



The Poly Rambler

Members' Newsletter of the Polytechnic Rambling Club

www.polyramblers.org.uk

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Mary King



View from the Mourne Way

Chair's message

The last few months have been challenging for everyone as we had to adjust to the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic. This will have been stressful for many of us living on our own at a time when direct contact with others was limited. The quiz and social evening have been really beneficial. Thanks to Gillian and Susan for organising these events.

Material for this edition collated by the committee.
Production by Kim Chowns

Chair's message continued

The committee have been vigilant, following the guidelines for walking issued by the Ramblers Association, ensuring that we keep within the prescribed numbers for our rambles with risk assessments for some walks where attendance is higher. The risk assessment has been usefully trialled by Susan James on a recent walk and worked well.

Our Leaders and Walkers guides have now been completed thanks to a dedicated sub group of committee members who took on this task. They are a credit to our club. In addition to our leaders and walkers guides I would reiterate the need to ensure that all Poly Ramblers carry emergency contact details that are readily accessible on walks and trips.

Our walk programme is now established in its new temporary format. A special thank you to Gillian for devising the timetable of walks ensuring that we all have a chance to participate in at least some of the rambles. We have had a positive response to requests for walk leaders especially important with reduced numbers per leader. We have had some new leaders adding to the variety of our walks. I have been really impressed by the enthusiasm of walkers to participate on our weekly rambles.

Our walking trip to Newcastle in Northern Ireland took place over the August bank holiday weekend. Twenty Poly Ramblers attended. The weekend was efficiently organised by Jackie McCartan who led the hiker's group and Danny leading the strollers. The Mourne mountains were truly breath-taking, we would hope that a trip to Northern Ireland will be on the programme again in the future. A few of us also visited Belfast and this also proved really enjoyable. To conclude the Poly Ramblers has continued to thrive thanks to all the hard work from club members and I am confident that this will continue and am looking forward now to our Autumn walk programme.

Take Care

Hilary

The Polytechnic Rambling Club

(in association with the
University of Westminster)
Founded 1885

Affiliated to the Ramblers'
Association (Inner London Area)
Affiliated to HF Holidays

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

Honorary members

Christine Bignold
Peter Bonfield
Shirley Hafey
Rosemary MacLoughlin

GENERAL COMMITTEE

CLUB OFFICERS

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Hilary Abbey

General Secretary

Gillian Swan

Treasurer

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Mike Coyle
Susan James
Dominique Le Marchand
Jennifer MacKenzie
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<http://tinyurl.com/qclyyf>

* Articles for inclusion in the
newsletter are welcome from all
members. They should be walk
related, but do not necessarily
have to be about a club walk,
e.g. walking holiday or past
memories of events and walks.

Hilary and Clive's (Lonely Planet) trip to the North Island New Zealand

Our trip to New Zealand came about because Clive's AJS and Matchless motor cycle club linked up with the club in New Zealand. We went on a two-week pre rally tour of the South Island with some Aussie's and Kiwi's, culminating in attending the Bert Munroe Challenge at Invercargill the Southern most and possibly the windiest part of New Zealand. We returned back for a rally in Nelson before flying to Auckland to start on our second and more sedentary part of the holiday.

Clive and I had previously visited New Zealand but had not had time to visit the Northland, I planned our route using the Lonely Planet Guide, it was advertised as the world's best guide to New Zealand and didn't disappoint.

We hired a car from Auckland and started our first part of the trip to Russell a small but very touristy starting point for a visit to the Bay of Islands, one of New Zealand's top tourist hot spots. It has around 150 underdeveloped islands and a place of enormous historical significance. It should have taken us about four hours to drive to Russell but unfortunately the only main road had been blocked by a tanker accident and we ended up attempting gravel [unmade} roads in our newly hired car. We eventually arrived at our accommodation at 9pm and were lucky enough to get a take away meal from the only restaurant left open.

The next day we went on a boat trip around the Bay of Islands and were lucky to finish the trip in the midst of a large pod of Dolphins, an amazing sight and worth all the sea sickness tablets I needed to take. Other sightseeing highlights of the area included the Waitangi Treaty grounds and House with its fascinating history of the British emigration to New Zealand. One of our other highlights was the Hundertwasser Toilets!



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Hilary and Clive's (Lonely Planet) trip to the North Island New Zealand (continued)

Our next stop over was the town of Kaitia the gateway to the Kerikeri peninsular and the ninety-mile beach leading to cape Reinga and the North Cape, the northern most tip of New Zealand. The peninsula bends into a near perfect right angle resulting in beaches facing north, south, east and west in close proximity. The highlight for us were the Giant Te Pahi sand dunes where sand boarding is a popular activity. The Cape Reinga lighthouse stands at the tip of the peninsula and is a spiritual area for the Maori people, the waters of the Tasman Sea and Pacific Ocean meet here, Kauri forests covered this area for over 50,000 years; leaving ancient logs and much prized gum (used for making varnish and linoleum). Gum digging was the regions' main industry from the 1870's to the 1920's.

We returned back to Auckland along the Kauri coast to marvel at the Kauri forests one of the great natural highlights of New Zealand. This is a very underdeveloped part of New Zealand with few restaurants, cafes or accommodation options. There was noticeable poverty with the main industry being sheep farming or some crop growing such as sweet potatoes.

We visited the Waipoua Kauri Forest the highlight of the Northlands west coast, a Kauri tree can reach 60 meters in height and have a trunk five meters in diameter. Sadly, there are few Kauri trees left because of extensive logging. They have more recently been infested with a fungus which may result in them dying out, every effort is being made to stop this happening. Near the north end of the forest stands the mighty Tane Mahuta named for the Maori forest god, at 51 meters with a 13.8-meter girth and wood mass of 244.5 cubic meters he's the largest Kauri alive. We were lucky enough to meet a Maori guide who sang in Maori for us and told us the history of the forest.

We stopped for the night at Dargaville a town which epitomised the poverty of this part of New Zealand, before visiting the superb Kauri museum with photos, artefacts, fabulous furniture and wonderful collection of Kauri gum before returning to Auckland to start the long haul back to the UK.



Hilary

THE MOURNES – STROLLER WALKS (August bank holiday)

DONARD FOREST & SILENT VALLEY – 29 AUGUST

Danny led 5 strollers on a walk in Donard Forest to Donard Bridge which sits astride the Glen River. They then went to a view point with a spectacular panorama over the surrounding coastal plain. They crossed Glen River Bridge but turned back before reaching the old railway line which brought granite from the quarry to the harbour. They passed a stone grotto and went back to Newcastle for the obligatory refreshments. In the afternoon, they went on the Mourne Rambler bus for a circular ride through the mountains. They got off at the Silent Valley Reservoir and followed a marked trail before getting the bus back.

Dominique Le Marchand

TOLLYMORE FOREST PARK – 30 AUGUST

The Strollers group was joined by Dominique, Geoffrey and Lorna and we set off in warm sunshine uphill. Tollymore Forest Park is very varied. We walked through broad-leaved forest, mountain moorland and then descended into a deep dark valley where the Shimna river crashed through bridges and waterfalls. We took a lunch break in this atmospheric valley with its extremely tall pine trees and the ground carpeted by moss and ferns. Floods had broken bridges and swept away one of the famous stepping stones. It was a location for a Game of Thrones scene. Heading back to Newcastle, Danny, Sandy and Geoffrey invited the group for tea followed by a glass of wine in their rented house. A cheerful end to the walk and an opportunity to say thank you to Danny for organising the walks for the strollers.



Patricia Burbidge

DOWNPATRICK & MURLOUGH DUNE RESERVE – 31 AUGUST

We eight strollers started the day with a shuffle along a shingly seashore, before we were able to escape the beach after a mile or so through a gate into the Murlough Dunes National Nature Reserve owned by the National Trust. We didn't walk through any sand dunes as they had been knitted together with grass over 6,000 years to form solid hills, but followed a sturdy boardwalk and undulating path to leave the reserve to walk along a quiet lane following the south side of the Inner Bay an inlet of the sea, crossing a causeway to Dundrum. This would have been a quiet village, were it not for the noisy traffic of the A2 passing through it. Here we had refreshments outside the Mourne Seafood Bar a pub with a supermarket next door, before catching the bus to Downpatrick. Downpatrick is the bustling county town of County Down. It has many attractive buildings, including the old prison, courthouse and judges' lodgings which we passed before arriving at St Patrick's (Church of Ireland) cathedral built on a hilltop. We inspected the cathedral before going outside to inspect the grave of St Patrick, where he is apparently buried along with St Brigid and St Callum. (St Patrick is also buried in several other places in Ireland) We finished the day with a walk downhill and uphill to take tea and biscuits with Marilyn Danny's cousin in her lovely garden where we had a bit of a chat. Afterwards, we were escorted by Jim Marilyn's husband back to the bus station and back to Newcastle, where most of us had time to change before a gathering of Poly Ramblers on the Central Promenade.



Peter Tarl

(Editor - Hikers article will appear in the next issue)

My trip of a lifetime to New Zealand – February 2020

A trip to New Zealand was always going to be very special for me. I had been dreaming of visiting the country for at least 10 years. My imagination had been fired by pictures of its spectacular scenery and extraordinary wildlife and in particular I wanted to go there to hike. My precarious life as a self employed HR Consultant however meant I had never had the time or money to fulfill my dream. However, this became possible when in 2018 I gave up full time employment and sadly my mother's passing provided me with the finance to fund the trip.

The first thing that hits you about New Zealand when you are travelling there is just how far away it is. It is literally the other side of the world and with an hour's stop over in Singapore, it was a 26 hour flight to the country's largest city, Auckland. Stepping out of the plane, I was reminded that I was arriving at the height of their summer and immediately stripped off the winter layers I had worn to Heathrow airport.



I had booked myself into a city center hotel for the first four nights, to recover from the jet lag and have time to explore Auckland. Auckland, like most of the North Island is built on numerous volcanic cones, now thankfully extinct. It has a beautiful waterfront where the Americas Cup will be staged in 2021 and is surrounded by the most picture perfect beaches, bays and islands. I had a day trip to Waiheke where I joined a tour of the island's vineyards which included lunch and wine tasting. I had the opportunity to take a trip out to the suburbs to visit friends of a Kiwi friend in London. There I became aware of how far the city extends, although with a population a fraction of London's. This is because most New Zealanders live in what we would call bungalows; small detached pretty weather boarded houses standing on a sizeable plot of land. This is a legacy of how the land was settled by the early European dwellers.

After being joined by 16 fellow hikers from HF holidays , we piled into two minivans with two Kiwi guides and headed out of Auckland in a southerly direction. This was the start of a trip that would see us drive hundreds of miles down through the North and South Islands as far as Queenstown, staying at wonderful hotels, having fantastic meals (not forgetting the superb wines) and stopping to do the most amazing walks. Walks varied in length and difficulty, from short strolls of 5 miles if we'd had a full day's driving to longer trails of 13 miles and steep climbs, though there was always the option of a shorter or longer walk. Our guides were amazingly multi talented able to produce incredibly appetizing lunches, navigate vertiginous roads, and tell us everything there was to know about New Zealand's unique flora, fauna, and geology. New Zealand not only has spectacular scenery, it is incredibly well looked after by the efficient Department of Conservation from the provision of spotlessly clean public toilets including on the top of high mountains to ruthlessly eliminating animals and plants that destroy indigenous habitats.



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New Zealand trip continued

Our first stop after Auckland was Rotorua, famous for its geothermal bubbling mud pools and steaming geysers. It is also a centre of Maori culture with a living Maori village which we visited and were treated to a superb show of ceremony and ritual and a magnificent as much as you could eat feast. Maori culture is a very important part of present day New Zealand national identity and all children in school are now required to learn the Maori language. Place names on signposts are displayed, particularly in the North Island, in both the English and Maori language.

Just south of Rotorua, and the impressive Lake Taupo formed in the crater of a collapsed super volcano, is Mount Tongariro, the location of a number of dormant volcanoes (the last one erupted in 2014) and the world renowned walking trail, the Tongariro Crossing. However challenging the walking was going to be, I knew that I had to do it, as did all but one member of our walking group. I was not disappointed, it was definitely one of my trip highlights. The walk is 20 km and climbs 900 meters with the most challenging part a steep hazardous loose scree slope at the top of the downward section of the trail. The reward though for getting to the top were the fantastic views over turquoise pools, a martian like landscape with steaming vents and the ever so blue Lake Taupo in the distance.



From Tongariro we drove further south through alpine forests and rolling green hill country to the capital city of Wellington. What a delightful city this is - compact with a population of 400k, a lovely harbour front, beautiful botanical gardens, a victorian cable car, and an excellent national museum which houses the Treaty of

Waitangi, the peace treaty between the British colonial masters and chiefs of numerous Maori tribes, which is still being contested to this very day. As well as the seat of government, Wellington is the culinary capital of New Zealand and Cuba Street is the hub for numerous fabulous restaurants.



The day we arrived was warm and sunny. The next day I understood why Wellington is known as the 'windy city', as walking along the harbour front was not as balmy and comfortable as it had been the day before.

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New Zealand trip continued

From Wellington we said our goodbyes to our North Island guides and flew to the South Island to the town of Nelson where we met our two South Island guides. Nelson is a charming town, with a bustling port, pretty heritage houses, art galleries and crafts stores. On the edge of the Marlborough sound wine growing area which we flew over but did not visit, Nelson was our base for exploring the Abel Tasman national park. We walked a section of the Abel Tasman coastal track which is one of the great walks of New Zealand, with lush forests, golden sandy beaches and blue green sea. The warmth and sunshine made a swim in the sea a fitting way to end the day's hike.



Driving south from Nelson, we started to appreciate how mountainous the South Island is as we criss crossed the 'southern alps', between the west and east coasts, and skirted the vast Canterbury Plains famous for their large herds of dairy cattle and sheep. Agriculture is still central to the New Zealand economy though there are not as many sheep as there used to be.

As we approached the Mount Cook national park we saw the first of a number of glacier fed lakes and marvelled at their unbelievable turquoise colour created by a 'flour' of very fine rock particles brought down by glacial fed rivers. They are truly a

wonder of the world, and combined with a brilliant blue sky, took my breath away.

Mount Cook is the highest mountain in New Zealand and even though this was summertime, its peaks were still covered in snow. Although the Australian bush fire smoke was no longer in evidence, its effects were still present in the peachy colour of the snow. There was lots of good walking in this area, some of it very challenging and steep. I chickened out of a walk that involved a vertical climb of more than 2000 steps, instead opting for a gentler walk and boat trip to take a closer look at the Tasman Glacier.



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New Zealand trip continued

Our next stop was the lakeside town of Wanaka, which we used as our base for exploring the Mount Aspiring National Park; more snow covered mountains, where we were treated to an unforgettable helicopter ride over icy peaks and, after landing in the remote Siberia valley and a riverside walk, a hair raising ride back in a jet boat.

Queenstown was our final destination but the holiday wasn't over yet as there was lots to explore in this area. Queenstown used to have a reputation for being an alternative life style hippy town but it is now a fast growing tourist hot spot, popular with those seeking the thrill of adventure sports. Queenstown was our jumping off point for exploring New Zealand's fiordland, including a boat trip on the Doubtful Sound and a punishing but rewarding hike on the Kepler track, another of the 'Great Walks'.



In Queenstown I bade farewell to my HF walking companions who flew back to the UK. I joined another walking group of 45 mixed nationalities to walk the world famous Milford Track for 4 days. We were led expertly and hosted in very comfortable chalets on the track by another New Zealand hiking company. We were incredibly lucky to be walking the trail at all, as only a week previously the trail was still closed following a devastating cyclone. This trail was for me the icing on the cake and readily deserves its reputation for being stunningly beautiful. The walk has both

easy flat sections and rocky steep sections and is 54 kms (33 miles) long. Unfortunately, we were unable to walk the last 7 miles of the track as it was still impassable and so had to be airlifted by helicopter (what a shame!) to our hotel on the Miford Sound. My abiding memories of the Milford Track are – the stillness and beauty of what was true wilderness, the birdlife which is nothing like our own, the dramatic snow capped mountains and the lush forest. At the end we were treated to a boat trip on the exquisite Milford Sound where we saw dolphins, seals and rare penguins. It was a fitting culmination to a wonderful trip.



I had hoped to make a stop over in Hong Kong on my journey back, but decided to cancel this because of the growth of the coronavirus there. We had been oblivious to news of the rapidly emerging pandemic in our New Zealand

hideaway, just thinking ourselves lucky to have upgraded hotel rooms and quieter tourist hot spots because of the sudden disappearance of Chinese tourists. How the world has changed since then, and how lucky was I to have completed my trip of a lifetime before the pandemic really took a hold.

Mary King