

## SARCC NZ Tour 2023 - Report by Kevin and Ron

### **The planning**

After Eric Chaney advised he would not be running the NZ tour three newbies (Denise, Kevin and Ron) agreed to organise the 2023 tour trying to emulate the successful tours run by Eric in the past. Although not on the organising committee Eric was an invaluable source of information and suggestions.

As a bonus for the rookie organisers the ~~2022~~ 2023 NZ tour was complicated by the COVID pandemic and the Australian/NZ government's response to such. This resulted in a deferral of the tour from 2022 to 2023 and a few tense months prior to the tour start in 2023 waiting for NZ to finally change it's COVID rules to not require the whole party to isolate if one member was infected with COVID!

Accommodation, bicycle hire and transport bookings along with deposits had to be juggled and we all wondered if our hard work would have to be repeated each year until we could safely complete the tour. Denise and Ron put in a big effort researching and communicating with various suppliers.

### **The tour**

**Day 1 Monday 13<sup>th</sup> Christchurch** - Cyclone Gabrielle remnants struck the north island of NZ very hard in February. A few participants travelling through the North island only just made it into Christchurch in time for the kick off meeting this evening.

**Day 2 Christchurch** The usual issues with vehicles, trailers and bikes ensued...

- Vehicle with no towbar.
- Vehicle with wrong size tow ball for bike rack.
- E-bikes that did not fit on racks without modification (mudguard removal).

...confirming the wisdom of allowing a full day to gather all the necessary transport, bikes, supplies and getting organised.

Hilarity as Peter demonstrated the pitfalls of not tightening the stem bolts after unpacking

a bike. First unintended dismount occurs after two metres in Tasman Holiday Park carpark!

A short ride out to Kaipo for a much needed shakedown for new bikes and those dismantled for the air journey was completed with one rider suffering a minor fall due in part to a loose front axle. A number of hire e-bikes from Action cycles had axle bolts that need tightening as the wheels were wobbling.



*Christchurch accommodation*

**Day 3 Peter's Pass** - On arrival in Hanmer Springs it was raining persistently. About 9 brave riders took what was to be a very memorable journey to the top of the escarpment to ride Peter's Pass and the St. James trail. It was raining consistently so the roads and tracks were rivers of water in places and all riders except Ron were soaked through.

Jollies Pass road was cut by a torrent of water pouring off the plateau forcing riders to back track and take much longer to complete the ride. All the riders



enjoyed a hot shower to *New river across Jollies Pass road.*

fend off the hyperthermia from the extreme conditions. Not looking good for tomorrow's ride.

**Day 4 Rainbow Road** The forecast for today was not great for the Hanmer Springs end of the Rainbow Road and it was decided to not risk the buses on the trip out to Tennyson Lake and back to drop off riders and having them wait to ensure that the riders did not get turned back by high water.



*Rainbow Station Toll House*

We instead took the drive to St. Arnaud and went to the bottom carpark for the Rainbow Ski area to ride into Rainbow Road from the north as far as the Rainbow Station Toll Gate and return. The weather was much better at the St. Arnaud end of the track and the trail was a mixture of

rocky sections and water crossings with great scenery. If this small section of the road is anything to go by riding the whole road is worth the trip back to NZ in 2025.



**Day 5 Golden Downs** The weather was much better at St Arnaud for the Golden Downs ride. The first section until the turn off to Valley road was busier than expected with a few large trucks and we experienced one of the e-bikes breaking down due to a pin holding the disc pads falling out causing the pads to fall out of the caliper on a seriously steep downhill blast. We chased up the hirer who apologised and arranged for new pads to be fitted. A sobering event for all. The rest of the ride was



*Spooner's tunnel*

notable for the ride through Spooner's tunnel, a screw falling out of a gear selector, a great cafe in Wakefield and the painful state of one rider's nether regions.

**Day 6 Great Taste Trail** A good ride. From Nelson we had a crossover ride with one bus taken to the Kaiteriteri end and keys handed over in a rendezvous with the second group riding from the accommodation. The MTB park section challenged some riders. Di, Kathy and Ron enjoyed a paddle in the picturesque Kaiteriteri bay. Navigational challenges were overcome to complete a long but enjoyable day.



*Kaiteriteri Beach*

**Day 7 QC Track** **One of the best rides.** 15 riders decided to accept the Queen Charlotte Track challenge. The QC riders were up early to drive from Nelson to Picton then onto to a water taxi. All the bikes were racked on the boat roof and off we set across Marlborough Sound looking apprehensively at the steep sides up which we were about to climb. A false sense of security as the road to the saddle was a hard but doable climb, then we hit the track itself and things changed dramatically.

At one stage we were pushing bikes up 25% gradient hills so steep that there were foot holes dug into the track! Our progress was very slow and exhausting but the view from



*QC track viewpoint.*

the summit was magnificent and we got to chat with a group of Outward bound students on a multi-day walk along the track. They were very surprised to see a bunch of oldies at that point on the track.

Our tailender John A suffered an unintended dismount and had to be extricated from his bike and the surrounding bush by a helpful bush walker and fellow riders.

Many climbs and sketchy, scary descents followed until we burst out of the trees into Anakiwa desperate for water. A kindly tourist staying in a house on the track filled up water bottles for us, then we found a toilet block and bike wash 100 metres further down the track!

We all piled into a sea kayaking business as we turned on to the main road just before closing time, having noticed the "Ice Cream" sign.

Up the road Ron, who was leading, had a dead phone and asked John G to takeover the lead. Using his phone to look up the route whilst riding, he suffered a spectacular fall over the steep edge of the sealed road which ultimately left him with broken ribs that kept him off the bike for a few days!

A bike issue slowed us further and we were so late getting back into Picton that we decided to eat dinner there before heading home. Apparently the ferry to Wellington had broken down which accounted for the large number of trucks clogging up the streets. We arrived back in Nelson after 10pm. A memorable, long and tiring day.



**Day 8 Blenheim** - A quieter day after yesterday's exertion with a trip to Blenheim to ride some of the River Trail, visit cafes and the Omaka Aviation Heritage Museum. Many people did their own thing.

**Day 9 Greymouth** A transport day driving to Greymouth marred by the explosion of a tyre on the E-bike trailer. The same trailer that we suspect blew a tyre causing the bus to end up in a paddock on our previous 2020 tour! A challenging tyre change on a tight bend, albeit off the road on a verge, had us on our way again but a new tyre would have to wait until Greymouth. We missed the Old Ghost trail due to this.

**Day 10 Kumara** Greymouth was wet and the forecast was for more rain in the hills around Cowboy Paradise so a rethink was required. We decided to try to get in a ride to Kumara in the morning before the rain set in. A lovely overcast ride through native forest with a thick



*Forest track to Kumara*

canopy overhead and lots of ferns. The

highlight of which was seeing a small slip occur while crossing a suspension bridge. The slip was preceded by a loud crack like a shotgun and in fact was an earthquake as others confirmed the timing according to news reports. Ron was on the bridge at the time. As we arrived under the verandah of the Kumara Cafe at the end of the ride it bucketed down. Expert planning there!



*You picked a fine time to leave me loose wheel. (Apologies to Kenny Rogers!)*

**Day 11 Westcoast Wilderness trail & Cowboy Paradise – Another great ride.** The famous Westcoast Wilderness trail. Today the weather was much improved and we divided into two groups. One group drove out to Ross and then rode back to Hokitika following the shore and passing Lake Mahinapua. A driver was taken back to Ross to collect the bus later so that everyone could ride.



*Howdy partners*



The other group were dropped off at Kumara to complete the ride through Cowboy Paradise back to Hokitika. A great ride with much improved track surface from when Kevin last rode this.

After relating Kevin's favourite story from a previous tour regarding the owner of Cowboy Paradise and his unique customer service skills it was pleasing to renew our acquaintance when he showed up as we were preparing to leave after a short lunch stop. He was not happy about Dan parking his bike on the verandah and his behaviour confirmed to the group that Kevin's story was in no way exaggerated!

This abbreviated ride from Kumara to Hokitika takes in the best parts of the West Coast Wilderness trail and was a good alternative considering the truncated ride from the day before.

**Day 12 Tekapo** Transport stage with another big drive across the Alps. We made good time although did not undertake the Devil's Punchbowl waterfall walk due to rain.

### **A2O section**

**Day 13 Tekapo to Twizel** Early start for the A2O riders doing the helicopter transfer or sightseeing tour over Mt. Cook. The riders and helicopter sightseeing passengers were blessed with perfect weather for viewing Mt. Cook and surrounding mountains as there was no cloud or fog, just brilliant sunshine. The trail at the beginning through the river was enjoyable with the backdrop of the snow covered mountains and after 8km arrived at the Airport for the Heli transfer.



Riders found the ride across the river bed bumpy and then found the dirt road alongside the lakeside rough but the scenery was great. There was not as much water to cross as in previous tours.

The Tekapo riders seemed a little happier with their ride. Some were collected at Tekapo B power station while the rest rode to the accommodation in Twizel.

There were stories of lost buses, dramatic scenery and eating salmon by the lake.

*A2O start from White Horse Hill campground.*

**Day 14 Twizel to Omarama** A stunning ride along the Ohau Canal and around Lake Ohau for lunch at the Oahu lodge. Some left the ride here and others joined. Once again the scenery was great and varied with more open plains and occasional thick forest sections.



Then the never ending climb to Tarnbrea high point followed by a helter skelter rush down the mountain which the speed demons enjoyed and on to the Woolshed where we compared notes with participants in a commercial ride.

We rehydrated at the Omarama Hotel on the way in. Very friendly staff. Ron recommends the clothing shop in the main street for quality Possum and Merino wool products.



*Never ending climb out of Lake Ohau*

**Day 15 Omarama to Kurow** **One of the best rides** - The new Sailor's Cutting section beside Lake Benmore is an excellent modification to this part of the A2O. Wonderful views and reflections in the reservoir with steep drops and a sketchy surface adding spice to the ride. Much better than the previous on-road section with narrow verges. Ice cream van at the top of the dam wall was a great innovation by the organisers even though lunch was waiting at the bottom of the dam wall!



*Line up of likely suspects*

Lovely stay again at the Kurow Hotel. Painted in the Ukrainian colours (or could that be the local rugby team?). We enjoyed an excellent communal pub meal in a back room next to all of our bikes. A couple of group photos in the morning with tour jersey in the walled garden followed by one out the front of the pub for the owners.



**Day 16 Kurow to Omaru** The first section to Duntroon was interesting with diversions through farmer's properties keeping the riders off the boring trail alongside the main road sections. A cafe is now open in Duntroon and were very busy serving lots of riders. We all stopped in at Elephant Rocks to view the sandstone formations.



Some also stopped at the Fort Enfield Tavern coming into Omaru whilst others celebrated on the waterfront at the official end of the A2O. The riders

*Elephant Rocks*

posed for lots of photos taken under the wooden picture framed finishing line.

**A2O ticked off!**



That evening we all celebrated a wonderful, enjoyable tour at Fat Sally's restaurant where the three rider organisers were shouted a meal and given \$100 vouchers for all their hard work. A few speeches of appreciation topped off a memorable evening.

*Woohooo!*

**Day 17 Christchurch** Transport day. We drove back to Christchurch to return bikes, trailers and vehicles.

This took longer than expected which justified our early start from Omaru. Some e-bike riders who rented from Action cycles were asked to pay for damage to tyres caused by the Mangers trailer mounting points. We mentioned this to the trailer hirer but don't think they will make any changes to the trailer.

### **The summary**

The feedback from those who attended the tour agreed it was a tremendous success, leaving people with wonderful memories of iconic rides, spectacular scenery and new friendships.

*There is no better way to get to know someone well than being cooped up in a bus, sharing a room, sharing a meal, sharing a joke and admiring the scenery on a ride with them.*