

Ex Cyclone Gita Visits Motueka New Zealand



A very wet White Elephant Lodge



A cosy evening meal on the veranda during Cyclone Gita



Steve Mc Singing in the rain

Twenty six tired SARCC members arrived at The White Elephant Backpackers late Monday afternoon the 19th of February in the small regional hub of Motueka. We had been riding part of the very picturesque Taste Trail which goes through the fruit and wine growing regions of the Northwest of the South Island. We were to be based here for four nights and to ride out each day. Eric and his family were to take the opportunity to visit some relatives and friends nearby.

Mother Nature had other plans in that ex-cyclone Gita was approaching the coast at Motueka fast and was expected to arrive Tuesday afternoon bringing with it 200mm of rain in 24 hours with strong winds. A state of emergency was declared, and we were just going to sit it out with many other backpackers in the overcrowded hostel.

After checking into our varied accommodation, the singles mainly in dorms in the main house and the couples in units spread among a spacious garden we were able to enjoy the first of our shared meals prepared by a team of four. It was a balmy evening, so we were able to sit outside and intending to linger over the BBQ getting to know each other.

Suddenly, it was realised there may be no power the next day and shops may be shut along with the schools so cooking Team 2 was dispatched to buy ingredients in thirty minutes before the supermarket shut. This was my team and it was somewhat stressful, but the job was done and we got back to base to enjoy ice cream dessert.

It rained a lot during the night and Tuesday morning dawned to a sight of large puddles throughout the grounds which grew and grew until the whole area was a few centimetres under water. During the day there were a couple of periods of strong winds but nothing exceptional. Barefoot was the order of the day as well as several trips to town in the bus just to break up the day and for a coffee. Paul and I donned our serious wet weather gear and walked into town to visit the shops which were mainly open and the library, which had become a refuge for backpackers searching their iPad and guide books. We were able to read the newspaper there, before walking back with very wet feet.

We did manage to cook the evening meal in a very crowded kitchen and everyone enjoyed it squished up together on the veranda.

Wednesday morning the water had drained so we resumed our rides. The more intrepid went towards Kaiteriteri on the Taste Trail and had quite an eventful ride, just ask Dave and Kevin about the mountain



View over ridge on Great Taste Trail, Tasman



Spooners Tunnel



Roger & Kevin BBQ Chiefs



Just Desserts

park section. Seven of us went the other way along the foreshore, still on the Taste Trail but towards Nelson.

We were having a coffee at the quirky Riverside Cafe when we learned of the very severe local flooding and many road closures and landslips. People were being airlifted to safety by helicopter. Our ride was out along a ridge with stunning rural scenery and a mountain backdrop. The return took us along the main road across a wide estuary at high tide. At this point it started to rain and the winds across that road were the strongest I have ever ridden in, forcing me to walk parts for fear of being buffeted into the traffic. There is a four metre tide in this region and the same estuary had been a muddy wetlands when we drove into town 36 hour earlier.

Thursday was drier and more rides were had, but four of us chose to sea kayak and walk at Marahau which is at the entrance to the Abel Tasman National Park walking track. We saw first hand how badly effected this area had been by the rain. There were lots of huge landslips and mud on the roads. The wooden bridge at the beginning of Abel Tasman walk had been swung around 90degrees and heavy machinery was scraping mud off the roads.

Danny, Ros, Paul and I had a wonderful morning kayaking out from the coast around Adele Island where we saw NZ Fur seals with pups and many different sea birds. We had lunch on a tiny sandy golden cove then Danny and Ros walked the track back while Paul and I paddled back going into some sea caves. It was a "bucket list" item for me and I consider we were very lucky to do it considering the weather. The scariest part was launching into the waves at the very beginning.

That evening we all shared the highlights of our various activities and as usual that was lots of fun.

Great memories all around.

Thanks Eric, Sara and Amanda for another wonderful SARCC trip and to all the participants who contributed to the adventure.

