

Day Sixteen - Fox Glacier to Queenstown - 414 Km

A lot can change across the space of a couple of days, the weather for one. Our overnight in Hokitika was accompanied by a cacophony of noise as a vicious storm rolled in off the Tasman Sea, the rain battered the windows and the sea was whipped up into a frenzy. Come the morning though, and the dawn crept in over mostly clear skies, as the sun rose above the Hokitika River.

The storm must have meant restless nights for some, as some navigators weren't as sharp as they might have been early on, leading to consternation for the drivers of and hilarity to anyone who might have been watching on. What do you get if you cross a Jaguar SS100 with a Triumph TR4, a Ford Mustang and one wrong turn? A traffic jam in a cul-de-sac, mostly. This is what occurred on the first regularity, as three crews turned too early and ended up wedged down the tightest of dead-ends. "A 32-point turn was required to get out!" declared one exasperated driver, as a tremendous amount of time was lost for all of those involved.

It's easy to get over the mistakes though when you are driving through a country as beautiful as this one. The overnight rain seemed to have been just the tonic the parched land needed, and seemingly rejuvenated the yellowed landscape back into a luscious green paradise, as the run to the Fox Glacier took us through beautiful farm-land pastures and thick, green forest. With just a half day scheduled and an early finish beneath the gaze of the glacier, many had planned to head up to explore the icy monolith in helicopters, but sadly cloud cover and wind meant that this was not possible.

With a rest day within touching distance, an early start saw our band of travellers head out of Fox on the barren roads of a sunny Sunday morning. We could even see the mountain tops, as the clouds that had clung to the peaks the previous day had vanished overnight. The Haast Pass was the early morning target, with no competition scheduled until the afternoon every single one of us was free to enjoy the wonderful roads that would allow us to traverse across the southern alps and onward to Queenstown. The driving was relaxed and enjoyable and the vistas that stretched out before us were some of the most immaculate and beautiful that we had seen on the rally.

Those with a keen eye would have enjoyed Glaciers, waterfalls, rivers and lakes, including the vast waters of Lake Wanaka and Hawea. Plenty of time was allowed to take in the sights, and even those of an ultra-competitive bent would have revelled in being allowed a pause in the contest to enjoy the scenery. So much of the time is spent looking at maps and the tarmac that we miss many amazing things, that, were it not for the timekeeper's clock, we might otherwise see, so it was a thrill today to be able to take it all in.

With the pass cleared though, and lunch taken it was time to return to the governance of the stopwatch with today's one and only regularity, that had been christened 'Jolly Road'. It was as well, a fun climb into the hills above Wanaka with a return to the dirt roads we have become accustomed to on this trip. The last few kilometres in particular were a wonderful, flowing serpentine up to the summit of the regularity, which was completed at just the right pace to push the limits of adhesion without becoming a public nuisance.

A brilliant day behind the wheel was crowned with a visit to the Highlands Motorsport Park, to get a few laps in on a circuit that draws inspiration from many of the best tracks around the world and have a casual walk around the excellent on-site museum. After so many days in transit, all will be thankful of a day off the road tomorrow in New Zealand's capital of adventure, before resuming the action again in two days' time.

Until then, Syd Stelvio.