

CANOEING, KAYAKING, RAFTING ISSUE

New Zealand **Adventure**

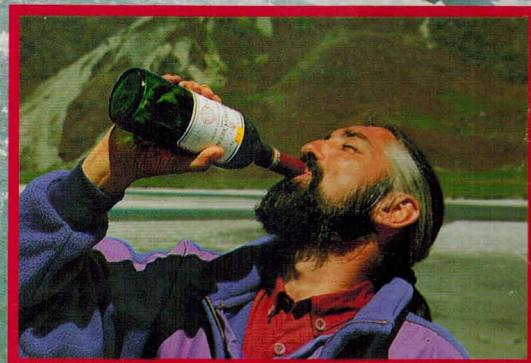
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DECEMBER /
JANUARY 1990

THE GRAND TRAVERSE

**A FRENCHMAN'S
IDEA OF FUN
DOWNUNDER!**

The race we won —
and made \$4m in
tourist money



HOUSEWIFE CLIMBS COOK • MULTISPORT UPDATE

The six-month way to see the South

(3000km and not one puncture!)



By Alison
Alexander
and Peter
Latham

Alison Alexander, 24, has been working as a food technologist in Hamilton since 1987 when she graduated from Massey University. A sausage specialist, Alison has been developing new tantalising treats for the meat market.

Peter Latham, 24, currently works for a photographic retailer in Auckland. A budding photographer, Peter rode with 14kg of camera gear on the back of his bike — the carrier broke twice. More of his photos appear in "Gallery" this issue.





Alison crosses the Arrow River near Macetown

Neither of us really knew what we were getting ourselves into when we came up with the idea of an extended bicycle tour of the South Island.

Our 3000km journey started in Picton on February 8, 1989. Since we planned a six-month trip with some diversions for tramping, we were fully optioned with woollies, packs and tramping boots. Peter's bike tipped the scales at 70kg, mine around 55kg. We set off on our 18-speed Milazo Rockbreakers pedalling down Queen Charlotte Drive towards Havelock.

At Pelorus we camped beside the Totara Flat river on a grassy patch sheltered by native bush. It was here that the sandflies drew first blood. Funnily enough, they seemed to like what they found — fresh sweaty cyclist. We took sanctuary in the smoke from the campfire, gazing out fearfully at the buzzing horde, which we later learned were only the little cousins of the monsters further south.

Looming before us was the big stuff — HILLS. The first one being the Rai is described by our cycling guide, to be re-

ferred to as, "Green Bible", as an ascent to 247m. It didn't sound much, but this was our first true hill and it left a lasting impression. At the peak we realised hill-tops are natural gathering points for cyclists, and we joined a summit conference of four different nationalities swapping notes.

From Motueka we headed off to Kohata Junction, where we found to our dismay there was nowhere to camp. With no choice but to stagger on, we reached Golden Downs and collapsed at 7 o'clock.

Finding St Arnauds at Lake Rotoiti busy with tourists, we much preferred the quiet seclusion of Lake Rotorua — except for one thing. Rotorua is the capital of the sandfly nation, so bad that most of one day was spent trapped in our tent writing letters, and ensuring each spoonful of porridge wasn't flavoured with insects.

Our introduction to the West Coast was the road to Punakaiki, five days against a head wind watching north-bound riders gliding past. Here is New Zealand's newest National Park, the

Paparoas, and its famous tourist attraction, the Pancake Rocks. This region is a photographer's paradise, with its tortuous limestone formations and magical sunsets.

With brilliant weather we spent three days in the Paparoas, including a tramp up the Fox river to the Ballroom Overhang. This enormous limestone cavity is a natural campsite, a popular base for exploring the Dilemma Creek canyon.

Thumbing a ride back to Punakaiki, a big limey-green house bus stopped to pick us up. Stepping inside we were greeted by three young fellows, two kittens, four dogs, two motorbikes, and all their other belongings. As the old Bedford ground its way along the coast, we laid back and absorbed its colourful character.

Hokitika is home of the last supermarket before Wanaka (345km south), so a major stock-up was essential. Five full grocery bags left us \$100 poorer, and 30kg heavier. Our next leg was a short one, to Lake Mahinapua, where sleep was non-existent as we battled the local

opossums. Five furry commandos fought us throughout the night refusing to be driven off by Peter's lumps of wood and rock.

Lake Ianthe was more hospitable—an extremely inviting spot where we spent two nights convalescing. The water here was surprisingly warm and therapeutic! There's nothing like a good penetrating soak to revive the battered body.

Here we met a Californian cyclist who had recently pedalled the perimeter of Australia—22,000km in 10 months. And we thought WE were keen!

Further south, the weather showed unpromising signs of change. Our next shelter, Franz Josef, was still 85km away with Mount Hercules yet to climb. Luckily the rain held off until just past Whataroa, where we found a long bridge high above the river with a nice dry patch of grass to park our tent. We unpacked and got a roaring fire going, then down came the rain. No worries.

We grizzled through the drizzle to Franz Josef, where we sat in the Youth Hostel for four days waiting for the torrent to clear. When it finally did, we packed in record time and headed to Fox, 23km and three hills away. At the Fox village camp, we pinched our pennies and opted for the tent, heartened by a glimpse of Mt Cook and Mt Tasman. Bad move—it rained again, this time we were awash.

Stormy clouds obliterated Lake Matheson's renowned reflections, so we pushed on to Bruce Bay, hoping things would improve. Green Bible mentioned a shop at Lake Paringa, where we planned to refuel, but trust us to arrive on a Sunday. Our timing was bad. So cooked rice and dehydrated vegetables it had to be, and we started a fire just as the rain arrived. Nurturing it with dry fern, an hour later we sat down to a wet lunch.

Along the coast to Haast, we encountered the scourge of touring cyclists—a head-on southwesterly. We selected first gear on the flat. Travelling up the Haast river stands as one of the most breathtaking days of our trip. The river was a fresh bright blue, reflecting the clear sky, and everywhere water cascaded down the hillsides, fed from the recent rain.

The first path across the Divide was Haast Pass (565m). After an appallingly steep start, it becomes an easier climb near the top, especially for the rider with chocolate. On the descent, Alison's rear gearwheel cluster, which had developed an irregular 'click' at Fox, finally gave way under the strain. Emergency surgery from Peter scattered the ball bearings all over the shingle; we had no choice but to

limp on to Wanaka hoping the cluster would survive without them.

The rugged dusty road which passes beside Lakes Wanaka and Hawea bears testimony to the barren Otago countryside. In contrast to the lush (wet) West Coast, we were relieved to be assured of drier times.

Following a break in Wanaka and a visit to Glendhu Bay (an absolute must, the Willows look stunning in autumn leaf), we pedalled on to Cardrona, home of the historic goldminers hotel and the start of Highway 89.

Pitching the tent here beside the river, we gluttoned ourselves on our speciality dish, Rice Risotto, in readiness for our assault on the Crown Range. As the sun went down and the temperature plummeted, we quickly appreciated our altitude.

Climbing New Zealand's highest through-route to 1121m (3700ft) offers a variety of panoramas to the serious traveller. But let us offer a few words of advice: ascending the Wanaka side is definitely recommended. Set at sharp angle, the Queenstown side descends as though over a sheet of corrugated iron, a jarring and brake-thirsty affair so it was by no means a speedy zap down the hillside. Eureka! The sealed surface of the final was bliss, weaving through a series of hairpin bends with a suggested limit of 10 km/hr (we flew around at 20, weeeee!) to the bottom.

With muscles recharged at Arrowtown, we were ready for a new challenge: Macetown, an old goldmining relic reached via 16km of rough terrain up the Arrow river gorge. It is usually accomplished by more sedate means such as four-wheel drive. However, mountain bikes have been known to make it too (skinny-tyred cyclists, FORGET it).

River crossing number one (out of 27) soon appeared and Peter found it easy enough with half the wheel submerged, while this eight stone featherweight could not hold things steady. I regrettably turned back and left the macho one to continue; for him it was a rewarding trip, mostly due to all the apples, pears and mushrooms he plundered.

With blue sky forecast, we left our bikes at Queenstown for a side trip to Fiordland. This included a night at Cascade creek, camped under the Beech trees where we were amused by the cheeky antics of a pair of South Island Robins. These tame little birds took a fancy to our porridge and kept coming back for seconds and thirds all morning.

Leaving The Remarkables in their first blanket of snow, we set out bearings for Alexandra, Central Otago. Following the

Clyde River down the once-beautiful Cromwell Gorge, we were disheartened to see the major destruction caused by the Clyde Dam developments.

The short distance between Alexandra and Gore displayed incredible contrasts in the landscape. From the bare, rocky hillsides to the flourishing orchards of Roxburgh (where we munched on apples the size of baby buttercups), then the juicy GREEN, rolling pastures of Southland.

Invercargill's wild southerly winds were new to us, and our tent. During exhaustive wind tunnel testing we were forced to abandon ship one night at 0200 hours. So after a day's recovery, it was without hesitation that we cleared out regardless of the howling gale.

Blessed with a tail wind, we set sail eastward towards the Catlins and 40km later came up to a bridge with camping potential beneath. Questioning our fate for the evening, a kind farmer rolled up and offered us his duck shooting hut for the night. "Yes please" we cried, and followed his directions past the cowshed, dropping into first gear as we slushed through the dung and praying that we would not get stuck!

Nestled in the bush, Do Duck Inn is no ordinary hut. It's complete with a coal range powering water (hence a hot shower), bunks to sleep 12, gas lighting, battery car stereo and a dart board with its very own spotlight. What a luxury to sleep on a four-inch foam mattress.

Leaving the exposed coast at Fortrose we roller coasted to speeds of 50km an hour without pedalling.

Getting to Balclutha was not without problems. Just before the town there is a deep set of railway tracks. Ping went a pair of spokes on Peter's rear wheel. Our spares were too short, but luckily the local bike shop was able to put us right.

We carried on to Kaitangata via the Stirling Cheese Factory (cheap cheese), and discovered on our arrival that the motor camp was deserted. After a few enquiries at the pub, we traced a key to the Ladies and Gents changing rooms where we spent the night on a pair of wire wove bases.

Kaitangata is an old coal mining town where only a handful of people remain today. To us it was like turning back the clock 30 years, for the only evidence to suggest the year 1989 was the occasional late model car.

After a friendly stay in Dunedin, we headed north over Mount Cargill. At the summit we wandered up the Organ Pipes track to witness these hexagonal columns.

Here we met Bruce Sheppard, a native



from Waitati who offered us a place to stay that night. With Kiwi ingenuity, Bruce had built his house over the last decade using old materials and so it had real personality. His inventive spirit was evident throughout the house. Take the shower, for instance. This comprises two roses — one from below, knee high pointing up for the important parts, and a “super turbo” from the ceiling above. The toilet sits on poles, stuck to the side of the house. Inside it is painted black, and facing you when seated on the “throne” is a view of the garden through a car wind-screen, while to your right is a car door complete with winding window. Planted with unusual exotics, the garden is scattered with junk sculptures, TV screens, sewing machines, telephones, etc. In its arrangement, Bruce has portrayed a clear message about the society we live in today.

Our habit of veering along secondary roads had its rewards, but this time, Trotters gorge en route from Palmerston to Moeraki was more than we bargained for. Green Bible referred to “1km of

gravel but a very nice road” (travelling south). What we encountered north-bound was quite the reverse, more like “A very steep gradient of loose metal rising to 240m”. Hooray, to the sight of bitumin which led us down into the scenic gorge.

At Oamaru, we were shocked to find the priciest turf yet — \$7.50 each for one night in the tent. That meant one night, not two. So after further broken spokes we departed for Pleasant Point, detouring through Waimate to break the monotonous straight roads.

Barkers Winery, tucked up under the Four Peaks range west of Geraldine proved a favourite. After stopping there for a taste or three, we continued in a merrier mood to a nearby friend’s farm.

North of Mt Somers, we found an ideal opportunity to camp out alongside a river, nestled under some pine trees (along came thoughts of a glowing bonfire). That afternoon, a nearby farmer cheerfully advised us that the weather was about to pack in. “We can hack it,” said we. He was right though, because

The Do Duck Inn... a welcome shelter for intrepid cyclists.

that night it snowed.

Not about to be hindered by a few icy flakes, we ploughed on, shouting ourselves to the luxury of Methven’s “Blue” Hotel. There we soaked up the warmth and pondered the route to Christchurch.

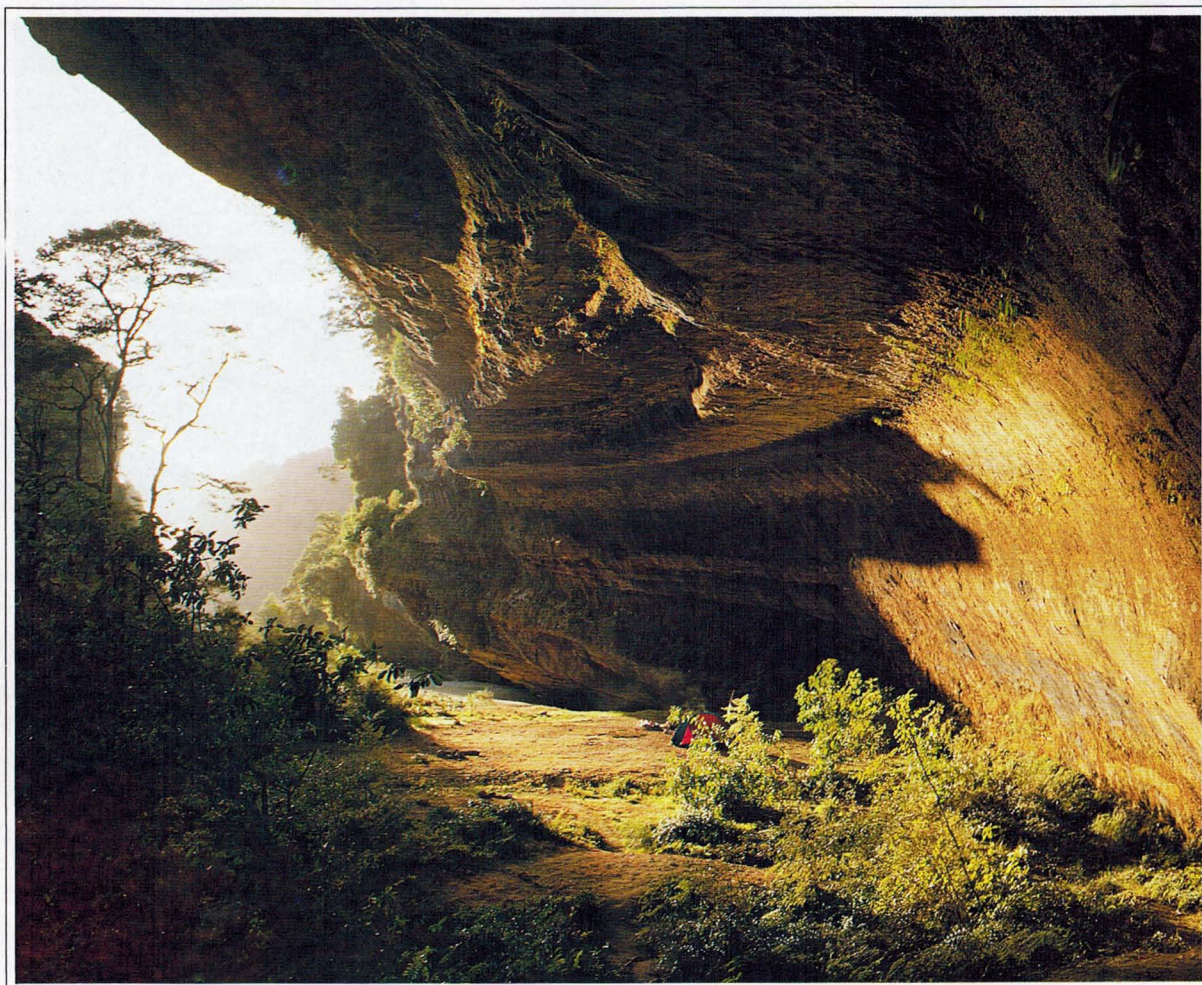
Our longest distance in one day was from Kaikoura to Ward, 88km. This record was especially good considering the short daylight hours of mid-June. Soon after, we returned to Picton.

Six months on the road, 50 packets of Rice Risotto and 140 loaves of bread and goodness knows what else lay behind us.

Cycle touring the South Island gave us a perfect insight into the true beauty of this country and its people. We were able to absorb the smallest details which busy motorists fly past and enjoy the smells and sounds of cow paddocks, damp and humid forests rushing mountain streams and native birds.

How many punctures did we have? You may not believe it, but not one!

GALLERY



PETER LATHAM catches the early morning light in the Ball Room Overhang, near the Fox River in West Coast's Paparoa National Park. Latham used an 81A filter on a 40mm lens, set at f16 for 1/30 second on his Bronica ETRS camera.

GALLERY



THIS DRAMATIC coastline picture was taken by Peter Latham at the Pancake Rocks near Punakaiki. Using a polarising filter on his 40mm lens, Latham stopped the surging sea at f5.6 for 1/60 sec.