

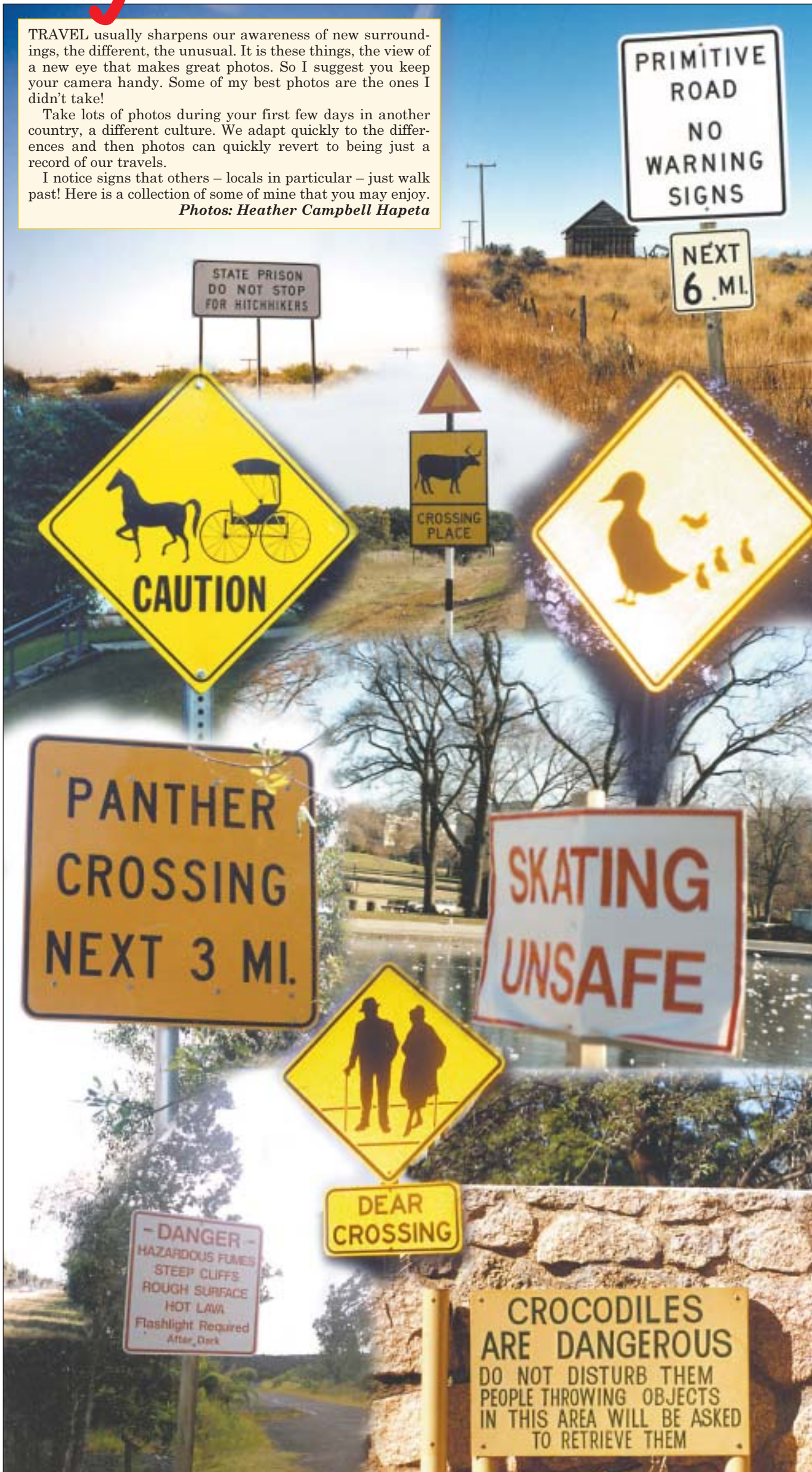
Signs of the times

TRAVEL usually sharpens our awareness of new surroundings, the different, the unusual. It is these things, the view of a new eye that makes great photos. So I suggest you keep your camera handy. Some of my best photos are the ones I didn't take!

Take lots of photos during your first few days in another country, a different culture. We adapt quickly to the differences and then photos can quickly revert to being just a record of our travels.

I notice signs that others – locals in particular – just walk past! Here is a collection of some of mine that you may enjoy.

Photos: Heather Campbell Hapeta



What topic this week?

"While other crafts have to sit around chewing their fingernails waiting for a movie to be put together, writers have one great strength. They can sit down and generate their own employment and determine their own fate to a great extent by the degree of their disciplines, their guts and their talents"



By Heather Campbell Hapeta

– Fay Kanin (American union activist. Writer b.1917)

UNFORTUNATELY, many times as I sit to compose this weekly column I doubt I have the discipline, guts or talent to do so.

Why does it always have to be on a travel-related topic? (Because it's on the travel pages Heather). Why can't I just write about what I think about the world? (Why should anyone be interested in what you think about the state of the world?) Why is it so hard for an opinionated woman like me to think of a topic week after week, month after month? (Who knows? Who cares how hard it is for you?)

Such are my thoughts as I sit at the computer contemplating a blank screen. I am not a disciplined person. I find it difficult to remember to take medication when it's been prescribed. I just don't do routine.

"That's why you travel so well," said a friend a few days ago. "You actually thrive on the state of flux your life is in when you're on the road."

I concurred. Decision-making on the spot, living on my intuition, going with the flow, swimming with the current rather than across it or upstream are the hallmarks of a passionate solo traveller such as I. But does it make a writer? One who needs to be making a living by the sweat of her brow, or pen. Does it give me the guts and talent Fay Kanin talks about?

Recently I listened to three columnists talk about what a column is and what a columnist should say. This is my interpretation of their words.

A writer of weekly columns should be disciplined (ha ha), have something of importance to say (yeah right), something fresh (sure), of the moment (really).

They should never be pretentious (or precious I wonder?), they should have a strong opinion (not always easy with travel topics) and seek to polarise – you, the reader – occasionally. Of course it needs to be interesting enough for you to read it to the end (I know my mother reads it, that's her duty, but other readers, please don't go, stay till the end).

If it's not personal it's not a column they tell me. Well that's a balancing act if ever there was one. How much do I want you to know about me and even more importantly, how much do you really want to know about me?

Sure, I can be witty and charming and lucid but at other times I can be mean-spirited, self-centred and occasionally – very occasionally of course – obtuse.

So, be daring they tell me, but not defamatory, be opinionated, get up people's noses sometimes, attack sacred cows, be the devil's advocate. Point out double standards. Write about sex. Be insightful.

But wait, like the advertisements, that's not all: I should test your ideals, push frontiers, make you think. I need to be provocative and make you react and I should be passionate.

What a darn tall order: even taller within the confines of a travel column, nevertheless I just tried. I had to delete the whole paragraph! It was all the things a column should not be. Forced, pretentious – and "pretension is fatal", said the chair of the forum.

So what now? Guess I will just keep writing these each week.

I will keep sitting in front of the screen awaiting the muses' arrival with a basket of sexy, provocative, challenging, insightful topics for me to write for you to read – right to the end.

For those who have, I salute you and thank you for your time.

TRAVEL BOOK WINNERS

Winner of Tropical Diving and Outback Driving, Queensland, is **Brian Morris** of Christchurch. Winner of, Gateway to Thailand's Colourful North, Chiang Mai & Northern Thailand, is **Mrs N Makoni** of Christchurch.

Please collect your prizes from: Second Floor, 159 Manchester St, Christchurch.