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## "A Different Light"

### **A Different Light - 5 June 2021 "Ice place"**

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Was it cold? Yes. Freezing? Borderline! It was Dunedin in the twilight days of Autumn after all, so what else should I expect, the Sahara? My wife Sally was going down to a meeting in the deep dark South, so I decided to take a few days off work and tag along with her for a mini break, an escape from the cold weather into far colder weather. When we were planning our foray to the bottom of the country we looked into what there was to do down there. There's the semi-historic Larnach Castle, with a garden of International Significance. Then there's the Royal Albatross Centre (not that I'm into birds that much, but Albatrosses sound pretty spectacular, ask the ancient mariner!). Tours of the Coast by boat are also available, apparently allowing one to see wildlife such as sea lions, seals and dolphins. However, after further research we realised that all these attractions were a fair way out of the CBD, meaning we would have to hire a car to get there. As we only had one day that we were both free being the Saturday, hiring a car did not seem worthwhile. We decided that we would stick to the centre of town and make this trip an urban experience, staying close to the metropolis of Dunedin.

We got there midweek, late in the day. Going outside the airport at dusk we were hit by what felt like a wall of cold air. Admittedly it was still around 8 degrees but hey we are from Northland and anything below 20 degrees feels positively frigid. I remember the last time I went to Invercargill. In the anticipation of the cold temperatures, I wore long johns and a thermal top under my suit. We went straight into a meeting from the airport to a well heated building. Ten minutes into the meeting I started sweating. I thought I was going to expire through heatstroke. I had no way of discarding the thermal wear until the end of the day. I wasn't going to make that mistake again.

The next day Sally went off to her meeting, leaving me solo for the day. Determined to go out and have a look around the city, I ventured forth on my scooter with my phone for directions. On my scooter I find that I am fairly navigationally challenged, I seem to get my bearings fairly

fast when I am driving a car but on my scooter at street level, I seem to get hopelessly lost. My theory is that I never use to walk that far around urban environments so I never learnt to navigate them. It's only relatively recently when I started using a mobility scooter, that I started to cover urban ground at pace and in quantity. I remember a couple of years ago meeting a friend in Wellington for dinner who lived locally. Afterwards I went to scoot back to my hotel but got horribly lost, asking locals for direction that were always conflicting, sending me deeper and deeper into dark streets. By the time I found the hotel the only people out and about were the odd drunks shouting and wailing in the distance.

Anyway, back to Dunedin. As I trundled along, the environment seemed to get bleaker and bleaker, everything looked beige and grey. The people had a beige and grey look as well. Everything seemed to have a gritty and a beaten down feel to it. Not wanting to venture too far in case my battery died, or I got lost, I opted for the first accessible café I came across and then after a bite to eat and a merlot I made a beeline back to the cocoon warmth of the hotel room.

On the second day Sally finished her meeting in the afternoon and we set off again into town under Sally's superior navigational skills. We headed for the Octagon, the centre of town. Progress was somewhat slow as Sally insisted on looking in several shops to quench her shopping thirst, which usually involves inspecting every item on sale, while I patiently enjoy the windchill factor outside. This thirst did not seem to be quenched as hardly any of the shops were diverse or quirky. Nothing seemed to pique her interest. Even at the Octagon nothing seemed to stand out. Back we went.

On the third day the weather was bleaker, greyer, add rain to the mix and an urban excursion did not seem that appetising. We set off for a quick trip to get provisions which consisted of sparkling Pinot noir and battered Bluff oysters, and we hunkered down. It was the highlight of the trip. One day we will do a pilgrimage back to the deep South and extend our radius of adventure to the outskirts of Dunedin, in the meantime we are happy with the comparably winterless North.

*Jonny Wilkinson is the CEO of Tiaho Trust - Disability A Matter of Perception, a Whangarei based disability advocacy organisation.*