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Newsletter of E.J. Peiker, Nature Photographer and www.EJPhoto.com
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Special New Zealand Edition
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Welcome to the quarterly newsletter from E.J. Peiker Nature Photography and www.EJPhoto.com. In this quarterly email publication, I will keep subscribers posted on upcoming workshops including the DuckShop Workshop Series as well as sharing some photos and experiences with you. I will also give you brief impressions on any new equipment that I get the opportunity to use and any other general information in the world of digital nature photography. Please feel free to forward this along to other photographers and interested parties but please do so only by forwarding this newsletter in its entirety. Note that all content is copyrighted by E.J. Peiker. If you would like to be added or deleted to the mailing list, just send me an email message at ejpeiker@cox.net. Back issues are available online at <http://www.ejphoto.com/newsletter.htm>



Milford Sound (D3x, 24-70mm- 4 vertical frames)

New Zealand Diary

January 30-31, 2010 – Day 1/2

After a year of planning, the day has finally come to depart for New Zealand, a place I have been wanting to visit for many years – ever since reading about the Southern Alps on the South Island.

A US Airways flight took me from Phoenix to Los Angeles where I boarded a Air New Zealand 747 for the 12 ½ hour flight to Auckland. I am a bit nervous about getting my 31lb camera gear carry-on on-board since the published carry-on limits for Air New Zealand are a ridiculously low 7kg per passenger (16lb). To add to the fear, they wheeled up a scale to the gate with a sign saying that only one carry on is allowed regardless of class you are flying in. But fortunately my Gura Gear Kiboko camera backpack was never questioned. as they tried to heard over 400 people onto the 747-400.

My gear for the trip included a Nikon D3x for landscapes, a Nikon D300 for birds, a Nikon D700 for night and low light photography, and a Panasonic Lumix GF1 for walking around shots. The lenses I brought were the Nikon 500mm f/4VR, 70-300 f/4-5.6VR, 24-70 f/2.8, and 14-24 f/2.8. For the Panasonic I took the 14-45mm stabilized lens. I also packed the Nikon 18-200 in my checked baggage as an emergency backup lens. For support I took a Gitzo 3541, a BH-55 ballhead and a Wimberley II Head. Other miscellaneous items included Singh-Ray Polarizers, SinghRay variable ND filter, Nikon SB-900 flash, and other accessories.

Service in the upper deck of the 747-400 was excellent. Due to the 20 hour time difference between Phoenix and New Zealand, I went to sleep on the plane on Saturday night and woke up on Monday morning even though I only slept 6 hours. A 20 hour time difference is actually pretty easy to adjust to since you simply subtract 4 hours from your current time but it is the next day. So my flight left Phoenix at 6:00PM on Saturday which was 2:00PM on Sunday in New Zealand – subtract 4 hours and add a day.

February 1, 2010 – Day 3

It's Day 3 already even though I have been gone from home for only 17 hours or so as we land in sub-tropical Auckland, New Zealand on the North Island. I am thankful that all of the luggage came off the carousel with little delay. Wow, it feels like Hawaii, hot and very humid. It's raining. Since this trip is to the South Island where the Southern Alps are, after clearing customs, immigration, and bio security, we made our way via shuttle to the domestic terminal for the final leg of the flying part of the journey. There were no delays on any flights and again no hassle with the camera gear despite all sorts of signs warning you about the 7kg limit. Flying down the northern half of the south island at 34,000 it was really interesting to be able to see the east coast of the country out of one window and the west coast out of another window. Again all of the luggage was there upon landing in Christchurch and the thing I feared most on this trip was no problem.

It really felt good stepping outside into about a 70 degree dry and sunny day. A Toyota 4 Runner from Avis was waiting, the little SUV was loaded and it was off to buy groceries and then make way to Lake Tekapo in the center of the island. The south island is approximately the shape of and slightly smaller than the state of California. Driving on the left side of the road was another fear that really turned out to be no problem at all; the only issue I had was that I kept using the windshield wiper lever as a turn signal since the turn signal handle is on the right of the steering wheel rather than the left.



Lake Tekapo (GF1, 14-45mm)

After a 3 ½ hour drive through rural and then mountain foothill country, the spectacularly colored Lake Tekapo appeared. Tekapo is a very large glacial lake that has the light blue milky color that glacial run-off lakes often have. This is due to the suspended sedimentary silt from the glacier. After moving the bags into the room at the Lake Tekapo Scenic resort at about 3:00PM, I grabbed the little Panasonic GF1 for a bit of an orientation walkabout. A bit later it was off to Lake Alexandrina to see what birds might be there. I was very happy to immediately find New Zealand Scaup, one several ducks in this country that I do not yet have in my quest to photograph all the world's waterfowl. Additionally there were gorgeous but wary Crested Grebes. But persistence and several hours paid off as I ended up getting some nice shots. Many Mallards were also present even though I initially thought they might be Pacific Black (Gray) Ducks since I wasn't thinking that the breeding plumage pattern would be reversed but of course it is since it is midsummer here now. I did successfully photograph one Gray Duck.

February 2 – Day 4

The day started early before sunrise with a drive up the east side of Lake Tekapo in hopes of finding some Alpenglow opportunities on a long dirt road. We stopped at a small turnout and went cross country on foot to higher ground and was treated to a nice mountain glow just before the sun came up. On the way back, a small side road proved to be fruitful as we spotted some Gray Teal. They Gray Teal is another bird that I needed for my waterfowl list. These are very wary birds but I was successful at getting some nice photos.. Returning to the hotel grounds I photographed Black-billed Gulls and Chaffinch.

After checking out of the lodge, it was time to head further west to Aoraki Mount Cook – this is the tallest mountain in New Zealand at nearly 13,000 feet. The route passed the south end of another very large glacial lake called Lake Pukaki. After several stops along the way for scenic photos of the mountains with the lake in the foreground, arrival at Mount Cook Alpine Village and the Hermitage Motel was at hand. Since it was a bit too early to check in, Tasman Glacier seemed like a great place to go. Getting to the glacier is a short but steep hike that results in getting to a high overlook over Tasman Lake – a lake formed by the Tasman Glacier that has some small icebergs in it even this late in the season. On the way up to the glacier overlook, a side trail took us to several small glacial lakes called the Blue Lakes. But they are actually green this time of year.



Mount Cook (D3x, 70-300mm)

Next was check in followed by an almost immediate departure for Hooker Valley. The Hooker Valley trail is about a 3.5 mile (one way) trail that leads to Hooker Lake with incredible views of

Mount Sefton and Mount Cook with a glacial river running near the trail. You actually cross the treacherous river two times via long and high suspension bridges. There were many photographic opportunities along the way and I look forward to processing the RAW files. Including all of the photography, the 7 mile roundtrip took about 4.5 hours.

This was a long day but an exhilarating one. Everything hurts but it's great. Seven glacial lakes, two incredible mountains, three hikes totaling 12 miles, alpenglow at morning and night, and many photographs – who could ask for anything more.

February 3 – Day 5

Day 5 started early in the morning with a pre dawn hike back up the first part of hooker Valley to photograph Mt. Sefton with morning alpenglow. A number of good vantage points were found. On the way back, the campground was full of Keas being rambunctious. Keas are the world's only Alpine Parrot. Watching them cracked me up as they were trying to dismantle motor homes in the campground. I witnessed one Kea stealing a pair of underwear off of a clothesline and running away with it. I got some nice shots of these pretty green birds.



Kea (D300, 70-300mm)

After a large breakfast, it was time for a little relaxation until the light got better later in the day. We visited the visitor center to learn a bit more about the region in the afternoon and then went on another hike for a different view of Mount Cook via Kea Point. While the view from the point of the mountain was not as good as many others, it did allow photographing down into some

very colorful glacial pools. A much better view for last light on the mountain was a few hundred yards short of Kea Point where a V-cut in the foothills allowed a nice framing of the mountain. Hiking back to the hotel in the dark was no problem, and as was the case on most excursions, the people along the way were very friendly and some stories were shared.

February 4 – Day 6

Another 5:30AM wake-up and immediate departure towards Lake Pukaki where we were hoping to find some areas where there were good views of the lake with Mount Cook in the background, the Glacial lake in the foreground and nice light on the mountain at sunrise. We were successful although there was quite a bit of atmospheric haze to contend with. On the way back to Mount Cook village we stopped back at the Hooker Valley campground to photograph the Kea some more but they were gone. So we went back to the hotel for breakfast and then packed up for our journey to the southeast part of the South Island. We made a number of stops along the way to see what we could find. These included a 30 mile unplanned side trip to Lake Ohau which was glass smooth and allowed for some nice foothill reflections in the water despite the sun being very high in the sky.

As we continued eastward, we ran across Lake Waitaki which had the most unreal neon bright turquoise color. It was simply a color that one has trouble believing exists in nature. I made the comment that they must have rounded up all of the world's turquoise food coloring and dumped it in the lake. After a few more side trips that proved to be fruitless photographically we arrived at Moeraki. The primary goal here was to photograph the Round Boulders on the Beach that have been exposed by coastal erosion over the eons. However, prior to going to them, we decided to go out to a lighthouse and much to our surprise, there was a Yellow-eyed Penguin colony there. The Yellow-eyed Penguin is the rarest penguin in the world and has just



Yellow-eyed Penguin (D300, 500mm)

barely been brought back from extinction through a massive conservation effort. There are now about 4000, up from about 40 and it only lives in New Zealand and its islands. It is the world's 4th largest penguin. They are known to be extremely wary of people however we found several individuals and their babies that were not scared of people at all.

After the Penguins, we hurried to the Boulders but by now it was cloudy but this allowed for long exposure abstracts of the boulders with water flowing around them. The Moeraki Boulders are a really fun subject that really tests one's compositional skills. We photographed them until after sunset. This was another long day with photography and driving from 6:00AM to 9:30PM

February 5 – Day 7

The wakeup alarm came early again. The goal was to get the boulders with some early morning light on them but this was the first soaked in day. Coastal fog and mist had rolled in so we did more compositional experiments on the boulders with some really long exposures. At times, while waiting for a 20 second exposure to complete, a wave would roll under the tripod legs causing the tripod to shift and ruining the exposure but we still got many great shots.



Moeraki Boulders (D3x, 70-300mm)

After breakfast we checked out of the Moeraki Motel and made our way south to Dunedin and the Otago Peninsula. There was a sign for Shag Point (a Shag is a Cormorant) so we followed it and found an ocean point with hundreds of Spotted Shags, several Stewart Island Shags, a Little Shag, New Zealand Fur Seals, Red-billed Gulls and Black-backed Gulls. The Spotted



Northern Royal Albatross (D300, 500mm)

just starting to fly – it was great watching them and photographing the tepidly take to flight as youngsters.

We finally made it to Dunedin in the early afternoon and after checking into our accommodations in Portobello on the Otago Peninsula, we went out to Tairoa head at the very end of the peninsula. This is home to a breeding colony of Northern Royal Albatross – the largest wingspan bird in the world with wings that can span over 10 feet. We spent much of the afternoon photographing them as well as Australasian Gannets and Stewart Island Shags in flight. I burned about 600 frames on the Albatross as they would pass overhead and also below against the brilliant blue and green waters of the South Pacific. Towards early evening we took an 8 wheel drive dirt buggy down the cliff to a Fur Seal Colony with babies, a secluded Yellow-eyed Penguin Beach and a Little Blue Penguin Burrow area. Distances on the Yellow-eyed Penguins were long and the Little Blues are hard to photograph in their dark burrows (no flash allowed) but it was fun seeing them.

February 6 – Day 8

This day was planned to be largely a driving day going from the east coast to the west coast and it was but that didn't stop us from first photographing some birds on the Otago Peninsula at Hooper's Inlet. Species included Paradise Shelduck, Pied Stilt, White-faced Heron, Pied Oystercatcher, and Little Shag.

After breakfast at a small cafe in Portobello, we took the Southern Scenic Route for part of the way to Te Anau, our overnight stop on the way to Milford Sound and Fiordland National Park. After scouting around a bit for photo opportunities, Te Anau seemed like a great place to do a little shopping and to get a great Pizza at Tuscana's. I had torn up my heals on the heavy

hike day at Mount Cook so I took the shopping opportunity in Te Anau to get a pair of Crocks. My feet thanked me!

February 7 – Day 9

We left Te Anau in early morning towards Milford Sound. This is one of the things I have most been looking forward to. Milford Sound is in Fiordland National Park and is actually a fjord, not a sound, since it was carved glacially and I have seen many beautiful photos from the Sound and Mitre Peak. I wanted to photograph it myself. Unfortunately it was a cloudy and overcast day. My hopes are high though that it will get a bit nicer as the day goes on. We stopped at several spots along the way to take photographs. After taking a good 4 hours with frequent stops to drive the scenic 120km we finally arrived in Milford Sound and it looked like the weather just might break. We checked into our chalets at the Milford Sound Lodge – they are beautiful – a luxury chalet with incredible views. In late afternoon we boarded a boat that was largely empty to cruise the Sound. By now it was beautiful and the cruise was easily the best scenic cruise I have ever been on with incredible views of this magnificent fjord. After getting back I was hoping for some color in the sky behind Mitre Peak at sunset and there was some – not great color but good color. I was getting relentlessly attacked by these little flies that bite.



Milford Sound (D3x, 24-70, 4 vertical frames)

February 8 – Day 10

My hand and arms have lots of really itchy bumps from the flies. It turns out these are Sand Flies and I was not prepared with the proper insect repellent. The itching is horrible – so much worse than mosquitoes and it appears hard whitish bumps are forming underneath.

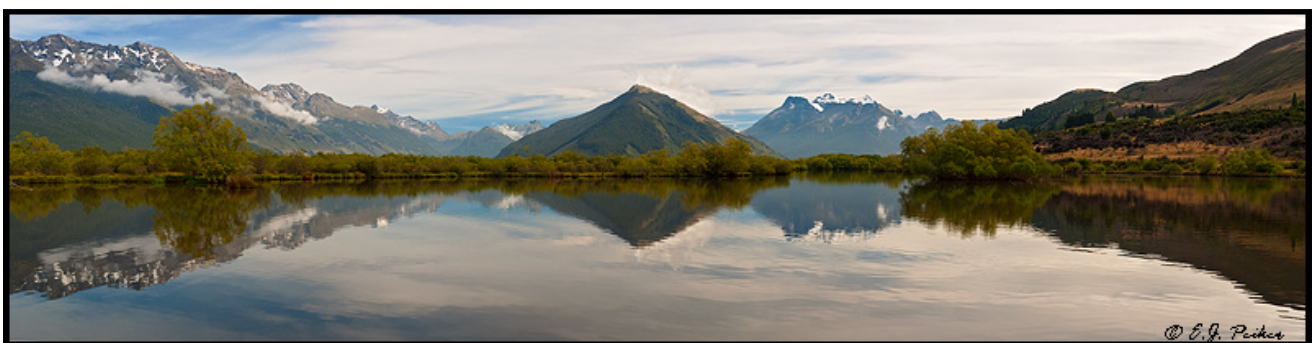
But the morning was beautiful with calm waters and nice reflections of the Sound and Mitre Peak. More excellent photography of one of the most beautiful spots on Earth.

After check-out in mid morning we made our way back to Te Anau for lunch and to get some anti-histamine ointment for the Sand Fly bites. Then on to Queenstown. We arrived at the Earnslaw Lodge late afternoon and walked through a large park and then into Queenstown. Queenstown is a really touristy place – not so much my kind of place but it gave us a chance to walk around town, consult with a pharmacist who gave me Telfast which is Alegra in the US. Fortunately it's not a prescription drug here. It definitely takes the edge off of the itching but it is still much worse than mosquitoes. By now I have 15 bites on my arms and hands and 7 in my scalp.

After Mexican Food for dinner (I've never paid \$25 for a burrito before – Queenstown is \$expensive\$), a little drive in search for some evening color along Lake Wakatipu proved largely fruitless.

February 9 – Day 11

We got out early in hopes for some good light in the morning on the peaks surrounding Lake Wakatipu but again it was mostly cloudy. Wakatipu is shaped like a seat and Maori legend has it as the seat of the gods. The Maori have a legend about almost every formation. New Zealand is called Aotearoa or land of the long white cloud so having some clouds was very much expected. As the morning wore on we made it to Glenorchy at the north end of this large lake and found a local lagoon that had Black Swan, Paradise Shelduck, and Scaup among other things. Light by now was fairly nice and I did some panoramic shots using the Panasonic GF1. This camera has proven to be so much fun when just walking around or to carry with me for scenic grab shots when I am carrying the big rig for birds.. After a picnic lunch we drove around the Glenorchy area and walked up the river feeding Lake Wakatipu and then returned to Queenstown to visit the Kiwi Birdpark. In the Birdpark I was able to photograph Blue Duck and also a duck I never thought I would get – the Campbell Island Teal.



Glenorchy Lagoon (GF1, 14-45mm, 4 frames)

After the bird park, we ate another really good pizza, this time at Winnie's in Queenstown. Next it was time to do laundry and then back out to shoot along lake Wakatipu - this time at

Bob's Cove. Bob's cove is a really nice little cove on the central part of the lake where the water is a bit more quiet and nice mountain scenics surround. Even though it was overcast, some nice long exposure shots were taken.

February 10 – Day 12

Today was a day that we took our time getting out to the coast for the next leg of the journey which will take us up the western edge of the South Island. Enroute we drove through Mount Aspiring National Park and photographed Fantail Falls and Thunder Creek Falls and some gorgeous blue water at Blue Pools. This is an area where glacial water comes down in a river and empties into the Haast River. Another highlight was an area called Gates of Haast which is a series of cascades as the river falls to the Tasman Sea. We finally arrived in Haast in late afternoon in a torrential rain.

After dinner we drove out to Haast Beach where I finally got to photograph a Variable Oystercatcher and even got one with a clam or some other shell fish. It was a bit dark but it was nice to have a cool ocean breeze which kept the sand flies away. There was also a Spur-winged Plover couple and a couple of Shetland Ponies.



Variable Oystercatcher (D300, 500mm, 1.7x)

February 11 – Day 13

A pre dawn drive back to Haast Beach to see if we could get the Oystercatchers in some better light resulted in a continuous invasion of large masses of sand flies despite our best efforts with insect repellent. It got too annoying after only a half hour or so and a few more Oystercatcher photos and some photos of the Ponies.

At this time my Sand Fly bite count is 5 on the legs (despite always wearing socks and long pants, 17 on my hands and arms, 5 on my face and neck and 14 in my scalp. That's a total of 41. I am popping Alegra like it is candy just to keep from going insane!

After breakfast we went to Jackson Bay, about 50km south of Haast for a 2 hour boat tour around the bay in a fishing trawler that was actually carrying a load of freshly caught Tuna. The goal of the trip was to seek out sea life. Along the way we saw Hector's Dolphin, Southern Fur Seal, two species of Shearwater, and many gulls. It was so nice to get out on the ocean away from the Sand Flies.

After a lunch back in Haast we drove to Fox Glacier, about 150km north in Westland National Park. After check in we drove to Lake Matheson for reflection shots of the glacier but were thwarted by low clouds over it. We were however able to photograph Pukeko (Swamphen) and Welcome Swallows. A hike around the lake was good exercise and took about 1.5 hours. When we got back the skies started to light up at sunset and I took a number of shots of the unique native trees in with some nice pink clouds above.



Wetland National Park (D3x, 24-70mm)

February 12 – Day 14

It looked like we might get socked in today but the weather cleared in early morning and a hike up to the Fox Glacier followed by an even more spectacular hike to the Franz Josef Glacier made for some very nice landscape shots even though they were not taken in the sweet light of early morning or evening. At the Franz Josef Glacier, one can hike up a hill to get a dramatic overlook of the glacier and its environs. I'm glad I brought that 14-24mm Nikon lens for this.



Franz Josef Glacier (D3x, 24-70mm)

After the Glacier Hikes, a drive up the coast to our next overnight stop in Greymouth took us to the more Northwestern parts of the country. After checking in we proceeded farther north to the Punakaikae Pancake rocks in Paparoa National Park. These are strange coastal formations with dramatic thin layering and striations. Scientists have not yet been able to definitively determine how they were formed. We also ran into a Weka, which is a chicken sized Rail at the picnic ground begging for scraps.

February 13 – Day 15

The rains came hard overnight off the Tasman Sea along with gale force howling winds making it difficult to sleep. Since it was completely socked in, we departed Greymouth a couple of hours early to go inland to Arthur's Pass National Park. The weather did improve as we went inland and the rains finally eased to a drizzle with occasional clearing. Several Keas

were in the street ready to greet us as we entered the village in Arthur's pass. Here we hiked to two waterfalls, the disappointing Bridal Veil Falls (due to the overlook being largely overgrown) and the more spectacular Devil's Punchbowl Falls. The hikes took us through some beautiful rainforest. Our hotel for the evening was located a bit outside of Arthur's Pass in the drier interior region. We knew we were in some serious sand fly territory when the rooms smelled like DEET and it was not permitted to open the windows. Fortunately, it was windy so the Little Black Demons of New Zealand did not bite. The mountains to the west made for some very nice evening landscapes as did the glacial river just below the hotel in Bealey.

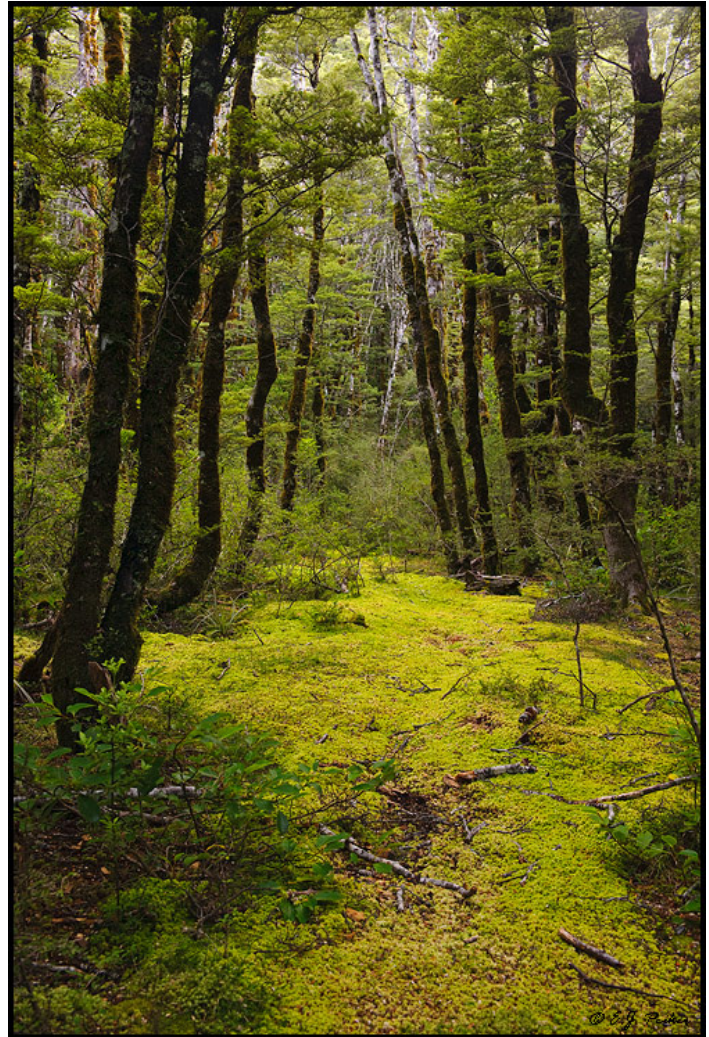
February 14 – Day 16

More mountain landscapes in the morning in the nice morning light followed by a short rainforest walk for photos now that it was not raining.. After breakfast we made our way back to the east coast of the South Island and then North to Kaikoura. Once in Kaikoura, a drive along the waterfront revealed several Shags (Cormorants), Herons, Dotterels and Oystercatchers as well as Fur Seal that were willing posers for cameras. Unfortunately as afternoon turned to evening, the rains began so there was no evening shoot of the Kaikoura Mountains as we had hoped.

February 15 – Day 17

Today was Albatross Day. Despite rains and very rough seas (5 meter swells), we went out into the South Pacific on a small boat to photograph Albatross and other sea birds in their environment. Despite getting tossed around, getting wet, losing breakfast, we got many species of sea birds including the rare Campbell Island (Black-browed) Albatross. This was just phenomenal and the Albatross got so close to the boat that I could lean over with a 24 mm lens and get close-up shots. I was really glad I brought the D700 as I could raise the ISO to ISO 1000 and not worry about excessive noise. What an experience! We even saw a couple of Dusky Dolphins at play on the way back.

Unfortunately, the rest of the day rained but late afternoon it eased enough to finally get some nice Pied Shag shots as well as pictures of one very wet New Zealand Kingfisher.





Campbell Island Albatross (Black-browed Mollymawk) (D700- 70-300mm)

February 16 – Day 18

Today is the last day in new Zealand but before we head back to Christchurch for our flights home, we took a Dolphin encounter boat and wow were we surprised. The number of Dolphins in the South Pacific near Kaikoura is amazing. We saw and photographed hundreds of Dusky Dolphins playing in the sea and performing all sorts of acrobatics. We also saw Common Dolphin and the very rare Hector's Dolphin. This was one incredible trip and seas were significantly calmer than the day before so many fewer breakfasts were tossed overboard and I felt great the whole time.

After the Dolphin boat, we made our way to Christchurch stopping in a couple of places and finally seeing but not able to photograph Australian Shoveler.

As evening came, it came time to go to the airport and depart for Auckland and then on to Los Angeles and Phoenix. Security for the flight to the US from Auckland was very tight with full searches of everything, full pat downs and 2 X-ray screenings. This procedure was ONLY for flights into the USA. Once in LA at LAX, it occurred to me that on the same day, Tuesday February 16, at the same time I was on a dolphin boat. So you can be in two places on two different parts of the globe at the same time! Due to the time difference and crossing back across the International Date Line, the Sunday that was missed on the way to New Zealand was made up by having a 44 hour Tuesday.



Dusky Dolphin (D300, 70-300mm)

New Zealand is a fascinating and very photogenic country that I definitely want to visit again. I would want to visit closer to Winter to have more snow in the mountains, greener countryside and fewer sand flies. The trip was a fantastic experience and New Zealand is one fantastic country to visit.

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