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Greetings from aboard "*Feierabend*". If you've not met her before, *Feierabend* is our house-bus. She's a sturdy old dame that once had a sedate life as a bus for a retirement village, and then came out of retirement into a life of adventure once Mani transformed her into a "just for two"-sized mobile home.

Right now, she's at a DoC lake-side camping ground at Lake Rerewhakaitu. Never heard of it? Neither had we! It's off the road to Waikaremoana at the Taupo end, on one of those roads you sometimes pass and never even wonder about. It's an expansive area of grass, with large trees full of birds and cicadas, still lake-waters disturbed only by trout jumping, and just a few other tents/caravans in residence.



Classic kiwi campground, Apitio

I started writing this page at Te Awanga in Hawkes Bay, with the sea in front of us, and vineyards behind us - nice! That was a busier place - well-known to the motor-caravanning fraternity - and quite a few international free-spirits too. Te Awanga is a favourite surf-casting beach for the locals. We watched a guy land a grand-father snapper. He had all the gear, unlike some young German tourists who were gamely throwing out a small line, without any bait, but heaps of laughter.

We were joking about how our South Island tour last year produced Swiss travellers in the remotest campgrounds. Well, we didn't identify any Swiss at Te Awanga - but the other campground convention applied: in the van next to us, we met un-met-neighbours from just around the road from our place in Paraparaumu ... and next to them, people from the Wairarapa, just by the old family farm where I grew up! The easy fellowship between the mo-vanners means there's always an invitation for a conversation, especially at wine-time. The other night was even more fun. We were "taking the waters" at De Bretts in Taupo, and a group of Lilliput caravan owners were having a rally. Out came the guitars and ukuleles after dinner, and the camping ground turned into a street party. I just happened to have my ukulele in *Feierabend* ... and so no second invitation to join in was needed.

Before Te Awanga we had done a leisurely roam through those small sea-side communities that dot

the northern Wairarapa and southern Hawkes Bay coastline. Each of them is out on a limb from the "main" road, so they're not places you casually pass through and think "we must go back there sometime". That means the people you meet there in their baches and caravans are often the farmers from inland - sometimes retired to the beach for the fishing. At Apitio, we got invited to the Boat Club - which on a Friday night (fortuitous timing) doubles as the local pub. The night we arrived, there was only one other couple in the camping ground. You've guessed it - a Swiss guy and his partner who are now living in the Hutt Valley! We did a big recruitment spiel for the Swiss Club... so you never know.

All along that stretch you can see the damage from last March's storms. Repaired drop-outs on the roads, slipped hillsides, and at Kairakau (another of those wonderful off-the-track beaches) a stream had swept through many houses, and the river had deposited stones along the beach which before had been only sand. The stones were beautiful - coloured in greens and pinks, with fine-veined patterns, and rounded by the river. We're putting in a new garden in Paraparaumu, so we've done our little bit to clean up the beach by bringing away a few. The rest.., well that's over to the sea. Listening to the waves at night, you could hear the undertone of grinding, as it worked to turn stones to sand.

Another interesting North Wairarapa/South Hawkes Bay sight: the number of magpies! Many places on our travels we see only a few, since they're now considered a pest. We had stopped with my brother out of Masterton. He and his neighbours are on a magpie-extermination campaign: he reckons the number of small birds is soaring as they get rid of the maggies. But my news for him is that just over the hills are families full of young looking for new territories. Like the sorcerer's apprentice's water-supply, I suspect they're going to keep on flowing (or flying) in. Mani (who's fond of magpies) did tell brother Dennis about how in Switzerland they'd discovered that crows, once reviled by the farmers, had been found to be highly beneficial in keeping down grass-grub and were now considered the farmers' friends. Somehow that didn't seem to change his mind.

Also on the "perhaps pests" subject - the visual theme of the journey thus far has been agapanthus plantings at farm gates. Brilliant blues, and occasional whites, in full luxuriant flower. It seems as if there are fewer farm gates *not* marked with agapanthus than there are with. And then, there are the ones still with remnants of red-hot poker (once the "must-have" farm-gate decoration). In combination with the agapanthus, the colours are arresting, even on a dull day. Save the agapanthus, I say!

And again, Mani and I tell each other over the *Feierabend* glass of wine - if you had to choose two countries in the whole world to live in - it has to be Switzerland and here!