

## Cape Palliser and Castlepoint trip - (October 2011)

The moment I heard Cape Palliser was the southernmost point of North Island, that was it! I had to go! I have this fascination with visiting the northernmost and the southernmost places on each country we visit. My interest was further aroused when I saw a picture of a motorhome on the road to Cape Palliser, with high cliffs rising on one side of the narrow road and the cliffs on the other side dropping off into the sea.



As Cape Palliser is so remote I first took the precaution of posting a question on the NZ Motorhome Forum enquiring if the road to the lighthouse is suitable for a motorhome. The answers were generally positive although we were warned of extremely strong winds from the south - there is no land mass between Cape Palliser and the South Pole, so winds are known to be violently strong in a storm. As it turned out no one mentioned just how narrow the road from Ngawi to Cape Palliser is - but more about that later!

Our first stop was at the NZMCA club-owned park in Takapau, roughly halfway between Waipukurau and Dannevirke. Here we met



the volunteer camp hosts, Fred & Rose, who were very hospitable and to their credit the camp looked very well maintained and groomed. Although our plan was to stay for only one night we stayed an extra day & night there as the weather was



pretty grim, with heavy rain and strong winds. This was no hardship, we had a very enjoyable evening with Fred & Rose in our motorhome - Rose, sorry the rum gave you a headache?

From there we travelled onto Masterton, although we had not planned to stay in Masterton, we did, it was still raining and the forecast was better for the next few days. Masterton (pop. 21,000) is the largest town in the Wairarapa region, separated from Wellington by the Rimutaka mountain range. It is the headquarters of the annual Golden Sheep-shearing competition. It is not a city, as in order to qualify as a city in NZ, the population needs to be over 50,000. It's the first time we ever stayed in Masterton, normally we just drive through it on our way to Wellington. Although a small town, it's a great place to visit

After leaving Masterton, we headed for Martinborough via Stonehenge Aotearoa, a a full scale model of Stonehenge in the UK. Unfortunately upon arriving there it appeared the long gravel driveway to the structure was a very narrow, tree-lined driveway, and I could not see a suitably sized turnaround, so we did not go in, but saw it from the road. Apparently, it incorporates ancient Egyptian, Babylonian and Indus Valley astronomy, Polynesian navigation, and Celtic and Maori starlore. Maybe next time!



After the disappointment of not seeing Stonehenge we drove straight to Martinborough, which is a super small village with very neat streets and beautifully restored old buildings, in particular the Martinborough Hotel (Peppers), it was restored in 1996.

Martinborough has an amazingly large road-surrounded village square, a little like the squares one finds in Europe.



There is even a grocery store, Pain & Kershaw, which has been owned & operated by the same family for over 130 years! Today the original business is split into 3 businesses, but the grocery store is still operating!



Not too dissimilar to many New Zealand towns there were plenty really nice pavement cafes, the ones here were much nicer than most and the tea and cake were well worth the short stop in this quaint historic town.

The weather was really good so we decided to push onto Lake Ferry, on a large inlet. We had hoped to spend the night there but there was no freedom parking and the RV park did not look at all inviting, so we did not stay. A friend had recommended to us that we should have a lunch of fish & chips at the Lake Ferry Hotel, which we did. My fish was slightly overcooked and disappointing but Yvonne's scallops were really good! After this we walked around a bit but the only activity seemed to



to be whitebait fishing, in which I have no interest, in catching or eating. For non-Kiwis, whitebait in NZ resembles long overgrown sperm cells and the little tadpole-like fish do not taste particularly nice - they are not all like the whitebait one gets in other places of the world, which we are both very partial to. White baiting is done with long fine-mesh nets by people who possess an enormous amount of patience, and too much time.



The very expensive NZ delicacy, Whitebait.

Seeing as the weather was good we decided to head straight for Cape Palliser, roughly 45 kilometres along a hilly, twisty and narrow road. For the most part it is a good road and quite acceptable for motorhome travel, it's only the last 6 kilometres which is a bit hairy.

Ngawi (pronounced Nah-wee) is a fascinating fishing village - the fishing is predominantly for crayfish, however due to the low price the fishermen are paid by merchants the fishermen have ceased fishing until next season. We recently paid \$35 per uncooked crayfish in Napier, however the guys there told me they get less than \$10 per crayfish. What makes this village really interesting is all boats are put into the sea and hauled out again by various-sized bulldozers. The beach access is pretty steep, one of the reasons they need the pulling power and traction of bulldozers. Some fishing boats are around 50ft in length, weighing way



over 25 tons.

We loved the pink bulldozer, seen here on the left, with a cheeky donation sign!



After a brief look around and me quizzing a local regarding the unsealed road from Ngawi to the Cape Palliser lighthouse we decided to go to the lighthouse - even though the local was a little hesitant about taking our motorhome on the road, he thought it would be "sweet" or "good as, mate!".



At first the road seemed quite good, but not 500 metres from the start of the unsealed road, things became a little hairy when we had to cross a culvert which had about 6 inches of water flowing over it. Needless to say, Yvonne was just a little perturbed by this. As it turned out it was no problem at all, but another few hundred metres on, things got even hairier. The road narrowed, it was now just wide enough for us, not even a bicycle could have passed us going in the opposite direction.

On one side were vertical cliffs rising inland and on the other side there was a sheer cliff dropping off into the ocean. No turning back, as there was no where to turn around, so we continued along the road, slowly!

The trip was worth it, the lighthouse is situated at the most southern tip of North Island, with 250 steps leading up to it.

The view from the top was stunning and was well worth the effort and exhaustion from climbing those 250 steps. In the photo below one can see the narrow road, at least this portion was flat and uneventful.



One particularly "tight" stretch of road



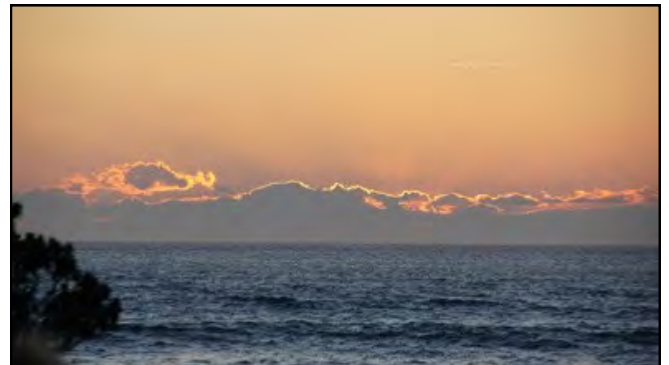
The view towards the South Pole



Later that evening we drove back to Ngawi, where there is a really good grassed freedom parking area, right opposite the fire station and next to a take-away caravan. The aroma emanating from the caravan made us salivate. It's was a pity we had

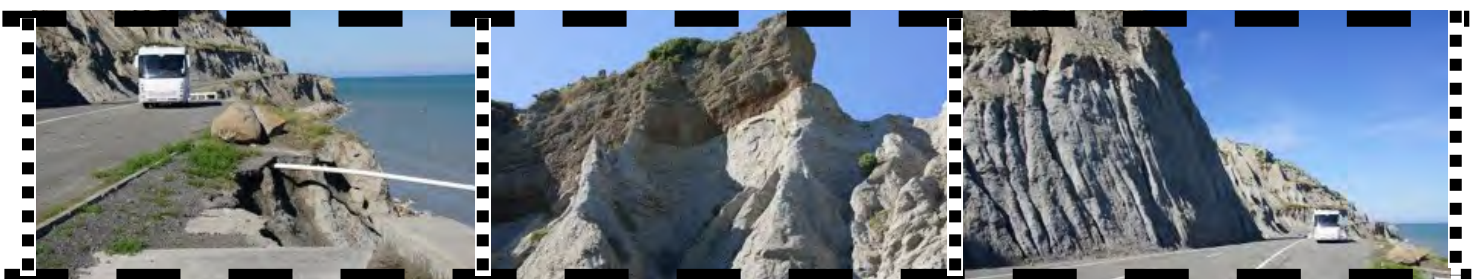
fish & chips earlier at Lake Ferry. Later on we experienced one of the most stunning sunsets in NZ we have ever seen. It was great sitting watching the sun go down, ever so slowly.

We saw many seals on the rocks between Ngawi and Cape Palliser, there was no need to go to the specific location of the seal colonies. A dead seal washed ashore at Ngawi and I watched with morbid fascination as the seagulls attempted to peck off bits of meat from the seal.



From Ngawi we decided to go back via a different route, to Featherston, where there is a Railway Museum with the only surviving Fell Locomotive in the world.

On the drive back we stopped to take a few photos of the wind-sculptured sand cliffs halfway between Ngawi and Lake Ferry.



The Fell Locomotive Museum in Featherston is a treat for any steam engine enthusiast. Here, H199 was restored to full working condition. Originally built in Bristol in 1875. Six Fell locos were used by NZ Railways to get people and goods across the 1:13 (7.7%) incline over the Rimutaka mountains, between Cross Creek and Summit, a distance of 4.8kms. The Fell locos used four grip wheels on a raised centre rail in addition to the normal train wheels. These grip wheels were also used for braking when going down the incredibly steep decline. In addition to the train, a braking coach was also used. After each decline, the brake shoes had to be replaced, due to the wear.



These Fell locos were used until 1949. A visit to this interesting museum is highly recommended. Don't miss the short video about the history of these powerful trains.

Another decision to be made—do we head back to Napier or do we go to Castlepoint, where there is yet another famous lighthouse. It is 64kms from Masterton, towards the east coast, we were told it is on a reasonably good sealed road, but is very hilly and very twisty in places. At Masterton, we decided to go to Castlepoint as the weather was brilliant and we were so close. Due to the nature of the road, the 64kms took us about an hour and a half, but it was really scenic and we are so glad we did the trip.

There is not much there other than a few holiday homes, a lighthouse, a fishing fleet and a caravan park. As there is no freedom parking there we stayed at the Castlepoint Holiday Park, which wasn't bad, but expensive considering it was out of season (\$33 per night, and then one had to pay 50c for a shower!). The parking sites are really small, luckily the camp was empty as we took up 4 sites, overlooking the sea. The location of the camp is stunning, but forget about staying there in season.



The lighthouse was built in 1913, it still operates today, but without a lighthouse-keeper, it is controlled by computer from Wellington. It was "manned" until 1988.

The fishing fleet is interesting, their boats are launched using self-powered trailer, most of the trailers have their wheels driven by hydraulics. Some boats are in excess of 50ft.

The reef on which the lighthouse stands, on its northern tip, is 1km long, inside the reef is a very sheltered bay, where the boats are launched into, in certain conditions.



There is also a large seagull population on an island just off the reef.

We had a stunning sunrise the morning we left.

Castlepoint is another place not to be missed if you are in the vicinity, it's a beautiful beach holiday resort, a place to soak up the sun and relax, that's if you don't mind the wind - its reputation did not live up to it when we were there, it was absolutely stunning weather.



On the way back to Napier we stopped at Takapau again, where we spent the night. We met a number of club members and enjoyed a *happy hour* with them - an Australian motorhome tradition which is not so prevalent in NZ, a great pity!