

SCHLITZ GOES TO NEW ZEALAND!!!

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WWOOFing in New Zealand (Willing Workers on Organic Farms)

January 3rd, 2006 – March 21st 2006



New Zealand



New Zealand is a geologically and biologically unique country in the southwest Pacific. It is located 2000 km from Australia and consists of the more populous northern island, and the more environmentally diverse southern island. With a population of about 3.9 million, about 15% is the native Maori group. The people are principally involved in agriculture – the islands boast 13 times as many sheep as people.

Geographically and biologically New Zealand is spectacular. It ranges from long coastline, to high Alps. There are significant mountain ranges in the islands, meaning less than a quarter is less than 200 m above the sea. The South Alps in the South Island have over 220 peaks above 2300 m. They boast over 360 glaciers. Since New Zealand is located along a fault line in the Pacific, it contains its share of volcanoes. It also is one of a few countries in the world with impressive Fjords, located in Fjordland National Park in the South Island. The country also contains a number of species unknown anywhere else, since it separated early from other continents. The animals have had time to evolve into diverse species, such as the kiwi bird, rare frogs, and a variety of flora.

New Zealand also has a striking history. Originally uninhabited by people, the Polynesians crossed the sea to the islands between 950 and 1130 c.e. and settled them. They lived there in well-structured communities until the first European explorers arrived in 1642. The early landing parties were somewhat distressed to discover the cannibalistic practices of the Maori. However, they got

over these initial setbacks and set out to purchase land from the Maori. By the 1790s whalers, traders and missionaries began to settle the islands. In 1840 the British heard rumors that the French were planning on colonizing the South Island and decided to move in. The Maori signed a treaty and the island became part of the British Commonwealth. Now New Zealand is an independent British Commonwealth. It is a progressive nation, having been the first to give women the right to vote in 1893, creating nationalized health care and economic reforms.

Now for some basic information on New Zealand. The exchange rate is \$1 US dollar for \$1.40 New Zealand dollars. Since New Zealand is in the southern hemisphere, the “winter” months of January through March are actually the summer, and the best season to visit. The international airport is located in Auckland, on the North Island. There is a good train and bus system connecting major cities and a few national parks. A ferry from Wellington to Picton links the two islands. Backcountry huts are scattered around the islands for hikers and hostels in the cities for urban travelers. There are a number of established “great tracks”, which are multi-day scenic backpacking trails. There is plenty of room to explore.



WWOOFing

WWOOFing stands for Willing Workers On Organic Farms. It was started in Autumn of 1971 in England by Sue Coppard who wished to provide access for people to the countryside. The initial event was a trial weekend at a bio-dynamic farm at Emerson College that met with significant success. It expanded from the UK to over 20 countries. Now it is a network of farms willing to accept

intern farm workers in exchange for room and board. The aims of WWOOF are listed as:

- enable people to learn about organic growing techniques
- enable town-dwellers to experience living and helping on a farm
- to help farmers make organic production a viable alternative
- improve communications within the organic movement

(www.wwoof.org)

WWOOFers are given a list of organic farms and are then responsible for contacting farms of interest and arranging a stay. While staying at the farm the WWOOFers live with the family, getting room and board, in exchange for labor. New Zealand has 897 farms in the WWOOF program. WWOOFers can be responsible for a range of tasks including herding sheep, planting, weeding, harvesting, selling food at farmer's markets, making bread and jam, cheese and yoghurt, planting trees, milking cows, farm maintenance, watching children and cooking meals. WWOOFers get to stay on a farm, learn about organic farming, and interact with people from the host country.

Why WWOOFing in New Zealand

The organic farm has always appealed to me since coming to Dartmouth. I've been to some farm events and workdays. This past summer I took envs 25, ecological agriculture, and became interested in learning about sustainable agriculture. Currently we are part of increasingly large-scale food production, with unsustainable techniques such as heavy fertilizer and pesticide use, use of heavy machinery which compacts soil, lack of crop rotation necessitating significant nutrient addition and use of poorly planned fields. I would like to gain knowledge about alternatives. Permaculture, the technique of careful planning to ensure the most efficient growing strategy, originated in the Australia/ New Zealand area. Furthermore, in modern society we are very unconnected with food production and consumption cycles. By visiting and working on farms in New Zealand I would take part in a growing alternative agriculture movement.

There are many reasons why I'd like to WWOOF in New Zealand. My first inspiration for New Zealand dates back to tenth grade when I initially heard about the geologic variety in the country. There is a wide range of landscape to visit, and I clearly would love to see the impressive array of country to hike through. Also, New Zealand has an interesting culture. There is the dynamic of the Maori and the more recent European settlers. The country also has been a source of democratic inspiration, and now has more socialized measures. Basically, New Zealand has been on my list of places to visit.

WWOOFing is a particularly good program in that I can interact closely with people who are making their living out of farming. I can experience cultural exchange with the locals instead of just visiting as an outside tourist. This appeals to me strongly as I would like to experience the culture as well as the farming and hiking aspects.

My Trip Plan

Map of New Zealand with my intended route



My main goal in going to New Zealand is to be a part of the WWOOFing program. I will spend most of my time working on three organic farms. However, while I am down there I clearly need to visit some of the fantastic national parks. So on travel time between the farms I plan to hike three of the 'great tracks': the Tongariro Northern circuit, the Abel Tasman track and the Milford track.

I will fly into Auckland, New Zealand on a January 3rd flight. Immediately I will head to my first farm 45 minutes out of Auckland. It is a small permaculture farm with connections to the local Maori tribes. I will spend two weeks helping with their farm operation (working about 5 – 6 hours a day 6 days a week).

Next I will travel south to Mt. Tongariro to hike the Tongariro Northern Circuit. It is about a four day walk over Mt. Tongariro and around Mt. Ngaurahoe. It crosses volcanic craters and glacial valleys, and contains huts to stay in every night.

Afterwards I will take the train to Wellington and catch a ferry to Picton on the South Island of New Zealand. From there I plan to go to Nelson and hike the Abel Tasman track. It is 51 km, or about 3 days. It goes through coastal forest and beach territory, and has huts in which I can spend the nights.

Next I will catch a train to Christchurch, at the beginning of February, where I will stay on another small organic farm with a variety of production about half an hour out of the city. I will spend a few weeks on the farm, working about 5 hours a day.

Next I will catch a bus to Dunedin and work on another organic farm for the end of February and first couple weeks of March. I will likewise work about 5 hours a day on the farm.

For the end of my time there I will travel to Fjordland National Park and hike the Milford track. It is 54 km, about 4 days. It starts North of Lake Te Anau, and then heads to Milford sound, through glacial valleys, alpine areas, waterfalls. It is labeled "one of the finest hikes in the world" by backpackerboard.co.nz.

My Background

Interests:

I have been studying earth science while supplementing with a number of environmental studies courses. I have been interested in earth science and environmental systems for awhile. I was involved in my high school's earth corps. At Dartmouth, my interests have turned towards getting students outdoors, to appreciate our local environment. I am a leader in Cabin and Trail and Dartmouth Mountaineer Club, as well as the DOC directorate, acting as president over the spring. This means I see a lot of new faces interacting with unfamiliar concepts in the outdoors, and growing inspired to get outside more. I've most enjoyed teaching people new elements of outdoor activity. Over the summer I took the course with Ross Virginia at the organic farm, Ecological Agriculture. While I had previously been interested in the Dartmouth's organic farm, working there occasionally, the course sparked new interest. We discussed a number of the techniques involved in sustainable agriculture, which I would like to see in practice.

Skills:

I have been playing in the outdoors since I could walk. My family went skiing, hiking and sailing together all my life. In high school I participated in endurance sports: cross country running, skiing and crew. Since coming to Dartmouth I have continued my activities in the outdoors. I have become quite involved in Cabin and Trail and the DMC, becoming a leader in both. I have done a bit of cross-country and downhill skiing on my own. I took a pe course with Ledyard this past summer. I have done some work with the organic farm. I have been involved in DOC directorate, acting as president this past spring. I am comfortable in outdoors activities, and ready to try the challenges of organic farming for a long period of time. I have first aid and cpr certification, and basic outdoors skills. I am competent hiking and farming. I have also traveled internationally before, and am competent.

I am looking forward to learning how to plan for a long expedition. Since I have led a number of shorter trips, I am using the same basic strategy of planning different parts on a much larger scale. I am enjoying the challenge of figuring out an extended trip on my own.



Risk Management

I realize there are a number of risks posed by this trip. I will break them down into the following categories:

- traveling alone
- farming
- hiking injuries

Traveling alone in a foreign country can be dangerous. Fortunately this is a relatively safe, first-world foreign country. They speak English, which is coincidentally my first language. However, I do need to take precautions to ensure that I am safe. I will give my parents a list of contact information. I plan to carry a cell phone and contact my parents at least once a week with my location and plans. I plan to minimize risks by employing common sense. I will make sure I stay in safe locations, and ride safe public transport.

Most of my time will be spent on the WWOOF farms. The WWOOF network tends to be very safe as the farms have a constant feedback system. When WWOOFers stay at a farm they are able to report that it was a good experience. I have had a number of email exchanges with the farms where I will be working, and plan to call to further assess that they are reputable. In terms of actual farming activities, my tasks will consist of low – technology labor. I will not operate heavy machinery, thus significantly lowering my chances for injury. Furthermore, since the farms are organic, they do not use dangerous chemicals on the crops. In case I was injured, none of the farms are located very far from a city. A benefit of New Zealand is their universal health care which extends to visitors. Thus I would be able to get good health care if anything happened.

Finally, I plan to do a little hiking in my time in New Zealand. The three areas that I plan to hike are well-traveled, especially during this peak travel season. I will be able to ask for help should I sprain my ankle, or otherwise have problems. Furthermore, I am first aid and cpr certified, and have read a few books on backcountry medicine. I will carry a comprehensive first aid kit. I will make sure to leave my parents with a date of return from each hiking expedition.

While there are risks, they are within the range of reason, and can be managed effectively.

Benefit to the DOC

Why is this a great trip for the DOC to fund? Because it's awesome. But not only that.

The most important part of this trip is sharing the experience with others. Currently we are not very connected with food production. After learning about sustainable agriculture in New Zealand I want to pass on my new knowledge.

First of all, being a leader in two clubs, I am in a good position to pass on knowledge informally. I will gain the new skills of permaculture, and first hand knowledge of organic farming. I will also gain cultural experiences. But furthermore, I would like to present what I learn: sustainable agriculture practice, how to go about WWOOFing, and travel in New Zealand. And finally, I would like to write up a short journal (with photos!) of my experiences WWOOFing, in the hopes that others will be inspired.

We haven't had too many farming trips, and no WWOOFing trips so far, so this would be a good new skill set to tap. Furthermore, the close contact I will maintain with the local farm community will be a new addition to simply visiting a country for adventure.

And yes, I will write a fantastic woodsmoke article.

Budget

Travel: Airplane	\$2500
Travel: On the islands	\$800
Train: Auckland to Wellington roundtrip	\$300
Ferry: Wellington to Picton roundtrip	\$100
Train: Picton to Christchurch roundtrip	\$200
Bus fares (other locations)	\$200
Food: Travel days	\$400
Lodging: Travel days, hut pass (\$100)	\$300
WWOOF membership	\$30
Total	\$4030

I am also applying for Dickey or Tucker funding, but their decision is pending.

I am asking for:

 Low figure: \$500

 High figure: \$1000

This would be put towards covering the cost of airfare to New Zealand.