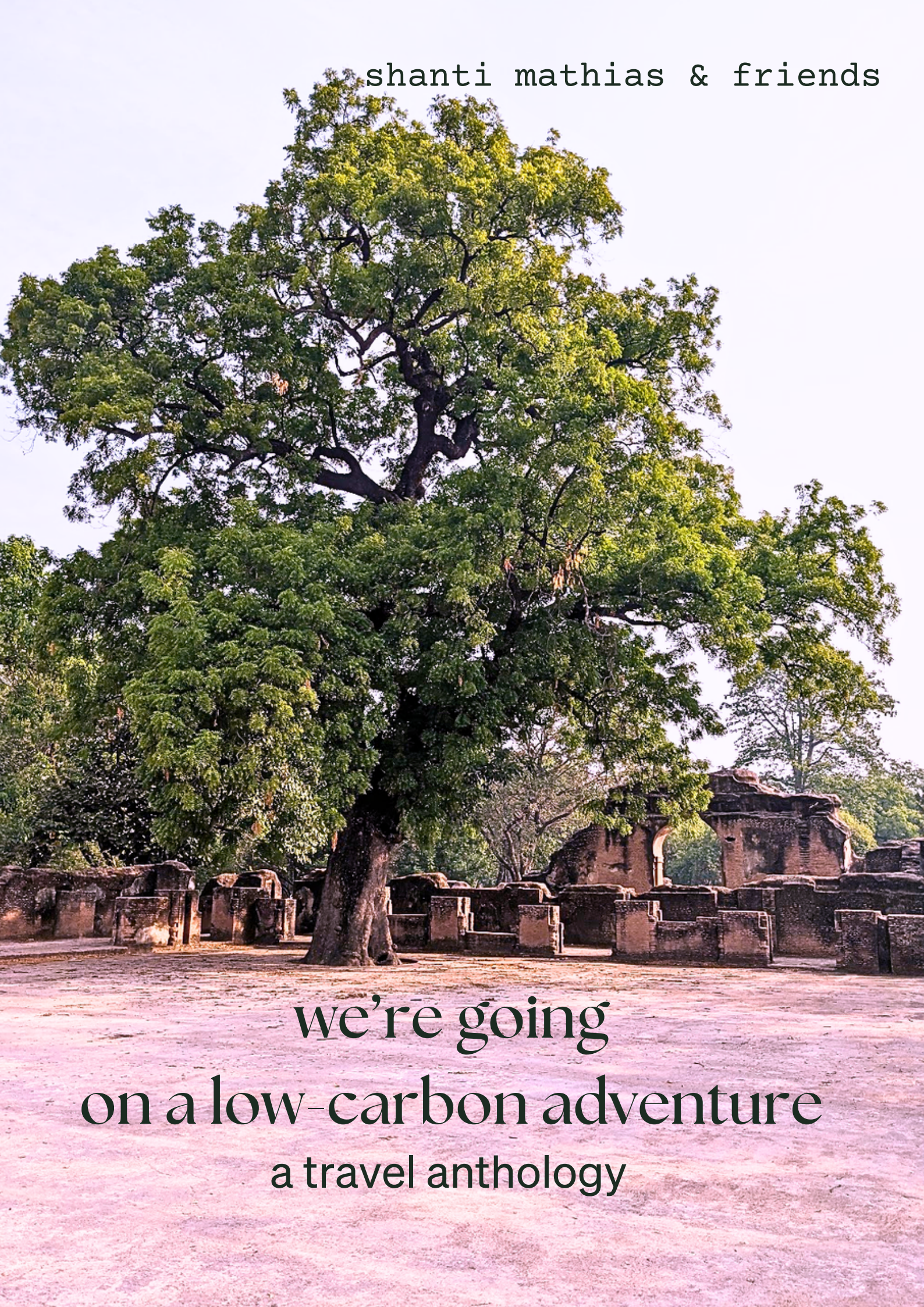




shanti mathias & friends

we're going
on a low-carbon adventure
a travel anthology

Introduction - Shanti Mathias, editor

August 2026

In the winter of my nineteenth year, I had lots of university assignments and cold fingers from biking in the rain. It was a long weekend, and the cure was taking my one friend to the Paekakariki Escarpment, a walk with train stations at the beginning and end. (For more details on this route, see Mika's entry in **I Had a Low Carbon Adventure**). A year later, much happier, I went for another walk with friends on the Queen's Birthday public holiday – this time to the Wellington wind turbine and home from Red Rocks.

The following year, I decided the walk should be an annual tradition, almost always using public transport. Further trips on winter long weekends included running to Luxmore Hut in Te Anau, taking the ferry to Rangitoto Island, carpooling to Huia in Auckland and overwhelming my friends with bus route options to go to Castle Rock and walk to Sumner in Christchurch. It is such a thrill to meet friends on the bus and explore somewhere together.



I titled this edition “We’re going on a low-carbon adventure” because something that draws me back to low-carbon adventures is how having fun outside of private or flying vehicles makes it easier for others to come along for the ride. Last year, some friends didn’t have time for the full walk, so they got the bus home without worrying about parking. Ferries and buses have more seats than cars, and it’s easier to do trips with different beginning and ending points. Yes, there are inconveniences, but there are just as many opportunities.



There are lots of solo adventures in this edition, too, from Mercy's 25 hour biking and running mission over the Torlesse Range, Siobhan's two train trips from Chicago to San Francisco and Amanda's navigation of buses and bullet trains in Japan. But whether you're alone or with others, with bikes and feet, on buses and trains, using paddles or eating muesli bars, with enthusiasm and curiosity, so much is possible.

choose an adventure

do you want an adventure with bodies of water?

no, I want a tour of Auckland

no, I want to see monkeys

yes

saltwater

Justin's adventure,
pg. 9

Amanda's adventure,
pg. 6

freshwater

are you bringing a bike?

how do you feel about running?

yes

Jenny's adventure,
pg. 11

I could run all night!

no

how much global trade crosses the strait you will encounter?

billions of dollars

trillions of dollars

I would rather paddle

Elisabeth's adventure,
pg. 7

I would like to run at civil hours

Shanti's adventure,
pg. 10

Siobhan's adventure,
pg. 4. (Cholmondeley Strait)

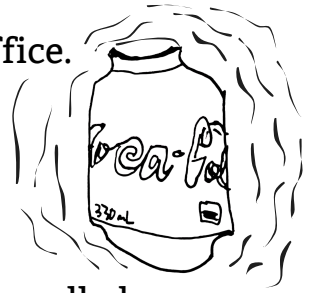
Mercy's adventure,
pg. 3

Rohan and Lin's adventure
pg. 5 (Strait of Malacca)

How to become a real university student - Mercy Jones

Ōtautahi- Mt Oxford- Torlesse Range-Ōtautahi, 187 km biking, 48 km running

24 hours, a commuter bike, and a can of coke scavenged from the office.
I scampered out of work early and pointed toward the hills!



Wheels: To the base of Mt Oxford: Let the flat, straight road begin!

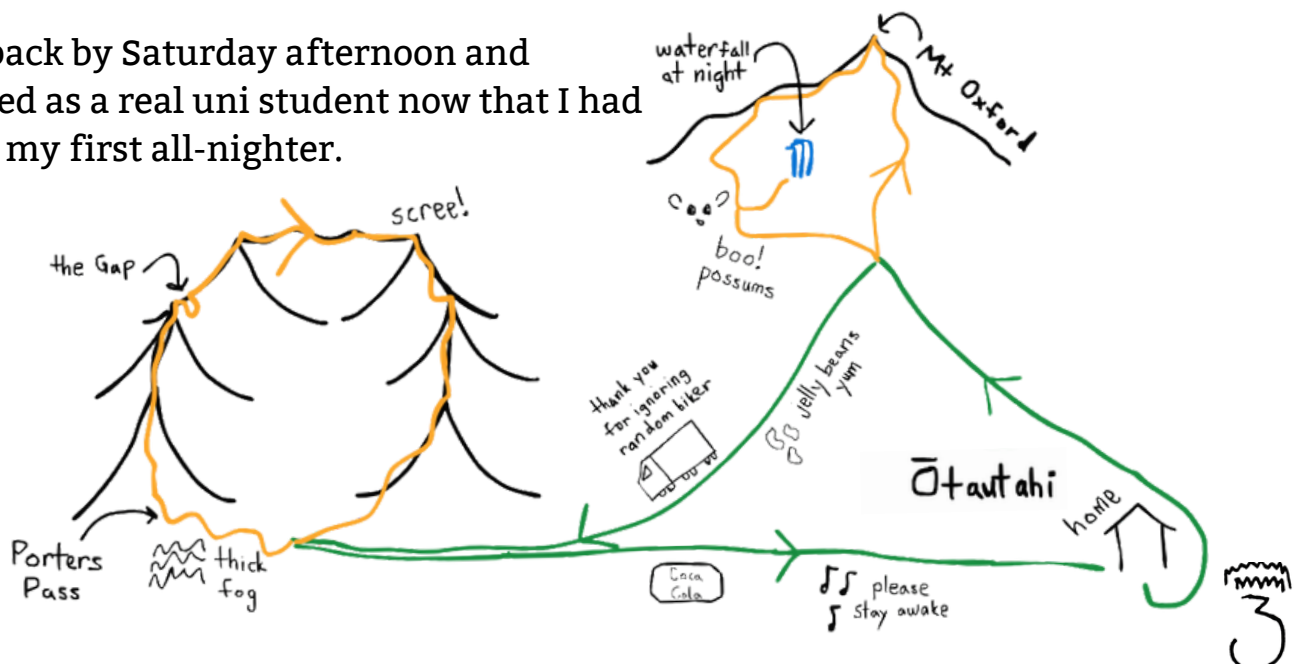
Feet: Mt Oxford loop: The anticipation of a sunset from the tops propelled me up quickly. Boo! The possums that I scared gave me bigger frights than I gave them. Sidequest to Ryde Falls because waterfalls at night >>.

Wheels: To base of Porter's Pass: More flat straight road. Grateful all the passing truck drivers heard my silent pleas to leave me alone ('I know you weren't expecting to see someone biking along this road at 2am but I promise I'm fine'). West Coast road in the dark was offering very little (OK almost nothing) to keep me awake so I played the game of watching my watch and letting myself eat one jellybean every two minutes.

Feet: Torlesse traverse: The 3am fog sat so densely that I could just pick out the white road line to follow up Porters Pass. The fog burnt off just long enough to climb Foggy Peak under a sky full of stars and watch the sun rise over the Cragieburn's cloud blankie. Down through The Gap and along a very frothable ridge with lots of quality scree time (mostly derogatory).

Wheels: Back to Ōtautahi: More flat straight road :)). But slightly downhill this time! The road still wasn't quite engaging enough to keep me awake, but the office-sponsored coke and some singing into the wind did the trick.

I was back by Saturday afternoon and initiated as a real uni student now that I had pulled my first all-nighter.



The moon rose over an open field - Siobhan McDonough

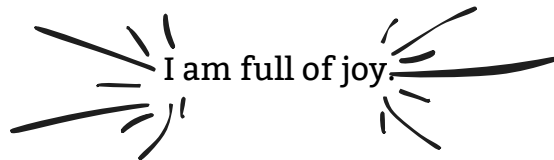
Chicago-San Francisco, train (and a little bit of bus), 3900km

At the tail end of the pandemic, I took a train across the country to interview for my dream job and meet a boy. From my brother's apartment near the Chicago train station, I packed my bag with two days of bread and cheese and fruit and went to look for America.

The Zephyr begins in Chicago, the most American of American cities, built on industry and railways from the ashes of fires, clean, bright skyscrapers on an ocean-like lake. It weaves through the cornfields and small hills of the Midwest — Iowa was not as flat as I expected, Eastern Colorado flatter. From Denver to Grand Junction it is like a cruise through the mountains, tourists and guide and all, telling you about geology through breathtaking mountain scenery.

But before and after this is where the other side of the train comes out, that of small town America, friendly in the Midwest and still, even today, wild past Grand Junction with its stucco station with a store called “Store”, small towns with building facades and dust-covered streets, junkyards full of rotted-out cars, rocks rising from the desert, people getting on in the night with no idea where they’re getting off.

When we arrived, it was almost sunset. I had been writing in a journal the whole time, trying to capture the scenery and stories. The last leg of the journey to San Francisco is a bus across a bridge; the city approaches like shadows from the fog. I wrote only one thing on the bus:

I am full of joy.

I found myself on the Zephyr again three months later. This time, my heart was a little broken. I talked to fewer people. The train wended into the desert. Night fell before I saw the rock formation that on my first trip, had hung the moon.

After a three hour-long hiccup where I nearly got kicked off the train in Reno, Nevada—the part of the trip that seems like a fever dream — we crossed the Sierras, and as we descended to the flatlands of the Bay, a gorgeous amber sunset.

San Francisco, the city of my childhood dreams, the inheritance, in some way, of all of Chinese America. I reflected, but I never regretted it. Five years later, I'm here.

Note: If you ever want to travel across the US by train, the Amtrak USA Rail Pass is good value: \$499 USD for 10 train segments of any length (yes, up to and including Chicago to San Francisco!) in coach class over 30 days. It also fairly often goes on sale.

Forty-one buses later - Rohan Mathias and Lin Li Yeoh

Bali-Java - Malacca - Thailand - Laos - Vietnam, bus, train, ferry, walking, 9000ish km

Our journey began in the lush forest and Instagram worthy beaches of Bali, the cheapest flight into South East Asia. The goal? To spend the next three months travelling through SEA without a flight. While winding east up Java Island on buses and trains, we sat next to a plethora of individuals, many who gave us the valuable gift of a story. Lin and I learned about the life of a Muslim woman from Jakarta who liked to freedive in her holidays. We watched (terrified) as a blind man took a leap of faith off the bus onto the platform, a metre in the air.



A ferry to Sumatra saw the mega-cities and well constructed infrastructure give way to kilometres of untamed jungle and the scars of where it had been cut down for palm tree fields, to be harvested for palm oil. While both of us were firm believers in 'journey before destination', a 30 hour bumpy bus ride to the port town of Dumai challenged that belief.

Next came a ride across the waves to Malacca, Malaysia. A city ruled by the British, Dutch, Japanese, and Malaysians at different points. We tasted Indian and Chinese cuisines blended into something uniquely Malaysian. By now the ebb and flow of late trains and non-appearing buses were not dissonant feelings but a part of the harmony of multicultural Southeast Asia. Thailand and Laos continued this story with long border crossings and a beautiful two day slow boat trip down the Mekong to the capital of Laos, Luang Prabang.

We rode the Chinese funded high speed train south through Laos and then a hop skip and a jump (25 hours on buses) later we were in Ho Chi Minh, flying to see Lin's grandmother. Yes, public transport is slower, but we had more stories.

Statistics: **Trains/metro rides: 38, Buses: 41, Ferries: 12, kilometres without a flight ~ 9000.**

Day off in Kyoto - Amanda Stone

Kyoto-Arashiyama-Kyoto-Osaka, bus, walking, bullet train, 60ish km

My low-carbon adventure in Kyoto began with a bus ride to visit the Arashiyama monkey park. The buses I took in Japan only accepted coins, which really took me back to my teenage years of bussing from Newlands to Wellington City to spend my babysitting money on caramel sundaes. I settled in for a 30 minute ride to the outskirts of Kyoto, enjoying the views of architecture and mountains from my window seat while trying to ignore the nausea that buses never fail to give me.



The bus dropped me at the base of the monkey park. After paying for entry, I had a 20 minute uphill bush trail climb to see the monkeys. The forest was lush and progressively ominous signage informed visitors of the dangers of monkeys. This park was free range, so we could encounter monkeys anywhere, although they were really all located at the top of the hill where they know they'll get food.

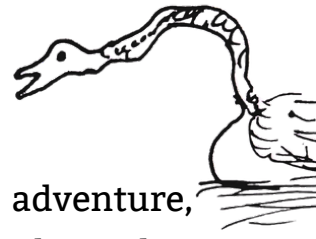
As I wandered back down the road, thinking I had plenty of time, I watched my bus zoom past the stop. Frustrated, I hung around for the next bus, thankfully only another 15 minutes away. I climbed on, only to realise a few stops later that I was heading in the wrong direction (thank you google maps! I would not have known if not for my phone). Getting on the bus in the wrong direction in Japan is just as aggravating as it is when I do it in NZ, but thankfully being on holiday I had no real rush to be anywhere. Eventually I made it back into the centre of Kyoto.

Japan is widely known for its Shinkansen (bullet/speed trains), as evidenced in the Phoebe Bridgers song Kyoto, among many other cultural references. So, as part of my mission to live out as much of the song Kyoto as possible (while not having a deadbeat dad) I simply had to take a bullet train. I headed to the main train station and caught the train to Osaka, which took less than half an hour. Although the adventure had not gone entirely to plan, it was enjoyable nonetheless!

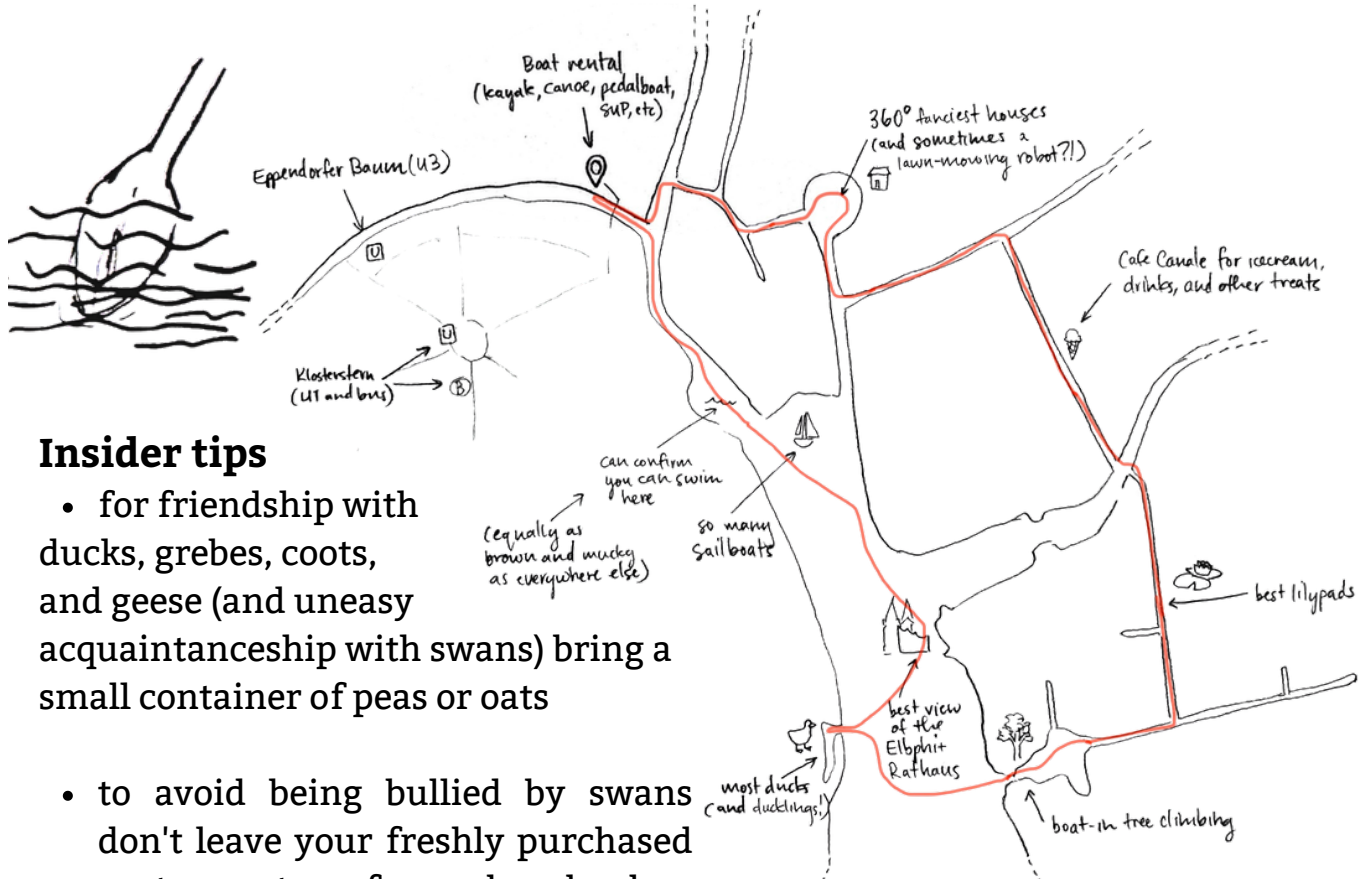


Paddling the Alster - Elisabeth Pesavento

Hamburg, kayak, 5km



For an urban but marvelously green (low-carbon and also verdant) adventure, here is one of my favourite paddles on the Alster in Hamburg! It's only about 5km and can be enjoyed by kayak, canoe, or whatever else you find that floats, and boat rental is easily reached by walking from the nearest U-Bahn or bus station. It can fit into busy city days or expand into a leisurely weekend outing. Happy paddling!



Insider tips

- for friendship with ducks, grebes, coots, and geese (and uneasy acquaintanceship with swans) bring a small container of peas or oats
- to avoid being bullied by swans don't leave your freshly purchased pastry on top of your kayak when feeding them oats
- everyone likes photos of themselves being served ice cream out of a window into a boat on the canal, if you take these photos for strangers and offer to airdrop them you might make new friends that aren't birds!
- it's fun to test the acoustics under all the bridges, and to see the surprised expressions of the people walking on the bridges when you come out from underneath.
- paddling on the Alster is gorgeous in all seasons and at all times of day (cherry blossoms! warm golden sun! autumn colors! crunchy ice! sunsets! stars!) and if this one particular rental place is closed there's a kayakomat that can be used 24/7 year-round
- sights to look out for: dogs in boats and on paddleboards (because aw), sailboats on collision courses with your boat (because ow), more places that serve treats to boaters (because yum)



Siobhan's train in the mountains, moon shining, page 4



Justin rides the 70 (and dreams of Motu Move), page 9



Jenny finds the quiet, scraggly side of Waiheke, page 11



All day on the 70 bus - Justin Hu

Botany-Britomart, bus, 20 km, again and again



I have ridden some version of Auckland's 70 bus for over fifteen years - through school, university, and now a full-time job as a political reporter. Three out of the four places I've last lived at have been on the 70. It has carried me through indignity, glory, sadness, joy, and most of the states in between.

The first bus at 5am is usually filled with bleary-eyed shift workers before the commuter rush, with a bus every five minutes, an avalanche of students, and what some would derisively call the white-collar lanyard class. After 9am, the Gold card concessions and Asian grandparents come to life.

Walk onboard the 70 throughout the day and you'll find a slice of this part of Auckland. The route starts in the eastern suburbs where close to one in five people can speak Mandarin, and early-2000s suburban sprawl reigns. Botany's big-box suburbia gives way to Panmure; the road shrinks from six lanes, to four, and then two along the final stretch of Great South Rd. Then to the glass and neon of Westfield Newmarket, finally terminating downtown next to Britomart.

There's a public transport planning principle that transit lines succeed when they are useful to many people for totally unrelated reasons — good for everyone, in general, ideal for nobody in particular. This 20km, close to two-hour (at peak) bus route may not be anyone's perfect commute, but nirvana was never the point.

Late at night the bus empties out but is rarely totally empty. Even the last bus has people coming home from town, student stragglers like myself and many shift workers - I remember the same KFC worker used to board at Greenlane at about 11pm, her kid half-asleep against her.

Some of my strongest memories of the 70 are of the bus drivers from Howick and Eastern. Or all the ones that drive like they have somewhere to be. On the counter - there's the bus drivers who honk at cyclists. Or the ones that have been on the receiving end of assaults, and the one who ranted at me, as the lone passenger left onboard, about his employer and the immigration system.

Fifteen years on I'm still not sure I've seen everything the route 70 bus has to offer.



Run along the quiet hills - Shanti Mathias

Wellington-Manor Park-Petone 35 km by train, 21 km running

In a busy February week of wedding-attending and friend-seeing I had a day off. I packed some sandwiches and muesli bars and took the Hutt Valley Line to Manor Park, delighting in going the opposite way to all the commuters. The tiny train station is right next to the motorway, but once I crossed the tarmac I was alone with the hills.



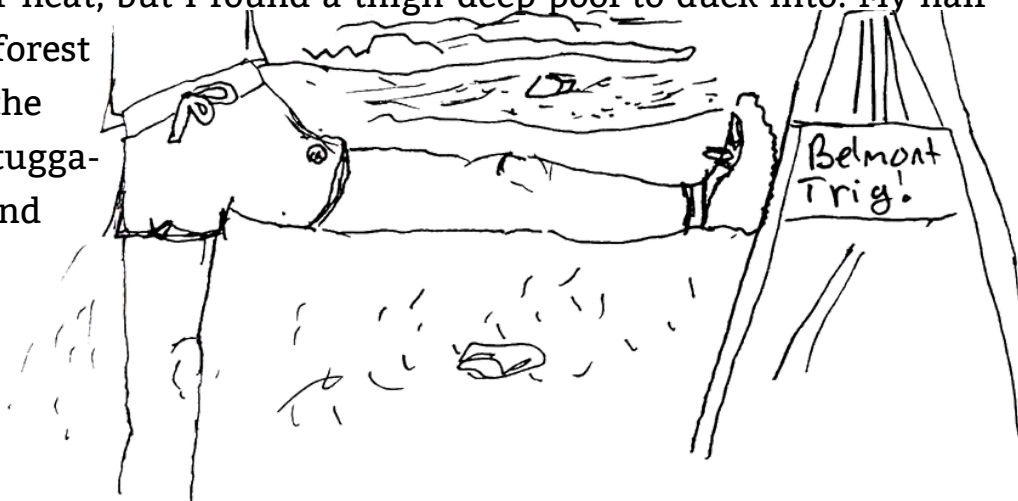
I stopped to pick berries. My fingers turned as purple as a bruise, and so did my tongue. As I headed uphill I crushed horopito leaves between my fingers, the sharp and spicy scent distracting me from tired thighs and reminding me where I was.

I spotted the odd trig point, reminders of the surveyors and maps. I kept checking my topo map for the security of knowing my exact elevation. Much of the land is farmland, grass nibbled to its roots by eager ungulates.

Occasionally, I saw little brown rabbits scurrying at the periphery of my vision. Once, a farm truck on the road below me, a conversation about the water tank drifting through the air. Apart from that, I saw no-one until the Korokoro valley.

It was a cloudy, humid day, a steely ceiling skimming the top of the Orongorongo hills. Blue curve of the harbour, mouth of Māui's fish open to the dark water of the strait. I unpeeled my muesli bar, kept running, slowly.

The final scurry down from the Belmont Trig is the best part, sudden lush forest. I paused at Baked Beans Bend, feeling hungry again. This is why it's a good idea to bring multiple muesli bars. The Korokoro stream runs through the valley; it was shallow in the summer heat, but I found a thigh-deep pool to duck into. My hair was still dripping cool forest water when I got onto the train in Petone, tugga-tugga-tugga back to friends and laptop and dinner.



Waiheke escape - Jenny Sahng

Tāmaki Makaurau-Waiheke-Tāmaki Makaurau, 20 km biking, 44 km ferry

In the winter of 2024, I had a week between wrapping up my last job and starting my new one. I decided a ferry + bike holiday to Waiheke would maximise enjoyment of my week. This was before I owned a bike with panniers so I literally just had a daypack with clothes and toiletries for a few days. At the ferry



terminal, I paid for a ticket at the kiosk and hopped on board, bike in tow.

I love the door-to-door nature of travelling by bike. Once at the Waiheke ferry terminal, tourists and hens-party-goers waited for their rideshares or the local bus or a car rental or some such, while I rolled right off the gangway and pedalled away. Whooo see ya!

I had booked a room at Waiheke Island Guesthouse for 3 nights. The most direct route is straight through the main town centre of Ostend, but instead I went south along the coast there, skirting Blackpool Beach and Mitchell Reserve. This had less traffic and a tiny bit less elevation, 8.5 km and 115 metres up. It was nice to see the slightly less polished beaches with their old dinghies and gnarled trees strewn about.

The guest house is up a bushy road, very quiet, residential, and surrounded by birdsong. I had a supremely relaxing four days. I slept 10 hours a night, read four books, and went for various short walks and bikes to nearby beaches and parks of my choosing.

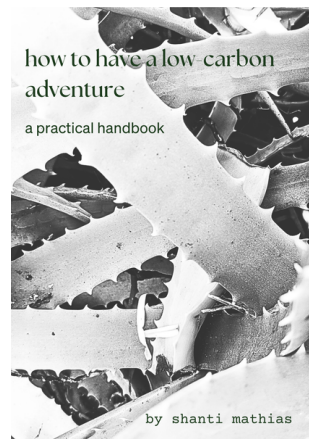
The journey home was much the same, through the island, onto the ferry, and back up the Grafton Gully cycle path to my door. It felt like a cheat code, to be able to ride straight out my door and get to a beautiful island in the Hauraki Gulf surrounded by birds, bush, and beach, with very minimal fuss.

I have moved away from Tāmaki now, and am living in Ōtautahi. While the flatness and the steady buildout of excellent cycleways has meant living virtually car-free has been both feasible and delightful, there's something quite special about cycling near waterways. It's super cool that Auckland has ferries as public transport, that you can take bikes on them, and that those ferries go to beachy, holiday-y, bike-friendly destinations like Waiheke.

Mostly Good Ideas

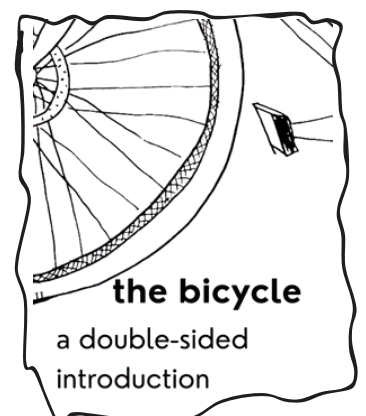
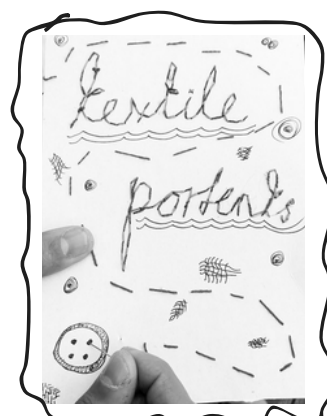
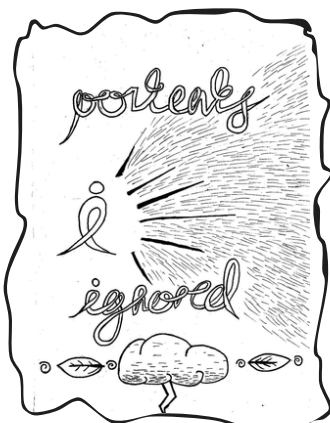
Mostly Good Ideas is a project by Shanti and Shreyas. We make zines about biking, portents, adventures and possibilities. Find out more at mostlygoodideas.nz/zines or email shanti.mathias@gmail.com if you're interested in a physical copy. We also document dispatches from car culture, sewing and woodworking, books we read, trips that don't make it into the zines and other things we like.

Low carbon adventures: Use the **practical handbook** (with index of trips) to plan your low-carbon adventure, and start thinking about ways to make your adventure more silly, meaningful or creative. Read the **compendium of expeditions** to be inspired by other people's adventures! Scan the QR code for music, movies, blog posts, essays and other **adventure resources**. (mostlygoodideas.nz/adventureresources).



Biking: Read the **double-sided introduction** to get to know your bike's parts and embrace its wonderful repairability. Turn it inside out for some haikus. Flip through the **Turkish cycling sketchbook** to see lizards, poppies and Mustafa's Magnificent Goat.

Portents: If you lived in a fantasy novel, portents would be a sign of great change. But you don't, so they're just something you **ignore**. Or maybe you're finding that even **suburbs** have bubbling microbes and omens of oil economies ending. Or the fabric around you is tearing and unravelling and you need to interpret some **textile portents**?



A full-page background image showing a person in a black shirt and shorts jumping in the air on a rocky mountain ridge. The person's arms and legs are spread wide. In the background, there are snow-capped mountain peaks under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The foreground ridge is covered in dry, brownish vegetation and rocks.

A Mostly Good Ideas zine

For a PDF copy, go to

mostlygoodideas.nz/zines

Contact me with feedback,

cool pictures, route

ideas or more.

Happy adventuring!

shanti.mathias@gmail.com

made in Ōtautahi