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Newsletter 01/07

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From Auckland to Wellington

Kia Ora: The World Tour has started!

New Zealand's North Island is quite hilly. That is fine. But not, if you are sitting on a loaded 110kg long vehicle for a world journey. A typical hill is taken by the dynamic Bankerbikers somehow like this: Julia (from behind): "Oh dear, look at that?" Right in front of us a 10% uphill about 1km long. Stefan: "Rock 'n' Roll, Baby!" (well, not quite, more likely: "Oh no, not another one!"). 700m to go. No breath to continue that lively conversation. The tandem staggers with 5kmh (!) slowly uphill. Pure fun. You have all time in the world to think about whether these cosy sheep lead a better life than we human beings. You should consider that sheep can eat and shit at once. A big advantage! On top of that they look that nice-dumb, that they are everybody's darling. But we can resist them, we are married!

Slowly we are towed forward and reach the speed of a campervan. The tandem just rushes on steadily, the sun is shining brightly. Hills are cool!



Wanganui is a small city we really liked – lots of historical buildings and cosy cafes /restaurants.

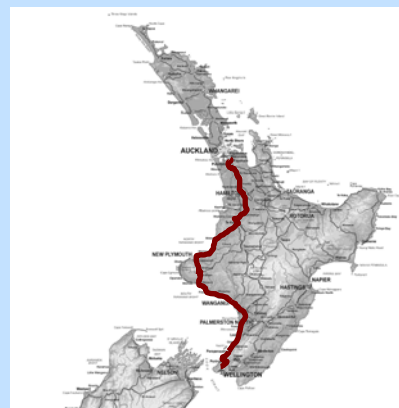
The closer we got to Wellington the prettier the townships looked. On the strenuous drive into the city we were amazed to see huge million-dollar-view mansion nestling on the big hills around Wellington. On the other hand we saw American fast food chains and anonymous shopping centres for the suburbians. Wellington City itself is the Cafe Capital, everyone invites you to stay and enjoy the coffee. Shopaholics would also love this town. We restricted ourselves to buying some postcards and food. Unfortunately we are not able to transport other things.



500m to go. We remember saying often last December "For three weeks of cycling you have to train, but not for three years". We promise ourselves not to say that again. 300m. Julia swings into a dynamic standing on the pedals. That looks sexy, and we would tumble otherwise. Behind us approaches a campervan – honking a friendly horn at us. While waving back we nearly lose balance and scarcely avoid the side of the shoulder. The sheep are fleeing. 200m. We don't like campervans. 100m. Thinkin about it - campervans are quite cool. 50m to go. The final sprint – we accelerate to 7 kmh. Yes – the peak is here.

The trip

From Auckland to Wellington we managed to cycle 919 km and 7351 vertical meters in 18 days. The joke "That person in the back is not pedalling!" can be heard every day... Otorohanga, Te Kuiti, Mokau, Urenui, Patea, Wanganui, Waikanae – sound like the newest teletubbies but in fact they are landmarks on our trip. Cycling into the city of Auckland was somehow hectic but as city kids we are quite used to that. It took us nearly one day before we left the southern suburbs of Auckland and turned into the amazing green landscape with thousands of sheep. The villages became smaller, the distance between them longer – we were heading to the remote west coast. A handful of houses, a dairy, a takeaway and, if you are lucky, a cafe – that is a typical settlement here. Sometimes the shops were closed – then we had to ride further being hungry and dreaming wildly of chocolate muffins until we reached the next food stop.



Some lessons have now been learnt: 1. Only leave your clothing pannier open overnight outside the tent if you are keen on big spiders with hairy legs nesting in your underwear (Julia). 2. Never forget to fully inflate your tyres – otherwise the best tubes of the world will get a snake bite while riding over gravel. 3. Apply sun lotion to all parts of your body – longtime scarlet glowing ears are not that attractive (Stefan).



Obviously we feel really great! Getting comfortable here was easy. New Zealand's clocks tick slower, even in Auckland shops on the main shopping street close at 5.30 p.m. Being close together is a great joy for us, after the stressful last months in Germany. We now at last have enough time for each other. For diversion there are lots of friendly Kiwis who are always in for some chatting.

The slower pace of life is just perfect for us: December was hectic and full of hassles up to the day we left Germany:



Sad goodbye at the airport

Dec, 31st 2006, 3 p.m. at the Frankfurt airport: We do the chek-in and are glad to have checked-up all our luggage. A Tv team of Sat 1 is also with us having decided short-term to film our departure. Much more important: Parents and our best friends are here, swinging big goodbye signs and opening some bottles of sparkling wine. Saying goodbye is full of emotions for us and all of us shed some tears. Then the time has come: a last hug and kiss, a final picture, then we head off to our gate. 30 hours later we are in Aotearoa – the land of the long white cloud.

New Life

Saturday evening, around 9 p.m. in a settlement with 450 inhabitants on the dreamy westcoast: the local restaurant has closed already, the next village with a pub is 60km away, no car or pedestrian on the road, no mobile phone net, is here paradise? Yes! – At least for a medium term - for the rest of our lifes it might be too quiet.

But for now it is heaven on earth. The hostel has no key for the door – no criminals here. The tandem sleeps peacefully in an old shed. We spent the day reading, drinking coffee and dreaming on the long black lava sandshore with its shining stones and mussels. For early dinner we had whitebait – a local fish speciality. During the day we had a nice talk with our landlords and got invited by New Zealand local tourists who pass by on their vacation in their own country. In the fridge waits ginger beer for us – another local speciality. You have to get used to the taste – as like to the Kiwi slang with lost of stress on the “e”: Is thieees yeer impreeeeesive bike? We are told: The best way to speak “New Zealandish“ is to put your fist in front of your mouth while speaking. (Recommendation of a real Kiwi!)

People on the way

We especially enjoy the fact that we already met so many special people along our way. We feel very privileged to have met them far away from the normal touristy paths and therefore got to know small pieces of their “normal“ lives. For example, dairy farmers or campground owners. We were most impressed by Jayne, a totally blind mother of five who aims to get gold in 2008 in Beijing in the paralympics tandem cycling competition. Due to hard training she already had some greate successes. We visited her and her husband in their house and could ask her intensively about her sporting life. We wish her the best of luck and will follow her along her dreams. Perhaps we can meet her again, but with her ultralight carbon tandem and her muscles she will be way ahead of us. You can find all info about her on www.eyesongold.co.nz.

Next plan?

After heaving reached our first goal of Wellington we are heading to the South Island. We look forward to see the places again we visited in 2005 and expect lots of new experiences on unknown paths. Tomorrow we will get on the ferry to Picton and will go to the Marlborough Sounds. In Blenheim we hope to meet Sally and her husband. Sally works in banking with the regional wine growers – that should be very interesting! We then will have to decide if we go over the rainbow road or via Kaikoura Coast to Christchurch.

We would like to end with the author and world traveller Josie Dew:

“A bad day on the road is better than a good day in the office.“



Cheers, Julia and Stefan

Sponsor of the month:



“What a mean machine“ or “What a flash bike“ - we hear these comments daily. And very true, our Koga Miyata Twin Traveller is a tandem of exceptional class: Full suspension, 27 gears and Magura hydraulic brakes – the Porsche Cayenne among bicycles. Usable in rough conditions and fast if needed. Our dream on two wheels... Only the pedalling (fortunately) is still ours to be done.

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