

Off Highway 1

South Island Road Trip 2016

<https://southislandroadtrip.wordpress.com>



Cape Campbell, from Clifford Bay

Day 1

Wellington—Blenheim via Marfells Beach



We had two goals: avoid SH1 and visit as many lighthouses as possible. First day: failed on both counts. We had to take SH1 to get to Marfells Beach. But the lighthouse was inaccessible and the camp booked out. So back to Blenheim. Still, we had an enjoyable day checking out the saltworks, beaches, and historic Awatere bridge.

—February 7, Sunday

Clockwise from top left: Lake Grassmere; Marfell's Beach; Awatere Bridge; Grassmere saltworks

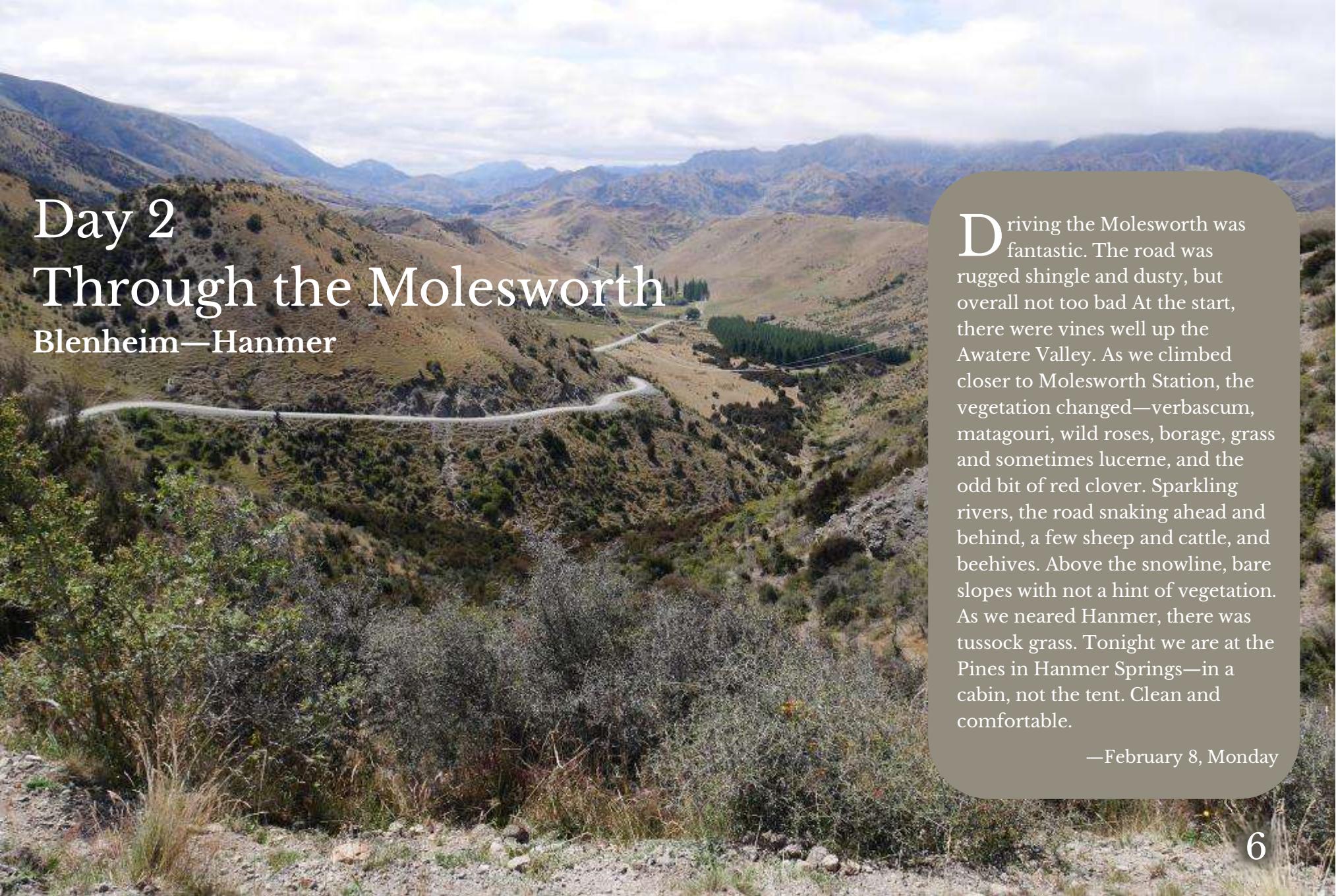




En route to Marfell's Beach



Over the Dashwood

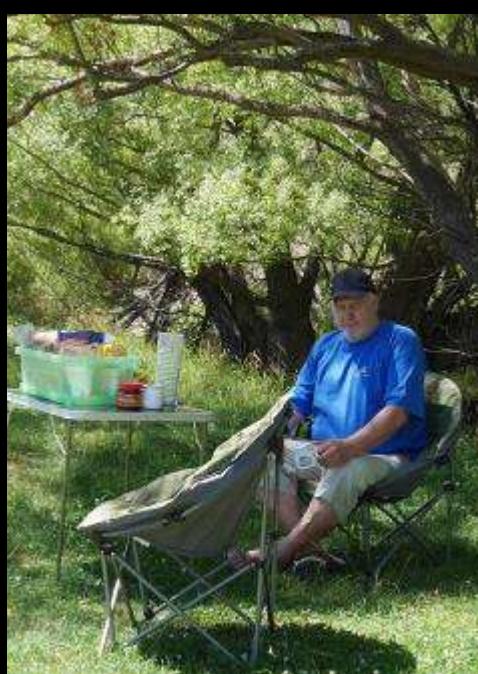
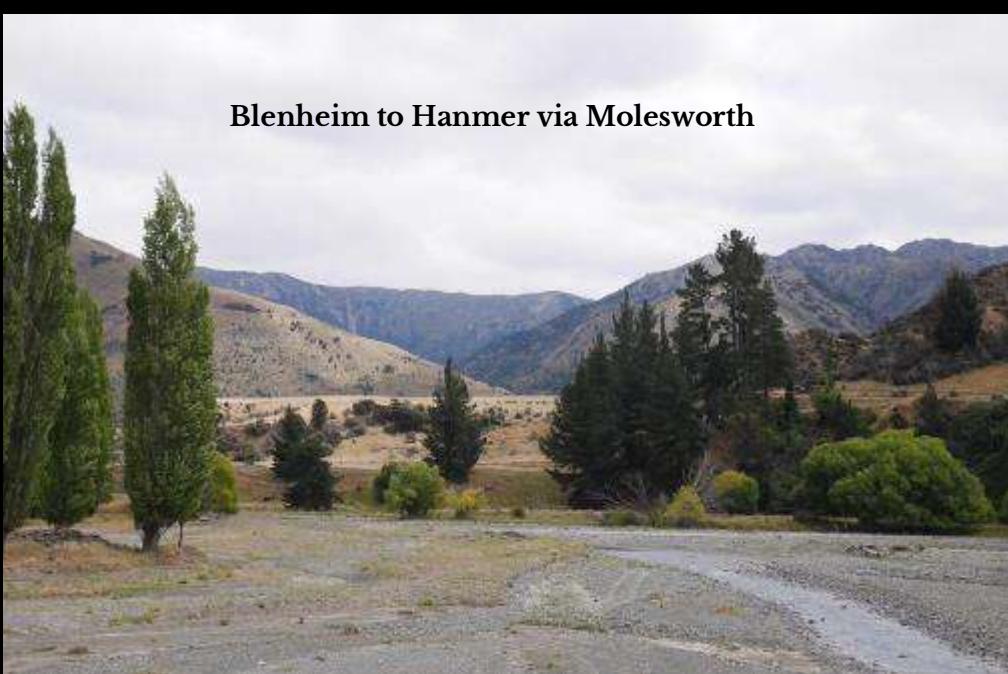


Day 2 Through the Molesworth Blenheim—Hanmer

Driving the Molesworth was fantastic. The road was rugged shingle and dusty, but overall not too bad. At the start, there were vines well up the Awatere Valley. As we climbed closer to Molesworth Station, the vegetation changed—verbascum, matagouri, wild roses, borage, grass and sometimes lucerne, and the odd bit of red clover. Sparkling rivers, the road snaking ahead and behind, a few sheep and cattle, and beehives. Above the snowline, bare slopes with not a hint of vegetation. As we neared Hanmer, there was tussock grass. Tonight we are at the Pines in Hanmer Springs—in a cabin, not the tent. Clean and comfortable.

—February 8, Monday

Blenheim to Hanmer via Molesworth



Lazing in the sun



Day 3 Hanmer

We've decided to spend an extra night here. It was blistering hot today. We had a couple of walks around the town, but spent most of the day lazing in the sun. We were rocked out of our comfort zone in the afternoon by a sharp 5.7 earthquake. There was a rumble like a heavy truck passing followed by a lurch that rattled the cups, but no damage.

—February 9, Tuesday

Day 4

The day started with fog, but before long the sky cleared and temperatures soared. We travelled along Highway 7A and then 7, and joined State Highway 1 at Waipara. We stopped to visit some rock art in Waikari, but one look at the hill and I decided rock art could wait for another day. L pushed on a bit before deciding he too had climbed enough in the midday sun. Final stops for the day were the frog rock at Weka Point and the Glenmark historic railway station. Then it was on to Amberley, where we again opted for a cabin over the tent.

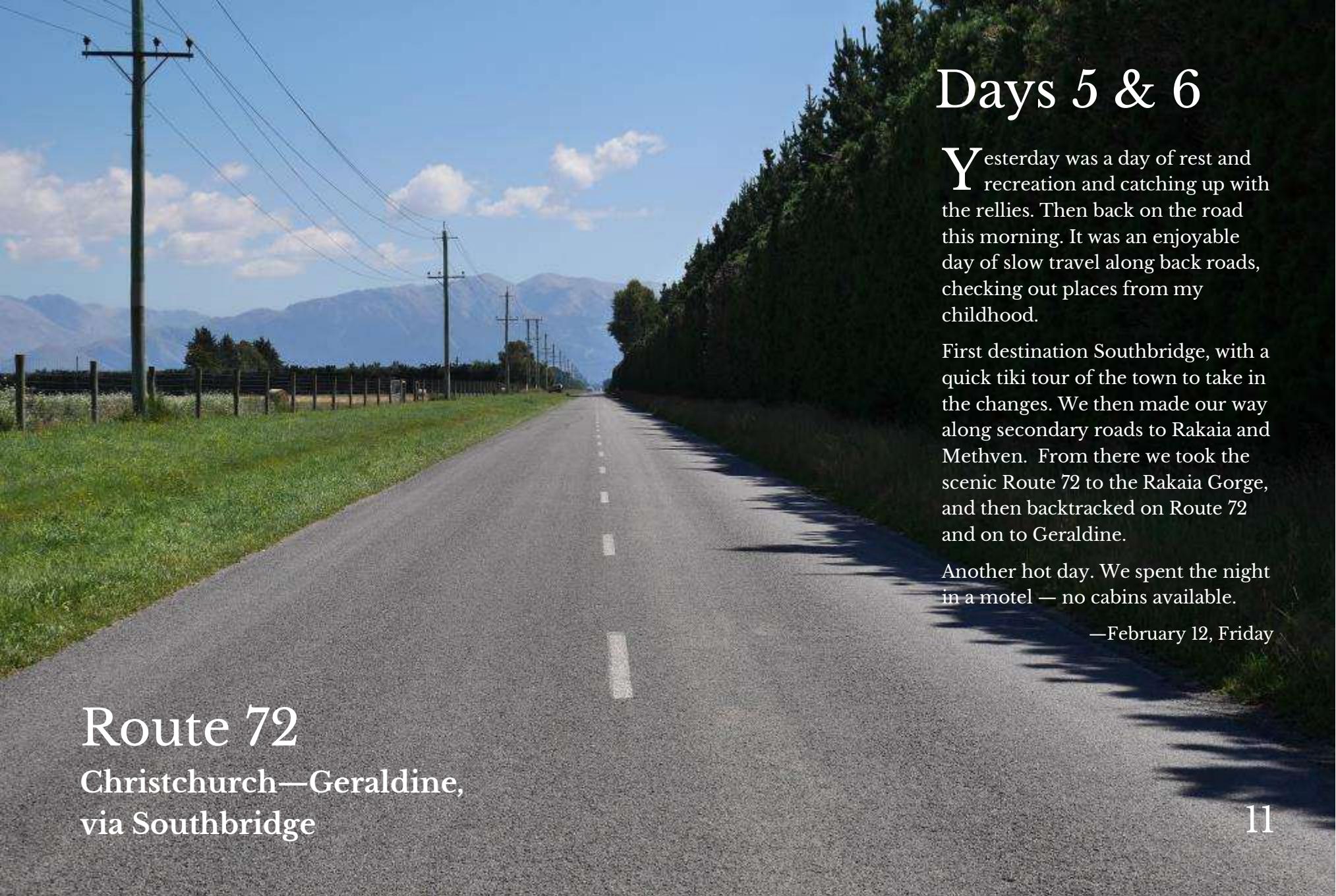
—February 10, Wednesday

Mainly Highway 7 Hanmer—Amberley





Waikari walkway entrance



Days 5 & 6

Yesterday was a day of rest and recreation and catching up with the rellies. Then back on the road this morning. It was an enjoyable day of slow travel along back roads, checking out places from my childhood.

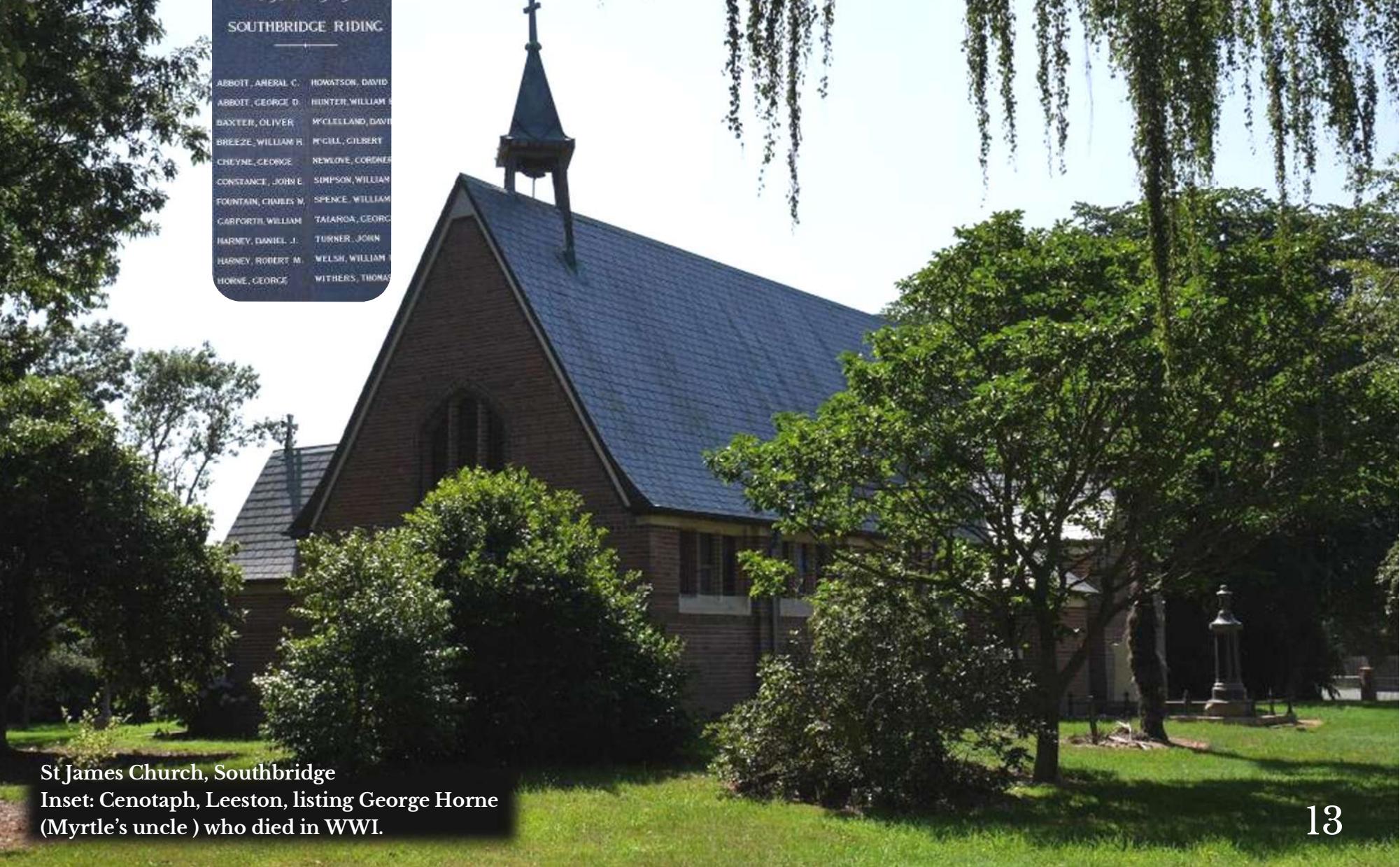
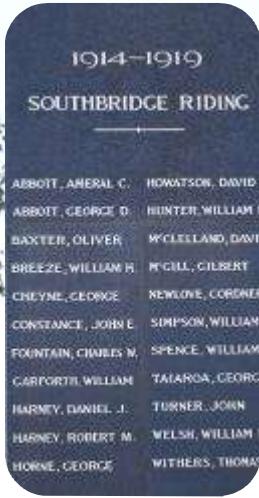
First destination Southbridge, with a quick tiki tour of the town to take in the changes. We then made our way along secondary roads to Rakaia and Methven. From there we took the scenic Route 72 to the Rakaia Gorge, and then backtracked on Route 72 and on to Geraldine.

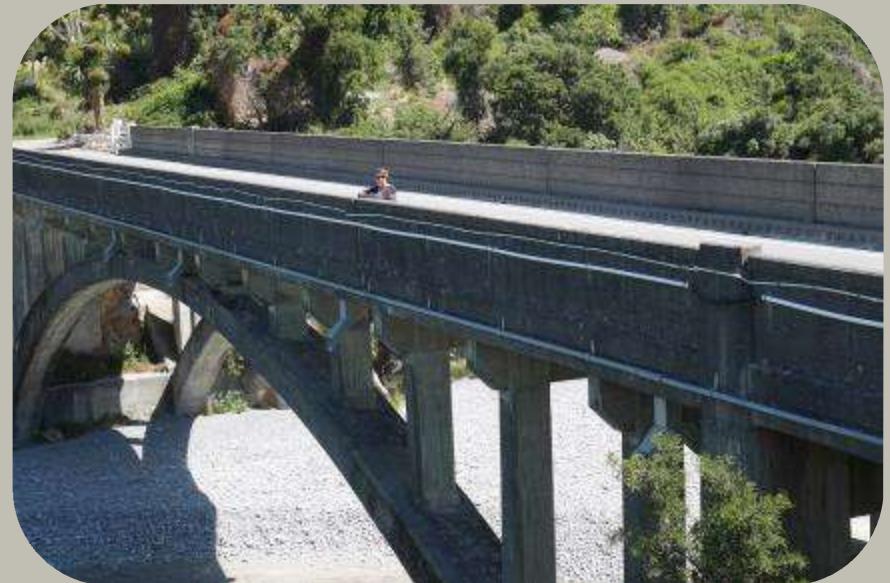
Another hot day. We spent the night in a motel — no cabins available.

—February 12, Friday

Route 72
Christchurch—Geraldine,
via Southbridge







Rakaia Gorge



Day 7

Geraldine—Timaru



We started the day backtracking a little, from Geraldine to Peel Forest and towards the Rangitata Gorge. We didn't quite get to the gorge -- we didn't want to be late for our lunch date in Timaru -- but we had some spectacular views of the river, all the same. It was then back on Route 72 to Winchester and a little bit of Highway 1 to Timaru and a great lunch at Zest and fabulous catch-up with M & K from T.

That took care of the afternoon, but left time for a walk in the evening to our second lighthouse for the trip, the one at Jack's Point. L says the Jack's Point light is interesting in that it was originally on Matiu Island in Wellington Harbour and was shifted to Jack's Point before 1900.

We spent the night in a cabin at Glenmark in Timaru.

—February 13, Saturday

Jack's Point Lighthouse



Top: Road to Rangitata Gorge
Below: View from Jack's Point



Jack's Point

Day 8

Today has turned out another beauty. Left Timaru this morning after another quick tour of the old haunts, a brief drive along Highway 1 to the turn-off to Pleasant Point, and we were on the way to Omarama. Spectacular Mackenzie Basin scenery —except for the encroachment on the tussock of irrigated pastures for intensive dairying. So it was along Highway 8 until we reached Lake Pukaki and our first sighting of Aoraki Mt Cook. We stopped by the lake for lunch, before moving on to Highway 80 to Mt Cook village. Then back to Highway 8, a quick detour to check out the Ohau Canal, and on to Omarama, where we had the best accommodation of the trip so far.

—February 14, Sunday

Mainly Highway 8

Timaru—Omarama, via Aoraki/Mt Cook



Tasman Glacier ice



Lake Pukaki and Aoraki Mt Cook



Aoraki Mt Cook

Day 9

Over Danseys to Central Omarama—Naseby, via Kurow & Danseys Pass



The day started with a drive through the rest of the Mackenzie valley and lakes, taking in the three power stations of Benmore, Aviemore, and Waitaki. Then on over Danseys Pass, which soon became a Molesworth-like corrugated shingle road that twisted and turned until Danseys Pass Hotel. From there it was a short hop to Naseby, our stop for the night.

—February 15, Monday



Benmore Dam

Day 10

Naseby—Balclutha via Ranfurly

A pushing-on day today. Fabulous though Central Otago is, we've spent enough time in the hinterland. Time to get further south to areas we've not been to, or haven't been to for a very long time. We're also looking forward to being on the coast again and visiting our next lighthouse, at Nugget Point. After a short bit of country road from Naseby, it was on to Highway 85 to Ranfurly, where we stopped for coffee and some photos of the art deco-themed wall paintings. Then Highway 87 for the trip through Middlemarch in the Maniototo and on through Dunedin to Balclutha, where we decided to call it a day.

—February 16, Tuesday



Ranfurly





The Clutha

Day 11

Balclutha—Bluff



Today we visited not one but two lighthouses. The first was at Nugget Point, south of Kaka Point, and the second was at Waipapa Point, the southern-most land-based lighthouse in New Zealand. It is also unusual in that it is wooden.

After a quick visit to the coal town of Kaitangata, we travelled along Highway 92 before detouring to Kaka Point and on to Nugget Point. We rejoined Highway 92 north of Owaka.

At Nugget Point we were treated to displays of lazing and fishing by the seals in the water below. Our timing was wrong for viewing the yellow-eyed penguins, though. After Owaka, it was on through the spectacular Catlins until we turned off to Curio Bay and Waipapa Point.

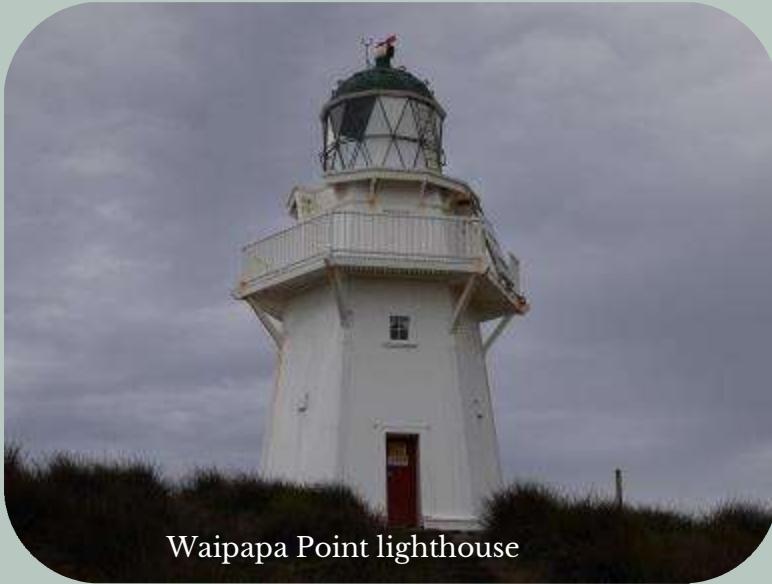
From there we travelled local roads back to Highway 92 and on to Bluff for the night.

—February 17, Wednesday

Nugget Point



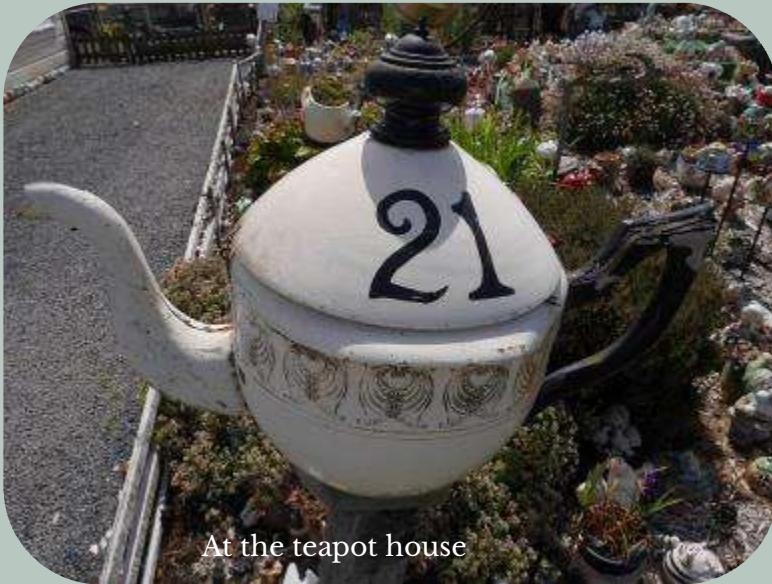
En route to Waipapa Point Lighthouse



Waipapa Point lighthouse



Lunch stop



At the teapot house



Florence Bay





Day 12

Exploring Bluff

A rest day today. After coffee with Murray W, we visited the motorbike museum. This collection of vintage and modern motorbikes range from Burt Monroe's Fastest Indian to a Norton Commando 750 competition bike and a Matchless. It's a most unusual and amazing museum housed in Hayes, Invercargill's hardware store.

We spent the rest of the day checking out various places in and around Bluff. We walked along the Southern coast, where we could just make out the lighthouse on Dog Island, off the entrance to Bluff harbour. We visited the Bluff maritime museum, checked out Oreti Beach, and drove around the wharves and up to the lookout on the highest hill in Bluff, where the shore to ship communication centre was set up way back.

After last night's rain, this morning dawned fine. It rained again this afternoon for about a couple of hours but fined up again. Tomorrow we are off to explore Riverton and further along the south coast.

—February 18, Thursday



“We walked along the Southern coast, where we could just make out the lighthouse on Dog Island, off the entrance to Bluff harbour.”





Oreti Beach



Day 13

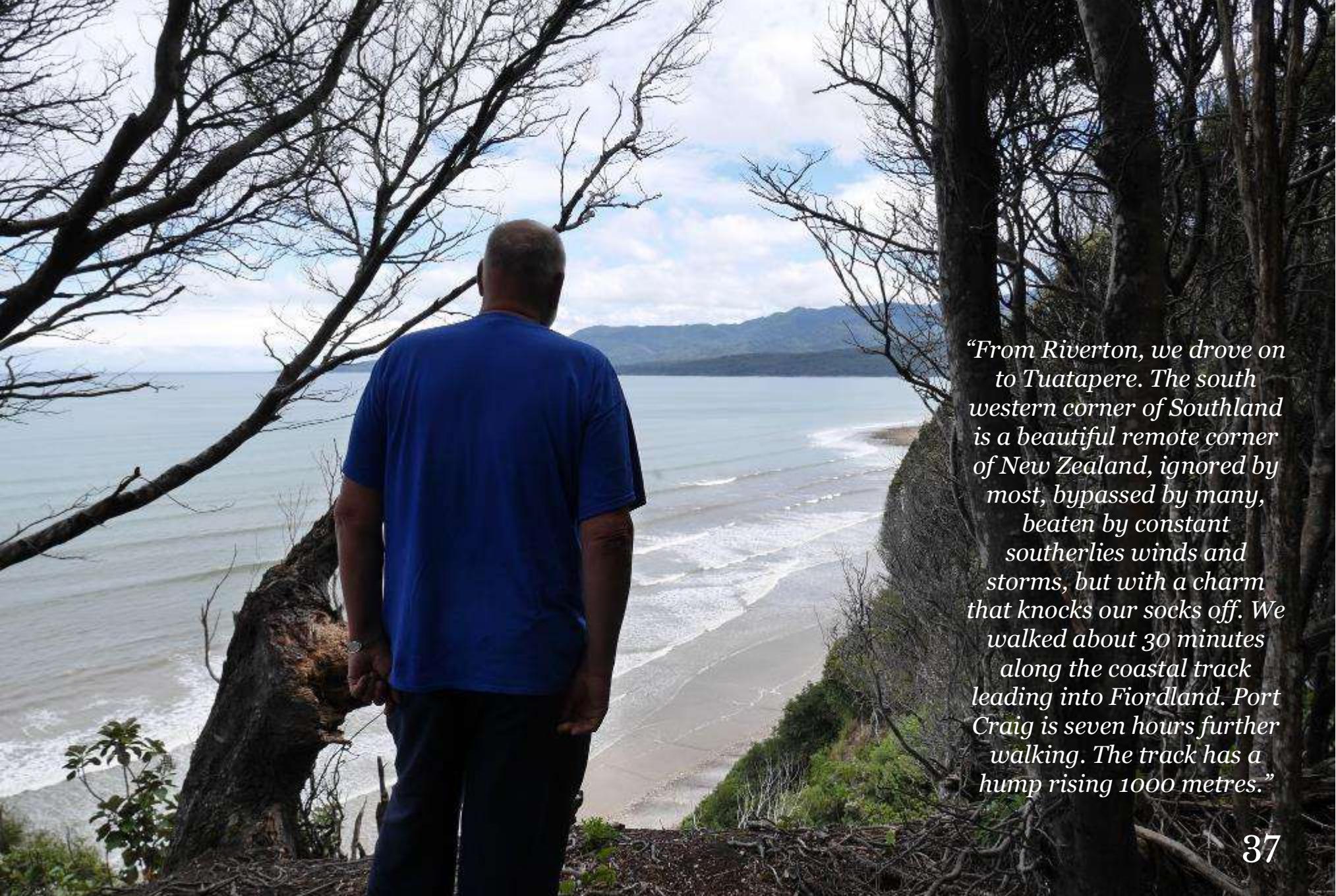
Bluff—Riverton—Tuatapere

We left Bluff and headed for Riverton, a fishing village huddled around the mouth of the Aparima River. The fishing boats, all inshore boats, are moored alongside a jetty running parallel to the river bank. The river is wide and tidal at this point and we saw it at its best with the tide in. The most poignant site in Riverton is the memorial to the fishermen who never made it back from the sea. There is also an excellent museum with strong Maori and maritime themes.

From Riverton we drove on to Tuatapere, where we walked about 30 minutes along the Hump Ridge track. Tonight we have a cabin at the Tuatapere camping ground.

—February 19, Friday





“From Riverton, we drove on to Tuatapere. The south western corner of Southland is a beautiful remote corner of New Zealand, ignored by most, bypassed by many, beaten by constant southerlies winds and storms, but with a charm that knocks our socks off. We walked about 30 minutes along the coastal track leading into Fiordland. Port Craig is seven hours further walking. The track has a hump rising 1000 metres.”

We departed from Tuatapere earlyish, headed for Lake Monowai, stopping at the Clifden suspension bridge on the way. This bridge, no longer in use, was designed and engineered in New Zealand. The four towers are concrete, hand-mixed, and bucket poured. The buckets were run up on pulleys and poured into the boxing, also by hand. The towers are 50 feet high and support a total of 28 cables.

At Lake Monowai, we walked the forest track and checked out the power station. We continued to Lake Manapouri, where sadly the underground power station was undergoing extensive maintenance, so not open for viewing. Our day ended at Lumsden in a cheap (but not cheerful) cabin for two.

—February 20, Saturday



Day 14
Tuatapere—Lumsden



En route to Lake Monowai



“At Lake Monowai, we walked the 30-minute return track through the forest—it was like stepping back in time. The underfloor was mainly leaf mulch, the fallen trees were covered in moss and fungal growths. It was quiet apart from the bird calls.”

Day 15

Lumsden—Haast



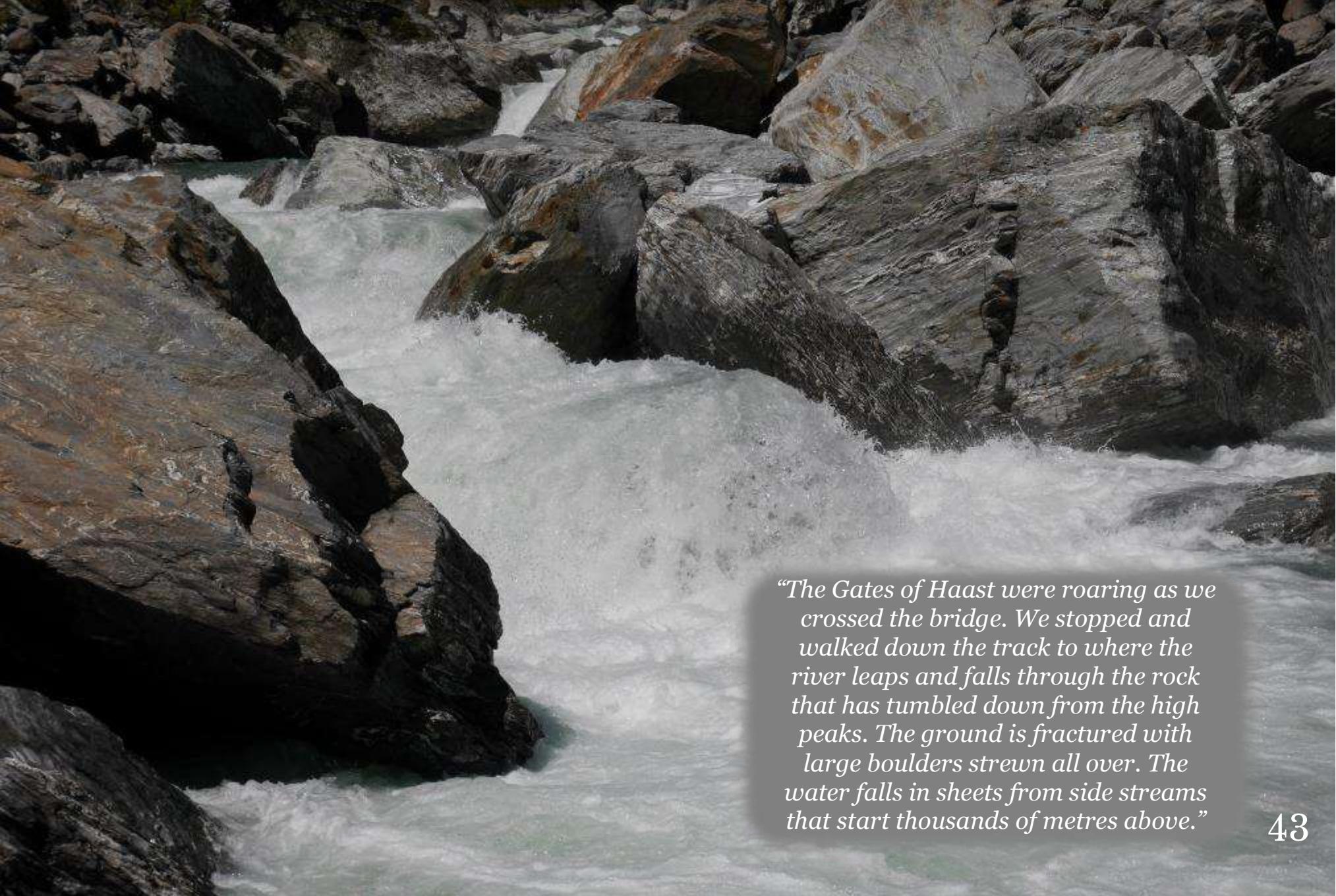
Last night was a \$40 cabin in a little motor camp in Lumsden—not the most comfortable night. We were up and away early, on the road to Queenstown, Lake Hawea and on through the Haast. The traffic has been much more than on any other day. The main features of the day have been the gates of Haast and the side trip to Jackson Bay, south of the Haast Bridge.



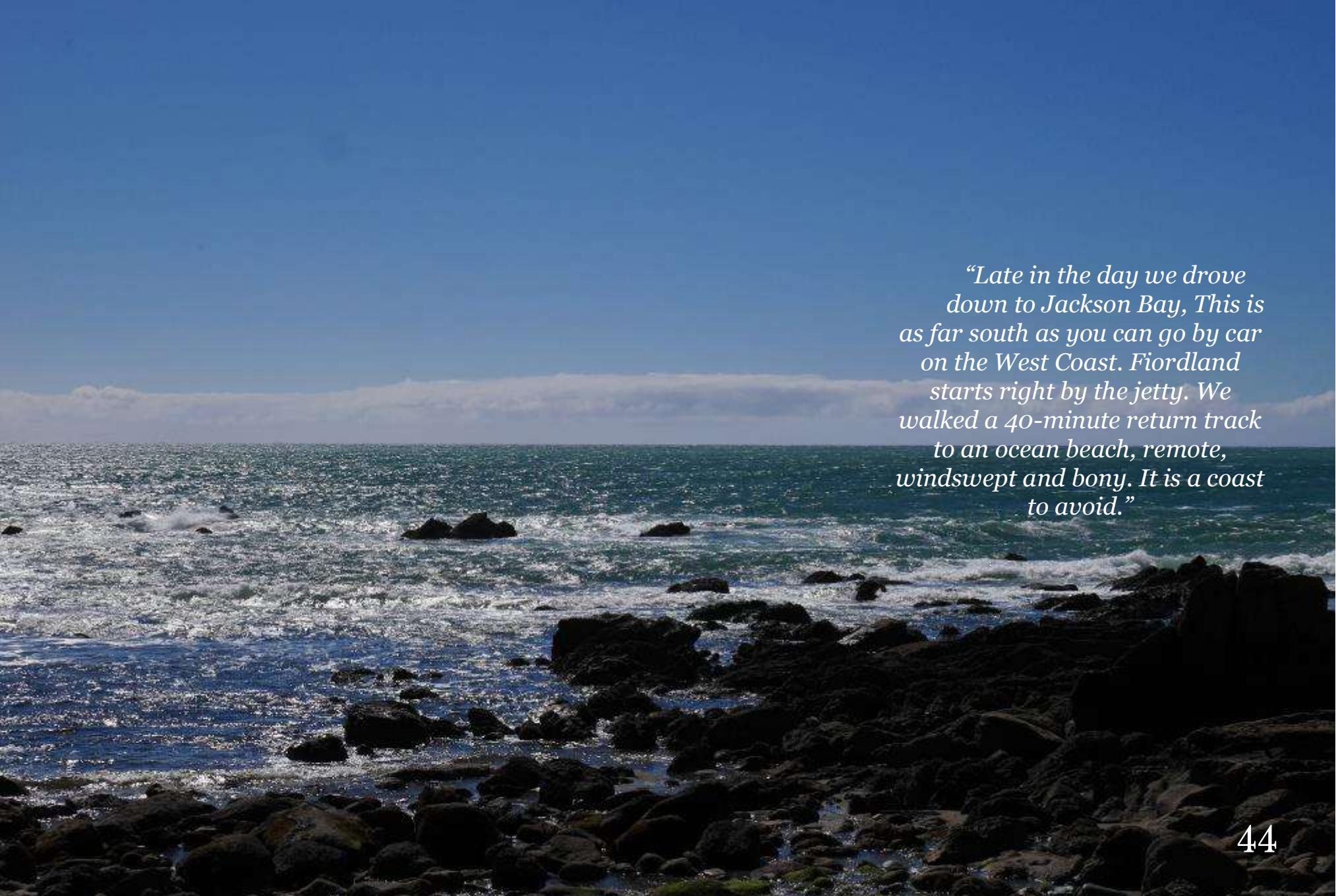
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GIVE WAY

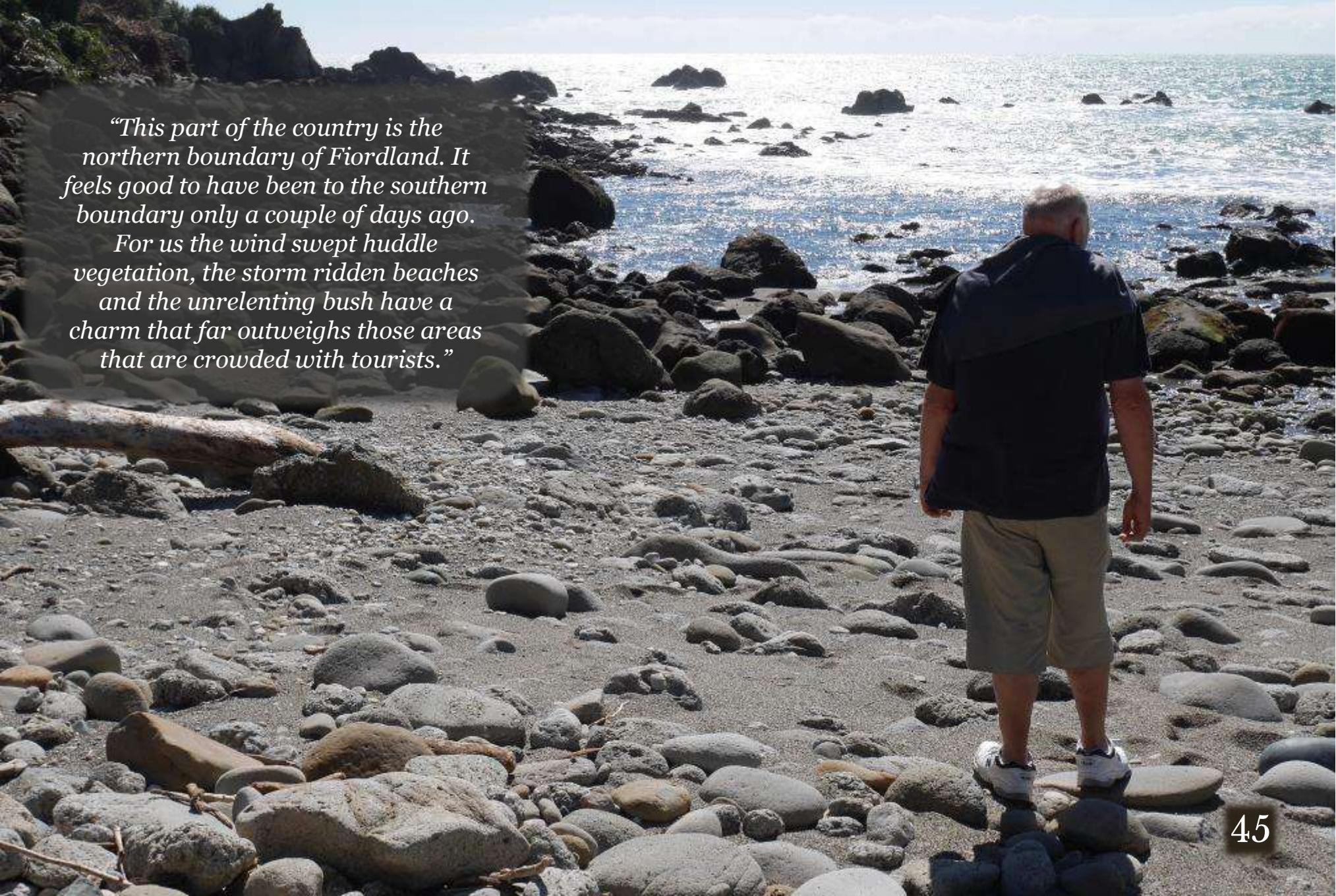
GATES OF
HAAST



“The Gates of Haast were roaring as we crossed the bridge. We stopped and walked down the track to where the river leaps and falls through the rock that has tumbled down from the high peaks. The ground is fractured with large boulders strewn all over. The water falls in sheets from side streams that start thousands of metres above.”



“Late in the day we drove down to Jackson Bay, This is as far south as you can go by car on the West Coast. Fiordland starts right by the jetty. We walked a 40-minute return track to an ocean beach, remote, windswept and bony. It is a coast to avoid.”

A photograph of a man standing on a rocky beach, looking out at the ocean. The beach is covered in large, smooth, grey rocks of various sizes. In the background, the ocean is visible with some small waves and rocks protruding from the water. The sky is clear and blue. The man is seen from the back, wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt, light-colored shorts, and white sneakers.

“This part of the country is the northern boundary of Fiordland. It feels good to have been to the southern boundary only a couple of days ago.

For us the wind swept huddle vegetation, the storm ridden beaches and the unrelenting bush have a charm that far outweighs those areas that are crowded with tourists.”



South Westland

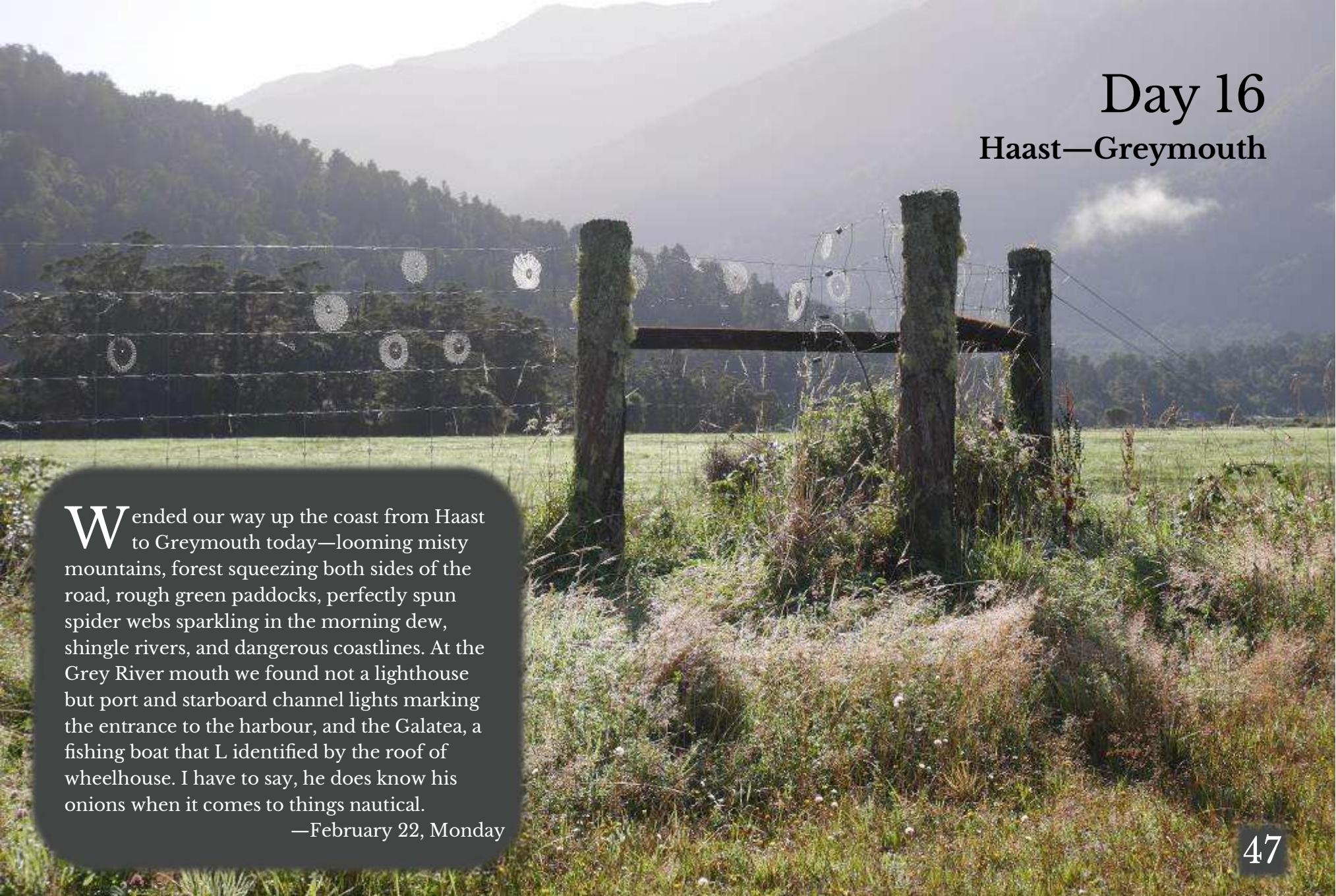
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Day 16

Haast—Greymouth

Wended our way up the coast from Haast to Greymouth today—looming misty mountains, forest squeezing both sides of the road, rough green paddocks, perfectly spun spider webs sparkling in the morning dew, shingle rivers, and dangerous coastlines. At the Grey River mouth we found not a lighthouse but port and starboard channel lights marking the entrance to the harbour, and the Galatea, a fishing boat that L identified by the roof of wheelhouse. I have to say, he does know his onions when it comes to things nautical.

—February 22, Monday

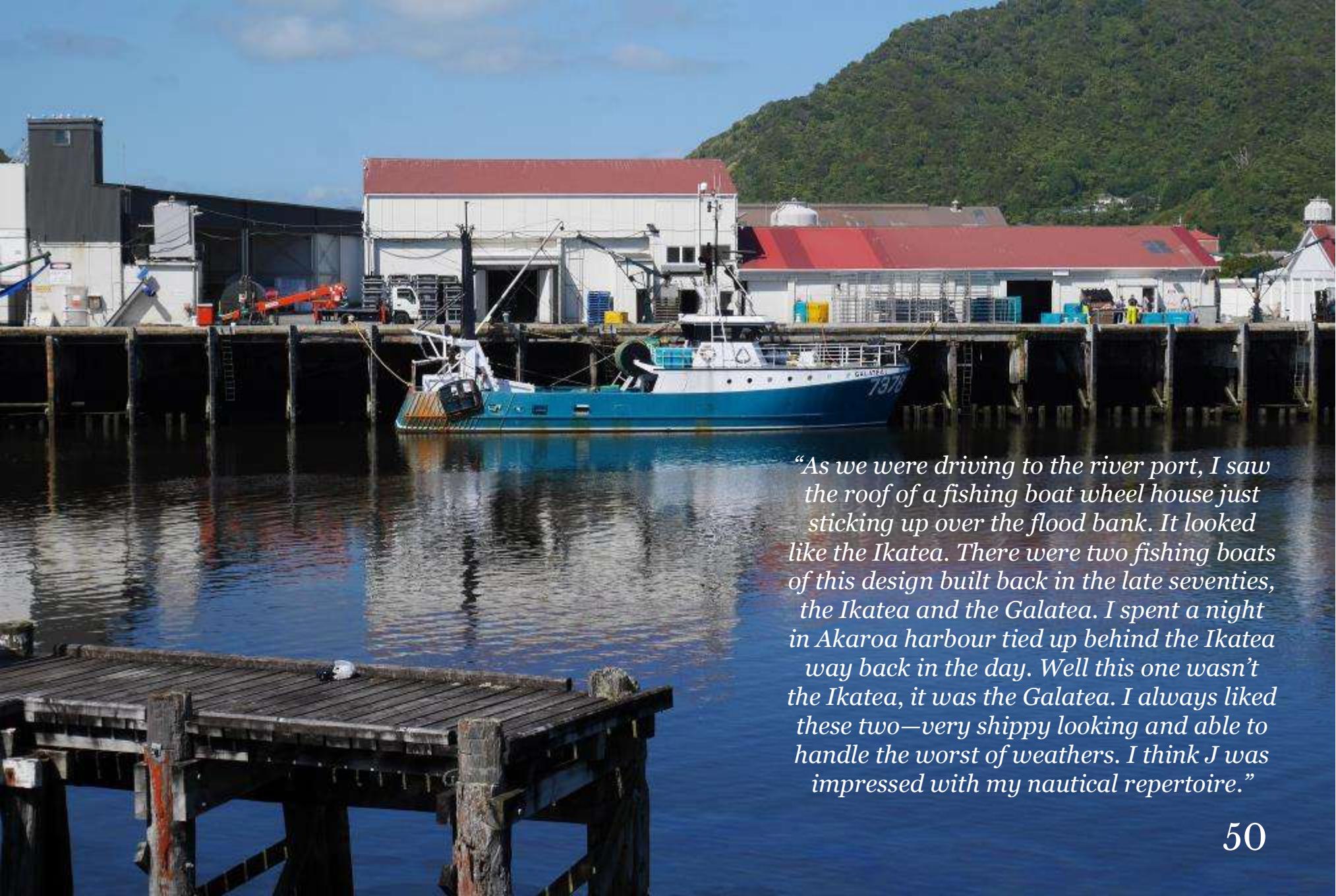




En route to Greymouth



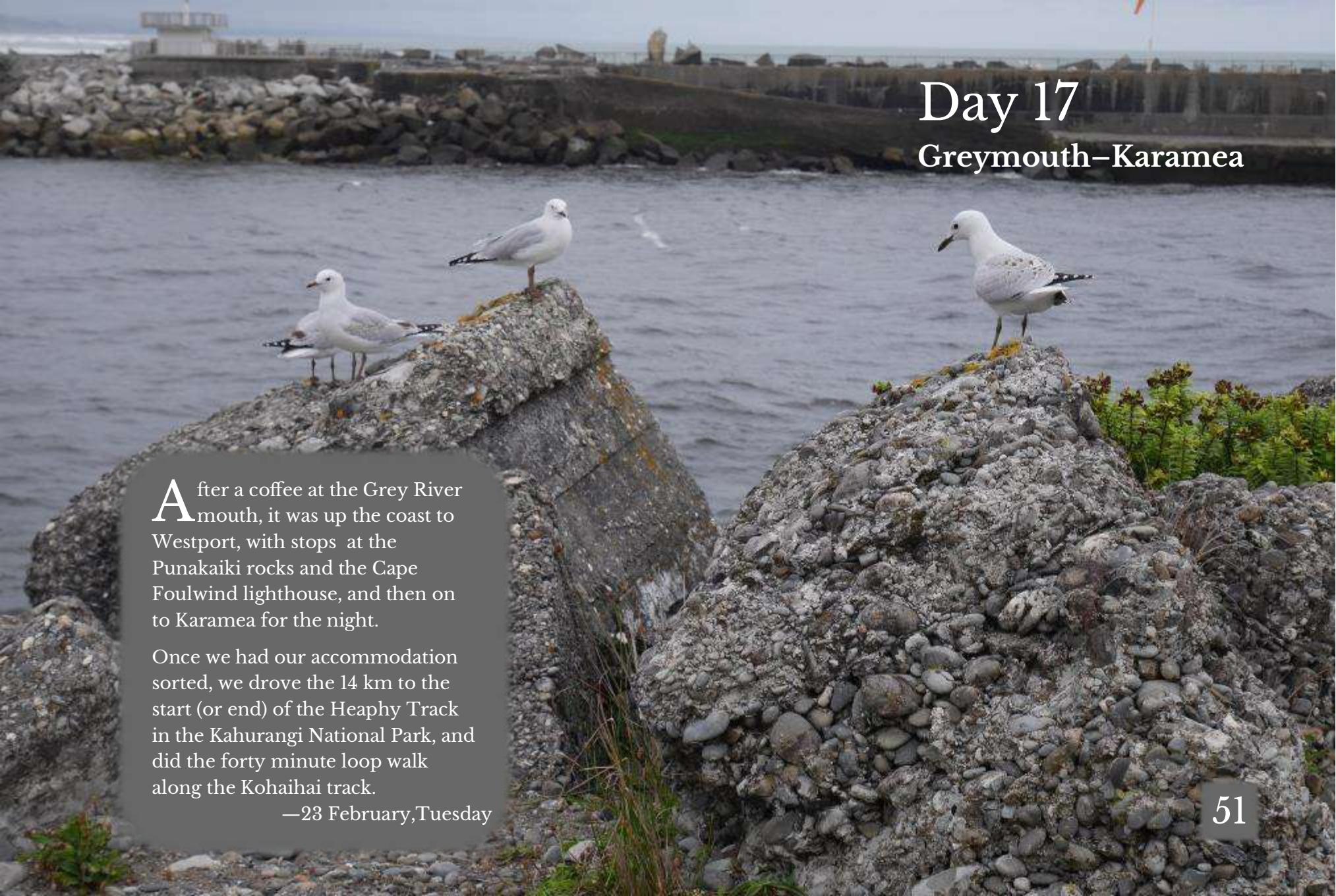
Grey River mouth



“As we were driving to the river port, I saw the roof of a fishing boat wheel house just sticking up over the flood bank. It looked like the Ikatea. There were two fishing boats of this design built back in the late seventies, the Ikatea and the Galatea. I spent a night in Akaroa harbour tied up behind the Ikatea way back in the day. Well this one wasn’t the Ikatea, it was the Galatea. I always liked these two—very shippy looking and able to handle the worst of weathers. I think J was impressed with my nautical repertoire.”

Day 17

Greymouth–Karamea



After a coffee at the Grey River mouth, it was up the coast to Westport, with stops at the Punakaiki rocks and the Cape Foulwind lighthouse, and then on to Karamea for the night.

Once we had our accommodation sorted, we drove the 14 km to the start (or end) of the Heaphy Track in the Kahurangi National Park, and did the forty minute loop walk along the Kohaihai track.

—23 February, Tuesday



Nikau at Punakaiki



Punakaiki Pancake Rocks



En route to Karamea

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Day 18

Karamea—Wellington

Turning the corner for home

This turned out to be the final day of our South Island not-on-highway-one road trip. Strange how it always happens – turn the corner for home (in our case, leaving Haast and starting the journey up the coast), and suddenly getting home looms larger than slow travel and exploring the by-ways. So instead of exploring the north-west section of the South Island as initially planned, we headed for Picton and the 6.45 sailing of the Aratere, with plenty of stops along the way.

And so our South Island road trip comes to an end. We've covered a lot of ground—about 450 km all up. We couldn't totally avoid Highway 1, but we weren't on it a lot. Highway 6 was a biggie, accounting for much of the route from Lumsden to Nelson. I can't recall all the roads, but they included highways 7, 8, 72, 87, 92, 94, 95 and 99, plus a number of secondary and minor shingle roads.

A great trip—but we're also happy to be home.

February 24, Wednesday

A wide-angle photograph of a coastal scene. In the center, a small sailboat with its sail down is anchored in the calm, light-colored water. The water is shallow, with a rocky and pebbled shore in the foreground. In the background, a range of mountains is visible under a sky filled with scattered, wispy clouds.

Off Highway 1

South Island Road Trip 2016

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