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Lockdown in Waitangi

- Last Updated 29 Sep 2021

Geologist Hamish Campbell shares his experience of getting stuck on the Chatham Islands during lockdown.

I was one of eleven who arrived on Chatham Island as participants in the inaugural 2021 Chatham Islands Festival of Science.

The others included David Johnston, Kelvin Tapuke, Jennifer Lillo and Brandy Alger from Massey University, Aneika Young from the Cawthron Institute in Nelson, Lisa Murray from Metservice in Wellington, film-maker Julian Thompson, engineering geology consultant Matt Ryan (from ENGEO) and his partner Ailsa Robertson, and Jackie Gurden (Tourism Chatham Islands).

We had a splendid first day on Tuesday 17 August, with a science-based field excursion to NE Chatham and

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various interactions with Kaingaroa School.

Level 4 lockdown hits

That evening it all turned to custard. Level 4 lock-down conditions were imposed at 11:59 pm.

Four of the group escaped home to the mainland on the Wellington flight the next day. The rest of us who chose to stay split into two bubbles with four (David, Kelvin, Jennifer, Brandy) based at 'Whareweka', and the remaining three of us became part of the Hotel Chatham bubble.

After a few days, Hotel Chathams closed and we three were on our own, occupying two of the self-contained units (Kopi and Schist) in the Forget-Me-Not Suites along with builders, Murray and Sharon Sutherland.



Hamish and his home during lockdown

Exploring the local area

I count myself very lucky to have had Matt and Ailsa in the room next to me. They were outstanding company and we dined together for every meal.

Our day began with porridge every morning in my room, Schist (...of course!), we visited the Waitangi Store most days for essential supplies, and we went for short walks most days.

One notable long walk took us all the way to Red Bluff along the beach from Waitangi, and back home along the road.



My wonderful neighbours, Matt and

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Ailsa, at the 'black rock', Petre Bay



Some beach treasures

Getting to know the team

Matt is a geologist with a PhD from Victoria University. I have known him since 2008 when he was an undergraduate. Anyway, it turns out that he has expertise as an assessor for buildings that are ear-marked for demolition.

He approached the Chatham Council with the knowledge that the old (existing) Council offices will have to be demolished once the new build is complete.

Matt was encouraged to submit a quote for his services. And so it was. It just goes to show that there is a silver lining to every situation!

I am also very lucky to have been 'locked down' in the Forget-Me-Not Suites. They are state-of-the-art 'fish-bowls' with outstanding facilities, comfort and décor.

I take my hat off to Toni Croon and her team for building such marvellous accommodation. I could not have had better. I thank Simone Croon and Liz Fraser for their generosity and kindness as my suitably-distanced minders.



The 'fish-bowl'

In the last few days of my time in lockdown here in Waitangi, we went to Level 3 and we were able to extend our bubbles a bit when we enjoyed several wonderful dinner engagements with Jocelyn Powell and Kaai and Francesca.

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All in all Matt, Ailsa and I had a lovely time in lockdown. For all that we were here on the Chathams, we took it all very seriously indeed. To this day, there have been no cases of Covid-19 in the Chathams. Long may it last!

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