

FJC MAGAZINE



KIWI TOUR '11







KIWI TOUR 2011 ○ SPECIAL ISSUE

FROM THE PUBLISHER

All good adventures, no matter how meticulously planned, end up breaking out of the mold you so carefully crafted. Our Kiwi Tour '11 was no different, and resulted in a much more exciting story to tell. While we weren't able to explore New Zealand as much as we planned due to illness, that setback gave us the opportunity to see more of the south island than anticipated. The north island and the northern half of the south island have yet to be explored by the FJC Magazine crew, but that's great since we now have a very good reason to go back.

We shot over 700 photos and 5 hours of video while in Aotearoa but unfortunately only a very small subset of our images will fit in this issue. Soon we'll post many more of our photos on the Kiwi Tour '11 website, so be sure to check it often at www.kiwitour11.com for the latest releases. We are still working on editing some of the video down to a watchable movie and will release that as soon as possible.

For now, enjoy our thoughts and photos from one of the greatest adventures we've ever taken. We're excited to share this with you, and hope to see many of you around the country (and world) in the years to come.

Until next time, Stay the Trail, Tread Lightly, Leave No Trace, Stay Safe, and HAVE FUN!



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For FJ Cruiser Owners & Enthusiasts
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A World Away



Governors Bay



Playing by Lake Tekapo

When we began thinking about touring New Zealand in an FJ Cruiser, our plans were grand: Drive from the middle of the south island down to Fiordland, then all the way north to Picton, take a ferry across Cook Strait, then drive north to Auckland. All in 12 days, it seemed like a good plan at the time.

Unfortunately you know what they say about the best laid plans. The long story short is that we ended up staying on the south island for the entire trip, and thanks to Toyota of New Zealand we were able to make the best of a trip that was nearly ruined by illness.

Despite being cooped up in a hotel room for a few days getting well, we were able to experience much Aotearoa's South Island. While we certainly didn't see all the area has to offer, we've seen enough to know that we'll be going back as soon as possible.

Since the FJ Cruiser is a brand new vehicle in right-hand drive, it's an extremely rare vehicle in New Zealand. In fact, we only saw 3 other FJCs during the entire trip (two Sun Fusion & one Ebony (Black Diamond)).

Off Road Trails are also much different in NZ than we experience in the US. While we have hundreds of thousands of miles of dirt roads and trails, much of the off-the-beaten-path tracks in NZ are either private or restricted. The New Zealand government is very protective of its natural beauty (as it should be) so, in fact, we were only able to find 30 'official' off road tracks on the whole of the south island. Most of these are more often than not closed due to seasonal conditions. After speaking with locals we learned that there are many more, but those usually involve knowing someone that can get you access, since it's mostly on private land.



We were still able to find some pretty great places to explore with our limited time. Most were simple dirt roads and certainly no match for even our our completely stock loaner FJ Cruiser. We were turned back a few times by water in NZ.

Franz-Josef Glacier in the Clouds



The view from Paddys Ridge



Queenstown Golf Course



Our loaner VDB FJC at the Summit of Borland Road



A pull out on Lake Wakatipu south of Queenstown



As you'll soon see, this special issue is very photo centric. We shot over 700 photos and accumulated about 5 hours of HD video during our journey, so narrowing everything down to what we've presented here was quite a challenge. Photos that didn't make the cut here can be found on our Flickr page, or on the Kiwi Tour '11 website (<http://www.kiwitour11.com>) for your enjoyment.

Have fun with this issue, and let us know if you're heading down south!

Mt. Aspiring National Park from a distance



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The FJ



At the summit of Crown Range Road

Ready to explore Christchurch



Our loaner FJ from Toyota of NZ was a stock 2011 VooDooBlue model. Every FJC in NZ (and maybe all RHD, we're not sure) comes in the same configuration: Automatic, 4x4, stereo with USB and Aux inputs, gauge cluster, and backup camera (screen in the rear view mirror). It's unfortunate that the MT full time 4x4 isn't an option, although driving on the left

was challenging enough, so it's probably safer for us Yankees :).

Other than subtle differences, the right hand drive FJC is about the same as ours in the states. The rear bumpers have extra reflectors, there are blinkers in the front fenders, and of course right hand drive are the changes that really stand out. Of course with a RHD vehicle

the blinker and windshield wiper controls are reversed, so we kept the windshield nice and clean every time we changed lanes or made a turn.



Angie doing great with RHD

The stereo in this FJ, while not quite as interactive as our iPad install, worked very well for our

View from Crown Range Road



needs. We used both the Aux input and the USB iPod input, depending on how we wanted to listen to tunes. The iPod input had enough power to charge our phones, but not the iPad (which requires a 2.0amp USB charger). Still, we were able to get crisp music through the sound system which comes in very handy when the baby is watching Despicable Me for the 200th time.

The original plan for our trip was to use the Top To Bottom FJ, which is fully modified and includes a snorkel (among other mods). Unfortunately that truck was down for maintenance so we ended up with the VDB.

The truck worked very well, but without a snorkel we had to turn back on several trails when the water was too high to chance it with a stock truck. It seems that the first mod any 4x4 owner installs in NZ is a snorkel, so we wonder if Toyota should at least offer it as a dealer installed option.

Overall we really enjoyed the loaner FJ Cruiser from Toyota of NZ and really appreciate the opportunity to spend time with a RHD version of our favorite vehicle. Hopefully next time we visit we can get out to a few more remote places, and maybe even engage the locker. ;)

Posing at Governors Bay



The Roads



The roads in New Zealand... well the photo kind of tells the story here. As you enter the terminal in the Christchurch Airport, this sign warns you to take it easy when driving on the south island.

"We're from Colorado though, surely NZ roads can't be much worse than ours. Besides, it's summer time so there's no worry of snow. Anyway, we drove on the left side in Scotland 5 years ago." Angie and I remarked and affirmed each of these ideas to each other as we checked in and got the keys to the FJ.



locals like to travel at...100km/h, almost regardless of the features of the road you're on. Of course this is a generalization, and no, not all Kiwis drive this way. However during our trip there was more than one occasion that we held up traffic on windy roads by simply slowing down for curves. We were even passed by an older (rickety) 70 Series Landcruiser including, let's just say, 'communicative finger gestures'.

While we were correct on every point, the story doesn't quite end there. First, while we're from Colorado and we're used to driving on narrow, windy roads. In Colorado (and most of the US), the speed limit changes depending on the type of terrain: steep grades,

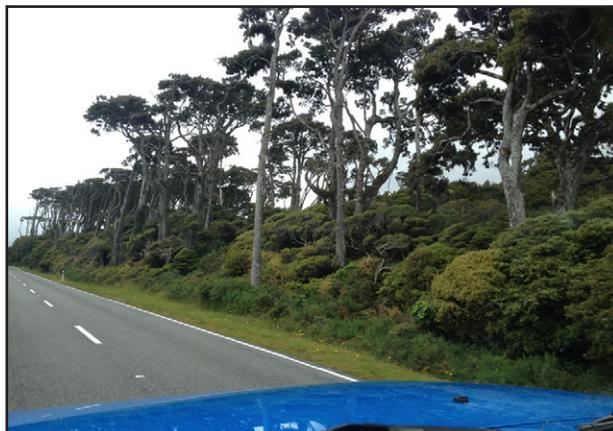
switchbacks, windy curves, all get their own 'recommended speed'. In NZ however (for the most part), the speed limit outside towns is 100km/h (about 60mph). There are signs here and there warning of steep sections, curves, and the like, but the speed limit is...100km/h. That fact alone isn't an issue, it's the fact that many



Above:
One land bridges
abound

Right:
Vegetation on
the west coast

Far Right:
Pull off on Lake
Wakatipu



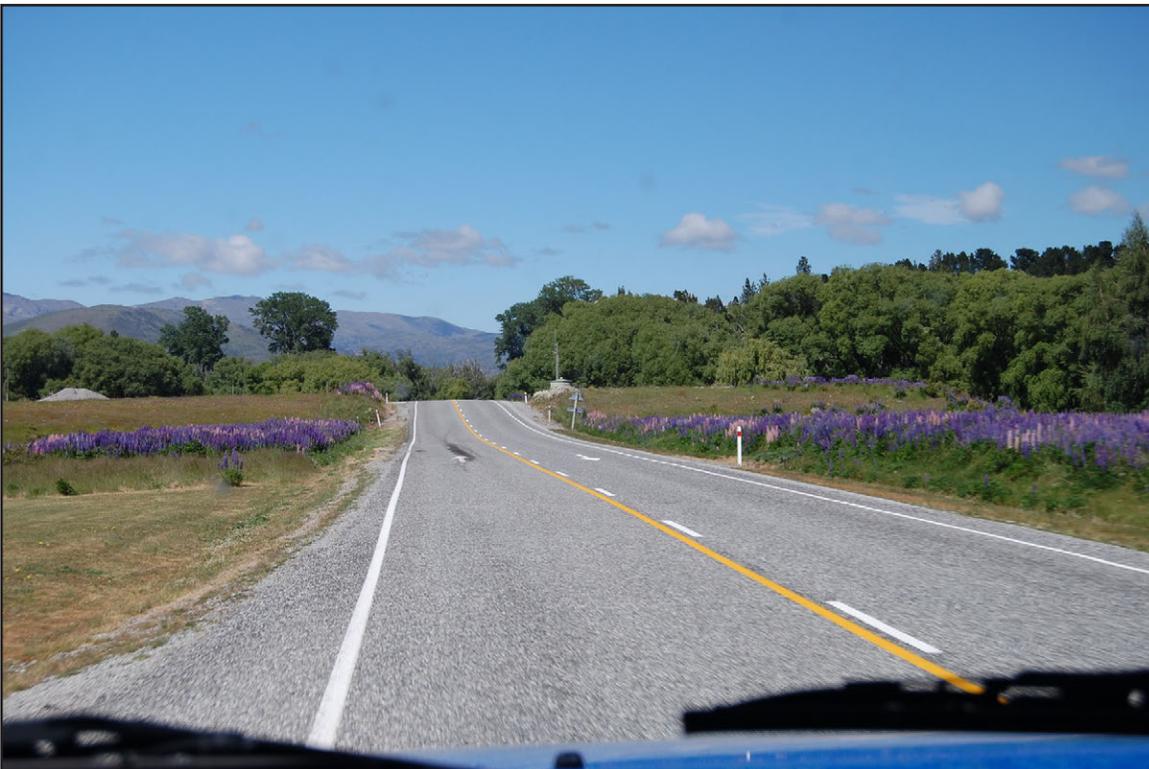


You may have noticed that this section is entitled 'roads' not 'trails'. It's not that there are no trails in NZ, we managed to find a couple, it's just that off roading in Aotearoa is a little different than what we experience in the western US. Now that I'm thinking about it, NZ trails may be more like eastern US trails: There are a few, they're usually very wet, and if you 'know someone', you have many more options. Read more about the trails we ran on page 16, 'The Tracks'.

In the western US, we are extremely fortunate to have hundreds of thousands of miles of dirt roads, back country routes, and great 4x4 trails. Our general rule when exploring a new area (after consulting the FunTreks guidebook of course) is to just drive around and try marked roads that look cool. We don't usually plan exactly where we're going or even have a reason for the treks we take. We're lucky to live in an area that's great for this kind of exploration, but we may be just a little spoiled. Trails in

NZ just can't be explored that way (for the most part).

The New Zealand Department of Conservation produces a document on Off Road Driving for both the North and South Island. Much of each PDF covers etiquette, safety, rules, and general guidelines, which is a very good thing. New Zealand is very serious about biosecurity in order to protect their amazing natural features, so that information is included as well. The last few pages discuss legal



Above left:
A long one lane bridge with pull outs.

Above right:
Another closed trail.

Left:
Lupines line most roads on the south island

Following:
View of Mt. Cook across Lake Pukaki





routes around the south/north island, organized by geographic area.

We reviewed these documents in depth before leaving for the trip, and several more times during the trip while consulting our local maps. The reality is that with our limited time in any one area it would be difficult to find a suitable trail. By 'suitable', I mean something scenic, which wasn't hard; open, which was more difficult than we thought it would be; and safe for a solo stock FJC, again, more difficult than we thought.

The Department of Conservation is very serious about restricting access to tracks depending on the time of year and current conditions. So the two or three trails we attempted in the mountains were not open due to wet weather. The tracks that we did run were great fun, but not technically challenging. On multiple occasions we had to turn around before reaching our goal due to high water and no snorkel on our FJ.

Driving on the right side, attempting to stay out of the way of locals, and experiencing the best 4x4 vehicle on the other side of the planet all contributed to a pretty amazing adventure. While very different than the way we experience roads, tracks, and trails in the western US, it was very rewarding and we're extremely excited about returning as soon as possible.



What a difference a day makes

Above: The Tasman Sea on the west coast on a cloudy, rainy day.

Below: The same view of the Tasman a day later, with mostly clear skies.



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The Tracks



When planning our Kiwi Tour '11 adventure, our initial plan was to cover as much off-pavement scenery and tracks as possible. During the planning process however, it became clear that our short trip down south would keep us on sealed (paved) roads for the majority of the trip.

We were, however, able to find a few unsealed tracks (trails) that provided both amazing beauty and the fun we're used to experiencing in FJ Cruisers. Specifically we ran Borland Road, Reese Valley, and drove up Arrow River toward Macetown. We also ran up Paddy's Ridge in the Crown Range (which

is a simple dirt road) to get a better view of the area.

Borland Road

The 37KM Borland Road Track, while not the southernmost route in New Zealand, is certainly one of the most interesting. The road was originally created (and is still used) to service the power lines coming from the Monowai Power Station. What really makes Borland Road special is that it is (as far as we know) the only public road into Fiordlands National Park, which results in some pretty amazing views from the Summit (despite the cloudy weather).

The track itself is not what we would consider technical in any way. It's curvy and steep in places, but it's very well maintained so we didn't see any rutting or obstacles of any kind. Borland Road ends at the south arm Lake Manapouri and while we're certain the end of the

line includes great views of the lake, we never made it. A very large tree had fallen over the winter, and crews didn't have the chance to clear it before we arrived. We made it within about 1km of the end at the lake. Maybe next time.

Paddy's Ridge

With a little time to kill while the rest of the family was resting in Queenstown, I scoured the maps for something that may be interesting, yet safe for a solo-stock FJ. I ended up ascending Crown Range Road toward Cardrona, made a right turn and headed up the mountain. The road is a very well maintained dirt track and leads to Snow Farm and Snow Park, and although it's an open road, it is mostly on private property. The annual hill climb "Race to the Sky" was held on the road from 1998-2007, but no event has been held since.

Top: The Summit of Borland Road with a few clouds

Right: End of the line in Rees Valley





The coolest feature of this track is the switchbacks, which really reminded me of Colorado. It's a well maintained dirt road (since it provides access to two snowsports areas) and is popular in the summer with mountain bikers. The drive was peaceful albeit windy, and resulted in some pretty great views. After exploring the trails around Snow Park NZ for a while, I headed back down to Cardrona then back to Queenstown.

Rees Valley

Lake Wakatipu in Queenstown is the longest of the NZ glacial lakes, and it's possible to drive the entire length on the eastern and northern shores. We explored the eastern shore on the way down (and back) from Borland Road, so on one of the last days of our trip, we headed up the north shore toward Glenorchy.

Upon reaching Glenorchy on the northern end, we could see mountains peeking out further to the north, so we pulled out the map and found a track heading up Rees Valley. This is one of the tracks we had read about online, and with fairly clear weather we had a good shot of finding more incredible New Zealand Views.

This track, like most we drove, is not technically challenging and consists mostly of dirt road. There are few small water crossings as it winds up the valley, but nothing a stock FJ can't handle. We managed to find a few spots that may challenge a standard SUV as we pushed north, and ended up following a Toyota Surf (4Runner) for a few kilometers.

True to our prediction, the views were absolutely incredible and resulted in some of the best photos we snapped. Every turn revealed another view of the Forbes Mountains and Jura Glacier, so we were excited to push up the trail as far as we could. Unfortunately, we finally arrived at a water crossing that was too risky for our stock FJ. The Surf we were following forded it without any issues, and even stopped on the other side to watch us cross. They were disappointed though when we

Top: Cardona Ski area in the distance

Right: A cool view of Snow Park NZ in the summer





shot a few more photos, turned, and headed south. This track is definitely on the re-do list next time we're in NZ... with a snorkel.

Arrow Gorge

On our final day in Queenstown we had two activities planned: Play the Queenstown golf course, and find another cool dirt track to explore. All searches online for great tracks near Queenstown included the drive to Macetown. The track doesn't show up on Google Maps, but luckily the road maps we found for the Garmin Nuvi included it, so we were able to find Macetown as a waypoint and headed out via Arrowtown.

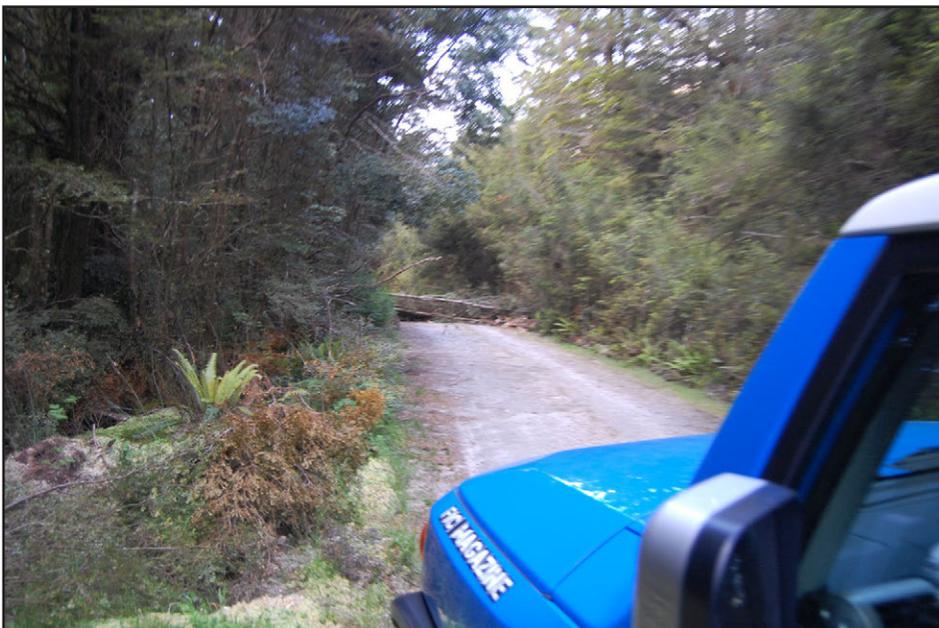
The key feature of Arrow Gorge, according to reports on the internet and a few locals, are the water crossings. Again, the track is not technically challenging at all other than a few muddy spots, but with over 14 water crossings, it is possible to get in over your head, so to speak.

We managed to get up the track quite a distance before we weren't sure about a crossing. After careful inspection of the current and depth, we went for it and the FJ rolled right through without a problem. The next crossing required driving up the middle of



the river, so picking the proper line (and avoiding deep holes) was the key. Unfortunately, choosing the shallower line resulted in stuck FJ in a silt bed. This was the only time during the entire trip we engaged 4-Low. Luckily that's all it took and we were free in less than a minute. Still, since we're not used to driving in rivers, hearing the water flow around the truck while stuck was an interesting experience.

After this very cool water crossing we came to a tour company driving Land Rover 110 models, and asked a driver about further crossings and he stated the next one was the deepest, and was about as deep as one we'd already experienced. We pressed on to the edge of the water and after careful thought, decided not to chance fate and performed the patented FJ Cruiser 18 point U-turn. Arrow Gorge to Macetown is still on our 'to-do' list for the next trip. With a snorkel.



Above: Breathtaking views in Rees Valley

Left: A tree abruptly ended our Borland Road trip

Right: A tour 4x4 follows us out of Arrow Gorge



The Scenery



What can be written about the scenery in New Zealand? The entire country is well known for its amazing natural beauty, epic mountains, world renowned glaciers, and adventure of every variety. I think the best way to approach this is to briefly discuss the areas we visited for a quick overview our Kiwi Tour. Hopefully we'll be able to help you plan your next (or first) visit to Aotearoa.

Christchurch Area

Christchurch is known as one of the largest cities in the southern hemisphere, and obviously for the earthquake that rocked the city in February 2011. By the time of our

visit in December 2011, recovery was well under way but the city center was still off limits due to dangerous structures.

We only spent one night in CHC, but we had the chance to head over to Governor's Bay via Dyers Pass Road. This was the first right-hand driving we did in NZ, and the locals didn't care for our gawking at the scenery too much. Still, the views of the bay were pretty good despite overcast weather.

Central Lakes

The drive from Christchurch to Queenstown takes you through the central lakes region, and the first

of these is Lake Tekapo along Highway 8. To get there from Christchurch meant driving through the 'lowlands' of the east coast which are reminiscent of the rolling hills of eastern Colorado. There are no mountains to speak of (at least on the rainy day we drove through), but the view is nice through the heavy agricultural area.

As we climbed toward Burkes Pass we began to see breaks in the clouds, and once we rounded the final corner and drove north toward Tekapo the true beauty of the south island was revealed. We had finally arrived!

Chalet on Lake Tekapo



View of Governors Bay



A great hiking trail at the top of Crown Range Road



After a short stay at Lake Tekapo taking our first hundred or so photos, we headed down Highway 8 toward our room for the night in Twizel. As amazing as Tekapo was, rounding the last corner before driving along the shore of Lake Pukaki was the best reveal yet: Mount Cook.

Mount Cook (Aoraki) is New Zealand's tallest mountain at 3,754m (12,316 ft) and (from what we've been told) is rarely 'out', meaning it is most often covered in clouds. On this December day, the summit was clearly visible with Lake Pukaki in the foreground, displaying one of NZ's truly amazing views.

Southland

Our time exploring southland in the FJ was brief, basically just the time we spent to run Borland Road and the drive back to Queenstown. Of course our visit to Milford Sound via aircraft was one of the most amazing days in our history of adventure, so both trips resulted in some pretty amazing scenery.

Again we were blessed with pretty great weather for early summer in southern New Zealand. While there were clouds, we didn't experience much rain which made the views that much more spectacular. Milford Sound, despite the wind, was mostly clear and included just

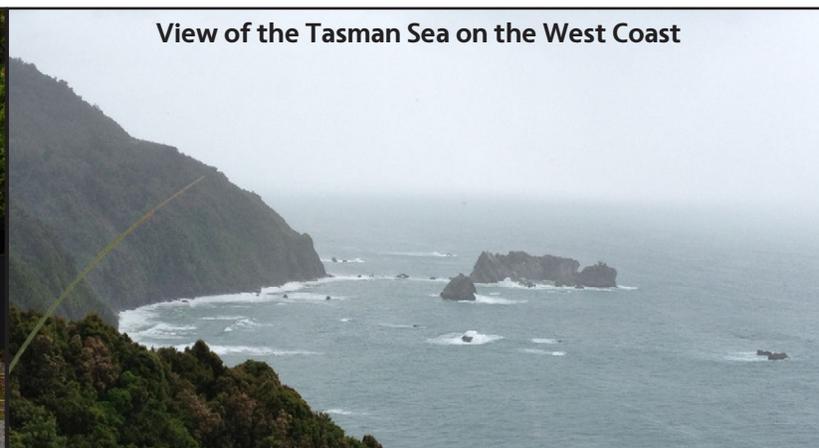
enough clouds to give our oodles of shots a little depth and substance. Overall it's really best to let the photos speak for themselves. We'll definitely be spending more time in Southland and Fiordland National Park in the future.

West Coast / Glaciers

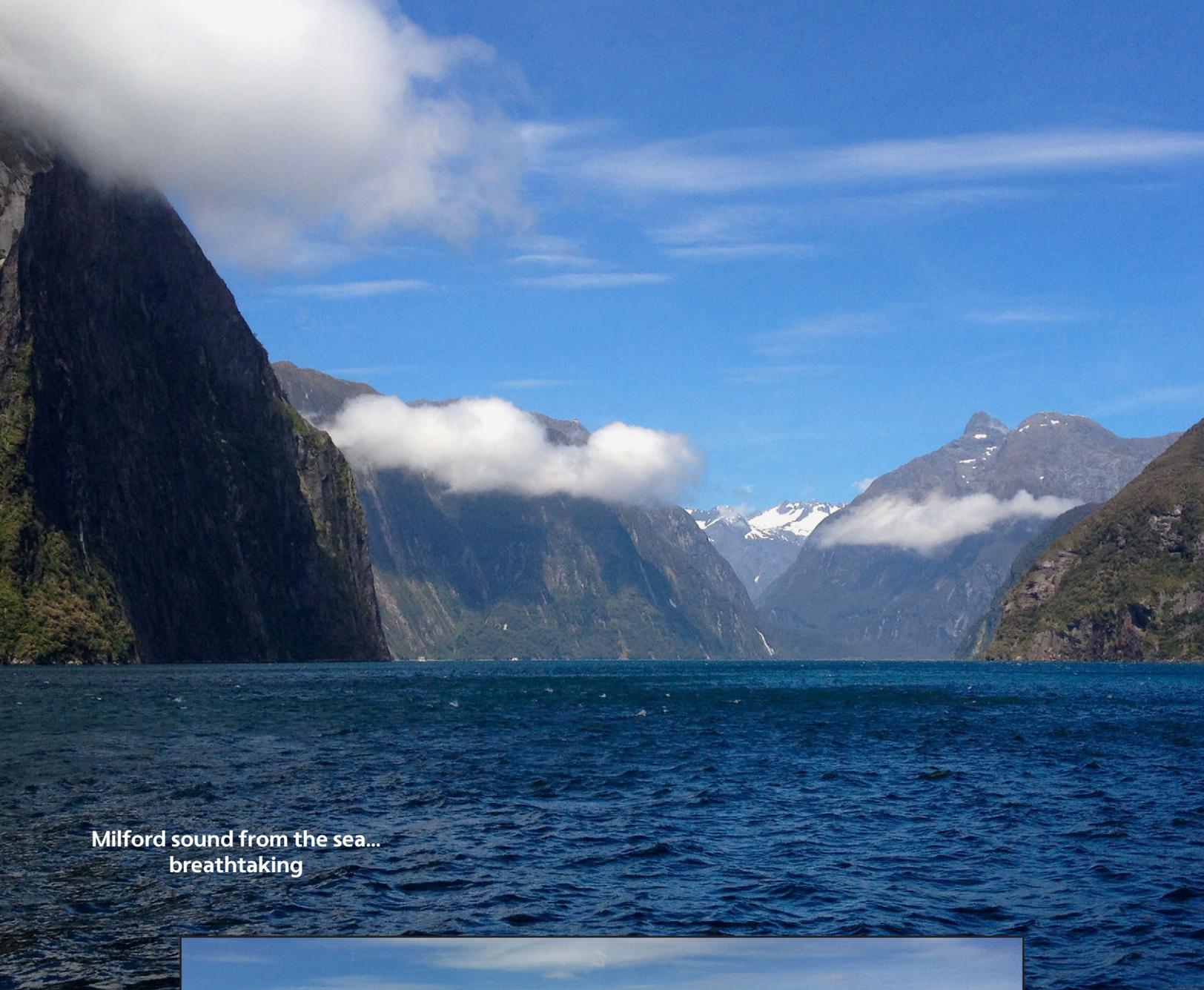
Like our southland adventure, our time on the west coast to visit the glaciers was brief, yet pretty amazing. We made the trek on a rainy day so there were no views to speak of. A quick hike to the Blue Pools provided a great change of pace despite the dampness. It's very interesting how different the west coast is from the Otago area.



Hiking to the Glacier



View of the Tasman Sea on the West Coast



Milford sound from the sea...
breathtaking



Fiordland from the plane to
Milford Sound

Hiking to the Blue Pools
provided a great change of pace



Driving along Highway 6 through Mt Aspiring National Park provides a great transition into the dense, almost jungle like West Coast.

The section just past Haast along the Tasman Sea includes several pull outs for coastal views similar to those along the Pacific Coast Highway in California. The highway eventually leads to Fox and Franz-Josef glaciers, two of the most famous glaciers in the world.

Queenstown Area

Much of the scenery and places we visited in the Queenstown area have already been mentioned, but the beauty of one of the most famous New Zealand cities cannot be overstated. The combination of lakes, rivers, gorges, waterfalls, mountains, and glaciers truly make this a very special place on earth. As much as we love our mountains in Colorado, Queenstown and the central Otago region are as close as it comes to Atlantis for outdoor adventurers.

To see many more photos than we can publish, visit www.kiwitour11.com



Fox Glacier from a distance

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Kawarau Gorge on the road
to Queenstown

