

Day 12 – Hiking in Tongariro National Park [Wednesday 02-Feb-2011]

I felt so rested when I woke up. We got up just before 5AM and started packing. Recall that as we are traveling westward, it is easy to get up in the morning. We got all our stuff ready and hit the road by 6AM. I wanted to leave before rush hour. The car felt weird as I stepped in..



This is how it could have looked like for the driver...



Who am I kidding! This is how it actually looked like. Fortunately “D” meant forward.

Even though we had the GPS plugged in with our NZ/AUS map in it (bought that second hand on eBay) the GPS insisted that we were in Las Vegas, so it proposed that we had 6,500 miles or so to travel today! Eventually it synched up. But while it was working on finding the satellites, I was quite busy with the car and traffic as they drive on the other side of the road in New Zealand. The roads started out being 6-lane around Auckland and progressively turned into two lane roads and farm land. The weather was overcast.

We followed State Road 1 for some time and then started looking for a rest area. All we could find were rest areas next to the road, literally. We were hungry so that did not matter much in the end. We stopped just past the town of Te Kuiti. A lot of things in New Zealand appear to have Polynesian names.



The NZ picnic areas were next to the road. We watched trucks crawling up the hill. Hmm..

After breakfast we continued. We saw lots of rolling hills and plenty of farm animals around us. There fences were impressive. The fence posts were very close to each other. In general, it seemed a bit tidier than at home.

We arrived at the Tongariro National Park by about 11AM. We were allowed to check into our site right away. Lilli pitched a tent while I started to rummage through things we wanted to leave on the campground office while we would be out hiking. There was no fee for entering the National Park. Incidentally, it is this park that parts of Lord Of the Rings was filmed.



It took us less than an hour to reach Taranaki Falls. The main fall is about 60ft tall.

By the time we reached Taranaki Falls the weather had improved and we felt that we had the energy to continue to the next milestone along this trail.



It got windier further up. In the background: Mt Ngauruhoe (L) and Mt Tongariro (R)



Lilli is reading the guide book as we rest by the glacial melt Lower Tama Lake. 4,300ft.



White moss in the foreground as we look up on Mt Ruapehu. Its an active volcano.

It was a very refreshing hike. The sky got bluer as we continued along the hike.



Late summer flowers are still breaking through

The loop was about 9 miles. After an initial climb the trail stayed at 3,900-4,300ft. When we got back we headed over to a beer garden below the Chateau and had a nice brew and enjoyed the view. Incredibly, the clouds rolled back in as we watched. We must have had an incredible luck during our hike.



Another important NZ visual: a dump station. Not Airstream friendly, for sure.



This is our campsite. We had all the gear with us to make it comfortable.



Wine, cheese and crackers took the edge off.



Dinner: that came out quite well with some Chinese leftovers dumped into it

After some wine and cheese Lilli started to prepare dinner with the fuel kitchen. We brought some freeze dried food some the US that Lilli topped off with some of the Chinese leftovers from last night. It tasted delicious.

After we were done I walked up to the building to do some dishes. What luxury campground, or perhaps this is just NZ “Holiday Parks”! Inside, there were several complete kitchens and tons of people sitting down eating inside the building.

By the evening we were quite pooped. We were ready to hit the bed before the sun was supposed to go down. As we had a complete cloud cover it was hard to tell.

All in all this ended up being a very satisfying day. Not only did I not have an accident with car, but we got to enjoy some very nice hiking in Tongariro National Park with sun and all. We had the pleasure of seeing a few very iconic NZ mountains on a clear day.