

Day 18 –Milford Sound and the NZ Fiordland [Tuesday 08-Feb-2011]

We got up fairly early. I worked on the diary a bit and checked into my emails. We ate breakfast in our room, showered and then walked into town where we were taking the bus up to the Milford Sound.

The bus ride took a good three hours to reach the port in the Milford Sound, including a lunch stop. The weather was mixed and turned into heavy rain for a while. They supposedly get some 500 inches of rain per year up in this area! The roads were fairly windy but the driver kept the food on the pedal most of the time. It was a small bus and I do not think it had more than about 20-25 seats in it. It was full.

We stopped at a couple of places for quick photo ops. The driver spoke to us through a microphone as he drove, narrating what we saw. We saw a very large number of water falls, most of which were really active today because of the heavy rain.



A Kea (large NZ mountain parrot) walked around the parking lot where we stopped

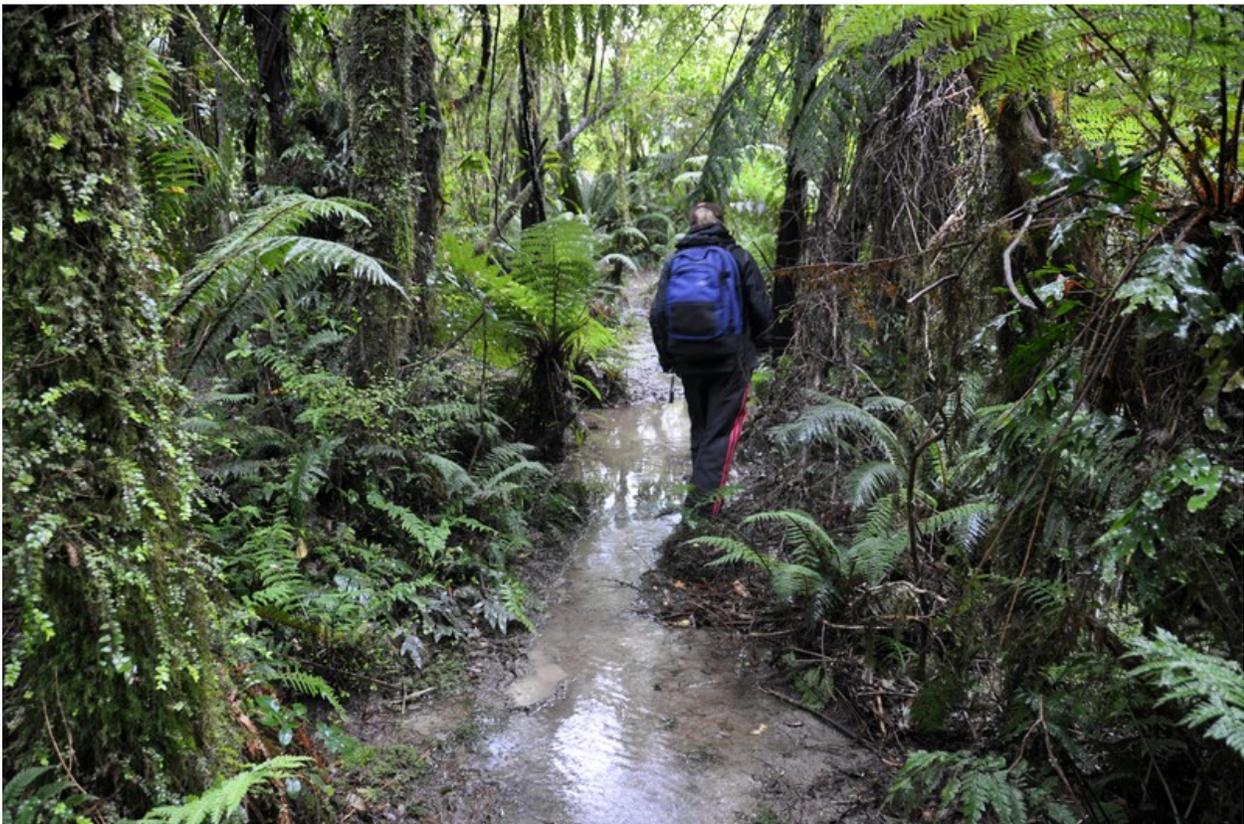
We saw Kea birds in a couple of places. They are quite big, probably twice the size of our Triton Cockatoo at home. I am guessing their head is about 10 inches above the ground when they walk around. They are definitely much wider than our bird at home. They seem very intelligent.

Due to the rain, the driver had to make changes to the plans where we were going to eat. He stopped at a small camp in the National Park where he cooked some basic food while we were walking around in the camp. It rained when we were there. But we had fortunately brought rain gear with us from the states.



So much precipitation led to waterfalls everywhere

At the back of our bus we had a group of 4 Japanese tourists. They did not understand English very well. I could see that they were handed small head-sets and receivers so that they could listen to a Japanese translation of what was going on.



Lilli is trying to navigate the start of the Hells Bells Track where we stopped for lunch



The river at the old camp where we stopped for lunch was raging



At another stop, this Kea bird walked around on the roofs of cars



Let me into your car! Don't just sit in there. I know you have snacks.



Ok, fine. No snack. Then I'll just eat some berries while I stand on your trunk lid.



Very definitely a tropical rain forest where our bus stopped for a break



When we arrived at the Milford Sound, the weather had completely changed for the better

As we arrived at the port area there were perhaps 20+ tourist buses there. I could not see any regular cars. The boat ride took about 1 ½ hours. It basically followed the Milford Sound out to the Tasman Sea and then turned back around. Rather than going in the middle of the Fjord it went on the side, in and out, so that we could get a closer look at falls, etc.



In one case, the boat got us so close to a waterfall that I had to run for cover



Some falls were very far above us and their water just turned into curtains of rain



There are literally waterfalls everywhere due to the recent heavy rains



This fall had so much water it shot straight out

We boarded the bus and headed back. The driver did not say much. Instead he left some music on. We were back in town again around 6PM. We walked back to our campground and drank some wine in the sun, on the deck, before heading out on town (Te Anau) for dinner. Since the weather here is so variable, you have to seize every sunny moment rather than assume that it will be around later on.



Roses outside the Chinese restaurant in Te Anau



Amongst other things we had this Lemon chicken for dinner



John is trying to trick us into taking the wrong way home..