and doing. it's amazing to watch.

really neat to learn about their culture in this manner, but i was thinking about impossible standards, and when do they cross the line of selling out by appealing to people just like me. and ina understood that was at the base of my question and her answer is this (paraphrasing): i believe in what i'm selling. i want to promote my people. that it has to be a monetary relationship is unfortunate, but also naive to think it could be any other way so why not make the most of it. still, taz's last monologue, about the importance of the lodge and its owners to the community, was donor pitch ABC. and yeah, if they don't sing their own praises who will? they are finally benefitting from a system that's exploited them for so long. nothing wrong with that. but it still feels a little icky. not just art and culture — it's their living and so it's the same way i feel about being a commercially viable artist and having to please your audience instead of your creative vision. is there compromise? of course. and these thoughts help keep things real for me. it was a super day. the poi, weapons, being in the rainforest and seeing everything there. i felt so happy, plain and simple. very in tune with the natural world and my own rhythms instead of the real world that everyone else is dealing with.

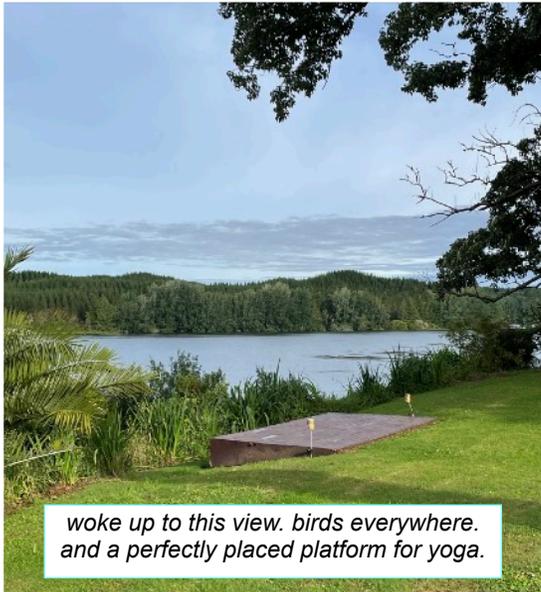




four layers of meat and eel here.

oh, forgot to tell you about the traditional pit bbq they prepped. so first they heat the stones (selected from the surrounding river specifically because they keep the heat well) for a few hours. and there's a pit that's already dug, so they lay down the stones and then layer meat in cages above the stone and then they cover that with a wet thin material and then cover that with huge tarp and heavy canvas material and then that with stones around the edges so heat can't escape and that with about 40-50 big shovelfuls of dirt. then the meat cooks for 3 hours and they take everything off and dinner is served.

5 dec, tuesday



woke up to this view. birds everywhere. and a perfectly placed platform for yoga.

our eeling activity was cancelled due to a death on the river last week. the tribe and all neighboring tribes halt activity on the river for two weeks, to honor the soul of the new ancestor.

before leaving town, taz took us to a spot in the woods of Kaingaroa with the oldest rock carvings found in nz. just a pull-off on the road. no marker. need to be a local to find it.



maori carvings from 950AD show a canoe, eels, and mountains in the distance

then we headed northwest toward Rotarua. stopped at the Wai-o tapu 'thermal wonderland' to see this

corny geyser that they ensure erupts at 10:15 every morning. by pouring a chemical compound in. just like the science fair volcano, it blew on demand (and unannounced every 38 or so hours). then we walked around steaming holes of hot and crude oil springs. a few kilometers

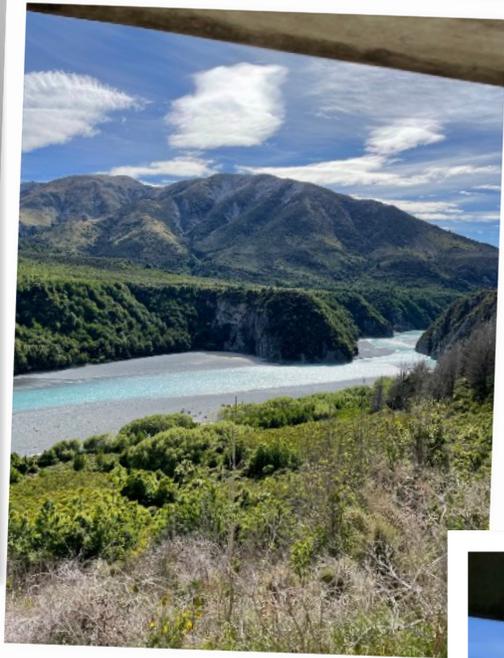


away, we actually got to enjoy the geothermal pools for a couple of hours before hopping on a flight to christchurch on the south island. didn't see much of the city, but it was a city. and after that rain forest, sirens and large thumps of trash bins took a little adjusting to. marxe and i found a thai restaurant down the street. not bad. and a yoga mat in the room. 😊

me in the super hot Springs. felt goood.

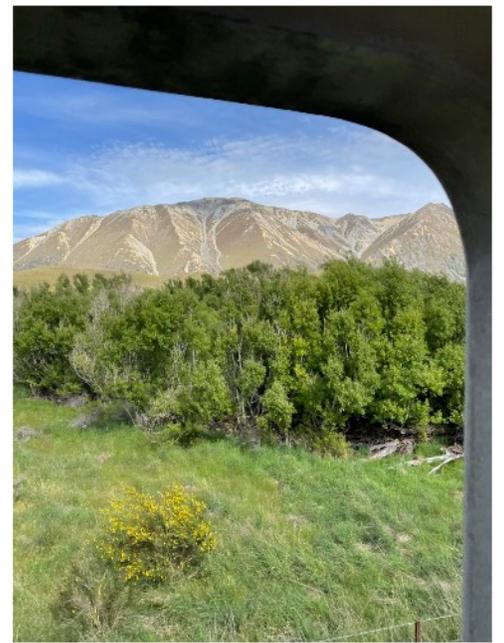
6 dec, wednesday

pictures from the four-hour tranz-alpine (southern alps) train can't really begin to give you an idea of this place. marxe took videos, and that's closer, but still. it was like going through different scenes in a film about paradise. colors of the mountains and trees darkened from bright green in the east to a mature pine in the west. so so amazing. got my first taste of a much more quiet māori culture on the south island — the train wasn't bilingual. from this point on, we rarely heard kia ora.



disembarked at a small tourist trap-ish town called greymouth, and took the coastal road south, past fox glacier (shrouded in clouds and rain).

got into tonight's wilderness lodge on lake moeraki with some time to hang before a nice dinner.





7 dec, thursday

a young couple on work visas (biologist and ecologist) took marxe and me on a rain forest hike. highlight: these eels climb out of the river for food (watch marxe's video of it here <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/PPZ9CtD-9bE>). one of many times we've heard about the importance of eels to both māori and white culture here.

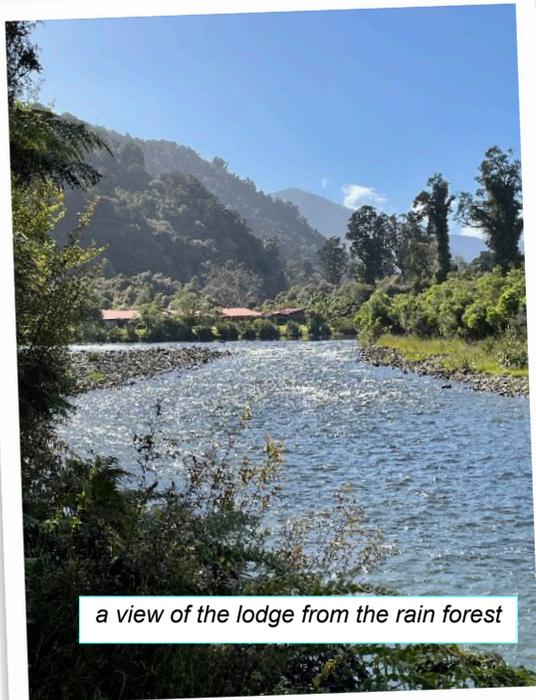
after an hour, we stopped for tea and biscuits — a staple on the south island. our guides on the south island always carried tea and biscuits in their backpacks. eventually we got to some hidden (single) kayaks, which we rowed down the river to the tasman sea. found rough jade rocks on the shore. our guides lit a small fire so we could roast marshmallows. cool birds. sun was out (yay) but so were the sand flies, and they hurt.

after rowing and hiking back, we took it easy for the rest of the day, reading and catching up on stuff. later on, marxe went to check out some more glow worms. he had been waiting to talk to the lodge's owner, a research biologist who founded this place to help educate and save local ecosystems. he's an older man who seemed pretty busy. everyone had only the best things to say about him, but alas, he didn't know anything about bats, which

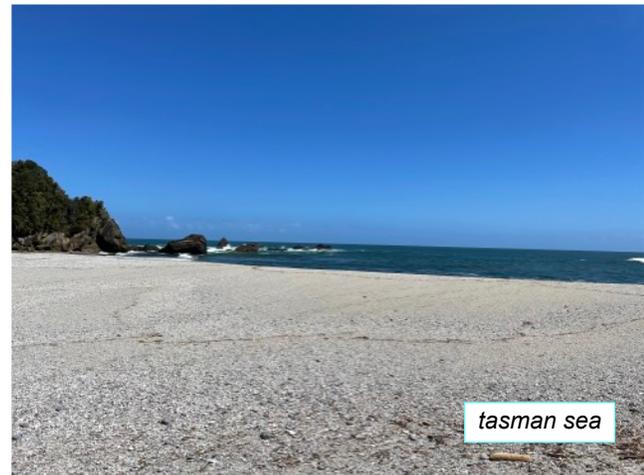
happened over and over again. we couldn't find anyone up on bats in nz.

thinking about māori art and how my work echoes it. because of first seeing it 30 years ago or did i develop it independently?

doesn't matter really, but i am definitely influenced by the same things that influenced the ancient māori.



a view of the lodge from the rain forest



tasman sea



fantail falls



8 dec, friday

one week down. whew. fit so much into so little time. my IT band feels it though, and the pain's starting to spread to my knee a little. blah. i know it's being worked way more than it's used to, can't stop, so i baby it as much as possible, rub in the diclofenac, and massage it at night.

we drove into the mountains, east from the sea. not much traffic on these mountain passes, always two-lane roads, but every couple kilometers or so, a one-lane bridge pops up and we have to wait, often to the last minute, slowing to a stop, to see if there's already someone else coming this direction on the bridge. nz's way of controlling traffic, consciously or not.

stopped at a couple waterfalls. visitors to fantail falls leave stacks of rocks. big and small flat rocks here are perfect for towers. of course we left our own.

arrived at lake wanaka in time to catch our afternoon activity, visiting mou waho island (which has a lake itself) and is inside lake wanaka. ate my bagged lunch off the back of the boat.

austin serves as tour guide for this, south carolina expat with a really weird accent, 100 percent hippy without the drugs, describing all the birds and plants indigenous to the island. on our hike up (all around nz (even the jungle)) we saw rat/stoat/possum

traps. europeans brought those pests in the late 1700s, and kiwi and other birds never evolved to fly because they had no ground predators. easy prey. so these traps are helping the bird population recover.



weka birds, rare, on the island. also saw wood pigeon (huge) and canu



view from half-way up

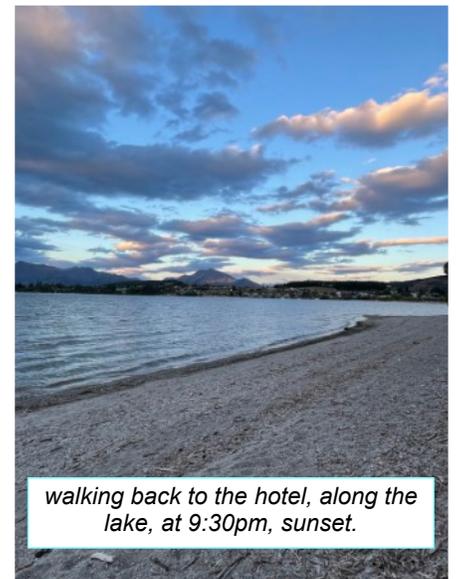
after hiking up and back down, marxe helped plant a small tree (austin has planted more than 300 trees during his time in nz). loved the splashy back-of-the-boat across lake wanaka and then piled into the van and went a couple kms

around the lake to our fancy schmancy lodge, which was really kinda a glorified motel. marxe and i walked into town to check out the food trucks instead of eating with everyone else at the hotel, and had some yummy kimchi fried rice and korean buns from a food truck, stopped at a meh bar for a drink, and then we walked back through the rocks lining the lake (knee not happy). bunch of people lined up to photograph the famous tree in the lake at sunset. didn't think of it as such a big deal, but we were obviously in the minority.



at the top of mou waho, 470 meters. this is the island's lake below and then lake wanaka beyond

back in the room, we turned on the tv for the first time — landed on a nz woodworker competition reality show, *good with wood*. the best woodworker, a man much older than everyone else, had on my dad's tool suspenders. he won. also watched a documentary about mako, māori traditional tattoos. i learned about the importance of the chin tattoo for women, once again honoring ancestors and tribal affiliation.



walking back to the hotel, along the lake, at 9:30pm, sunset.

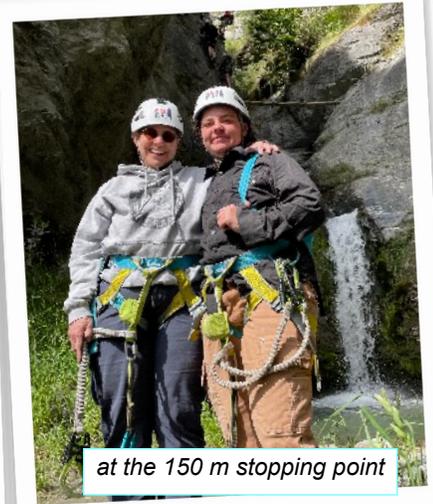
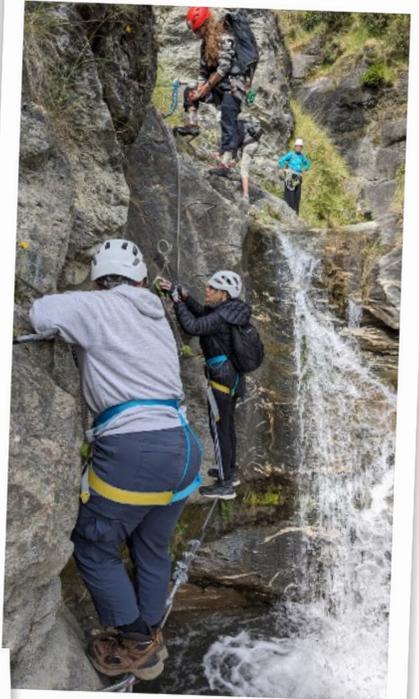


marxe took a picture of people taking pictures of the tree in the lake

9 dec, saturday

plan-your-own day. marxe and i chose rock climbing! super fun. signed up for level one since we had never done it before, but once we finished that, marxe decided to continue on to level two. i really wanted to continue but did adulting and gave my knee a break. super annoying american woman in our group, but she stopped when i did, so marxe got to climb unimpeded. i wouldn't say it was hard, but it definitely took all my focus and strength at times. and crossing the single 1" x 4" plank across a 500 meter canyon, my legs did jelly some.

at basecamp, we watched dogs drive cattle into a different pasture. cool. independently, marxe and i both saw a falcon. awesome.



at the 150 m stopping point



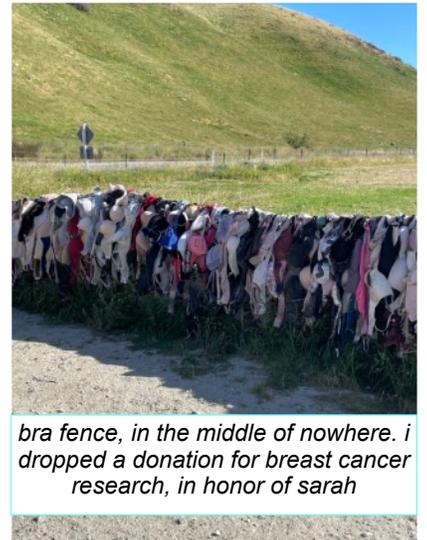
marxe at the top of level two, 320 m

later, lee dropped us off in town: i got a massage, marxe had an unexpected sauna (he loved). after, we went to a busy chinese restaurant for some seaweed and egg soup, eggplant in garlic sauce, and marxe tried the white bait fish that's an important delicacy here. around the corner, we got some ice cream and walked through the rain the 30 minutes back to our hotel. marxe said this was his favorite day of the trip. so far.

10 dec, sunday

up and beautiful day. bye wanaka. hour or so drive to arrowtown, old west type main street, established in the 1860s, reminds me of the setting in nz author eleanor catton's *illuminations*.

walked around the touristy shops (no luck finding original, affordable art) before meeting at an ebike place. rode 21 km on the arrow river bridge trail, past a breathtaking gorge, goats, alpacas, chickens, long suspension bridges, and the original bungee jumping bridge (urge there, but daddy's voice and my knee said no). our ride ended at a winery, where we started drinking immediately, well primed for the wine tasting. after, when we're all pretty drunk, they served lunch platters of olives, crackers, cheese, and fruit. yum.



bra fence, in the middle of nowhere. i dropped a donation for breast cancer research, in honor of sarah



poppy!



winetasting before lunch



our final ecolodge, in glenorchy (on the other side of lake Wakatipu from queenstown), is the most eco place i've ever stayed. they used building materials recycled from ruins of the 2011 christchurch earthquake, composting toilets (no flush), ecology-minded upcycled art all over, natural lighting in every room (and timed lighting for dark hours), glacier water, and my very not-favorite: timed seven-minute showers, with variable temperature water.

dinner from the open kitchen was really good. home made pumpkin ravioli and cauliflower steak and good veggies. they had a laundry room, but the guy who moved my stuff out of the dryer took two socks, ruining two pairs (needed those). the lodge replaced them with merino wool socks, much better than the lost ones.

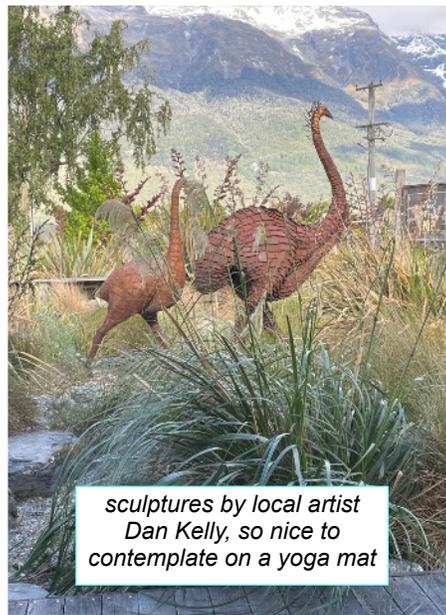
11 dec, monday

yoga class, finally, in the beautiful meeting / conference room, looking out at mountains, birds, and cool art.

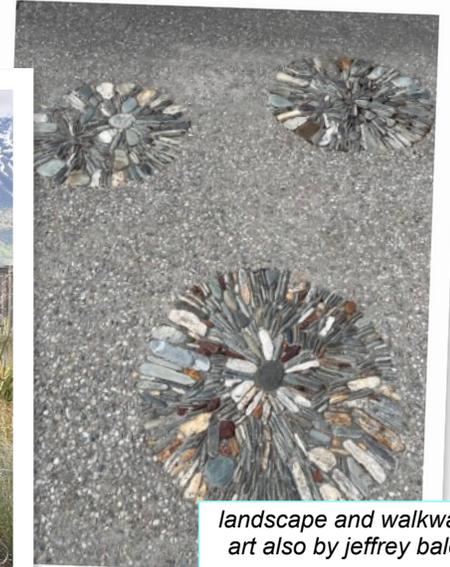
so today we had another new adventure: helicopter ride! took us about 20 minutes into the mountains, and let us off at a ridge, where we then hiked 90 minutes up / down / around rough bush to the bottom of a glacier.



inner wall made entirely of driftwood and a mosaic by jeffrey bale



sculptures by local artist Dan Kelly, so nice to contemplate on a yoga mat



landscape and walkway art also by jeffrey bale



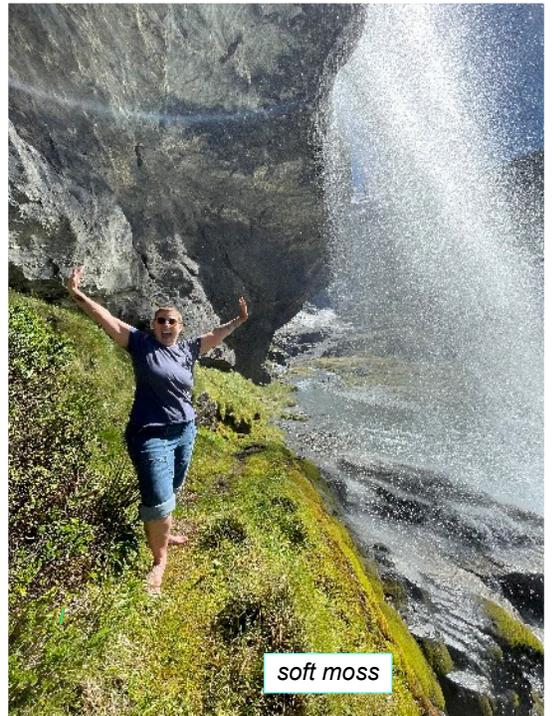
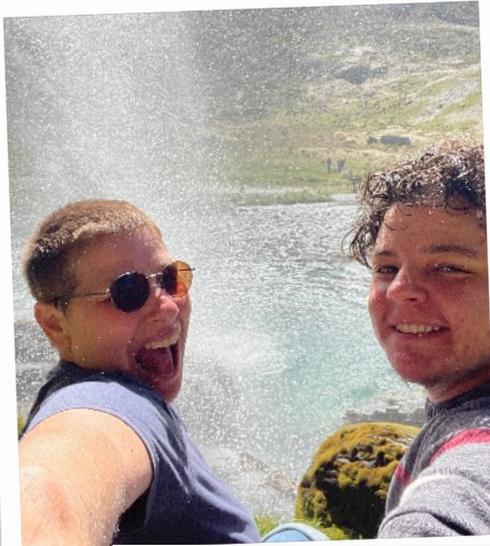
i got to sit in front!



the spiky spanish grass made me happy i was wearing those thick jeans. and i layered well too: started with a jacket, which came off during the hike, and my hoodie, which came off at the waterfall.

indescribably beautiful, used as middle earth in *lord of the rings* movies by peter jackson (who lives close by).

water in the river dropped directly from the glacier — the coldest friggin water my feet have ever touched. even though we were probably in the river less than a minute, it took a good ten minutes in the sun for feeling to return in my feet. we braved the freeze to sit behind a waterfall shown in the movie.



soft moss



letting my jeans dry off after the waterfall.



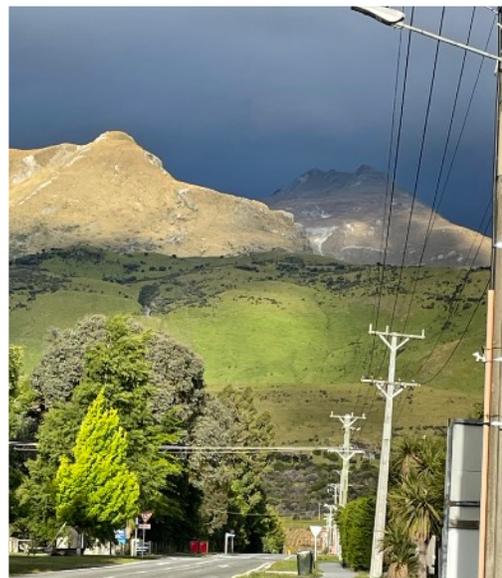
before the helicopter ride back (and close fly-by to higher parts of the glacier), we had champagne and cheese and crackers. amazing. incredible. and any other exemplary adjective you can think of.

back in glenorchy, lunch (a scone for me) at the general store, and then to our second adventure of the day, jet boats down the dart river. sounds like a good idea, until your captain beaches the boat and it takes two more jet boats, an inflatable raft, and an hour to get moving again. it was cold!!! and windy!!!! waiting on the rocks in the middle of the river for everyone to be rescued.



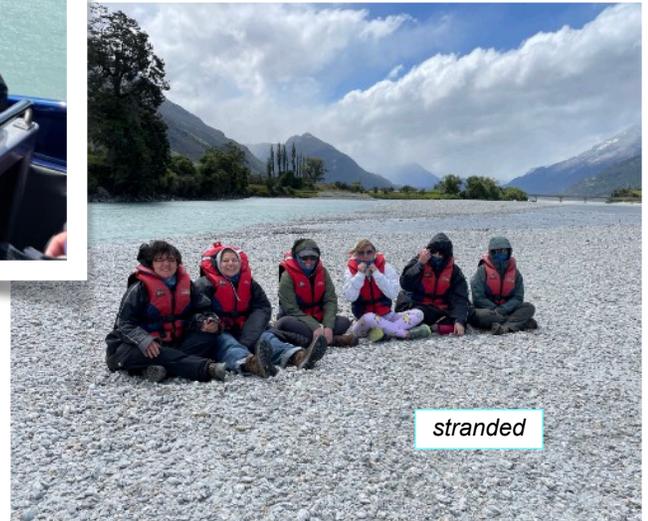
did get to see a pukeke (the bird made infamous recently by john oliver) on the way back to shore though.

area we beached



really wanted a long hot shower on our return to the lodge, but no. seven minute limit.

our dinner at the pub a ten-minute walk away was unremarkable except for the server giving me straight aperol without the spritz. but we did have a gorgeous view on the walk back.



stranded



12 dec, tuesday

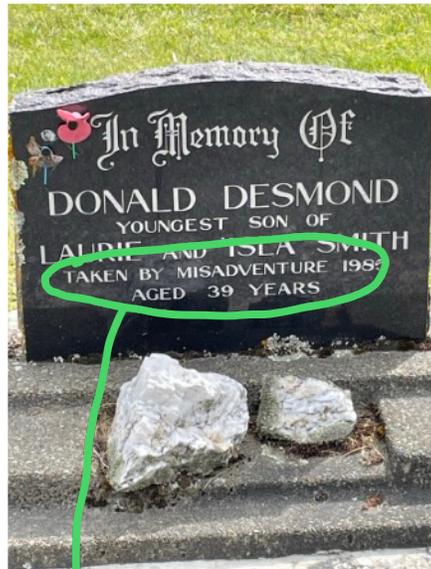
another yoga morning, and another free day. marxe and i took the 45 minute ride into queenstown and walked around looking for art. visited a couple of galleries with some interesting feather art, but nothing that blew me away. at the botanical gardens, we watched squab ducklings learning to dive for food and a paradise duck family hanging out. finally had the basic sushi offered everywhere we looked: scallop, tuna, and salmon. also ate yummy cookies at the 'cookie time' store.

we finally found someone with little info about bats — a woman at the department of conservation who had volunteered on a bat survey. she had found seven bats, but marxe pointed out that she had seven recordings of bats, not necessarily seven different bats.

when we returned to glenorchy, i walked around. found a tiny cemetery. small and simple.



paradise duck family



hmmm!



neat how they added a plaques to an unadorned river rock

13 dec, wednesday

packed up one last time and drove to this small farm where we were supposed to see sheep shearing, but they didn't do that anymore. everyone went to pet the farm animals, but i just hung out in the warmth.

then we stopped at an 'artisan village,' which really only included one artisan, but an interesting exhibit about bees and honey. and then it was off to the queenstown airport. we said goodbye to lee and the other people of our group.

got into auckland and ended up at this pretty bad hotel near the airport. sticky floor. marxe and i decided to only wear his shower sandals when not in the beds.

we walked a couple of kilometers to a pub for dinner (meh). buoyed by a rainbow on the walk back.



14 dec, thursday

left the skanky hotel without touching our feet to the floor and took an uber to a store run out of a 75-year-old māori woman's home (marie), filled with carvings and tchotchkes from local artists. marie and i had a really nice discussion about tradition, carving, symbolism, and chin tattoos. she felt that māoris pay too much attention to the past, but was adamant about women not getting a chin tattoo unless they walk the walk (no drinking or smoking). i really liked her.

uber back to the hotel to get our luggage and then to the airport. shorter flight home cause of huge tailwinds (95 mph for a while).



the bone carving i bought from marie.

27 dec, wednesday

a couple weeks later, and my knee is pretty well recovered from its overuse. i would do it all again in a heartbeat. a really wonderful vacation, with my favorite son.

thanks to marxe for the use of some pictures

