



# *The Sitzmarke*

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The Beautiful Ladies of New Zealand  
(Fiji/NZ Trip – July/Aug 2002)



(Article by Ellen Eastham, with David George, Gloria Lopez, Patti Maudslay, Carmen Mikhail, Steven Teoh, Eric Timmreck, and Thuy Tran)

Fuji/NZ participants, as noted in the article, include Alice and Dale Allbritton, Diane and Ross Baker, Sue Bohnert, Rita Bradley, Denise Butler, Penny Chancey, Karen Clapper, John Cornwell, Ellen Eastham, David George, Deborah Haynie, Suzanne Hegemier, Leigh Howlett, Ed Kanyuck, Tor Lileng, Gloria Lopez, Patti Maudslay, Carmen Mikhail, Nora and Mike Montgomery, Kelly and daughter Kelsey Murray, Ann Odegard, Concietta Ruggiero, Steven Teoh, Carol and Eric Timmreck, Thuy Tran, BobTripp, and Chuck Woolley.



It was an amazing trip to Fiji, New Zealand and Australia, full of adventure, excitement, adrenaline, activities, and camaraderie. The writing committee compiled detailed and humorous stories, called the "Trip Memoirs". The stories and vivid memories demonstrate the wonderful and creative adventures shared by the group. This article is a brief recap, just 10% of our original document. Just ask the participants if you would like to hear more!

## FIJI, TROPICAL PARADISE

On Saturday, July 27, 2002, thirty-two SCSC members and those of four other Texas Ski Clubs, departed from many airports. **David George** was not on Continental's passenger list, but luckily was found before takeoff under George David! Travel

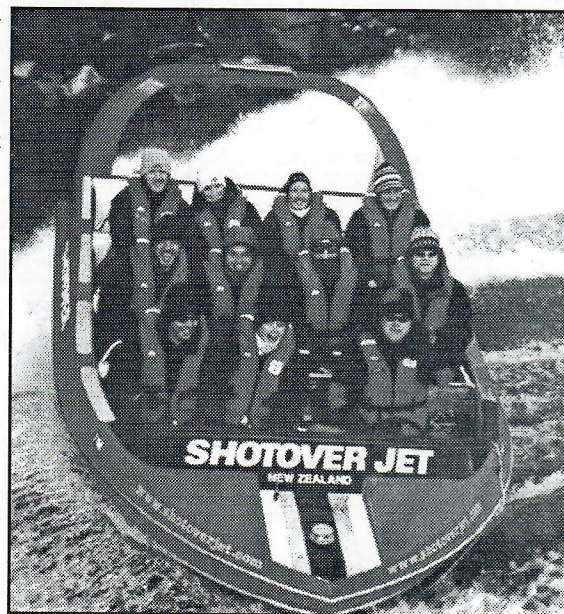
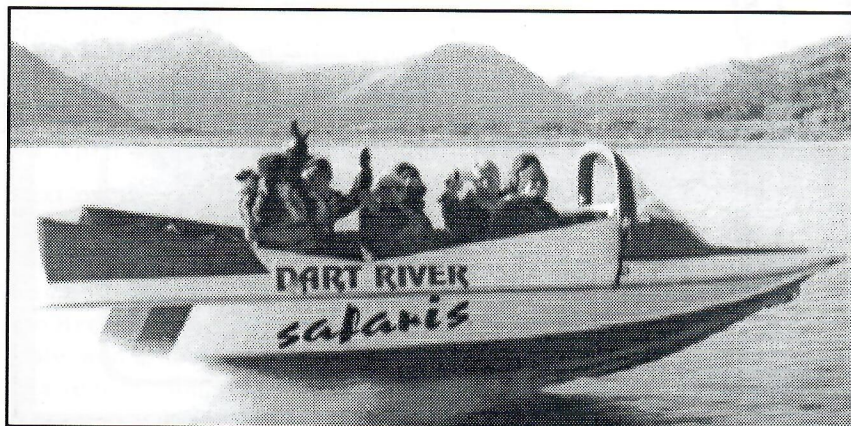
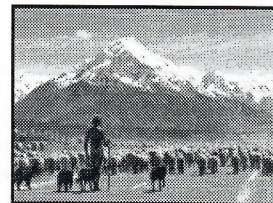
time, home to hotel, was about 24 hours, and included crossing the equator and International Date Line. Arrival in Nadi, Fiji was at the wicked hour of 3:15 a.m. Monday (17 hours ahead of Houston). **Carol and Eric's** luggage did not arrive. They had upgraded to First Class, but their luggage tags kept a final destination of LA, not Fiji. With a small compensation by Air New Zealand, they purchased "Island" style clothing, until their bags arrived.

**SUNRISE AND SUNSET SAFARI** - Shortly after arrival, a group went on the *Sunrise Safari Tour*, driving to a high point over Nadi to watch their first sunrise in Fiji. The group saw countryside, forest, and sugar cane fields. A later group went on the *Sunset Safari Tour*, and were treated to a beautiful sunset, the traditional kava ceremony and a lovo dinner. The southern sky filled with beautiful stars was a nice ending to the first day in Fiji.

**SAILING** - The Sheraton Fiji Resort offered catamaran sailing lessons.

**Concietta** and **Ann** became sailing fanatics, joined by **Rob Smith** (Austin ski club) for a sailing adventure. The adventure was short lived as their boat stuck rocks near the shoreline, only to be rescued by the sailing instructor. Others rode a

100' sailboat to a small island for the day, where the group completely demolished the on-board supply of alcohol after one hour. **Leigh** chartered a 37' catamaran from Captain Valentino, and was joined by **Thuy, Suzanne, Carmen, Ellen, Tor** and **John** for a day of sailing. Thirteen islands silhouetted against the sky and a beautiful sunset





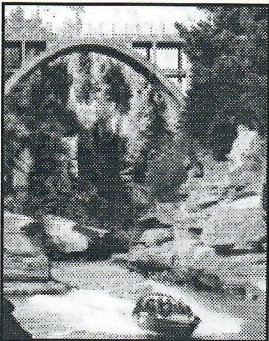
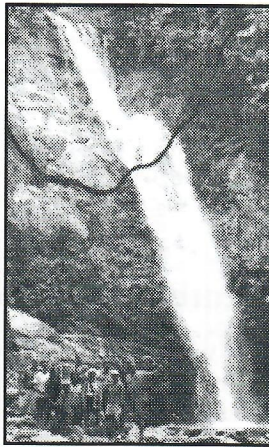
ended the day.

**SCUBA DIVING** - Fiji is known for world-class diving. Two new divers, **Mike** and **Patti**, made their first ocean dives. They joined Dive Tropex, and experienced divers **Chuck** and **Karen**, to some popular dive sites. The many colors, sizes, and species of fish were amazing to see... especially brilliant were blue starfish.

**Diane, Ross, Ellen, Bob, Kelly** and **Kelsey** chose an unusual dive – the Aqua Trek 3-D Shark Encounter. Minutes from shore in Beqa Lagoon, divers took the plunge, descending to 100 feet. One dive master opened a trash can full of chum, and thousands of fish of all species swarmed for dinner. The divers appeared to be an audience in a movie, mesmerized by the abundant fish life. When sharks appeared, first in the distance, then up close and personal, they took no notice of the lined up divers. The group watched a fish-feeding frenzy at a shallower safety stop, finally entering the boat after an hour of being part of the fascinating underwater natural habitat.

**GOLF** - **David** and **Leigh** were joined by a rookie golf player, **Gloria**, at the beautiful course at the Sheraton Fiji Resort. The two male players managed to lose almost all the golf balls they pilfered in the numerous water hazards, but **Gloria** held on to hers!

**ISLAND TOURS** – Exploring beyond Nadi took the group to: *Garden of the Sleeping Giant*, an orchid farm on beautifully landscaped acres; *Kula Eco Park*, a native wildlife park; *Savu Na Mate Laya*, a large waterfall where we posed for photos, after a hike deep into the jungle, across eight streams; *Viseisei*, an original Fijian village; and *Kalevu South Pacific Cultural Centre*, where one could learn the history and customs of Fiji.



Fijian for “Hello” is “Bula”. **Ross**, driving a rental car with three passengers (on the left side of the road), became slightly distracted and the car’s front tire went off the road into a muddy ditch. A man approached, offered to help, said “Bula Bula”, and left. **Ross** went for help, returning with a group of men. Ten people could not lift the small car out of the ditch. The native wanders back, leading two huge bulls connected by yoke, who then easily pull the car from the ditch! It seems the Fijian was originally saying “Bullock Bullock” (Fijian for “Bull”)! The bulls were dubbed “The Fiji Tow Truck Co.”

### ADVENTURES IN NEW ZEALAND

Fiji to New Zealand entailed a major climate change and the donning of winter clothing. With numerous choices for activities around Queenstown, the group divided up daily and went many different directions as they chose to ski, experience “Adrenaline Sports”, or take Group Tours. **Ed** rented a car and explored New Zealand’s South Island. **Sue** explored Queenstown by city bus while shopping for souvenirs.

**SKIING** – “Kiwis” are New Zealanders; Kiwis that ski are “skiwis”. This being a ski club trip, some felt compelled to ski here, including **Denise**, on her first SCSC ski trip. While many opted for other activities, **Carmen** and **Tor** skied 4 days. Twenty skied *Cardrona* the first day, the largest group all

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week. Although close to Queenstown, the drive up the mountain required chains. Also in the area: **Treble Cone**, known as the “Jackson Hole” of the Pacific; **The Remarkables**; and **Coronet Peak**, which locals call “Concrete Peak” due to the hard packed snow. Overall, the snow and weather were ideal ski conditions.

**ADRENALINE SPORTS** – Some chose thrilling activities, such as the **Jet Shotover**, a high-speed jet boat ride through narrow canyons on the Shotover River. **Penny, Kelsey, and Kelly** took the plunge, fearlessly **Bungy Jumping** head first, and down 129 feet, off of the Kawarau Bridge, while a large cheering squad watched. Eleven chose an incredible combination of a 12-minute **Helicopter Ride**, across barren land and vineyards, to snow-peaked mountains, where they outfitted in red coveralls for **Snowmobiles**, crossing pristine fields of snow under a blue sky.

In Queenstown, a **Gondola Ride** rose to a scenic overlook at the Skyline Restaurant, high above the city, where we had our final night’s group dinner. You could also take a chair lift above the Gondola to the **Luge Ride**, for a choice of “scenic” or “fast-paced” tracks. Or, like **Bob and Ellen** you could hike from the restaurant to the **Tandem Paraglide**: a steep 20-minute hike, a quick explanation, and the guide and customer literally run and jump off a “perfectly good mountain”. The paragliders float with the wind, spinning slowly downward to a gentle landing.

**DART RIVER** – On a perfectly grand day with puffy clouds, bright sun, and moderate temperatures, fourteen took a scenic excursion by bus along Lake Wakatipu, and through the area where much of **the LORD OF THE RINGS** was filmed, arriving at Glenorchy. The Dart River Valley was especially

magical and majestic and included a hike through a wondrously primeval beech forest. The group then divided into two boats for a fast-paced ride down the Dart River. **David** kept his signature cowboy hat on even as he won “Wettest with Clothes On Award”. The boat driver swamped him during the many “360” spins with the boats.

**HIKING** – Swinging bridges, deep in an enchanted forest, highlighted the **Routeburn Track**, one of the world’s outstanding treks. Tiny dripping rivulets squeezed through spongy stone, covered with all manner of moss, fungus, and lichens. Monstrous green rocks peopled the sun-rayed glades. In awe were the four small transient humans, **Suzanne, John, Carol and Eric**, who were privileged with brief membership in this land of wonder.

**SAFARI OF THE RING** – **Gloria, Carol, and Eric** took a tour to Middle Earth, enjoying high tea at Lothlorien, the Misty Mountains, Isengard, even braving the road to Mordor, but wisely turning back before approaching Mount Doom. **Gloria** became especially popular with super-guide Del when she characterized a kiwi as

‘about the size of a turkey’ and referred to kiwis as ‘critters’ ... seems these terms are considered less than complimentary in kiwi-ese! Gloria’s enjoyment of this tour was all the more notable in that she was the only person ever to take this tour WHO HADN’T SEEN THE MOVIE!

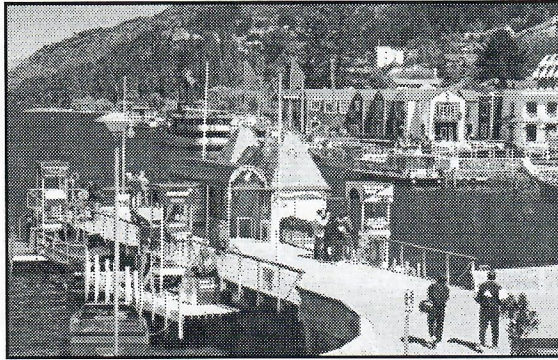
**MILFORD SOUND** – Twenty-two ventured on a day trip to Milford Sound. The tour crossed diverse landscapes from golden fields, tropical rain forest, towering granite peaks, beautiful waterfalls and incredible water. The day featured Mirror Lake, a hike through the woods, waterfall at the Chasm, driving through Homer Tunnel, and a spectacular cruise through Milford Sound, turning back at the Tasman Sea. The scenery of towering mountain peaks with beautiful waterfalls was magnificent. Playful dolphins accompanied the boat’s return to port. During the cruise, **Steven** accepted an additional job as translator for a Chinese tourist group.

**WINE TASTING** – The conclusion of sixteen that enjoyed the wine-tasting tour of famous vineyards was, “*The decibel level increases proportionally with the amount of wine intake, and inversely proportional to tour guide story telling.*” Early in the day, the group boarded a bus in orderly fashion, obediently listened



**Continued on page 14**





to the tour guide, but after sampling eight wines at two vineyards, they became quite animated! After lunch and the third vineyard, the guides lost control of the group, many creating “mutiny” wanting to shop in Arrowtown, so the guides gave up and told the group to return to the bus in one hour. **Thuy** summarized, “A wonderful day was owed all to those “little grapes”.

**TSS EARNSLAW** – Several groups boarded the *TSS Earnslaw* (named after the highest peak in the region), for a boat ride across Lake Wakatipu. At Walter Peak High Country Farm, a gourmet evening buffet was served prior to a sheep-shearing demonstration by a Kiwi local, and a sing-along session on the return boat ride.

**DUNEDIN** –Six stalwart adventurers followed **David** on a trek to the city of *Dunedin* on the East Coast, and to *Otago Peninsula*. Two carloads hired Arthur, a jolly Scottish tour guide, for a city tour, including the historical Railroad Station, Baldwin Street (the steepest street in the world), plus the spectacular harbor view from Tower Mountain. Otago Peninsula provided getting close to fur seals and the yellow-eyed penguin, an endangered species, as they popped out of the sea. On the drive back to Queenstown, the group searched for quaint New Zealand cuisine in Alexander at 9:00 pm. Unfortunately, the only restaurant open was a KFC!

**BUDDY AWARDS** – Each of us was assigned a person to whom we would present an award at the last evening’s group dinner. One which brought laughter was **Thuy’s** award to **Ross**. “Ross brought numerous “super-size” bags filled with audio/video equipment. He has state-of-the-art underwater photography equipment for diving, numerous digital cameras and tiny Sony camcorders for land purposes, which he downloads every night onto his laptop. He even brought his HAM radio

to communicate to home, like E.T. **Thuy** and others developed a condition, AVEE (Audio/Video Equipment Envy).” For his award, she bought him something he would never buy..... a disposable camera.

**Nora** received the “Hard Luck Award”, as she was sick several days in Queenstown and missed activities. **Patti** gave her several souvenirs collected on tours she called, “A Trip in a Bag.”

#### SIGHT-SEEING IN SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

On August 10, twenty boarded the plane to return to Houston, while twelve ventured to Sydney, Australia. The first night **David**, **Concietta**, **Penny**, **Alice**, and **Dale** traveled to at the top of the AMP Tower (1,000ft) to experience the *Skytour* journey through Australian landscapes. The attraction uses technology to showcase the different areas of Australia with the movement of a roller coaster ride.

The entire group enjoyed a city sightseeing tour, a buffet luncheon while cruising Sydney Harbour on the *Captain Cook Tour Boat*. During the Sydney visit, some explored the restaurants in Chinatown and some toured the *Darling Harbour* area. **Kelsey**, **Kelly**, **Deborah** and **Rita** went to the *Tanonga Zoo*, saw kangaroos, an emu chased them, and enjoyed seeing native creatures. **Diane**, **Ross**, **Alice** and **Penny** made the 3-hour Bridge Climb to the top of *Sydney Harbour Bridge*, for a breathtaking view.

The final day’s highlight was the *Opera House*. Some took a day tour, while others attended the evening opera. In a city of 4 million there is so much to see and do – the group agreed they needed more time. However, after seeing three different countries in 3 weeks, on August 14, the last twelve people had to return to “normal lives.”