

A Day in The Life of Mangere Bridge

Four years ago, I moved to Mangere Bridge when I returned from Australia. I have been privileged to have seen many dawn images such as this but you do, of course, need to get out of bed as early as possible. These sunrises over the Manukau Harbour are often spectacular and an early walk along the waterfront gives one opportunity for meditation and reflection. Sometimes in mid-winter, sunrise occurs after 7am and my bus to work used to leave at 6.45am so I often left home in the dark thus missing the sunrise. Living next to the water offers so much and encourages one to get up early and experience the day. On the occasional days when I do sleep in, I do miss the chirping of the birds, the rising of the sun and the gradual brightening of the day.



This is another view of a dawn across the Manukau Harbour towards the Onehunga Wharf – you see the lights of the wharf across the water. This harbour was in use a thousand years ago by the Māori residents of the region who travelled south to the Waikato and also north to the Hokianga and beyond. The thought of these waka (canoes) crossing the bar at the harbour head fills one with dread as the currents are particularly strong. The Manukau Harbour is the second largest natural harbour in NZ and there is a tidal variation of some 4 metres. This means that more than 157,000,000 m³ of water flows through the harbour entrance as the tide changes.

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One of the great pleasures of walking along the waterfront is the bird life which reside in or migrate to Mangere Bridge. In the foreground are seagulls which are permanent residents along the shoreline. In the background are South Island Pied Oystercatchers the breeding pairs of which migrate to the South Island during the winters. So sensible of them to spend the summers in Auckland! Other marine bird life include Spoonbills which I love to watch as they search and sieve the shallows for food. I am very pleased to say that New Zealand's only Kingfisher can also be found in the 'hood' and I have tallied up to least a dozen in a single count. Cormorants are frequently seen fishing in the waters, then drying out on the lava rocks on the shore. I have seen several flocks of mallard ducks who are also permanent residents. Godwits, wrybills, curlew sandpipers, white-faced herons are just a few more to name. "Birds of a feather, flock together"



Not every dawn at Mangere Bridge is clear. When the atmospheric conditions are right, mist fills the harbour and village and on more than one occasion, visibility was reduced to around 5-8 metres. We are only 6 kilometres from Auckland Airport which means that disruptions of flight schedules can and do happen a couple of times a year. Mostly the mist lifts, however, by late morning and schedules resume. The dark structures you can see in the photo is solidified lava which was laid during the several eruptions of Mount Mangere which provides the backdrop to the village. Don't panic – those eruptions happened some 70,000 years ago!

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And this is a photo of Mount Mangere. It is just 100m high and the volcanic peninsula covers an area of some 5 sq km. Interestingly, there are two craters on the mount, the larger of which has a volcanic dome – one of the few in Auckland. Given its prominent position around the Manukau Harbour, the volcano was the site of a fortified Māori settlement, called a 'pa'. Many archaeological features remain from this settlement period such as the kumara (sweet potato) pits, raised garden beds and stone boundary walls made from scoria. As scoria has a specific density greater than 1, it sinks in water whereas pumice (the other type of volcanic rock) floats. The local council has recently upgraded the pathway on the mount and this will no doubt encourage more visitors to the special site.



I have a special arrangement with Mount Mangere. As a token to my exercise regime, I walk around the mount, a circuit of some 7km. As I conduct this walk, I stop and have a chat with some of the non-avian residents of the village. The horses are members of a charity group which provide therapy for youth with disability. I carry either carrots or apples with me to give them a bit of treat. The sheep, however, are not so friendly – this is probably the closest I have approached them. And because there are so many, I am not able to provide treats (actually not a very good idea at all!). I only have two pieces of headwear and you see both here. The Great Circuit Walk takes about 75 min (if I don't talk too much).

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But what about the people of the village? Well, there is at least one who is not shy to share their feelings about our Prime Minister. You may know that Jacinda Ardern was the darling of the world after her appointment and the Christchurch massacre. But then covid hit. Although most citizens were initially very happy about the way on which NZ closed its borders and kept covid out but, since then the weakening economy, the mismanagement of MIQ and the frustration of lockdowns, her crown has slipped a little. The MB community is diverse with large groups of Pacific Islanders and Māori but you can also hear Chinese, Korean, Tagalog, German, Spanish, Vietnamese and many more languages as you sip your coffee at Ruby Red.



And this is coffee at Ruby Red. This is an amazing photo because as Derek (on the left) was concentrating hard on getting the selfie right and Andrew (on the right) and I giving our best smile, do you see the photo bomber in the red t-shirt behind me? Well, that is Dianna McGregor – my landlady. She had spotted us having coffee and was pushing her way through the crowd to come and say hello. Andrew and Derek are friends with Dianna's sister, Michelle, and it was through them that I found my perfect home in Mangere Bridge. Since then, the extended McGregor family (who have lived in Mangere Bridge for several generations) have added me to their whanau (family) and I am very grateful to all. But where do I live, I hear you ask?

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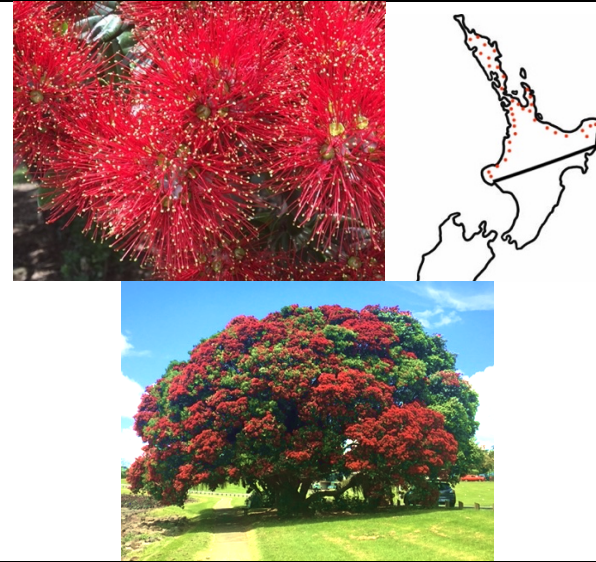
Here. Isn't this just the most amazing place? Okay, I have to be honest – the deck and garden are not technically part of my unit (but the McGregor's have always invited me to use them) but the building behind is my unit. My en-suite bedroom is 'upstairs' on the right and lounge/dining room/kitchen is 'downstairs' on the left. The harbour and walkway are literally 5m across the road and you can see the sign for the bus stop to the city right outside my unit. This is my 'happy place' and it is my intention to spend the rest of my days right here in this little piece of heaven.



Many, many years ago I stopped celebrating my own birthday. Having had many gatherings over the years, I just thought it was time to celebrate every day that we are alive. But these folk did not get the memo! Firstly, the McGregor's decorated my unit (something that has not been done for me for decades!) – thanks. Second, my niece in Canada, Kelly, sent a gift parcel against my wishes – thanks. And Derek and Andrew arranged a surprise dinner party to celebrate my BD – thanks. Okay, it was my 65th so I suppose celebrating my official retirement should have been 'a thing'. I am so grateful for all the friends in my life, scattered across the globe as you all are.

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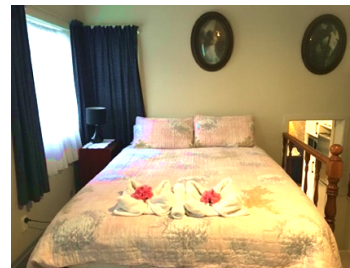
Since migrating to NZ in 1997, I have always been impressed by the Pōhutukawa tree – the flowers of which you can see in the photo on the right. It is hardly surprising then that it is referred to as NZ's Christmas Tree. It usually begins to flower in November each year and by Christmas, they are often in full bloom. The natural range of Pōhutukawa is the coastal regions of the North Island of New Zealand, north of a line stretching from New Plymouth (39° S) to Gisborne (38° S), where it once formed a continuous coastal fringe. I have grown to love them and eagerly await the first blossoms as Christmas approaches.



Just as in real life, not every day is filled sunshine, happiness and warmth. 'To everything there is a season' and living on the edge of a huge harbour can bring torrential rain, gusty wind and generally appalling behaviour! But this just makes life more exciting because it brings with change and the necessary adaptation which is so important in our lives. It may force us indoors with a book and a cup of coffee but these things, too, are also very important. As the world grapples with climate change, let us just remember that our earthly weather (and climate, too) changes and we need to change with it.

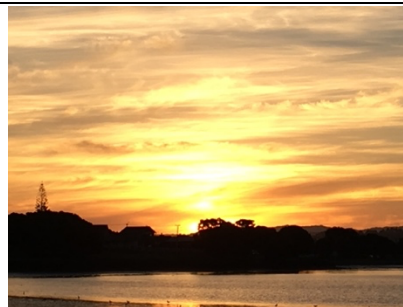
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When it's cold and miserable, this is where I retreat to. I am a member of the Auckland Library with a branch in Mangere Bridge Village and with the request and hold service offered, I collect my reserved books and retreat to either of these venues to enjoy my reading. Since I have retired, much of my time has been devoted to this activity and I am thoroughly enjoying the many hours spent reading to my heart's content. I don't read much fiction, though, preferring non-fiction including biographies, memoirs, travel stories and trying to keep up to date with world developments in politics, technology, and looking at end of life choices. It is such a pity that when one is working, one has little time to read.



I really do think we need to start thinking about different work vs life arrangements, perhaps only 'working' three or four days a week.

What do you think? Make it happen!



But one cannot stay indoors for too long – not when these scenes await you. It is towards the end of the day; work is done and you begin to think about the evening and the night ahead. I often grab a beer – or more usually a glass of prosecco – cross the road and sit and watch the sunset. And I have been so, so privileged to be doing this at this stage of my life. I have lived, loved, laughed - travelled, taught, trained – but above all, been able to choose what to do, when to do it and with whom to do it. My life has been richer because it has had you in it and I hope that I have been able to enrich your life, however small that may have been. I will not be here forever – so let us treasure the time we have right now – and waste a minute not!