

The morning was bright and cold.

It was the sort of morning that made some people anxious to drive up the mountain and carve deep sinuous lines into freshly groomed snow.

It was the sort of morning where the hot water you've just poured on the windscreen to thaw the ice, refreezes while you go inside for another coffee.

It was the sort of morning where everyone is jumping up and down and demanding to do things, at the same time as staying in bed for as long as possible.

The sun caught the tips of the mountains, turning them a molten white against the blue of the southern morning.

That same sun glinted on the camera lens as your intrepid narrator took photos of the sun catching the tips of the mountains, turning them a molten white against the blue of the southern morning.

Click, went the camera. Another mountain.

Click went the camera. Trees artfully placed in the foreground, mountains rising above.

Click went the door to one of the lounge bedrooms. Footsteps approached the photographer.

"What are we doing today?", asked a voice.

"We're going to Paradise", replied the narrator, sounding more confident than he felt.

"Where's that?" asked the voice

"Oh, up at the top of the lake. We're going to drive there."

"Cool. Is there ice skating?" asked the voice. Interest was sparked.

"I don't think so."

"Are we going shopping?". The voice was hopeful.

"Not in Paradise, no. But we may have to buy some bread for sandwiches at the supermarket on the way."

"So what's at Paradise, then?"

"I don't know. I just saw it on the map."

"So what are we going to do when we get there?" The voice carried a trace of annoyance.

"I don't know. We'll find out when we arrive."

"Oh." Said the voice. A pause. "So when are we leaving?"

"As soon as everyone is ready. Hopefully soon."

Three and a half hours later, everyone was ready. We had all rapidly re-learned the lesson that a group moves as fast as its slowest member.

We piled into the vans. Diesel fumes filled the carpark as we waited to leave.

Click, went the door to the van as it closed behind us.

There, marked in black and white letters on the road map- the words: "Paradise."

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The road to Paradise followed the side of the lake west and then north. Across the water, the mountains reared fearlessly from the shoreline, casting their timeless bulk among the clouds.

"Are we there yet?" Called a voice from the back seat.

"I don't know. I don't think so. This is just the roundabout at the far end of town." The intrepid driver replied, yanking the van into third gear.

"When are we going shopping?" Persisted the voice.

"When we get back from Paradise." Responded the intrepid driver.

"So where are we going?" Asked another voice from behind.

"To Paradise." The van lurched into fourth gear.

"Where's that?"

"At the top of the lake." The van jolted back into third gear as the road climbed around a bend. The van eventually decided to climb the hill as well.

"What are we going to do there?"

"I don't know. Maybe have some lunch."

And so the conversation continued, winding round corners in the lake, zipping past mountains that reared fearlessly from the shoreline to cast their timeless bulk among the clouds.

The road stretched before us. On the map on the seat beside me, the red line of the road wriggled northwards, towards the hopeful, mysterious word in small black letters. "Paradise."

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Soon, the lake was far behind us, and the mountains seemed to have lost interest in rearing fearlessly from the shoreline.

The mountains along this particular part of the road now marched ceaselessly onwards, their abrupt ranks forming brooding ramparts against the vast expanse of sky.

The van lurched forward up the valley, occasionally reaching fifth gear.

"Can we see Paradise yet?" Asked a voice in the seat behind.

"I don't know. I don't think so. The last sign said we still had 12 kilometres to go."

"Have you been to Paradise before?" The inquisition continued.

"No. That's why I wanted to come up here."

"When's lunch?" Asked a hungry voice.

"When we get to Paradise."

"Where's Paradise?"

"Somewhere on this road, I guess." The map couldn't be wrong, I reasoned.

The circular rhythm of question and reply continued. The mountains kept on forming brooding ramparts on either side of us, and the van lurched on.

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Rumble, went the van.

Click, went the gearstick as we dropped back to third gear.

We had run out of sealed road. The road wound ahead of us, onwards up the valley.

"Are we at Paradise yet?" Chattered a voice from the back seat.

"I don't know. I don't think so."

I was looking for a sign. A place to stop. But the road just seemed to lead around yet another corner.

The van rumbled on.

Splash, went the van. We forded a small stream. (The journey was now taking on epic proportions.)

"When are we having lunch?" asked a voice.

Splash, rumble, said the van. We forded another stream, this time a little deeper.

"Are there toilets at Paradise?" asked a voice.

"I don't know. I don't think so" was the intrepid reply

Rumble, splash, scrape, Rumble, said the van in agreement. Another stream had been crossed.

The mountains brooded, apparently not noticing the painful progress of our little convoy.

"How far away are we?"

Splash, rumble, crash, rumble, replied the van. (We found out later that we had dented the muffler as we forded that particular stream).

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Click, said the van door.

"OK, everyone out. We're stopping here."

We had, quite literally, run out of road. The track disappeared over a riverbank ten metres ahead of us. Beyond, a rather large river flowed through shingle beds down the valley.

No sign. No house, no picnic table. Just the road, the riverbank, and then the river.

It was as good a place as any to stop. Around us, great giants of mountains rose, not only managing to cast their bulk among the clouds, but also rear fearlessly, brood against the vast expanse of sky and do several other impressive mountain-type things which defied description.

The afternoon was bright and cold, but the shadows lengthened in the valley as we had our lunch.

It was the sort of afternoon that made some people wish they had gone shopping.

It was the sort of afternoon that made some people go wading in the river, in water fed by glaciers and eternal snows not too far away up the valley.

It was the sort of afternoon where you could stand in silence and wait for the penny to drop.

"My feet are cold!" yelled a voice attached to legs that had stood too long in the icy river. The voice bounced off the mountains and hung in the air for a moment.

Click, said the camera. Another mountain, delicately posed with its snow-covered arms draped over the wall of rock and forest below.

Click, said the camera. This time the river, in its green, blue, glacier-fed glory. Flowing south to the lake.

"So is this Paradise?" Asked a voice from behind.

"I'm not sure. I was just following the map," I replied.