

PIERRE ROBIN



New Zealand by bike

In 50 Steps

Aotearoa

"THE ISLAND OF THE GREAT WHITE CLOUD"

Collection Chemins d'un Cyclopède

SIGNING SESSIONS

*To Wim COOSEMANS,
who made the dream come true by inviting me
To Hawea To Discover His "Little Paradise".*

To Steve RIDDELL, who kindly facilitated my trip.

*"There are magical processes that eliminate the distances,
the distances of space and time, the emotions".*

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR



FROM THE SAME AUTHOR :

Carnet de voyage au Maroc 2006 (Drouin)

Carnet de voyage en Islande 2007 (Pyramide)

Sur la route de la soie 2008 (Decombat)

Sur la route des Andes 2010 (Decombat)

Rêves de Norvège 2019 (SIC)

Internet orders on : www.cyclopede63.com

ALL TRIPS ON THE WEBSITE :

<http://www.cyclopede63.com>

*By trip: Maps-Itineraries- La Montagne articles-
Travel logs-Selection of photos and all photos-
Exhibitions-Miscellaneous documents-Projects.*

Access free of charge, advertising-free, royalty-free. Subject to the author's authorization for commercial use.

CYCLING NEW ZEALAND IN 50 STAGES

Choosing a destination for a cycling trip is often a matter of imperfect alchemy : a challenge, a dream, friends on the other side of the world, something strangely singular.

However, this type of travel always ticks the boxes inscribed in its DNA : enjoying freedom, satisfying curiosity, making the most encounters, savoring contemplation and exploring inner reflection.

Choosing New Zealand is no exception to this rule.

With time running out, I could also add another unavoidable clause : adapt to your physical means. What Michel Onfray calls for in his book on the theory of travel : *“don't turn your journey into a cross”*.

The decision to set off to discover Aotearoa, the *“land of the long white cloud”* of the Maoris, New Zealand's original people, was based on all these criteria, but also on more personal objectives:

To find any descendants of the aviators who died in the crash of their plane on March 5, 1944 near Orcival, and are buried in the Carmes cemetery.

Track down Wim Coosemans, the Belgian bike traveler met in Chile and then welcomed in Clermont-Ferrand, now living in Hawera, New Zealand, on the South Island.

The starting point has now been established in all its original detail. However, as with all other journeys, it would suffice to define it by taking inspiration from this Tuareg proverb:

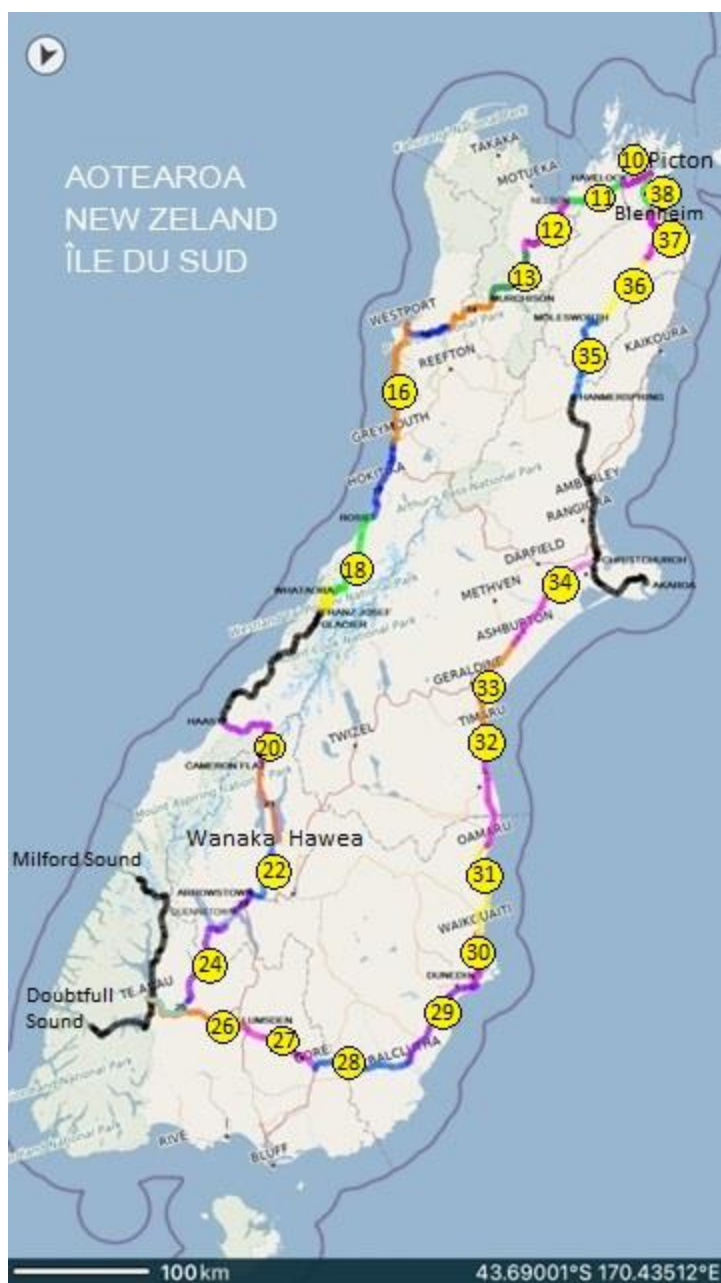
“To travel is to go from oneself to oneself through others”.

AOTEAROA NORTH ISLAND CYCLE ROUTE



Black for bus journeys. One color per stage

AOTEAROA SOUTH ISLAND CYCLE ROUTE



Black for bus journeys. One color per stage

PROLOG

New Zealand has to be earned !

I left Lyon Saint-Exupéry on Sunday, December 10th and arrived in Auckland on Tuesday, December 12th. If air travel alternates between an unchanging succession of meals, films and sleep, stopovers bring their share of unforeseen events, between fatigue and stress. In Dubai, for example, the sprawling airport is a city within a city. It never sleeps, drowned under a flood of neon lights. A deafening noise, fed by countless sources, destroys you during the eight hours of wait wherever you take refuge.

In Sydney, the stress has been ratcheted up a notch. As my check-in had not been confirmed by my tour operator's faulty IT system, coupled with contradictory information about the future of my luggage, including my bike, there was panic for the 3 hours it took to resolve the situation. This was without counting on the fastidious emigration authorities, who were intrigued by the situation of a bicycle traveler. Finally, after two hours of questions and the provision of various documents, a search was carried out, with a complete dismantling that only the Soviets of the old days could do. At the airport, I was met by Steve Riddell, the guardian angel I had met through Bernard Laquet, a friend from Clermont-Ferrand, during the last Rugby World Cup in New Zealand.

From residential Auckland to the « BACKPACKERS »

Steve's welcome was essential to my arrival. Firstly, because he had made himself available to solve all the material problems, including transit from the airport, but also because of his calm, his determination, the smile he never loses and a natural kindness that make him a very nice person. Reassembling the bike took me a good 3 hours, plus a few tricks related to the loss of parts during customs unpacking. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank COLSON collars for their all-rounders.

After my first contact with the road and my first mistake of driving on the right when you drive on the left here, I disembarked directly at Auckland harbour on the ferry that crosses the bay. Soon after, I join my PC for three days with the “backpackers”.

Where adventure begins

The city's rectangular layout makes it easy to find your way around. In short, the architecture is a skilful blend of the Victorian style of the many preserved buildings on Queen Street, the main street, and the resolute modernity of little New York. The climate could be described as tropical in terms of temperature and humidity, but Nordic in terms of fog and a permanent drizzle from the Pacific. Backpackers are housed practically at the foot of Auckland's iconic Sky Tower. Travelers are housed in eight-person dormitories, so yes, welcome to the Fashion Week, the International Tatoo Style Competition and other oddities of all kinds. If at first glance you might think that anarchy reigns here, you'd be wrong. Of course, promiscuity is the order of the day, but it's a spontaneous, practical organization that dominates, where sharing is the absolute rule. The collective kitchen takes on the appearance of a multicultural international restaurant. In fact, it was in the company of soccer fans of all nationalities, including a Frenchman, Marco, on a round-the-world trip from Vietnam, that I was able to follow the Blues' qualification for the final. As a result, I had one goal in mind : covering the 270 km in three days in the hope of seeing the final on Monday, in the town of Taupo, on the shores of the eponymous lake at 4am local time.

It feels good to be here, with this feeling of an open door to adventure. As far as I'm concerned, I'm on the road this morning, Friday, December 16th at 7am, heading for Taupo..



STEVE RIDDELL, who picked me up at the airport, my first great encounter in AUCKLAND



Shuttle bus across AUCKLAND Bay to the harbor, direct access to the city center



The port of AUCKLAND, the starting point for all your dreams



AUCKLAND's station esplanade during the Christmas holidays

FROM AUCKLAND TO TAUMARUINI AUCKLAND AND WAIKATO AREAS

*Stage 1: Auckland-Pokeno (80km) Stage 2: Pokeno-Hamilton (75km)
bus transfer Hamilton-Taupo via Rotorua, Stage 3: Taupo junction
SH41/route 43 (94km) and Stage 4: Junction/Taumarunui (44km)*

The road decides

You dream of it, you hope for it, you fear it, you contemplate it, you endure it, it's the road that makes the decisions for the Bicycle Traveler. It's never the same, and it's the road that imposes itself on you as an uncompromising "velocrat", otherwise beware of the final bill!

Finding the way out

Getting out of big cities is never a smooth ride. Auckland is no exception. The Mount Eden that dominates the city is followed by a dozen or so industrial and commercial zones whose copy-and-paste architecture disorients you. I've become a Minotaur in a maze of dead ends and obligatory directions that devour me for four hours, leaving me with the impression of treading water. My Ariadne's thread is losing its batteries!

Reality outstrips fiction

I finally find myself on an "express way", the only choice I have. These roads are authorized for bicycles with specific signage and a wide three meters painted area, the "lane". But being subjected to the roar of trucks with large trailers and hearing the whistling of car tires hurtling at you at high speed, makes your blood run cold. The road chooses another alternative and I take it after 40 km.

Advantages and disadvantages

Fewer vehicles, but less space for the cyclist. It's quieter, but I'm eating "big tar", that sneaky tire puncture at any moment. As for me, for a thousand milestones game, I drew the Marathon #3 card for my wheels and I feel indestructible!

For the first time, I can look out over the countryside, where every shade of green spreads out in a life-size bucolic painting. A giant has scattered volcanic cones here and there, their pointed caps serving as promontories for cows in need of a train. This road takes me as far as the little village of Pokeno, where children and associations march in a Christmas parade. I decide to stop off in this charming village.

Review the "rundown" before setting off

Leaving Hamilton via Expressway 1 is once again forced upon me and plunges me back into disarray. In the end, I decide to take the bus to Lake Taupo. A few hours later, I'm back with the friendly backpackers, concentrating in front of my TV screen on the France-Argentina final. "4 a.m. I'm shivering, I don't have a TV, but I'm turning up the sound..." on my radio! The dream of a third star finally joins Messi's "sky and blue", but national honor is safe in this Hitchcockian match!

A quick geographical survey takes the stress out of my trip, as I take Route 32 around the north side of the lake, avoiding Expressway 1 to the south. I climb a dozen Berzet hills, which leaves me exhausted. The 30 kg of my bags weigh down my freedom. I rest after 90 km in conditions that are uncertain, to say the least, but close to the junction with my new route to Taumarunui, my next stopover.

Saddlebags of disappointment...

I've ticked off a little jumble that says a lot about the unpredictable that inevitably happens...

- A hook on my camping bag breaks. I find the solution with a nylon cord found by chance on the road*. This allows me to reattach the saddlebag to the luggage rack.

**The roads are full of everything!*

— I set up my wild camping tent in a lovely thick grass meadow of a huge “resort” (NZ name for hacienda). The owners delegate three sturdy men to get me off the site quickly... Go and find out who's the wildest...

— Nice country road, but with no bread of the same name and no water, I forgot my water bottles at the backpackers. My blood sugar level began to decline towards hypoglycaemia, and I was running out of strength. I'm saved from this severe punishment by a brave farmer and his daughter who interrupt their sheep counting (given the number, they were about to fall asleep) to prepare me a meal as an effective remedy. I swore, albeit a little late, that I'd never do it again...

— On the same theme, managing my medication is a real challenge and I have to be inventive. For example, I often give my gel packs away during my coffee breaks, so that I can refreeze them before slipping them into their isothermal bag.

— O thunderstorm, o despair, after intermittent rain, the sky darkens and suddenly cracks, pierced by the lightning of a tropical summer storm. In 20 minutes, the bike could have been relegated to pedal-boat status if a timely bus shelter hadn't generously saved me from the flood!

A journey to the end of Taumarunui

To illustrate the theme of my talk for the day: “It's not you who imposes the road, it's the road that imposes itself on you”, I discover in Taumarunui that route 33, which rolls its ribbon out towards Plymouth, a coastal city on the Pacific Ocean, is known as the “Forgotten world highway”. We can't resist such a myth, especially as the proposed route is divided into two 90 km stages, shared by an equidistant relay for eating and sleeping, the two golden rules of the bicycle traveller. So I choose to interrupt the day's ride to spend the night in Taumarunui...and since there's a “nui”, it's the road that decides!



Lake Taupo. Set in the heart of a highly volcanic region, its north bypass is exhausting!



Geothermal energy is a magmatic, channeled, inexhaustible energy resource in New Zealand's subsoil



"Lost World Farm Station"



The farmer and his daughter served me an improvised meal to overcome a sudden hypoglycemia

A LOST WORLD

MANAWATOU AND TARANAKI AREAS

Stage 5: Taumarunui/Whangamomona (95 km) –

Stage5: Whagamona/Stratford (63 km) and bus transition to New-Plymouth

Taumarunui is a small town, stretching along its main street. It smells like the Wild West and exudes adventure, with its covered passageways linking one store to another. The only thing missing from the decor is the clatter of spurs on boards... This is where the “Forgotten World Highway” begins.

It could be the title of a movie. For me, it's a road like any other. It weaves its way between volcanic domes, languishes along small rivers or rebels when it suddenly rears up at 13% to cross a “Saddle”. New Zealand gives me its best, a peaceful countryside, all in green, where even the farms, Stations, seem timeless. A few herds of Angus cows, black as they should be, wander quietly through the meadows. This is the time when thousands of sheep are herded into pens to await shearing. The forests are dense with tropical vegetation, and the crowned heads of tree ferns emerge proudly from this ocean of green.

After passing the Paparata Saddle, I enter the Tongarakau canyons, a place of freshness that regenerates me after the last of my 8 climbs. But in “the lost world”, the road-menders have gone, leaving behind them 10 km of generously spread gravel. This is no longer cycling, but a 3 km/h circus exercise! So go surprises...

Time travel

These journeys transcend time and space. In this new century, the 20th, people wanted to escape from their daily lives, to conquer new territories, but also to stop accepting the fatal fate of distant doctors and the time it took to travel for treatment. The new civilization heralded the automobile, and real roads had to be built to enable them to get out of the mud ruts where horses and men were exhausted. If we look back for a moment at what life was like for these pioneers from 1890 to 1910, when the new "trail" was being created, we can imagine their slave labor, all shovel and pickaxe work in the extreme climatic conditions that these unfortunate people endured.

The road pays tribute to them, and in particular to Joanas Morgan, the man who led this mad venture, who died of peritonitis on the site in March 1893 at the age of 35... for lack of a doctor!

The Moki tunnel, left in its original state, opens the last door on the descent to Whangamomona.

The campground and the few dwellings clustered around the historic hotel, founded at the end of the 19th century, almost seem like the ideal resting place, despite a violent storm.

Pacific at last...

The road I had chosen to take to Plymouth is in fact a gravel road. In view of the previous exercise, I gave up this endeavor and headed straight for Stratford. Exhausted by the last 50 km of hilly riding, I decide to take a bus to Plymouth, 30 km away (I'll cover it on the way back), where I take a much-needed rest day.

The sound of dying waves on Plymouth's black sand beach lulls my night. We're approaching Christmas a day early for me, with Santa Claus ahead of me.



TAUMARUNI, gateway to the “Forgotten World Highway”



A road through a tropicalized plant world



The historic MOKI mining tunnel, a key access point for the WHANGAMOMONA



NEW PLYMOUTH, open harbour on the TASMAN Sea, Pacific West coast of North Island

FROM NEW PLYMOUTH TO WELLINGTON TARANAKI MANAWATOU AND WELLINGTON AREAS

Stage 7 : New Plymouth/ Hawera (74 km) - Stage 8: Hawera/Whanganui (100k) - Stage 9: Whanganui Bulls (51 km) transition bus to Wellington.

Moving is vital!

I didn't know how essential it would be to hit the road as a “wanderer” at this point in my life. In my youth, I was often confronted with the injunction to “move on”, usually accompanied by the demeaning complement “bunch of...” designed to provoke a potential group reaction. I didn't yet know the full meaning of this directive, which life could seize upon. Solo travels taught me that.

Move forward

“Move forward” would perhaps be the word to choose for the Bicycle Traveler. It's always about moving, moving forward, discovering, being surprised, reacting. So the two days in Plymouth – not quite a harbor, with a single boat alongside and few pleasure sails, nor quite a beach, a few bathers, languid waves, black sand and driftwood everywhere – could have been a suspension of time in the emptiness of Christmas alone.

In reality, it was a moment of calm where I was able to observe how sport was an integral part of the New Zealand society. In an environment idealized by the meticulous setting of a nonchalant, flower-filled coastal path, open to the ocean, people walk, run or ride as a family or alone.

Stay on targets

Moving is also about achieving goals. Getting to Whanganui with a stopover in Hawera means covering 180 km, where concentration is total. My energy is obsessively focused on not falling off, driving along the “lane” so as not to fall prey to the many cars and milk trucks with trailers in this area. The road here is knitted like a thick-knit sweater, with big needles holding your wheels all the way up its hilly sleeves.

Get organized

Get organized is essential if you are to remain the decision-maker along the way. Don't lose anything, taste everything, leave nothing behind, because we rarely go back. It's also part of the ritual where each of your belongings takes place, its place, before you set off into the unknown.

With three days to spare in Wellington and the ferries fully booked for the festive season, I wandered around the city with my nose in the wind. Mount Victoria and its famous “Cable-Car” funicular, set up in 1902, the Botanical Gardens and the historic wharves satisfied my curiosity.

To adapt

This is probably the key word for the journey. “To bend and do not break”, wrote La Fontaine in *The Oak and the Reed*. This doesn't mean giving up the fight against the natural elements, which are what spice up the trip. The 3/4 head coastal wind is powerful on the stretch from Whanganui to Bulls, and my saddlebags swell with pride as I reach this city, where I've reserved my seat on a bus to Wellington. To give up riding on the WH1 is also to adapt and to consider your life as essential!

It was the same for eating during the three days of general interruption of activities in NZ due to the Christmas holidays. The results : a Chinese noodle diet and a few kilos less...



Huge and terrifying, the TARANAKI volcano gave its name to the region it occupies almost entirely. Yet it is climbed every day by countless hikers



Santa Claus precedes me in Hawera. All stores closed for three days

Where has humanity gone?

Cycling alone could be a valid reason for dehumanization. On the contrary, it reinforces encounters, another pillar of bicycle travel. Here, everyone is ready to help you realize your dreams. But when it comes to buying services, it's a different matter! Everything goes through your smartphone. Buses, rooms, campgrounds, ferries, hotel reception, payments – and in English, please!

I'm still laughing when I think of the “escape game” – or should I say “open game” - of two pages in English to get to my room at 10.30 p.m. in this ghost hotel...

It's not my isolation that's the fundamental obstacle, it's the digital civilization that's setting up its increasingly all-consuming web, leaving you little space for human interaction. In NZ, I'm a little ahead of you, as is the planetary clock...

It's time to get back to my room, because tomorrow the ferry is waiting for me at 7 a.m. to reach Picton, gateway to the South Island.



WELLINGTON, the capital, seat of New Zealand's parliament



The CABLE-CAR, WELLINGTON's iconic funicular since 1902



WELLINGTON, a harmonious blend of Victorian and contemporary architecture

SOUTH ISLAND, FROM PICTON TO NELSON MARLBOROUGH AREA

*Stage 10 Wellington/Picton transit by Ferry - plus
Picton/Havelock (35km) - Stage 11 Havelock/Nelson (77km)*

Like a slice of southern Corsica

At the end of an uneventful “mini-cruise”, my ferry, the "Kaitaki", slipped between the Marlborough Sound's, a sumptuous stage for an imposing arrival in Picton, gateway to the South Island. During this brief 4 hours journey, I met and exchanged ideas with Mark, a Canadian from Toronto, a bike traveler from the end of the world, who had arrived here from the west of the planet. But our paths diverged, as I opted for the Scenic Road 6 to the north, while he headed directly south.

It's 1 p.m. and a bright sun greets my arrival. Everything changes. No more towns, just villages. No more traffic, just a few cars on their way to the Christmas vacations. The "Stade highway 6" has turned into a gently sloping mountain road that rolls and winds lovingly from the sea to the coast. It's hot, but a fresh sea air remains. A relaxed atmosphere reigns here, with many families picnicking at the edge of small coves. Overlooking me, as I wind my way through the lascivious loops, nature offers me its most beautiful spectacle.

The sea spreads a deep blue-green between the islands, scratched here and there with small silver commas left by careless boats. Tropical vegetation adds an exotic charm to what looks like a small slice of southern Corsica.

The road now takes me along the Pelarus River, which nonchalantly spills its jade-colored waters into a marshy delta, the perfect nesting place for many seabirds. I spend the night in the Havelock Municipal Campground, famous for its giant mussel shellfish, before setting off again for Nelson, the most northerly town on my itinerary.

Ups and downs

After climbing up the Pelarus river to the Pelarus bridge, where the river bubbles in erosion potholes suitable for swimming games, I start my ascent to a modest volcanic peak. But now, I've run out of strength and have to stop every 200 m. I don't know what's happening to me. Of course, my wheels are licked with relish by the long, raspy tongue of the coarse tar road ribbon, of course it's really hot, over 30°, but it's when I turn around at the last bend, the one that triggers the switch to a rapid descent, that I realize I've climbed an unexpected slope, steeper than I'd suspected!

Finally, a landscaped cycle path along the seafront reconciles me with my bike all the way to my new campsite in Nelson at the end of a morally difficult stage.

We're soon into the Southern New Year, with its 250 km as a special treat and just two stopovers to Westport, the start of the West Coast route.

SOUTH ISLAND, FROM NELSON TO HAAST TASMAN AND WEST COAST AREAS

Stage 12 : Nelson/Kohatu (61 km) - Stage 13 : Kohatu/ Murchison (63 km) - Stage 14 : Murchison/Inangahua Junction (66 km) - Stage 15 Inangahua/ Westport (43 km) - Stage 16 : Westport/Greymouth (106 km) - Stage 17 : Greymouth/Ross (70 km) - Stage 18 : Ross/Whataora (53 km) - Stage 19 : Whataora/Franz Josef glacier (54 km)

Transit by bus Franz Josef glacier/Fox glacier/Haast

Pacific rain takes over

From Westport to Ross, my three stages for 255 km had rain as a common denominator. A small oceanic drizzle is followed by a light rain, then buckets of water from a cloud that breaks through and releases all its contents at once. Then, the cycle starts all over again, never-ending. It's all part of the bike trip, you just have to accept it, it's inescapable. A rainy journey is not a happy one, and morale is affected. Well-protected for riding, we're in pretty good shape, although we have to be extra careful on the downhill sections. But getting your clothes dry, taking care of your gear and wet publications, and pitching and dismantling your tent is hellish at every stage. After the rain comes the good weather. The warm summer sun reappears on the mountain as we leave Whataora for a short 33 km connection to the Franz Josef glacier.

A pale glacier tongue

This village was founded in the early 20th century by mountain enthusiasts. They began by building a hut to enable New Zealand society to discover the glacier. Today, Franz Josef has become a resort entirely devoted to popular family tourism around the glacier, the main attraction.

Sadly, the glacier is inevitably shrinking, and its tongue has lost 5km since 1902, like 80% of terrestrial glaciers that are about to disappear.

So mountain biking, forest hiking, kayaking and hot springs in tropical spas are taking up the challenge to keep the activity going. I wouldn't dare mention the helicopters whose deafening ballet gives visitors a first-hand view of global warming... Rather than being able to walk on the ice, propeller blades make up for the pale ice age, an absurd feat, but that's business!

Surprise on holds

Leaving Greymouth, I decide to renew my medical kit without waiting for Wanaka. With my prescription translated into English in my pocket, I head for the only pharmacy in the grey town, but the procedure requires a counter-prescription certified by the hospital. It took me four hours to get my medication, the same as in France! Illnesses are international and don't care about borders, but they do care about management, which is, understandably, my responsibility.

Three encounters will mark these stages: Mark, the Canadian from Toronto whom I met again in Greymouth and then in Ross, but who suddenly vanished, revealing the independence of the autonomous bicycle traveler. His English and his logbook were invaluable to me.

In Whataroa, I met two young Americans, David from Michigan and Jack from Minesota. After six hours of rain, this meeting was decisive for my accommodation in a ghost hotel, out of public service, but whose owner rented out rooms at a modest price. It was enough to lift my damp spirits, and well deserved a meal together in the village bar! In Haast, I meet up again with Jack, who was driving towards the pass, and David, who has found work in the campground where I'm staying for the night.

Finally, I met a Kiwi couple, Lesley and Fred, who invited me to visit them in Saint Arnaud on my way back from the south to Picton. For you, "it may be nothing, but it means a lot!"

I finally decide to make the journey from Franz Josef to Haast (135 km, two days) by bus transfer to get closer to Wanaka before climbing the Haast pass. Marcel, the Belgian driver, turns into a guide and stops the bus, so we can take photos at all the viewpoints! It's like nothing we've ever seen before... Come on, warm up Marcel!

Where are the landmarks?

When traveling by bike, time is no longer measured in hours. We think only in solar days and daily content. Get up, put away the gear, pack up the tent, leave as soon as possible, eat when you're hungry, drink often, take breaks, look for a place to spend the night, eat again, it's obsessive, get the gear out, write, sleep. On the other side of the world, the hours go by indifferently. Sylvain Tesson writes: "My aim is not to catch up with time, but to succeed in making it indifferent". It's the body that commands, it's the brain that adapts. If you're more of an "evening person", you become a "morning person", there's no arguing with that... As far as I'm concerned, I add a blood sugar check to the rhythm of my day when monitoring meals.

The same applies to distance. You don't really count in kilometers anymore, even if this remains an interesting unit overall – I'm at 1300 km – but in priority choice of arrival and departure points. The rest stops impose themselves on you in their offer of services, sleeping, drying, meals, attractions, beer..

The same applies to the difficulties of the roads, climbs, services, and possible intermediate rest points. As a result, the kilometers of your itinerary are full of disparities. In fact, they adapt to the conditions you actually experienced. In the end, their discrepancies mean that you've crossed a zone of unforeseen turbulence.

At this time, I'm enjoying the glorious sunshine over the Tasman Sea and the Otago Mountains at Haast campground. I'll be resuming my route via the landmarks I've identified as essential, whatever the distances.



PICTON, sea entrance for ferries linking the two islands



Coast from PICTON to HAVELOCK, reminiscent of formerly Corsica



Wilderness camping, BULLER RIVER shoreline, PAPAROA coastal river, National Parc of the WEST COAST



*FOX GLACIER, melting ice tongue
from the South Island's New Zealand Alps*

FROM HAAST TO WANAKA WEST COST AND OTAGO AREAS

Stage 20: Haast/Cameron Flat (71km) - Stage 21: Cameron Flat/Hawea (73km)

Paradise has to be earned...

It's with a light heart that I leave Haast and the Haast River delta on Aotearoa's West Pacific coast. I'm going to meet up with Wim, a young Belgian computer scientist I met in Chile on the Austral Carretera. Wim has been living in New Zealand in Hawea for 10 years, and works remotely for a company in Wellington.

"Come and see my paradise", he wrote to me one day, enclosing a photo of Lake Wanaka.

This invitation came from a seasoned mountaineer, capable of sleeping in a bag suspended by two ropes from a rock face, always in search of the best sensations, in love with nature and a nature in love, I had to take things seriously... So Wim, here I am!

It took me two stages to complete the 150 km from Haast to Wanaka. A gentle climb over the first 50 sunny kilometers turned out to be very pleasant, with numerous fresh waterfalls at the end of marked hiking trails. Nature seems to have come to a standstill in its most beautiful setting, carefully painting the grandiose landscapes of the New Zealand Alps. A white cloud, compact as absorbent wadding stretched from its wrapping after a night's sleep, clings to the leaves of the tree ferns of the volcanic domes. You want to roll around in this fleecy scarf, to snuggle up and hide... Especially as the last 3 km of the pass are very steep and make me put my foot down.

The war goes on...

Fifteen kilometers further on, I pitch my tent on Cameron Flat, a self-service campsite facing the “blues pools”, erosion potholes dug into the rock by ice-mint-colored water from melting ice. I'd have to fight a merciless battle against the sandflies attracted in droves by the tourists, despite having perfected a clever technique for packing my gear in my closed tent... Unfortunately, I was careless and forgot to fasten my last bag to the luggage rack in the folded and stowed canvas. The result was a complete open air re-packing on several surfaces, so intense was the general vengeful attack...

Pictures galore!

The descent to Wanaka will not be a smooth ride. The wind blows hard up the bumpy slopes of the two lakes, formed in parallel by glaciers, millions of years ago.

The SH6 skirts Lake Wanaka North first, then takes a 2 km rocky passage, the neck, which connects to Lake Hawea and leads me to Wim.

This stopover will last a few days and will prove essential for repairing the bike. I've lost my front brake after breaking the lever when I escaped*. I'll be taking advantage of this check-up to replace the mudguard attachment to the fork, which is also in poor condition following the various bus transits.

I'm also going to take advantage of my stopover in Wanaka to visit some exceptional places that are now attracting many tourists from neighboring Queenstown. Sunset on the lake, kayaking 20 km down the Clutha River from Wanaka Lake, hiking to Mou Whanou Island, which has its own small crater lake at its summit, will remain as many unforgettable images and moments.

** MAGURA hydraulic brake replaced by a conventional cable regenerative brake.*

Rituals have their benefits

I wasn't familiar with rituals. As a disciple of Rabelais, I was even amused by the initiation ceremonies of the Order of the "Oyster and the Ham". *

But arranging the traveler's luggage, finding a place for each object according to volume, weight, overall balance and chronological order of use, requires a rigorous method that must be scrupulously followed, under penalty of irrevocable sanction, as we were able to judge upstream.

Over the course of rehearsals, this essential phase of the journey, the traveler's departure, becomes an elaborate ritual in which order and precision are almost immutable.

I agree with Sylvain Tesson's assertion that "travelling is not about choosing order, it's about bringing order into oneself".

Now that everything's in order, the plan for the 950 km in 13 stages to Christchurch has been drawn up, and my energy levels are up again, it's time to say goodbye to my host, my friend Wim and his partner Cat, and head for Arrowtown and Queenstown, my next stops.

**Wacky, convivial ceremonies to share good times with friends.*



*Ascent of HAAST PASS along the HAAS RIVER.
50 km of gentle climbing, only the last three are steep*



*CAMERON FLAT campground, start of the Bues Pools track,
overrun with sandflies*



20 km rafting trip down the CLUTHA RIVER with WIM and CAT from Lake WANAKA



The Lake WANAKA tree, worldwide photographed

FROM HAWEA TO TE ANAU OTAGO AND SOUTHLAND AREAS

Stage 22 : Hawea-Wanaka/Arrowtown (75 km) - Stage 23 : Arrowtown Queenstown (23 km) - Stage 24 : Queenstown/Marova Lakes road (75 km) - Stage 25 : Marova lakes Road/Te Anau (40km)

Useful rests

Rest stops are essential on every type of trip. They are a breath of fresh air, a punctuation mark that highlights what you've accumulated over the miles. They may not be systematically programmed, but they can be a useful way to stimulate curiosity. During my trip to Beijing in 2008, I'll always be angry with myself for not leaving my bike in Tashkent and taking local transport to visit Samarkand, a historic city on the Silk Road, 4 hours from the capital..

Dotting the i's

It's obvious that the body also needs to recover, but it's also a good time to take stock of equipment and other needs, to draw up an initial assessment of the trip and perhaps to re-orientate one's future itinerary. Thanks to the kindness of Wim and Cat, our stay in Hawea was perfect in every way.

Reshuffling the cards

Road maps show the way. They open the door to dreams, which they bring to life with their geographical and logistical markers. You need to take a little time to decipher them, supplementing them with local maps, tips gleaned from chance encounters, or, along the roads of New Zealand*, by reading the signs posted at remarkable information points.

**The same goes for Canada, especially for its Contemporary History.*

I leave Wim and Cat, not without emotion, at a farewell ceremony facing Lake Hawea, with a glass of excellent local white wine, Sauvignon grape variety and BBQ self-service. Eventually, I'll reach Te Anau, a small town on the eponymous lake that wasn't on my original itinerary, via the bike path along the Hawea River to Wanaka, a delight. Then I reached Arrowtown, also unplanned thanks to Georges, a charming pioneer village restored in the Far-West style, and finally Queenstown the next day, one of the essential totems of the trip. Strangely enough, I won't be spending too much time there, given the international crowds and the prices charged in this all-season tourist resort. The same goes for Florence and Jean-Marc, world-class cyclists from Bordeaux, whom I met several times along the way. I met them again at the Queenstown campground, where we shared a negotiated pitch for our tents.

Dream Gravel

On the advice of Wim, who thinks I can do it*, I cross the lake on the Earnslaw, a steamer launched in 1912. Under the thin curtain of light rain, which soon lifts to let in a beautiful summer sun, I take the 125 km, including 85 km of gravel track, that will take me to Te Anau in a day and a half.

It's wonderful to be a landlubber and enjoy these breathtaking landscapes. The road winds its way up and down, up and down, up and down, disappearing and reappearing on the horizon. In the immensity of the cradle of the glacial valleys, the rivers linger, flow and stroll in their pebble beds. The sky, pure azure blue, has the luxury of hemming in clouds of thick absorbent cotton. The golden mountains harmoniously blend hills, volcanoes and peaks of the EYRE range in the FIORLAND National Park in Southland Aotearoa.

**We wore out our tires together on the 1000 km Austral Carretera in southern Chile.*



Last day in HAWERA with CAT and WIM



Crown Range Summit, 1078m, access pass to Arrowtown and Queenstown at the bottom of the valley. Planes skim over the pass and slip through a narrow air corridor between the mountains



EARNSLAW, steamboat that has been crossing the lake since 1912



The extraordinary 90 km bush between Queenstown, Marova Lakes and Te Anau

We forget the gravel, the too thin road tires, the too heavy load, the arms vibrating on the gravel for seven hours. There's no one to talk about this mixture of hardness and sublime beauty. Just the squeal of suffering tires. In the course of the day, I pass three farmers' cars and a quad bike with dogs to herd sheep. I'm also surprised to see a lone backpacker silhouetted in the distance at the end of the endless trail. I immediately give him a place of honor. Paul is Corsican and is making good progress on this road of plenitude. I give him my consideration, my admiration and some good news: he's exactly 2 km from his planned campsite at Lac Mavora, the kilometer position of which I'd recorded!

What's the rush?

This is where history meets the big picture. It was around these two lakes, so inaccessible at the time, that many deserters and conscientious objectors went into hiding to escape mobilization for the 14/18 war in France*. After the war, they were prosecuted, ostracized from New Zealand society, stripped of their civic rights and barred from working in any of the country's public administrations for more than 10 years, but in the end, they lived!

The road of the bicycle traveler is filled to overflowing with the splendors the planet has to offer, these journeys back into history and the little things, a smile, a few words of sharing that re-humanize and enchant these moments of solitude.

Mine will end on a wild camping ground somewhere, 40 km from Te Anau, which I'll reach the next morning, leaving me time to prepare for three exceptional excursions.

**120,000 "Kiwis" were involved in the First World War conflict. 18,500 died on active service.*

VISIT FIORDLAND NATIONAL PARC

BUS TOUR OF DOUBTFULL SOUND, MILFORD SOUND and the GLOWWARM

Te Anau is the most advanced small town in the National Fiordland Park. It has all the services you need as a base for visiting the Sounds, which can be described as fjord-channels. New Zealand's most beautiful natural maritime areas are easily accessible by bus, boat or both. I will successively visit Doubtfull Sound (two days), a Glowwarm cellar, cave and underground river with glow-worms (three hours) and Milford Sound (one day).

More than any words, the pictures speak for themselves. I'll leave you with the pleasure of discovering them.

Doubtfull Sound was discovered by Cook in 1770. With a length of 40 km and an average depth of 420 m, it is the number one for its respect for wilderness and silence.

Milford Sound was later revealed by John Grono, who set up the first visitors' hut. Having visited the fjords of Norway and Patagonia, Milford Sound, with its 16 km length and 330 m average depth, surpasses all others in its mountainous approach and diverse maritime splendor.

I was a little disappointed by the Glowwarm, where the lack of light necessary for the development of glow-worms leaves you in total darkness. It's a far cry from the idyllic promotional photos used for tourism communication.

I'll be leaving Te Anau with my eyes full of sublime images, but not without having shared a few memories of browls with Mikkel*, a young Danish student who loves to speak French.

**A Work-Holiday contract enables young people aged between 18 and 30 to benefit from a visa allowing them to work and move around the country for 1 year.*



Lake Te Anau, seen from the campground where I was camping



Deer farm, Te Anau road



Te Anau lake from my campsite



Doubtfull Sound, 40 km long, 420 m average depth



Milford Sound, undoubtedly the most beautiful fjord in the world



Fur seal colony near the open sea

FROM TE ANAU TO DUNEDIN OTAGO AREA

*Stage 26: Te Anau/Lumden (77km) - Stage 27: Lumden/Gore (64km)
Stage 28: Gore/Balclutha (73km) - Stage 29: Balclutha/ Dunedin
(83km)*

Let's go!

After three days in Te Anau, the urge to get back on the road has never been so intense. This physical need is inexplicable, almost irrepressible. All backpackers feel this call. You just have to get out there and get it done, even if it hurts sometimes! A powerful inner force pushes you along the path. No doubt also, the pleasure of discovery, as Michel de Montaigne experienced it: "Have I left something behind to be seen? I'm going back, it's still my path". Or what Michel Renaud finally translated when he created the IFAV: "You have to go and see" to satisfy your curiosity. And then, there's the thrill of the body, just waiting to express itself and lead you towards your desires for space, color, sound, light, encounters, beauty and, ultimately, sharing. That's where the pleasure lies too, in sharing your travels without boring rhetoric, so that something special remains for everyone. It's important to remember, however, that despite our best efforts, these memories will gradually fade with time, leaving only a limbo of dreams.

Come on, I can't wait to get on my bike and head for Dunedin.

It scrolls on...

I had imagined a boring route between Te Anau and Balclutha, given the profile I had consulted to get an idea and also perhaps to lower the barrier of my fears. The first fears quickly disappeared, as I didn't even feel the 30km of bumps I'd had on the downhill section on the outward journey. As for the next part, I was expecting an arid plain. It turned out to be nothing of the sort.

On my right – we drive on the left in New Zealand – a ridge of small hills lies between the coast and the road. Most of the time, this rocky formation is covered with beautiful grass, and livestock farming dominates. It's also a barrier that directs winds from 3/4 back: a delight! I make the most of it, averaging 20 km/h over the 70 km of each of the 3 stages. I'm no longer a Galápagos tortoise with my 23 kg load, but a Charente's snail express! Furthermore, I meet another of the same species, an Australian "GLOBUS CYCLIST" from Sydney, and we share a few common European salads where our spumescent tracks have crossed, always a good time for exchanges...

To my left, a patchwork of agricultural crops covers the land in pastel colors to great effect.

In the center, my road has laid its ribbon over a plain that rolls out a gently undulating carpet until the approach to Balclutha. Each of these three pleasant routes ends with a campground at Lumsden, Gore and Balclutha. These campsites are unpretentious, but have all the elements of "useful complementary family comfort": Wi-Fi, well-equipped communal kitchens, showers, facilities – all clean and respected.

On the spot...

The last stage from Balclutha to Dunedin soon turned out to be a disappointment. If the early climbs were swallowed with the elegance of a night's rest, the opening of the plain to the headwind in my panniers was a return to ruthless reality... The impression left was that of a 50 km "on the spot", all the more so as I'm always given a congruent portion of coarse tarmac on the routes, well stocked with oversized flints, to stuff up to the wheel hub... It's long, very long! For all bicycle travelers, don't say "Have a nice ride", say "Godspeed"!

The final stretch to Dunedin was as hilly as its hills, and resembled a gymkhana hampered by roadworks and swept along by a strong sea wind from the Pacific on its east coast.

Three minutes after lying down on my inflatable dream mattress, I was asleep like a dormouse recruited from exhaustion.

Meeting with History

It'll be staying in the town for two nights to explore it, but also to meet the leaders of RSA, the NZ veterans' association, before heading off to Waikouaiti, a coastal village 50 km from here, where one of the airmen buried in the Carmes cemetery is originally from.

La mémoire aura survécu au « crash »

Un hommage particulier sera rendu, demain, à 18 heures, au cimetière des Armées de Clermont-Ferrand, en mémoire des aviateurs alliés tombés dans le massif du Sancy, dans la nuit du 4 au 5 mars 1944.

UNE nuit comme beaucoup d'autres que cette nuit du 4 au 5 mars 1944. Quelques heures au-dessus du massif du Sancy, une escadrille italienne sans lune, à laquelle le brouillard épais et les orages de neige ont décidé de venir se mêler. Une mission comme beaucoup d'autres, également, pour les sept hommes d'équipage — trois Britanniques et quatre Néo-Zélandais — embarqués à bord d'un appareil appartenant à la 79^e escadrille de la Royal Air Force (un Short Stirling Mk III de 26.000 mètres de long et dépassant les 30 tonnes, capable de voler à plus de 300 km/h). Habituellement, la 79^e Squadron effectue des opérations de bombardement. Le Short Stirling pouvait transporter deux tonnes. Mais cette nuit-là, l'escadrille a été détournée par la SOE — ses services secrets — pour réaliser un mission de mission de parachutage afin de réapprovisionner le maquis, dans le but de préparer le Débarquement prévu pour les semaines à venir.

Petit quatre heures plus tard de sa base de Mical Clermont-Quaillat, l'escadrille a déjà accueilli en feu de la DCA allemande juste après avoir franchi la Marche, puis décollé au-dessus de la Luftwaffe, dirigé vers le « drop zone ». Mais les mauvaises conditions météorologiques ont empêché la nuit de descendre de plus en plus bas pour réaliser son objectif. Heureusement, les sept hommes d'équipage ont pu se poser dans le massif du Sancy, à l'abri de la DCA allemande. Ils ont été découverts par la DCA allemande, puis décollés à bord de leur appareil. Le pilote, le navigateur, le bombardier, le radio, le mécanicien et le mitrailleur arrière. Le plus jeune avait 20 ans, le plus âgé... 33.

Selon les renseignements recueillis par Georges Merle, pour le comité de l'Union national pour les anciens combattants de la Résistance au ministère de la Défense, les sept hommes seraient dix, outre l'ensemble du crew, au front arrière qui regrettait cette nuit-là.

L'après-midi se trouvaient en route au commandement des Carmes, à Clermont-Ferrand, dans un camp militaire réservé aux alliés, avec celui de ceux de deux autres escadrilles également tombées dans le massif des Anglais et des Canadiens.

En leur mémoire d'aviateurs, à deux survivus au crash (1) et d'un de ses membres d'équipage, le mitrailleur britannique, c'est le 27 mars 1944 que les autorités d'après-guerre ont décidé d'installer un mémorial au-dessus du site de la chute de l'appareil, à proximité du village d'Orclivat.

Georges Merle. Passionné d'histoire et de patrimoine, il a écrit un livre sur le crash du Short Stirling, le 4 et 5 mars 1944, intitulé « Le crash du Short Stirling, le 4 et 5 mars 1944 ».

Le Short Stirling Mk III sur le dos duquel on distingue l'habitacle du mitrailleur supérieur occupé par le « Pilot officer » Arthur Stanley Jones, seul rescapé du crash du 4 mars 1944.

Le dernier épisode de « petit fracas » par le position particulière occupée alors par le mitrailleur supérieur, sur le haut de la carlingue de l'avion, entre les ailes et le queue.

Mais à l'époque, on ne savait pas que, le sergent Armstrong n'en avait pas moins, aux mains des Allemands, peu après le crash.

COUSINS Néo-ZÉLANDAIS

Au cours de ses recherches menées pour le comité de l'Union nationale pour les anciens combattants de la Résistance, Georges Merle a découvert que le sergent Armstrong — auteur de l'opération « Objectif Clermont » (2) — Georges Merle a accusé le commandant de la 79^e escadrille, le capitaine Armstrong, d'être un « traître » et d'avoir été « réhabilité » par le commandement britannique.

En réponse, il a écrit une lettre de sa famille, en Angleterre.

En réponse, il a écrit une lettre de sa famille, en Angleterre.

En réponse, il a écrit une lettre de sa famille, en Angleterre.

(1) « Squadron leader », grade correspondant à celui de commandant.

(2) « Colonel » Clermont », de Claude Gervais, aux côtés des Carmes Britanniques, arrivés en 1943 et 1944, après l'Armée Méditerranéenne (170 pages, éditions d'un service de presse de la Résistance, 1977).

(3) « Colonel », grade correspondant à celui de sous-lieutenant.

(4) AGPC-CATM — Actions combattantes et préparations de guerre-Combattants d'Algérie, Unioed, Maroc.

Article from La Montagne, April 12th 2001



New Zealand airmen's graves at Carmes cemetery



Southern Otago Corridor, granary and rich Stations between the Pacific and the New Zealand Alps



DUNEDIN, « The Sleeping Beauty », nestled against the hills, open to the Austral Pacific

FROM DUNEDIN TO CHRISTCHURCH OTAGO AND CANTERBURY AREAS

Stage30: Dunedin/Waikouaiti (49km) - Stage31: Waikouaiti/Oamarou (76km) Stage 31: Waikouaiti/Oamarou (76km) - Stage 32: Oamarou/Timaru (89km) - Stage 33: Timaru/Asburton (79km)

Dunedin, the sleeping beauty

Dunedin, founded by Captain Cargill's Scotsmen in 1848, is the second-largest city in South Aotearoa, with a population of 118,000. It's also an eagerly-awaited resting place on my itinerary after 300 km and four consecutive cycling stages.

Nestling at the head of a bay, protected to the east by the Porto Bello peninsula, it is backed from south to north by a natural rampart of hills. To the west, it raises two eyebrows of blond sand against the deep blue of the Pacific. It's a real city, in the European urban sense, with a town center, embodied by an octagonal square with trees, surrounded by bars and large service buildings. A few iconic statues stand watch, and the main street aligns its shops along pedestrianized arteries. It's Sunday, it's summer. Students haven't gone back to school. The streets are deserted, and the Victorian architectural style with which the city is imbued gives me the impression of a sleeping beauty. I'm going to do the same and take advantage of the beaches close to the campground to bask in the sun before swallowing a short but bumpy stretch of road to WAIKOUAITI.

Where disappointment follows enthusiasm

A small village of 1,200 inhabitants, lost at the bottom of the Waikouaiti river delta, yet one of the historic Maori settlements, this is one of the most important meetings of my trip. It was the home of the family of Hugh William Henderson, the navigator on the crew of the crashed RAF Stirling.

On March 5, 1944, during a snowstorm near Orcival on his way back from a mission to drop weapons on the Auvergne Resistance.



I was greeted with surprise, interest and emotion by some locals, who directed my investigations to the museum, as the village is administered directly by Dunedin. Alas, after inquiries with the local museum, no survivors or descendants of his family could be located.

Hugh William Henderson, Waikouaiti Museum Archive

The next appointment is in Wellington, where the office of the local Clinton ASR association, opportunely met on my way, has made contact with the national organization to explain and advance this memorial project in 2024 for the 80th anniversary of the disappearance of these Kiwi aviators.

Weath

I set off, with the rage of failure in my stomach, propelling my panniers at an average speed of 20 km/h through the four stages that would take me to Christchurch on Highway One. Successively, the campgrounds of Oamaru, Timarou on the Pacific coast and Ashburton in the middle of the fields will welcome me. The road is fast, boring, tiresome. The only thing that counts is the goal: to reach Christchurch, the new platform for my visits. To get away from the monotony of this plateau of fertile volcanic soil, a veritable granary at the eastern foot of the New Zealand Alps, I make a beeline for the village of Temuka. Oh surprise, how could such a small village afford so many beautiful houses in pure Victorian style? When questioned, a policeman told me that here, at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, the wheat and meat trade with the United Kingdom, then the Commonwealth, had made the country rich... Thank you, sir, but which country are you from? Bilbao! So, we've all become "citizens of the world", the power of the economy erasing all frontiers...

To keep the passerines out

Like every morning in New Zealand, it's the chirping of little birds that wakes me up at sunrise. It's a situation I'd never experienced before, and with its gentleness and joy, suddenly takes on a capital importance. To paraphrase Sylvain Tesson, who evoked the effect that houses deep in the woods had on him, I like to think that as long as there are sparrows in cities, nothing will be completely lost...



City sparrow





WAIKOUAITI Bay, after 45 km of steep coastal climbs



Sea lions sunbathing on the sands of the Southern Pacific coast

FROM CHRISTCHURCH TO BLENHEIM CANTERBURY AND MARLBOROUGH AREAS

Bus transit to Akaroa French Village and Hanmer Springs

Stage34 : Hanmer Springs /Molesworth (83km)

Stage35 : Molesworth/Awatere Valley Road (63km)

Stage36 : Awatere Valley Road /Blenheim (52km)

Christchurch: life in green, with everyone!

Destroyed by an earthquake in 2011, Christchurch, the country's 2nd largest city with 380,000 inhabitants, is struggling to heal its urban wounds, which are open to parking spaces. But the city has managed to reorganize its urban planning around two interlocking strengths: huge tree-lined parks, such as Hegley Parc and the Botanic Gardens, where century-old trees have survived, and a vibrant, youthful, carefree lifestyle in the modernized riverside district of the Avon River. The river lounges here, meandering around the flower-beds and lawns before slowly dying in the Pacific, embracing it with its delta in a final kiss.

A whole flora overwhelms the banks with scents and colours. The local fauna enjoys the peace and quiet. Ducks, cottontail rabbits, geese, fish and eels live in harmony, barely disturbed by boats manned by pole-vaulters in 1900s costumes. Here, I'll meet up with Steve and his wife, who've come to spend a few days in Christchurch. It was a real moment of friendship, with the sharing of my trip to their country and future projects around the organization of the Rugby World Cup in France.

The last shot for this city, undoubtedly the most attractive I've visited: its tramway. A circuit has been redesigned to facilitate discovery aboard historic 19th-century streetcars, with successive stops freely accessible with the same ticket. More than ever, "glass", a symbol of conviviality, dominates everywhere, and it's pleasant.

Akaroa, a mythical French village

I set off by bus to discover the bay where the French, led by Jean François Langlois, landed. This whaling captain obtained permission from the British, bound by the Treaty of Waitangi of February 6, 1840 to the Maori tribal chiefs, to establish the only French colony on the two islands. Today, little remains of this epic story, and only the graves in the cemetery bear witness to our island presence. However, this "so Frenchy" character has become a good selling point, combined with the exceptional setting of the bay and its marine fauna. The bay's endemic Hector dolphin family, fur seals and Antarctic penguins are the main tourist attractions.

Bike preparation

200 km of gravel track are on the agenda after Hanmer Springs, which I reach by bus, avoiding the traffic on Highway One. I visit several bike stores open on Sundays and find what I'm looking for by replacing my worn front tire with one more suited to the challenge. I achieve this change with a pump and a compressed air cartridge. Thus equipped, I'm ready to face what I suspect will be a tough ride.

Crossing Canterbury and Marlborough

Difficult is not the word. It's a physical shock and, beyond that, for me, a challenge. As always, there are two sides to this adventure, both of which are unmistakably opposed. On the "black" side, I'd say the nature of the track is very demanding, the gravel is impossible, especially in Marlborough, the climbs are brutal and incessant, followed by the descents like a tightrope walker, the brakes are so tight that your hands twitch, and the weight of the bike is far too high for this playground.

On the marvels side, varied, atypical landscapes, where the brutal imprint of volcanism gives the planet its original expression.

As for the rest, it's all a question of logistics. Food, water, rest, camp and warmth have to be managed in a primary but rigorous way. You emerge exhausted, but with your eyes filled with these frozen lava canyons, these lost valleys where rivers seem to seek their outlet between pebbles of a thousand shades of gray. The track hung in the sky between the domes, but this azure sky brought millions of stars to the eyes forever. Wim, it was impossible, that's why I did it.

Farmers: guardians of heritage

Tracey and John Cochrane, whom I met at the Blenheim campsite, own a farm in Clinton, a small village that I happened to pass through at the southernmost point of my route, between Gore and Balclutha. Intrigued by the strange monument of a crew of four horses pulling a cart, I took the unusual photo. Well, you know what? It was John's father who supplied the cart - what a small world!

With 10,000 sheep and 800 Angus steers, these farmers don't "bald out": breeding flocks (25% of ewes and cows are kept for this purpose each year), shearing wool, storing fodder for the winter and caring for the animals are their daily lot. The meat they produce meets a global market demand. But life has changed, and they now intend to take a few vacations to discover their own country. Beyond their work on the farm, the "Farmers" are the guardians of a heritage handed down to them by three generations of pioneers. It is from this hard life that the educational roots of New Zealanders draw their meaning.

A short psychological treatise on kilometers

Whether you like it or not, your eye is too often caught by that black plastic rectangle attached to the handlebars – the odometer. Its magic screen records and dissects all your efforts. In fact, what really counts is what you ultimately decipher from it... which isn't always what counts!

As far as I'm concerned, the chronology is more mental than physical. From 0 to 10 km, it's cooler than ever, and this figure comes as a surprise. From 10 km to 20 km it's long, never-ending. From 20 km to 40 km hard, tiring. At 50 km, the countdown is reversed and things get better and better. After 60 km we're fine, most of the time. After a short, painful passage from 80 km to 90 km, you have to wait until the 120th km to feel the urge to stop everything and take the tent out of your saddlebag...but all this is just "Pierrot's tales" which, as everyone knows, make good friends on the road too!



AKAROA Peninsula French Village



HECTOR, endemic dolphin species, familiar to tourists



The French village, like an exotic vacation



*AVON RIVER, coastal river, that crosses the city to end its course in Monck Bay on the eastern PACIFIC coast.
Life is organized all along its course, with walks in the BOTANIC PARK, flowers, meadows, ponds and the many bars and restaurants on the river side attracting a happy crowd.*



CHRISTCHURCH, a city destroyed by the 2012 earthquake, which has repaired its urban wounds and is living life to the full on the River Side of the AVON



HANMER SPRINGS, thermal use of hot volcanic waters



MOLESWORTH'S campground, lost in the middle of the Bush



AWATERE VALLEY ROAD, 200 km of gravel trails through the Bush and the valleys of CANTERBURY to MARLBOROUGH



Marlborough vineyards near Blenheim

Back to square one

Back in Picton I've booked my ferry's ticket, an hotel in Wellington, a meeting with the RSA national veterans' organization and a bus to avoid Highway One. I plan to stop off in Hamilton, then head back up to Auckland bus station for a change of bus to Whangarei, from where I'll drive along the east coast to Cape Reinga, the sharp tip of the North Island.

FROM WELLINGTON TO WHANGAREI NORTLAND'S AREA

Ferry transit from Picton to Wellington, then by bus from Wellington to Hamilton, then from Hamilton to Auckland and finally from Auckland to Whangarei

In search of lost time

This Proustian title was inspired by the crash, on March 5, 1944, of the Stirling, which had come from England to deliver arms to the Auvergne Resistance, near Orcival. Four members of the crew, all New Zealanders, died and are buried in the Carmes cemetery. In my search for any family descendants of the pilots, I was sad to discover that the family of 22-year-old navigator Hugh William **HENDERSON**, from **WAIKOUAITI**, had died out. In Wellington, the capital, I met with the NZ National Veterans Association, RSA. I visited the national museum, "**TE PAPA TOLGAREWA**" translated as: "container of treasures", and then to the National Library. I focused my research on Raymond Johnson Watson, the 27-year-old pilot who lived in one of the city's neighbourhoods. I then had the good fortune to meet Ms. **FIONA GREY**, a librarian, rock and roll in appearance with her multi-coloured cap screwed on her head, passionate about her profession. She consulted and surfed successively through the electoral roll, the list of state donations of deceased people and the marriage list. And do you know what? She managed to track down a great-granddaughter whose family now lives in Auckland. Fiona Grey gave me her address and phone number! I'm really pleased about this, and hope to be able to make this link with the past a reality when I return to the city on March 3rd...

Melting buddies...

Campgrounds, towns and even the road itself are the setting for exceptional, often astonishing moments. Here are just a few of them:

I meet Tim and Marée Robertson at Hanmer Springs campground. They quickly invited me to a convivial barbecue, held between tent and caravan. That's when they tell me they've come from Ashburton, a little village virtually unknown in the deep south. Located between Tamaru and Christchurch, it's precisely the one I'd chosen to balance an effort of 180km over 2 stages. After our astonishment, we had a good laugh at the village's huge campsite, capable of accommodating 2,000 people, where we were four tents and three caravans in desperation...

It was a Catalan intonation that caught my attention. I spoke the language "com un català", as my grandmother raised me and my sisters in this culture. Montserrat and Eduard are Barcelona "Globe-cyclers", who have also cycled around the world. The exchange was short but rich, over a shared meal on the night ferry. We parted with the hope of meeting again one day in Clermont. It was at Wellington's central bus station that I met Inès and then Helias. Inès is Franco-Tunisian and now lives in Indonesia. On her way to Taranaki, she's taking a vacation that's been spoiled by "Gabrielle", the 2nd typhoon to hit New Zealand. Helias is German, you know where from? Regensburg! The three of us end up on a platform that will remain empty because no bus will come to pick us up. They've been suspended nationally due to the weather. Inès contacted the bus company to reschedule our tickets and book the hotel opposite the station, where we'd be sleeping in the same mixed room, while I booked the restaurant we'd spotted the day before. Helias, on a "working vacation" visa for young people under 30, will be surprised and delighted to see the photos of his city, and amazed that I can tell the legend of the construction of the bridge and cathedral of Regensburg!

Gabrielle !

*« Tu joues avec mes nerfs,
Je peux crever, désenchanté,
Alors fini, fini pour moi.
J'ai refusé, j'me suis déchaîné,
Loin de ta portée, je vais t'expliquer ...»*

That's pretty much what Johnny Hallyday could have sung about "Gabrielle", the second hurricane to hit New Zealand. Auckland had been hit hard by the first storm. This time, Gabrielle licked the east coast of Northland, just above Auckland, and particularly affected the Coromandel and East Coast regions in the south-east of the North Island. Downed power lines, numerous uprooted trees, landslides and cut or closed roads isolated these regions from the rest of the country. Wellington was shaken by strong winds, but without any major damage. My Tuesday buses were cancelled, but I was lucky enough to be able to leave on Wednesday in two stages, one for Hamilton and the other for Whangarei. The bus had to slalom from the center of the island to both coasts, but in the end it arrived safely in Whangarei. Thank you, Steve, for appreciating the starting point for this last Northland tour of the island, saving me a lot of trouble.

I never lose my bearings

To achieve this tour of New Zealand, I've planed twelve stages averaging around sixty kms, with arrivals in campgrounds, so as not to "end up as a mop", washed out by a rather mountainous profile that should impose itself along the coast. On the program: a visit to Cape Reinga and the primary forests of the West Coast. The cycling loop ends in Wellsford on the HW1. To get back to Auckland alive, I'll avoid the Motors Way traffic by taking a bus. Finally, as a climax to this extraordinary journey, I'll pay a visit to the potential family of Sergeant Raymond Watson.

FROM WHANGAREI TO MANGONUI NORTLAND ISLANDS BAY AREAS

Stage 37 : Whangarei /Whangaruru (63km)

Stage 38 : Whangaruru/Kerikeri (68km)

Stage 39 : Kerikeri/Coopers Beach (62km)

Stage 40 : Coopers Beach/Houhora Heads (61km)

A brief treatise on anticipation

The events surrounding hurricane "Gabrielle" inspired me to write this chapter, which could have been entitled: "Just anticipate, anticipate only".

To anticipate actions and make the right choices, you first need to be "*in the right frame of mind*" to make a decision. Being in the right frame of mind means, above all, being aware and open, to the exclusion of any emotion or sensitivity. Of course, these are technical and strategic choices, but their impact is likely to affect your morale or health, or even that of others.

You need to carry out the following analyses methodically: the goal to be achieved, the active and passive elements involved, the risks incurred, then list the possible solutions according to the probable results, by comparison or by costing. Another important concept is "when". The timing of the decision can be decisive, when the same factors are involved.

For my part, I have selected my choices according to these methodical principles: managing my health as a diabetic, for example. "Possible or not?" Managing my equipment according to three scenarios: the indispensable, the facilitating, the useless. "What should I keep? Which itineraries to choose: for what final goal – the imperative – the eventual – the sacrificed. The examples are numerous, and your journey will depend on them.

To succeed in this delicate undertaking, you may have to go as far as the absurd: "Anticipate what cannot be anticipated". Then you'll have reached your full potential!

Three in one...

I've divided the 300 km climb to Cape Reinga and the 450 km return via the west coast into 12 stages. That's an average of 65 km for each section. This is both more comfortable, with only 4 hours of cycling, and gives you the chance to respond to a demanding coastal geography that may well impose its own steep climbs...

To sum up the first three stages, I'll use a comparison of itineraries with their own specific features, but which will evoke images close to reality.

The first stage from Whangarei to Whangaruru reminds me of the roads in the Provençal hinterland around Carpentras. The Whangaruru-Kerikeri route along the east coast reminds me of Corsica, 50 years ago. As for the third section, it's comparable to an Auvergne postcard near Murot, with the sea at the end!

The desire to set off again with my faithful companion survives from the first stage! A shady road, sometimes rough with small landslides, a few downed trees and here and there, power lines to be restored, nothing to worry about after "Gabrielle". For me, it was above all two encounters. At a crossroads where I was looking for my route, a former All Black player selected for a tour in Jean-Claude Skrela's time, and a passage through Clermont. I didn't have time to get his name or take a photo.

At "the Farm" campground in Whangaruru, my hosts for the evening are Hiki Bennett, his wife Tara and their 1-year-old baby Rocky. You immediately feel at home in this house, which has become an accomplice to their hospitality. The rooms are spacious and tastefully furnished, with wood in all its forms. A collection of vintage objects is skilfully displayed. You're welcomed with simplicity, and the freedom you can enjoy is the fruit of a certain generosity.

I was particularly struck by the welcome I received from the young Kiwis.

1. The unvarnished beauty of the Islands Bay east coast landscape is moving and fills you with joy. You stop and want to shout to the world, “How beautiful it is!” But no sound can be heard... Only a few “fauvists” would have dared to use such a palette of raw colours, uniting all the shades of green of the vegetation with the frankly turquoise ocean bordered by blond sand. The last stage takes us back to our native Auvergne, where the hills that dot the landscape intertwine, leaving just the undulating path for a road that leads on vacation to the ocean.

Staying on course

I'll reach Cape Reinga in two days if all goes well. I feel free, finally able to “let go” with the absence of pressure. During my last journeys, I'm now deeply aware of the fullness of the flood of images and emotions pouring over me.



Campground at WHANGARURU farm. A vintage atmosphere at the home of Hiki Bennett, his wife Tara and their baby Rocky.



Beautiful east coast from ISLANDS BAY to MANAWAORA



THE OKIATO FERRY



Dream beach at COOPERS BEACH

FROM MANGONUI TO CAPE REINGA NORTLAND'S AREA

Stage 41 : Houhora Heads /Cape Reinga (70km)- Stage 42 : Cape Reinga Houhora Heads (70km) – Stage 43 : Houhora Heads /Ahipara (55km)

Staying on course

For a sailor, it's obvious. Staying on course is an essential part of navigation. He chooses it according to a multitude of parameters, most of them unstable. More than a goal, it's a direction that can be altered according to currents, wind, obstacles, future lows, regulations and so on.

For the bicycle traveller, it's the other way around. The data is materially in place, and he must follow the track and his landmarks. Over the years, this choice becomes narrower. He becomes sensitive to all influences, whether physical, topographical, material, meteorological or, above all, mental. For him, the course is more than a direction, it's the ultimate goal, his Grail. To "want to go and see" triggers all his decisions.

So when I discovered the map of New Zealand, with its 100 km long peninsula to the north that separates the Tasman Sea from the Pacific Ocean, Cape Reinga was an obvious choice. It became the ultimate goal of my journey.

I choose a connecting stage along an east coast that is dying in brackish marshes and mangroves. The Houhora Heads campground is located on the shores of Pukenui Bay, where the sea takes a break, without making waves. It will serve as a return base from which to draw strength for the 80 km of step-by-step climbs that lie ahead.

Faced with the Cape, you can moan for hours about the slopes being too steep, the load too heavy, the distance too long. It doesn't alter the problem. The Cape is still there, immovable. Its storm-tossed rock withstands every wind, every wave.

More than just a cape, a sacred myth
More than just a cape, a sacred myth

The Maori people, the majority in Northland, have dedicated a sacred place to it, where the spirits of the dead depart for the afterlife, the “HAWAIKI”, via a centuries-old tree rooted on the rock. Cap Reinga is discreet. It's not a shameless tourist attraction. You have to come very close for it to finally reveal its contours. White sand stretches limply over lurid green vegetation, between rocks that have been braving the breakers from Australia since the dawn of time.

A "lighthouse" – I love this word –, round, reassuring, transparent, has been shining its rays on the sea since 1941. Everything is in harmony in this sacred place. I'll be going there twice to get a good photographic light. When I arrived, I was greeted by a swarm of mosquitoes. I returned the next morning after a night spent by the ocean, in the sheltered campsite of a small cove nestled at the end of a vertiginous 2.4 km gravel descent.

Always great meetings

At the Houhora Heads campground, I met two young Bretons, Nolwenn and Enzo, trapped by an exploded van engine – in fact, a scam. Enzo, a trained chef, had found work at Lucile's beach restaurant. He had promised to prepare a fish meal for my return, and he kept his word. Enzo sublimated the King Fisch caught in the afternoon into a sashuchi, combining its delicate taste with aromatic plants chosen from the vegetable garden. The Kahawai, another fish from the bay, was dressed in a discreet breading, Fish en chips style. There's no denying this young man's talent, as a gourmet in Bermuda shorts!

Towards the end of the journey

I'll be heading for the town of Kaitai, then the small village of Hahipara, on the west coast. Its campground, hidden in tropical vegetation, is cradled by the Tasman Sea. I'll be seduced and spend a bonus day there before completing five stages between sea and coastal rivers. I'll take the bus back to Auckland from Wellsford. Road traffic is difficult to cope with on a bike, and I run the risk of ending up like those poor possums, slaughtered in large numbers on the road, despite the protective boxes installed.



Houhora Heads campground, on the edge of a fish-filled bay



King Fisch and Kahawai on the evening menu



Enzo, a young French chef, and his partner Nolwen



West coast of Cape REINGA on the TASMAN SEA PACIFIC



REINGA'S Lighthouse is on guard for security and tourism



My campground to the left of the cape after 2.5km of steep downhill

FROM AHIPARA TO WELLSFORD NORTHLAND'S AREA

Stage 44 : Ahipara /Rawene (75km)

*Stage 45 : Rawene/Waipoura camp (57km) - Stage 46 :
Waipoura camp /Dargaville (54km) - Stage 47 : Dargaville/Paparoa
(50km) - Stage 48 : Paparoa/Kauri museum (30km)
Stage 49 : Paparoa/Wellsford (49km)*

From North to West, monotony

I regretfully leave Ahipara, all the more so as a slip of the road allows me to discover the other side of the village, separated into two villages by a rocky promontory. It's the last place to be on the immense 90 km-long peninsular beach to the north-west of Cape Reinga, "Ninety Mile Beach".

The stages follow one another through a monotonous landscape of cattle-breeding "stations". Only the Rawene ferry breaks this green countryside to cross the end of a deep fjord opening onto the Tasman Sea.

Between sea and mountains

The next stage brings a sudden change of scenery and, at the same time, a worrying drop in morale and fitness. In Opononi the coastline is lined with Pyla-style dunes. It's also a village known to all Kiwis for the story of its dolphin, "Opo". This mammal had settled in this fjord at his convenience, and had taken a liking to the humans who reciprocated by playing with him in this naturally improvised dolphinarium. Sadly, the dolphin died, and the whole of New Zealand was affected. A memorial and museum are now dedicated to him in recognition of the friendship between humans and Opo.

With that out of the way, I know that I'll soon find myself climbing the 15 km ascent through subtropical rainforests with my bags, with no guarantee of accommodation. A rainstorm as if to greet me doesn't help matters.

Doubt invades my mind and I spend perhaps an hour wondering what I'm doing in this godforsaken place and whether I'll ever get out of it. With my strength returning after refuelling at a small mini-market at the foot of the climb, I decided to tackle the day's difficulty, which I'd thought a mountain of. In fact, it was a pleasant surprise. A steady slope, equivalent in length and percentage to the ascent of Mont Mouchet, led me gradually and better and better to the entrance to WAIPOUA FOREST National Park. Nicolas had told me about it, and I wasn't disappointed. A long boardwalk allows visitors to get close to the park's trees, where the majestic KAURIS reign unchallenged.

« Tane Mahouta », the lord of the forest

It's so impressive that I didn't even see it on my first visit. Its age, estimated at around 2,000 years, makes it one of the oldest living trees on earth. With a height of 51 meters and a trunk that spans 14 meters in circumference, Tane is, according to Maori beliefs, the son of Ranginui the sky and Papatuanuku the earth, his mother. He is the father of all living creatures on earth. Spiritually, we're not far removed from the pantheistic Inca beliefs that venerate as deities the natural elements that influence our life on earth.

In my case, it was a member of staff who gave me the optimism I required by confirming that at the bottom of the descent, after a small bridge, I would find a gravel path that would lead me to a free campground. That was all I needed for a good night's sleep.

The mountains win you over and the plains give you grief

The next day, the replica of the previous day's coastline, completed by the foothills of the national park, was a pleasant formality. Arriving in GARDAVILLE, on the banks of the KAIPARA RIVER estuary, I found a bit of life in a very old hotel indicated by the staff of the closed campground, in an almost deserted town that is slowly dying. The estuary, with its sandy waters and not a bird's wing in sight, is a backdrop that contributes to the ambient gloom. *Morne plaine*", Victor Hugo would have written. I have the headwind to hold me back until my next encounter. A Dutchman, Johnny Hollemberg, married to a New Zealander, knows Clermont, as he has a friend in Les Fades les Ancizes! Once again, it's a small world... Then I turned my back on the wind to arrive in PAPAROA, a small village with a welcoming campground. I'll be staying there for two days, long enough to visit the remarkable Kauri museum dedicated to this tree with its unrivalled wood qualities. It also tells the story of the greedy, destructive madness that seized settlers in the early 20^e century to put down these sacred giants. Today, these thousand-year-old lords are fortunately very well protected. I also took advantage of the day I had granted myself for safety reasons to book my bus and hotel in Auckland from Wellsford to my fiftieth and final cycling stop.

What ending?

The day of my return is approaching, with the revelation or otherwise of the authentication of the family of Raymond Watson, the pilot of the Stirling that crashed in the mountains near Orcival. But this story belongs to History. It will bring my journey to an end in the land of volcanoes, rich in cultural diversity and rugby, carried by the Haka, the warrior dance, pride of the Maori people, as a sporting symbol under the All Blacks jersey respected the world over.

BACK IN AUCKLAND AUCKLAND'S AREA

Stage 50 : Auckland Glendowie-Beachlands (30km)

Epilogue

I won't keep the suspense surrounding the Stirling Raymond Watson pilot any longer. After a long bus journey to the GLENDOWIE district in south-east Auckland on the morning of March 3, the day before the fateful date of the crash, I had confirmation that they were indeed descendants of his family. To be precise, his great, great niece Sally, wife of Peter HAY, daughter of the recently deceased Caroline WATSON BRASSEL. She herself was the daughter of Iris Émeline MITCHELL, sister of Raymond WATSON, children of the couple Lily May JOHNSON, his second wife, who died in 1971, and Ernest WATSON, their father, who died in 1950. Sally and Peter HAY were unfortunately away from home this weekend. The incorrect telephone number in my possession prevented me from arranging a prior meeting, but reliable contact was made with the HAY family.

With this success, things have come full circle, and the various parties involved, both in New Zealand and in Clermont, will be kept informed. I would like to thank Mrs WALTER, their wonderful neighbour, and Mrs Fiona GRAY, the Wellington librarian, for their invaluable help.

What will remain

"Look" was Paul Chaylat's advice before my first trip to Morocco. So yes, Paul, I took your advice. The immensity of the landscapes between Queenstown and Te Anau, their array of vivid colors, the path running through the valleys, tumbling down the plateaus to hang in the sky, the hidden coves between rock and sand of Marlborough Sound and the Islands Bays, the exceptional wild beauty of Milford Sound, Lakes Hawea and Wanaka, the kayaking down the Clutha River, its opaline waters, the climb up Cape Reinga are etched forever in my memory.

The towns of Christchurch and the campgrounds of Houhora Heads and Ahipara achieve these images as the most memorable places to live.

Finally, the reunion with Wim 10 years later, Cat's welcome, the hospitable, generous encounter with Steve and his wife Karen, all these strangers to the Kiwi people, open, helpful, proud of their culture and pioneering past, will remain as moments of intense emotion.

Leaving Auckland without a visit to the mythical EDEN PARK would have been an offence that referee Bernard LAQUET and Steve NARDON would have punished me for. A commuter train and the kindness of the hostess made up for it, even if the stadium in concert mode shattered the dream.



AHIPARA Campground



EAST COAST, THE FORCE OF THE WAVES ON AHIPARA BEACH



Maori totem pole, similar to the Tahitian tiki



East coast of OPONONI, home of OPO, the dolphin



RAWENE'S Ferry



Primary tropical forests of WAIPOUA FOREST NATIONAL PARK where KAURI TANE MAHOUTA, lord of 2000 years is living

LIKE - DISLIKE

Like

The probing mentality and availability of the Kiwis-respect for the original Maori people-landscapes-campgrounds and hotels all equipped with communal kitchens, lounges, laundry facilities and everything else that contributes to the useful comfort of the casual traveler-Speight's beer-white and red Marlborough wine, Otago and Canterbury white and red wine -facilitated access to workplaces for young and old alike -the culture of sports -museums and libraries - the omnipresent respect for memory -gourmet-quality food -a discreet and benevolent police presence -long-distance and short-distance bus service -weekend commercial openings -all your messages of friendship which have helped me through difficult times.

Dislike

HW1 traffic -coarse tarmac -lack of signage on regional roads - shovelfuls of gravel thrown onto gravel roads -no bread or cheese -infinite time to prepare breakfasts -opossums slaughtered by cars - trash dumped on roadsides -power sockets -failing wifi -inflexible rigor -banking fees -no railways -5pm closures - "Monopoly" houses..



I don't like "My big tar"

TRIP SUMMARY IN FIGURES

I covered a total of 5500 km, including 3500 km by bike in 50 stages, an average of 70 km per day. 2000 km were done by bus or boat to escape the traffic or devoted to sightseeing. Only my discovery of the South-East coast of the North Island was unable to materialize, as the COROMANDEL and GISBORNE regions became inaccessible after Cyclone Gabrielle.



KAURI TREE

*THE TANEMAHOUTA
"Lord of the
forest"
2000 years old.*

*51 m trunk,
14 m in circumference,
Son of heaven, his
father and of the
earth, his mother,
Father of all
living creatures on
planet, according to
Maori pantheistic
belief*



Mrs WALTER, wonderful neighbor of Sally's family, wife of Peter Hay, daughter of Caroline WATSON BRASSEL



Crossing the Bay by shuttle boat, from AUCKLAND harbour to BEACHLANDS, at Steve RIDDELL'S home



Chemins d'un Cyclopède is a non-profit association under the French law of 1901, whose aim is to "share the stories of bicycle journeys through words, writing and images". It contributes directly or indirectly to the actions of UNICEF and its Auvergne Delegation through donations.

Association's RNA : W632004633
SIREN identifier : 905 080 362
SIRET identifier : 905 080 362 00015
Printing: PORÇU
Legal deposit : July 2023
Final proof : June 2023
ISBN n° : 905 080 362 00015
Texts and Photos : Free of rights.
Permission required for commercial use.



DUMEZ
AUVERGNE

Living in a respected environment

Discovering the planet by bike is more than just an ecological way to get around the expression of a desire to blend into the environment, to become an integral part of the landscape through which we pass, to get as close as possible to living beings, to mankind, animals and the nature that has protected them since the dawn of time, without fundamental balance.

It is in this belief and deep respect for the natural available resources to them on Aotearoa that lifted the souls of the first Polynesian settlers Polynesians who arrived around the year 1000. Six centuries later, pioneers from Europe, most of them British, disembarked. Guided by their respective spirit, the Treaty of Waitangi, these two peoples laid the moral foundations of a New Zealand society respectful of all cultures, and built the future of this country.

Of course, there have been hesitations, mistakes, deaths, destruction and the terrible revolts of an indomitable nature, a volcanic earth and the anger of the winds. Then came the rebuilding. This age-old labour continues. Pierre ROBIN has gathered evidence of this at every turn along the way to share with us in this book.

Nothing in this journey was taken for granted. It took effort, perseverance, determination, but also optimism, mutual aid and benevolence that his experience deserves to be discovered and to be taken seriously.

It's because our approach to every project in which we engage our teams inspire the same desire for pride, the same collective respect for nature and biodiversity of nature, that we support the publication of this book.

Antoine Francis

New Zealand by bike

Bicycle trips carry in their saddlebags the solutions to enjoy your freedom, satisfy your curiosity, enjoy encounters, savour contemplation and explore your inner self.

The choice to discover Aotearoa, "The land of the long white cloud" of the Maoris, New Zealand's original people, not only fulfilled all these criteria, but also met a personal desire.

The search for possible descendants of New Zealand aviators who died in the crash of their plane on March 5, 1944 near Orcival and buried in the Carmes cemetery.

The invitation to come and discover the "little paradise" of Wim, a brother on the road, met in Chile in 2011, now living in Hawea.

The elements of this adventure will be in stark contrast elements of this adventure: a route that is demanding by nature, climbs, followed by tightrope-walking descents and the discovery of sublime landscapes where the imprint of volcanism and the proximity of the Pacific give this country the expression of its original nature.

The trip proved to be one of the most difficult I've ever made. It was a physical shock and, beyond that, a challenge questioning the very foundations of my determination.

In this book, the traveller will find some answers to their own questions. It is also a source of optimism, an unflinching support to any adventure.

"To travel is to go from oneself to oneself via others".

