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What a mess! I sat down at my desk to tell you a little more about our travels, but honestly, the clutter! The Tomtom navigation system is sitting here to get loaded with the updated European maps. The camera wants me to extract the last of the holiday travel photos. The i-Pod is waiting to get the photos loaded for us to take for our Swiss friends. There's a folder of printouts about Spain. There are half-completed GST returns waiting for the last bit of calculation. There's my "guilty pile" of things I really must get round to (do we all have one of those?) And right there in the middle is the real culprit - the "to do before we leave" checklist.

Now I've tidied a little, and can focus. Speaking of getting sorted out, something worth exploring is the www.sorted.org.nz website. It has the most wonderful calculators. The "60-plus" one lets you put in your age, and how much money you have in your nest-egg, and it calculates how long you're likely to live, and how much money you can spend along the way. You can also say how long *you* intend to live, and recalculate on that. It's a funny conversation... "so tell me darling, how long do you intend to live?" Mani sometimes says 150, so I put that in - and the Nest-egg Calculator didn't even blink. It calmly worked out how he could stretch his nest-egg that long, without even saying "are you sure?"

By the time you're reading this, we'll be in Altenrhein already. This might be a bit brave - the forecasts are not yet encouraging, and our little house is very much a summer place: only a little insulation, a little heater, an electric blanket, and a few warm clothes. Never mind, we're just there to set ourselves up, and get the car onto the road, and then start heading to Spain. By the time we get back to Switzerland with some New Zealand friends we're meeting in Spain, it will be a glorious vision of spring.

We'll be carrying some good stories of the Swiss-Kiwi connection back to our friends. Of course, there'll need to be a little boasting about the Cowbell Competition. The Altenrhein gang are interested followers of the NZ Swiss Club activities and rather envy us having organised opportunities to get together.

We hope we might meet again the young Swiss cyclists we met sheltering from the rain in a motorcamp at Kawhia. They'd been biking for three months, were flying home in a week, and were into that "just about had enough" stage of a long and physical adventure. They perked up considerably with some familiar language, some talk of home, a little wine and some of Mani's cooking.



Swiss cyclists a long way from Zurich

It's always great to see NZ reflected through other travellers' eyes. The things that delighted them, and puzzled them... the things they found a little like home, and the things that were so different. We were saying something about Auckland traffic to a couple from the Netherlands who were camper-vanning around... and they said "Traffic? - Auckland rush-hour is like Amsterdam at seven on a Sunday morning!"

Our own view changes too, as their "strangers-eye view" makes us look at familiar things in different ways. Our familiar weeds suddenly look like roadside flowers. Our beaches seem even emptier, and blessedly free of rows of deck-chairs.

We were proud of the way Cape Reinga has been developed and presented. The road is sealed most of the way, and the rest is in progress. At the top there's plenty of parking space, and a place where people are selling native shrubs and trees that you can buy and plant on the banks of the tracks. A wonderful way to renew the vegetation! The buildings are all ecologically friendly, and you enter through a tunnel alive with the sounds of traditional Maori instruments. The path down to the lighthouse is beautifully made, and flanked by handsome signs in English and Maori that explain facets of the history of the area, the geology, and the mythology. Overall, it's really impressive - and great is the mix of Kiwis and multiple nationalities walking up and down and taking it all in.

Another place that has developed hugely since I was last there is the Matakohe Kauri Museum, near the top of the Kaipara Harbour. It was the final experience of the "kauri" theme of our trip - an extensive museum with the huge machinery necessary to cut, drag and mill kauri logs, "working" models, and then the elegant furniture and kauri gum art.

Again - there were many visitors of all nationalities there. .

It was also on the Kaipara that we completed the "oyster" part of our tour - in a small place called Tinopai on the end of a peninsula dropping into the north Kaipara. Tinopai means in Maori "very good, excellent" - and it was probably the epitome of small kiwi campsites - right on the water, with a seal guarding the entrance

to the jetty, and oysters on the rocks.

Then - we were really pointing homewards, through the forgotten world highway, through Taranaki (so green after the Far North brown), and home to put *Feierabend* into hibernation and start packing.

Next edition - from Spain!