

A MiGhty KIWI Road Trip



Nobody would have thought that after almost 2 solid weeks of wintery, windy, wet weather, Sunday 17th August 2014 would have turned out to be such a perfect cloudless day. Perfect for the Manawatu MG group to do a run involving snow fights and soaking in thermal pools, to make a journey which takes drivers and passengers alike on a circuit around the mountains of Ruapehu, Tongariro and Ngaruahoe. A small group of 6 cars left the Feilding railway station at 9.00am on a chilly cloudy morning albeit with the sun peeping through, promising us greater things.

The trip to Mangaweka over Vinegar Hill gave us glimpses of snow draped ranges, bare leafless trees of winter and stock eating food previously delivered by tractor. It was also a delight to see tiny



lambs, the promise of spring to come. Arriving in Mangaweka meant disappearance of clouds, the appearance of other MGs, notably with their tops down and the availability of a lovely hot coffee and toasties at the Mangaweka MG Pit Stop. It was time for the rest of us to take our tops down!

By the time we had got on the road again, our numbers had risen to 9, small by comparison with other trips, but no less enjoyable and sociable, we even had time to celebrate Rachel's

birthday briefly. My passenger (granddaughter) Emma, once arriving in Taihape was on the lookout for snow – to play in! But despite a snowy day in Taihape on Thursday – there was no sign of it, so we kept a lookout as we travelled on to Waiouru.

Mt Ruapehu was standing magnificently and glistening with snow over Waiouru, but no snow at foot, and as we journeyed over the Desert Road, noting high peaked hills with coverings of white and



little patches in shaded areas along the roadside. Thus when we diverted off onto the track towards the Tukino ski fields and those picturesque mountains,

Emma's excitement was tangible – her first touch of real snow. The gathering of MG's on a snowy muddy track with stunning views and beautiful crystal clear, still, sunny weather was a great opportunity for chatter, laughter,



photography and of course a snow fight or two. It was a truly beautiful place.

On the Desert Road again towards Tokaanu, the journey was interspersed with wintery desert landscapes of hardy native bush and scrubby grasses, and as you came around a corner the view was

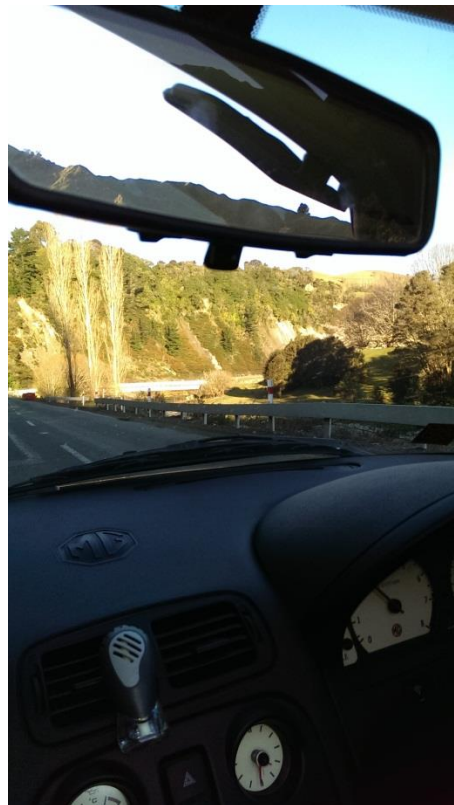
dominated with sudden glimpses of the nearness of the snow laden mountains and that rather active steam vent just north of Ngaruahoe. Sand and grit peppered the road, evidence of efforts to manage the damage of black ice.

At the Tokaanu Thermal Pools, we were welcomed with the calls of resident native birds, including bell birds, tuis and chaffinches and, having parked the cars, made our way to the hot thermal pools. It was here that I felt it was like slipping back in time, watching people and families bathe and chatter in the pool, as steam rose lazily from the water surface and children laughed and played,



dressed only in their togs (I had forgotten mine!) on this sunny winter day. Surely, families have been soaking and bathing here for centuries in this great gift of fresh water, warmed naturally by the cauldron of lava, just under our feet. This place was also a great opportunity to picnic in the native bush, among that feathered chorus and steaming, hissing cracks in the earth, bubbling, boiling mud and deep deep hot water springs.

The next stage of the journey took us up over the Tongariro National Park Road, around the other side of the mountains, now the companions of our journey. The Tongariro National Park is the oldest National Park in New Zealand, and recognised by UNESCO as one of 28 mixed cultural and natural world heritage sites. Stunning mountainous scenery. Once we regrouped ourselves at National Park on SH 47 we turned off and followed the journey down the Parapara Road towards Wanganui as the sun, still warm and shining uninterruptedly began its journey downwards to the western horizon. Driving past the entrance to the Chateau, Horopito and the former Waikune prison, one was immediately reminded that we were journeying through a very historic part of New Zealand. This was re-emphasised at our stop in Raetihi as we observed many beautiful now empty, but gorgeous examples of Classical and Arts and Crafts styles. The trip down the Paraparas did stunning rural scenery – big ranges of valleys and a windy road following, old deserted farm houses and wool undulant Whanganui River and some historic sites for which we did not have explore. As this part of the journey battle with the glare of the sinking sun came around corners, as did the hazard cow standing nonchalantly on the side the scenery was still breath-taking.



We gathered again in Wanganui to have tea and to agree – this could be include a high tea at the Chateau, a Upokongoro Pub and some explanation the area – Bridge to Nowhere? Steam

buildings, sadly Art Deco, Neo architectural not disappoint – hills, expansive giving glimpses of sheds, the very interesting time to stop and continued, the increased as we of a large black of the road, but

decide where to done again – to visit to the of the history of travel up the

river? Settlement of the Parapara Valley?—so much to learn. We do live in a beautiful, truly fascinating country, and I for one and Emma for another just can't wait for the next trip.

Thanks are due to Michael, John and others who enabled a trip for a hot pool swim to turn into a journey of great driving, superb scenery, and developing awareness of how lucky we are to be New Zealanders.

Also, thanks to Emma for the photography!