

**New Zealand Bicycle Tour
A Memorial to Russ Garlick
22 January – 6 March 2013**

In 1989, I made contact with a radio ham named Russ Garlick, ZL3AAA. Later that year, I met both Russ and his wife Zelda in Greymouth. We became good friends, kept in touch by radio, and visited several more times, both in New Zealand and Wisconsin. Russ had been a pilot during WWII, and I had the pleasure of taking Zelda and him to the EAA air show in Oshkosh in 1995. I last saw them in 1999, and Russ died in 2003. One of my goals for this trip was to visit some of the people I had met through Russ. Zelda was away, but I did meet some of the radio hams I had met in Greymouth and Murchison, as well as Russ' son Peter and his family in Motueka.

Pictures:

<https://picasaweb.google.com/107244327555358216606/NZ102>



Lake Tekapo, 1 February 2013

My first report is a bit tardy, but you'll learn why later.

After the usual tedious trip from Chicago, I arrived in Christchurch 22 Jan. Central Christchurch was, of course, devastated in the 2011 earthquake, so it has become a "city without a soul". I stayed in a pleasant enough B&B, but it was surrounded by sprawl. I did have a chance to meet with Nigel Rushton, author of a popular cycling guide, as well as some of the local radio hams.

Traffic leaving Christchurch was truly horrific. I had hoped the main road would have a wider shoulder, but it was quite narrow. In any case, after about 30 km, I got onto a much quieter road. Shortly before my destination, I came upon a sign reading, "F/R Eggs". A friendly couple sold me 4 eggs, and even shelled them. Just the thing for dinner. (Sadly, I had to toss them, as the fire danger was too high to use the stove.) I stayed in the little village of Hororata, which had camping in the domain (park). I later learned that Hororata was severely damaged in the Sept. 2010 earthquake. The tennis courts survived, and a few locals even showed up to play. The day was one of the warmest I had experienced in NZ, about 32 C (90F). Some of the locals thought it was too hot for cycling.

The first couple of days took me across the Canterbury Plains, a large alluvial plain west of Christchurch. It's quite flat, gently sloping upward to the west to the foothills of the Southern Alps. It's mostly farm land, much of it irrigated. Most of the rivers were dry this time, but the long bridges suggest some big flows.

A "change" came through that night, and the next day was quite cool, with a bit of rain. I rode on to Mt. Somers, another small village. Shortly before arriving, I came upon a coffee shop, with WiFi!

Sun and warmth returned the next day, and has remained. Temperatures have been as high as 35 C, very unusual for here.

From Mt. Somers, I rode on to Geraldine, a major tourist stop on the way to Mt. Cook. At one point, I turned off the highway onto a quiet side road, and promptly came upon a sheep jam. As I rode up, the farmer beside the road said, "Have you got a bloody GPS on that thing?" No, just an old-fashioned map. I spent a rest day in Geraldine, hoping to do a little oboe playing. Unfortunately, I had neglected to put enough sunscreen on my lower lip.

This part of the South Island has been largely cleared of native vegetation for farming and forestry. That also means there's little native wildlife. While I miss the native birds, I don't miss the sandflies and mosquitoes! I'll be encountering them soon enough.

This time of year, it's twilight here until nearly 10 PM, though first light doesn't appear until about 6 AM.

From Geraldine, I took the back roads to Fairlie. It was a very nice route through Middle Valley, partly sealed, partly gravel. The gravel was good limestone. As I turned onto the busy SH79 for the last stretch, I met a training ride of about 20 unladen cyclists, with escort vehicles ahead and behind. I fell in with them to take advantage of their escorts, and worked

very hard to keep up for the last 8 km. Fairlie had a nice campground, with WiFi working right at my campsite. I made a Facetime call to Bonnie, to discover she was having dessert with a bunch of our friends, so I got to say hello to everyone.

SH8 climbs 400 meters from Fairlie to Lake Tekapo. It was very busy, but didn't seem too dangerous. The road was fairly wide, and the drivers generally good. I wouldn't want to do it often. The huge increase in dairy farming in NZ has resulted in large numbers of tandem milk tankers on the roads. Lake Tekapo, at 700 meters, is the very top of NZ's extensive hydroelectric power scheme. Locals tell me power is very expensive, probably, I suspect, because their hydroelectric projects are paid for by electricity rates, not taxpayers, as in the US.

I had planned one day trip from Lake Tekapo before the long ride over Hakataramea Pass. Unfortunately, I somewhere along the way picked up campylobacter, the results of which are extremely unpleasant. I spent a day in hospital in Timaru, and I'm still recovering 5 days later. The only good thing I can say about it is that it led me to meet many wonderful local people, who have been very helpful. I'll probably be here a couple more days before I feel like riding over that pass.



Lumsden, 11 February 2013

It's good to be back on the road again. I got as far south as Gore, about 65 km north of Invercargill, before the weather turned cold and wet. The forecast is for more of that down there for the next week, so I've decided to skip the south coast and head north. I should have been down there that warm week I spent recuperating.

I've had to ride on a lot of major highways, as there often is no alternative. It's not been pleasant, but the road is just barely wide enough to make cycling slightly less than suicidal. It could be my imagination, but Kiwi drivers seem to be a bit more considerate than they used to be. I'm not so sure about the tourists in the campervans.

The weather turned cold and wet my last day at Lake Tekapo, then warmed up again for a while. The climb over Hakataramea Pass wasn't bad, as I started out at 700 meters. After the pass, I startled a fisherman walking down the road, and stopped to chat. He was nominally American, but hadn't lived there in a long time, and was unclear about his past abodes. We had a nice chat, and I sensed we could find some agreement on politics.

Next day was an easy one down the Waitaki Valley to Duntroon. There was a nice campground but, alas, the only cafe in town was closed. The next day was a tough one over Danseys Pass. Along the way, I stopped at a campground for a snack, and found that it was run by an American couple. I also met a Swiss cyclist there, just starting out on a day trip to the pass while her husband recuperated from what sounded a lot like campylobacter. My old map cruelly has the pass shown in the wrong place, from which one descends and climbs much further up the real one. That last climb took 50 minutes in the 22/36 gear at a blistering pace of 4.4 km/hr. The pass is 935 meters, 760 (2,500 ft) above Duntroon. Once over the top, it wasn't a bad ride to Naseby.

Naseby is at 600 meters, and I left the next morning in thick fog. I was in a bit of a hurry to get to Alexandra before the banks closed. Though New Zealand abolished provincial government long ago, someone forgot to tell the bankers. Once I left Canterbury, the ATM's in the little towns wouldn't take my card. One of them reluctantly gave me a measly \$20, then had second thoughts about it and shut itself down. I did get to the bank in time, but there the ATM worked just fine, of course. Most of that day was on the Central Otago Rail Trail. The surface was coarser stone that we're used to in Wisconsin, but the worst was the bridges. Rather than covering the sleepers with planking, they just filled in the gaps, making them really rough. That night, in the campground in Alexandra, I shared the barbecue with 11 Kiwi motorcyclists, who turned out to be quite civilized. They had pushed a grocery cart full of food (and beer) half a kilometer uphill to the campground.

The next day I rode south to Roxburgh (pronounced "Roxbury"). There were a whole bunch of big climbs on the busy highway, but I met a local cyclist, who showed me the way to a finished part of a bike trail for the last 10 km. That evening, I finally made good on the local eggs, as there was a farm just down the road from the campground. They had apricots, too.

By then, high pressure had settled in again, and it was warm for the ride to Gore, another major town. There was a nice route on some quiet back roads, the price being a bunch of big climbs, as usual. That night, a cold front came through, and yesterday was unpleasant. It only rained about an hour while I was on the road, but turned quite cold and I think there was

some sleet mixed in. At any rate, I got a cabin in Lumsden, after some trouble finding the caretaker of the camping ground. I decided to take a day off to give my bum a rest, before heading north towards Queenstown. Lumsden is typical of the small farming communities. All of them have grocery store, pub, usually a campground, various farm supply places, and at least a couple veterinarians.



Christchurch, 4 March 2013

First, the weather report. Unless otherwise specified, mostly sunny, dry, 23-28 C in the afternoon. Cool overnight, usually around 10 C by morning. That's pretty much the way it's been since that rainy spell down by Lumsden, so my decision to flee to the north seems to have worked out.

The morning I left Lumsden, I had a longer chat with the guy who owned the campground. It turns out he works for the mining industry, in Mongolia, 4 weeks on, 4 off. How's that for a commute? It must pay extremely well.

After leaving Lumsden, I decided to head straight north along Lake Wakatipu, rather than going over to Te Anau, as I was running out of time. After a night in Kingston, I arrived in the Queenstown area. Queenstown is a very popular, and expensive, resort town, with lots of sprawling development around it. I had seen a map of a bike trail that should have gotten me to Arrowtown, an old mining town nearby, without riding on the busy highway. Like so many bike trails, it turned out to be mythical. I did finally find some bike trails, but I wandered around for several hours trying to cover the last 15 km to Arrowtown. The next day, for no good reason, I took a bus into Queenstown and just wandered around for a while, without even buying anything but food. The old steamer, the Earnslaw, is still running, though I only saw it in the distance. Back in Arrowtown, it was nice enough that I decided to stay another day. My campsite even had a table, and was a good place to practice the oboe. I walked up "Tobins Track" in the morning, mainly to see if I could ride my bike up it the next day, and found it much improved. Along the way, I thought of trying to track down a woman some friends and I had stayed with on my first trip to NZ in 1986. I knew she would be about 93 now, if she were still alive. When I saw an "older" woman coming back down the track, I asked her if she knew Cicely, and she did! She's alive and well, and I met both her son and her that afternoon, at his house a 5 minute walk from my campsite.

The next morning, I met one of my old ham radio friends and his wife for coffee in Arrowtown. They've raised a whole family since I met them in 1989. That day, I rode over the Crown Range to Wanaka. It's the highest paved road in NZ, 1076 meters at the top. I did ride up Tobins Track, which bypasses part of the busy highway route. There's a new bridge, so I didn't even have to ford the stream this time. I've done the Crown Range road several times before, when it was gravel. It's paved now, which makes the climbing easier, but also results in much, much more traffic. After that, I decided I deserved a rest day in Wanaka, a scenic spot on another big lake. The water was apparently warm enough for swimming, which is unusual.

After that break, I started the trip towards the west coast. The main camping ground at Makarora, the first stop, is notorious for busloads of rowdy "backpackers" partying all night, but a few km before there I came upon a cafe with camping. It turned out to be a very pleasant spot, with my tent in a small orchard, with a table, and no nearby neighbors, so I could even practice there. It was one of my most pleasant campsites. Cheap, too. The next day, I rode over Haast Pass, an easy climb from the east, and entered Westland. Once over the pass, the notorious sandflies came out in earnest, and would be with me for a long time. I camped on the coast at Haast that night, enjoying more dry, sunny weather, which is even more unusual on the coast.

The next day was rather eventful. First, I came upon the scene of an accident, perhaps involving a motorcycle, though it was hard to tell. A little further along, there was an overturned campervan (RV) in the ditch, though I didn't see any evidence that anyone was hurt. I'm glad getting it out of there wasn't my problem. Then my back tire (new for the trip) started to come apart, which WAS my problem, and I had to put on the spare at the roadside. (Without a spare, it would have been a VERY long trip to a bike shop!) I found a little campground just past Jacobs River, a bit short of my intended destination, but close enough. There I met a group of 6 cyclists from California, carrying their gear, but not camping. They were booking their lodging a few days in advance, as they went. I'm not sure the extra hassle and constraints were worth it to just save the weight of a tent, but they did.

I went on to the town of Fox Glacier the next day, passing all the Californians along the way. It was a short ride, so I had plenty of time to hike up to the glacier itself, just outside of town. For various reasons, including a stretch of highway where I had a really scary close call with a truck in 1999, I had decided to take the bus from Fox to Greymouth, some 200 km up the coast. Along the way, I picked up a new (and expensive) tire in Hokitika. In Greymouth, I was met by another radio ham, whom I had met years before through my friend Russ. John and his wife Maureen put me up for a couple nights, in spite of the fact that their rain water tank was almost empty due to the drought on the west coast. Many folks there rely on rain water, as they usually get something like 5 meters (16 feet!) of rain per year. We had a nice visit, and I hope they have enough water to last until the next rain!

Leaving Greymouth, I headed inland to the coal mining town of Reefton, gladly leaving temporarily the busy main highway. A new traffic twist was the large house being towed toward me at rather high speed. (There were lead vehicles, so I had plenty of warning: "House Follows".) In this area, I also started encountering the plague of bumble bees, which I had noticed in 1999. They're introduced, of course, but they're numerous, and quite pesky. I haven't been able to find the story behind why there are so many.

After a pleasant night in Reefton, I had a rather long day to Murchison, further east. Unfortunately, I was back on the main highway again. In Murchison, I had a brief visit with another radio ham I had met in 1999, again through Russ. I was going to ride 130 km to Motueka the next day, but a late start, headwind, and old age conspired to encourage me to stop in the little town of Tapawera. I again got off the main highway on the "Dry Weather Road", which was very nice. I met 4 other cyclists on that road, 2 from Spain and 2 Americans, and stopped to chat with all of them. The told me there was a nice campground in Tapawere, which further discouraged me from riding the last 50 km to Motueka. I, in turn, warned them about the animal in the road ahead of them. I had met the postie (mail carrier) driving the other way, and he had warned me of a "cow" in the road, which had given him the "evil eye". There was a bovine in the road, all right, but it wasn't a cow. He gave me the evil eye, too, and I pedaled out of there in a hurry. Perhaps one of the local farmers will educate the postie.

The campground in Tapawere was a pleasant place, and it was a short ride the next day to Motueka. Much of that route was also on a back road, which had some hills, but light traffic. Along the way, I started to see hops and fruit orchards. That evening in Motueka, I had dinner with Russ' son and his family.

The next morning, I got up in the dark to catch the 7AM bus to Havelock, a small village east

of Nelson, on the Marlborough Sounds. (I wanted to avoid the heavy traffic to and from Nelson.) I got to Havelock early enough to play my oboe for a while, in the sun, but there was a cool breeze. The next day I rode up into the Sounds, where I had camped on a couple previous trips. There are lots of hills, though none are very long. The campsites were a lot more crowded now, but I eventually found a site. At one point, I stopped at a house, where some Kiwis (people, not birds) were enjoying their Saturday evening on the porch. When I asked if the next campground had water, one of them replied, "Yes, but no whiskey." I'm guessing that's what they were drinking. The campsite was pleasant enough, just a bit further than I had planned to ride.

The next day, I rode back over those same hills to the junction with Queen Charlotte Drive, which leads to Picton. For a change, this day was cool and cloudy, and it even sprinkled a little, the first rain I'd seen since Lumsden. Along the way, a young woman on a racing bike caught me, then slowed down to chat. She was from South Africa, working in New Zealand for Outward Bound, which had a camp nearby, and did some competitive cycling. Traffic on Queen Charlotte Drive was not as bad as I had expected, and climbs over another bunch of hills brought me to Picton, and the end of another New Zealand cycle tour.

Picton is where the ferries to the North Island depart from, but I was going the other way, by bus back to Christchurch. After an uneventful bus ride, I got on the bike one last time to battle the Christchurch traffic for 6 km back to my B&B. Now I just have to pack everything up and start the long trip home.

The final tally: 1,824 km (1,134 miles).

New Zealand has changed greatly since my first visit in 1986. Some which I noticed:

Much more traffic, of course.

A few more stretches of sealed roads.

The campervans are not only much more numerous, there are lots of very large ones.

Intercity and rural bus service is more limited.

There's been an enormous increase in dairy farming.

Roadsides are now mowed and sprayed, a job formerly left to sheep.

Containers of food are usually larger.

Madison, 8 March 2013

My last day in Christchurch was warm and sunny. This certainly was the driest of my 5 trips to NZ. I brought a new tent, used it nearly every night, and I still don't know if it leaks. I hope my friends on the west coast get some rain before their tanks are dry.

The trip home went smoothly, aside from the usual discomfort of cramped, packed airplanes, and user-hostile airports. I caught the 9 PM bus from Chicago with 10 minutes to spare. In Madison, I found 30 cm (12 inches) of snow on the ground, and the prospect of my first overnight ride of the season some ways off.