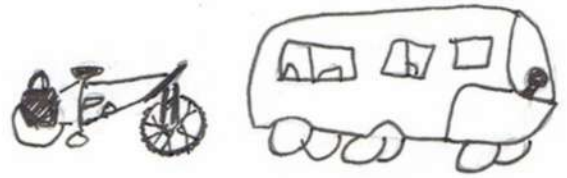




i had a low-carbon adventure
a compendium of expeditions

by shanti mathias + friends

Introduction



This is a sequel to my 2024 zine *How to Have a Low-Carbon Adventure*. When I wrote HtHaLCA, an acronym that doesn't roll off the tongue, I wanted to focus on the practical details of low-carbon travel. While I'm proud of the zine, this annoyed me after I had published it, mostly because I realised that I had used the word practical so much that it had lost a little of its impact.

Logistics *are* important. I remembered this at the end of December, eight months after finishing the first zine. Preparing for a multi-day bikepacking trip, my partner and I spent what felt like a full day decanting things into panniers in different combinations, looking for chamois cream and small tubes of sunblock. The next day, I felt almost dizzy with nerves as we waited in the diesel-scented cave that is the Intercity bus stop in central Auckland. I reread a guide to bikes and long-distance buses in Aotearoa, which is linked in the "Inspiration and Resources" page that accompanies this zine. Then the bus driver refused to take our bikes, which seemed like the worst thing that could happen. I booked us on another bus, and counted out dehydrated meals and kilometres for several anxious hours.

But once our bikes and our selves were on the bus, the fixation on logistics faded almost completely into the background. Instead, there was the joy of the journey. We spent four days biking from Rotorua to Wairoa. I ate breakfast by the side of the highway. I saw fat kererū swoop through the Te Urewera forest. I watched mist slide between the drowned valleys of Lake Waikaremoana. I talked to a man clopping bareback down the road on a black horse with his toddler, smoking. I stopped to sink my fingers into thick moss coating the roots of the trees. I felt strong, enchanted, transported: unable to imagine even wanting to be anywhere else.

There's an emotional side to low-carbon adventures. The aim of this follow-up volume, compiled from the generous contributions of friends and strangers, is to go beyond the "how" of low-carbon adventures. It's an extension of the appendix of trip ideas included at the end of the first zine, a ticket to some trips you could emulate in exact location or style.

I had a low-carbon adventure asks questions like: is a train trip along the east coast of Malaysia a story about a nostalgic past, or an optimistic future? Why should you bike to a music festival? What do the windy roads of Zanskar and Spiti, in the mountains of North India, teach us about our glaciated past, and our melting present? And what are the coordinates of a location in the South Island where a Moro bar might still be hidden?

From kayaking to buses, to trains both diesel and electric, with lots and lots of opportunities to bike along the way, this zine tells you where other people went, and what they thought about on the way. May it encourage and inspire you in your own joyful (though obstacle-filled) adventures.
-Shanti Mathias

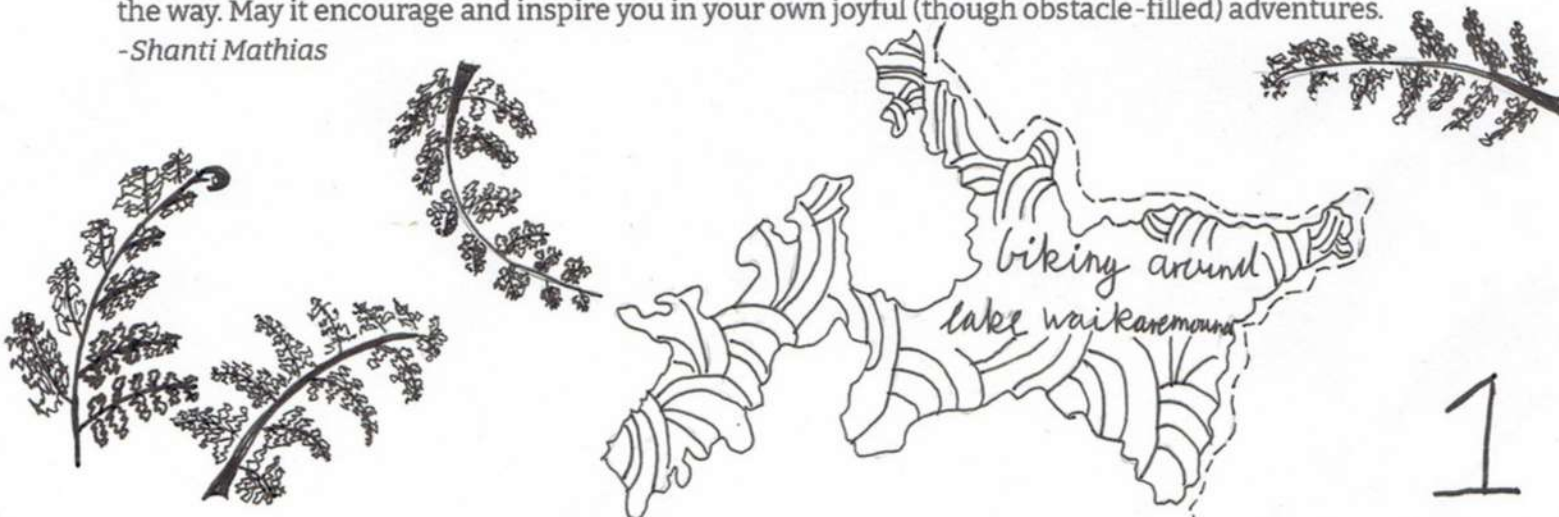
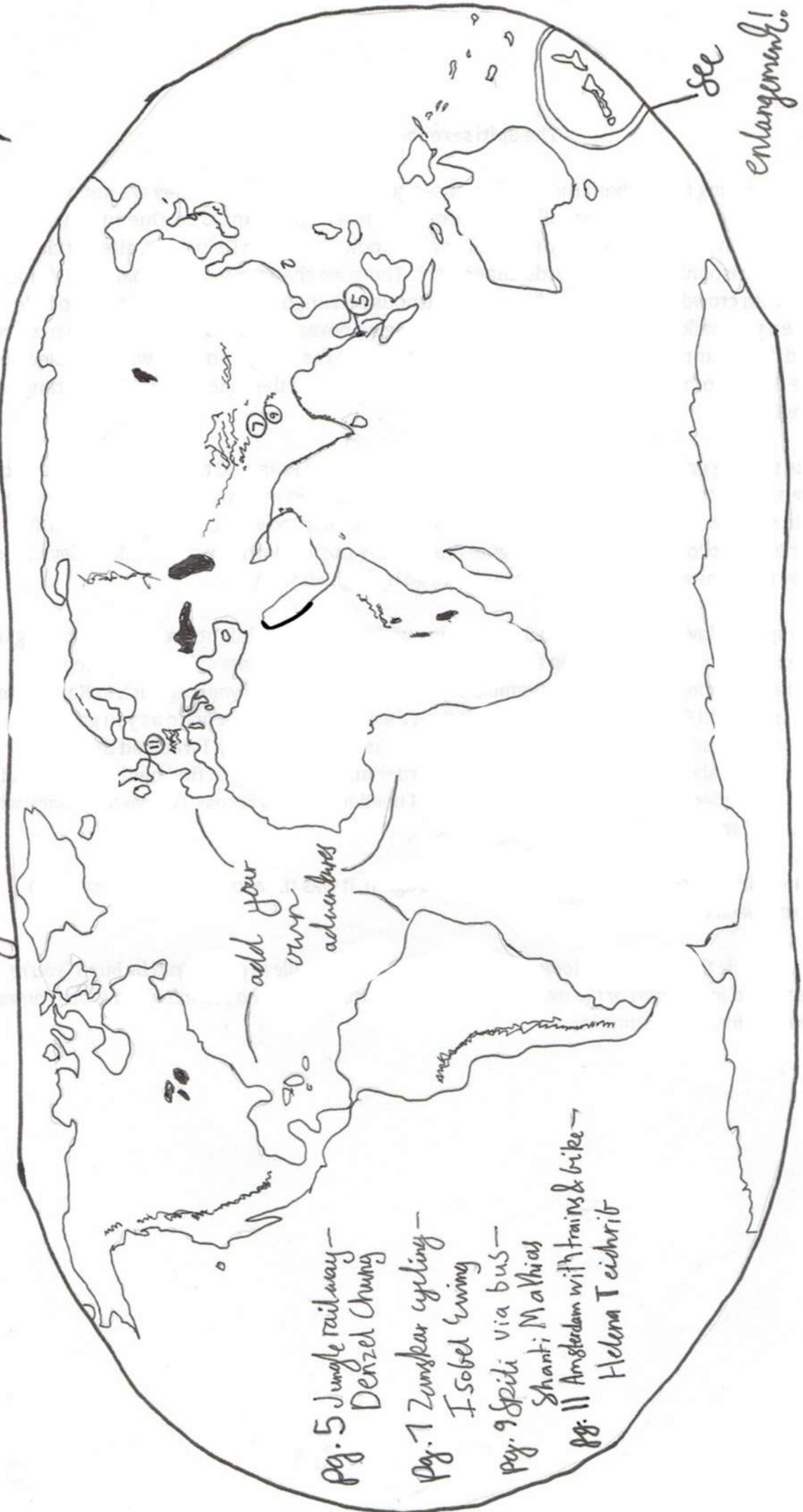


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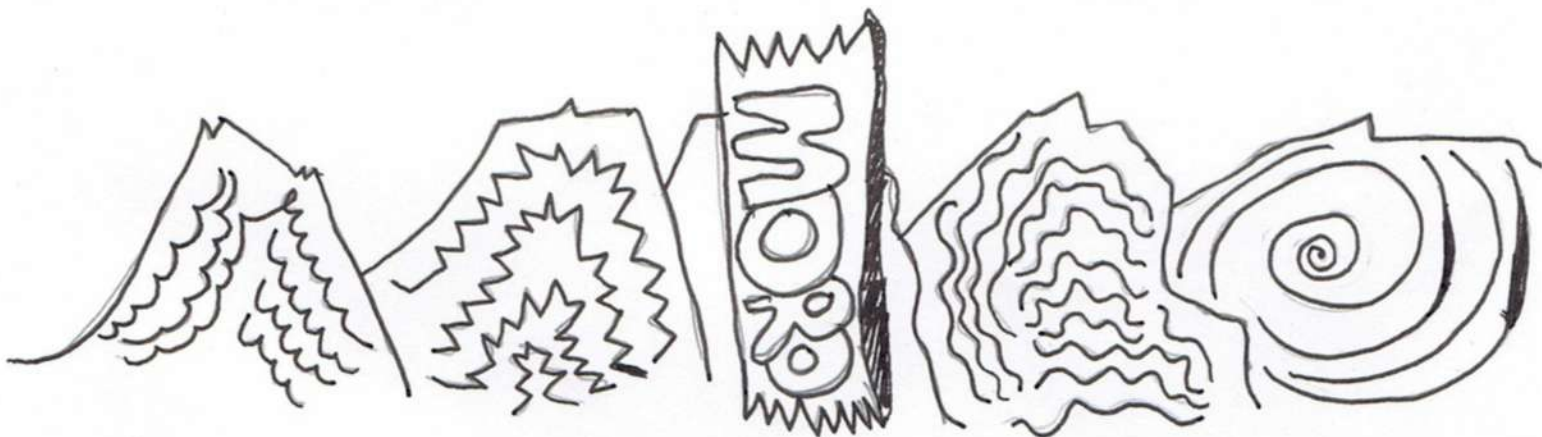
Where: Everywhere! (Picton, Arthurs Pass, Hokitika (+ remote road ends), Christchurch, Kaikoura, Picton). Around 1500 km of low carbon travel, a cost of about \$200, at midwinter 2023.

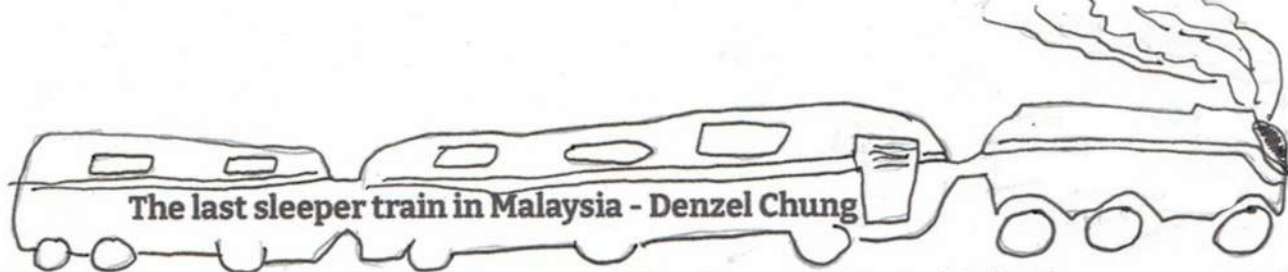
On this journey we used a combination of (primarily) hitchhiking, interregional buses, and the ferry to cross the Cook Strait. We went south with our packs, a few ice axes, many days of self dehydrated food, a vague idea of how far south we thought was reasonable, potential mountain ranges we wanted to explore but no real plans in place. The thing about low carbon adventures, especially when it's something you can't book, like hitchhiking, is you gain so much capacity for spontaneity, creativity, and freedom. You're not chained to any idea, because you can't be. You're fully at the mercy of strangers who are willing to give you a lift. That was the primary driver for this adventure. Freedom.

Our plans changed a lot. Depending on the weather, depending on who picked us up, how far we could hitch in a day, and random trip ideas that our drivers gave us. Our primary tramping excursions on this trip ended up being: Otehahe Hot Pools over to Edwards Hut, Traversing the Toaroaha Range, and climbing part-way up Snowflake to try and find Nicks moro bars he stashed under a rock over the summer before freaking ourselves out and turning back the next day (they're still under a rock at around 16,43422E, 53,17159N if you need a trip idea). But we gained so much more out of it than purely tramping.

You get a different kind of connection with a place when hitching. You meet local people, hear their stories, and have crazy discussions with people you otherwise would never have met. You witness real care, real compassion and generosity. You learn to have faith, that someone will pick you up, that you'll find somewhere to pitch your tent, that you can really do anything.

We're all adventurers, right? It's always been about the journey, not the destination. Remove the car. Pick a mode of transport. Give yourself 'x' number of days, buy a ferry ticket south, and surrender yourself to it all.





Malaysia's "Jungle Railway," its last operating sleeper train, has become a sleeper hit (hah) among tourists in the know, whether they are nature-lovers, nostalgia-nuts and knapsack-toting adventurers craving a taste of the "real" Malaysia. Rolling along the isolated east coast towards the northern border with Thailand, rattling vintage diesel engines, starched 80s linens and flag-waving conductors, languidly twining through forest and villages: something for everyone.

A sense of FOMO was behind my journey, the Jungle Railway is due to be replaced imminently by sleeker, speedier electric trains. I first travelled on the trains which traverse Kuala Lumpur's commuter belt to Malaysia's major cities at up to 140km/h (who says metre-gauge railways can't have nice things?). At RM20 (NZ\$7) for a 2 hour journey to Gemas (a sleepy town with all the charm of a reasonably-priced whitegoods display but, like a reasonably-priced appliance, it does the job it's meant to do, and does it well).

In Gemas, bleary-eyed close to midnight, I jumped onto the sleeper train proper: the quaintly-named "Ekspres Rakyat Timuran" ("Eastern People's Express"). Running the length of Malaysia's east coast and pulled by locomotives dating from the days of disco fever, everything about this train screams "time warp," from its clearly hand-painted livery to the passenger bunk's satisfyingly clicky light switches, to its fares (RM45, or NZ\$18, for an overnight bunk!).

I set an alarm to catch the sunrise, shining through the mist of deep rainforest; skipped to the front of the train to watch the trundling locomotive, horns blaring to every little village crossing; made small talk while attempting to decipher Thai-flavoured Kelantanese Malay in the bustling canteen. My 600km journey to Wakaf Bharu ended after nearly 12 hours – a leisurely trundle, at an average speed of 50km/h. (Unfortunately for low-carbon aspirants, you'll then need a taxi into Kota Bharu town proper.)

The trains are not flashy, but the Jungle Railway provides unrivalled reach into some of Malaysia's poorest and most isolated regions. The new electric trains have little of the Jungle Railway's nostalgic charm. From a low-carbon perspective, though, that's good news. Much of what makes the Jungle Railway charming for travellers makes it a nightmare for commuters; rattly, slow carriages and thickly-forested colonial-era tracks limit train speeds, frequencies and generally make choosing low-carbon travel a burden rather than a blessing.

When the new trains arrive, the Malaysian government has indicated fares will remain low and rural towns will continue to be serviced (some with new express trains, some with more frequent commuter units). Cynics may call it an anachronistic sop to an historically reliable rural voting bloc. I call it an anachronism in another way – an enduring legacy of an era when intercity public transport was a public good, not a privatised, personalised, profit-maximising venture.

So, while the Jungle Railway's imminent demise will be mourned by trainspotters and tourists alike, I, for one, welcome our new electric overlords.

Nostalgia is lovely. But usable trains are even better

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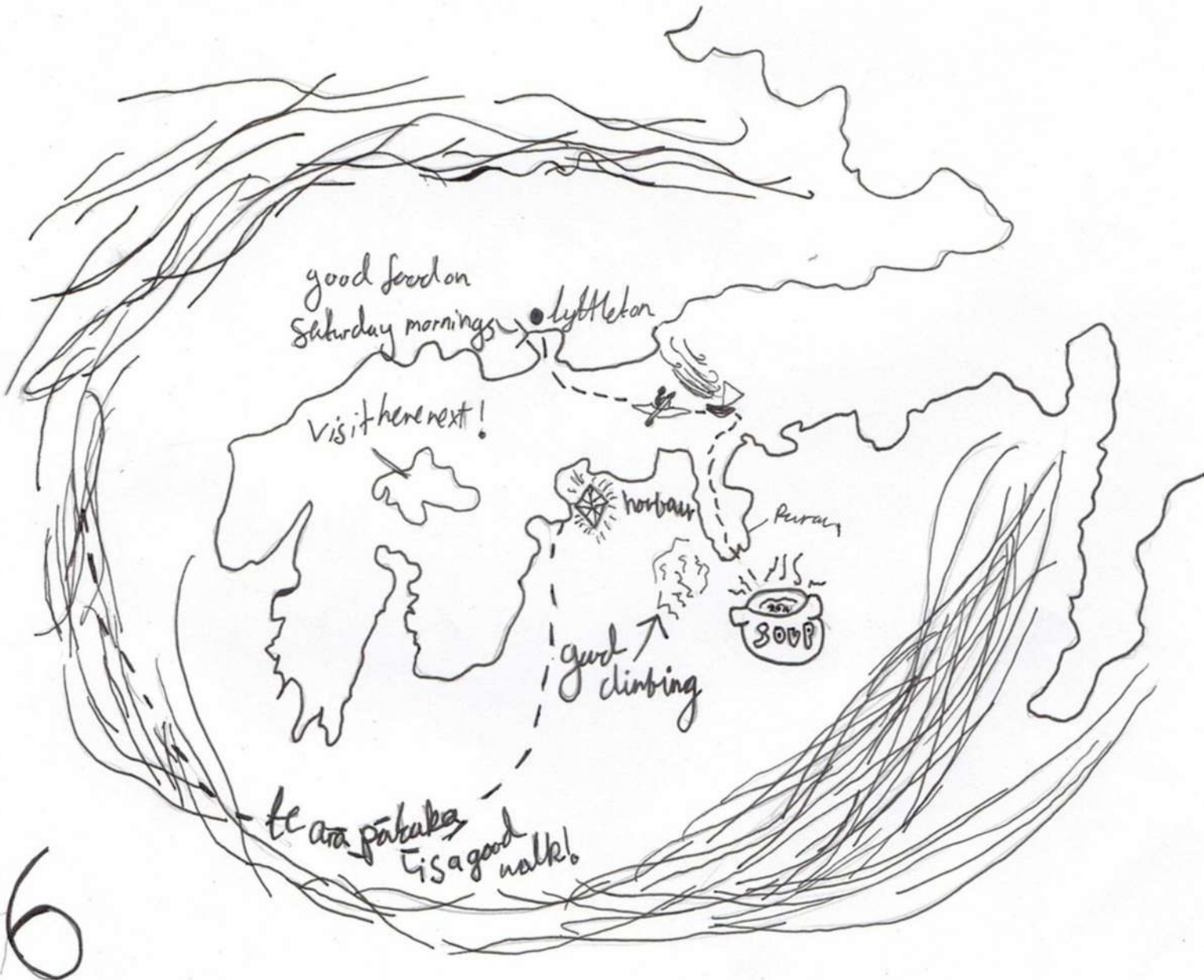
Banks Peninsula, Better - Adam Currie



We began the weekend at the Lyttelton Market, enjoying some beautiful kai and friendly company. We kayaked/sailed over to Purau, in an old dodgy fixed up boat and a howling wind! After battling staunchly against the wind, we eventually arrived at Purau Bay, where a friend has a collective piece of land there. You could also wild camp! After warming up with a hearty soup, the next day we walked over to the Diamond Harbour climbing crag - a fantastic introduction to climbing, easy moves above the beautiful harbour! if you're not into climbing, you could just have a walk around - or if you're a real ocean person you could bring a wetsuit and walk to the end of Stoddard Point and do some canyoneering making your way around the shoreline - clambering over/jumping off rocks making your way round Stoddard Point! Maybe even getting some kaimoana!

After a nice climb in the sun and a yummy picnic, we prepared to make the journey home over the harbour. It was a beautiful sail/kayak back home - with a tail wind sweeping us along; the seabirds soaring majestically above us and the ocean glittering blue.

Alternatives: Instead of going to Purau you could go to Diamond Harbour - or better, Otamahua/Quail Island!



Deep in the belly of Zanskar - Isobel Ewing



I rode my bike across the high altitude cold desert of Ladakh, deep into the belly of the Zanskar Valley where a wild brown river snakes below towering cliffs of purple, grey and orange. I felt at the mercy of the elements, heat searing my back and my tongue rasping against my dry mouth as I resisted the urge to sip from my ration of water. This is a region where climate change means yak herders are dwindling, their animals unable to bear the rising temperatures. I cycled over Singe La pass, gasping for oxygen in the thin air at 5000m above sea level, and I saw some yaks! Only a few, but I felt grateful to clap eyes on the creatures that may vanish from these plateaus before my children get a chance to see them.

As my tires skidded in euphoric descent down the other side of the pass I marvelled at the walls of marbled rock pushed from the Earth's depths by the collision of continents. This is a place shaped by raw, natural force. But new forces, the trapping of heat by endless pollution, is threatening this environment and the culture that supports life here. My fingers, poking out of my riding gloves, got heinously sunburnt that day. When I feel the slight bumps of scar tissue that remain on the skin on my joints I'm reminded of that harsh but astonishingly beautiful, otherworldly landscape. I am so happy I get to ride my bike in these places.

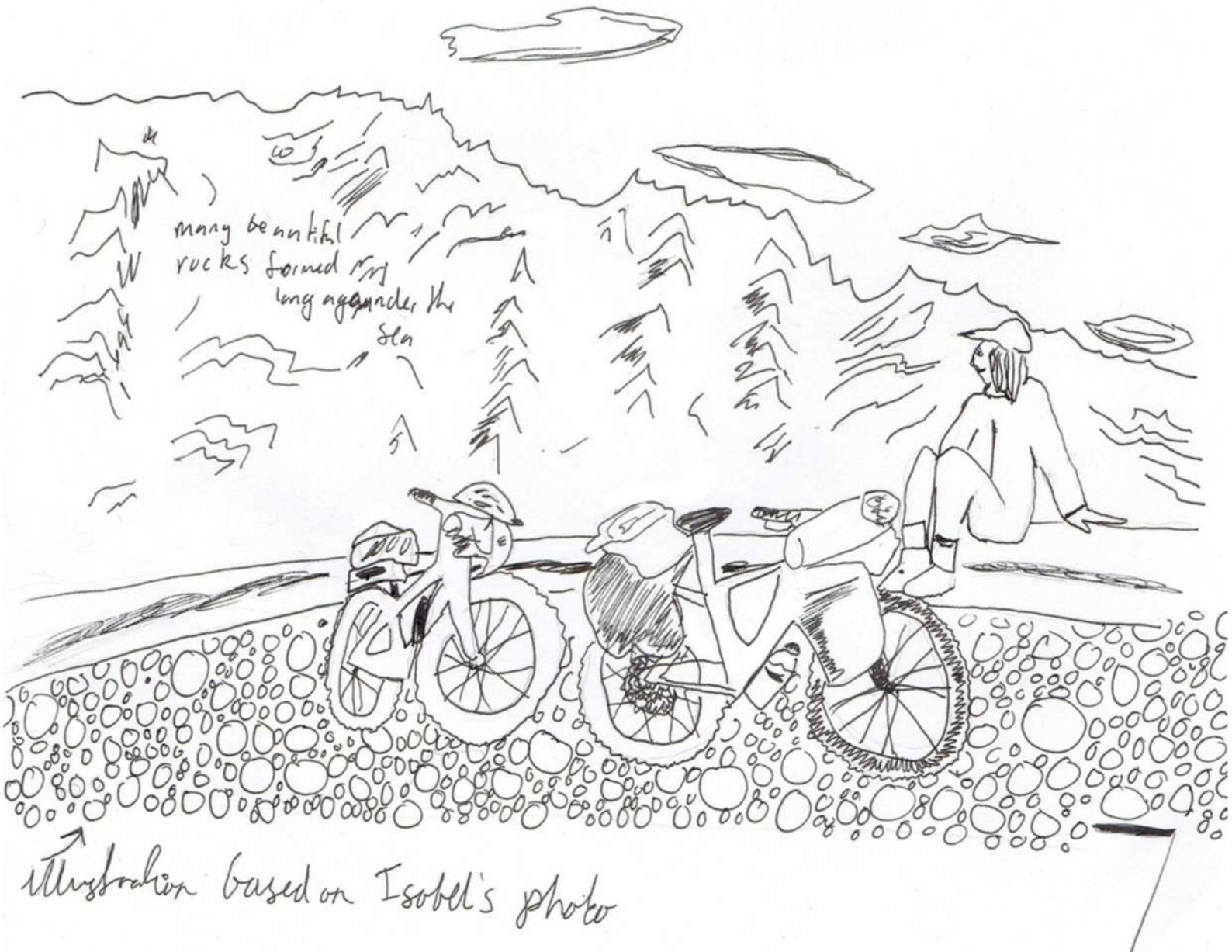
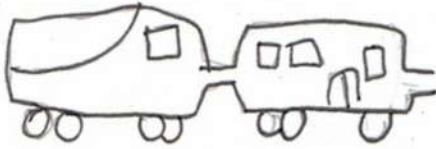
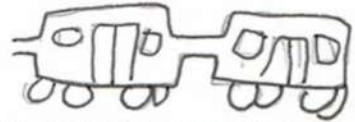


Illustration based on Isobel's photo



Capering beside Kapiti - Mika Hervel

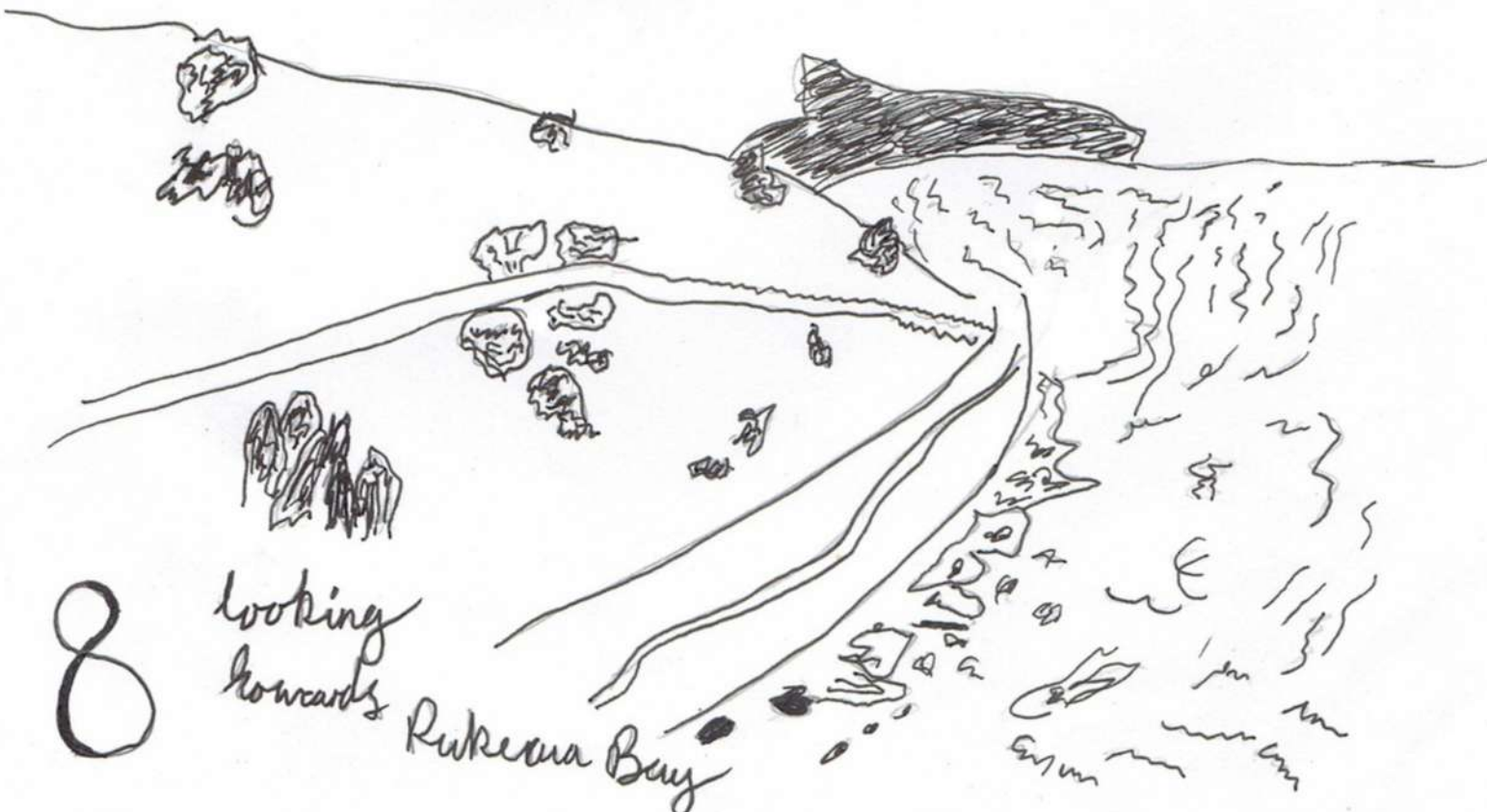
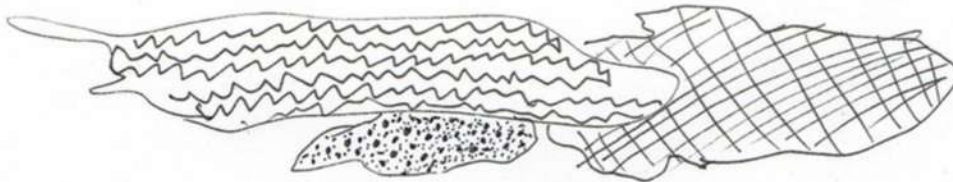
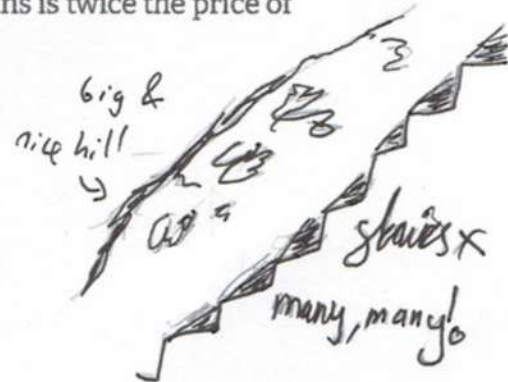


The Paekakariki Escarpment track is a great low-carbon adventure for people in the greater Wellington region. Connecting the coastal townships of Paekakariki and Pukerua Bay on the Kapiti coast, this walk provides stunning views of Kapiti Island and the sea. I would highly recommend doing this adventure in summer on a warm, clear sunny day to get the best views and cool off in the ocean afterwards. However, a clear day with fine weather in any season works.

You can do the escarpment track going either from Paekakariki to Pukerua Bay or vice versa. If you start at Pukerua bay, you will have to climb a lot of stairs and then face a gradual descent. Starting in Paekakariki means you have an easier start and finish with lots of stairs. It is also worth noting that Paekakariki has a more accessible beach, so if you start at Pukerua Bay you can pop down for a dip right after the walk. To get to either Paekakariki or Pukerua Bay, hop on the Kapiti line at the Wellington train station. You'll want to get on a train which goes to Waikanae and stops at every station.

The train ride to either Pukerua Bay or Paekakariki is about 45 minutes long and the stretch between these two townships, which you'll see either on your way there or back, is in my opinion one of the most beautiful and scenic stretches of rail in the country. It's best to get a Snapper card (*Ed: or, from 2026, Motu Move!*), which can be purchased for \$10 at the railway station info centre, and load it up with \$8 using a kiosk at the station. A cash fare on the trains is twice the price of using a Snapper Card, so you'll save money.

Remember to tag on and off the train from the points on the platform!





The Spiti serenade - Shanti Mathias

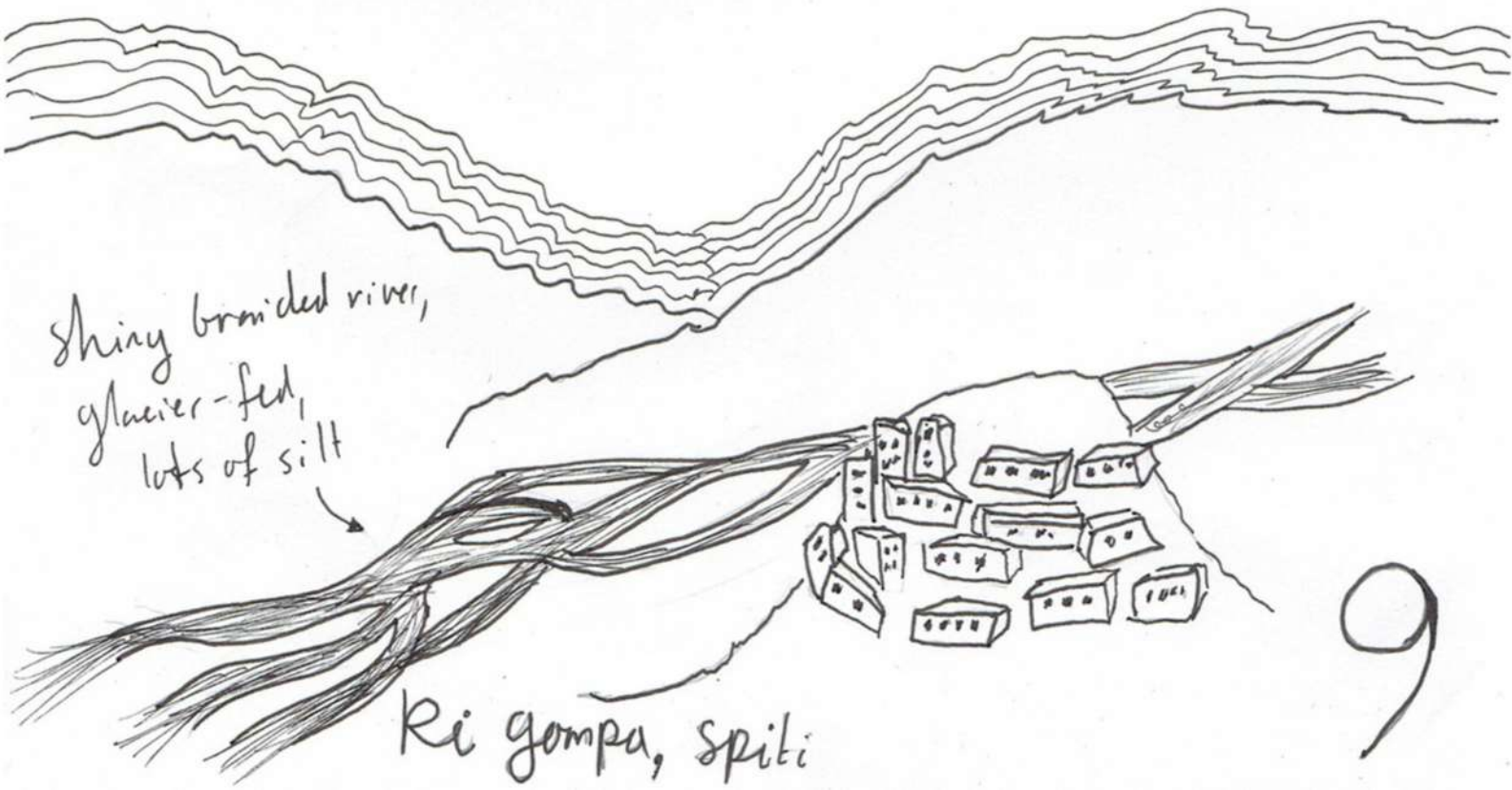
One amazing thing about India is that buses go nearly everywhere! They are not necessarily very comfortable, but they will go to many of the places you want to be. One summer, more than seven years ago now, my sister Shar and I took a bus from Dehradun, already claggy with monsoon, zagging towards Chandigarh. There we changed to the Manali bus. Manali is rife with crowd-pleasing delights, like enormous soft angora rabbits you can pay to hold when you walk up to the wooden temple, spangled boxes sold on tables beside the main road and delicious momos. Yet pause, take a breath; cross the bridge, and you will be poised above the Beas, toothy and hissing. Look up; towards the head of the valley, the Pir Panjal range is singing.

The singing grew louder as our bus zigged over Rohtang Pass, and then Kunzum La (although it was hard to notice it over my motion sickness). The rows and rows of mountains create a rain shadow: the earth was dry, little coves of fields bloomed with cunning irrigation. If you blink for too long, you start to imagine the glaciers nosing down from the side valleys. Mostly they are gone now, but some remain if you go up high enough.

We spent a lovely few weeks in Spiti, staying with a friend. Highlights include leaving a gas oven on all night and burning a cake to charcoal, playing with lots of kids, watching the extremely mid Sandra Bullock vehicle *The Proposal* (2009) and walking back to Kaza from behind the Ki Gompa. We made friends with the nearest veggie vendor; as you go further into the mountains, the cost of vegetables increases, too. Recently, I watched the film *Shambala*, about a woman in the Tibetan borderland journeying to find her husband, and was reminded of those few weeks in a place I needed a bus to access. I'd love to go back with a bike and tramping boots.

One morning, the alarm went off at 3:30 am again. It was time to catch the bus caravan home, back out of the mountains.

Note: While this adventure took place in 2017, and there's now a tunnel under Rohtang Pass, it's still possible to get to Spiti by bus. If you're interested in this part of the world, Delhi, Chandigarh, Shimla and Manali all have bus routes heading towards the mountains.





Biking and dancing in Ōtautahi - Liv Sisson



10/2/24. A day of sunshine, cycling, boogieing, singing. We set off from the northern Ōtautahi suburbs, cycled through the city, picking up our sweet friends along the way. We were headed to Nostalgia, a longstanding, bike friendly music festival held every Feb in Ferrymead Heritage Park.

Nostalgia organises a bike gang each year that leaves from the city. We wanted to leave a bit later though, so organised our own. We stopped at various mates' places to scoop them. Most already had bikes. We crowd-sourced spare ones for those who didn't.

By the time we hit Beckenham, our full group had assembled and we'd made one emergency stop off to repair an inner tube. We got a photo all together in our colourful festival outfits, on our ragtag bunch of bikes. From there we linked up with the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River and pedalled towards the coast. It was gray but warm as we biked along the river's harakeke lined banks, the last of the summer flowers hanging on. The mood was highly jovial and I was reminded of adventures around the neighborhood with my friends when we first got our training wheels off. We were going somewhere. Together.

Right on cue, the sun came out as soon as we entered the Heathcote Valley. It's a cosy little microclimate in there. We rode along the estuary, spotting water fowl as we went, getting a little lost but eventually making it to the festival. There were tonnes of places to lock up. We spent the day immersed in live music: Mel Parsons, LOU'ANA, Yurt Party, FazerDaze, DailyJ and more. We danced and sang, ate real fruit ice cream and OSM offcuts I had in my bag. We rode an antique train 500m (cost \$5) and explored the blacksmith shop, printing press, mercantile and other old buildings the heritage park offers. No one checked their phones really. We felt back in time.

Fazerdaze closed down the festival with a super silky set in the pouring rain. We then hooned it back up Ferry Road and into the city to end the night at Gogi Korean Karaoke. We were the final act. Biking to this experience gave our group a different sense of togetherness that lasted the whole day through.





Incognito mode in Amsterdam - Helena Teichrib



When I went home to Germany in 2023, I wanted to go on a trip with my best friend, who lived a short train ride from my family. Cycling? Yes. Hard cycling? No. So why not cycle through the world's premier *flat* cycling destination, and visit Amsterdam for the first time?

Germany has these beautiful new tickets, where you can subscribe for a month and get as many regional trains as you like, plus an extra ticket to get your bike on board. One early morning I jumped on my dad's old Holland bike and borrowed panniers from my brother and hopped on a train. My friend joined me when we went through her town.

We disembarked in Arnhem, aiming to reach Utrecht by the end of the day, more than 60 kilometres away. It was flat, but it was still hard: within ten kilometres, our butts started hurting, and that continued for the rest of the trip. We travelled beside the Nederrijn, then crossed the river on a tiny river ferry. All these rural quirks of being somewhere new: a farmer had set up a fruit vending machine, where you dialled the right number and a door popped open to reveal your cherries, a perfect cycling treat.

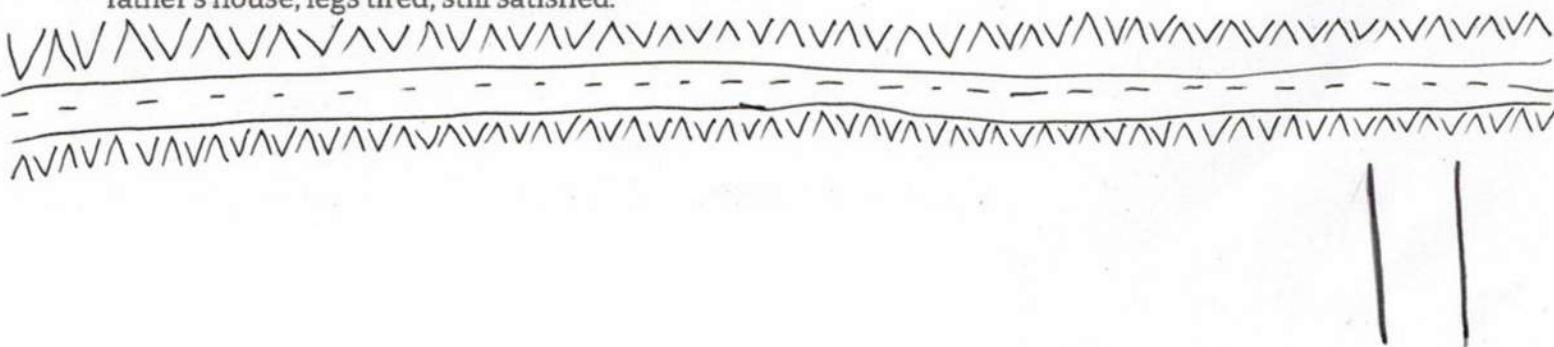
An older tech part of Dutch rural life: I spotted dozens of windmills until the novelty wore off. It felt so obvious that this country is incredibly vulnerable to sea level rise. Even in summer, the canals were full, and most people already live at sea level. It opened so many questions about the practical realities of dealing with climate change for me.

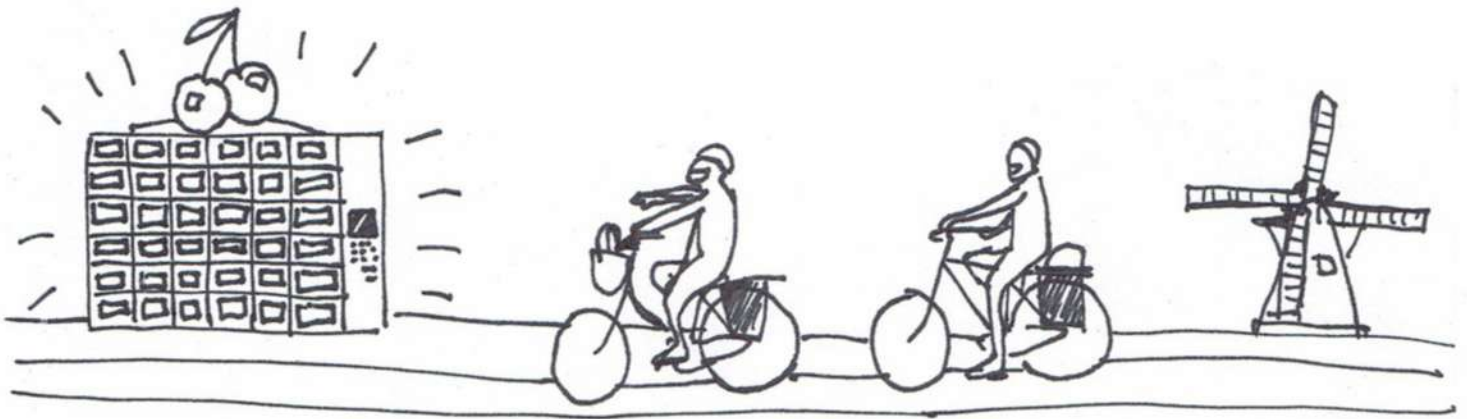
It was peak cycling hour in Utrecht in the evening. Everywhere I looked there were bikes, bikes bikes, people going to parties in the park, bike highways shimmering with the passage of a thousand wheels.

My friend and I both love looking at local architecture, so we were excited to reach Amsterdam the next day. Beautiful bridges, houses with steep steps, the red light district, our room curled above an arched window to see the city below. Whether wearing a suit or carrying a child or just exploring, having a bike was the best way to fit in with the locals.

Another favourite architecture encounter: the underground bike parking in the central Amsterdam train station, which we visited before taking the ferry over the IJssel to Hoorn. It's been reclaimed from the sea: you travel under the water as you go down the traveller, and there's all this art in the entrances. What would it be like to live in a city with designated, multi-million dollar bike architecture for everyone to use?

I wanted to spend quality time with my friend, and travel in a fun way, not sit somewhere and wait for the thing to happen. Getting back home involved a much more complicated series of trains thanks to a closed route. I ended my trip in reverse, riding back from the train station to my father's house, legs tired, still satisfied.





More from Mostly Good Ideas

Read the zine that started it all, available now at mostlygoodideas.nz/zine! A practical handbook, it contains ideas and inspiration for your first or fiftieth low-carbon adventure, plus a drawing of a muesli bar, trip ideas from around Aotearoa and multiple instances of the word practical.



fruit vending machines & windmills!
illustration by Helena



Where to next? This resources page is a starting place for low-carbon adventures. Find out more about some of the wonderful contributors, get hyped watching other people's adventures, and read the blog post about putting your bike on the bus that has a subtle humour best appreciated on the seventh reading at the Intercity bus stop.
mostlygoodideas.nz/adventureresources

Have you encountered something mysterious in the natural world? You're not alone: explore the ~portents~ series and find zero interpretation but lots of weirdness. "It's like a poem with pictures." - Shanti's aunty. "I didn't know the word portent and now I see it everywhere." - Ben





A Mostly Good Ideas zine

For a PDF copy, go to

mostlygoodideas.nz/zine

Contact me for feedback,

cool pictures, route

ideas or more.

Happy adventuring!