

COAST BY CAMPERVAN

While overseas tourists have evaporated with the spread of Covid-19 around the world, it has not been the end of tourism altogether. Campervans and caravans are still on the road, the difference being that most are now driven by New Zealanders out exploring our own backyard. **PAUL McBRIDE** called into the free campsites set up on the fringes of Greymouth to see where the tourists came from, what they thought of the facilities and what benefit they brought to the local economy.

Like bees to a honey pot, campervans are attracted to the free parking sites, toilets, showers and fresh water made available by the Grey District Council courtesy of the Government's tourism infrastructure fund.

Garry Bell drove from Levin and is touring the South Island in his self-contained bus. The West Coast has been the highlight so far.

"It's my first time here, what a brilliant place. Gold panning, fishing, and I've been mountainbiking riding on these amazing tracks. I had heard of the (freedom camping) sites but didn't realise how good they are here. Incredible — the toilets and facility is well set up. I would certainly recommend the West Coast as a great destination."

Dargaville couple Peter and Marion Taylor have been on the road since December 14 for their third visit to Greymouth.

"We have been down the east coast, but always come up the West Coast. The people are so friendly," Mr Taylor said.

"One guy in Jackson Bay gave us two big crayfish!

"We eat out quite a bit and try to support local business, but also cook as we have a proper oven. We cooked up a roast pork last night. The infrastructure for visitors is fantastic. The sites are very good and the councils have made it very camper-friendly."

Pat and Marian Miller have travelled down from Whangarei and were not aware of the free campsites until they arrived at Karama.

"I'm very impressed with Cobden (campsite), very clean and a new toilet as well," Mrs Miller said.

"I was here 40 years ago and have noticed a big difference, especially at Punakaiki. There is a lot of new development on the West Coast."

Mr Miller says they support the community wherever possible.

"We support the supermarkets and shops and go to the pictures as well.

"It is a different world here, segregated by the rugged mountains."

Former West Coasters, Brian and Jenny Wright, now of Temuka, were camping overnight at the Blaketown site.

"We live in the camper and just love it," Mrs

Wright said.

"We went to the Music in the Mountains (concert) at Tapawera and then to Westport for the three-day Country and Western Festival."

Mr Wright says self-contained campervanning is the perfect lifestyle.

"We are on super so it's great having no rates or power bills. We go to the local restaurants and put money into town. We have our own shower, toilet and cooking facilities," Mr Wright said.

"We normally go to motorhome parks when we travel around, costs \$6 a night, and this weekend we are going up to the motorhome rally in Blackball."

Britons Archie Crofton and Anouk Loman have been in New Zealand for over a year, a world away from their Covid-ravaged home in England.

"We've been on the West Coast for three weeks now. We are having a fantastic time and we eat out as well as go to the supermarkets. A coffee every morning at the local café and normally lunch as well," Mr Crofton, a freelance designer said.

"I've been so impressed with the infrastructure



The Blaketown tiphead freedom campsite.



The Cobden tiphead freedom campsite.

PICTURES: Paul McBride



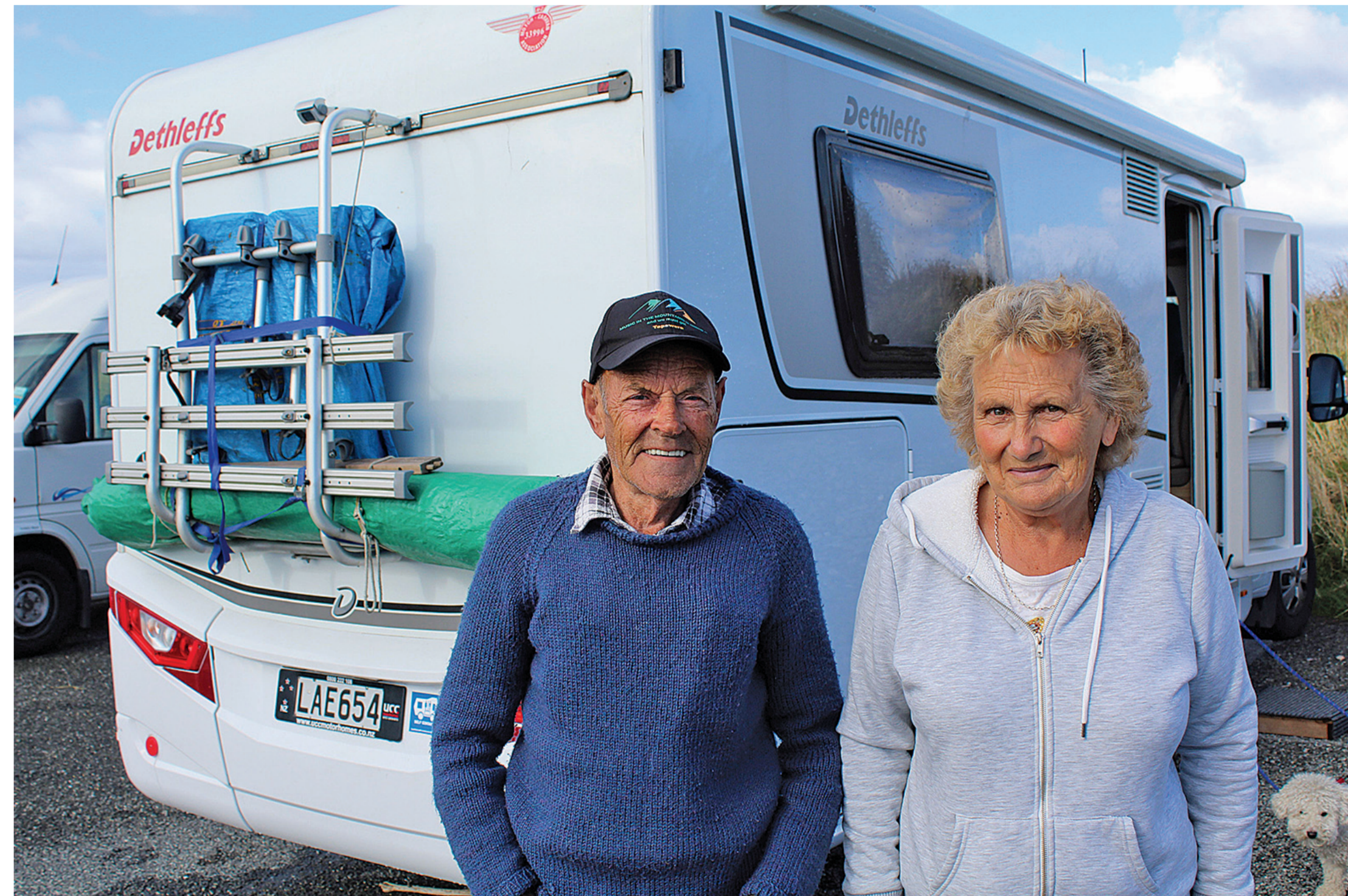
John Hodges and Jane Lyndon, from Tauranga.



Pat and Marian Miller, from Whangarei.



Peter and Marion Taylor, from Dargaville.



Brian and Jenny Wright, from Temuka.



Charlie Izod and Nathan Hudson, from Rotorua.



Archie Crofton and Anouk Loman, from London.



Garry Bell, from Levin.

here, astounded just how good the sites are on the West Coast. We have an (on-board) toilet but don't need to use it.

"What an experience on the West Coast! I was surfing just off the Fox River and there were two Hector's dolphins riding my wave beside me. Next minute, three orcas appeared and did a loop around me. They were just metres away, massive and it was pretty scary. They were after the dolphins and quickly headed north."

Charlie Izod is also from the United Kingdom and has been working in Rotorua, along with

Nathan Hudson.

"I've been here for 16 months and wanted to look around the South Island," Mr Izod said.

"We wanted to do underwater rafting in Charleston and are going down to the glaciers. I'm very impressed with the camping site at Blaketown. Some of these sites are far better than the ones we have paid for."

Wanaka residents Dave and Bev Haley headed over the Lewis Pass after attending a wedding in Ashburton.

"The camping sites are brilliant and the

improvements have been amazing," Mrs Haley said.

"We eat out most of the time when we are here, and had a beautiful meal at Speight's last night. We'll be going to Lake Brunner today and then on to Hokitika and take our time back to Wanaka. It's not the first time and it won't be the last!"

John Hodges and Jane Lyndon live in Tauranga and also have nothing but praise for the West Coast and the free campsites.

"I first came here when I was a teenager," Ms Lyndon said.

This time they visited Westport for the Buller Gorge Country Music Festival, and then set off down the Coast.

"I like the history and the scenery of the West Coast — it's different and it's rugged."

"In Westport, I found the Denniston incline very interesting."

"We cook our own food but do spend money in the supermarket, food and gas. The Liquid Laundrette in Greymouth was very good and very clean. So far we have spent in excess of \$400 here in Greymouth."



The Cobden Bridge freedom campsite.