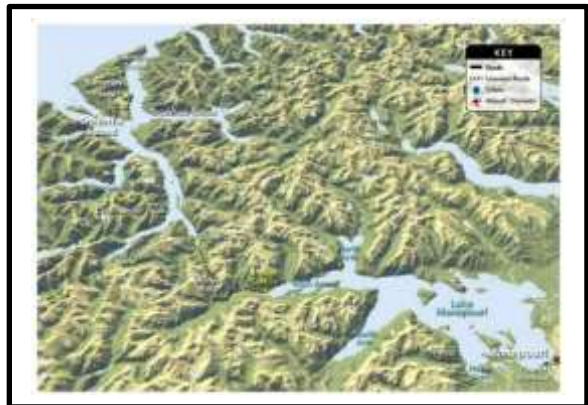




Minis came in a range of models

So there we were, burbling clockwise around New Zealand's southern isle, in a tiny white mini – the vehicle type - packed with camping gear and cookstoves, plus a large box stuffed with minis – the tiny skirt type - that my partner loved to flaunt! We had reached our most southerly point, one of the wettest places on Earth.



Leaving our little white rocket at the *Manapour Wharf*, in the far South-West land of The Sounds - the fjord country of the southern hemisphere - we ferried across *Lake Manapour*, then zig-zagged with a busload of tourists, up and over the mountain, from there dropping down into *Doubtful*

Sound. It was late in the day after cruising one of the most spectacular waterways in the world, with mountains rising like sky-high perpendicular parapets above the boat, when we returned to the jetty at the head of the sound: a leftover from the Ice Age.

The summer was a particularly hot one, and with the heat came the flies, midges and mosquitos: anything airborne with six legs ready to attack in multiple assault numbers, which could at times be cloud-size! This was a factor we had forgotten which came back to haunt us when we decided not to go back with the throng, but to stay on to face whatever might arise alone ... or at least as a two-some.



An hour later, with the oncoming dusk, we discovered the sandflies. They swarmed in millions and descended as miniscule, but ferocious vampires. With little protection other than NZ's industrial strength insect repellent - which I discovered rendered you blind for an hour or two if it went anywhere near the eye - we stumbled on the only other human being who appeared to be existing on that part of the planet (now that the day-visit tourists had departed).

Victor's small yacht was anchored not far from the shore, in waist-deep water, and following a few waves and coo-ees from my partner in her best camouflage mini (to fool the sandflies) we waded out and clambered aboard. He was a weather-worn, but none-the-less intriguing guy, originally from Split on the Yugoslav coast, but now taking time to discover the backwaters of New Zealand. Appreciative of the company he produced a mammoth bottle of Plum Brandy, the consumption of which he declared would keep the sandflies at bay. With that admirable goal in mind, we sat on deck drinking and talking into the night, retreating to his tiny cabin below when the bottle finally gave up its final tot.

I hate to think what would have become of us if we had been left to our own devices on the docks of *Doubtful Sound*. The imagination conjures up New Zealand news sheets with images of bloody bones picked bare by the sandflies, inwardly gloating at the stupidity of

two young Aussies who chose to go it alone, and as a result succumbed to the *Perils of Doubtful Sound*; while Australia's parliament held a special *Sandfly Session*, to discuss sanctions against their cousins across the Tasman, for not protecting the welfare of Australia's youth.

Could it mean the start of WWII?

Duncan Gregory

www.whittlingourniche.com