



# Greymouth Star



\$1 (Home Delivery 75c)

TUESDAY, MARCH 18, 2014



Est: 1866 Phone 769 7900

PROFILE

## Coasting along the Coast Road

## Plane search focus turns to abandoned airfields

P5

P8

www.greystar.co.nz

TOMORROW

# 19°

stly fine, patchy cloud early  
plied by Nelson Weather Service)

### Quick Read

#### Firefighters quick to the mark

Service fire safety officers and police are looking into a suspicious car fire in Cobden tonight. Cobden Volunteer Fire Brigade chief fire officer Pollock said the brigade was "very quick" to the blazing Primera, in Hall Street, as firefighters were still at the station, having just completed their monthly meeting.

#### Tobacco theft prompts search

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# Beach scoured for Christchurch man

Viv Logie

There is still no sign of a Christchurch man who was last seen near the Blaketown tiphead on March 9.

Kurt Green, 30, travelled to Greymouth with friends on Saturday, March 8.





Leon Dalziel and his four-legged pal Bud chill on the front porch at Ten Mile.

# COAST ROAD

## Coaster

Leon Dalziel is one of the more recognisable characters of the Coast Road, known as much for his german shepherd as he is for his involvement in the Barrytown community. He sat down with **CHRISTINE LINNELL** to talk about his travels, and the West Coast lifestyle that eventually brought him back home.

**T**he Coast Road between Greymouth and Charleston has a culture all of its own — and for born-and-bred West Coaster, Leon Dalziel, that world is right outside his doorstep.

“Everything’s out here for me,” Leon says, sitting in the sunlit kitchen of his house at Ten Mile, north of Rapahoe. Outside the front door, Bud the german shepherd waits impatiently for their next walk into the bush, while chickens wander in the yard and scratch in the flower beds.

Leon inherited this picturesque property from his father, who moved there in the late 1960s. “All of these houses were for the old coalmine up the back here. They were all little baches and huts, and this was the mine manager’s house.”

Located on a steep hillside overlooking the sea, the house gives him easy access to both the bush tracks and the beach. When he’s not running his web design company from his home office, he is most likely to be spotted outdoors with his dog — a New Zealand lifestyle that is becoming increasingly rare.

The Dalziel family has deep roots on the West Coast. Leon’s great-grandmother, Martha Keown, ran the Australasian Hotel for a few years, while his grandfather held a greenstone claim and was among the first Pakeha carvers, and his father, Cliff Dalziel,

was a greenstone prospector.

Cliff met Leon’s mother, Monique, when she was at university. Originally from Thailand, she came to New Zealand on a student exchange programme and completed sixth and seventh form at Greymouth High School before studying for bursary in Canterbury.

“That was when the whole Coast Road hippie art thing was kicking off, in the early 1970s,” Leon explains. “That’s how mum and dad met.”

Though neither of them were hippies themselves, they had mutual friends among the artists, carvers and potters making themselves at home near Barrytown.

“They were probably the two odd ones out,” he says.

They married, and Leon was born in 1973. He had one younger brother, Evan. The family spent much of their time away from town, with beaches and bush-covered hills always close by.

Leon remembers going to class at the small Barrytown School, with about 30 children of all different ages. “It’s still kind of the same as what it was,” he says. Later he spent a few years studying in Runanga and Greymouth, then went away to boarding school in Nelson. By an early age, he was starting to play around with computers.

“I probably don’t look like a computery person,” he admits. “But when I was at

school we had computer studies, and I kind of liked it. I thought computers seemed to be the way to go.”

At 17, he returned to Greymouth to study business computing at Tai Poutini Polytechnic. “It was the very first year of the polytech,” he says. “There was only the computer course, and there was a secretarial course, and the only other one was the forestry course.”

The field suited him so well that by 1990 he was moving to Sydney to do computer work for an advertising agency, first in graphic design and then database and administration work. Apple Macintosh computers were just coming into their own back then, and Leon learned a lot of his skills on the job. “It was kind of like an apprenticeship in those days.”

Sydney was a new experience after growing up on the West Coast. “I loved it at the time. I was five years in Sydney and it was great — shopping, out for dinner, partying, nightclubs, all of that. It’s really good when you’re young, in your early 20s. I just had a great time.”

In the end, however, the lifestyle was not for him: “Five years was enough”.

Leon returned to New Zealand in 1995 and worked at a small advertising agency in Nelson for a while. He also tried living in Wellington for a year, sharing a Thorndon apartment with his then-girlfriend.

In the early 2000s, his father died in an accident while hunting deer in the steep hills above his beloved Coast Road.

“I’ve kind of got this affinity with up the back here because that’s where dad used to look after the tracks and go deerstalking, and that’s where he died as well,” Leon says. “It wasn’t a good way to go, but it’s nice that he passed away doing something that he wanted to, where he wanted to.”

From then on the family home stood empty, and Leon would drive down from Nelson on long weekends to trim the lawn and keep the place in one piece. It became a kind of holiday home for him, but over the years his holidays became longer and longer, until he was dividing his time almost evenly between Nelson and the West Coast.

He finally settled back here for good about three years ago. “I got sick of the drive, and I woke up one day and thought, ‘I’ve been back here for nine months and I haven’t gone back to Nelson’. I thought it’s probably time to move down properly, so I did.”

It was also around that time when he adopted Bud, aka Big Ears, the big, friendly german shepherd that follows him everywhere.

“I got him when he was that big, and now he’s 40kg. He’s great. Because I’m up the back here and also down on the beach, I was very, very conscious of him being bird-friendly. I didn’t want him to be one of those

dogs that killed anything. The only thing he’s allowed to have a crack at are possums.”

Bud accompanies his friend on tramping trips over the hills, fitted with saddle bags so he can help carry water and equipment. In the evenings he patrols the bush near the house looking for possums.

“If he finds a possum he’ll chase it up a tree and bark at it until I come out and shoot it for him, and then he’ll pick the possum up and bring it back down to the house for me. I’m quite pleased with how he’s turned out.”

These days Leon spends the majority of his time outside. From his house he can climb down to the beach for paddle-boarding, diving and fishing, or follow a network of old mining and prospecting tracks that connect with the Croesus Track, a little further up the coast. He sets traps and bait stations for stoats, rats and possums, and is part of the West Coast Blue Penguin Trust.

“I enjoy the environment, but rather than just admiring it I’m wanting to be more involved with what’s going on. I’m trying to do some kiwi spotting and kiwi listening at night, and I get off on all kinds of tangents. I’m trying to see if there are any bats up here. I’m really curious to know if we’ve got any kaka around.”

Leon has his own web design company, baby-e, which he runs out of his home office in partnership with other small businesses in the South Island. He has designed

websites for the Buller District Council, the Greymouth Regent Theatre and a number of tourism and hospitality companies on the West Coast.

Working from home allows him a work-life balance that suits an active West Coaster. “When I was in Nelson I was working 50, 60, 70 hours a week, whereas down here I’m probably more likely to work 20 to 30 hours a week, and get out and enjoy doing things — and I’m not stuck in the office.”

The rest of his time is spent supporting the community around Barrytown and the Coast Road. He knows most of the people living between his house and Punakaiki and is on the committee that looks after the Barrytown Hall.

“The characters that I grew up with, they’re still here. Everyone’s doing their thing and it’s just a really good community feeling out here. If you walk down the road, half a dozen people will wave at you when you go past.”

Just a few years of this lifestyle makes it hard for him to imagine spending his life anywhere else.

“I love it too much, because I’m only 20 minutes from town, but I probably only go into town once every two to three weeks, if I can help it. I’m more likely to drive up to Punakaiki than go into Greymouth. It’s beautiful out here. It’s just like a different world.”