

# **Tourism for Visitors to New Zealand with Mobility Problems: a West Coast Perspective**

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## **SUMMARY**

Tourism is New Zealand's primary export earner, and the West Coast's largest employer. There is a growing trend worldwide to cater to niche-tourism markets. People with disabilities represent a large and growing niche tourism market, one that New Zealand and the West Coast has not yet begun to fully exploit. This market has increasing discretionary funds and financial power, is articulate and web savvy, and very interested in travel. There is a significant opportunity for the West Coast to place itself as a region of excellence in tourism for people with disabilities. However, awareness of this market and the ability to cater for it is currently negligible. This report provides an overview of the access market, a preliminary examination of the provision of West Coast tourism services for people with disabilities, and suggests ways in which this large and growing market can be researched and developed.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research project was carried out with the help and expertise of Lyn Heine, president of the West Coast Independent Living Centre Incorporated Society which is responsible for the Greymouth (West Coast, New Zealand) Disabilities Information Service. Lyn is a New Zealand registered occupational therapist with experience in housing modifications for people with disabilities, has barrier-free training, and is completing the barrier free auditor qualifications through the auspices of the *Barrier Free New Zealand Trust*. Thank you Lyn.

In addition, Lyn also illuminated many of the issues faced by people with disabilities. One such issue is the use of language - a powerful and often subtle influence on attitude - the use of which changes over time. An example is the use of the term "disabled person" as compared to the term "person with a disability". For some with disabilities, the use of the former phrase is acceptable. Others see this term as placing the emphasis on the disability rather than on the person, and thus see it in a negative light. Every effort has been made in this report to avoid using negative phrasing. For an excellent web site focused on the issues of language and people with disabilities, see *Word Up*.

Daphne Smithers, in her own time, acquired for the Tai Poutini Polytechnic library from the *Trade Me* website a copy of the book *Accessible Walks*, a guide to scenic walks in the South Island for people with disabilities.

Thanks are also due to all those who gave generously of their time and shared personal experiences, thoughts, and recommendations by telephone, via email, or in person, or who pointed me toward useful web sites. Your input helped put a human face on this subject.

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## SECTION 1. BACKGROUND

### General Introduction

World tourism has been growing for a number of years, and New Zealand tourism has grown at a stunning rate in the last ten years (Ministry of Tourism website, *MoT*). Tourism is now New Zealand's single largest export earner, directly contributing 9.4% of this country's GDP. There are more than 16,000 businesses operating in the sector (*New Zealand Trade and Enterprise* website). *MoT* predictions are that the sector will continue to grow (*MoT 1*), and the *United Nations World Tourism Organization* suggests that 25% of world tourist arrivals could occur in the East Asia/Pacific region by 2020. Currently, the sector supports one in ten jobs in New Zealand in a wide variety of jobs and skill levels (*MoT* website).

The tourism industry on the West Coast is built on its unique, dramatic, and pristine environment, on the large amount of land in the conservation estate, and on the areas isolated and sparsely populated nature (*Rhodda, 2006 A*). It has grown in a haphazard way in response to growing tourist demand (*Rhodda, 2006 B*), and the sector is the largest in the region in terms of both the number of people employed in the industry and in terms of contributing to household income. Currently (2006-2007 season), there are about 580 business that cater solely or mainly to the tourism sector on the West Coast (*Rhodda, unpublished*). In 2004-2005, the number of visitors to New Zealand and the West Coast did not rise as sharply as it had in previous years. In spite of that slowed rise, visitor numbers are expected to continue to increase in future. In 2005, 2.47 million visits were made by tourists to the West Coast. By 2012, this figure is expected to rise by 391,500 (15.8%) to 2.86 million (*MoT 2*). Not only that, but an analysis of the percent share of visitors in New Zealand who spend time on the West Coast shows that it has slightly but steadily increased over the last several years so that the West Coast is receiving a larger share of the tourists in New Zealand (*Rhodda, 2006 A*). *Tourism Industry Association of New Zealand* Chief Executive Fiona Luhrs reports that the most recent Christmas-New Year holiday season (2006-2007) has been one of the most successful on record in many parts of the country, with West Coast guiding companies in the glacier region reaching their maximum daily allocations on walks and heli-hikes on at least one day (*Travel Memo*, January 19, 2007). Overall visitor arrivals (267,600) to New Zealand in February 2007 were up 6% on February 2006, and total guest nights in short-term commercial accommodation on the West Coast were up 3% for the year ended February 2007 compared to the year ended February 2006 (*Statistics New Zealand*).

In 2001, *MoT* developed a policy document for the tourism industry, the *New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2010*. The strategy was designed to enhance an already robust sector with a sharper focus on sustainable development and to identify the challenges in maximizing its contribution to New Zealand. This document was followed up in 2003 with a review and way-forward document, *Toward 2010*. In 2005, *Tourism West Coast*, the regional tourism organization, produced its own strategic planning document adapted from *Strategy 2010* with a West Coast perspective, and in 2006, the *MoT* produced a *New Zealand Tourism Strategy* update (*MoT* website). The essence of these strategies for New Zealand and for the West Coast is to encourage, promote, and support the highest quality in the industry to meet and exceed visitor expectations.

Despite the growing awareness of and focus on attracting niche-market tourists, nowhere in the four documents are the needs of international or domestic tourists with disabilities mentioned. This is surprising, given the probable rise in number of people who will experience disability over the coming years (see page 6). This rise, coupled with the predicted rise in tourists in New Zealand indicates that the needs of visitors who have disabilities must be considered and addressed if New Zealand and the West Coast are to capitalise on this niche market. This report, arising out of a research project conducted by Tai Poutini Polytechnic in Greymouth, West Coast, New Zealand, goes some way towards an introductory investigation of this increasingly important topic.

## **BENEFITS TO TAI POUTINI POLYTECHNIC IN RESEARCHING TOURISM FOR THE DISABLED**

Benefits accrue to Tai Poutini Polytechnic (TPP) from research in the field of tourism for people with disabilities. Such research will lead to:

- Recognition and promotion of the role of TPP as
  - An institution with research capability in many areas of importance to the West Coast community
  - The primary research organization in West Coast tourism, one of the three leading industries in the region
  - A research-based knowledgeable primary participant in the development of the tourism industry on the West Coast
  - A key player in improving the West Coast tourism industry product by encouraging tourism businesses to improve access; in this way, TPP recognizes the critical contribution of the tourism industry here
- Enhancement and addition of another facet to the research already carried out by TPP illuminating the structure of the tourism industry on the West Coast, the training needs of operators, and the need for a human resources development officer in the industry here
- Enhancement and addition to the research conducted by the Tourism Recreational Research and Education Centre at Lincoln University, Canterbury into the West Coast tourism product, activities undertaken by tourists, and visitor satisfaction. In particular, it partly meets the objectives that TPP agreed with the New Zealand Government Tertiary Education Commission in developing a comprehensive understanding of the extent to which West Coast tourism businesses meet the expectations of their clients, including those with disabilities
- Initiation of TPP's involvement in research in a growing sector (people with disabilities) and thus to enhancing its reputation nationally and internationally as a proactive organisation with foresight and initiative
- Providing data so that TPP may develop and offer information and/or courses/seminars/workshops to fill the need in this area
- Strengthening the role of TPP as a significant contributor to the social and cultural life, as well as the economic life of the West Coast
- Continuation of TPP's tradition of proactive responses to developing areas of need
- Furthering the interests of regional development groups. For example, to furthering the intention of the *West Coast Development Trust* to “*play an ongoing valuable role in promoting the West Coast as a wealthy, growing, sustainable, vibrant and socially inclusive region*”, and to “*increase the global attraction of the West Coast as a tourism destination*” (*West Coast Development Trust 1*) (authors emphasis).
- Furthering the interests of national development groups. For example, to furthering the intention of the *Tourism Industry Association of New Zealand* and the *Ministry of Tourism (MoT 3)* to build a competitive edge, and develop global consumer lifestyle market segments
- Furthering the rights of people with disabilities and promoting the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with

Disabilities so that they may “have the same opportunities for recreational activities as other citizens” (*United Nations Organization*).

- Encouraging the development of access, not only for visitors to the West Coast, but for residents of the area.

## THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The research project had two phases:

Phase 1 comprised:

- Literature and web research in the area of tourism for people with disabilities
- Interviews and correspondence with a number of people and organizations involved in the tourism industry or in the accessible tourism industry in New Zealand and worldwide.

This research was carried out in order to better understand disabilities, tourism for people with disabilities, and access, to ascertain the level of research in the field, and to illuminate the provision of tourism information and facilities to travellers with disabilities in New Zealand and worldwide.

Phase 2 comprised:

- A field assessment of access to tourism business operations on the West Coast of the South Island of New Zealand
- A field assessment of all aspects of access and usability in a selected small number of tourism businesses on the West Coast
- A field assessment of access to public facilities on the West Coast (toileting, banking, laundrettes, telephones)

Field research was carried out to gain a snapshot of tourism provision for people with disabilities in the region and elucidate the level of understanding surrounding this market.

Information gathered from the literature and web research, interviews and correspondence, is presented below in **Section 2, Tourism for People with Disabilities, an Overview**, and throughout the text in order to better illuminate this subject. Sources of information are displayed in italics in the text, and these may be found in the reference section. Information on web sites may change over time so that material quoted in this report may not remain available after the date of the publication of this report.

Data gathered from the field assessments of access and usability of West Coast tourism business operations and public facilities is presented in **Section 3** and is discussed in the later part of this report.

## SECTION 2.

### **TOURISM FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, AN OVERVIEW**

#### **A) What is Disability?**

There is no universally agreed-upon definition of what a disability is (or an impairment, or a handicap), although attempts have been made to characterize these terms (for example, see the *United Nations Organisation website 1*, or the *World Health Organisation website definitions*). The *New Zealand State Services Commission Disability Classification Standard* is modified from the *WHO International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps*. It defines a disability as a

*restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being.*

That is, a disability is the functional problem at the person level. An example of a disability is difficulty walking up a flight of stairs. A summary of the *New Zealand State Services Commission Disability Classification Standard* categories of disability can be found in Appendix 1, page 56.

The experience of disability occurs when people with impairments are excluded from places and activities most New Zealanders take for granted. Many people with disabilities are seriously disadvantaged by exclusion, and are unable to participate in society on an equal basis with others. Physical impairments are the most common impairment type, with two-thirds of people with disabilities reporting a physical impairment, such as loss of mobility and agility. These impairments most often result from illness, with accidents being the second most common cause. The majority of people with disabilities (57% of disabled adults in 2001) have more than one type of impairment, often with varied causes. The prevalence of multiple impairments increases with age (*Office of Disability Information*).

The most recent information concerning New Zealanders experiencing disabilities comes from the 1996 and 2001 census and post census surveys of disability. At the time, one in five experienced disability (*Office of Disability Information website 1*). Since that time, there has been an increasing demand for relevant and current information about people with disabilities and disability issues for policy and planning purposes. With recent changes within government, particularly with the implementation of the *New Zealand Disability Strategy (Office of Disability Information website 2, released in 2001)*, government departments are now required to monitor the impact of policy changes relating to disability issues. Data concerning disability is used by government agencies, service providers, researchers, people with disabilities, groups interested in disability-related issues, and others involved with or interested in people with disabilities in New Zealand. Service providers are interested in the location of people with disabilities, the nature of their disabilities, and the effect disability has on an individual's ability to participate in work, education, and society

in general, including in tourism activities. There is also interest in the pool of potential care support in the community for people with disabilities.

Demand for a post-census survey of disability was highly advocated during the consultation phase for the most recent (2006) New Zealand census (*Office of Disability Information*). Consequently, the topic of disability was included in the 2006 Census in the form of two filter questions. These aided the selection of a sample for the post-census Disability Survey, an in-depth survey including more detailed questioning by interviewers (*Office of Disability Information I*). The survey was completed between July and November 2006 and collected information on the:

- nature, extent and cause of disability
- the impact of disability on the day-to-day lives of people with disabilities, and
- unmet needs of people with disabilities for special equipment and support.

Approximately 30,000 people were selected to participate in telephone interviews and an additional 10,000 people for face-to-face interviews. This provided a total selected sample of 40,000. The data from the Disability Survey will be used for a number of purposes. These include advocacy, profiling and development of services. The data will also inform policy and planning by a range of organisations, including government agencies, researchers and service providers.

Results from the 2006 survey will be released at the end of May 2007 (*Statistics New Zealand*), and should inform any discussion on tourism for people with disabilities in New Zealand.

## **B) Ageing and Disability**

It is anticipated that the number of New Zealanders found by the 2006 survey to experience disability will have increased from those found in previous census/post-census surveys. This is because the likelihood of experiencing a disability increases with age (*Office of Disability Information website 3*), and as the New Zealand population is aging, the number of people who will experience a disability is also likely to increase. Older people are substantially more likely than younger people to experience disability. In 2001, 11% of New Zealand children aged 0-14 years, 13% of adults aged 15-44 years and 25% of adults aged 45-64 years reported impairment. In comparison, 54% of people aged 65 years or over reported impairment (*Office of Disability Information website 4*). The proportion of the population aged 65 and older has changed only slightly since the 2001 census (12.1% of the population compared to 12.3% in 2006, *Statistics New Zealand*), but this translates into an increase in the actual number of seniors of almost 60,000. More tellingly, the proportion of New Zealanders who will become seniors is expected to more than double over the next 30 or so years, so that they will comprise over one-quarter of New Zealand's population from the late 2030s (*Statistics New Zealand website 2*).

Population ageing is not unique to New Zealand or even to "developed" nations, and is in many cases occurring at a faster rate in other countries (*Statistics New Zealand website 2*). Worldwide, one out of every ten persons is now 60 years or above and by 2050, one out of five will be a senior (*United Nations Organization*). For the first

time in history, the percentage of people aged 60-plus will be about the same as the percentage of people younger than 15 (*White House Conference on Ageing 2005*). By 2008 the entire baby boomer generation will be over 50, making it the largest and most powerful demographic group in our society. One obvious worldwide consequence of an ageing population is that impairment will also increase. Loss of mobility and agility are the most common impairments, and these are mostly brought on by disease (*Office of Disability Information*).

Currently, it is estimated that between 600 million and one billion people experience disabilities worldwide. That is about 10% of world population (*Hansen, 2005*). In Japan, the proportion of the population 65 and older is expected to reach 25% by 2015, and almost 40% of these are expected to have some form of disability (*Schoeni et. al, 2005*). In China, there are currently 60 million people with disabilities and this is expected to rise (*Pufang, 2005*). Telling indicators of the increase in disability with age include an Australia website, *Access Travel Australia*, which provides “*travel information for seniors and people with disabilities*”, and the annual “*International Conference on Mobility and Transport for Elderly and Disabled Persons*” which this year (2007) will have its eleventh session in Montreal, Quebec (*TRANSED*).

### **C) Spending Power of People with Disabilities**

There is little information accessible concerning the discretionary spending power of New Zealanders with disabilities, New Zealand tourists with disabilities, or visitors from overseas to New Zealand who have disabilities. However, some information is available concerning the spending power of people with disabilities in other countries. For example, a ten-year-old study of our largest tourism market reports that, up to the year of the report (1998), Australians with disabilities undertook some 3.7 million internal trips per year generating some A\$29.8 million nights (*Darcy, 1998*). Up to 2004, the Australian accessible tourism industry was estimated to be worth A\$1.5 billion, and the disposable income of people with disabilities in Australia was A\$26 billion per annum (*Nican, 2004*). An extrapolated estimation from this Australian figure implies that New Zealanders with disabilities may have about \$5.2 billion in disposable income per annum. Similar to the estimates of disposable income held by Australians with disabilities were found for Canadians with disabilities (*Conference Board of Canada*).

In the USA, people with disabilities have \$175 billion in discretionary spending (*United States Department of Labour and Department of Justice websites*). A 2002 market study conducted by Harris Interactive in cooperation with the Travel Industry Association of America and the *Open Doors Organization (ODO)* identified and quantified the needs and interests of people with disabilities with respect to the travel, entertainment and hospitality industries. It found that travelers with disabilities take 31.7 million trips per year in the U.S., and spend \$13.6 billion annually. Major areas of spending include \$3.3 billion on airfare, \$4.2 billion on hotel accommodations, and \$2.7 billion on food and beverage. In addition, adults with disabilities patronize restaurants about once a week, and they account for \$36 billion in annual revenue for restaurants (*ODO*).

Similar trends are evident in other countries. For example, the *Employers Forum on Disability* (2005) estimated 10 million adults with disabilities in the United Kingdom, with an estimated annual purchasing power of 80 billion pounds. The *Conference Board of Canada* reported working-age Canadians with disabilities had a combined annual disposable income of \$25 billion.

In addition, insight can be gained from an investigation of who holds the wealth in western societies. For example, the baby boomers hold more than 40% of Australia's household wealth (*National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling*). Australians aged over 45 represented only 45% of spending in most categories in 1989, but this figure will grow to 55 percent by 2009. People aged 45 to 54 represented 20.5% of spending on recreation in 1989; this had grown to 25.6 percent by 1999. The figures are very similar for food, clothing, and many other categories. Meanwhile, boomers' parents, the so-called Silent Generation, will experience increasing mortality, and inheritances will spell the largest intergenerational wealth transfer in history (*Roberts and Hill*). In contrast, the share of total wealth held by 25 to 39-year-old Australians declined from 27% to 19% over the same period. Mindful that disability increases with age, it is safe to assume that increasing age of those holding the wealth in Australia will lead to an increasing percentage of people experiencing disabilities that have high discretionary spending power.

In the USA, Americans 50 years and older control 77% of all financial assets, own almost 50% of all credit cards, and account for more than 50% of discretionary spending power – more than 2.5 times the average per capita. Travel ranks among the top leisure activities for Americans over 50, and mature vacationers travel more often than any other age group, and stay in places longer (*Suddenly Senior* website).

China, a country currently being courted by New Zealand tourism interests, is another example of a country in which the ageing of the population, coupled with the current and projected future rise in the economy, equates to an increasing number of Chinese nationals with disabilities who also have more disposable income. In fact, an increase in age, discretionary spending power, and disability is likely to be common in all New Zealand tourism markets.

#### **D) Tourism for People with Disabilities in New Zealand**

There are no data available concerning the number of tourists within or entering New Zealand who have disabilities. Some insight may be gleaned about this aspect of the tourism industry from the fact that the number of visitors to New Zealand in the upper age groups has increased steadily in the last few years (Fig. 1, p 9). Almost 1 million visitors to New Zealand in 2005 were 45 years or older, and this number can be expected to increase.

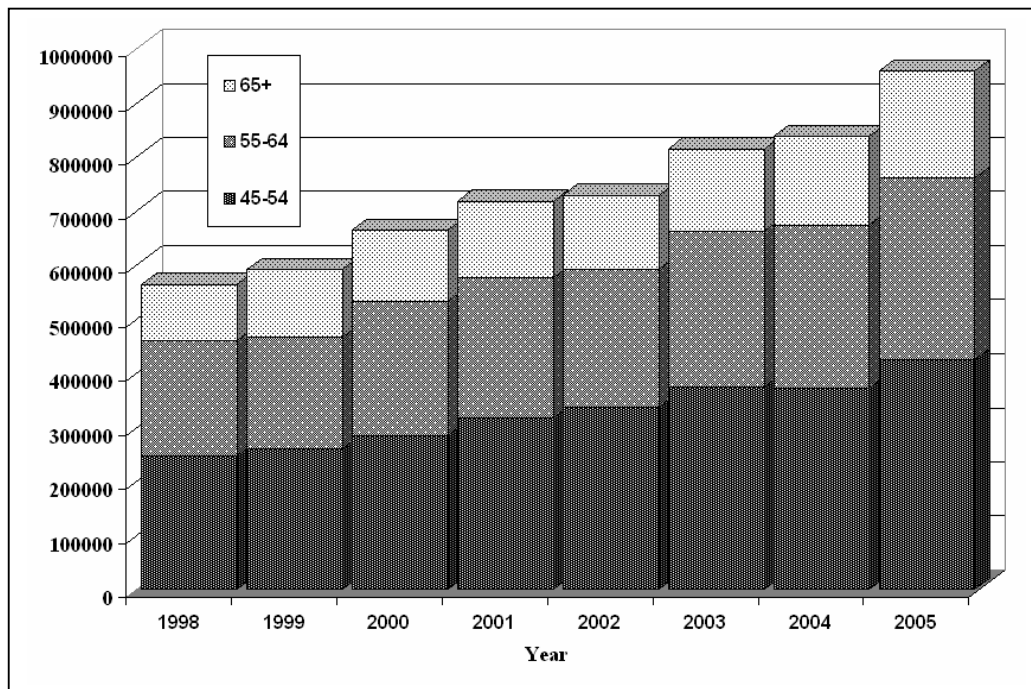


Fig 1. Increase in numbers of tourists to New Zealand in the upper age groups from 1998 to 2006. Graph created from data available at the *Ministry of Tourism International Visitor Survey Data and Analysis* website:

Nor is there much information available from sources accessible to potential overseas visitors. For example, a Google search (1<sup>st</sup> February, 2007) using the key words “tourism”, “disability”, “disabilities”, “wheelchair”, and “New Zealand” shows the first eleven entries to be

- *WEKA*, the New Zealand Disabilities information web site. This website provides information about a number of factors affecting New Zealanders with disabilities. At the time of writing, it included a travel and tourism page that had a book review of an out-of-print guide to New Zealand walks for people with disabilities, a list of 10 sites of interest to tourists with disabilities (including vehicle hire companies, tour operators - some of whom are no longer operating or do so from other countries, and product review sites), and a list of resources for New Zealanders with disabilities wishing to travel abroad (*WEKA*);
- Notification of a seminar to be given on accessible tourism research by an Australian researcher at the New Zealand Tourism Research Institute, Auckland University of Technology;
- Information for students with disabilities at Otago University;
- The *Statistic New Zealand* page reporting the 1996 household disability survey, included because of unrelated links to Tourism Satellite Accounts
- *New Zealand Tourism Online*, an information portal for tourists which includes a page for people with special needs. However, the information to be found on that site was limited to the following statements:

- **“Disabled Facilities:** *New Zealand law requires that every new building and major reconstruction provide 'reasonable and adequate' access for people with disabilities. Most facilities have wheelchair access, but it is wise to check when booking.*
- **Transport for the Disabled:** *Tour operators such as Accessible Tours and Jetsave can provide holiday packages for individuals and groups. Most transport operators do cater for people with special needs, but it is recommended to phone ahead to inform operators and check availability. Most urban transport buses are not equipped to cater for the disabled. Parking concessions are available for people with disabilities, and temporary display cards can be issued for the length of a visitor's stay. In order to obtain a New Zealand card, visitors should bring their home mobility card or medical certificate as proof of disability. Most parking areas have parks specifically allocated for the disabled.”*
- An article on disabilities with unrelated side-column links to a page on tourism;
- *Scoop*, a press release driven Internet news agency; in this case, a research result because there is an article on disabilities and an unrelated article on tourism;
- A mention of the *WEKA* site;
- A link site to mobility products and services;
- The *New Zealand Disabled Persons Assembly (DPA)* site. The DPA is an umbrella organization representing people with disabilities, the organizations that are involved in advocacy on their behalf, and service providers. Their goal is to be *“included in all community social activities, including developing our own, and (to be) catered for in tourism and other promotional campaigns”* (DPA); and finally
- A news release concerning the recipient of an award for, amongst other things, introducing innovative changes in the teaching of languages in tourism, and in access to teaching for the disabled.

Nor are the official government web sites catering for tourists much help. *Tourism New Zealand (TNZ)*, a Crown Entity established under the New Zealand Tourism Board Act 1991 has as its principle objective to ensure New Zealand is marketed internationally as a visitor destination in order to maximize the long term benefits for New Zealand. A search on the *TNZ* website on the same day and using the same search terms as for the Google search turned up one page (*Tourism New Zealand website 1*) which essentially was a review of two books (including the one mentioned above, and both no longer available at bookstores), and a review of an accessibility-related website, which is apparently no longer functioning. However, the *TNZ* site did state that New Zealand is

*“full of exciting places to explore and sights to see whether you are able bodied or not. It is a country that is ‘accessible’ to people with disabilities. The problem is not many people know that.”*

There is no further information. A similar search of the *Ministry of Tourism* results in no hits.

In addition, the subject of tourism for people with disabilities appears to be absent from tourism courses given in New Zealand universities and polytechnics, at least if standard text books are anything to go by. None of five books concerning tourism in New Zealand (Collier, 2003, Collier and Harraway, 2006; Hall and Kearsley, 2001; Harraway, 1998; McLure, 2004) used in such courses and published in the last ten years mentions tourism for people with disabilities.

### **E) Tourism for People with Disabilities on the West Coast**

There are no data available concerning the number of tourists with disabilities visiting the West Coast. A Google search was made on the same date and using the same search terms as in the search reported above, but included the term “West Coast New Zealand”. It returned only three relevant references, two of which were not particularly helpful. The first was the *Tourism West Coast* website, but was merely a reference to contact details for the Disability Information Service in Greymouth and nothing more. No information on accessible travel on the West Coast was given on the site. The second was the *New Zealand Tourism Online* site mentioned earlier. The third was for a lodge near Hokitika, which was presented on the website *Friars Guide to NZ Accommodation* as having at least one wheelchair accessible unit. However, a subsequent search of the lodge’s own website revealed no information about accessibility.

### **F) Resources for Travellers with Disabilities**

Alexia Pickering, Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit, has acted as an advocate for people with disabilities for many years. In 2000, she published a book called *Accessible New Zealand* which describes a number of towns, regions, and tourist facilities throughout New Zealand that she personally visited (Pickering, 2000). This publication was a huge step forward in providing information for people with disabilities travelling in New Zealand. It was launched by the Hon. Ruth Dyson, then and still (2007) central government Minister for Disability Issues, who noted the book’s description of aircraft travel included the following:

*"The smaller airports with smaller aircraft have forklifts to assist with boarding a wheelchair. Or if a forklift is not available, ground crews will carry the passenger and transit chair up the stairs."*

Dyson commented that being hoisted by forklift onto a plane is a totally “*unacceptable experience for people with disabilities as we head into the 21 century*”. She further added that something is severely wrong with our priorities when we can fly people to the moon, but we cannot get them onto planes in wheelchairs with any sort of dignity (*New Zealand Government Executive*).

In Pickering’s book, the section on the West Coast comprised short descriptions of the three big towns plus Franz Josef, Fox Glacier and Haast, nine attractions, and 38 accommodation providers. The accommodation section of the book was based on an accessible database called *Travel Access*, which was to be updated regularly. Unfortunately, the website is no longer available, and the book is one of the now-out-of-print guide book mentioned on several information websites (above).

Also in 2000, Anna and Andrew Jameson published *Accessible Walks*, a guide to scenic walks in the South Island. The book describes and rates 90 walks in the South Island in terms of accessibility to people with a disability, including those who use a wheelchair. The authors also point out that the guide is useful for families with pushchairs, and for older people who want to enjoy the outdoors without going on a major expedition. Walks are rated from “excellent” (suitable for wheelchair users of average fitness on their own, with no obstacles on the track, a smooth surface, and a level gradient) to “challenging”, (not suitable for wheelchair users of average fitness and strength on their own, the need for a strong companion, track obstacles requiring getting out of a chair, and track uneven, narrow, and/or steep). Other facilities at the start of the walks are also described, for example, the presence or absence of parking and toileting for people with disabilities. Twenty-one of the walks are located on the West Coast, with just over half being rated as “challenging”. The remaining walks are rated as “good”. Unfortunately, this publication is also out of print (and the second such book mentioned in the discussion above) and is no longer available through booksellers, although recently, a copy came up for sale on the New Zealand auction/sale website, “Trade Me.”

The impetus to provide travellers with disabilities in New Zealand with up-to-date information seems to be coming from the consumer end of the equation. A good example is the recently constructed “*New Zealand on Wheels*” website, launched to cover wheelchair travel in this country (NZOW). The home page of this site provides an explanation for why the web site was started and is a wake-up call to the industry and all stakeholders:

*“Hi, my name is Simon O’Keefe and I’m a trustee of NZ On Wheels. I live in Wellington and use a power chair to get around. Although I’ve traveled quite a bit with my chair, I’m learning all the time about the good and bad aspects of wheelchair travel and I’d like to share some of this with you. I want the reviews on this site to provide honest and useful advice for traveling with a wheelchair in New Zealand.”*

*NZ On Wheels is our **travel guide** for people in wheelchairs. We’ve been travelling around New Zealand for several years with a power chair and realized that there is hardly any information around to assist in planning our trips. Even after asking what seems like **hundreds of questions**, it is hard to get a clear idea of what to expect when visiting a new place. And as everyone in a wheelchair will know, what most people think is accessible and what actually **is** accessible are two different things!*

*We work on a voluntary basis to provide this information - we don’t get paid to write reviews. This means we can say exactly what we think!*

*Some standard problems:*

- *access is fine for a power chair, but not for manual chairs (and vice versa)*
- *level access but the doorway is not **wide** enough*
- *a **lift** is available but it is too small to fit a power chair*
- *signs that say “limited wheelchair access” (what does that **mean**?)*

- *motel/hotel rooms that are accessible, apart from the TV, phone and remote, which are up on a shelf*
- *level ground is coated in **gravel***

*NZ On Wheels started after a trip to Rotorua in September 2006. We were told over the phone that one of the main geothermal parks was fully accessible. On arrival we were given a map that indicated “**limited**” **wheelchair access** to at least half the park - but **no explanation** about what “limited” meant. This was illustrated by the international access sign with a cross through it... limited access, no access, or what? By this point we had already paid \$25 each to enter the park so thought we’d investigate!*

*It turned out that the access was pretty good for a power chair - there were only a few tracks that we couldn’t get to. For a manual chair though, it would have been tough to see as much of the park without assistance as the tracks were gravel and there were some steep hills.*

*New Zealand is an **amazing country** and everyone deserves to see it. We decided that if good information wasn’t available, we would provide it...the **NZ On Wheels website** began a week later!”*

*New Zealand On Wheels Homepage website February 1, 2007 (NZOW, emphasis: the author.)*

At launch time, (February 1, 2007), NZOW already had reviews of about a dozen services, including accommodation, attraction, and transport services. It requests any submissions praising or panning tourism products from the point of view of customers with disabilities, and, while it does not yet (March 1, 2007) come up when Googled, is bound to grow when it becomes better known. An example of the type of post on the site is that which recommends those in wheelchairs not travel on the Bluebridge ferry “Santa Regina” (Appendix 2, p 57).

The *Wellington City Council* with Positively Wellington Tourism is making a first attempt to provide information on accessible tourism business by listing operator self-assessed accommodation (*Wellington City Council website 1*), and sights and activities (*Wellington City Council website 2*). They hope to expand this service, and are keen to see a web-based New Zealand-wide accessible tourism information service developed (Ross Livingstone, pers. comm by telephone). However, according to Simon O’Keefe, trustee of *New Zealand on Wheels*,

*“It seems like councils and businesses all have very good policies on wheelchair access. Everyone means well. Things fall down when it comes to the execution of those policies in everyday life. For example, the Wellington City Council has excellent intentions about the accessibility of our capital city. However they have recently built a beautiful new park on the waterfront, and added 10 cm deep kerb cuts that even a powered chair will struggle with. This park is classed as accessible, as it is flat. But small details like the kerb cuts can really ruin a visitor’s ability to get around safely and easily.” (Simon O’Keefe, pers. comm by email).*

Worldwide, many sites like *New Zealand on Wheels* have been in existence for some time or have begun to spring up. These web sites, for and/or by people with disabilities provide information on everything, including coverage of world tourism, opinion pieces, forums, and other aspects of travelling for people with disabilities. A few examples include:

- The extensive *Rolling Rains Report* (Rosangela Berman-Bieler and Scott Rains). This website, overseen by Dr. Scott Rains, has numerous articles, postings, and discussion groups about travel for the disabled, destinations (including New Zealand), cruises, airlines, book reviews, meetings and symposia, careers, education, law, policies, and other subjects too numerous to mention, all of interest to people with disabilities.
- The *Disability Travel and Recreation Resources* website, which includes information and links, and an analysis or commentary on travel to a number of countries. New Zealand is listed under “South Pacific” and there are just four entries – a tour operator, the Automobile Association travel site (the accommodation list includes some accessible providers), a motor caravan association, and a wheelchair accessible rental motor home company.
- *Gimp on the Go*, which bills itself as the internet’s premier disabilities travel publication, is another extensive site, but it does not mention New Zealand at all.
- *Apparelyzed*, a spinal cord injury peer support site, has forums for people to post comments or queries about travel to different places and their experiences (*Apparelyzed website 2*). They have several articles both praising and panning various sites in New Zealand (for example, see *Apparelyzed website 3*).
- Some sites, for example, *Global Access News*, have articles written by travellers with disabilities about their travel experiences in different places, including travellers to New Zealand.
- Many websites provide both online and hardcopy travel information for subscribers who are disabled. For example, *Emerging Horizons* focuses on travel for people with mobility disabilities including everyone from wheelchair-users to slow walkers, and provides access information, resources, and news and travel tips.
- International and well known sites such as *Geocities* have web blog travel diaries, including by travelers to New Zealand. One such is that by June and Syd Burns, who praise and pan what is on offer for the traveler in a wheelchair on the West Coast (Appendix 3, p 58) and elsewhere in New Zealand.
- In the USA, the *People With Disabilities Broadcasting Corporation* is in the process of creating a 24 hour TV channel which will include shows about travel for the disabled (Rosangela Berman-Bieler and Scott Rains, pers. comm by email).
- Some websites also rate travel providers. For example, *Apparelyzed* states Air New Zealand will not lift passengers with disabilities into aircraft seats and suggests travelling with Qantas instead, because they have a “very comprehensive set of policies and are very helpful indeed”. Another post on *Apparelyzed* warns “NEVER, NEVER book Holland America [a cruise ship line] if you are wheelchair bound.”
- Similar discussions of the Air New Zealand wheelchair policy occur for example at *Flyertalk*.

The problem with such postings is that, even if conditions change, any negative comments can remain on the internet for many years.

In addition to these efforts by individuals and groups to focus the attention of policy makers and developers on provision of tourism for people with disabilities, some development agencies have an increasing interest in this area. Examples include the *United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific*, the *Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Secretariat*, and the *European Commission*. Such agencies have been conducting research, holding forums and conferences and producing policy and development documents on tourism for people with disabilities for a number of years.

On a related matter, the “United Nations Convention on Rights of Disabled Persons” (*United Nations Organization website 3*) was officially presented on December 13 2006 to the United Nations General Assembly for ratification. On March 30th this year (2007) it was signed by 80 countries and needs only 19 more ratifications before coming into force. The convention is the result of a 5 year campaign spearheaded by disability rights activists and the governments of New Zealand, Ecuador, and Mexico (*International Herald Tribune*). At the final meeting on the text in August 2006, delegates representing 115 countries participated. Incidentally, *Disability World* reports that the “*Person of the Year*” was Ambassador Don Mackay of New Zealand, who patiently shepherded the hundreds of conflicting additions to the UN text into negotiations, compromises, deals and face-saving concessions late into many nights over the previous three years.

At the national level, many countries have organizations interested in the subject of tourism and the disabled. A typical example is that of the *Society for Accessible Travel and Hospitality (SATH)* in the United States. According to their website, *SATH* is an educational non-profit membership organization whose mission is to raise awareness of the needs of all travellers with disabilities, remove physical and attitudinal barriers to free access and expand travel opportunities in the United States and abroad. Members include travel professionals, consumers with disabilities and other individuals and corporations who support their mission. Their aim is to raise awareness and they provide detailed training on how to serve and market to travellers with disabilities, organize conferences and provide speakers and panels for other industry associations (such as American Society of Travel Agents, National Tour Association, International Institute for Peace Through Tourism, and Travel Industry Association of America). *SATH* have sponsored the World Congress for Travellers with Disabilities and the Mature since 1977, and the Travellers with Disabilities Awareness Week. They serve on a number of advisory committees (for example, Greyhound Lines and Northwest Airlines) and perform access audits of hotels, restaurants and attractions. Since its inception, *SATH* has served as a clearinghouse for access information, providing articles and updates on destinations, cruises, web sites, legislation and more. They yearly answer hundreds of media requests on all aspects of disability travel including market statistics, travel trends and accessible destinations, and provides speakers for radio and television.

Below are given just a few examples of similar activities occurring in some of New Zealand's most important markets.

In Australia:

- *Access Travel Australia* and similar large sites have extensive information and links to information about accessible travel in that country and overseas;
- State parks departments list accessible parks and sites, e.g., see the *New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service*
- State-wide initiatives create excellence in barrier-free tourism. For example, in Tasmania, the "Devils Playground" is a barrier-free circuit of the entire state, providing self-catered accommodation and facilities for a range of visitors but especially for those with physical disabilities, a group "*previously almost totally ignored*" (Nican).
- State Tourism Organizations have a keen interest in catering to the access tourism market, for example, see the *Tourism New South Wales Disability Action Plan*
- Cities provide specific information about accessible tourism in their cities and areas, for example, see *City of Melbourne, Victoria*
- Shires provide access information for those interested, for example, see *Noosa Shire Queensland*.
- University research focuses on tourism for people with disabilities; for example, the *Curtin University of Technology Centre for Research into Disability and Society* runs conferences such as "Valuing the Disability Market in Tourism", September 2004.
- Individual companies develop products specifically for the access market. For examples, see *Byron Bay Rainforest Resort* and *O'Carrolllys, two, wheelchair-accessible accommodation providers*, and *Wheelie Easy* supported holidays and tours in Queensland, which has links to tourism products provided for those with disabilities in other Australian states.

In spite of this more progressive attitude to travel for people with disabilities in Australia compared to New Zealand, *Curtin University of Technology* describes tourism service provision to this sector as still fragmented and lacking in universality in that country. Information is reported to be unreliable and inaccurate, and the overall tourism experience for people with disabilities lags far behind that provided to other segments of the population.

In Canada:

- The Federal Government of Canada has an *Access to Canada* information site covering accessible transport and travel in that country.
- Umbrella groups such as The Canadian Abilities Foundation produce sites such as *Access Guide Canada* aimed at travellers
- Provinces and provincial Ministries of Tourism conduct research and have developing accessibility plans, for e.g., see *Government of Quebec, Government of Ontario*
- Government ministries support conferences on travel for people with disabilities, for example, *Transport Canada* will host the "11<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Mobility and Transport for Elderly and Disabled Persons" in Montreal, Quebec this year (2007).

#### In the USA:

- The Tourism for All Network for Responsible, Sustainable, and Inclusive Development of Tourist Destinations Overview is a project developed by the Inter-American Institute on Disability and Inclusive Development and its partners. It is a response to the enormous unmet demand of tourists, especially from the U.S.A., Europe and Asia, for accessible cruises and the market potential they represent for inclusive destination development (Rosangela Berman-Bieler and Scott Rains, pers. comm by email, Appendix 10, p 71).
- The *National Center on Accessibility* is a collaborative program of Indiana University and the National Park Service. It promotes access for people with disabilities in recreation, and, over the last decade, has played a critical role in increasing awareness of inclusion of people with disabilities in parks, recreation and tourism while advancing the spirit and intent of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Rehabilitation Act and other disability legislation.
- *Disability Statistics* allows planners access to comprehensive, up-to-date U.S. disability statistics via graphs and charts, tables, and written descriptions.
- The *Center for Universal Design* is a national information, technical assistance, and research center that evaluates, develops, and promotes accessible and universal design in housing, commercial and public facilities, outdoor environments, and products, including in the realm of tourism. The Center was established under a grant from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, US Department of Education
- *Adaptive Environments* is a 29 year old educational non-profit organization committed to advancing the role of design in expanding opportunity and enhancing experience for people of all ages and abilities.
- The *Annual Disability Status Reports* provide policy makers, advocates for the disabled, reporters, and the public with a summary of the most recent demographic and economic statistics on the working-age (ages 21-64) population with disabilities.
- The *John Dillon Park* in New York State is at the cutting edge of accessible wilderness parks. It is the first wilderness area with facilities specifically designed to accommodate people with disabilities, providing disabled access and facilities for camping, fishing and enjoying nature along three miles of trails built to the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Other innovations include wheelchair accessible lean-tos and solar panels at the welcome center for power to charge electric wheelchair batteries (Rosangela Berman-Bieler and Scott Rains, pers. comm by email).

#### In Asia:

- The *Accessible Japan* website provides information about accessible attractions, accommodation, and transport in that country
- Another Japanese resource site for people with disabilities includes lists of schools and universities doing research in access (*Information Resource for People with Disabilities in Japan*)
- The government of Hong Kong provides information on accessible public transport (*Government of Hong Kong Transport Department*)
- The *Singapore Tourism Board* lists accessible operators.
- The Beijing Municipal Bureau of Cultural Relics are making many of their tourist attractions wheelchair accessible in anticipation of the World

Paralympics Games to be held in that city in 2008 (*Travel Guide China* website).

#### In Europe

- *One Stop Shop for Accessible Tourism in Europe* is a fairly new website that “aims to implement a prototype multi-platform, multi-lingual digital information service providing national and regional content on Accessible Tourist Venues, Sites and Accommodation.”
- *Accessible Europe* is a website created by a pool of European travel agents expert in accessible tourism services for people with special needs – those with disabilities, slow walkers, the aged, families, and all needing special care – visiting Europe and the Mediterranean countries.
- Tourism interests in various countries provide web information about travel for people with disabilities in their country. Examples include Spain (*Turismo@Polibea* website), Portugal (*Accessible Portugal* website), and others.
- Many local regional councils in the EEC provide information for the traveller with disabilities. For example, *Getting About in Greater Bristol* is a website established by Bristol, South Gloucestershire, North Somerset and Bath and North East Somerset (Great Britain) councils working with Bristol Physical Access Chain and an independent consultant. It details accessible transportation options for all these areas, whether by bus, rail, taxi, day cruise or ferry, gives the location of accessible bathrooms, discusses shopping and museum access in the various areas, gives links to finding accessible accommodation, and more.

These examples are by no means exhaustive of the kinds of sites available to web-savvy tourists with disabilities who are using the internet more and more to plan their overseas trips. One such traveller living in South Africa is probably typical of many because he booked accommodation for a trip around New Zealand (and Australia) only after doing internet research on hotels/motels, and only after considering the email feedback from each business contacted concerning wheelchair access (Hilton Purvis, pers. com by email).

#### **G) Correspondence with Local and Overseas Travellers with Disabilities within and to New Zealand**

Web searches were conducted to locate and request input from:

- Individuals, both in New Zealand and overseas, interested in tourism for people with disabilities, especially in New Zealand
- Websites, both in New Zealand and overseas, devoted to or mentioning tourism for people with disabilities, especially in New Zealand

Requests for information from interested individuals and/or tourists with disabilities who had travelled to New Zealand, or tourists with disabilities who wanted to travel to New Zealand were emailed out or were posted on several national and international sites. A typical email/post can be found in Appendix 4, p 60. Some of the resulting correspondence is reported below, or has already been quoted in the text. .

The response from Simon O’Keefe (NZOW) included the following:

*“It is hard to find good, useful information about wheelchair access in NZ. Lots of tourism and accommodation operators will say that they are accessible, because they don’t really know what is required. For example, I stayed in a “fully accessible room” in a hotel, where my power chair could only just scrape through the door. The hotel lost a bit of paint, and we lost our belief in tourism operators” views on accessibility. Now I have to see it to believe it.*

*People in wheelchairs get around less accessible places due to a bit of kiwi ingenuity and a spirit of adventure. It would be nice if you didn’t always have to be quite so adventurous.”*

Leon Katavich is an Aucklander who uses a wheelchair and who makes regular trips to Rotorua and Wellington (staying overnight in Taupo). He writes:

*“I have stayed in hotels and motels which advertise disabled access rooms. I have found on average that these disabled access rooms are inadequate.”*

His full report describing encountered problems in hotels and motels can be found in Appendix 5, p 61.

A disappointed holiday-maker (who wishes to remain anonymous), described by email a trip she tried to take in the upper North Island with a relative who uses a wheelchair. She and her relative were shocked at how few wheelchair accessible motels there are. The one motel with a wheelchair unit in a sizeable town they wished to visit was booked, leaving these travelers with no choices within a two hour drive, and forcing them to cancel their holiday plans to this popular tourist area. This correspondent calls for more accessible accommodation, and asks,

*"Why can't New Zealand fix the problem of its woeful lack of suitable accommodation and market itself as a great place to visit if you are confined to a wheelchair?"*

Another typical critique of wheelchair travel in New Zealand is the response by a South African resident, Hilton Purvis, who uses a wheelchair, and his able-bodied wife, Loretta Jakubiec. The response was to a notice board post on the website, *Apparelyzed*, and can be found in full on that website and in part in Appendix 6, 62. Purvis and Jakubiec listed good and bad points about travel for the wheelchair bound in New Zealand.

Positive aspects included lodging in accessible holiday parks, wheelchair taxis and kneeling buses, lots of ramps, boardwalks, accessible public toilets, and most importantly to them as budget travellers, acceptable lodging in all price ranges. On this last point, the authors note that:

*“New Zealand's Top 10 [Holiday Parks] and HAPNZ [Holiday Accommodation Parks of New Zealand] holiday park networks are unique in that they are*

*affordable, accessible, close to / or in, the main town centres, and easily contactable via their websites / email. Other countries offer budget hotels/motels, but they are usually 10+ km out of town, far from transport services, and not as accessible. Hotels closer to the towns / cities are more expensive. When we travel we are not interested in plush carpeted floors, or pictures hanging on the walls . . . we want a clean budget priced room with an accessible en-suite bathroom, within easy walking distance of the centres. In all our travels (to 12 countries on 5 continents) the only place we found this was in NZ.”*

Negative aspects included inaccessible forest walks, or walks where help was needed, despite being sign-posted with the wheelchair symbol. Purvis and Jakubiec were also surprised to encounter very few New Zealanders with disabilities on their travels. The authors critiqued 13 places of accommodations at which they stayed from the point of view of someone with mobility issues. They were assured by operators before booking that each place of accommodation was wheelchair accessible. However, in spite of an overall positive assessment, all 13 places of accommodation had access problems of one form or another. These included:

- *“pedestal hand basins, which are out-of-bounds for wheelchair folk,*
- *cupboards underneath hand basins, which render them useless,*
- *no accessible tables in rooms; these are essential for working on / eating from / reading from, etc,*
- *shaving mirrors, or lack thereof, which frustrate clean shaven men, and must frustrate women wishing to put on make-up or comb their hair, etc,*
- *Kitchenettes are very handy extras to these rooms, but all assumed one had an able-bodied companion to reach the basin, microwave, hotplate, kettle, etc.”*

The full response from Purvis and Jakubiec can be found in Appendix 6, p 62.

Bruce Mumford, a visitor from Australia who uses a wheelchair, gave a number of named New Zealand tourism operations a glowing report. However, he criticized other sites and providers, and pointed out that:

*“Like anywhere else, there are still places that either cater poorly for those needing good access, or who don't even bother trying. [When booking accommodation,] avoid any places with "Lodge", "Manor" or "Resort" at the end of their names, as in my experience, this just meant vastly inflated prices with very little or no help for people with a disability! Some 'accessible' places the travel agent had booked for me had plenty of room inside, but getting through the door was impossible in a wheelchair because of the step! After two big trips overseas now as a tourist with a disability, I've decided to set up my own disability tourism consultancy. I have come to understand that regular travel agents generally don't understand the needs of the disabled traveller; and who better to help than someone who is disabled themselves and has tried traveling? Mumford, B. 2006, by email.*

The full text of Mumford's report can be found in Appendix 7, p 64.

A group of visitors from the USA visited the West Coast in December 2006. A member of the group, Doug Troutman, a former Oregon State Accessibility Project Coordinator is currently a consultant for disabled access in that state. He was contacted after his return home to the USA for any comments he might have concerning access in New Zealand. While Troutman did not tour here with the intention of critiquing access tourism in New Zealand, he was attuned to access issues because of his background, and the fact that a member of his group had a disability. Troutman saw many good things being done in New Zealand, including many trails that were accessible, but pointed out that it is often small details that create problems. For example, he noted door knobs here are placed very high, and that there were no specifically accessible facilities in the various accommodations the group stayed at. In Greymouth, he found curbing to be generally good, as was access to retail shops, although often shops were too crowded with furniture and fixtures to be wheelchair accessible. At Punakaiki, Troutman was surprised to see the international wheelchair sign (Appendix 8, p 68) with a slash through it. Excerpts from Troutman's correspondence pertinent to this report can be found in Appendix 9, p 69.

#### **H). Correspondence with New Zealand-based Purveyors of Tourism Products for Visitors with Mobility Concerns**

A search was made through several search engines (Google, Ask, Yahoo) for New Zealand tours and tourism products for people with disabilities or for those using wheelchairs. Much searching using different combinations of search terms and frequent following of links eventually turned up eleven New Zealand purveyors of tourism products for people with disabilities within the country. In November 2006, these purveyors were sent a small survey by email, in which they were asked to describe, amongst other things, the product they offered, how long the business had been offering services/products for those with mobility concerns, what approximate percentage of the tourism business income was derived from service to the disabled, did they include or wish to include the West Coast as part of their tours/services for tourists with mobility problems, and if not, why not. Reminder notices were sent in December 2006, and again in January 2007 to those who had not responded to the initial email request.

Only four of the eleven operators responded to the survey by the time of writing (March 2007). The two largest operators (judging by their websites) did not respond. Two responding operators declined to fill in the survey as one did only contract work for a transport company, and one had had no interest shown in products he was prepared to offer people with disabilities. One operator who filled in the survey was *Easy Rider Tours*. However, this company is actually a wheelchair specialist charter and not a tourism business as such, although they would like to run tours for visitors with disabilities.

The final responder was *Rest NZ Tours*. Only 5% of their tourism business income was derived from services to people with mobility problems in the 2004-2005 peak season, and all these customers were from overseas. This company offers pre-arranged tours throughout New Zealand and have a car with hand controls. They include trips to Punakaiki and Franz Josef for customers with disabilities because these areas include "*activities that can be done by disabled people.*" They would like to expand their inclusion of further features and highlights on the West Coast but do

not because “walks for example are not currently accessible by wheelchair.” They would also like to see “more activities that can be enjoyed [by people with mobility problems].”

The search for New Zealand-based purveyors of tourism services for people with disabilities was conducted in English. It was not possible to survey for such businesses in other languages, although it is known that at least a few exist. An example is the *Japanese Guest House*. This 5 year old business, based in Kaiapoi north of Christchurch, advertises only in Japanese and caters only for Japanese tourists. The business offers accommodation and South-island-wide touring and activity services to Japanese visitors, specifically targeting those over 50 years of age, and those with disabilities, although they also cater to any Japanese guest. They estimate that about 50% of their customers have disabilities and often these visitors are accompanied by family and/or friends. Photographs of Japanese customers with disabilities who use this business are featured prominently on the business website (*Japanese Guest House*). The operator has an accessible van, accessible accommodation, and includes meals in her packages, and describes her targeted business as growing annually.

## SECTION 3.

### FIELD RESEARCH

#### Introduction

Field research was conducted assessing tourism businesses and public services and facilities on the West Coast of the South Island of New Zealand. Defining what is a tourism business is difficult because “Tourism” as an industry does not fit conventional definitions of what an industry is. In order to circumvent this problem, businesses that were obviously aimed at tourists or businesses that had earlier declared they were tourism dependent (*Rhodda 2006 B*) were selected for assessment.

The field research concentrated on assessing access or assessing premises or products for usability for those with mobility concerns. While issues of physical access primarily confront those using wheelchairs or walking devices, people with sensory disability (sight and hearing) also have problems with physical access. Nevertheless, for the sake of simplification and as a beginning, it was decided to restrict assessment just to wheelchair access, which would also include other types of mobility aids such as power chairs, strollers, and walking frames. These aids are described in the *Barrier Free New Zealand Trust (BFNZT) Resource Handbook for Barrier Free Environments* (available from the *BFNZT*). Assessments were carried out in the three main centres, seven smaller centres, and in some rural locations, in coastal areas from Westport to Haast. Most (more than 98%) assessments, including all the in-depth assessments, were made by a barrier-free auditor (Lyn Heine). Lyn is a New Zealand registered occupational therapist with experience in housing modifications for people with disabilities, has barrier-free training, and is completing the barrier free auditor qualifications through the auspices of the *BFNZT*. Assessments were carried out in compliance with guidelines set out in the *BFNZT Resource Handbook*. A very few assessments (less than 2%) were carried out by the author, who is not an experienced barrier-free auditor. However, that small number of assessments was only conducted after learning about accessibility assessment factors from the barrier-free auditor.

#### Methods

##### **A. Assessment of Access to Tourism Operations on the West Coast of the South Island of New Zealand**

a) Two hundred and twenty tourism businesses were visually assessed to determine if the premises were accessible to a person in a wheelchair. This represents almost 40% of tourism businesses on the West Coast, and covered the 6 subsets described by *Rhodda, 2006A*, which were:

- 1) Accommodation: hotels, motels, bed and breakfast, home/farmstay, lodges, backpackers, holiday parks, holiday homes;
- 2) Food and Beverage providers, both licensed to sell alcohol and not licensed;
- 3) Activities and Adventures: guided tours, fishing and hunting operations, scenic flights, boat rentals etc.

- 4) Attractions: paid-entry museums, galleries, gardens, theme parks, interactive art establishments, etc.;
- 5) Retail outlets, but only if primarily directed at the tourism market (art and crafts shops, souvenir and curio stores, specialty food, e.g., salmon, specialty clothes, e.g., hand knit, etc);
- 6) Information providers: Department of Conservation information sites, iSites, national, regional, and local organizations, and interest groups.

In this part of the project, only entry to the premises was assessed, and this was conducted by a visual inspection. That is, businesses were assessed to see if a person in a wheelchair could actually enter the premises without help. In the case of accommodation, access to the booking and information office was assessed, rather than access to accommodation units. This was because of difficulty assessing all or a selection of units/rooms in a multi-unit establishment such as a hotel or motel, and to comply with the criteria of only assessing entry to the premises in other subsets. Similarly, only access to the booking office or similar building was assessed for most of the Activity and Adventure businesses, as costs of assessing the product offered were beyond the budget of this project. In towns, businesses were selected by walking around a business district and assessing any tourism business on the route. In smaller centres, most tourism businesses were assessed. Main and other entrances were assessed, or, where a designated wheelchair accessible entrance was indicated, this only was assessed.

Businesses were assigned to one of the three following levels of access depending on observed ease of access:

- *Yes*, where a person in a wheelchair or a person with a walking aid would have no difficulty in gaining access to the premises by themselves;
- *Difficult*, where there were one or a number of barriers that would hinder or make difficult wheelchair entry to the premises, or in which help would be needed to do so easily.
- *No*, where it would be impossible or improbable for a person in a wheelchair to gain access to the premises, even with a lot of help, due to delimiting barriers or a combination of barriers.

Assessed businesses were telephoned and asked the standard unvarying question: “Are you wheelchair accessible?” The response of the person answering the telephone, or the person to whom the enquiry was passed on (hereinafter called the “operator”) was assigned to one of the following:

- An unqualified “*Yes*” response
- A qualified “*Yes*” or a “*Difficult*” response (for example, “Yes, but call out when you get here to let us know because we will have to help you” or “Yes, but let us know when you are coming so that we can clear the ramp out the back” or, “Its a bit hard getting in but you should be able to do it”).
- An unqualified “*No*” response

Responses were then matched with the assessed reality and are presented in the Results section, page 28, below.

## **B. An Assessment of all Aspects of Access and Usability in a Selected Small Number of Tourism Businesses on the West Coast**

Thirty-one tourism businesses and seven Information Providers were selected for an in-depth assessment of access and usability (i.e., the ability of a person in a wheelchair to negotiate and use the premises once entry had been gained). Selection was not random, but was based on two factors. Firstly, all businesses selected in this section had answered “Yes” to the standard question “Are you wheelchair accessible?” Accommodation Providers who answered “Yes” were asked a second question, “Do you have wheelchair accessible units?” Five that responded positively to this second question were selected for assessment. Secondly, businesses were selected to ensure a representative cross-section of types of business (e.g., small accommodation and large accommodation providers, small Food and Beverage Providers and large Food and Beverage Providers) and a selection of businesses from different areas. Selected businesses were then assessed according to the *Barrier Free New Zealand Trust* Resource Handbook guidelines, and assigned one of the three levels of access (“Yes”, “Difficult”, or “No”) as described in Section 2, A.

Originally, it was hoped that the existing access and usability for each business/building could be compared to the rules of compliance in place at the time the facility was constructed. Requests for information regarding the date of building completion and designated use were made to the three district councils responsible on the West Coast. A written response supplying the information requested was received from only one district council; the second stated that the difficulty of a manual search and the fact that they were short staffed prevented them providing the information requested, and the third did not respond at all. Therefore, because the date of construction of a building used by a tourism business was known for only one District Council area, the idea of assessing buildings for compliance to standards in existence at the time of building was abandoned. Instead, buildings were assessed using current standards. This led to a uniform assessment procedure and is relevant as it is current access that is of interest. The businesses assessed were:

- Accommodation businesses. Four of five accommodation businesses which responded that they were both wheelchair accessible and had wheelchair accessible units were each requested to book a unit for the investigators. The certified barrier-free auditor (Lyn Heine) spent one night in each of the first four accommodations listed here. The last accommodation was a motor camp/camp ground which was inspected without the need to stay a night. The accommodations assessed were:
  - A motel with about 12 units in a main centre
  - An hotel with about 100 guest rooms in a main centre
  - An hotel with about 130 guest rooms in a smaller centre
  - A luxury lodge with about 10 motel-style units on the outskirts of a smaller centre. Due to a mix-up in bookings, the designated wheelchair accessible unit was not available. However, all units appeared to be built on the same design, and a non-designated unit was assessed.
  - A small motor camp/campground in a rural location which included a new social amenities block built in 2001 (Westland District Council information).

- Food and Beverage Providers. Assessments were made at the time of dining at ten different establishments. These included:
  - A boutique cafe capable of seating about 40 in a smaller centre
  - A boutique cafe capable of seating about 30 in a rural location
  - Two boutique cafes, each capable of seating about 30, located in two different main centres
  - A boutique cafe capable of seating about 20 in a smaller centre
  - A hotel dining room capable of seating about 130 in a main centre
  - A hotel dining room capable of seating about 100 in a smaller centre
  - A small dairy/takeaway with no seating in a smaller centre
  - A small dairy/takeout/eat-in capable of seating about 12 in a smaller centre
  - A country eatery, bistro style, capable of seating about 50 and contiguous with a tourism retail shop in a rural location
  
- Activity, Adventure, and Attractions Providers. Entrance fees were paid for 5 attractions and 1 activity. These, together with a well-managed and overseen free attraction (not an isolated wilderness attraction) were then assessed. They were:
  - Two museums, each in a main centre
  - A theme park near a main centre
  - A guided tour of an historic manufacturing premise in a main centre
  - A guided nature tour in the country
  - A low key nature attraction/activity in a secondary centre
  - A natural history display in a main centre
  
- Retail. Nine retail businesses aimed at the tourism market were assessed. These included:
  - 6 stand alone retail outlets
  - 3 multi-purpose facilities, each with a significant, separated-off, retail component; the retail component only was assessed
  
- Information Providers. Seven information sites were assessed. They were:
  - 2 local government supported Visitor Information Network (VIN) i-Sites, each in a main centres
  - 1 local government supported Visitor Information Network (VIN) i-Sites in a smaller centre
  - 4 Department of Conservation information sites, each in a smaller centre.

Responses were then matched with the assessed reality and are presented in the Results section, page 32, below.

## **C. An Assessment of Access to Public Facilities on the West Coast**

The following public facilities likely to be used by tourists on the West Coast were assessed for accessibility by a person in wheelchair.

- Three Laundromats. No contact information was provided on the premises or contact information had been defaced so that no person was contacted to ask the standard question “Are you wheelchair accessible?”
- Five public telephones or blocks of telephones. No person was contacted or asked the standard question “Are you wheelchair accessible?”
- Seven public toilets or blocks of toilets, each of which had the universal “wheelchair access” sign posted on the building. No person was contacted or asked the standard question “Are you wheelchair accessible?”
- Seven bank machines (automated teller machines or ATMs) belonging to five different nation-wide banking companies. As not all bank branches on the West Coast were listed in the telephone book, the 0800 number for each banking company was called and the agent asked the standard question “Are your ATM’s wheelchair accessible?” ATMs were assessed by Lyn simulating sitting in a wheelchair attempting to access the keyboard, and by measurement of physical dimensions (particularly, height of keyboard).
- Eleven banks, belonging to five different nation-wide banking companies. As not all banks had a number for their local branch in the telephone book, none were telephoned and asked the standard question “Are you wheelchair accessible?”

In addition, access to three travel agents offices was assessed. All three were telephoned and asked the standard unvarying question “Are you wheelchair accessible?”

The assessed facilities were then assigned one of the three levels (“Yes”, “Difficult”, or “No”) as described in Section 2, A.

Information concerning the assessment of public facilities and travel agencies are presented in the Results section, page 34, below.

## RESULTS

### A. Assessment of Access to Tourism Operations on the West Coast of the South Island of New Zealand.

i) **Overall Access.** Operator generated assessment of level of access and assessor observed level of access is compared in Table 1 and Fig. 2, p 28, below.

	% Declared	% Observed
Yes	85.9	38
Difficult	3.6	30
No	10.5	32

Table 1. Wheelchair access to West Coast Tourism Businesses. Results for all businesses examined. Tourism business operator answers to the question, “Is your business wheelchair accessible?” were assigned to one of the following levels of access “Yes”, “Difficult”, or “No” as described in Section 2A in the text. Actual access was observed to be either good (Yes), possible with some help or intervention (Difficult), or improbable or impossible (No), as described in Section 2A in the text.

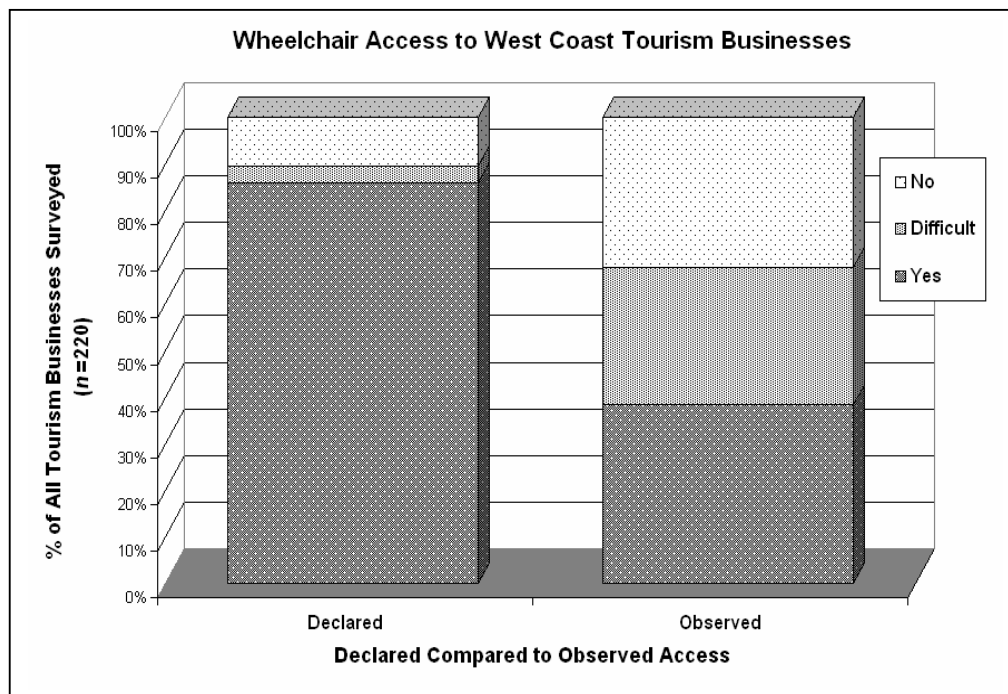


Fig. 2. Wheelchair access to West Coast tourism businesses. Legend as for Table 1, above

Almost 86% of West Coast tourism operators rated their businesses as wheelchair accessible, and a further 3.6% gave a qualified “Yes” response to the standard question, “Is your business wheelchair accessible?” Therefore, in total, about 90% of operators believe a person in a wheelchair should be able to enter their premises either alone or if the business was told of their arrival, or if they were helped. Only about 10% knew their businesses to be inaccessible. In contrast, only 38% were truly accessible, and a further 30% accessible with difficulty or if helped. Almost one third would be inaccessible to a wheelchair user.

Physical barriers to access for wheelchair users found included:

- No designated car park, or designated car park inadequate
- Ground/floor surfaces: change of level, soft or loose under wheel, gaps in paving, cross slopes, excessive cambers, lack of ramp upstand (protective kerb) or rail, kerbing hard to negotiate
- Objects obstructing an otherwise accessible pathway (display stands, pot plants, seating etc)
- Ramps too steep (above a maximum gradient of 1:12)
- High entranceway thresholds, deep mats at thresholds
- Doors opening toward the wheelchair user at the top of a steep ramp or into the space occupied by the wheelchair
- Heavy doors, spring loaded doors, high door handles or door bolts, unreachable from a sitting position
- Narrow, unmanoeuvrable access; access paths and ramps with unmanoeuvrable u-turns
- Objects obstructing an otherwise accessible ramp
- For those using walking aids, any or all of the above plus steps and stairs with inconsistent heights or depths, open risers, very smooth surfaces

Factors which would make wheelchair access difficult or uncomfortable included

- Designated car park a long way from the entrance
- Long circuitous uncovered pathway to the entrance (compared to short, covered access for able-bodied people)
- Designated car park beside a main highway, making it difficult to exit/enter a vehicle without being exposed to traffic at speed
- Access from the car park to the building/facility across a busy, fast road
- Designated wheelchair access partly following a motor car route
- Long distance from car park and steep slopes requiring excellent upper body strength in wheelchair users
- Poorly lit wheelchair access at the back of premises or down alleyways
- Wheelchair access exists, but is not indicated and/or is not obvious unless a search is made

Operators who gave qualified “Yes” responses to the standard question (and whose businesses were therefore classed as operator-assessed “Difficult” for wheelchair access) gave the following types of reasons for qualifying access and use:

- We would have to know when you are arriving so that we can help you up the stairs/over the doorstep/in the door/round the back
- We need to clear the ramp/path/access at the back of the building

- You need to enter our premises through the back entrance of the business next door
- We would need to clear a space for you to manoeuvre once you get in
- Call out when you arrive so we can open the fire exit door for you
- If you can leave the chair at the bottom and get yourself up half a dozen stairs you could get in.

**ii. Access According to Business Subset.** Operator generated assessment of level of access and assessor observed level of access according to business subset are compared in Fig. 3, p 30, below.

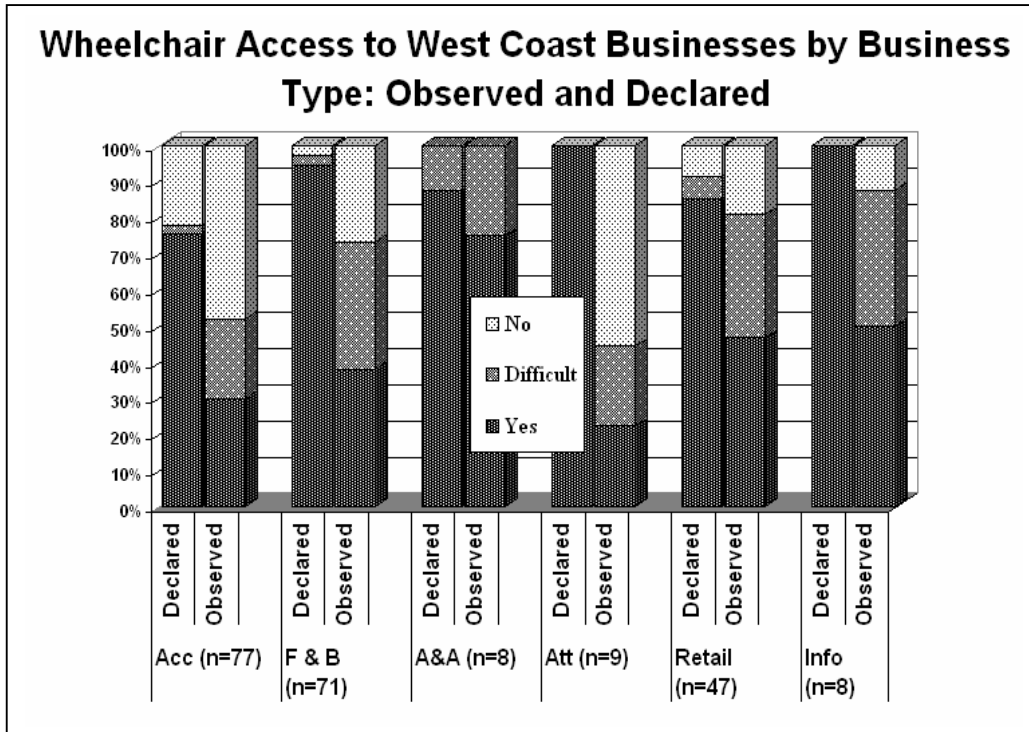


Fig. 3. Wheelchair access to West Coast tourism businesses according to business subset. Acc = Accommodation; F&B = Food and Beverage; A&A = Activities and Adventures; Att = Attractions; Info = Information Providers. Legend as for Table 1, above.

Information Providers and Attractions were unanimous in stating their businesses were wheelchair accessible. In reality, only half of Information Providers and about one fifth of Attraction providers (the least accessible of all business subsets) were. Almost 90% of Activity and Adventure Providers stated their businesses were accessible and this was closest to the assessment of access only to the booking office or premise (75%). After Attraction businesses, Accommodation providers were the least accessible, with only about 30% of their booking offices being accessible. A slightly higher access was found for Food and Beverage businesses (almost 40%), although almost 95% of such businesses thought they were accessible. A similar

comparison can be made of Retail providers, where 85% thought their premises were accessible, whereas assessment showed only 47% were.

**iii). Access According to Region.** Operator generated assessment of level of access and assessor observed level of access according to region are compared in Fig. 4, p 31, below.

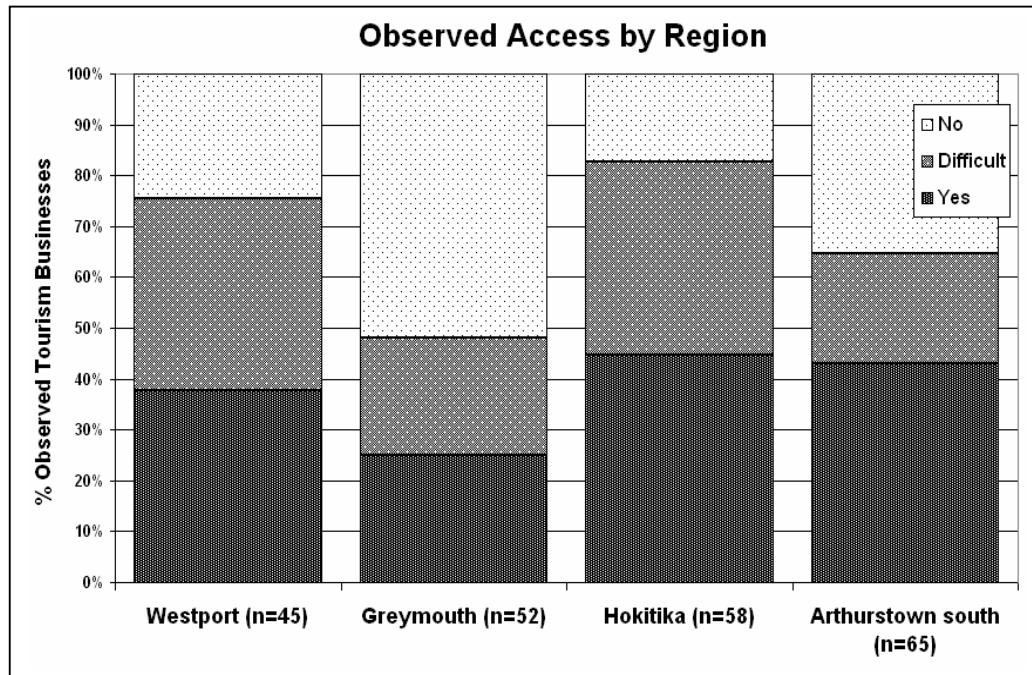


Fig. 4. Observed wheelchair access to West Coast tourism businesses according to region. Legend as for Table 1, above. Regions are: Westport, including tourism businesses in the town of Westport and the coast corridor from Westport to Nine Mile; Greymouth, tourism businesses in the town of Greymouth and surrounding suburbs; Hokitika, tourism businesses in the town of Hokitika; Arthurstown south, tourism businesses from Arthurstown to Haast village including towns and settlements in between.

A higher percentage of accessible tourism businesses (43-45%) occur in Hokitika, and from Hokitika south to, and including, Haast (Arthurstown south). The area with the lowest percentage (25%) of accessible businesses is Greymouth, which also had the highest percentage of inaccessible businesses.

## B. Results of an Assessment of all Aspects of Access and Usability in a Selected Small Number of Tourism Businesses on the West Coast

i) **Overall Access and Usability.** All operators in this section had declared their businesses were wheelchair accessible. This operator-declared 100% access is compared to the assessor observed level of access and usability in Table 2, p 32, below.

	% Declared	% Observed
Yes	100	31
Difficult	0	30
No	0	39

Table 2. Wheelchair access and usability of West Coast Tourism Businesses. Businesses had all assessed themselves as wheelchair accessible (“Yes” level of access as described in Section 2A in the text) when asked the standard question, “Is your business wheelchair accessible?” Actual access and usability was observed to be either good (“Yes”), “Difficult”, or “No”, as described in Section 2A in the text

In this section of the field work, the operator rating of access is 100%. In contrast, only 31% were truly accessible and usable, and a further 30% accessible and usable with difficulty or if helped. Almost 39% would be inaccessible and/or unusable to a wheelchair user. Physical barriers to access for wheelchair users found included the type of barriers restricting access to the premises discussed in Result Ai, p28, above. Factors preventing use, or full use, of a premise once entered by wheelchair users are discussed in the sections below.

### ii. Access and Usability According to Business Subset

The 100% operators declaration of wheelchair accessibility (and, in the case of Accommodation Providers, that they had wheelchair accessible units which the assessor booked and assessed) is compared to the assessor observed level of access and usability according to business subset in Fig. 5, p 33, below.

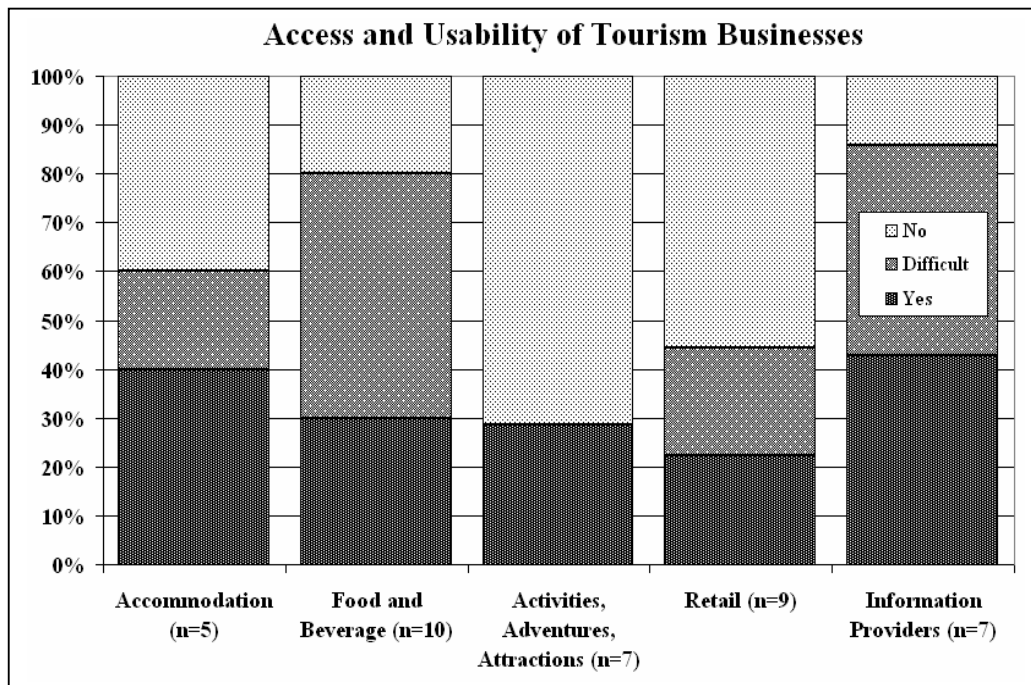


Fig. 5. Wheelchair access and usability of the premises once entered, West Coast tourism businesses according to business subset. Legend as for Table 1, above.

The least accessible businesses were in the Retail subset, and only 43% or fewer businesses in other subsets were accessible and usable.

Accommodation: While it is difficult to generalise about the usability of accommodation as only 5 were assessed, it is clear that only 2 of those were truly wheelchair accessible, although all claimed wheelchair accessible units. Two were inaccessible, and one was marginal. Factors preventing use, or full use, of Accommodation once entered by wheelchair users include, but are not restricted to:

- Internal barriers to manoeuvrability, including narrow spaces, heavy doors, doors blocked
- Incorrect work surface dimensions (counters, benches, tables, vanity units etc)
- Inaccessible furniture (for example, wheelchair unable to fit beneath table or vanity unit, not enough space for a wheelchair between bed and other objects, inaccessible storage area)
- Inaccessible taps, handles, switches, electric outlets, shelving, cupboard, telephone, window controls
- Inaccessible food preparation facilities
- Inaccessible bathroom area, inadequate space in bathrooms
- Incorrect and inaccessible toileting
- Incorrect and inaccessible - and in one case dangerous - shower facilities
- Inaccessible laundering facilities

Food and Beverage: Only 3 of the 10 Food and Beverage businesses were truly accessible and usable; five presented difficulties, and 2 were inaccessible and

unusable. Factors preventing use, or full use, of Food and Beverage premises once entered by wheelchair users include, but are not restricted to:

- Counters difficult to access;
- Self-serve food cabinets too high/difficult to access
- Little or no room to manoeuvre between furniture
- Wheelchair would not fit under table
- Non-compliant toileting
- Other services (for example, drinking water) difficult to reach and handle

Activities, Adventures, and Attractions. Five of the 7 businesses assessed were inaccessible. Factors preventing use, or full use, of businesses in this subset once entered by wheelchair users include, but are not restricted to:

- Unacceptable changes in floor levels
- Barriers/lips between areas
- Gaps in flooring needing to be straddled
- Heavy doors with no space for a wheelchair to manoeuvre
- Stairs
- Steep ramps
- Uneven lighting
- Printing on signs uneven and difficult to read
- Crowded interiors and narrow passages

Retail: The least accessible and usable of the tourism business subsets. More than three quarters of assessed retail businesses are either difficult or impossible for wheelchair users to patronize. Factors preventing use, or full use, of Retail premises once entered by wheelchair users include, but are not restricted to:

- Lack of room to manoeuvre between/within rows/displays
- Unacceptable changes in floor levels
- Barriers/lips between areas
- Counters and displays too high
- Uneven lighting

Information Providers: Fewer than half of Information Providers assessed were accessible and usable. Factors preventing use, or full use, of Information Providers once entered by wheelchair users include but are not restricted to those factors described for the Retail subset. In addition, problems were encountered with:

- lack of place to position wheelchair in theatre showing information videos

**iii). Access According to Region.** As only 38 businesses on the West Coast were assessed in depth for access and usability, the results for each region have not been analysed.

## C. Results of an Assessment of Access to Public Facilities on the West Coast

i) **Access to Banking Machines and Banks.** The assessor observed level of access to banking machines and banks is presented Fig. 6, p 35, below.

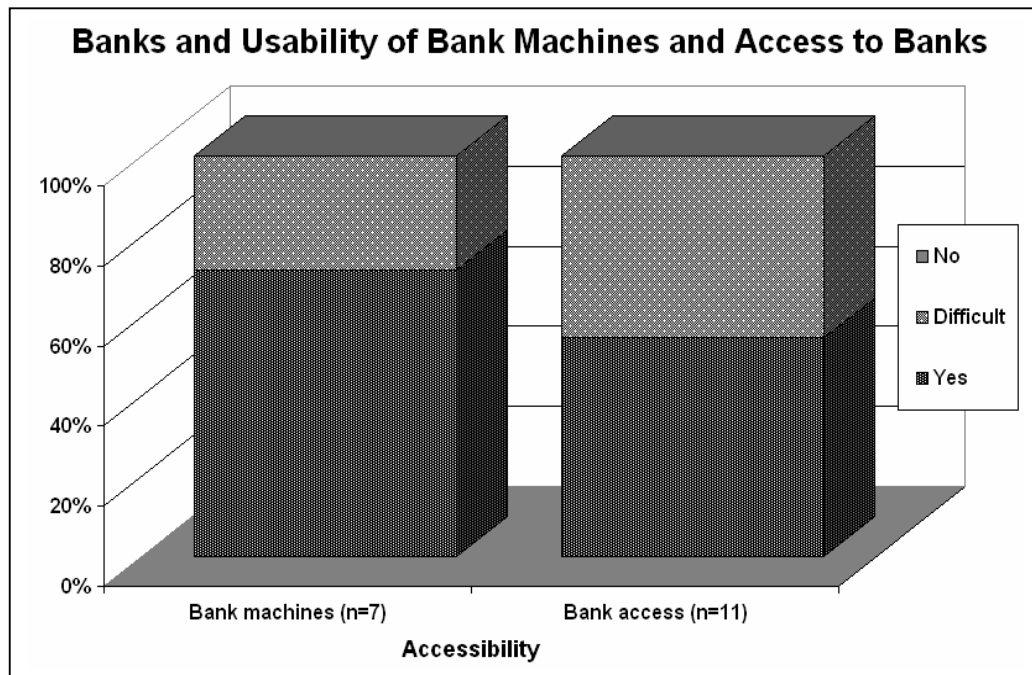


Fig 6. Observed wheelchair access/usability of West Coast bank machines (Automated Teller Machines) and access to banks.

No bank machines were inaccessible, although a person in a wheelchair would have found difficulty using about 30% of those assessed. Factors causing difficulty of access included:

- Keyboard difficult to reach
- Screens hard to read
- Receipt slots difficult to reach
- High mounting of functions with no compensatory knee space

Agents contacted at the bank 0800 number unanimously stated that their ATMs were accessible, although one bank agent did state that they were of different height so that people could not see what a bank customer was doing.

All bank branches were wheelchair accessible, although a person in a wheelchair would have found difficulty entering around half of them. Factors causing difficulty of access included:

- sharp turn off the street onto an acceptable ramp
- a heavy, outward opening door at the top of the ramp slope
- level street access but heavy doors with high handles as compared to acceptable automatic doors

**ii) Access to public amenities.** The assessor observed levels of access to public Laundromats, public telephones, and public toilets are presented Fig. 7, p 36, below. Factors affecting a designation of difficult or impossible access include but were not restricted to some or all of those factors described in Section 2A, 1, above.

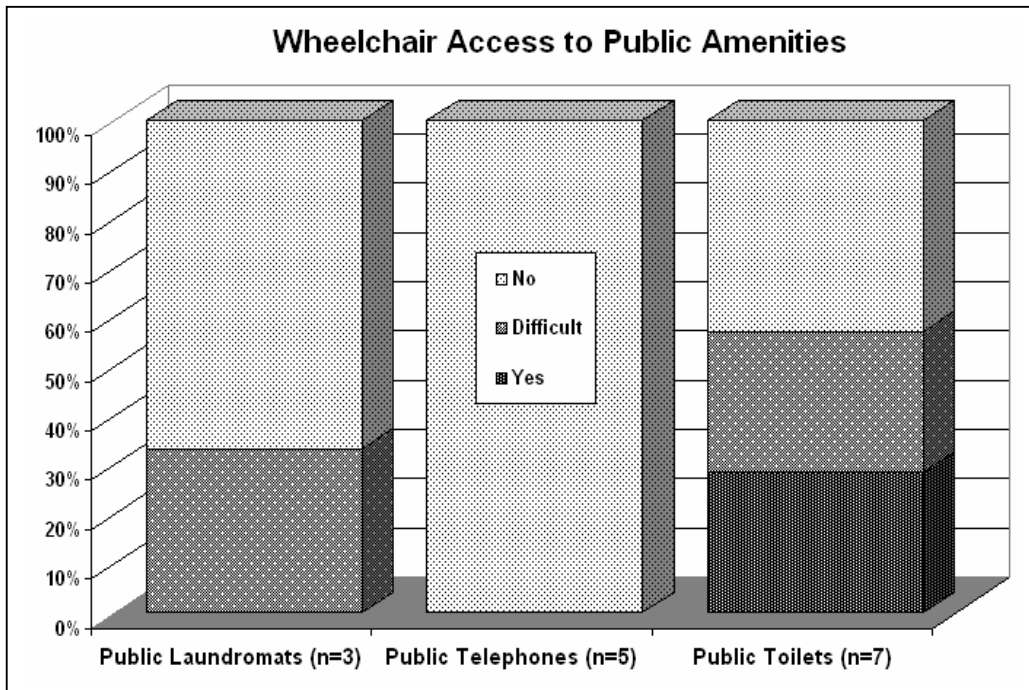


Fig 7. Observed wheelchair access to West Coast public Laundromats, telephones, and toileting facilities.

**Laundromats.** The three public Laundromats assessed were difficult or impossible for a wheelchair user to access and use. Apart from problems of access to the building (as described in Section 2A, i, above), facilities inside the building were made unusable by such factors as:

- controls and dispensers impossible to reach from a wheelchair
- top loading/unloading washers and driers
- restricted floor space
- noncompliant taps

**Public telephones:** None of the 5 public telephones/groups of public telephones were accessible. Problems ranged from:

- difficult terrain around telephones/telephone booths

- heavy, hard-to-open doors
- high and difficult to reach/see keypads and display screens

One group of public telephones had open access usable by a wheelchair, but the difficulty of reaching and using the instrument and controls unfortunately remained.

**Public toilets:** Over 40% of signed public toilets (i.e., those with the international wheelchair accessible sign indicating compliance with wheelchair access criteria) were unusable by a person in a wheelchair, with only 30% meeting all criteria for use. Features making wheelchair designated toilets unusable included but were not restricted to those factors described in Section 2A,i, above and also the following aspects specific to toilets:

- Incorrect positioning of the WC pan, handbasins, handrails, toilet rolls, and mirrors
- Incorrect space allocation, heights, and distances between fixtures and fittings
- Non-compliant taps
- No hand drying facilities

In addition one accessible facility had a long circuitous route to the toilet, with numerous intervening doors

**iii). Access to Travel Agencies.** All three agents/agencies assessed were wheelchair accessible, and all three stated they were when telephoned.

## DISCUSSION OF FIELD RESULTS

The field work in this study presented many difficulties to the investigators. One was properly assess the interiors of premises for use by a person in a wheelchair. This was particularly true when attempting to assess the retail sector. Operators are understandably wary of people with tape measures and note pads examining their facilities. For this reason, most businesses were assessed for access to the premises/booking office only and then assigned to one of the three levels of access (“Yes”, “Difficult”, or “No”). However, we are mindful of the fact that buildings in use today comply with the Building Codes under which they were built, and the guidelines for wheelchair access have changed (and improved) over the years. As we could only guess the approximate age of many of the buildings, we could not determine whether the building complied with the code in use at the time of its building or not. Thus, many buildings that were judged to be inaccessible would nevertheless have been in compliance. However, this is not the point. The point for a business is: does it cater to and benefit from its potential clientele? If it is inaccessible to a large (and growing) sector of the market, it does not.

Unfortunately, 62% of the 220 West Coast tourism businesses examined are either difficult or impossible for a wheelchair user to access. About 86% of operators state, without qualification, that their premises are wheelchair accessible, whereas less than two thirds of those who think they are accessible actually are. In some cases, a positive response to the standard question, “Is your business wheelchair accessible?” may have been given by an owner/operator/employee ignorant of the standards for true wheelchair accessibility. This is true no matter the age of the building.

Not only do many businesses give incorrect verbal assurances of accessibility, but also many display the universal symbol for wheelchair access (Appendix 8, p 68). Elinor Stratford, manager of the Disability Information Service in Greymouth, West Coast, points out that this symbol is available in stores throughout the country. Business owners can put the sign up with no training in access for the disabled, and no assessment of their business to ensure it is indeed accessible, although to use the sign, certain standards are supposed to be adhered to (Stratford, pers. comm). The symbol can be used only on buildings or facilities that comply with the requirements of the Building Code for accessibility. Showing the symbol on facilities that are non-compliant would contravene the Building Act, and mislead people with disabilities (*Department of Building and Housing*). For this reason, if for no other, operators should familiarize themselves with the needs of people with disabilities, and with the legal requirements of the different building codes.

Businesses may also make occasional mistakes when providing information or reserving for a person who asks if the premises are usable by someone in a wheelchair - for example, in the booking at the luxury lodge where a non-wheelchair designated unit was supplied by mistake. Whether through ignorance or through understandable human error, the result would be the same for a tourist (or a local) wishing to partake of a service offered: the user of a wheelchair would arrive to find the premises actually unusable. This was particularly evident in the case of a large hotel, which claimed wheelchair accessible units. An assessment of such a unit showed that it was not only inaccessible, but was in fact dangerous for both people in wheelchairs and the able-bodied. To make sure no misunderstanding had occurred when a wheelchair

unit was initially requested, this business was telephoned a second time three months after the assessment was carried out and asked the standard question “Are you wheelchair accessible?”, and “Do you have wheelchair accessible units?” The operator assured in the affirmative.

While mistaken or inaccurate information involving food and beverage, activity, attractions, or information provision must be annoying for a visitor in a wheelchair, inaccurate information concerning wheelchair accessible accommodation must be extremely stressful. Because there is little truly accessible accommodation available on the West Coast, if a visitor in a wheelchair is booked into unsuitable - or even dangerous - accommodation, then it would not be easy to just move on to the next provider. This is probably true throughout New Zealand.

One hundred and eighty-two of the 220 businesses assessed were assessed for access to the premises only and no assessment beyond the front door was carried out. It is highly likely that an assessment of facilities within these businesses would lead to a greater percentage of them being found difficult or impossible for a visitor in a wheelchair to use once they had gained access. This is because access to premises is only the first step on the “Accessible Journey”, and usability of the interior of premises, or of rides, tours, or adventures, is bound not to exceed access to premises; there is little point in providing accessible interior facilities if the building/business itself is inaccessible. In support of this argument, 32% were considered inaccessible when access only was assessed, but 39% were unusable for a person in a wheelchair if access and usability were both considered.

It is surprising that more than half of the Information Providers on the West Coast are difficult or impossible to access and use, although all state they are. It is particularly surprising because some are run by the Department of Conservation, a government department supposed to adhere to guidelines on access. As the first point of entry to the West Coast for many visitors, it is imperative that Information Providers be more accessible. Even those Information Providers who met the access guidelines used by the assessor had problems. A typical example would be the Information Provider with no designated car park, and parking in a graveled area with an uphill slope to a road used by cars. Once the road was crossed, an able bodied visitor could use a short walkway with stairs, all undercover from the elements, to gain the main entrance. In comparison, any visitor in a wheelchair was directed along a long, uncovered path, exposed to the elements, around the back of one small building and then to the back of the main building, to gain the back entrance. The visitor was then confronted by a heavy door with a high handle, and was further encumbered by a thick rubber mat in front of the door on which to maneuver backwards.

At the premises of another Information Provider, considerable upgrading has been carried out in the last twelve months. There has been a good attempt to provide accessible elements but unfortunately these elements are isolated. For example, the signed accessible toilet is separate from the main building and is not easily reached without help because of deep (and new) curbing. Like the first information centre described above, this facility is fraught with access problems for the visitor in a

wheelchair – there is no designated car park, and a person in a wheelchair must follow a route used by cars for part of the way, around the back of the building, across uneven surfaces onto a path, then around to the front entrance of the building. Only here are there automatic doors giving good access to the premises.

In fact, customers who use wheelchairs are frequently directed on long treks to the backs of buildings, or on circuitous routes around buildings or facilities. Many of these treks are fraught with obstacles that hinder or prevent access and many are pathways through less-than-ideal conditions. Whereas the fronts of premises present a clean and inviting entryway for the able-bodied visitor, wheelchair access is often dirty and messy. The worst case was one in which excrement from a dog kept at the back of a restaurant was in the pathway of any customer in a wheelchair brave enough to follow the wheelchair access signs and venture along it.

It is unfortunate that Attractions are not more readily accessible, especially as there are few such businesses on the West Coast (*Rhodda, 2006 A*). While Activity and Adventure businesses are more numerous here, it is probable that users of wheelchairs are limited in their ability to partake of this type of tourism offer, and would therefore probably patronize and appreciate partaking of such products as museums and theme parks. It is probable that a good many of the Activities and Adventures on offer to tourists to the West Coast would be, by their very nature, out of the question for a person in a wheelchair, whereas Attractions might be expected to be more accessible. However, a customer in a wheelchair would be disappointed when visiting most of our Attractions because of their inaccessibility. One such provider who claimed wheelchair accessibility had reasonable access to the main building, but displays and signage were often inaccessible to a seated person, and the signed toileting facilities were totally unusable for someone in a wheelchair.

Another Attraction had made an attempt at providing wheelchair access, but often ramps were too steep and would have allowed access only to wheelchair users with considerable upper body strength or attendant carer. At this business, surfaces differed (making wheelchair progress difficult), display areas were sometimes cramped and the displays themselves too high. In this instance, the property comprised very old buildings and a site with an unmodified contour. We are mindful that such conditions present problems of modification for the business, but feel it would not take much to improve access for visitors with mobility issues.

In the in-depth assessment, results for Activities and Adventures are combined with results for Attractions; for reasons of cost, only one Activity and Adventure was assessed. When access only was surveyed, three quarters of Activity and Adventure booking offices were accessible, but accessibility to the products offered is unknown.

Once tourists who use wheelchairs have settled their accommodation, gathered the tourism information they need, and been involved in the limited (to customers with mobility concerns) West Coast offer of activities, adventures, and attractions, it is probable that they would like to shop and certain that they would like to eat. While after some searching they may find a suitable place to eat, they would not find many places where they could shop in comfort. This represents a loss to the tourism Retail subset here, as retail sales in New Zealand make up 22% of all tourism expenditure (*Statistic New Zealand website 3*).

Clearly, there is a long way to go before West Coast tourism businesses can take advantage of the growing access market, a market that the West Coast, and indeed all of New Zealand, cannot afford to ignore. As pointed out in the introduction, making a business accessible to visitors using wheelchairs is only part of an accessibility upgrade. To fully take advantage of the access market, consideration should also be given to those customers who have sight and hearing impairments.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

A very few tourism operators are beginning to provide facilities on the West Coast suitable for visitors who are disabled, but they are few and far between. One such business is a purpose-built country retreat which opened in 2006. All features of this upscale bed-and-breakfast-style accommodation have been constructed with the visitor who experiences disabilities in mind, and many go beyond the requirements of the building code.

Some operators also listen to the concerns of the disabled. Alexia Pickering writes that she attended a tourism conference on the West Coast some years ago and was unable to stay with the other delegates at their hotel because it was, at that time, not accessible. Since she spoke to the hotel management, it has upgraded its accessibility. (Pickering, pers. com by email).

However, provision of accessible accommodation alone does not transform a region or country into a Mecca for tourists with disabilities. There is also access to Food and Beverage outlets to be considered, and even infrastructure. An example of excellent provision of access to customers in wheelchairs occurs in the small township of Fox Glacier, where a number of businesses in one part of the township are superbly linked by well ramped, wide verandas. Also to be considered are the attractions and activities that bring a tourist to an area in the first place. The West Coast in particular caters for the young and/or fit, and consequently misses out on the opportunity to share the region with a diverse and plentiful market.

In spite of the fact that accessible tourism is an untapped growth market, and that some provision has begun or has been upgraded, many tourism operators do not consider the accessible market as commercially viable because it is “too small”, and “too expensive to cater for” (pers. com, several operators). In spite of gradual improvement in accepting people with disabilities into the mainstream, there still remains physical and attitudinal resistance to their participation, including participation in tourist activities. Tourism research is generally focused on overall statistics and does not specifically look at the market for people with disabilities (or the market for seniors). As a result, there is no research-based data adequately describing the size and characteristics of the international and domestic accessible tourism market in any country (*Curtin University of Technology*), and particularly not in New Zealand. This lack of research leads to a lack of information. This factor, coupled with the failure of tourism agencies to promote the market for visitors with disabilities, probably contributed to the lack of interest shown by West Coast operators in learning how to provide for people with disabilities (*Rhodda, 2006 B*), although it is not known if this is because operators already have all the information they need in this area but do not act on it.

Visitors Purvis and Jakubiec from South Africa were surprised to encounter very few New Zealanders with disabilities on their travels. It is not known if this is because New Zealanders with disabilities do not travel because of lack of facilities, or if they do not do so because of lack of information. A third factor could be that, in New Zealand, people with disabilities are represented disproportionately in the lower

income bracket (*Ministry of Health, 2006*) and therefore may not have as much disposable income to spend on tourism as disabled people from overseas. In addition, New Zealanders with disabilities often have higher expenses compared to able-bodied people as a direct result of their disability. In any case, our ageing population is bound to lead to an increasing percentage of New Zealanders with disabilities and the time and disposable income necessary for travel. They will become increasingly visible as tourists, and demand the services they need or go elsewhere.

Few pre-planning resources exist in New Zealand aimed at the traveller with disabilities, and there seems little interest at the various levels of government or in the industry itself in the provision of such resources.

In the words of Alexia Pickering:

*“The Tourism Industry needs a 'wakeup' call. They need to accept that there are more travelers with disabilities visiting New Zealand”*

Pickering gets almost daily enquiries from people with disabilities about conditions here and warns we should be better prepared for the influx of visitors with disabilities coming to New Zealand for The World Cup in 2011. She feels New Zealand still has a long way to go to change the attitude of some tourism providers towards travelers with disabilities, and is keen to see an improvement in the quality of information available concerning travel here for such tourists (Pickering, pers.com by email).

Another wheelchair using traveller and his partner who are interested in improving the information available to potential tourists who use wheelchairs is Hilton Purvis and partner Loretta Jakubiec. In their words,

*“The Internet has made a huge difference to the level of [information concerning wheelchair accessible options] I have available when researching accommodation. When we first traveled back in the early 90's there was no email, no Internet, no information! Now one can communicate quickly via email, see websites with photos of rooms and bathrooms, etc. All this can be done in hours, rather than weeks or months”* (pers. comm via email).

There are over a billion people with disabilities worldwide and 10% of those earn equal to or above the average weekly wage of their country. In addition, people with disabilities on average spend eight nights away from home (longer than other travellers), and travel with 3.4 people (*Curtin University of Technology*). The magnitude of the accessible tourism market makes it part of the mainstream, and, as with all markets, has unique characteristics that must be researched and understood before it can be effectively developed and promoted. It is not, however, an homogenous market. While it is clear that more and more people with disabilities want to take advantage of tourism, the disabled, like other travellers, have individual preferences for mode of travel, type of accommodation, choice of activity or attraction and so on. While little is known about the accessible tourism market, even less is known about these individual preferences.

When the New Zealand tourism product for the disabled is brought up to scratch, this market should be vigorously pursued. In particular, New Zealand should be trying to attract the large Australian disabled market because, as Bruce Mumford (Appendix 7. p 64) points out, the journey from Australia to New Zealand is short compared to going elsewhere outside of Australia. Length of journey to the destination is of particular concern for a person with mobility issues. People with such issues find long-haul travel even more onerous than do able-bodied travellers. Coupled with that, there is a growing concern in some quarters in the United Kingdom and the European Union over the price, in terms of the use of fossil fuel, of long haul travel.

While New Zealand lags, other countries have increasing awareness of this market. For example, Hilton and Jakubiec report that

*“We have just (March 2007) returned from Tasmania, Australia and were amazed to see how jacked up they have become in the seven years since our last visit there. In 2000 it was a sleepy island, with little travel information available, and limited services. Now they have excellent travel info, top class visitor centers, and a thriving travel industry, and the disabled access is outstanding (even in the smallest of country towns). It was an interesting lesson in what can be achieved in such a short period of time (pers. comm by email).*

However, no country has a full commitment to the development of accessible tourism. Australia, while more advanced in this area, is still lacking. For example, neither the Australian governments *Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre*, nor its *Tourism Australia* websites mention accessible tourism.

Apart from the financial incentive, there are legal imperatives for the development of services for people with disabilities. It is possible that many large and small tourism operators are unaware of their legal responsibilities, and indeed their moral obligation to provide, for example, safe fire exits for the disabled. In Australia, most accessible tourism opportunities are driven by adherence to legal requirements rather than proactive business decisions (*Curtin University of Technology*), and a similar situation probably exists on the West Coast and in the rest of New Zealand. Mere adherence does not generate any competitive benefit or commercial advantage to a business, region, or country.

Many of the barriers currently in place which degrade the enjoyment of West Coast visitors who use wheelchairs could be easily and inexpensively removed. Physical barriers such as heavy doors in accommodation, narrow aisles in shops or restaurants, or tables unsuitable for a wheelchair could all be fixed with little expenditure, while knowledge, communication and attitudinal barriers illustrated by operators and staff should be easily fixed through customer service training.

Worldwide, there is clearly a large group of internet-savvy consumers who have mobility concerns, a group that is bound to increase in number due to the ageing of the population. Also likely to increase are people with other types of disability, such as sight or hearing loss. People with disabilities in fact constitute the world's largest

minority (International Herald Tribune). Travellers who are disabled have a large discretionary spending power and an increasing number have more leisure time due to retirement or impending retirement. They are also set to inherit from their parents, the so-called the Silent Generation. These factors, coupled with the predicted rise in tourism worldwide (despite environmentalist calls for a limit on “unnecessary” long haul travel) mean that in order to take advantage of this niche market, New Zealand and the West Coast must be proactive in developing accessible services, and must do so soon. The best publicity for a product is word-of-mouth, and considering that the Internet is a sophisticated form of word-of-mouth, any negative messages concerning accessible travel in New Zealand will reach a large audience. Persuading the large and growing number of people with disabilities to come as tourists to New Zealand can only be enhanced by improving both provision and access to information about accessible accommodation, eateries, activities, transport, and other services, and by increasing interest amongst stakeholders in providing for travellers with disabilities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM THE RESEARCH

### Areas for Further Research:

- Survey visitors with disabilities to the West Coast and to New Zealand to illuminate their experiences.
- Include an investigation of the behaviours of domestic/international tourists with disabilities to increase knowledge around when, why, where, how, how often they travel, and what they do on their travels
- Survey potential visitors with disabilities to illuminate what influences their decision to come/not come to the West Coast
- Research/evaluate the size and value of the market for tourists with disabilities
- Investigate the extent of operator knowledge of the market for tourists with disabilities
- Investigate the reasons why operators think their businesses are accessible when they are not
- Investigate why operators do not see the benefit of the market for tourists with disabilities and why they do not cater for it
- Evaluate the current thinking by key stakeholders in the tourism industry in New Zealand (e.g., Ministry of Tourism, Tourism New Zealand, transportation providers, industry representational groups/organizations) around the market for tourists with disabilities

### Further roles for Tai Poutini Polytechnic

- As this report provides valuable information, make submissions/presentations/workshops to Tourism West Coast, the West Coast Development Trust, councils, operator groups, and other interested parties to:
  - increase knowledge on the West Coast about the subject of tourism for the disabled,
  - improve access on the West Coast, and
  - place the West Coast as the Centre of Excellence in “Tourism for the Disabled”
- Disseminate these findings nationally so that national interests can
  - Champion the development, growth, and maintenance of the accessible tourism market
  - Champion the improvement of industry standards to better cater for this market “beyond compliance”
  - Encourage government to provide incentives to those who develop accessible operations “beyond compliance”
  - Provide information and support to tourism industry operators and service providers to better enable them to cater for people with disabilities
  - Support evaluation and accreditation programs for accessible tourism sites and facilities and the accredited adoption of universal disabilities symbols
  - Increase awareness that access problems are not just experienced by people with physical disabilities but also by people with other disabilities, for example, those with sight and hearing impairments, and

by able bodied members of the population, such as parents with pushchairs

- Urge adoption of the recommendations of the *Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Secretariat 2003 Tourism Working Group* on best practices in tourism accessibility for travellers with restricted physical ability (New Zealand was one of the participating countries producing this report)
- Invite collaboration between organizations representing citizens with disabilities, the tourism industry, and various levels of government in order to progress inclusive regional and national tourism planning
- Encourage the creation of “Excellence in Tourism Access” awards similar to existing excellence in tourism awards
- Promote access issues and accessible tourism to the general community
- Heed the human rights imperatives of encouraging the development of the accessible tourism sector

**Suggested ways in which Tai Poutini Polytechnic could incorporate the findings of this research in the betterment of the institution, and the creation and delivery of courses**

- In line with the *Ministry of Health Disability Strategy*, and in collaboration with representative groups, undertake education in the area of the provision of services for people with disabilities
- Include sensitivity training in the hospitality courses and Kiwi Host type programmes
- Create training in ecotourism for the disabled
- Develop training sessions/courses for the transportation sector to improve their attitude, knowledge and skills
- Invite collaboration between organizations representing the disabled, the tourism industry, and various levels of government to facilitate the development of training programs
- When delivery of courses concerning issues of disability and access occur, include delivery by people with disabilities
- Assess and improve where needed access to TPP campuses

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1.

#### *Summary of New Zealand State Services Commission Disability Classification Standard*

- **Sensory**
  - *Hearing* - includes those who have difficulty hearing/cannot hear what is said in a conversation with one other person and/or hold a conversation with at least three other people; and
  - *Seeing* - includes those who have difficulty seeing or cannot see ordinary newsprint and/or the face of someone from across a room, even when wearing corrective lenses.
- **Physical**
  - *Mobility* - includes those who have difficulty with or cannot do the following:
    - walk about 350 metres without resting;
    - walk up or down a flight of stairs;
    - carry an object as heavy as 5 kilograms for a 10 metre distance;
    - move from room to room; or
    - stand for periods longer than 20 minutes.
  - *Agility* - includes those who have difficulty with or cannot do the following:
    - bend over to pick something up off the floor;
    - dress or undress themselves;
    - cut their own toe-nails;
    - grasp or handle small objects like scissors;
    - reach in any direction;
    - cut their own food; or
    - get themselves in or out of bed.
- **Intellectual**

Includes those who need support or help from organisations like IHC or People First, or who have been to a special school or receive special education because of an intellectual impairment.
- **Psychiatric/Psychological**

Includes those who, because of a long-term emotional, psychological or psychiatric condition, have difficulty with or are stopped from doing everyday activities that people their age can usually do, including communicating, mixing with others or socialising.
- **Other**

Includes those who have long-term conditions or health problems that cause them ongoing difficulty with their ability to learn or remember, or causes them difficulty with or stops them from doing everyday activities that people their age can normally do.

  - *Speaking* - includes staff members who have difficulty speaking or being understood.

## Appendix 2.

**Assessment of a transport service on the *New Zealand on Wheels* website (Taken directly from the *NZOW website 2*).**

“NZ On Wheels recommends that you **don’t travel** on the **Bluebridge ferry “Santa Regina”** if you are in a wheelchair, **unless you really have to**. The access is **very limited** and if you are able to get on the ship, you **won’t be able to get around it**. Entry is via the vehicle ramp, which is **rough and bumpy**. If you’re in a manual chair you’ll need help, if you’re in an electric chair you’ll be able to do it but it will be uncomfortable. There is a small lift up to the passenger deck, which most **powerchairs will not fit** into without being lifted. My chair weighs 150kg so is a bit of a stretch for anyone to lift! Most manual wheelchairs will fit into the lift. However, once you’re on the passenger deck you are limited to one end of the boat as the **far end is not accessible** to wheelchairs, unless you have someone who can lift you over two **one-foot-high steps**. This applies to all external doors and to get to the cafeteria! So **no food** and **no sight seeing**. The windows are also too high for someone in a wheelchair to see out of. While this trip is **possible**, it is not by any means ideal or comfortable and the [Interislander ferry](#) provides an **infinitely more wheelchair friendly** set up.”

### Appendix 3

**Web site posting on *Global Access News* by June and Syd Burns about a trip to New Zealand; only comments about access on the West Coast are presented here (taken directly from the website).**

Arriving in **Greymouth**, we booked into the **Highpark Motor Inn**, which is the best laid out wheelchair friendly so far. The places appear to be getting better as we get further on our travels. Even the taps were situated at waist level to enable anyone in a chair to operate.

The day was dry, so we departed early to view the **Pancake Rocks** and **Blow Holes**. A wonderful drive with views of raging seas, huge rocks and rain forests. The ferns and greenery were breathtaking. Maybe it is better to see it after a rain. The rocks and blowholes far exceeded our expectations, with the majority of tracks suitable for wheelchairs. Special car parking places for the disabled were provided, which was a blessing in a very busy area. Many hours were spent watching and listening to the roar of the sea bursting some 50 ft. through the blow holes.

Off early with the sun shining, heading to the glacier town of **Franz Josef**. Arriving at the **Terrace Motel**, we had the most wonderful reception from the owners. Lovely wonderful people, who couldn't do enough getting us settled in. Another well laid out unit, but the gravel made wheeling very difficult, and the shower was more of a dribble. Booked for a helicopter flight next day if the weather is permitting over the **Milford Sound**.

Looked around the town, really not impressed, pure tat. We searched for a wheelchair friendly walk. Being pointed in the right direction and checking the maps, we found a walk. Getting on to the path, was a trial as there was a right angle wooden gate that would not allow a chair through. I bypassed it on the side, so with some difficulty we got on the track. It was a lovely walk, not easy but most pleasant. We got half way along the track about a mile when we were faced with a steep rocky incline. We tried with no avail to ascend the incline. A total impossibility. We retraced our steps having some luck in fellow walkers starting out help us through the gate. We are not enjoying **Franz Josef**. Things got worse when we tried to get into the local large hotel for a drink. A posh establishment, with six steps up to get in. There was no access whatsoever. I was not surprised when they told me they had never had a disabled customer. Lots of people offered to help to carry June inside, but that was not the point. We declined. The rain started again, so we bought loads of fresh veggies and had a cook in.

Totally refreshed, the "wasted day" it was not. The day was bright, so we were glad to be away from **Franz Josef**. The motel owners were totally wonderful and were devastated when we told them about the shower.

First stop the viewing point of the **Franz Josef Glacier**. We couldn't get on to the glacier but the lookout point was wheelchair friendly. We stayed looking at the beauty until the car park started to fill up.

Reluctantly, we moved on to the **Fox Glacier** some 25 miles toward our destination of

**Wanaka.** The accessible viewpoint to the Fox was down a long, narrow twisting road that seemed endless. It was well worth the drive. Again the viewpoint was wheelchair friendly. It wasn't so busy, so we could spend some time there. Stopping at **Haast**, we had a superb lunch in what appeared to be the only eating establishment for miles. A note here, that so far all the toilet facilities are wheelchair friendly. The views of the **Southern Alps** and lakes have themselves made the trip worthwhile. Plenty of stopping places to gasp and take pictures.

## Appendix 4.

### Typical website chat room or email post

“Hello. My name is Sandra Rhodda and I am a researcher at **Tai Poutini Polytechnic in Greymouth, New Zealand**. I am doing a study on accessible travel in New Zealand, particularly on the West Coast of the South Island. Part of the study involves asking businesses if they are wheelchair accessible, then checking (by a registered barrier free auditor) if they actually are. We have restricted the study mostly to wheelchair accessible factors as this is a preliminary study which will hopefully lead to further investigation. The aim of the study is to gather and analyse data so that recommendations can be made to tourism operators/the industry on improving their service to people with mobility concerns. There is a very big educational need in this area, and this study is a start on enlightening those who offer tourism products. Is there anyone reading this who has a mobility concern, or who is confined to, or must use at times, a wheelchair who has visited New Zealand (especially the West Coast of the South Island), or who has contemplated visiting NZ? If so, I would really appreciate hearing from you. I would like to know what experiences of travelling to and in NZ are for people who have mobility concerns or who use a wheelchair. You can write as much as you like as any comments, stories, and/or recommendations will be welcomed. Such input (anonymous if you wish) will certainly help to flesh out the upcoming report (which will be available on the polytechnic website), and give a human face to some of the facts and figures. As well as your comments, could you also tell me where you come from (country), your age and gender, how you got to and from NZ, how long you stayed, where you stayed, and what you did. If you have ever considered visiting New Zealand but have not because of your mobility concerns or use of a wheelchair, could you also tell me of your experiences?

You can email me directly if you wish at [sandrar@tpp.ac.nz](mailto:sandrar@tpp.ac.nz). Thank you in advance for any help you can give me.  
Sandra”

## **Appendix 5.**

### **Email response from Leon Katavich**

“I have only been in a chair (paraplegic) for 5 years, but have made regular trips to Rotorua and one to Wellington (staying overnight in Taupo). I have stayed in Motels and Hotels which advertise Disabled access rooms. I have found on average that these disabled access rooms are inadequate.

A few points they often fail on are:

- heavy carpeting making maneuvering a wheelchair and shower chair difficult.
- very little space in the room, which makes maneuvering of a wheelchair difficult
- poor accessibility to benches with either cupboards underneath and/or bench-tops too high.
- small steps into Motel units.
- showers with uneven floor levels, making use of a shower with a shower chair, very difficult. One motel had a strip of plastic on the floor to stop water running out of the shower, but the plastic strip was approx. 10 mm high. As my shower chair cannot easily negotiate such an uneven surface, I had great difficulty getting in and out. It
- was so hard for me to get out of that shower space that I was sweating by the time I managed to get out. It took at least 3 or 4 minutes of struggling to get out. (Motel in Rotorua)
- showers with fixed shower heads (heads with hoses are much more suitable)
- shower spaces that are too small
- toilets that are a bad height
- cupboards that are too high
- beds that are too low
- no disabled spaces in the car-park
- rooms that are on the far side of the building from the entrance.

I have always approached management with my concerns. Usually they have been happy to hear my complaints, but not always. And the Motel in Taupo actually addressed my concern so my stay, upon returning to Auckland when driving from Wellington, was better.

I hope this is some information that you find useful. There are probably a couple more points but this is all I can think of at the moment.

And yes, you can quote me if you like.

Leon Katavich”

## Appendix 6

### Response from Hilton Purvis and Loretta Jakubiec to a request for information posted on a website

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“My wife and I have returned from a six week tour through New Zealand and Australia and thought you might be interested in some feedback. I am permanently confined to a wheelchair through spinal muscular atrophy. For the purposes of travel evaluations please bear in mind that I am lightweight, my folding manual wheelchair is narrow (22 inches overall), and that we enjoy “walking” as much as possible. We generally “hit the streets” at around 09h30, and return to our accommodation after 21h00. The “access” discussed here is obviously from a wheelchair point-of-view.

### New Zealand

Tourism is big in New Zealand, far bigger than their government is prepared to acknowledge. In some towns the tourists outnumber the locals, and the only business is lodging, food and souvenirs. The whole of Europe, the UK and Japan appear to be touring NZ. Lots of campervans and hire cars, and a fair number of people cycling, which is really the hard way of seeing the country. Access for the disabled traveller is very good, with lodging available in all price ranges, accessible camp sites & parks, wheelchair taxi's kneeling buses, lots of ramps, boardwalks, accessible public toilets, etc.

- Forest walks are really only accessible with help. The trails may not have steps, but the surfaces are often undulating, rough, slippery (wet, debris, or both) or steep. Boardwalks were not continuous, i.e. they either started the trail but then stopped, or only started deep into a trail, or were scattered intermittently along a trail (mixture of boardwalk and bare ground).
- Where are the disabled in NZ ? . . . in four weeks of travel we met only two NZ'ers in wheelchairs (both at the tourist counter in Wanaka). All others were tourists. One holiday park owner told us he only sees about three or four disabled people per year (to use his accessible cabin). Next to Oz they arguably have the most accessible country in the world, yet they are nowhere to be seen. Strange.
- Able-bodied people don't park in disabled parking bays!

Below is the list of accommodation we used, with contact details, and a description of each. Some of the comments may seem a trifle “picky”, but we have tried to assess the rooms in terms of all mobility impaired tourists, and not just ourselves, working on the assumption that many disabled travellers are on their own and do not have able-bodied companions. A number of items stand out, namely :

- a) pedestal handbasins, which are out-of-bounds for wheelchair folk,
- b) cupboards underneath handbasins, which render them useless,
- c) accessible tables in rooms, which are essential for working on / eating from / reading from, etc,
- d) shaving mirrors, or lack there of, which frustrate us clean shaven guys, and must frustrate women wishing to put on make-up or comb their hair, etc,

- e) Kitchenettes are very handy extras to these rooms, but all but one assumed one had an able-bodied companion to reach the basin, microwave, hotplate, kettle, etc”

[This authors then goes on to critique 13 accommodation places he and his wife stayed at from the point of view of someone with mobility issues. They assessed if the accommodation was wheelchair accessible before booking and where assured it was. However, all 13 accommodations had problems for a wheelchair-bound traveller, which ranged from the minor, to major and dangerous-for-wheelchair-users accommodation.]

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“Ferries: The InterIslander Ferry ([www.travelnz.com/ferry-interislander.html](http://www.travelnz.com/ferry-interislander.html)) took us from Picton on the South Island to Wellington on the North Island for NZ\$55 each. They claim to offer concessions to disabled travellers, but we had to pay full fare. The booking was handled through Apex as part of the car hire package. No problem with the wheelchair at any stage, and accessible toilets in both terminals, and on board the ferry.

The Milford & Doubtful Sound Cruises ([www.fiordlandtravel.co.nz](http://www.fiordlandtravel.co.nz)) have a good website, easy to book through, and they followed up very quickly on my wheelchair comment. They put us on the midday Milford cruise because it uses the larger boat. The weather was beautiful so Hilton spent the entire 2h30 seated right at the bow in his wheelchair! Wild horses couldn't have prized him away! The Doubtful Sound is a different matter. It involves three stages, the lake crossing from Manapouri, the bus ride to Doubtful, and the ferry ride onto the Sound, and that is the only way to do it. None of the stages are accessible, but, as in our case, we were determined, and assisted by good people all the way. We knew the situation beforehand, Fiordland Travel were very honest and upfront about the levels of access.

We took a calculated risk when booking accommodation after internet research and feedback from accommodation businesses (my requirements/capabilities -vs- their level of access) depending on the size of the town (not many choices in some NZ towns) and the cost (we travel on a tight budget).

Hilton Purvis and Loretta Jakubiec”

## Appendix 7. Taken directly from the website, *eBility*

### Traveling with a disability: New Zealand

by Bruce Mumford

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We had only been back a few days from our trip to Europe when Louise said she thought we might go to New Zealand next Christmas. It was then I knew the travel bug had bitten.

All we needed was a golden egg-laying goose and we'd be right. Fortunately for us one came along - and I know it's like finding a needle in a haystack for people with disabilities to be able to trip over such a windfall. However we were lucky.

But enough of multiple metaphors; New Zealand was great!

Before we went we asked people who had been before to find out where we should go. Nearly all replied, "Everywhere's good". Not much help, we thought. Now we know they were right!

There are many reasons why the Australian tourist with a disability should go to New Zealand. For a start, they speak English - well sort of (I had almost perfected my Kiwi accent, but the rest of the family forbade me 'prectising' in the car). This makes communication and understanding of our needs so much easier.

New Zealand is so close - only 3 hours on the plane - and so much cheaper than Europe. Even in their High Season car hire, accommodation and tourist attractions were much cheaper than Europe in the middle of Winter. Although food and petrol were more expensive than in Australia, they were still quite a bit cheaper than Europe too.

Like Tasmania, there's a lot to see and do in a small area. Unlike the rest of Australia, you don't have to drive for hundreds of kilometers between big 'tourist spots' (in New Zealand everywhere's a tourist spot!). And while it might seem clichéd, it's true that New Zealanders are very friendly and helpful. Also true, but I thought fair, that a TV

advertisement there had a set of New Year's resolutions which included "making more fun of Australians".

Things for me seemed a bit harder than Europe in some ways; but that was because with chronic progressive Multiple Sclerosis (MS) things get worse - and it was a year later. Louise was right though; it's a good idea to try these things while you still can.

The great thing about New Zealand is that there's a wide diversity of things to do and see for people of all levels of ability. Before we left, I had imagined myself sitting down reading the paper while the family went off 'tramping' (Kiwi speak for hiking). Far from it! While Louise and the boys did more physical things, I was able to enjoy other less demanding activities, including just looking at the stunning scenery.

There are many, many activities most suitable for visitors with disabilities in NZ. Like anywhere else, there are still places that either cater poorly for those needing good access, or who don't even bother trying. At one place I was sat in front of a video because seeing the real thing would have been too difficult. My son Ashley commented, "This is just like 'The Victory' in Portsmouth Dad".

I had an exciting time trying to get down a moss-covered path into a glow-worm cave (run by a very big tour company) that had a walkway that was only about 3 feet lower than the cave roof over a raging stream. Tricky on crutches! I gave up after one punt in the dark was followed by more steps, more walkways and another punt. As there was no wheelchair available, I ended up having to get a 'fireman's chair' all the way back to the wharf.



It didn't surprise me much that the same company had no access to their steamship cruise in Queenstown (they had a wheelchair - but it was at the destination on the other side of the lake).

However, many tours made an effort and I liked the attitude of staff on a "King's Swim with the Dolphins" cruise we did in the Bay of Islands. "You tell us how you want us to help". That works.

A good number of tourist attractions were very well set up for disabled visitors and a number provided me with great help. At "The Buried (by a volcano) Village" in Rotorua, not only did they have a wheelchair available, but the site was mostly accessible with a great indoor display and easy paths around the site. While the rest of the family went to explore inside the excavated huts and down to the waterfall, I was able to read the information on plaques (conveniently placed at wheelchair height)

and to trundle around the scenic walkway on the edge of the escarpment. Even though my journey was level and only about one tenth as long, we still met up at the junction around the same time! Ah well, I've since worked out - at the face of the magnificent Fox Glacier - that on my crutches a "5 Minute Return Walk" takes 35 minutes. So I'm about 7 times slower than your average tourist. Sometimes more if I'm thinking as well as walking!

The Albatross Centre outside Dunedin even had an electric scooter available allowing me to take the steep, but spectacularly scenic path up to the viewing hide. We did a small bus tour to Milford Sound with 'Trips 'n Tramps', which wasn't expensive, but was very well organised for me, with wheelchairs waiting whenever I needed one. Even though I decided kayaking wasn't for me at Okarito, the owner kindly drove me for a tour of the old gold-mining town, while the family kayaked across the lagoon to see nesting white heron.

Accommodation was variable, but best when I had booked it myself, contacting the managers months before on the internet. The internet is a great tool for the travelers with a disability and I found New Zealanders very helpful here too. All my queries were answered and often if a place could not take a booking, they'd refer you on to someone else who could. When emailing Europe, I was used to about a 60% reply rate. In New Zealand it was more like 100%. By all means try to avoid any places with "Lodge", "Manor" or "Resort" at the end of their names, as in my experience, this just meant vastly inflated prices with very little or no help for people with a disability!

Some 'accessible' places the travel agent had booked for me had plenty of room inside, but getting through the door was impossible in a wheelchair because of the step! But many places we stayed in were great and not at all expensive. A proportion of all motels in NZ are now required by law to be accessible. One bathroom even had a mirror at wheelchair height (most 'access designers' forget that one)!

A tip: because you'll probably need a downstairs room, try to get one in a single storey building - as someone above you, usually means lots of noise!

In short, I found the size and price of a tour, attraction, motel or company was rarely proportional to the access provided or the help given to tourists with disabilities. In fact, it was usually the reverse.

In future travels, we have decided to ditch the electric wheelchair and invest in a manual wheelchair. Obviously this option is dependant on the type of help you have available, but we found the electric wheelchair too bulky and inflexible for traveling, with batteries that seemed to become weaker and weaker. And Louise and the boys demanded the exercise.

### **More access travel tips**

I have learnt this holiday that we all have to be careful in choosing activities that are within our capabilities. Certainly tourist attractions should make some efforts at accessibility, and many now do, but sometimes white-water rafting, glacier walking and bungee-jumping are best left to others (although Louise thought I could try this

last one, without the elastic cord). As I have said, the good thing about New Zealand is that nearly everywhere there are a range of activities suited to most levels of ability.

When traveling if you are disabled, it's very important to book ahead. And don't be afraid to say you could do with help. It's taken me a while to work this out, but most places are set up to cater for people with disabilities and are only too happy to help if given notice. You might be pleasantly surprised and even find yourself at the front of the queue for once!

Do try to use a travel agent who specialises in accessible travel.

After two big trips overseas now as a tourist with a disability, I've decided to set up my own disability tourism consultancy. I have come to understand that regular travel agents generally don't understand the needs of the disabled traveler; and who better to help than someone who is disabled themselves and has tried traveling?

If you are thinking of going to New Zealand, I found [Tourism New Zealand](#) very helpful and you may also seek help from [CCS](#) - a private disabilities organisation in New Zealand. There's also supposedly a [disabled traveler's NZ site](#), but I haven't been able to reach it. I would also be happy to answer any further queries you may have. Please email [blmumford@exemail.com.au](mailto:blmumford@exemail.com.au)

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**Appendix 8.**

**The universal symbol of wheelchair access.**



## Appendix 9

### Exerts from email correspondence with American visitors to New Zealand, Doug and Dawn Troutman

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“1. At Pancake rocks, one sign had a wheelchair with a prohibitive slash. We wouldn't do that, the steps are an obvious obstacle at that point, but we leave it up to the person to decide. A number of my friends would have left their chairs and hopped out and gone on. This sign was near the end of the trail anyway.

2. We did mostly bed and breakfasts and a few hotels. Though I didn't see any accessible hotel rooms, we didn't ask. Generally though, I saw NO specifically accessible facilities. e.g. Barbara did not find Braille on elevators for example.

In the U.S., a B & B with five or fewer rooms where the owner is a resident is exempt from the Americans with Disabilities Act.

One B & B owner was working on a ramp and had a nice bath in progress, but did not have a useable bar for transferring to the toilet. His BIG problem was that his doorways were all 26 inches wide.(clear space- many people don't realize the door takes up space within the door frame!) A wheelchair is 28 inches wide!! Talked to my friend John in Colorado today and we discussed all the trips we'd been on together where motel rooms, especially bathroom doors, were too narrow. In some cases maintenance took the door off, other times John would take the chairs from the dining table and put them in a line from the door to the toilet to scoot along for access..

3. MANY of the New Zealand trails we hiked were very good for access! Boardwalks were common to protect the habitat, and provided good access. Many other trails were firm stable surfaces, of natural materials, and wide enough for access. Though 32 inches is a good minimum width, 36 inches is better with passing zones five feet wide. The grades on many trails were also pretty good. While 8% is the limit on ramps in the "built" environment, and more than some people can accomplish, in the outdoor environment, trails are allowed to go a little above this. I can get more details on design to you later.

4. In Greymouth and elsewhere I saw many storefronts that were good. There was flat access or ramps going into many establishments with wide doors. Steps of course are a roadblock. (Many stores are too crowded with racks and counters inside for maneuvering a chair however.) Curb cuts at street crossings were generally good. The audio warning at crossings that you have are good from Barbara Ann's perspective.

With an aging population, and aging TOURIST population, anything done to accommodate disabilities helps many people we wouldn't normally think of.

People with canes can get along in the outdoors. The old "blind trail" concept of putting up ropes etc for guides is NOT necessary, or in keeping with natural environments.

The U.S. Forest Service in conjunction with others is coming along well with a trail design manual. Though the ADA (American Disabilities Association) doesn't address this part of outdoor recreation yet, it has been in the works for a long time. There are many things that can be done that aren't required by law. Which is a point. The International Building Code has very minimal details on Universal Design. There is a LOT of information and "tips" out there for people who want to go beyond "the law" and "minimums for design" that are actually quite practical to adopt.

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I spoke with an architecture student on the plane coming back and was encouraged that "universal design" and accessibility were finally being emphasized in her course work here in the U.S. A few years ago, the total coverage on access for an architect might be only a couple hours. I taught courses to provide access that were a week long for maintenance people!!

I also saw some great starts on toilet designs. At Bluff there was an "automated" public toilet with some great concepts. - button operation of the doors, automatic flush, automatic wash and hand drier that flushed the toilet!!! The biggest problem I saw was an absence of bars to accommodate lateral transfer from a chair to the toilet. The circular walk and overlook at Bluff was also very good. Though there is a problem for many people in chairs going around curves or up circles, this one had a minor grade and plenty of width. (In a wheelchair, the operator becomes the differential in the rear axle, meaning one hand must push harder or faster than the other. This can be VERY difficult for many people with poor upper body strength, or suffering from the joint damage typical after years of pushing a chair.)

Okay, I see I'm getting carried away, but this IS my thing!

One key thing to remember is communicate with the disabled community on designs. A KEY point is to remember that we see things from our personal perspective. Just because a person uses a chair, it does NOT mean they see things from the perspective of others with a different level of disability from their own, so a TEAM approach is good. Also, chair users tend not to see things from the perspective of the blind, or amputees, or people who wear splints or braces on their legs.

As you know, ecotourism is still growing rapidly. Greg Lais from Wilderness Inquiry in Minnesota has been taking tours for years now with able-bodied and disabled clients. Pack panniers on a horse will accommodate a wheelchair! Rafts and canoes are GREAT access to the outdoors for everyone.

I didn't use my tape measure as much as usual on my trip, but I saw MANY good things being done, whether on purpose or by accident. It is a lot of the SMALL details that create design problems. One thing was that doorknobs are really high in much of NZ, and didn't seem standard around the country. I did see a number of lever handles instead of round knobs, this is good!

Doug 'n Dawn"

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## Appendix 10

### Taken directly from correspondence with Scott Rains, by email

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“The Tourism for All Network Responsible, Sustainable, and Inclusive Development of Tourist Destinations Overview project was developed by the Inter-American Institute on Disability and Inclusive Development - IIDDI and its partners. It is a response to the enormous unmet demand of tourists, especially from the U.S.A., Europe and Asia, for accessible cruises and the market potential they represent for inclusive destination development. We refer, mainly, to retirees and seniors, who possess time, money and the desire to travel, but who find themselves with reduced mobility, generally due to physical, visual or auditory limitations, among others. This rapidly growing population has increased its life expectancy guaranteeing a long term growth market.

#### Vision:

##### To:

- accomplish an integrated application of the principles of sustainability and social inclusion in tourist destination development;
- promote infrastructure, economic, and cultural transformation in order to raise the quality of life and well-being of those who visit or reside there.
- create a network of accessible tourist destinations operating under plans that integrate environment management and accessibility guaranteeing inclusion of the tourist with varying ranges of functional capacity, such as seniors and people with disabilities.

In this we affirm the objective of Universal Design which is "a framework for the design of places, things, information, communication and policy to be usable by the widest range of people operating in the widest range of situations without special or separate design" often achieving its goal "at little or no extra cost." Specific Objectives are to :

- Improve existing tourist products and services, making them accessible to all by
  - preserving the environment
  - valuing the local culture
  - promoting social inclusion social
  - minimizing discrimination, prejudice, and exclusion
  - fighting poverty and generating conditions of better income distribution
  - educating the tourism industry, the general population, and public officials about the values of environmental sustainability, social inclusion and responsible tourism
  - educating the general public and public officials on the social and economic benefits generated by the practice of environmental sustainability, inclusion and responsible tourism”