



◆ Maori carving with
paua shell eyes,
Rotorua, North Island

A RETURN TO AOTEAROA

THE LAND OF THE LONG WHITE CLOUD

A Travel Photographer's Tale

BY ROBERT SANGER

ROBERT SANGER is an amateur-turned-professional world travel photographer and writer, founder and owner of world travel images library Blue Planet Images of London, with the unusual addition of travel information and photo tips drawn from his experiences, which are often anecdotally and amusingly written.

For most of Robert Sanger's working life until three years ago, he followed a career in the shipping industry as a broker for both ship sales and purchase and more recently new ship-building projects. His travels on shipping business only occasionally permitted him to take photographs, but did enable him to go on vacations to some fascinating places.

Nikon cameras and lenses entered his life over twenty years ago whilst employed as a shipbroker in Monaco, when he replaced a Minolta camera, stolen in a burglary, with a Nikon F3HP which he still has to this day.

What followed was a gradual self-learning process, which he has continued with other Nikon cameras since. He told us that he

came to understand that if he ever wanted to sell his images, he decided he would need to use professional transparency film (digital was yet to put in an appearance at that time), and so he began the building of his world travel images archive based for the most part upon Fuji Velvia film.

After six years working in Monaco, a change of job brought him back to live in the U.K. and not so long after that, through photo magazine advertisements, he made his first visit to **Grays of Westminster**. As a self-taught amateur with limited photographic know-how, he told us that the trepidation he felt "on first stepping through that now familiar dark blue-painted front door in London's Pimlico was



very quickly dispelled by the friendly and helpful, reassuring service that still awaits all customers to this very special Nikon camera shop". Thus, many years, and much Nikon photographic equipment later, Robert says that at **Grays of Westminster** "the invaluable advice, superb service, support and encouragement continues as does the friendship that has made such a difference to my passion for travel photography". ■



❖ Summer dawn over
“The Remarkables” mountains
and Lake Wakatipu, Queens-
town, South Island



❖ Tree fern leaves, Coromandel Peninsular, North Island

AOTEAROA, “THE LAND OF THE LONG WHITE CLOUD” is a Polynesian name that fills the mind of the traveller, and especially that of the landscape photographer, with a sense of romance and mystery as well as the anticipation of pristine landscapes of breathtaking natural beauty, unsullied by the hand of man. A name so much more evocative of what still awaits the voyager across the oceans to Aotearoa than the less poetic European derived name of New Zealand.

I count myself indeed fortunate to have first arrived in New Zealand by sea from Fiji many years ago whilst working and travelling my way around the world after graduating from University in England. In doing so I saw for myself from the deck of a ship, nearing the end of a long trans-Pacific Ocean voyage, what the Maoris’ ancestors must have seen from their war canoes when first arriving on these shores in ancient times: the outline of North Island gradually disclosing itself from beneath a long billowing white bank of clouds on the Western horizon.

Now, many years later, here I was again touching down from

Singapore at Auckland’s International Airport just after Christmas 2003 at the start of my third visit. This was to be a carefully planned four weeks photo-shoot that would take me through much of both North and South Islands taking photographs for my world travel photo archive.

MY KIT FOR THE TRIP

I found myself at the start of my travels through New Zealand armed with my two trusty Nikon F100 camera bodies and Nikkor lenses, a newly acquired Lee Filters system and a very large amount of Fuji Velvia film, with the aim of significantly adding to my, by now, quite large world travel images archive. However, in addition to my usual photo equipment for this trip, I had added something new that I was eager to try out, namely a Hasselblad X-Pan panoramic format camera with two lenses which had been lent to me by Hasselblad U.K.. This was the result of a very kind offer from Hardy Haase, the head of Hasselblad U.K., whom I had met the previous summer at Grays of Westminster’s Wildlife & Natural History photographers’ workshop with Heather Angel.



◆ Maori fertility figure carving, Whakarewarewa, Rotorua



❖ Lake Matheson near Fox Glacier, South Island – afternoon, storm clouds developing over Southern Alps

The Lord Of The Rings EFFECT

New Zealand has seen a tremendous growth in the numbers of tourists arriving to see for themselves the spectacular landscapes portrayed in the film trilogy based on J.R.R. Tolkien's book *The Lord of The Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring, The Two Towers* and *Return of the King*. These films were shot at the WingNut Production company situated in Miramar, Wellington for U.S.-based New Line Cinema and at a number of different locations in both the North and South Islands. In the best-known tourist destinations in New Zealand there is clear evidence of this growth in tourist arrivals over recent years, attracted here by the imagery in these films, most notably the many escorted groups from Asian countries on

"highlight" tours which include the locations for shootings of *The Lord of The Rings* films.

In my opinion however, the reality and immense scale of the wilderness places of New Zealand is even more wonderful than is apparent from the films.

This wild and beautiful land was here long before J.R.R. Tolkien conceived and wrote his books, and will endure long after the growing numbers of curious tourists have gone and forgotten about Peter Jackson's film masterpieces. Indeed it is ironic to



◇ Evening thunder
storm over
Fox Glacier,
South Island

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 OF THE
 LONG WHITE
 CLOUD**



❖ Morning calm, Lake Paringa, West Coast South Island

reflect that Tolkien, whose stories are very much based upon Nordic mythology and Runic legends would probably be most surprised to now see how the films have created this linkage in people's minds with New Zealand as the land of The Lord of the Rings, which nonetheless seems so appropriate.

As a traveller and photographer I have come to love Aotearoa, The Land of The Long White Cloud, even though it is on the opposite side of the globe from my home in London.

We human beings are each passing by for but a brief moment in time – experiencing life on this planet which will continue after we are each gone. As photographers, we attempt to record our impressions of our experiences of time and place, but also much more. We attempt to say "I was here and this is what it meant to me; how about you?"

New Zealand is a wonderful place to photograph and reflect upon the beauty of this Earth and our transitory presence here, which for me is so poignantly evoked in the poetic words written by J.R.R. Tolkien in The Lord of The Rings as a song sung by Bilbo Baggins:

*I sit beside the fire and think
 of all that I have seen,
 of meadow-flowers and butterflies
 in summers that have been.*

*Of yellow flowers and gossamer
 in Autumns that there were,
 with morning mist and silver sun
 and wind upon my hair.*

*I sit beside the fire and think
 of how the world will be
 when winter comes without a
 spring that I shall ever see.*

*For still there are so many things
 That I have never seen!
 in every wood in every spring
 there is a different green.*

*I sit beside the fire and think
 of people long ago,
 and people who will see a world
 that I shall never know.*

*But all the while I sit and think
 Of times there were before,
 I listen for returning feet
 and voices at the door.**

*© J.R.R. Tolkien The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring published by HarperCollins

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