



# SCOTTSDALE TOURS

## HIGH COUNTRY SPECTACULAR 2011

The Cook Strait ferry operators cancelled our ferry crossing at late notice so we decided to make our first stop-over in Palmerston North instead of Blenheim hence there was no panic to get down to Wellington that first day. We picked up passengers all the way through to Putaruru and stopped for morning tea at the thriving timber town of Tokoroa. Because we had the time, we decided to call in and have a look at the Huka Falls in Taupo. It was a gorgeous day so we had a leisurely lunch in Taupo, bought the mandatory All Blacks flag for the bus and headed off down the Desert Road. All three mountains were covered in snow and clearly visible making for great photos. After our overnight stop in Palmerston North we drove around the Massey University Campus and headed on towards Wellington. We stopped for morning tea at Paekakariki then ventured up the Paekak. hill to take in the view of the coast and Kapiti Island. We carried on down the other side and on to Wellington and decided it was too nice a day not to go up Mt Victoria to have a look over the city. We picked up another couple of passengers at the ferry terminal before boarding the Blue Bridge for our trip across to Picton. It was a calm clear day which made for a very pleasant trip, especially through the Sounds. After arriving at our lodgings in Blenheim there was time for a quick freshen up we re-boarded the bus to go to the Marlborough Clubs for a lovely buffet dinner. Early next morning Rick and Michelle picked us up in 4wd vehicles for our first epic journey, a fantastic trip through the Molesworth and the Awatere and Acheron Valleys to Hanmer Springs. Another gorgeous, scenic day and a welcome cuppa at Gladstone Downs sheep station along the way. It was all go in Hanmer with the Wallabies in town. They had just been beaten by the Irish so were not likely to be big noting it anywhere. Time for a dip in the hot pools before dinner which was a buffet at the hotel adjacent to our motel. Of course footy was the main entertainment that night as we watched the AB's beat France. Rick correctly predicted a short sharp squally storm overnight but it would be followed by another nice day, although it was getting cooler now. It was still cool but clear the next morning as we made our way to Amberley Beach for morning tea and a catch up with our good friends Maurice and Sandy. It was a good thing Sandy was there and well organized because we had forgotten to bring the milk. Fortunately she had some to spare. They showed us photos of the snow they'd had at the beach just 3 weeks earlier. It was so thick



**Huka Falls, Taupo**



**Kapiti Is. from Paekakariki Hill**



**Acheron Valley, Molesworth**



**Old Molesworth Homestead**

and heavy they were snow bound for a week. The sea was washing the snow off the foreshore. Christchurch was the next port of call. We skirted the suburbs around to New Brighton and were saddened to see the damage that had been caused by the earthquake, and we weren't even in the hardest hit areas. It makes you wonder if it will ever really recover. It was cold and windy at the pier so nobody walked down it this time. We decided to stop at Hornby shopping centre for lunch, after which we called in to see Peter and Margaret on one of their massive dairy farms. We timed it right to see one of the huge automated circular milking sheds in action. 500 cows an hour and the machine can be run by one person, amazing. By now it was really starting to get bitterly cold and the wind was not letting up. It started to cloud in as we made our way to Methven, our stop for the next three nights. Not far from the Resort where we were staying it started to rain.

Within a very short time the rain had turned to snow and it was very bleak and miserable. We saw a car in the ditch still with its lights on then just around the corner two more vehicles had left the road. It was at this point that we discovered what had caused these accidents – black ice! The bus started to do a little dance which had us all holding our breath until Ross had us back on track again. A short time later we arrived safe and sound at our accommodation. Once we were warm and dry inside it was great to watch the snow falling down outside. Our hosts Ann and Mark were great, very friendly and helpful. A great place to spend the next three nights.

Our second high country adventure was in the form of a bus trip to three high country stations around the Lake Collieridge area. The Point Station was first on the list. There was still plenty of snow on the ground as we wandered around the grounds after a fabulous morning tea of home cooked goodies and a nice cuppa beside the open fire. Second on the list was Middle Rock Station where we were highly entertained and enlightened by Charlotte who took us on an extended tour of the family station. Of course Ross encouraged her to take us further afield than was intended which resulted in a reprimand from Mother, Lyn, for being late back for lunch. We enjoyed the fabulous views across the Rakaia Gorge to the mountains we would be travelling through the next day. Lunch was another grand display of home cooked country fare enjoyed outside in the glorious sunshine surrounded by beautiful gardens. Last but not least on the list was Peak Station where we were treated to a dog trial display followed by a walk around some more country gardens and yet another great offering of home baked goodies for afternoon tea. We wobbled our well fed selves back to our accommodation at Methven in time to have a quick nana nap before heading to the Blue Pub for dinner. As if we hadn't had enough to eat already.

Another blue sky but with the typical Canterbury wind blowing next morning as we made our way to our meeting point with Mark and the team from Hassle Free tours. Three 4wd vehicles awaited us and once everyone was aboard we made our way down the main road to Thompsons Track, up Tramway Road past Mt Somers and popped into Clearwater for a quick look around the summer holiday settlement. We ventured on up to Hakatere and



**Snow on roadside near Methven**



**The Point Stn, Lake Collieridge**



**Middle Rock Stn, Lake Collieridge**



**Peak Station, Lake Collieridge**



**Terri McNicols farm – author of 'The River Rules my Life'**

out towards Erewhon Station where from a strategic vantage point at Jumped Up Downs we could see the knoll in the middle of the Rangitata River which was the site of the 'Golden Hall' in the Peter Jackson movies 'Lord of the Rings'. We then doubled back to Hakatere (if you are trying to follow this on a map you will need Kiwimaps Rural map No.13 of 18.) We followed Heron Road out to Lake Heron and stopped for a cuppa with the Canterbury wind doing its best to blow us off our feet. We then got onto a farm track that took us through the Lake Stream valley out to the start of the Rakaia River. It was exhilarating climbing around the base of the mountains, the views were spectacular and none more so than the one that greeted us when we rounded the hill beside the Rakaia River. Of course we had to stop for photos. The wind wasn't so strong around this side of the mountain and the views were stunning. We continued along the rivers edge until we reached Glenfalloch Station which is where we stopped for lunch. Dietlind had prepared a lovely picnic lunch for us down by the river but unfortunately the wind got up just as we arrived so it was not as nice as it would have been if it had been calm. We ventured back to the accommodation for a cup of tea out of the wind and heard a little bit about the history of Glenfalloch and it's owners before re-boarding our 4wd vehicles for the last time. The Double Run Road took us back to our starting point at Windwhistle where we reboarded our bus and headed back to Methven for a lovely buffet dinner with Ann and Mark. The Hermitage was our next destination on a glorious Central Otago day. The weather was warming up the further south we went. We stopped for lunch and some scenic flights at Lake Tekapo. A beautiful place to spend a couple of leisurely hours. The drive around Lake Pukaki to The Hermitage was gorgeous, making for some great photo opportunities. Both Mt Sefton and Mt Cook were standing proud and majestic in clear blue skies and remarkably they were still standing proud and majestic in clear blue skies the next morning. A very rare treat indeed. This made the view from our floor to ceiling windows in our rooms even more spectacular right through the changing light of dusk and dawn. We decided to delay our departure just so we could further enjoy this rare opportunity. The weather stayed fine from here until the end of the trip so the sightseeing was all the better for that. Ross opted to detour out to the clay cliffs en-route to Omarama where we stopped for lunch. Then it was off to Cromwell, our stop for the next 2 nights. It was lovely to be able to throw open the doors and sit outside in the afternoon sun and have a nice cup of tea with our feet up. That is provided you weren't the tour guide and driver of course! Central Otago called us the next morning so we made our way down through the gorge to Clyde, stopped off to look at the dam then took the back road through Susy's old haunt, Earnsclough. We grabbed a picnic lunch in Alexandra and ventured on up through Omakau stopping for lunch in historic old Naseby. We took the time to check out the Naseby Curling Rink and learnt a little more about this interesting game before heading out of town. Then it was off-road again as we hit the dusty trails out to other-worldly Poolburn, a



**Hassle Free Tours adventure**



**Morning Tea at Lake Heron**



**Mountain climbing in 4wd**



**View from our Hermitage rooms**



**Cromwell**

fascinating place of rocks and pools. You could be forgiven for thinking you were on another planet. The dusty trails eventually led us through rolling hill country back to Cromwell for our second night. The sun was shining and the birds were singing next morning so Ross put the Nevis road at the top of the day's activities, one of his favourite 'off-road' adventures. We climbed our way to the top of the Nevis Range to its highest point at 1330 meters. This is the highest public road in NZ although not many would venture up in the family car. The stunning views were enhanced by interesting cloud patterns and along with the mountains and rock formations made for great photos. Down the mountain again and this time we stopped off at the Bannockburn Domain for morning tea. On our way to Queenstown through the Kawarau Gorge, we decided to call in to the Gibbston Valley Cheesery following a request from several passengers for a wine and cheese tasting. They coped very well with a sudden onslaught of 39 people. It was like a locust swarm, we came, we bought and we disappeared again, some also visited the winery next door. There was nobody jumping at the bungee jump and none of our group was game so we trucked on into Arrowtown for lunch. It was such a lovely day and so much to see that we spent an extra hour there before we ventured up to see what was happening at Coronet Peak. It was a bit overcast and windy but the views were great and there was still plenty of action on the ski fields. A quick buzz around Queenstown before we unpacked our bags at our last accommodation stop before heading home. We dined in house and watched Tonga beat France in the World Cup. The next day was the last of our intrepid high country adventures as we boarded Adin's Southern Explorer 4wd vehicles lined up to take us to either Macetown or Skippers Canyon. It took seven vehicles to cater for such a large group. Again we were lucky with the weather and both trips were fantastic. The wind picked up again in the afternoon as we got back but that didn't hinder our lunch break in Queenstown. As a special treat we teed up a visit to one of our most favourite places in NZ, Stoneridge Estate at Lake Hayes. Da Vella regaled us with her hilarious stories and showed us through the 'Blessed House' and Wayne put some of his boutique wines out for us to sample. Finally it was our last dinner together and what better way to spend it than across Lake Wakatipu at Walter Peak Station. Of course the only way to get there is on the old Earnslaw with the piano playing and the guests singing and the wonderful old steam engine chugging away below. A glorious evening, great food and a farm show as well. What more could you ask for. We made our way to Queenstown airport next morning, the weather still holding and went our separate ways back home. Another fabulous trip, thanks everyone, it was great to take you with us on this great adventure.

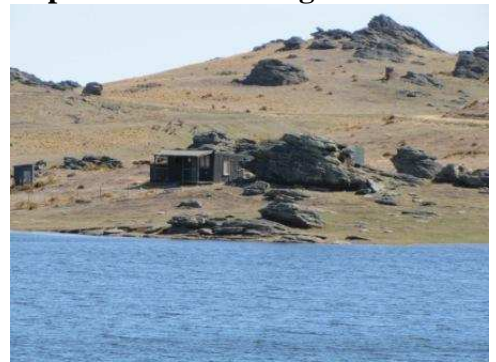
*Kind regards, Ross & Susy*



**Blue Lake at St Bathans**



**Top of the Nevis Range**



**Poolburn**



**Walter Peak Station**



**Group Photo – The Point Station**