

The Long Voyage Home

YOU stand a very good show of getting a taxi at the Wellington ferry wharf, if you don't dally on the boat. And you'd better take a long look at the taxis you see there because you may not see one again for quite some time. Note the air of informality. In Christchurch a taxi driver wears a cap and a white dust coat; in Wellington he wears a sweat shirt and an air of nonchalance—

"Will you take me to Khandallah?"

"Don't mind if I do, sport. I've already got a joker for Seatoun. Not far out of your way."

So off you go, and you don't know how lucky you are until you try to find one on a wet night. There is a terribly high death rate at the taxi depots on wet nights. The phones ring frantically, but the dead are in their graves and cannot answer. If you're persistent to the tune of half-an-hour on the end of the telephone, you may raise a zombie:

"Sorry, sport. There isn't a taxi in the place."

Packed and Often

WHEN you travel round Christchurch, you either go on a bike, or look at a timetable, find you've just missed a tram, and wait half-an-hour for the next one. In Wellington you walk confidently to a tram stop and take your choice of three or four trams, all packed tighter than a double-dumped wool bale. If you miss one cluster, there's bound to be another in a few minutes. Same with the buses. They're always full. I saw one going down Tinakori Road at 7.15 on a Saturday morning with only four or five empty seats. Why is this? Aha, no bicycles! Bicycling in Wellington, uphill and against the wind, is worse than pushing a loaded pram; downhill and with the wind is a quick, sure way to hospital. So, unless you're over-privileged and own a car, you must walk or ride in public transport. The system, a good one, seems to work on the principle of frequency first, everything else nowhere. Green as grass, I tried to buy a timetable for Petone buses.

"Haven't seen a timetable for months," an official told me. I mentioned the hour I wanted to travel.

"Oh," he said. "They leave on the hour and every ten minutes after."

They didn't, of course. They were far more frequent than every ten minutes. There goes another leisurely southern habit. I won't try to buy a timetable again.

Commuters' Glaze

THE front doors bang, the gate latches click, and patter, patter, patter go the feet down the steps. The commuter dislodges with his tongue the last crumb in the crevice between his front

teeth, tucks his morning paper under his arm, scampers to the bus stop, gathers his resources and boards with the joyless determination of a customs official climbing the Jacob's ladder of an unsavoury ship. There is one empty seat. He sinks down in it, opens his newspaper as a formal gesture, and enters that suspended state of consciousness known as Commuters' Glaze. His thoughts are stilled, his breathing diminishes until it is scarcely sufficient to sustain life, his eyes are blank, he cannot see the harbour, the hills, or the standing woman who obviously considers she should have his seat. He moves through space, but is not of it; time passes, but he is outside it. Then the city snaps its fingers at him like a contemptuous hypnotist, he wakes from his trance and gets down into the street, still not quite sure whether he is his own man or something dangling on the end of a string.

In Kupe's Vicinity

KUPE OF RAIATEA, his wife Hine Te Aparangi, and Pekaourangi the Magician, who discovered New Zealand about the Xth Century, stand in stone in a rather obscure and cluttered corner of the Wellington railway station. They have been surprised in the act of sighting New Zealand, and are gazing fixedly at the wall a few feet in front of them. The two men are impassive, grasping their official staves, but Te Aparangi has flung out her left arm, forefinger extended, pointing to their discovery. Slightly behind and below her, pointing in the same direction, is a red neon finger and the illuminated word TELEPHONE, which seems about as good company for the intrepid explorers as the notice by the station dining-room doors, a yard further away: Exit Only, Entrance Other Door.

Blow the Man Down

ABOUT half-past eight on Christmas night I was waiting for a lift at the Waterloo corner. A sailor and his girl battled alongside in the gale. He was a little drunk and she was nagging him. He pointed his shoulder into the wind and said nothing, riding out her blast and the Northerly's. We stood close together for a few minutes in the blustering dark, two of us silent, then a car stopped by the kerb in front of us, and a family piled out carrying Christmas spoils. Out came the son, whooping, and winding a rattle; out came the daughter, nursing a doll dressed for a garden party in a long white frock, and a white picture hat. The hat sprang into the air like a maddened helicopter and bowed away south down the Quay. The daughter screamed, waved her arms, and was hustled into the hotel foyer by her parents. As I started south after the hat, the sailor

"Frequency first, everything else nowhere"

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