

Rob's Tiko Tour

It was rather a cool breezy day when MGers gathered in Ashhurst on 18th November for Rob's Tiko Tour. The low lying clouds hid the busy-ness of the wind turbines, but most of us didn't mind – we were going to Hawkes Bay where there was eternal warmth and sunshine. Some of us even had our tops down to catch that sun when we arrived. 20 cars, including a couple of vehicles pretending to be MGs, and amongst us all were some new members and old friends.

At the sound of the vintage Boy's Brigade Bugle played by Robert, and following his final words of advice and handing out of the itinerary sheet, we started our journey through Ashhurst onto the Saddle Road. Was curious to see the state of the Saddle, wearing my AA hat, and was pleasantly surprised. NZTA is certainly pouring the resources onto it to cope with the pressure of the closure of the Manawatu Gorge.

Once over the Saddle we continued straight on till we got to Pinfold Road, where we followed Valley Road and Top Grass Road. The Ruahine Ranges were our constant companion on our left, visible through low lying cloud and veils of scattered showers of rain. Amazing scenery included healthy and productive looking dairy cows everywhere, with some paddocks being treated to host fodder crops. Upon our arrival in Dannevirke, cars were parked in a scattered manner along Hospital Street where we all took the time out to stretch our legs, gather morning tea essentials out of the boots of our cars and visit Dave's Den where there was a model vehicle display, and have a cuppa and of course a chat. I don't think many of us have ever seen so many miniatures of cars, trucks, vans and buses in one room at a time.

Once the visit was over, coffee drunk, and muffins eaten, and at another 'tune' of that bugle we were off again along SH2 to the junction of the highway with SH50 where some of our Hawkes Bay members waited to join us. At this stage we were becoming aware that the expectation of gorgeous warm sunny Hawkes Bay weather was not going to be a happening thing. Still, as all good MGers we were prepared for all conditions.

We travelled along SH50 for 12 kms, then turned left up Blackburn Road, the road sign indicating that we were also heading for Forest Gate, familiar names to me, given we were back in the territory of my childhood. As we ventured up this road we rose into the hills, again in view of the Ruahine Ranges but this time obviously in a more northerly aspect. Despite my childhood memories, I do not recall being in this neck of the woods in those years, and became more and more fascinated with the stunning scenery. Fortunately there was low lying cloud about so my gazing at the environment was limited, otherwise, I might have lost contact with my usual role – the driver! What a beautiful part of the country. An area of Hawkes Bay which silently shouted – "This is where pastoral settlement began to take place about 150 years ago"! Rolling hills, supporting idyllic grazing country with very healthy-looking beef cattle and sheep presenting themselves at every turn on the road. Well established breaks of trees, mostly native, and fenced off, gave stock shelter, and if I had had time to look further, no doubt provided the calm surroundings for long established homesteads.

Calling in on the Bibby Family Memorial Church, it became apparent that certainly the folks of this region of Hawkes Bay were longstanding, generational caregivers of the land and their farms. The church was built in 1911 as part of the wider Waipawa Anglican Parish and as a memorial to pioneer settlers Edward and May Bibby.

Following on from our stop at the Church, we continued along this hidden rural treasure of NZ, following the road that dipped and dived over hills and down valleys, sometimes wandering through this gorgeous mature native bush, the taller trees leaning over the road creating a luscious green tunnel for us to drive through. Intermittently along this drive, light showers came and went, but those hardy ones among us continued driving top down. I wondered now, as I observed the reaches of the upper valleys of the Tuki Tuki River meandering eastward from its source, the Ruahine Ranges, I was reminded of last year's attempt by the Hawkes Bay Regional Council to establish the Ruataniwha Dam as a storage scheme to assist with meeting the needs of the rural community further eastward and downstream. Where on earth would you develop a huge dam in this beautiful country?

Finally, at the end of Holden's Road we arrived at Tikokino which was alive with activity for the local school's gala day. This is where the Sawyers Arms Pub was waiting for us with our lunches already being prepared. The irony of it was though, some of us misunderstood the instructions and ventured back along SH50 until we began to recognise that we had gone too far. However, we all found our way back to the pub for a delicious and very generous lunch. It was a very busy pub with locals, motorcyclists and MGers enjoying great hospitality and food.

At this point we were given another itinerary sheet, which indicated our next trip was through the lovely vintage town of Onga Onga and on to Pukeora, an old establishment on a hill overlooking Waipukurau. Pukeora originally started as a hospital for WW I soldiers suffering from illnesses caught while in service overseas. After that the hospital provided care for TB patients, then disabled, and now is the home of the Pukeora Winery and the buildings are now used for Market Days and Exhibitions. Having driven to the top of Pukeora Hill, one is reminded that we were now on the plains of the Tuki Tuki River where beef and sheep farming is being merged with orcharding and wine growing. The view from here over the surrounding countryside is certainly astounding. Max Annabell, the Wine Maker and owner of the Winery then took us through the variety of wines he is producing here and tastes of the individual wines gave us all plenty to think and talk about. Many of us were tempted to buy a bottle or two to take home. We were taken on a trip through the winery itself, showing how Max's number 8 wire skills had turned a basement room of this former hospital into a very effective wine making room. The visit was a fascinating opportunity to learn about the wines and the efforts taken to produce them. Many of us after this visit and a wander around the establishment, decided it was time to take the quicker way home. It had been a lovely day, despite the weather, and would you believe it, as I drove over the Pahiatua Track into Palmerston North, I was stunned at the sight of the Manawatu plains drenched in warm sunlight! No matter Robert - it was a great day, with awesome sights and scenery, and truly well organised by you – thank you once again for another trip, giving us the opportunity to explore yet another beautiful part of this great country.

Sue Forde