

## Chapter Sixteen

The plan for the day was to catch the ferry across to Paihia, then walk the 2km around the bays to the Treaty Grounds at Waitangi. Seeing the grounds where the Treaty of Waitangi was signed was something I had been looking forward to, so I was extremely pleased that the weather was kind for such a trip. The ferry ride was a short one but the local's had assured me that a full day would be needed to make the most of the grounds. The previous day in Russell, when I had announced my intention to walk to Waitangi from Paihia to some of the long term residents, I had received a most indifferent response. Some were very encouraging of this plan and had assured me it wouldn't be more than an hour's walk. Other's had looked at me like I had gone bonkers, shaken their head and assured me that to get to Waitangi from Paihia on a Saturday, I needed to have left last Wednesday, and even then I'd be pushing it. However, upon mentioning I was from Dunedin, their advice changed entirely. I was quickly told that I'd have no problem covering the distance. I'm not sure how this changed things, but apparently it did.

One of the intriguing phenomena I've noticed when traveling in New Zealand is this. As soon as people find out I'm from Dunedin, I end up having one of two conversations. Either I end up discussing southerly weather patterns that include wind, rain and general cold temperatures or I end up discussing travelling distances. I'm not sure why this is, maybe everyone thinks all we do in Dunedin is walk in the rain. I'm not too sure.

As the 9:30am Russell to Paihia passenger ferry pulled away from the dock the temperature had already climbed to a lovely twenty five degrees. The ferry had a small scattering of passengers as it quietly eased its way across the still, calm bay. It seemed almost the perfect way to travel. Looking across the bay, all sorts of water activities were getting underway along with a multitude vessels that were preparing for something called the Tall Ships Regatta. Whatever the event was, they had a splendid day for it and I was glad to be free of the hired car.

Fifteen minutes later the ferry pulled into its berth in Paihia. After disembarking from the ferry and somehow managing to trip as I did so, I set off for my destination. It was a lovely fine morning and after a short 30 minute stroll along Te Ti Bay I found myself at the Treaty Grounds in Waitangi. With a good 30 minutes to spare before the next tour, I had decided to pass the time by looking through the Waitangi museum. I had been assured it was well worth a look so I figured, well, why not!

Of all the things I've discovered recently, the most interesting and peculiar is this. The Treaty of Waitangi, our nation's founding document was lost for nearly 30 years. At the time, this was something I couldn't quite believe. Even now, I still find it mind boggling yet somehow very typically kiwi.

Much like the rediscovery of the treaty, I came across this information quite by chance. It was during a recent visit to the treaty grounds in the Bay Of Islands. It was a lovely fine morning and after a short 30 minute stroll along Te Ti Bay I found myself at the Treaty Grounds in Waitangi. With a good 30 minutes to spare before the next tour, I had decided to pass the time by looking through the Waitangi museum. I had been assured it was well worth a look so I figured, well, why not!

I casually strolled through the various exhibits which I must confess was very captivating until I happened upon a display cabinet containing a very worn and ripped piece of paper that resembled a school notice that had been at the bottom of a child's bag for some time. The document, as it turns out, was an exact copy of the actual Treaty.

It seems that after the initial signing at Waitangi on the 6th February 1840, the treaty then went on a kind of regional tour around New Zealand so other Maori chiefs could sign. Unfortunately the next year the document was nearly destroyed by fire. Then, sometime after 1877 it was 'misplaced' (for nearly 30 years) before being found by historian Thomas Hocken in 1908.

The story goes that the highly esteemed Thomas Hocken was rummaging around in the basement of a Government building in Wellington when rolled up, thrown in a corner, damaged by water and eaten by rats, he discovered the Treaty of Waitangi. It was then damaged further when restoration work (a little DIY presumably) went horribly wrong. It was at this point, after misplacing it for 30 years, damaged by fire, water, rats and restoration work that everyone decided it was best to leave the thing alone, put it in a tin case and lock it up for another 50 years.

As I moved out of the museum into bright sunshine and towards a gathering crowd that I assumed was the tour party I was joining, I had two thoughts. Firstly, what other important national documents are we missing? Secondly, has anyone thought to look for them in remote hay barns?