



THE SOUTH ISLAND OF NEW ZEALAND FROM THE ROAD

ROBIN MORRISON



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To Dinah, Jake and Keir

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PREFACE

From the Road is a personal photographic view of the South Island of New Zealand. I have loved the South Island for many years, and in 1979 I was able to express that feeling by spending six months photographing the land, its people and the mark they have left on the country.

This island is usually photographed by and for those whose only visual reality is the scenic and the picturesque. The photographs in this book present an alternative view.

I travelled 18,000 miles with my family into most corners of the South Island, but concentrated more on the areas that held my eye — in particular Central Otago. We stayed in the holiday houses of friends and enjoyed the space and sense of being on the edge that we so rarely have in the closeness of a city.

While the title *From the Road* cannot be taken too literally, it does convey the found, unplanned way in which the photographs were taken. With the help of a Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council grant, I was able to work without the usual restrictions of time to evolve a view of the South Island that was finally edited into this book.

The view shown reflects to some extent the analytical eye of a visitor, but this apparent detachment belies my deep feeling for the landscape and the people who live in it.

THE NORTH

The photographs in this book show several different approaches to looking at the South Island. First there is the documentary one, where the photograph has recorded a particular place or event — the interiors of houses, the reflection of a car in a shop window, people riding by on a tandem.

Then there is the landscape, but not the usual South Island most of us are familiar with. These landscapes are more personally defined.

There is also the architecture and its effect on the landscape. And this architecture, sometimes bizarre and grandiose, sometimes simple, charming and hospitable, says a lot about the people who live in the South Island. These people are another important part of my photographs.

Colour is a very special aspect of the South Island, especially the way ordinary people use it. Blue, green and pink are often used in the painting of buildings. It's to do with people's art, the way they paint their structures.

To drive through the South Island is a joy. There is little traffic, the roads are well-formed, and you really have a chance to drive and look at the same time.

The first photograph in the book is a good introduction to the South Island. It is of Cape Farewell, an isolated and interesting part of the Island. When you look at that photograph you can hear the soft clattering sound of the wind from the Tasman Sea through the cabbage tree leaves.

The second photograph is also evocative of the sea, this time in Golden Bay — still and calm and shallow, providing a contrast with the seas on the West Coast and the rugged coasts further down.

There is only one road to Golden Bay, over the Tākaka Hill. It's a hard, high climb. The people who live in Golden Bay have that isolated, on-the-edge look about them. Like the people who have built a house for their mother at the Pākawau camping ground (image 3).

The Bainham Post Office (image 5) is the last outpost of any civilisation before the Heaphy Track — that long walk to the West Coast. The Post Office has a Victoria Regina letterbox and the old Frosty Jack ice-cream sign. The whole place looks really well used. I fancy collecting my mail from one of these postboxes.

Then you cross to an area like Nelson, which is still in the north but quite different. It's more settled, and intensively farmed. You can see the terrible desecration of the landscape by the Forest Service (image 6), surrounded by beautiful orchards.

The buildings in the Nelson area (images 7–10) proclaim themselves. It's almost as if the people who built them said, 'We're not going to let the landscape dominate us. We're going to leave our mark here.' Their religious buildings, like the Gospel Hall in Tasman and the Assembly Hall in Stoke, really shout; the architecture and the titles painted across the front appear to say, 'We're here to stay!' It's a strange mixture of isolation and decoration. You can see it too in the gates as you go into the sportsground at Ward (image 18).

Cabbage trees, Cape Farewell.





Cloud at Pākawau, Golden Bay.

2

Bevin and Denise Langmuir, the owners of the Pākawau camping ground. They are building a room for her mother, who has come to live with them.

3

Cabin at Pākawau camping ground.

4





