

TRAVEL



A veil of mist adds to the allure and mystery of Doubtful Sound. Picture by Kara Matheson Fiordland Explorer Cruises

'Kiwis indeed a rare species'

busy police station, and 500 men lived on the Wanganella, a converted former cruise ship, anchored in 45 metres of water at Deep Cove.

"After the power station was finished, divers found a 40-metre high mountain of beer bottles under the ship so the lads nearly drank themselves aground!"

An English mate of Chris's pestered him for months to take him tramping in Dusky Sound, even more remote than Doubtful Sound. Chris finally relented so off into the bush they went.

"Within two hours I was carrying half Dave's pack and after four hours, I had his whole pack and mine. After four days of three-wire bridges and waist-deep mud holes, he succumbed to droopy-bottom-lip syndrome and total sense-of-humour failure and wanted out."

Going down the steep pass, Chris pointed out the huge variety of trees including rimu, shrubs and ferns in the temperate podocarp rainforest.

The fuchsia was a personal favourite of his — he had seen many a drunken tui falling out of a tree after drinking the fermenting nectar of the fuchsia flower.

He also credits the fuchsia with helping him give up smoking. When he was a ranger on the Milford Track, he had to carry a dead body down from Mackinnon Pass and was desperate for a cigarette that night. He had no tobacco so tried smoking dried fuchsia bark and never smoked again.

He also drew our attention to the AA signs on the steepest part of road which a witty grader driver had amended to read Danger Mice and Trucks Use Low Gear, Buses Free Wheel.

At the foot of the pass at Deep Cove, Chris showed us the bridge he had helped build above where the two 10-kilometre tailrace tunnels discharge their water into Doubtful Sound "at rate of about 500 small elephants a second".

On a more sombre note, he explained DoC's heroic campaign to trap vicious predators like stoats and bring birdsong back to our forests.

"Stoats are natural killers and the females have incredible survival mechanisms like reabsorbing embryos to limit their litters if there is not enough food around. Most Kiwis don't know what they're missing — waking up to birdsong is magic."

The cloud was dispersing and the sun was breaking through as we cruised down Doubtful Sound in the Fiordland Explorer Cruises boat, Tasman Explorer, skippered by Russell Dore.

Another Fiordlander with encyclopedic knowledge of the region, Russell's forebears operated the original steamer, Titiroa, on Lake Manapouri in the 1880s.

Deep Cove at the head of the sound is 40 kilometres from the open sea, making Doubtful the second largest of Fiordland National Park's 14 fiords after Dusky Sound.

About then, I experienced a repeat of my fiord/sound confusion. Although Fiordland's fiords are officially mapped as sounds, strictly speaking, they should be called fiords. A fiord is a glaciated valley — typically narrow and steep-sided — that has been flooded by the sea after the glacier's retreat. A sound, on the other hand, is a river valley flooded by the sea following a rise in sea levels or depression of the land, or a combination of both. All three arms of Lake Te Anau are called fiords — North Fiord, Middle Fiord and South Fiord — which they are

penetrate so many deep-sea species such as black coral grow in the comparatively shallow depths of the sound.

The endangered Fiordland crested penguins, one of the world's rarest penguins, and the resident pod of 60 bottlenose dolphins, were playing hard-to-get the day we called by but we cruised very close to a colony of New Zealand fur seals at Nee Islets near the entrance to Doubtful Sound. It was a thrilling sight especially for the overseas tourists on the boat. As usual, we were the only Kiwis present, just as we had been on the Milford Track and the Kepler and Routeburn before that.

With the weather improving, Russell took us right out to the Tasman Sea where the vastness of the ocean, the power of the surging swell even on this most docile of days, and the knowledge of what fury these elemental forces were capable of unleashing, engendered in me a huge sense of respect and awe.

Captain James Cook was responsible for naming the sound. He sailed by in the Endeavour in 1770, calling it Doubtfull Harbour, after being uncertain whether, if he entered the inlet, there would be sufficient wind to manoeuvre his ship out of its narrow reaches.

In 1793, Italian explorer Captain Alessandro Malaspina sent cartographer Don Felipe Bauza into the sound in a long boat. Bauza produced a remarkable map resulting in many Spanish place names, including a large island named Bauza.

Doubtful Sound is home to one of two marine reserves in Fiordland, Te Awaatu, the narrow passage between Bauza and Secretary Islands, a popular place for divers.

On our return journey, the cameras were out in force as the sound, the pass and the lake sparkled under a clear blue sky. In the space of 10 hours, we had experienced a great adventure and accomplished, in comfort, what used to take early travellers a week or more in sometimes appalling conditions.

Fiordland smiled on us that day, and despite her moody, mysterious and sometimes inhospitable nature, I just can't seem to get enough of the place. So entranced by the wild, remote landscape, I went to see the stunning movie, *Ata Whenua Fiordland on Film*, for a second time in Te Anau after the Milford tramp.

And once again, we were the only Kiwis in the theatre . . . we are indeed a rare species in this most beautiful neck of the New Zealand woods.

“ I felt somewhat overwhelmed by the immensity of the landscape . . . ”

not. Very puzzling.

As the clouds cleared, I felt somewhat overwhelmed by the immensity of the landscape unfolding around us and the colossal tectonic and glacial forces that had shaped the fiords and sculpted the towering mountains.

Waterfalls, replenished by the rain, plummeted straight to the sea from staggeringly-high overhangs or danced down the mountainsides in multiple tiers, disappearing deep into the forest and emerging with greater force further down, finally gushing with great gusto into the sound . . . or fiord.

Due to the sheerness of the mountain walls, Russell was able to nudge the prow of the Tasman Explorer right under the waterfalls in Crooked Arm giving those at the sharp end a Fiordland shower, and allowing Chris to collect a saucepan full to make waterfall tea. The water held special powers, he said, claiming he was actually 75 years old. I drank some, but obviously not enough.

Rock and tree avalanches scarred the steep mountains, some fresh and raw, some beginning to regenerate, a process taking 150 to 200 years.

Depending on rainfall, a two to 10-metre layer of fresh water floats on top of the sea water, stained brown from the tannins in the forest. The dark tannins make it difficult for light to



Waterfalls, replenished by the rain, plummet to the sea from staggeringly-high overhangs. Picture by Fiordland Explorer Cruises



A cloudy grey morning on Lake Manapouri clears to . . .



A sparkling clear afternoon without a cloud in the sky.

• *Fiordland National Park (1.25 million hectares), the largest of New Zealand's 14 national parks, is also one of the biggest in the world. It is part of Te Wāhipounamu — the greenstone waters — a UNESCO World Heritage site in South West New Zealand which encompasses four national parks: Westland Tai Poutini, Aoraki/Mount Cook, Mount Aspiring/Tititea and Fiordland, and covers 2.6 million hectares, almost 10 percent of New Zealand's total land area.* Pictures by Justine Tyerman unless specified