

TRAVEL



The view from a lookout on the Remarkables.

PICTURES © Ngai Tahu Tourism

Communing with mountain-tops

our snowshoes in the fresh powder and the occasional squawk of a kea, New Zealand's mountain parrot.

It was a surreal experience hiking straight uphill in the snow, crossing a frozen lake and munching lunch on a ledge just below the summit of a mountain I had worshipped from afar all my life. Double Cone (2319m) and the jagged black rocks of the Remarkables towered above us, the reverse side of the iconic sawteeth seen from Queenstown.

They have always held a quasi-mystical, sacred fascination for me and it was a pinch-myself moment to be up there, communing with the mountain-tops . . . not to mention having got there, sans chairlift, under my own and the TBs' steam.

In fact the TBs were jolly good sports the whole day and, dare I say, even appreciated the ease of grip on the steeper terrain afforded by the spikes on the underside of the high-tech, light-weight snowshoes.

They also enjoyed ribbing some Aussies who turned up wearing flimsy sand shoes and little else. I heard them guffawing uncharitably with some other TBs they were chatting to on our hike.

The young couple from Melbourne had never been in

snow before and our gem of a guide, Shaun from NZ Snowshoe, kitted them out from toe to top without even batting an eye.

The TBs spent the night in the cosy drying room at the posh Crowne Plaza, hanging out with TBs and SBs (ski boots) from all round the world.

Then early next morning Pam from Guided Walks NZ collected us and we headed 46km up the side of Lake Wakatipu to Glenorchy.

As promised, we jumped in a jet boat, hooned up the Dart River doing a series of 360s on the way and then wandered off into the wilderness to do some real off-track tramping. The TBs were in their element . . . but that's another story.

FACT FILE:

* *Ngai Tahu Tourism owns NZ Snowshoe, Dart River Jet and Guided Walks NZ. www.ngaitahutourism.co.nz; www.snowshoeing.co.nz; www.dartriver.co.nz*

* *Crowne Plaza Hotel has the best location and views in Queenstown. www.crowneplazaqueenstown.co.nz*

* *Air NZ flies direct between Auckland and Queenstown return. www.airnewzealand.co.nz*



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