



## Travel Stories by Amaru & Suzanne



### What the Fox?!?

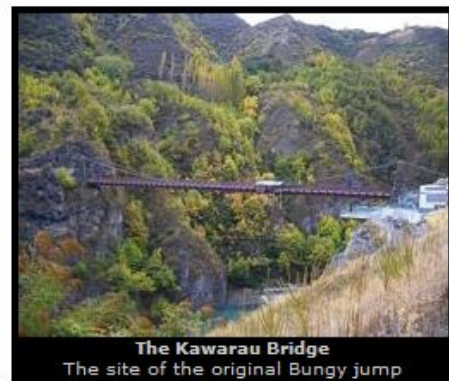
by Amaru & Suzanne, April 17th 2007

The time had come for us to leave Queenstown and make our way north to visit some glaciers!

Since this was to be the longest drive of our whole trip, we decided to start really early, that way we would have plenty of time to make a few stops and not have to rush. We got out of bed early and then it was time for me to have one of those days....

It started in the kitchen while I was preparing my oats for breakfast, making them in the microwave I missjudged the time and ended up with oats all over the place.....so I had to start all over again. Not long after this while driving out of Queenstown we stopped to re-fuel the car and I end up with petrol all over my jacket, what a start to the day (I found out later that this was friday the 13th....figures!!).

Our first stop along the way was the Kawarau Bridge, this is where a crazy Kiwi years ago for the first time threw himself off a ledge and at that time created the phenomenon now known as Bungy.



Standing on the bridge and looking down didn't look that bad, I guess it's because of the fact that just the day before I had thrown myself off 134m and this wasn't more than 45m or so. Still, when jumping off this bridge you actually get wet since your head is dipped in the water. Good thing I wasn't doing that today, it was freezing and snow was falling on the mountains.

We got back in our car and after a short while we pulled over in Wanaka to have a quick look at Puzzling World. This is a place filled with puzzles, mazes and illusions. First stop was the loo, and did we get a surprise here... Just outside the facilities you find an area that's called "Roman Toilets", quite funny and grosse at the same time. We didn't go inside the main museum (too expensive) so we just strolled around the ground, had a look at a few things here and there and finally played around a while at the leaning tower where we had some silly photos taken.

Along our drive we also had a short break along Haast Pass where we hiked up to a viewpoint. The sign at the beginning said that it would take 30min to reach the viewpoint, but it didn't mention it being straight up a mountain. It was quite strenuous to reach the top but the views were well worth the effort!

After 7 long hours on the road we finally reached the village of Franz Josef and since we still had a few hours of sunlight left we decided to have a look at the glacier. We started strolling towards the glacier and at first it might look like it's just going to take 5-10 min to reach it. 30 min later and we were still not close to the beginning of it.

Just when we thought we were around the corner from it, we reached the roped off section that was telling us that it was too dangerous to walk any further. Normally I would have pushed on and walked all the way to it, but since we were going to walk on Fox Glacier the very next day we just admired the Franz Josef Glacier from a close distance and headed back towards our car.



The leaning tower of Wanaka



On my way to the top  
Quite a steep walk

Early the next morning we drove the 20km between Franz Josef and Fox Glacier Village (and all of those 20km through some very windy roads), then we checked in and got fitted with boots, socks and crampons to use whilst on the ice. Rain jackets weren't necessary since the weather on this day was perfectly clear and sunny, we couldn't have asked for better conditions to trek the Fox glacier.

We all left together in a bus that took us to the car park at the glacier, pretty much the same story as with the Franz Josef (the only difference is that it takes longer to get on the glacier at Franz Josef). From here we started our hike through the rainforest and up the mountain.

Along the way our guide pointed out some facts to us, such as where the glacier reached a 100 years ago and also explained how a glacier can advance and retreat. We loved it when he was comparing it to a bank account, insert more money on top and it will advance on the bottom, take money from the bottom and it will retreat (we know the retreating part very well I might add).

Anyway, after climbing across a mountain and a half we reached the glacier and had to strap our crampons to our boots so that we had some grip on the ice, we also had to tuck our socks in to the bottom of our pants.....very sexy!

The walk on the glacier was awesome, we got to walk across a few crevasses, saw some blue ice and also found some glacier flour. This is what you see on top of the glaciers, what looks like dirt is actually some very finely grounded rock, rocks get stuck when the ice passes and is crushed. What is left behind is supposed to be some really good mud for a facial (according to our guide).

So to try it out..... I smudged some of it on Suz's face (that's why she has black on her on some of the photos), and she did say that it did feel very nice.



Suz and I  
At Haast Pass



Haast Pass  
Gorgeous landscape!

Just trekking on a glacier is quite cool (no pun intended), but it was just perfect when the sun climbed over the mountains and lit up the glacier, all of a sudden it was very bright and we were quite happy that we had remembered to put on some sunlotion earlier that morning.

Back in the village again we had a quick lunch (gourmet pizza....yum) and then headed off towards Lake Matheson.

Lake Matheson must be one of New Zealands most photographed lake, on a clear day the reflections you see in the water of Mount Cook and Mount Tasman (the two highest mountains in NZ) are supposed to be "impossibly photogenic" to quote our guide book.

Earlier when we'd started the hike to the glacier, the skies were perfectly clear, unfortunately a few clouds had arrived and blocked our view (well, can't get it all). We still sat there for a while admiring the view and we did see a few glimpses of the mountains behind the clouds so it wasn't all bad.

The next morning we left Franz Josef and drove to Greymouth where we would spend our final night before returning to Christchurch.

Now, Greymouth doesn't have a lot to offer so we checked into our room, dropped our stuff and then drove 40km north to a place called "Punakaiki Pancake Rocks". Why are they called this? Well, I'll just leave you with the photos and then you can figure it out yourself. The rocks were actually quite impressive, and just a little weird that you find them just here at this place and not along the whole coast.

Back in Greymouth we went and did what everyone does when visiting this town, a tour of the Monteith's Brewery (which just happen to be my favorite NZ beer). The brewery is quite small but the tour was still good and it was fun to find out that they just have around 10 or so people working there so everyone has to know everything!



Franz Josef  
Glacier



The small village of  
Franz Josef

After the tour followed the obligatory tastings where we got to sample all of their beers, even Suz tried them (and found one that she liked).

At one point when I was up at the bar collecting a new sample the guide asked me if I wanted my photo taken behind the bar while pouring a beer...silly question. I told Suz and she snapped a quick photo of me (yes, I got to keep the beer as well). Not long after that the guide told everyone that we could now try and pour a beer each. Suz and I lined up as well and while we were waiting the guide came up and asked us what we were drinking and then got us a big glass each, special service indeed, everyone else was drinking from small glasses.

I'm not sure why we were given the "VIP treatment", but we didn't complain =)

Besides from the the brewery tour and the tasting we had one more event that was included with the admission price, BBQ dinner at the local pub with a free pint of Monteith's beer. We met quite a few fun people that evening and after chatting for a while realized that we were all around the same age. It was fun to sit and chat to some people that weren't 20 and are travelling for the first time.

The next morning we got back in the car for the last drive, we were now heading to Christchurch. From Greymouth there are two different roads that can take you to Christchurch. We chose to drive along Arthur's Pass.



On our way to Fox Glacier  
Looking down to where the ice used to be

There are three Tranz Scenic trains in New Zealand and we had already done two of them (Auckland to Wellington and Picton to Christchurch). The one that we were missing is the one that goes through Arthur's Pass from Greymouth to Christchurch, and this is supposedly the one that offers the best views. We figured that even if we weren't catching the train we could still drive through the area to see what all the fuss was about =)



Fox Glacier  
At the terminal face

We can imagine that taking this train during winter must be amazing with all the mountains surrounding you at all times, still it was beautiful to drive through it in autumn as well.

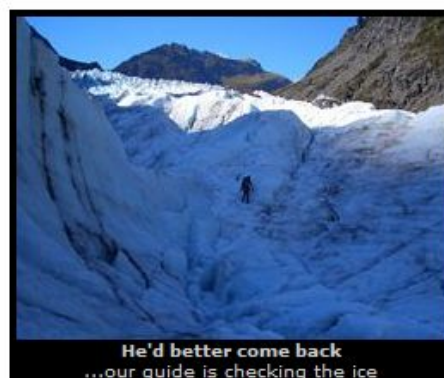
It's quite a challenging drive as well in some areas, the road twists and turns and takes you next to some high cliffs, not a good place to snooze off in. We made a few stops here and there to admire the view, stretch our legs and to pick up some coffee for me =)

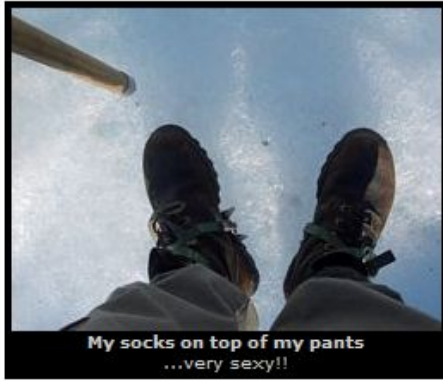
After a few hours drive we made it to Christchurch, we checked in to our hostel, dropped our bags and then went for a walk into town. Since we'd already been here we didn't feel that we needed to explore the city again and what it has to offer, so after a quick snack (we went for some Greek food...Yum!) we headed back to our hostel where we spent the

rest of the afternoon and evening just relaxing and packing. We've had a car for quite a few days and didn't have to worry too much about luggage, so when you need to pack everything away to go on a flight....

The next morning we returned our car, were dropped off at the airport and caught a plane back to Auckland.

We had a blast on our trip to the south and among our favorites were; Wellington, Milford Sound, Queenstown and the Glaciers. We didn't get to explore the whole South Island on this trip but we can always come back, and maybe in winter next time!





**My socks on top of my pants**  
...very sexy!!



**Suz and I**  
on Fox Glacier



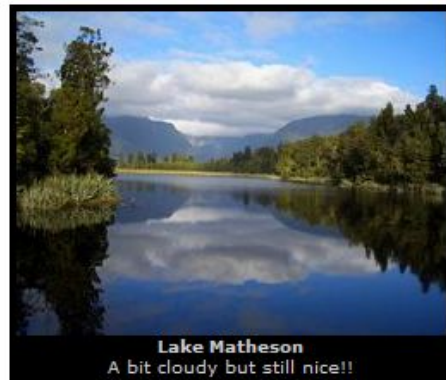
**Time to walk back, our time on the glacier has come to an end**



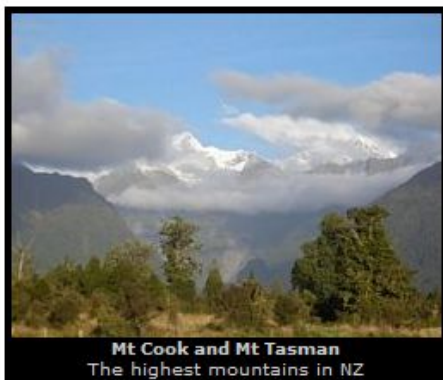
**Good thing we put some sunscreen on**  
The sun is very strong on the ice



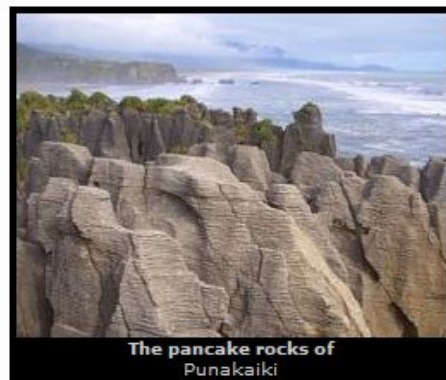
**A well deserved lunch**  
after our glacier walk



**Lake Matheson**  
A bit cloudy but still nice!!



**Mt Cook and Mt Tasman**  
The highest mountains in NZ



**The pancake rocks of**  
Punakaiki



**Suz looking out over  
the Pancake rocks**



**Monteith's Brewery  
Time for a tour of the brewery**



**That's a lot of beer  
Looks and smells very nice!**



**Pouring myself a  
Monteith's Black**



**Suz drinking a beer?!?  
Yup, she is!**



**Ehhh....well  
I like the funny looking pissoars =)**



**An impressive bridge  
Driving towards Arthur's Pass**



**Arthur's Pass  
On our way back to Christchurch**



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