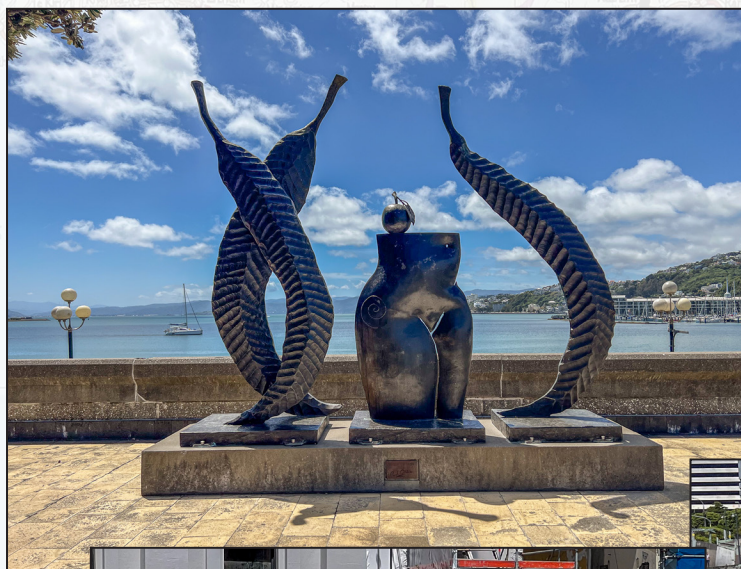


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WELLINGTON - BLENHEIM

From Napier to Wellington was one of our longer drives but most of it was by the better New Zealand highways. We made a couple stops for birding along the way and arrived in Wellington late afternoon and found our very central downtown lodging.

Wellington, the capitol city of New Zealand, is located at the south-western tip of the North Island and was our jumping off point to the South Island after a few days exploring the Wellington area. It is the third largest city in New Zealand and the world's southernmost capitol of a sovereign state



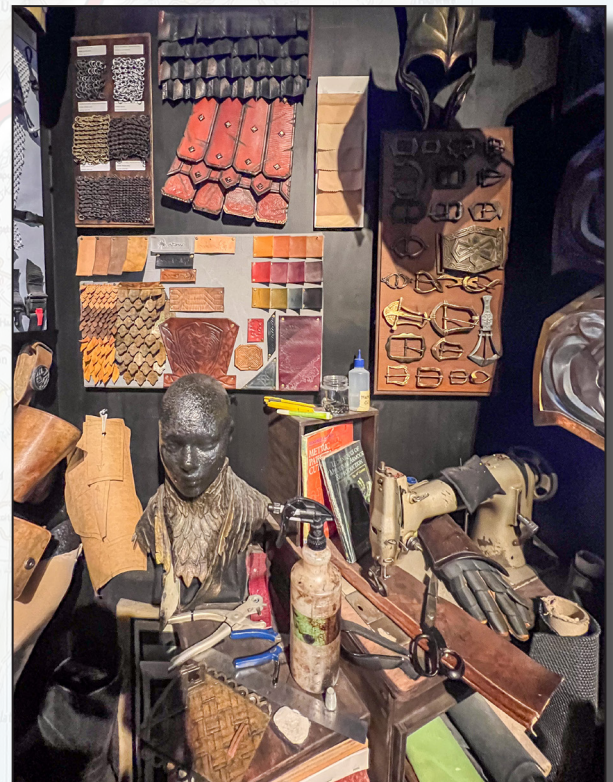
NEW ZEALAND 2024 /2025 - PART X

WELLINGTON - BLenheim

We toured the Wētā Workshop while in Wellington, a creative company for concept design, special effects, props, and renowned for their effects for television and film. They produced sets, costumes, armor, weapons, creatures and miniatures for the *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* projects. They also aided in the making of Jackson's 2005 version of *King Kong*. It supported the creation of *Reclaiming the Blade* (2009), a documentary film on stage combat, historical European and Asian swordsmanship.



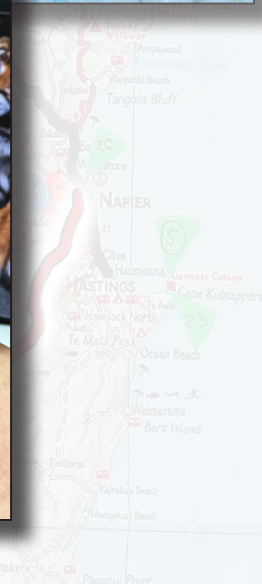
In most of the complex we were toured through, we could not photograph in, but in one area they set up work benches and displays where we could.



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An animated character on a test bench was very realistic, but I didn't think the *Please Do Not Touch* sign was all that necessary.



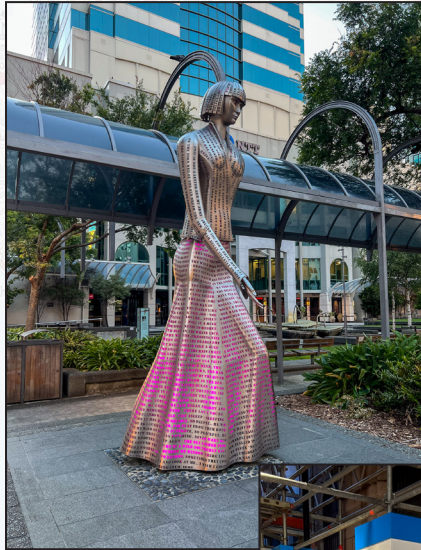
There are a lot of awfully creative people there, this artist's work is done with aluminum foil (and a great deal of talent). She was demonstrating her work and allowed us to give it a try (none of which will be shown here, only her works).



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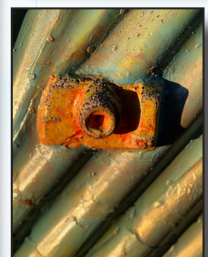
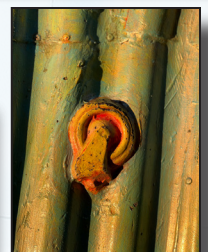
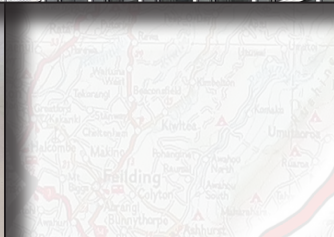
We enjoyed walking around the streets of Wellington near where we stayed. There was lots to see and do.



Around this corner was the Israeli embassy. We saw a few places around New Zealand where there were demonstrations of support for the people of Gaza, always peaceful though.



We found a very nice French bakery near our hotel lodging and got fresh croissants a few of the mornings we were in Wellington.



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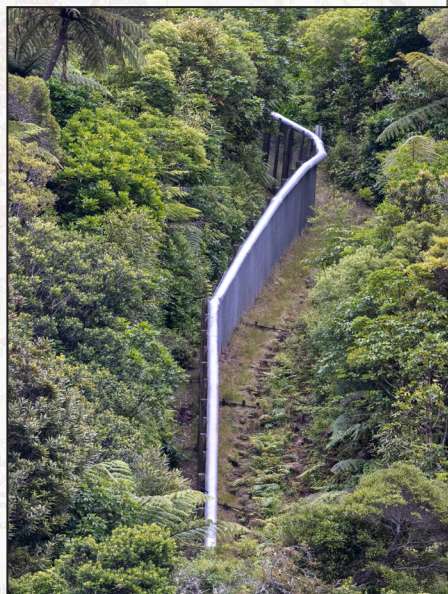
We had a nice guided birding tour in Zealandia Te Māra a Tāne, also known as the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary. It is the first urban completely fenced ecosanctuary. The ecosanctuary is a biodiverse area of just under a square mile of forest being restored to native habitat. The sanctuary covers an area that was previously used as the water catchment area for Wellington. The ecosanctuary, surrounded by a pest-exclusion fence, is a good example of an ecological island, which allows the original natural ecosystems to recover by minimizing the impact of introduced flora and fauna. The most crucial aspect of the sanctuary is a pest-exclusion fence, designed to exclude 14 species of non-native land mammals ranging from deer to mice, which encircles the over 5 mile perimeter of the sanctuary. Construction of the fence was completed in late 1999 and all mammalian pests within the perimeter were then eradicated over a nine-month period. This predator-proof fence is of great conservation significance, being a world first design to bar all terrestrial mammals from mouse size up.

We saw this sort of fence in other places in New Zealand in areas that were being protected from introduced flora, fauna and mammals. Most of New Zealand's ecosystems have been severely modified by the introduction of land mammals that were not present during the evolution of its ecosystems, and have had a devastating impact on both native flora and fauna.

Birds and other native animals have been released and thrive in the ecosanctuary. We saw a few of the more than a dozen of those species (albeit, none of the 20 Little Spotted Kiwi that were release there in 2000).

We did get see the rare tuatara to the right, a species of reptile endemic to New Zealand. Despite its close resemblance to lizards, it is the only existing member of a distinct lineage, the previously highly diverse order Rhynchocephalia. The name tuatara is derived from the Māori language and means "peaks on the back".

The tuatara has been protected by law since 1895. Tuatara, like many of New Zealand's native animals, are threatened by habitat loss and introduced predators, such as the Polynesian rat. Tuatara were extinct on the mainland, with the remaining populations confined to offshore islands until the first North Island release into this ecosanctuary. During routine maintenance work in late 2008, a tuatara nest was uncovered, with a hatchling found the following autumn. This is thought to be the first case of tuatara successfully breeding in the wild on New Zealand's North Island in over 200 years.



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We saw several of these UBCO 'Electric Utility Vehicles' around New Zealand. They seemed pretty stout and come in variations for different kinds of activities. We saw them used as delivery vehicles (such as Uber Eats, DoorDash, etc.), and personal transportation. It is a New Zealand company but their web site says they have US dealers and even some locally to us, but I've never seen one on the road here... yet... Interesting though, you can check them out here if you like: <https://ubco.com>.



We had to turn in our rental car in Wellington as the rental car company we used would not allow us to take it on the ferry to the South Island. They tried to loan us this McLaren one but the luggage space was too limited so we had to decline.*

** Disclaimer: Only part of this story is true.*



As you can see on the map to the left, to get from the North Island to the South Island (Wellington to Picton) we had to go slightly north and across the Cook Strait.

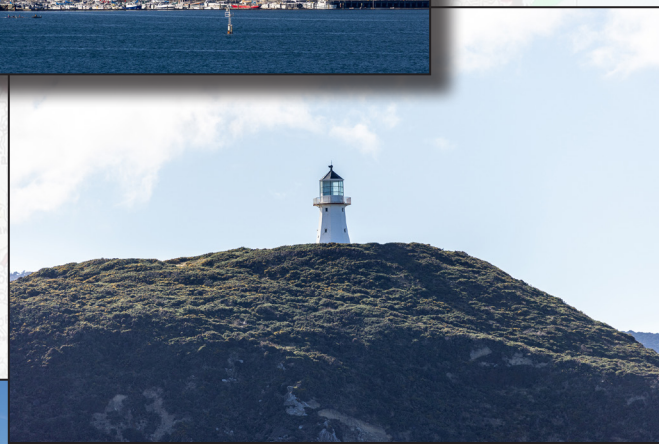
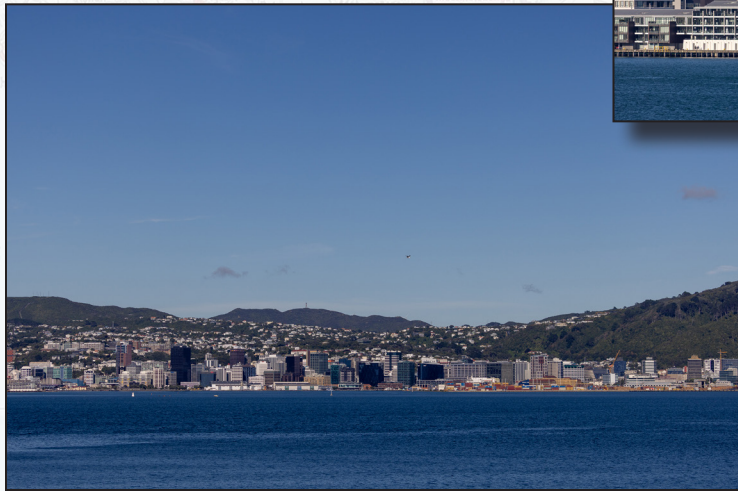
The numbers on our map indicated the stop number (red), number of nights there (blue), and birding spots (green). At this point we are headed to our 14th stop (Blenheim) where we will spend 3 nights. In a couple months time from this point we will spend 5 nights in Picton (the 37th stop) before going back across to the North Island and north of Wellington for the 38th stop.



NEW ZEALAND 2024 /2025 - PART X

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We rearranged our seven months of luggage from land / car based travel to sea travel once again. We had a bit more to pack since we got off the ship. We had purchased some art, a chilly bag, a few more clothing items, Wendy's new birding binoculars and a few other items. This required the addition of an additional carry on piece of luggage but we made it work, checked some luggage and then carried some on the ferry.



We had calm seas leaving Wellington Harbour. Next up was Cook Strait, which has been described as "one of the most dangerous and unpredictable waters in the world". We had already experienced the wrath of The Drake Passage on our Antarctica trip a couple years ago, so we were pretty apprehensive about crossing the Cook Strait. Wendy was (and still is) suffering the affects of the price she paid to cross The Drake. Fortunately we had pretty calm seas crossing the Cook Strait as well. and in the Queen Charlotte Sound to Picton.

Coming into Queen Charlotte Sound the clouds over the South Island reinforced the feeling that the South Island would probably be more dramatic in terms of landscape and weather.

On our way down the Queen Charlotte Sound into Picton we passed several seemingly isolated cabins and homes. They brought up day dreams of how we might avoid the chaos back home in the USA... at least for the next few years... or until our years long New Zealand visas expired. We had some options anyway.



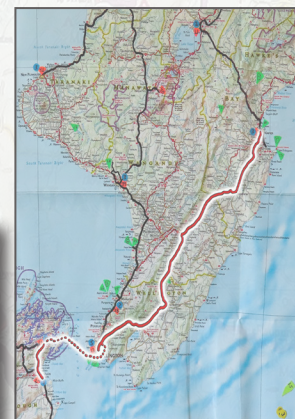
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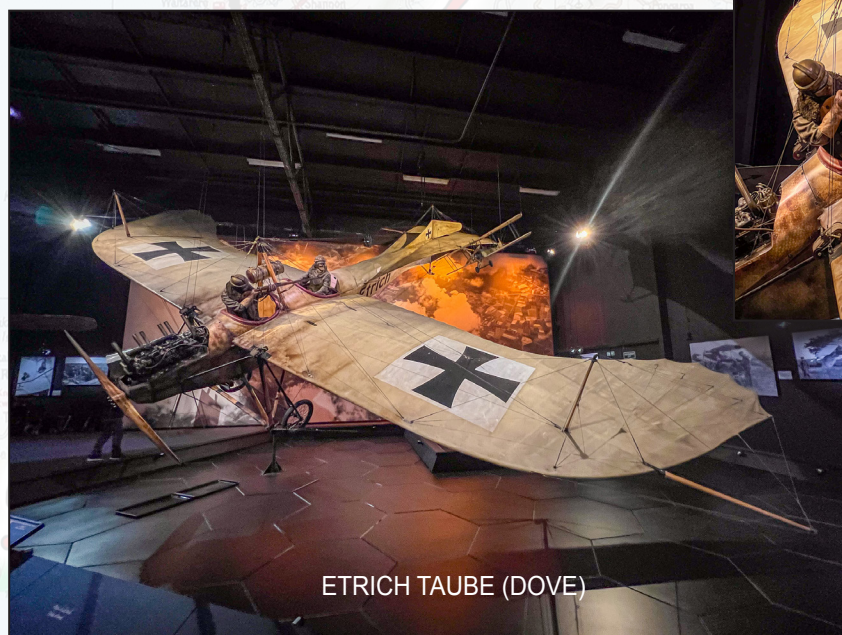
In Picton we collected our luggage and headed across the street from the ferry terminal to collect our next rental car, and MG mid-sized SUV. While not as quirky and automated as the last rental car, it had a few of it's own oddities that we would get used to over the next two months. Still, even with a few oddities, it was reliable and served as more than adequate for our purposes.

It was a short drive From Picton to our next base camp in Blenheim, where we could once again regroup and rearrange our luggage for car travel.

We found a couple Situation Rooms of character in Blenheim where we could get our coffee. By this time I'd outfitted our travelling kitchen with a French press and the necessary tools for coffee in our lodgings but we preferred to find suitable Situation Rooms in the areas we stayed where we might practice our flâneur-like behavior.



For me, the Omaka Aviation Heritage Centre was a highlight of our explorations of Blenheim area. It has a rare collection of WW1 and WW2 aircraft displayed and explained in very creative ways designed by the Wētā Workshop we toured in Wellington. Where I could find more information about a plane a link was added if you click the photograph. Most of these links will be to Wikipedia.



ETRICH TAUBE (DOVE)





NEW ZEALAND 2024 /2025 - PART X

WELLINGTON - BLENHEIM



FOKKER E III 'EINDECKER'

Dog Fight! Advantage Fokker!



AIRCO DE HAVILLAND DH-2

New Zealand 2024 /2025 - PART X

WELLINGTON - BLENHEIM



ROYAL AIRCRAFT FACTORY R.E.8



ROYAL AIRCRAFT FACTORY R.E.8



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Not the way to fly a plane, but desperation and the will to survive has something to do with this recreated "situation". There is a YouTube video that explains it. Click this text or the image to the right to see the story.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6nl4LY7MQ&t=70s>



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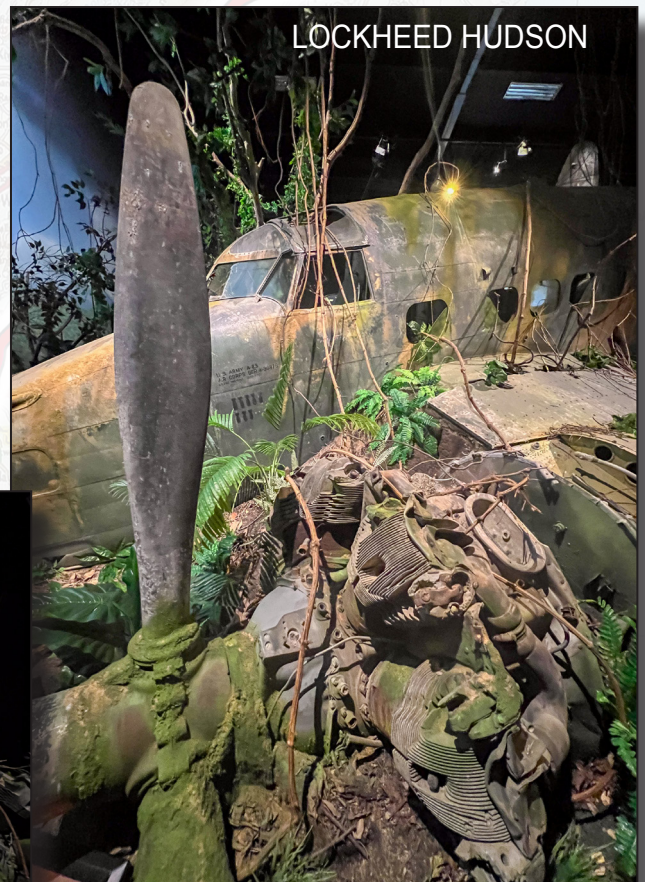


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NIEUPOINT 27



LOCKHEED HUDSON





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THE BARON'S LAST FLIGHT



FOKKER DR.I 'DREIDEKKER' TRIPLANE

Easily the best known Triplane pilot was Manfred von Richthofen who flew several Fokker Triplanes including an all-red example. However, many of his 80 victories were achieved flying an Albatross D.III. It was because of a version of the Fokker triplane he flew being painted red all over that he became known as 'The Red Baron'.

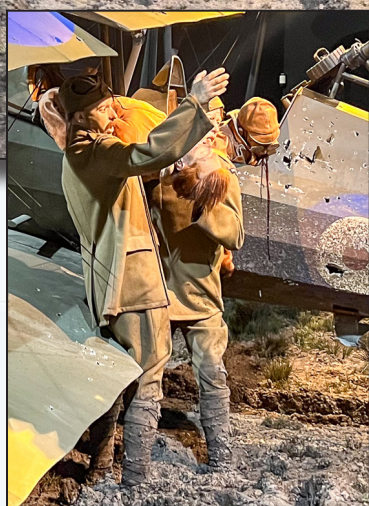
This display depicted his last flight and the resulting souvenir scavenging.





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There is an airport next to the museum that offered us airborne examples of aircraft as well.



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