

Darren Henderson

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## Ngawi & Palliser Bay

by Darren Henderson

C O L O U R P H O T O G R A P H S

S o u t h W a i r a r a p a , N e w Z e a l a n d

May 2017

# Ngawi & Palliser Bay

photographs by Darren Henderson

foreword by Richard Lyons



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## Acknowledgements:

To Deb and Lee McKinstry for their support, because without their encouragement these photographs would not have been taken.

Thank you.

To Alexandra Dando and Richard Lyons for putting up with my pre-dawn starts and early nights routine. Your friendship and tolerance pushes me onwards, whilst keeping me grounded.

## FOREWORD

An image of the sun setting against a Martian horizon encapsulates the loneliness of all the unobserved places in the cosmos; promotes consideration of that which under normal circumstances eludes observation.

For my own part, far from inspiring despair, such depictions promote a sense of wonder, a certain curiosity, perhaps even a degree of envy. Life is short and we inhabit a world full of wonders. The desire to see all there is to see is as natural as the urge to venture forth to the stars. But it's not just the drive for experience that goads us ever onward, there's also a hunger for that which we so often seem to lack, space.



Mars Exploration Rover: Opportunity (superimposed) on the rim of Victoria Crater [NASA/JPL/Cornell]

The photographs in this book were taken over a two week period in the town of Ngawi (pronounced: 'nah-wee') on the southernmost coast of the north island of New Zealand.

A mere stone's throw from the famous Cape Palliser lighthouse, this tiny collection of seasonally inhabited homes huddle against one another as the looming mountainous backdrop thrusts them into the teeth of wind and wave.

Despite the howling winds and pounding sea, I found a quiet here and a sort of contrary calm as if I were reposing in the eye of a storm. The unrelenting social static of home and work evaporated as the demands of calculative thought ebbed before a tide of profound inspiration. Often I found myself wearing a grin that was only partly due to the sleet lacerating my cheeks and I felt like a kid again, playing in the rain.

In an age of satellite phones and personal locator beacons there are few places left that can be considered truly remote. Ngawi in many ways feels a long way from anywhere and it certainly evinces an appearance of remoteness. It's something I can imagine tourists commenting upon as they rush past. The southernmost tip of the island is a regular feature of the meticulously researched and efficiently planned itineraries of many.

In reality the place is little more than a brisk half day's walk from the next nearest town and you likely wouldn't have too much trouble hitching a ride from a friendly local if you were so inclined.

Nevertheless there lies behind the immense natural wonder of the place a sting, a potential to do one harm that invariably coexists beside great beauty and which all but the least astute could not help but feel in their bones. Like a coiled serpent, an almost incredible potency pervades the land, from the geological strata beneath one's feet to the mercurial character of the climate.

Repeatedly I was struck by the sense of a place at once both old and young, possessed of a sort of primordial youth where one felt ancient monsters might still roam and the land still held the strength to heave itself skyward and refashion its features at a whim.

I can't wait to return.

R Lyons September 2017

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## AFTERWORD

There's a stillness in these photographs that I've not observed in my previous work, so I have to assume that this quietude stems from the region where these images were captured. It's not as though time stands still in Ngawi, but it is a place that's perhaps better measured in geological time. East of the Rimutaka Range at the bottom of New Zealand's North Island, Palliser Bay sits at the foot of the Aorangi Ranges. Overlooking the Cook Strait and very much exposed to the Pacific Ocean, Palliser Bay is located in the latitudes of the roaring forties.

Heading south-east from Pirinoa, what begins as a leisurely drive through farmland unfurls once the road merges with the coast at Te Kopi and continues through to Cape Palliser. Coastal erosion and active slips have long nibbled away at Cape Palliser Road and sometimes require its closure. By car Cape Palliser Road is the only way in or out. With no shops of its own, the small fishing village of Ngawi is more than a thirty-minute drive for bread, milk or a newspaper. In many ways Ngawi is a town that's both connected and isolated. Seemingly it's a place to get away from the powers that be — a site where personal sovereignty rubs shoulders with nature in a quiet co-existence.

Tractors and bulldozers are used to launch fishing boats along the rocky and unpredictable beach at Ngawi. Born of historic pragmatism this is simply common practice for the Ngawi locals. Yet to the passer-by the entry to the township is a surreal collision of industrial machinery with nature's splendor. At night, in the orange glow of streetlamps, the rusty bulldozers appear like a ramshackle collection of satellites that have been jettisoned back to earth.

These photographs of the Ngawi foreshore and its surrounds were captured over a two-week period in May 2017; with two of the images taken one afternoon in mid-April 2016, on my first visit to Kupe's Sail. This photography project is void of the regions' two key tourist attractions: the Putangirua Pinnacles and the Cape Palliser Lighthouse. Instead my efforts were focused on the Ngawi settlement, along with some of the geological formations that punctuate the Palliser Bay coastline.

Shot mostly in the blue hours, and sequenced from dawn to dusk as a fictional day, this photo-essay is a stylised depiction of the North Island's southernmost tip. Since the Palliser Bay area is by no means a pristine wilderness that's untouched by human hands, I made a conscious decision to frame these photographs replete with power lines, streetlamps and earth movers. Absent from this group of images are the local fishermen, holidaymakers and tourists, but what availed itself was an eerie calm.

Darren Henderson  
August 2017

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Photography by Darren Henderson

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