

Day 45 Dunedin, New Zealand–Larnach Castle–Penguin–Albatross–10 Nov. 09:

The day started with overcast sky and moderate sea as we approached Otago Harbour at Dunedin, New Zealand.

The temperature was a chilly 50 degrees. We passed through the entrance and into Otago Harbour as shown on the right. Dunedin is on the water channel but large ships with cargo or passengers for Dunedin have to stop at Port Chalmers because the channel becomes too shallow from that point on.



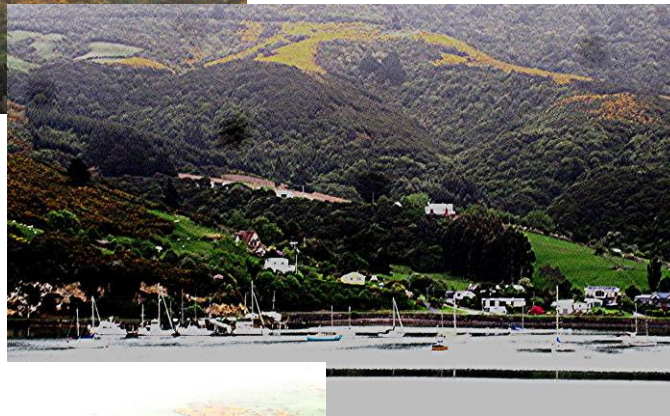
We were scheduled to dock at the Beach Street Berth in Port Chalmers which is about 8 miles from Dunedin. On the way

to Port Chalmers we were treated to a wonderful display of green hillsides decorated with the yellow flowers of Scotch Broom. Several photos we took as the Amsterdam cruised down the channel are shown on the left and below.



The name Dunedin is the old

Gaelic name for the city of Edinburgh in Scotland. It is pronounced like “Done-Eden”. The early colonial settlers were mainly Scottish.



Later in the day our tour guide, Chris, told us, with tongue in cheek, that the English people managing the colonization of New Zealand sent the Scotts to Dunedin because they were used to hard work farming the rocky, unfertile and hilly land of Scotland. On the other hand,

the English immigrants were sent to Christchurch where the land is flat, fertile and easy to farm. This bit of local humor may have a germ of truth in it.

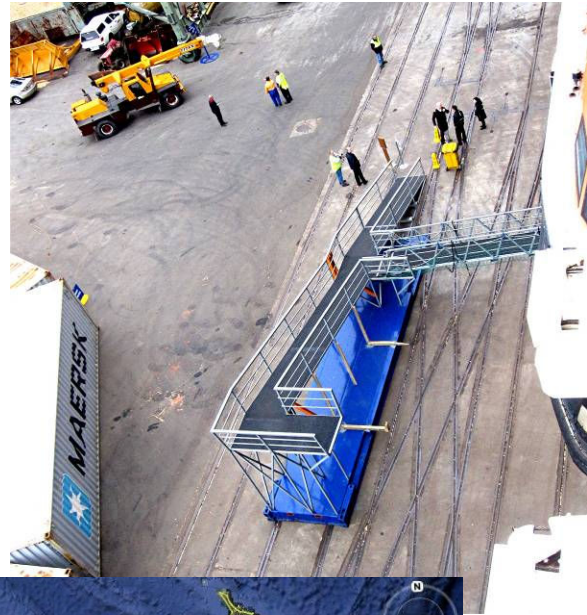
Port Chalmers appeared to be a busy harbor with lots of cargo containers stacked on some of the piers, as shown on the right.



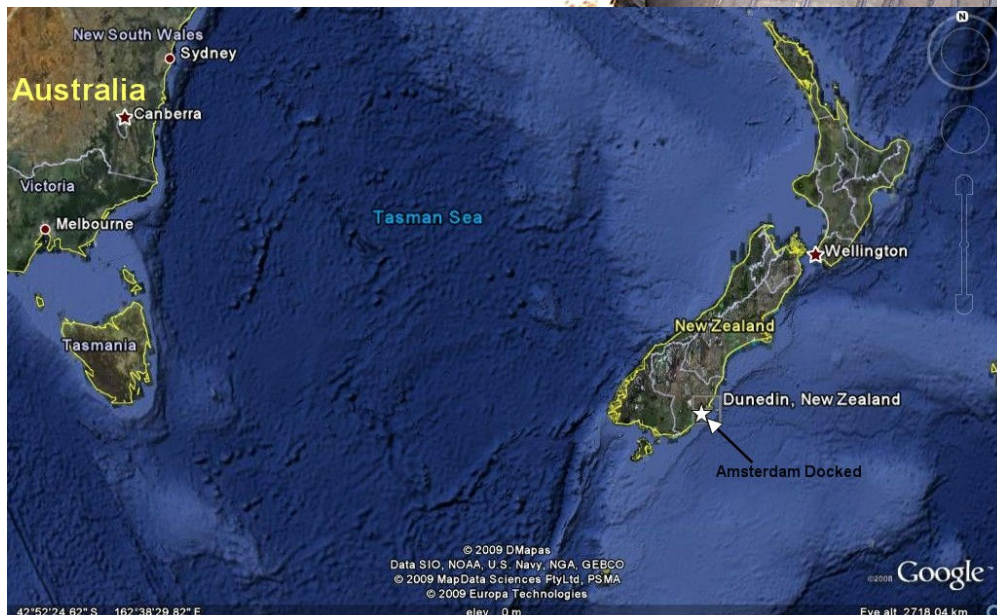
However, the Amsterdam came to be docked at a wharf where pine logs were being stacked as shown on the left.



It didn't take long after docking before the gangway was in place, as shown on the right.



The Amsterdam was now set up to begin our visit in Dunedin, New Zealand. The location of Dunedin on the Southern Island of New Zealand is shown on the Google map below.





The location of the Amsterdam in Otago Harbour, is shown below on the map adapted from Google Earth. The route and highlights of a tour we took later are shown as the double ended white arrows and white stars respectively.

Cruise Director, Bruce, came on the PA and gave us the standard warning about not taking fruit or other food ashore in compliance with the New Zealand agriculture quarantine regulations. The Amsterdam was cleared by the local authorities by 8am and we got ready to leave the ship.

We had signed up for a tour that had been arranged by a Cruise Critic friend, Bill (sk8teacher). The tour company was called Back to Nature and would take us to the Larnach Castle, the Penguin Reserve and the Albatross nesting area. All of these spots were located on the Otago Peninsula. There were 20 of us who gathered with Bill in the Atrium on Deck 3 at 8:15am. We took these pictures of the group as we waited for the

last couple people to show up. On the far right Jean can be seen acting up for the camera.



At about 8:30 everyone was present so we lined up and passed by the ever alert Detector Dog that checked our bags for contraband fruit, vegetables and other food, as shown on the right and below.



This dog had a jacket with a catchy little saying on it that we liked. It said "NEW ZEALAND, IT'S OUR PLACE TO PROTECT". Like the Aussies, these guys are into clever phrases with double meanings.



Our group gathered out on the pier looking for the "Back to Nature" tour van.



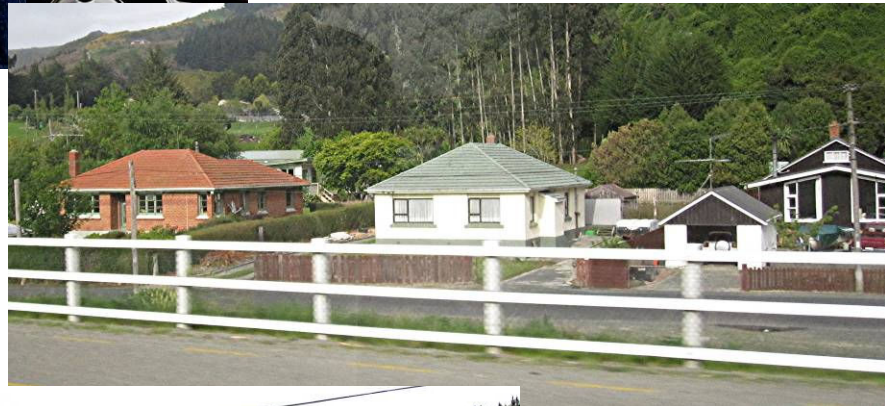
Another cruise critic bunch walked by on the way to their tour, as shown below.



We found our Tour Van and met our driver/guide named Chris. Here is our van on the right and Orlin grabbed Chris for a quick picture below. It might appear that Bill is driving this vehicle below but remember we are blessed with left hand traffic in this ex-British colony.

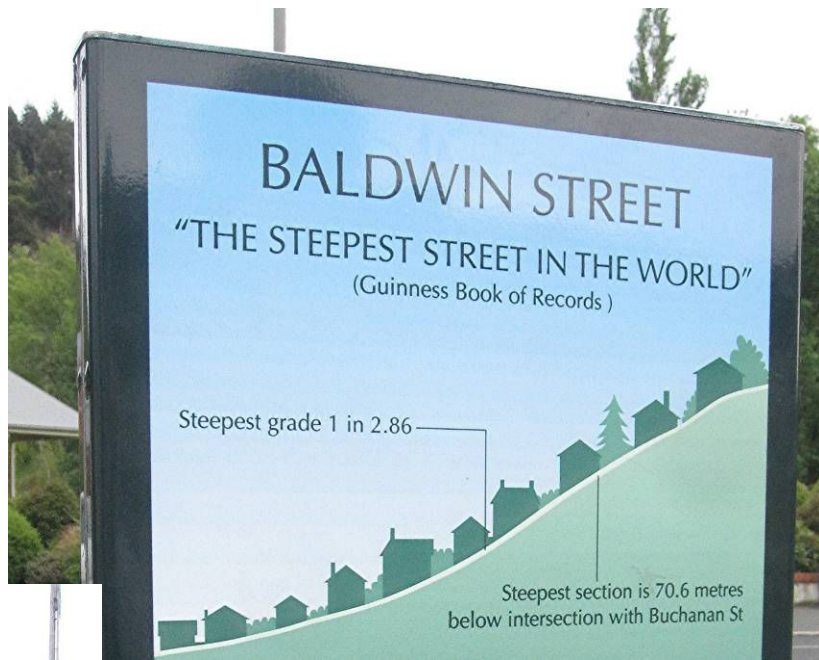


We drove through a section of Dunedin and took pictures along the way to show some typical homes, as shown below.



Chris estimated these homes would sell for \$150,000 to \$200,000 NZD (\$125,000 TO \$155,000 USD). He also said that home prices in Dunedin are dropping as a result of the soft economy.

The first stop on the tour took us by surprise. It was “The Steepest Street in the World”. Apparently some active soul has managed to get the Guinness Record people to declare Baldwin Street in Dunedin, New Zealand as the steepest street in the world as shown by the sign on the right. The steepest grade is 1 foot rise for



every 2.86 feet forward. On the left is a picture of the street taken from the bottom of hill. You can't tell much from this view of Baldwin Street but it doesn't look that bad from here.

We are wondering if the Guinness people have checked our Laurel Street in San Diego.

This Baldwin Street stop was a bit of fun and we soon moved onward toward our next point of interest which was the Dunedin Railroad Station which is a beautiful example of Victorian architecture. Along the way we passed the Cadbury Chocolate Factory shown on the right. Our mouths were watering but we resisted the urge to stop in for some tasting.



We arrived at the Railroad Station and immediately took some pictures of the station, as shown on the right. We are not experts in architecture but this sure seemed like a great Victorian building to us. The alternate black and white sections of the lower colonnades are black and white sandstone that is found in the area. We went through the station and



took a picture of the loading platform to show that the building had a real function, as shown on the left. It is beautifully maintained and operational railroad station.

We then took some pictures of the beautiful flowers in the front of the Railroad Station, as shown below.



While we were taking pictures we also got Barbara (TENNcruisers), Jean (aussieoz) and Nicole (nicoleontheseas) in a group photo.



While we were riding along we told Chris how much we liked the yellow Scotch Broom we had seen on the hillsides this morning on the way into the harbor. Without hesitation he said that what we thought was beautiful, he thought of as a plague. The local people

hate the Scotch Broom (which they call Gorse) because it grows profusely, like a weed, and crowds out more desirable plants. It was imported by the Scotch settlers as a hedgerow plant. It made a good hedgerow plant but quickly spread from the hedgerows to the open fields where it took away grazing space for sheep. Regardless of the local dislike for the Gorse, we loved the look of it on the hillsides this morning.

The next stop on our tour was at Larnach Castle with the entrance sign shown on the right.

The castle is not a military fortress but a really big stone house built to resemble a small castle. It was built in the 1871-76 time period by W.J. Larnach, a wealthy banker and politician. After a successful and productive life he came to a sad end about 22 years after completing his castle. He was a member of the New Zealand legislature and committed suicide by shooting himself during one of the legislative sessions. Blame



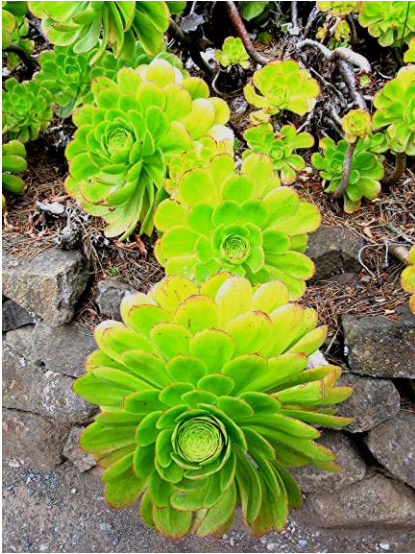
for his suicide was placed on his third wife who was having an affair with a younger man (a son from his first marriage). Although wealth obviously didn't bring eternal

happiness, the effort he put into the large home and surrounding gardens continues to bring pleasure for the visitors to this palatial home which is shown on the left.



The home is available for touring inside at \$15 NZD per person but we didn't do that. We toured the outside grounds which are a veritable botanical garden with a wide variety of beautiful plants.

Examples of some plants are shown below.



There was one fern which was of particular interest. That was the fern that goes by the common name of “Silver Fern”. The silver fern has a normal green upper surface on the fronds but the under surface has a silver color. It has been adopted as the symbol of New Zealand by athletic teams from New Zealand. Sports teams for all sports usually show the silver fern in some part of their public displays. Here on the right is a flag that shows the silver fern that might be flown at a sports bar or



sporting event. The Larnach Castle gardens had a silver fern that we were able to examine. In the picture on the left you can see the normal green color of the upper leaf surface and Barbara has turned one of the leaves up so the silver underside is exposed.



There is an “Alice in Wonderland” theme to the gardens. The theme is carried out by a few displays around grounds. This small King of Hearts statue, shown on the left, is an example.

There was another example that we couldn’t resist. It was an oversized chair representing a throne. Barbara climbed up and enjoyed being the “Queen of Hearts”, as shown on the right.

Our visit to the Larnach Castle came to an end after we had a satisfying stroll through all of the grounds. There were a few gardeners out tending to the flower beds which were immaculate. New Zealand is famous for having botanical gardens in nearly every city and the private one at Larnach Castle carries on this tradition very well.

We left Larnach Castle and drove to a small village called Portobello. Chris had arranged for us to



descend on the Bistro of a small hotel called Portobello Hotel.



We got our group of 20 seated at two tables and the orders for lunch were quickly taken. The pub bar in the next room was open so it was possible to get a pint of the local Speight’s Beer. Available either dark or light it went down very well.

We got some pictures of our happy crew at the lunch hour, as shown on the right and below.



Chris had arranged for all the entrees to be at one price of \$15 NZD. Beer was extra at \$4 NZD per glass. We had the fish and chips shown in the picture on the right and never had them any better than that.



Everyone seemed happy with the lunch. After we had eaten and were just milling around Barbara became fascinated by an extremely small car that pulled in across the street. She took this picture on the right of what our bar tender said was a 15 or 20 year old Honda that used to be sold in New Zealand.



It looked like an early version of the new Mercedes “Smart Car”.

After lunch we drove a short distance further out on the Otago Peninsula to a private reserve that is trying to keep the Yellow Eyed Penguin from further depletion and eventual extinction.



The yellow eyed penguin is a small (2 foot tall) penguin that nests on the beaches of New Zealand. Because of loss of habitat and mammal predators the yellow eyed penguin numbers have been decreasing. This reserve is dedicated to creating a nesting habitat that will promote greater numbers of hatchings and greater survival of the baby chicks that do hatch. Part of their funding comes from the fee paid by visitors, like us, who come to observe the penguins. Visitors can see the penguins nesting in a state that is natural except for some nest structure at the back that provides more protection from predators than like weasels and rats that can sneak in the back of a natural nest and steal the eggs.

We were first given a short presentation on the life cycle and habits of the yellow eyed penguin by one of the guides as shown on the right. We then got into a van and drove across the ridge of Otago Peninsula to the beach. At the beach, trenches and blinds had been built



close to the penguin nests to allow people to observe the penguins without causing significant disruption for the penguins. We got out of the van and quietly followed our guide through camouflaged trenches as shown on the left.

Some of the trenches were covered with camouflaged netting as shown on the right.

The trenches led to enclosed blinds where we were about 50 feet from a penguin's nest. The inside of one of the blinds is shown below.



We were all busy taking pictures of the baby penguins under the adult penguin which

could have been either the mother or father of the chicks since they take turns sitting on the nest. Our camera has limited zoom capability so it was not possible to get a good picture of the baby chick. However, we did get a couple pictures of the adult penguins on the nest as shown on the right and below.



Bill, who describes himself as a serious amateur photographer had a large telephoto lens that he used to get a terrific picture of a small chick in the nest near an adult penguin. Nicole, also using a telephoto lens got a good picture of the baby penguin.

Here is a picture taken later as the photographers gather some more photos from the nesting area.



The blinds used to observe the penguins are shown in this picture on the right. The vertical green posts behind the blind are plastic protectors for small trees and shrubs that have been planted to improve the habitat for the penguins. Without the plastic protectors, rabbits will chew the bark off the young trees and kill them. The protectors can be removed when the tree is old enough to have bark that does not appeal to the rabbits.



After getting mixed success in photographing baby penguins we left the preserve. However, before we left it was possible to get a close-up photo of the dreaded Gorse plant that we thought was so pretty as we sailed into the harbor. Here on the right is a close-up view of a Gorse (Scotch Broom) bush blooming gaily in the spring sun.



After view the penguins we continued our tracking of bird species this afternoon by driving a short distance out to the end of the Otago peninsula where there is a protected area set up for the only area on a mainland that albatross nest. It is called the Royal Albatross Centre and the sign for the site is shown below.



When we first arrived we saw one albatross glide silently overhead. It was close to sea gulls and the enormous size of the albatross was evident. We spent about a half hour trying to spot an albatross going or coming from a nest on the sea cliff but we had no good luck. The best view of an albatross that

we got was in the Royal Albatross Centre building where there was the stuffed body of a 6 year old albatross that had been killed in an accident. That unfortunate albatross is shown, along with Barbara, on the right. As can be seen in the picture, the albatross is a large bird. Albatross can drink sea water and live off the ocean without touching land for years at a time. They return to land only to mate and lay their eggs. Since they come to land so seldom they don't learn how to land on solid earth. They usually tumble over and over when landing. That is how they got the nick name of gooney bird.



We left the Royal Albatross Centre and headed in to Dunedin City. We were going to the center of town which has a ring of streets shaped in an octagon form and it is called The Octagon. On the way we drove past the Speight Brewery shown on the right.



We got out of the van at The Octagon and looked around at a few of the shops. Downtown Dunedin looks like most downtown areas in large cities, as shown below.



We had one tradition to fulfill here in Dunedin and that was to take a picture of Barbara's library card. The Octagon is near the Dunedin City Library. We found the

library and took the picture with Barbara's card to keep the tradition going, as shown on the right.



On the subject of library card pictures, earlier in the day just before we arrived at the Larnach Castle we had passed through the small community of Pukehiki and stopped at the small library there. Chris said he thought this was the smallest library in the world. It is open only one hour per week and that is on Fridays. We didn't want to discriminate against small libraries so the rest of people in the van waited while we took this picture of Barbara's library card visiting Pukehiki, New Zealand.



Another tradition we have is documenting the price of gasoline in the various ports we visit.



While driving through Dunedin we photographed the station shown on the left. In that station the unleaded gasoline was selling for \$165.90 NZD or \$1.296 USD per liter. Approximating 4 liters per gallon the \$1.296 per liter works out to \$5.18 USD per gallon. The US continues to look like the place to be for cheap gasoline. The high octane gasoline in that station was selling for \$172.9

NZD per liter and the Diesel sells for \$1.079 NZD per liter.

At various times during the day we happened upon sheep in the fields beside the road. Since New Zealand has on the order of 40 million sheep we couldn't close out the day without showing some of the sheep we photographed. Accordingly, here are some sheep photos.



We got back to the Amsterdam about 5pm. The ship got underway about 5:30pm with a lonely bagpiper playing traditional Scottish tunes on the pier, as shown on the right.



The Amsterdam made its way out of the harbor and past the head of land at the end of the Otago Peninsula where we had tried to see some albatross birds today. We looked for a gliding albatross in vain as the Amsterdam quietly sailed by the nesting area below the lighthouse, shown on the right.

We turned and headed north towards our next port of call, Christchurch, New Zealand.

We should be at the dock in the Christchurch harbor about 7am tomorrow morning.

