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Epic Journey 2008 -- Family & Friends Newsletter
Volume III - North Island Edition

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Week XXI Abroad
Wellington (North Island), New Zealand

When we last left our hero was traveling from the South to the North, an exodus from the incredible beauty of the South Island to the civilized atmosphere of the North Island. Over the course of several weeks, I saw the entirety of New Zealand, from the most northern tip (Cape Reinga) where the Pacific and the Tasman Sea meet, to Steward Island the last stop before Antarctica. I have bungy jumped, river boarded, mountain climbed, trekked, swam, and splunked every square meter of these islands... and loved every minute of it.

A major goal on this trip was to establish myself in New Zealand. Meaning, finding a place to live, a job to sustain myself, and community to get involved in. While it hasn't always been

fun or easy, Wellington has provided me with what I sought. When I arrived I found myself having to transition from a traveling to a living mind set. In that transition, I realized how long I would be away from home and it was emotionally stressful. I realized what and who I would miss while living here. As time progressed and I got involved in finding a job, joining a rugby club, and meeting new friends; which caused living here to become easier and fun. My time in Wellington has been enjoyable, filled with new experiences and people.

Time has certainly gone by quickly as I will be leaving NZ in a few short months. I will be departing August 19th and will commence a two and half month world tour before retuning back to Los Angeles. I will



Several meters below ground at the Waitomo Caves. The caves although massive can become quite constricted in certain places.

be visiting countries in Asia, Oceania, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. I will be roughing it in the outback of Australia, exploring the pyramids in Egypt, enjoying a pint or two in Munich during Oktoberfest, experiencing the start of civilization

in Greece, floating down the canals in Venice, taking a train across the span of Russia from Moscow to Beijing and finally returning home on the American battleship, the USS Ben Fold. This will be the trip of a lifetime, with memories that will last un-



The Gang performing the Maori Haka in Rotorua. The Haka is a traditional war dance that is performed by warriors preparing for battle.

**WANTED: ADVENTURE SEEKERS TO
EXPERIENCE THE WORLD!**

EXOTIC DESTINATIONS INCLUDING OCEANIAN, ASIA, EUROPE, THE MIDDLE EAST, AND AFRICA. THERE IS A HIGH PROBABILITY OF FUN, EXCITEMENT, DEBAUCHERY, AND LIFE LONG MEMORIES ALONG THE WAY.

PLEASE CONTACT ME IMMEDIATELY IF YOU ARE INTERESTED. FAINT OF HEART NEED NOT APPLY.

til the twilight of my life. If you are available and would like to experience the world, please contact me as soon as possible. My preliminary itinerary is below. If you would like to join me for any part of my trip, please let me know. I would love to share this experience with you.

Living in Wellington Capital City Lodge

Curtis and I are cur-

rently living in a flat complex called the Capital City Lodge. The Lodge is an interesting place to say the least. The best way to describe it would be a mix between a college dormitory and a ADG fraternity house. For what it lacks in luxuries, it makes up in community. The diversity of people is a strength of this accommodation, as each person brings something different to the community. The

Fall 2008 Epic Journey Preliminary Itinerary

August:	Australia
September:	Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Dubai, Egypt, Greece, Turkey, Croatia, Germany, Italy, Hungary, Slovenia
October:	China, Russia, Czech Republic, Austria, Hong Kong, Poland



Pete jumping from a waterfall in Tongariro National Park. This daring jump was at a height of 10 meters into a chilly pool of water.



stories and the background each person has is fascinating. There are students, other travelers, Maori's, working "professionals", etc. The highlight of the accommodation would be the nightly meals. Breakfast and dinner are included in my rent, so I never have to cook and there is always a meal waiting for me in the evening. After dinner I can enjoy bil-

liards, table tennis, or share a beer with the guys in the lounge. My flat is centrally located and is a short walk to downtown Wellington, work, the gym, or the rugby pitch. Its location is a definite strength as I can walk to almost anything in the city. When something is just a little too far there is a bus stop that can take me anywhere in surrounding area.



Top: Enjoying a fresh pint of Speight's in Russell. The township of Russell severed as New Zealand's capital city prior to Wellington. **Bottom:** The famous Cathedral Cove. This scene has been used in several movies and NZ advertisements. The cove is large enough to fit several buses.



Working in Wellington - Wakefield Hospital

Getting a job when I arrived was a cause of major anxiety. After traveling for several months, I was anything but wealthy. I would not have been able to stay unless I got a job quickly. Although hospitality jobs are easy to come by, I wanted to get a job that utilized my skills and education. I want-

ed to work as a professional, either in IT or accounting. To my surprise, my job found me. When I arrived in Wellington I registered with several professional employment agencies. After interviewing with them, they found me a job that met my exact specifications.

I am currently working as an accountant for Wakefield Health Limited. We are a health conglomerate that owns a variety



of private hospitals in New Zealand. I work for their largest hospital, which is responsible for the health care of several thousand people. My role is responsible for all aspects of the hospital's financial system and it requires me to use all aspect of my accounting and IT training. The hospital's management hired me as a contractor for four months, while they conducted a search to find someone to fill the position permanently. After two months on the job the hospital's general manager approached me with the

opportunity to stay longer. While I was incredibly flattered by the offer I know where my home is. Therefore, I respectfully declined in order to finish this trip and come home. However, it is nice to know that my experience and education are valued around the world.

This role has been a great opportunity as it has exposed me to international accounting and tax laws. The depth of the position has caused me to me gain a deep understanding of accrual accounting and has been wonderful experience for my

Top: Raglan beach; Raglan is known as the surf capital of NZ. In fact, their public schools include it as a course in primary schools. **Middle:** Daisy & Curtis Buchanan at Cape Reinga, this is the absolute most northern tip of NZ. **Bottom:** Sandboarding at Ninety Mile Beach. These sand dunes are absolutely massive and take several minutes to climb up but only seconds to come down. Check out the YouTube video.

career. I like to refer to it as “accounting boot camp”. My current supervisor is leaving the company at the end of June and her replacement is not starting until the end of July. Therefore, I will be de facto responsible for my department during the interim. Not bad for a recent college graduate on the job for a couple of months.

Playing Rugby in New Zealand

New Zealand is the rugby capital of the world. The nation’s enthusiasm for the sport is comparable to America’s love of baseball, football, and basketball... combined. I am a recent fan of rugby. I started learning the sport right before I left. One of my goals of this journey was to play organized team rugby. Wellington offers an abundance of

teams to play with. I joined the Wellington Rugby Football Club (RFC). My club was established in 1875 and is arguably New Zealand’s oldest established club. The club is divided into different teams based on weight and ability. For example there is an under 80kg team, for those around that weight. I play for the Senior 2nd & 3rd grade which is made up of mostly seasoned veterans of the sport. We practice two nights a week and I train an additional 3 nights a week. It is a serious commitment but has been a great way to meet people and learn a new sport. Although the level of competition is certainly outside my abilities, it has allowed me to learn quickly. As I practice more and train harder I am confident that I will improve. I will keep you updated as the season progresses and will most-



At a cricket test match in Wellington. The test match was between the NZ Blackcaps and England. Although, I watched the match for several hours I have no idea what happened. Something about wickets...



The other side of Cathedral Cove. This picture might give you a slight idea of the massiveness of the cove. Truly one of nature's marvels... I likely upload a rugby video for your enjoyment.

Underground at the Waitomo Caves

Have you ever been spelunking? Spelunking is a fancy word to describe the exploration of caves. Half way down the North Island, I decided to spend the afternoon several meters below ground exploring a massive labyrinth of caves. The excursion began in the early afternoon by suiting up in a thick wetsuit, then climbing down a steep ladder into the black abyss. This journey was not for the faint of heart or claustrophobic. The space was tight, the water frigid and the light nonexistent. As we progressed through the caves we saw stunning examples of stalagmites and

stalactite, which are slow growing columns formed by dripping water. They grow approximately 1 centimeter a year! Some of the columns were massive, and had been forming for thousands of years. After a lengthy guided tour though the caves, I came to an underground river. I jumped on an inner tube and went for a leisure float. As I floated I gazed up to the roof of the cave to witness the thousands of glowworms. Glowworms are tiny insects that produce light as a way of attracting other insects. To the casual observer, they appear as a millions of tiny soft green lights dotting the roof. Overall, it was a great experience and highly memorable. Much like scuba, it is a complete different world down there.

Rotoura & Maori People

Further along my trek to the south of the North Island, I spent a night with the indigenous people of New Zealand. The Maori are the original Polynesian people of the islands. They inhabited the NZ for centuries before Europeans "discovered" it. I spent the night in a Muraenge, which is a traditional Maori meeting room. While there I feasted on delicious Hangi style cuisine. The food is similar to food you would find in Hawaii or other Polynesian islands (e.g. Samoa, Tonga, etc.). It featured chicken, pork, mutton and a variety of local vegetables.

After dinner, a group of Maori youth came to our Muraenge and performed a cultural show. They demonstrated the highlights of their culture, including the Haka. The Haka is the Maori war dance. It was traditionally performed by warriors before a conflict. It is a loud and aggressive dance that

instills fear into the opposition. The Maori were well known as a warring people and the dance was commonplace. The Haka was made famous in western culture through New Zealand's national Rugby team, the All Blacks. The All Blacks perform the Haka before every match in front of their opponents. Much like the ancestors of New Zealand, the All Blacks use the Haka to instill fear into opposition. The Maori youth taught the Gang and I the Haka. Cruise over to YouTube, and check out our performance. I think you will agree that fear is the furthest thing we instilled.

Bay of Islands

Before settling in Wellington, I took one final trip north to the top of New Zealand to an area known as the Bay of Islands. The Bay of Islands doesn't refer to a specific city but a general area about 150 miles above Auckland. I stayed in the township of Paihia, in



After a good match of rugby! Background: Wellington Football Club. That building houses our practice and social facilities.

the center of the region. If Auckland is comparable to Los Angeles, Paihia would be comparable to Newport Beach. Just like the rest of the country, it is stunningly beautiful in a Hawaii meets Santa Barbara kind of way. In addition to the normal gang of Curtis & Pete, we were joined by visitors from home, Daisy Buchanan (Curtis's sister), and Sarah Strand, (Pete's friend). They flew around the world to join us for our week in Paihia.

On our first day in the Bay of Islands we took a day trip to the most northern tip of New Zealand, Cape Reinga. The trip began at daybreak in a specially designed 4x4 off-road bus. We were on the road for several hours before coming to the northern tip, where the Tasman Sea and the Pacific Ocean meet. At that point those two mighty bodies of water collide in fantas-

tic fashion as each tries to strong-arm the tide its way. The highlight of the day was sand boarding down dunes at Ninety Mile Beach. The dunes are as high as the nose bleed seats at Angel stadium which allows for a long and fast ride. The boards are incredibly fast and agile. The experience feels like extreme boogie boarding. Check out my sand boarding video on YouTube for a good laugh. It was more fun than the best roller coaster ride of my life. As we worked our way back to Paihia we took the scenic route via 90 Mile Beach. The bus literally drove down the surf as we rode into the sunset of the evening.

The next edition of my newsletter will be a wrap up of living in New Zealand and a preview to the next leg of my journey. I will be sending it in early August.

CHEERS!

--Steve



Curtis and I at the Wellington Botanical Gardens. The Gardens have a commanding view of Wellington and they surrounding bays.