

## Some Good Kiwi News to Cool You Down – from Louise Scott – 14 December 2025

To escape yet another scorching Perth summer, we headed for New Zealand — and what a tonic it proved to be. Three glorious months were spent wandering through both the North and South Islands, catching up with friends and filling in a few travel gaps left from 2023. As ever, New Zealand revealed itself as effortlessly beautiful, welcoming and endlessly rewarding.

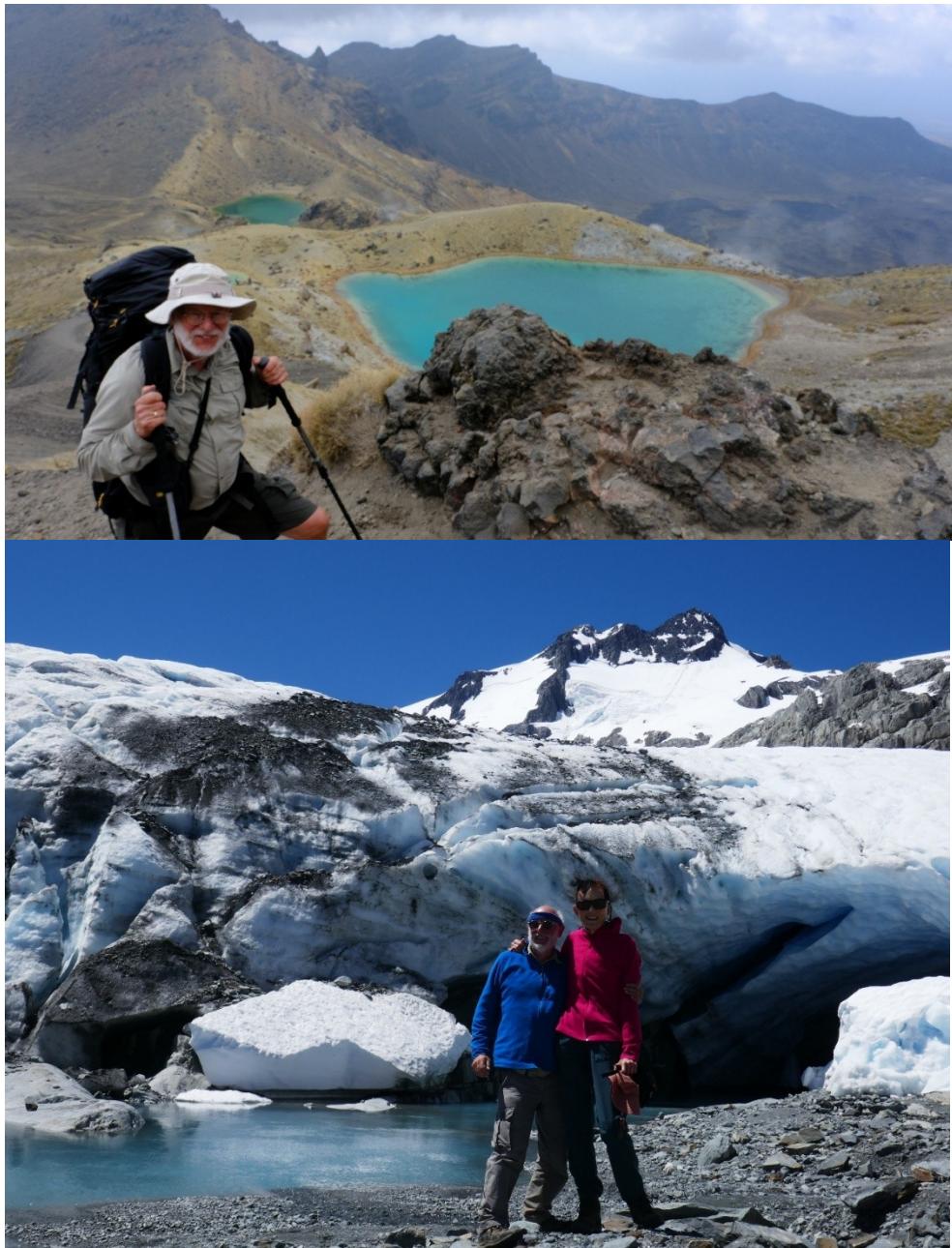
We began in Auckland, staying with friends Gavin and Megan and their family, before retreating north to their stunning holiday home overlooking the Hokianga Harbour. Days drifted by gazing across shimmering water to distant hills, walking among ancient kauri forests, admiring a magnificent pōhutukawa clinging to the shoreline — and even stumbling upon a snoozing seal tucked away in a sea cave.

From Auckland we travelled south to Hamilton to catch up with Fiona and her partner Alec. As we approach the Perth International Folk Dance Group's fiftieth anniversary, it was a pleasure to reconnect with fond friends and dance teachers who have contributed so much to our repertoire over the years. Fiona, a long-time friend of the group, still dances with enthusiasm, though her focus has shifted towards Celtic traditions rather than international folk. Our timing was perfect: the Hamilton Summer Festival was in full swing, filling the city with music, colour and a relaxed holiday atmosphere. A highlight was watching Fiona's dance group take to the stage in a lively and elegant display of Celtic dancing — swirling skirts, stamping feet and infectious energy. It was a joyful reminder that dance, like travel, is all about community and connection.



From Hamilton we continued through Rotorua and Lake Taupō before reuniting with Gavin and Megan at Tongariro National Park, the standout highlight of the North Island. A rare window of perfect weather allowed us to climb Mt Ruapehu, standing above snowy craters and a glowing crater lake with views that seemed to stretch forever. We then completed the four-day Tongariro Northern Circuit, one of New Zealand's Great Walks, winding through dramatic volcanic landscapes, fiery red craters and jewel-bright emerald lakes

— a World Heritage treasure indeed.



After farewells in Wellington and a flight south, we set off on a full circumnavigation of the South Island. Staying with friends in Timaru, we were immediately challenged by a demanding three-day hike into the remote Arrowsmith Range in the Southern Alps — wild, rugged and blissfully uncrowded. More alpine splendour followed in Mt Cook National Park, where an overnight climb to Mueller Hut delivered a spectacular sunrise over Mt Cook and Mt Sefton, rising above a sea of cloud.

Wildlife and coastal scenery drew us to the Otago Peninsula, before Fiordland provided its signature drama: moss-draped forests, steep climbs and breathtaking views over Milford Sound. A few days camping by boat on Lake Manapouri felt deliciously remote — sandflies aside — with forests straight out of Middle-earth and sweeping vistas from the Monument.

We travelled north up the wild West Coast, passing retreating glaciers, before slowing the pace in Golden Bay with friends, exploring turquoise bays and the striking Archway Islands. Our final flourish was the Marlborough Sounds, where a climb to the summit of Mt Stokes revealed a dazzling maze of inlets, forested hills and shining sea — a perfect farewell.



Once again, New Zealand delivered the goods with wonderful people experiences and adventures.

*From Louise Scott – Note that the following has been published as a holiday supplement to Graevine Vol. 27, Issue 1; December 2025*