

Awed by Kiwiland

Richard and Bev are **Team Eat.Run.See**, two former South Africans now living in Vancouver. Follow their insights, experiences, and culinary quirks issue by issue from the countries and trails they visit on their multi-year vegan globe-running adventure.

On top of the world on the Kepler Track!

t **K**ia Ora! New Zealand will always offer you a very warm welcome. It's an amazing country with rich cultures, gorgeous and varied landscapes, more sheep than you can count, and an incredible network of running trails.

We spent three months running through fern forests, up craggy hillsides, around lakes, alongside the ocean, next to hot springs, and on the foothills of dormant volcanoes. New Zealand's twin islands are beautiful and safe, with plentiful resources and well maintained trails. In this issue we're reporting on a favourite run on each island:

SOUTH ISLAND **The Kepler Track**

The Kepler Track is a 60km loop located far down on the South Island in the Fiordland region. The track starts near the lakefront town of Te Anau, which is well set up as a base for all sorts of adventures.

The Kepler Track is typically hiked over three or four days, with nights in comfortable huts. We chose to run the route in one day, following the course and direction of the Kepler Challenge,

a popular annual trail run. We were self-supported and filled up our water reservoirs along the way at the hiking shelters.

This region is one of the more mountainous parts of New Zealand, and as you can tell from its name, Fiordland is known for its fiords!

This means that the Kepler Track has a fair bit of elevation, with a total gain (and loss) of 1,905m. It's a stunning course through the diverse ecosystems of Fiordland National Park.

The track starts next to Lake Te Anau, and winds its way through lush fern and mossy, tall forests along the lakeside. At the 6km mark the trail begins to climb, and climb, and climb for about 13km until you reach the highest point of the trail: Mount Luxmore at 1,472m. The views across the lake and towards the many fiords and gorges are breathtaking, and a wonderful reward after a hard climb.

A good stretch of exposed rocky ridge running offers toe-bumping, foot-sliding technical singletrack with loose gravel. The steep, quad-punishing descent into the valley provides a wonderful change of scenery, with

roots, stream crossings, and low-hanging branches to avoid! It also provides shelter from the often windy ridge (and it was incredibly windy the day we ran the course). The Iris Burn shelter at the bottom of the descent is roughly the halfway mark.

The second half of the track is mostly slightly downhill or gentle undulating pathway. This part of the course takes you through rare wetland, alongside rushing rivers, and through more lush, green fern growth. The air is clean and fresh, and it's an amazing feeling running free in this largely untouched part of the planet.

Along the way we encountered many friendly hikers, attempting the trek in either direction. The trail is wide enough in most places to accommodate runners alongside hikers. Ending the run back where we started, our 60km Kepler Track adventure took eight hours, with only an hour spent on flat terrain.

It was a fantastic day in nature, testing the heart, legs and lungs, and an abundance of opportunity to stretch the mind and challenge the spirit!

NORTH ISLAND

Tarawera UltraMarathon

What's better than running a 100km trail race? Running it in the spectacular Tarawera Forest! The Tarawera Ultramarathon is a world-class affair, offering a very runnable 100km course near touristy Rotorua.

It draws an increasingly large field of international superstars, including the likes of Mike Wardian and Dylan Bowman (the 2015 champion and new course record holder).

Race morning dawned (well, that's just an expression, since we got up at 4am, well before any hint of dawn) and we made our way to the start at the entrance to the magnificent Redwoods forest (with the help of our new Kiwi friends).

A goosebump-inducing rendition of the Haka performed by Maori dancers set the mood. After an amazing start, it didn't take long to settle into a comfortable groove amongst the majestic Redwoods that stood sentry in the early morning. A train of headlamps created a wonderfully eerie sight through the waking forest.

Bev and I quickly found our rhythm and before we knew it, we felt relaxed and confident. The first few kilometres passed uneventfully, listening to the nervous and excited chatter of those around us, and quietly hoping that we'd last all the way to the finish.

For me, this confidence started fading fairly soon afterwards. By the first aid station, 20km in, my quads started feeling unreasonably fatigued, and with another

80km to go, it didn't fill me with joy. I tried something new at the aid station: Marmite sandwiches! And it worked; the 17km to the next aid station felt really easy, and we enjoyed the camaraderie amongst the runners.

We were focused on getting to the 60km mark, since the final 40km were largely on forest roads, that offered beautiful, non-technical running with relatively little elevation change, but the section between 37km and 60km is also where the course makes you pay. It's advertised as the toughest part of the race and we'd have to wholeheartedly agree.

It's also beautiful, and unmistakably Kiwi. Majestic tree ferns, lakes, fast-flowing rivers, and roaring waterfalls line and criss-cross the ever rising and falling technical singletrack.

Our marginally more comfortable road shoes were waiting for us at the 60km mark and we were buoyed by only having 40 *easy* kilometres to the finish.

Soon we started feeling like we were going to make it, and upon reaching the aid station at 70km, it struck me as remarkable to see 30km as just a short hop to the finish.

Endurance athletes often report feeling a range of emotions during long events: nervousness, excitement, loneliness, friendship, self-loathing, and *love*.

Bev and I always go to the loss of our baby boy, Archer. Putting ourselves in these physically demanding situations helps us process that loss. On this day we experienced all of the emotions mentioned above.



Stronger together along 100km of beautiful Kiwi terrain.

Thinking about family and feeling their support always gives us strength and a sense of belonging.

Running the final 15km in the dark with only our headlamps illuminating a narrow cone in the darkness ahead, and only our footsteps and breathing piercing the cool silence, added meaningfully to the surreality of closing in on the finish of a 100km long run through some of the magnificent forests and countryside of New Zealand.

Finding the last turn towards to

finish was almost magical. Seeing the finish line, hearing our names being called out as we crossed that line was wonderful. But what was truly special, was the fact that many new friends were there waiting for us with our medals and hugs ready. 🏆

BEV & RICHARD ATTFIELD

Their journey started in Belize, Central America, and has taken them through 30 countries, including South Africa. eatrunsee.com

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▲ GOOD TO KNOW

- No direct flights from SA to NZ; Asia and Australia offer good connections.
- No visa is necessary for SA citizens visiting NZ for under three months.
- Currency is the NZ Dollar.
- There is no bad time to visit NZ, but February to April may be the best months as there are fewer people, and weather is mild.
- Good transportation network by bus, ferries, car, and plane.
- Easy camping and camper van access, with rentals available countrywide.

▲ YOUR RESEARCH STARTS HERE

- newzealand.com ■ ow.ly/S50zJM
- irunfar.com ■ camping.org.nz

▲ TRAIL RUNNING RACES

February [Tarawera Ultramarathon](http://taraweraultra.co.nz) (60km/85km/100km plus relays)

December [Kepler Challenge](http://keplerchallenge.co.nz) (27km/60km) keplerchallenge.co.nz

BEFORE
YOU
BOOK