

2/10/13 - Day 35 – Wellington, New Zealand: The large city of Wellington is the capital of the New Zealand nation. Wellington is located on Cook Strait which separates the two large North and South Islands, as shown in the map on the right. The Cook Strait between the two islands channels the prevailing westerly winds across Wellington so strong breezes are common and the city has been nick named “Windy Wellington”.

The Amsterdam arrived in Wellington harbor about 8am this morning and there was a moderate breeze coming in across the bow. However, the temperature was in the high 60s so conditions on deck were comfortable as we got a view of Wellington across the bow of the Amsterdam. The downtown buildings hug the shoreline while residential districts spread up the mountainsides that surround the city. Later in the day we would take a funicular up the mountain near the center of the picture below.



We docked at the gaily painted cruise terminal that is located next to the huge aluminum clad sports arena. Buses were waiting for the tours that were scheduled for today.



The economic importance of timber exports in New Zealand was immediately apparent as we looked at the dock area covered with pine logs.



Our plans for the day included taking the funicular (cable car) ride up the mountain at the center of Wellington in order to get a



good overall view of the city. (For those who care, the Wellington “cable car” is really a funicular that consists of a long cable looped over a wheel at the top of a mountain with a train car permanently attached at each end. One car comes up the mountain while the other car goes down. On the other hand, a “cable car” consists of a cab that dangles from a moving cable and the cab can be attached or disengaged from the cable by mechanisms along the cable route. Most people call a funicular a “cable car” and that is what we will do here.) After the cable car ride we would catch a Hop On – Hop Off bus and take a riding tour to get a more close-up look at the different neighborhoods and important sites in Wellington.

We joined with friends Roy and Gayle and set out on our adventure about 9am. The shuttle bus provided on the dock took us into downtown Wellington. We were dropped off near where we could catch the cable car that would take us up the mountain that rises steeply from the downtown streets of Wellington.



On the way to the cable car we spotted a man walking his dog. Barbara had to make a fuss over how wonderful his dog looked. The New Zealanders (Kiwis) seem to be naturally friendly and this fine gentleman was no exception as he thanked her for the compliment and told her that his dog was a German Shepherd.

As we entered the cable car station we sighted a sign that made a good backdrop for showing Barbara's library card had made it to Wellington. We took a quick picture as shown on the right.

We got our cable car tickets \$7 NZ each (\$6 USD) and boarded our car along with a tour group from the Amsterdam. Most of the tourists on this early Sunday morning were from the Amsterdam.



On the way up the mountain we saw that Lucia, one of our Cruise Specialists

ambassadors, was on the same car with us (good looking lady in blue). The slope is very steep and standing people had to hang on to the poles to keep from falling.



At the top of the mountain we got off the cable car and walked around the park-like setting in the Kelburn District.

There was an observatory as part of the park, as shown on the left. It was originally established to assist the early sailors with navigational data. Now it is open to the public for educational demonstrations.



We found a wonderful high-tech sundial that was laid out in the lawn of the observatory. By standing in the correct place for this month of the year and raising your hands above your head, the resulting shadow pointed to markers in the lawn that showed the time of day. Here on the right is Orlin testing out the device which indicated the correct time of 10 o'clock.



We strolled around a bit more and took some pictures of the view down the mountain into Wellington. In the photo below the Amsterdam is shown at the dock next to the circular soccer stadium.



The Kelburn District where the cable car stopped was definitely part of the upscale section of Wellington. On the right is a sample of some of the homes that could be seen from the cable car stop.



Eventually we decided to go back down the cable car route and continue our tour of Wellington. We made our way to the

Visitor Center at the Civic Square. We wanted to buy tickets for John's Hop On – Hop Off city tour bus. The seats for pickup at noon were all sold so we bought tickets for the 1 pm "Hop On" at a cost of \$45 NZ each (\$38 USD). Roy and Gayle didn't want to wait around that long so they decided to continue their tour of Wellington separately. We had an hour to spend so we took off toward the harbor to check out the scene there.



When we entered the Civic Square we were greeted by an amazing work of art. It appeared to be a large silver ball suspended in air above the square, as shown in the picture on the left. The ball was made from thin metal that was cut into the shape of the Silver Leaf Fern, a national symbol of New Zealand. Although at first it seemed to be floating in air, upon closer inspection we could see that it was actually held up by thin cables.

We walked across the Civic Square and on to the boardwalk the led along the Wellington Harbor. The New Zealand cities we have visited seem to be very livable with lots of space allocated for recreation. The picture on the right, showing children playing with the ducks on this small beach in the heart of Wellington was a good example of what we have seen elsewhere. Here are some other examples of recreational activity we saw today in downtown Wellington.





We stopped to chat with some local folks who told us about the farmer's market that was just a little further down the boardwalk. We continued on and soon came to a marvelous display of vegetables and fruit. The photo on the right is an example of what was offered.

In addition to fruit and vegetables there was a vendor offering venison from a deer farm, as shown below.



It was approaching 1pm so we hustled back to the Civic Square where we caught our Hop On – Hop Off (HOHO) bus.

The bus was really a van that carried about 12 people. Our driver, Richard, said that the tourist traffic in Wellington couldn't support the large HOHO buses we have used in some other cities. We climbed on board the van shown on the right and headed off for a 2 hour tour of sights and neighborhoods of Wellington.



We headed out for Mount Victoria Lookout as our first stop. Our progress was slowed by street congestion and blockage caused by equipment and workers in the street in front of a movie theater. They were dismantling a huge theater façade that had been put in place for the world premier of “The Hobbit” movie that had ended last night. We were to learn that the motion picture industry is a significant part of the Wellington economy. With Richard fretting about the delay we arrived at Victoria Lookout and were rewarded with a magnificent view. Shown below is the entire “U” shaped Wellington harbor. The Amsterdam can be seen at the dock near the upper right corner. Where we had recently been walking and watching the kids in the water is near the center of the “U” on the left.



Another interesting area we visited was the Weta Cave area which is not a cave but the neighborhood in Wellington where motion picture companies have located. Richard claimed that the motion picture industry was big in New Zealand and a significant part of the Wellington economy. In addition, most of the action takes place around the Weta Cave area. They certainly don't compare with Hollywood but they are a serious contributor to the world wide motion picture industry. Richard pointed out something that he said was Wellington's humorous way of showing that they were hot on the heels of Hollywood. He was referring to the Wellington version of the iconic "HOLLYWOOD" sign that is displayed on the hill above Hollywood in California.

There was a "WELLINGTON" sign posted on a nearby hill with a little embellishment building on the Wellington nickname of Windy City, as shown on the right.

You could see that the last few letters of "WELLINGTON" were being swept away by the wind. We liked their sense of humor.



By a stroke of good luck we just happened to drive by a gas station that had posted the price of gas in Wellington, as shown on the left. Unleaded gasoline was selling for \$2.179 NZ per liter. At the exchange rate of \$1.20 NZ per \$1 USD and assuming 4 liters per gallon that works out to about \$7.25 USD per gallon.

Our next site of interest was the Colonial Cottage. The Colonial Cottage was built back in the 1800s when the first settlers were building Wellington. It was built of wood and several generations of the same family occupied the home over the next century. It had recently been restored so we were seeing it in the best possible condition. A photo of the Colonial Cottage is shown on the right.

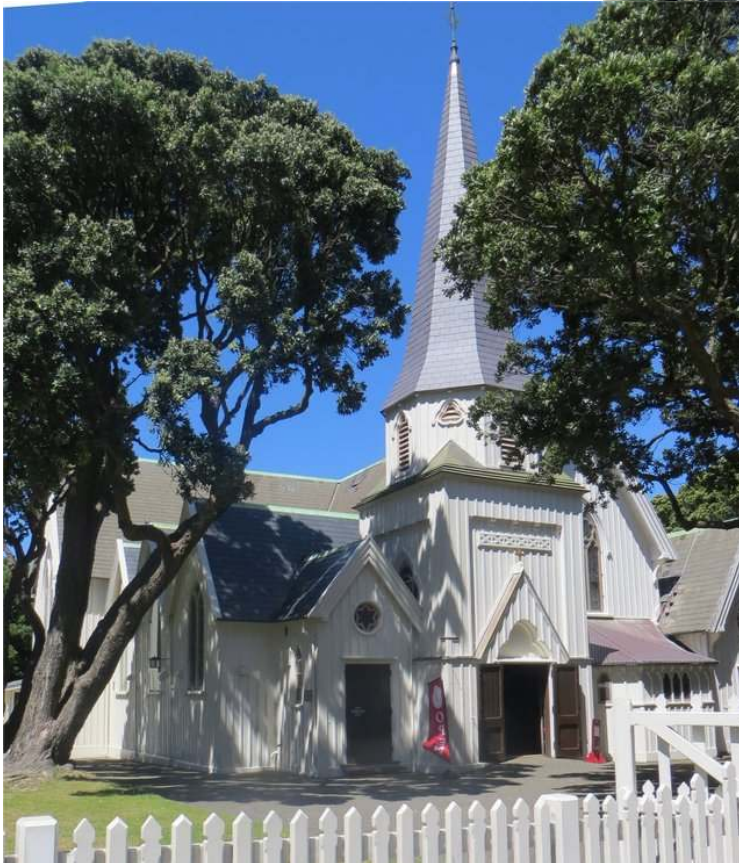


While we were touring around the various neighborhoods we took some pictures of typical homes that we saw. Some of the homes are shown below.





Our next stop was the Gothic style St. Paul's Church that was built in 1866. The church is unusual in that local



wood was used instead of stone to create the structure. A picture of St. Paul's Church is shown on the left.

We now headed towards Wellington's government complex and the parliament building which has an unusual shape known locally as "the beehive". The local people in Wellington apparently like to disparage the design but according to some of the literature the building is actually a deep source of pride in the community. It does have an unusual appearance for a government building, as shown on the right. We were told that the inside of the building is beautiful but we couldn't see it because on Sundays the building is closed.



Our HOHO tour of Wellington came to a conclusion and we returned to the Amsterdam. At dinner time there was a special buffet dinner prepared beside the pool on the Lido deck. The theme of the buffet was the abundance of delicious

New Zealand food products. There was a beverage display of beer, wine and other drinks as shown on the left.



While standing in the buffet line we spotted our long time friend, Karen, and snapped a picture of her, as shown on the right.



We got a nice selection of New Zealand food items like lamb chops and fish and chips from the buffet. We then settled down to eat at our table with Roy and Gayle. It was all quite good with the New Zealand beer and wine that was close at hand.



This was a very nice way to end our day in Wellington and get ready to move on to the next port.

The Amsterdam got underway about 11pm and we were bound for Picton, New Zealand. The town of Picton is on the South Island of New Zealand deep within a fiord-like bay that connects with Cook Strait. We should arrive in Picton tomorrow about 8 am.

