

# BDC New Zealand Tour 2006

## Part 1 - Arrival and South Island

**Paul and Liz Spencer**  
**3 litre Bentley YR2876**

**18 November 2005**

I thought this trip was to be summer driving! Today was the day to take the car to Southampton, and it dawned bright and cold. 1926 3 litre YR2876 has been well prepared for the trip, with a lot of odd jobs that had been waiting until I got round to them being done over the summer, new tonneau and hood cover, an overdrive fitted and a final check over by Clive Oliver at South Stoke. I shall make no more comments about the suitability of the car for a 3000 mile trip, as I don't want to make her a hostage to fortune.

As I say, bright and cold. YR2876 has never been a great cold starter, and it is -3 degrees this morning, but we got going eventually. Putting a half set of plugs in front of a fan heater for ten minutes did the trick. A long warm-up in the garage, and off we went, my wife following in a modern car with luxuries such as a roof and heating. I knew my skiing thermals would come in useful.

We are planning to replace our garage while the Bentley is away. Unfortunately, one wall is 2 metres from a 30 metre tall giant redwood, which has been causing problems. We have decided to look at some wooden garages as this could allow more movement without cracking. So we stopped just south of Guildford at the showground of one manufacturer. The garages looked awful. Never mind, we will also be looking at some custom oak-framed garages near Southampton on our way back.



We made it to Southampton at the due time, but of course everything was running late (through no fault of Cedric Cook, who is organising the trip). Our turn for loading came after an hour or so, at which point we were told that there were no containers left. So the last time I saw my car, it was sitting on the dockside in the open, with Cedric assuring me that it would make it to New Zealand. We shall see!

### **21/22 January 2006**

Virgin VS200 to Hong Kong went pretty much like any long flight. We didn't get our pre-booked seats, which was a shame as we ended up in the middle of the cabin instead of the two seats by the window. But the food was OK and Virgin gives a good choice of TV and films.

We arrived late afternoon on Sunday the 22<sup>nd</sup>. I didn't know Hong Kong was so cold - 12 degrees. Not impressed by the hotel room. It is clearly due for a makeover - very old-fashioned, towel rail hanging off the wall and the bath plug does not go down. We drank a free welcome beer at the hotel and went across the City Garden Square to Lei Gardens restaurant for a meal. It was 10:15 by this time, and the last diners were finishing their dinner. They agreed to serve us, and the food was excellent - much more subtle flavours than the equivalent back home. I must look up what "thousand year old egg" actually is - or is it better not to know? After France, it was a bit strange to be brought the bill in the middle of the main course and be asked to pay it straight away, but they were already doing the books for the day.

### **23 January 2006**

Since we are staying a few days, we had booked a half-day coach tour, and it was excellent. First to Aberdeen for a sampan ride through the floating village where the fishermen live. We think our sampan driver was Hong Kong's oldest apprentice. First she hit a mooring buoy and got the boat stuck on it, then she hit another sampan.

From there, we went to a jewellery factory, where we had a tour. Although most of the jewellery itself was not expensive (Liz bought a pearl bracelet for \$80 or about £6), they had some expensive items as well. One was a vintage Mercedes in gold and diamonds for \$4.3m, or a bit under £400,000. I'm sure they would make a Bentley on request, but for the same money you could get a decent speed six or eight litre and still have change for a 3/4.5. From there we went to Stanley market where we got presents for Helen and Sue (who is feeding our cats while we are away). The final part of the tour was a trip up to Victoria Peak for



the views and the tram ride down. In the evening we went to Kowloon for the shops on the Golden Mile and Temple Street night market. In spite of Hong Kong's reputation for shopping, all we managed to buy was a laser pointer for about a pound.

### **24 January 2006**

We took a ferry to the island of Cheung Chau, about 45 minutes away. Cheung Chau is supposed to represent the way the whole of Hong Kong used to be. We walked around in the morning, starting at a temple where we lit joss sticks for long life, health



and happiness. We walked along a lovely beach, where there was a worrying sign saying that the shark nets had been removed and apologising "for any inconvenience caused". Lunch was at a small and un-prepossessing restaurant that served excellent fried scallops with celery, ginger and cashew nuts. Liz had the same with prawns instead of scallops.

After getting the ferry back the Central, we took the escalator series up the hill and walked back down through the zoo before returning to the hotel. Something else we have discovered is that the hotel is unheated. Reception arranged for us to get a heater in our room.

### **25/26 January**

Back to Kowloon on the Star ferry on Wednesday morning to try to buy Liz a silk jacket for her birthday. We could only find Asian styles, so bought a necklace instead. In the afternoon, we went to the airport for the flight to Auckland and then Christchurch. The flight to Auckland was disappointing as the plane had not been upgraded to the new standards that Air New Zealand is making such a song and dance about. The plane was also late arriving, so it was a dash to the domestic terminal (with our luggage) for the connecting flight. We think some people missed the connection.

In Christchurch, we met some others from the tour who had the phone number of the car storage place, so they sent a minibus to collect us. The car was fine, but customs had taken everything out and just dumped it inside. Even the stuffing was pulled part way out of the passenger seat. We met Kurt Furger at the storage place, and drove to the hotel together.

### **27 January**

Beautiful sunny day for Liz's birthday. We walked into the centre of Christchurch following some walks from a local guide. There is a world busking festival on, so we saw a couple of the acts. The mayor of Christchurch held a reception for us in the afternoon.

**28 January**



We decided to give the car a run today, so drove over to Lyttleton through the tunnel, up to the time ball building (which was closed) then over Summit Road and on to New Brighton. While there, we walked

down the pier and watched the surfers. In the evening, we had a sticky experience with Lauren.

**29 January**

Spent much of the morning working on the car. It was running a bit rough yesterday, and also needed some cleaning and polishing. To start the car on the way to Southampton, I had had to put in some old plugs (which were warm and dry), so I put the new ones back and cleaned the other half set, although they were not oiled up. We then went to the Antarctic Exhibition, which is supposed to be the number one attraction in New Zealand. It was OK. The best bit was a simulation of an Antarctic storm. This was in a chamber at -5 degrees, with a wind chill down to -18 when the storm was on. The car needed the mixture setting to half rich to run smoothly, so I set the carbs richer by three flats.



**Day 1 - 30 January Christchurch to Mt Cook 220 miles**

The first day of the tour! Garry Moore, Mayor of Christchurch, was going to start the cars by waving a cap, so I lent him my flag to set us off in more style. We left shortly before 10:00 for the 50 miles or so to McIlroy, which is a Bentley garage in Ashburton. We were expecting tea and biscuits, but got sandwiches and cake as well. I added another two flats to get the mixture richer. From Ashburton, it was on to Lake Tekapo, where we just had a drink, then continued to Mt Cook. The last part was spectacular. The roads are nearly empty and, even where they run through the mountains, not too bendy.



We kept an average of over 50 mph without exceeding the 62 mph speed limit and hardly had to switch the overdrive off, let alone change down. We had been warned that there were a number of keas (NZ alpine parrots) near the hotel, and that they attack cars, so we had bought a tarpaulin in Ashburton and used it overnight. Supper was a buffet quite early in the evening.



## **Day 2 - 31 January Mount Cook to Te Anau 260 miles**

A long drive and very windy, which was uncomfortable at times. The car was also stuttering some of the time. Others had the same problem, and we put it down to bad fuel. Lunch was at the Waitiri Creek Winery, and was excellent. Then on to Te Anau. It was not the most exciting day's driving (perhaps we are getting blasé already), but Te Anau itself is set among beautiful scenery. The Kingsgate Hotel is not good - dirty with flaking paint and sagging beds. Those (mainly from the Southern hemisphere) who ended up at the Village Inn did rather better.

## **Day 3 - 1 February Te Anau**

No driving today, but a coach trip to Milford Sound instead, with a boat trip on the fjord. The scenery is so spectacular that a waterfall more than twice the height of the Niagara Falls is just another sight to look at. There is not much point adding more words. The pictures tell it better.







#### **Day 4 - 2 February Te Anau to Queenstown 106 miles**

A short drive today, with a long break for lunch at Mandeville Airfield. Several of us had requested flights in a Tiger Moth. Unfortunately, too many, so most of us went in a Dragonfly instead as this could take four at a time.







### **Day 5 - 3 February Queenstown**

We have three nights in Queenstown, so no driving today. Instead, we have an arranged trip on a steam launch to Walters Peak Station for demonstrations of working the sheep with dogs and sheep shearing, followed by a rather rushed barbeque lunch.



### **Day 6 - 4 February Queenstown**

Another free day, so Liz and I went white water rafting. Cedric and Mandy were there as well, so we shared a raft with them and a young Irish couple. This was a great way to spend a morning, and thoroughly recommended to all. Well, maybe to most - the Irish girl was throwing up over the side just at the description of the last set of rapids we would be going through. As well as the rafting, we got the opportunity to float down one set of rapids and jump off rocks into the river.

Phil Dunstan, a local car collector, organised a barbeque for us at his local wetland. He was not there for the occasion, but he had arranged a great meal in beautiful surroundings.



We were given access to the collection of cars and Harleys. Two V8 Ford trucks, a lovely Mercedes and a Mustang in the cleanest and tidiest garage I have ever seen.

### **Day 7 - 5 February Queenstown to Franz Joseph 224 miles**

An early start today as we have quite a long drive and there is lots to see. We were out of the hotel and on the road at 07:00 well wrapped on a rather cold and grey morning. We had breakfast in Arrowtown, which was originally a mining settlement and both the European and Chinese parts of the town have been preserved. From Arrowtown we drove over New Zealand's highest through road to Wanaka. We met up with Kurt Furger and Roger Jacques and stopped with them for coffee in Wanaka. Following them gave an interesting comparison of different gearing. I have a BS box and 4.23:1 axle, while Kurt has an A box and higher overall gearing. This means I can do the hairpins in second while he does them somewhat slower in first. It was the same on the steeper climbs, where I never needed first. However, on the slightly less steep sections, he was much faster in second and I could not get into my rather high third gear. It was the same when I needed second down the hills. When we stopped for lunch in Haast, you could smell which cars had come down in third!



From Wanaka, we continued North to the Fox Glacier. As soon as we turned off the main road to a viewing point, it started to rain and we put the hood up. Once we got back to the main road, it was obvious that the rain had been very localised as the road was dry. On to another point from which we could view the glacier, then on to the Franz Joseph glacier. Again it rained, but we decided to do the 90 minute walk to the base of the glacier - well worth while. When we got to the hotel, it was obvious which cars had been in the dust and rain on the glacier roads, and which had stayed clean and dry on the main road.



## Day 8 - 6 February Franz Joseph to Greymouth 120 miles

After a rather dull end to yesterday, today was bright and clear. Most cars just needed a clean, but David and Lorraine

Hughes were not so lucky with bearing problems. At least there was a good view while loading. An Aussie 3 litre belonging to Mike Knowles had bendix problems that took much of the day to fix, while Bernard and Liz got their car back with a new exhaust manifold.



Given the clear views, we elected

for a helicopter flight up to the glacier. This was our first ever time in a helicopter, and what a way to do it! A flight round and over the hills to the top of the glacier, where we landed and spent five minutes or so before flying back.



Once we left Franz Joseph, we quickly caught Kurt and Roger, so followed them to Ross, where we bought a picnic and all had lunch by a lake. We left there just behind Cedric and Mandy Cook (4.5 Litre). Cedric waved us past, and we lost Kurt after that. As we were driving through Hokitika, we saw a sign saying "live kiwis". Liz has been

desperate to see a kiwi since we have been here, so we turned off into the town. After a quick look at the beach and a jade factory, we went to the wildlife centre that had a lot of fish and eels and the kiwis. Kiwis are nocturnal, so their habitat was very dark and flash photography is not allowed, so we don't have photos. From there, it was on to Greymouth and the hotel. Frank Renwick has decided to instigate a "happy hour" so we get to know each other better. That went well tonight and will be repeated for the rest of the tour.

### **Day 9 - 7 February Greymouth to Nelson 220 miles**

Last night, we had been told that we would get a discount at the Wild Coast Café at Punakaiki if we were wearing Bentley clothing. Always in search of a bargain, off we set for breakfast. The pancakes were great, but the discount did not appear. This café



serves pancakes because of the local "Pancake Rocks" so called because sedimentation and erosion have caused the rocks to form into shapes resembling stacks of pancakes. They have also formed blowholes that are spectacular when the tide and wind are right, which they were not this morning.

From the pancakes rocks, it was a long drive along a rocky coast through Westport and up to Nelson for a Teppan Yaki meal at the hotel restaurant.

### **Day 10 - 8 February Nelson**

Rain stops play!

Having driven through some of the wettest places in the world in the rainy season and having brilliant sunshine, today it rained all day in a place noted for its fine weather. For those of us in open cars, it was good that it chose a free day to do so. We decided to take it easy, and just wandered around the town and caught up with some sleep. It also meant that I could catch up with the diary, which was a few days behind and get the photos off so I can post the text tomorrow.

## Day 11 - 9 February Nelson to Hamner Springs 190 miles

A bright start to the day, so we decided to get another picnic. We carried on for a while, then saw a sign to a picnic spot, where we stopped and walked down to a waterfall to eat lunch.



After this, the weather got steadily worse, until we ended up driving through the rain to Hamner Springs. There are a few things that make the difference between a great drive and something to be endured, and rain is one of them.

Hamner Springs is famous for its hot springs, so we felt obliged to visit these.

The springs have been channelled into a rather artificial environment, so visiting them is rather like sitting in a hot bath outside in the rain with a lot of other people. Not really worth the 350 miles or so from Nelson and back to Portage (tomorrow's trip) rather than the short direct drive. In fact, some people decided to skip Hamner Springs entirely, and we rather wish we had joined them. Perhaps the redeeming feature was the Indian restaurant next to the hotel, which served an excellent rack of lamb with lightly spiced trimmings.

## Day 12 - 10 February Hamner Springs to Blenheim 165 miles

Another grey morning. These may not be so pleasant to drive in, but the low cloud can make the landscape look as spectacular as bright sunshine.



We have generally taken to stopping for breakfast a little into the day rather than having it at the hotel. We therefore stopped at Mount Lyford, which had been scheduled as a morning coffee break. We were lucky we got there early - those who arrived five minutes later were told they could not have breakfast as the café was preparing for a wedding party. They therefore had to sit watching me eat my full English breakfast while they just had a cup of tea.

Breakfast was also well timed in that the grey morning turned to pouring rain while we were eating, then bright sunshine as soon as we were ready to leave. Another case of "if you don't like the weather, wait five minutes".

From Mount Lyford, we drove across the hills to Kaikoura, where we walked out across rocks to the seal colony. Some people went whale watching there, but we have done that before in Boston, and did not want to spend the time. From there, it was up the spectacular coastline to Kekerengu for lunch, and then on through Blenheim to Portage.

The last bit of the day was a 20 mile slog to Portage. The hotel was chosen as Blenheim has a wine festival on, and no hotel there would accommodate us. We were told later that the 20 miles of road has 365 bends. I like bendy roads, but not like this. In the Alps, you get sharp bends separated by straight bits, and can have fun. Here it was just 90 degree bend after 90 degree bend with no long-distance visibility and no straight sections. It was a case of third gear almost all the way, with the occasional drop into second. Some people had it worse - those who went whale-watching, and Kurt, who had to wait while someone made him a new sump gasket, did this bit in the dark and pouring rain.

The hotel itself was fine, and we had the advantage of a room next to the laundry, allowing us to listen in to the all-female conversations. One conversation went along the lines of:

"He has overalls, but he never wears them because he says it's only a little job, but it never is."

"You would have been better off marrying a carburettor - it would have less oil on it." While we just did a bit of car washing to get rid of the salt from driving along by the ocean, others did seem to be doing a bit more work. One participant walked past our room carrying a dynamo.

### **Day 13 - 11 February Blenheim**

Portage is a wonderfully scenic place in the Marlborough Sounds, and the weather the next day made the most of it. This was a "free day" with a mussel tour arranged for the afternoon and a final South Island Dinner in the evening. Liz and I took out a canoe in the morning.



Others indulged in more typically English holiday pastimes.







The mussel tour involved taking a boat out into the Marlborough Sounds and seeing the mussel farm. Some interesting facts (for example, each float on the farm supports a ton of mussels and is harvested after 18 months), but the highlight really was the eating (mussels) and drinking (NZ "Champagne" and white wine). After the trip, a short time to get ready, then a dinner dance to celebrate the end of the South Island part of our tour.

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