



Getting started

All day until after midnight on Friday 21 February 2014 bikers and hikers flew into Christchurch—mostly from Adelaide, Detlef and Siggy from Port Hughes, and UK John (a whinging Pom?) How good was it to find Eric waiting for us at the airport! Last arrivals, Lorraine and Chris (recovering from asthma), crept in at 4.00am.

Who? Thirty six members of the South Australian Recreational Cycling Club.

Why? To be in it—picture-around-every-corner New Zealand, trails and tracks, snow, sleet and sunshine—The New Zealand Tour 2014. Unparalleled living experience, unforeseen exploits, camaraderie and enterprise, challenge and reward.

Vital!

Eric—to imagine, visualise, plan, fantasise, he dreams and says –why not. (which he did with thoroughness and unlimited enthusiasm)

Helen—to hold the reins and purse strings, guide, cool, pre-empt, implement.. (which she did with grace)

Where? Two loops from Christchurch. The first up the east coast through Kaikoura to Blenheim and back to Christchurch via Hanmer Hot Springs. The second via Mount Cook to Queenstown, Te Anau, Alexandra and Waipiata, returning to Christchurch. Total—3,500km.

How? With the help of three 12-seat minibuses each with a luggage trailer carrying 12 bicycles on the roof, and an 8-seat people mover. The people mover had the Naughty Seat - surely no-one would misbehave... Notable—Peter's exceptional trailer-backing skill in a cul-de-sac at Torea Saddle.

Vital!

David—to enlist a dozen co-drivers, delegate, guide, interpret, organise... (which he did with consideration, without maps and without losing anyone)

Vital also (many times)

Marilyn—to feed, fill, surprise, delight, satisfy... (which she did with minimal equipment, and smiling competence)

Accommodation: who will you sleep with tonight?

Helen cleverly added, subtracted and divided, ensuring a different mix of room mates at each venue. We got to know each other very well.

Shower, toilet and bed—these are the necessities after on-the-go days. We had them every night—in one form or another: motel, lodge, hostel, holiday park, country pub—up-to-the-minute / historic—dual-flush toilet with warm seat and utmost privacy / outside dunny minus door catch.

Remember Queenstown Holiday Park—a quiet environment adjacent to the cemetery, upstairs rooms with picture windows, double bed between lounge and dining table, single bed and two bunks in the adjacent room, spacious bathroom, heaps of warmth in blankets and heater, and a convenient little kitchen.

Remember the pub at Patearoa—a quiet country environment. Little huts ('chalets'), with lacy curtains and cuddly mattresses. Blankets lent by neighbours. Showers and toilets workman style. Breakfast for 12 early birds. But—beautiful dark wood panelling inside, reminiscent of past refined holidays, and chandeliers. Chandeliers!



How did 11 men manage their night together at Alexandra Holiday Park? Did they have difficulties? If so, it was not for lack of careful instruction—or perhaps they didn't read *all* the notices.

Ask Helen Smith for a critical summary of accommodation facilities.

Food: lovely rice pudding for dinner again

Did you eat in, with room mates? There were memorable shared meals in several places where room mates put cooking skills, pasta and a glass of wine together with surprising results—getting-to-know-you conversations, ah-hah moments and new friendships.

Did you eat out, at the local pub? cafe? Have trouble finding your way back to the motel?

Henrika?

Marilyn's communal meals were surely the best—satisfying cycling persons' refuelling needs. Is there more? Yes, there is.

What about The Rice Pudding? Creamy. Delicious enough to please even Mary Jane. Want to know the secret? Marilyn's ingredients: rice cooked to stickiness with water, finished with eggs and sweetened condensed milk

Christchurch

Distressing to see earthquake damage in the centre of the city and in the suburbs—desolate, empty, bulldozed, fenced properties, waiting the verdict of condemnation (insurance companies deeming them beyond repair) or delayed in the long queue for rebuilding.

Heartening to feel the pulse of optimism and assurance: 'We can rebuild! We will rebuild!', to shop in vibrant Container City, and to see new structures like the Anglican Cathedral, built largely of shipping containers and locally-made cardboard tubes.

Inspiring to attend the Civic Memorial Service in the Botanic Gardens for the 3rd anniversary of the Canterbury Earthquake, with themes of comfort and hope in music, speech, flowers and silence.

Bev went to Christchurch and came back plastered. (Alan's words—and he should know)

Rides

Windy Whisk Around Wineries (Sunday 23 February)

Thirty six set out with high hopes to visit vineyards in Marlborough, New Zealand's premier wine region. Early in the evening a spirited wind eventually blew splintered groups back to Duncannon Hostel at Blenheim, with stories of wineries closed and head winds. Wine? Not a drop. Detlef provided disposable wine glasses for all. They eventually did come into use. Lorraine's helmet and sunglasses—intact?

Wham Bang Walking Track (Monday 24 February)

Of the Queen Charlotte Walking Track, from Torea Saddle to Anakiwa, Eric's notes say, 'This 20km section of the track has lots of pushing, switch backs on descent.' Any mention of tree roots, stones, loose gravel, mud? Seven hardy people completed the long haul. Ten others took most of the morning to ride 5kms. Did Helen really change a tyre on her upside-down bike beside the track?

Pot Luck Day (Tuesday 25 February)

Pot holes too, and Hokey-Pokey icecream.

Fourteen riders to Havelock; six going beyond Havelock to Picton and back to Blenheim (68km); eight up hill and down, up hill and down towards Anakiwa on Queen Charlotte Pass.

Liz and Co walked (22,000 steps?) to the Omaka Aviation Heritage Centre, world-class display of early and WW1 aircraft, spectacularly put in place by set-designer Sir Peter Jackson.

Gaynor not only walked the distance, but picked up all the roadside rubbish on the way—Garbo Queen.

From the Heights (Saturday 1 March)



Crown Range Road, the highest sealed pass in NZ, offered a zig-zag run punctuated by hairpin bends. Sunshine and speed all the way down. Who needed brakes with wind in the face bringing tears to the eyes? Was it blinding tears which caused Michael to follow three fast riders—who were not going to Queenstown?

Tobin's Track (rated 'a good unsealed road') took us from this swooping glide, less gracefully, into Arrowtown.

From Arrowtown it was a road ride or the bike trail to Queenstown. Slippery downhills showed us what Denise can do.

The Road Less Travelled (Monday 3 March)
(with thanks to Robyn)

An early start to the day as we crossed Lake Wakatipu to leave seven riders at Mt Nicholas Station to climb the heights. Survivors were to descend to Lake Mavora. Every one donned every piece of clothing, but soon the cold turned fingers to stone making gear changes and braking impossible. Fine rain, head wind, snow, no shelter... Ask Robyn how Michael the Gallant carried her and her bike across a creek through ankle-deep icy water (requiring 5 trips). Coffee the ostensible reward; a knight-hood earned. (Read Robyn's account at the end of this journal.)

Iliad or Odyssey?—Battle or Journey? (Tuesday 4 March)

Originally it was certainly a battle to cut out a hole for the Homer Tunnel. In 1935 five men with picks, shovels and wheel barrows started burrowing through the granite. Now it's a 1.2km x 7m passage. In the semi-darkness Jo found the largest pot hole, which threw him down, cracking open his helmet and damaging several parts of him. Fortunately Henrika, Robyn and Sara were there to professionally bind and reassure him. On Awards Night he, the oldest participant and an inspiration to us all, received a First Aid kit.

For thirty three riders the 1:10 down to Milford Sound (17km) was a battle against the cold—chilling fingers and stiffening legs. At The Chasm, where water thunders through tortured rock sculptures, fingers and knees thawed for the final thrust to the sun-filled coffee shop. What a journey, inside a snow-capped ring of mountain peaks!

Walks

Rain, wind, sleet and snow: to Mt Cook's Hooker Lake (Friday 28 February)
Outward bound we struggled against high stinging wind and increasingly heavy rain, rain which somehow penetrated waterproof layers, freezing fingers and faces. When we reached the white-pink churning lake we found breakaway lumps of glacial ice. (Did Clarry jog in T-shirt? How did he manage to carry a handful of ice back to the Lodge?) The wind dropped as evening approached. Peaks glistened with new snow. We slushed through puddles, feeling the cold, bitter cold, in frozen knees, and awed by the implacability of the mountains.

Magic: Lakeside to the South Mavora Lake swing bridge ((Monday 3 March)
Single-file with Lee beside the lake, quiet walking on fallen beech leaves in fine rain, springy walking over leaf-covered branches and twigs, crossing rivulets and moss-covered tree roots. Did Hobbits pass this way, wrapped in drifting mist?

Celebrations

A significant birthday for our ever-young leader. Eric's two daughters and son joined us at Waipiata for drinks, dinner and a very chocolately chocolate cake, not quite smothered in candles.

Wasn't the whole fortnight a celebration? Ups and downs, hot air (a little?) and cold, lies (?) and truth, challenge and reward, fun and friendship translate to memories of the unsurpassable SARCC 2014 New Zealand Tour.

Anne Way



The Road Less Travelled to Mavora Lakes

As about thirty two of us boarded the boat at Queenstown at 7.30am we wondered what further adventures we would have that day. It was lightly raining and mists hung around the mountains as we sped along Lake Wakatipu to Mt Nicholas Station. Most were enjoying the superb lake and mountain scenery but seven of us were also thinking about the forty kilometre ride we were going to begin from Mt Nicholas to the Mavora Lakes campground. It was to be on a fairly remote unsealed road with the possibility of continuing on to Te Anau.

After disembarking with bikes and watching the others sail away we felt very alone in this very peaceful place. Very quickly a female station hand drove up in her 4wd with sheep dogs and was able to guide us to the correct track. We learnt that the station hosts people wishing to hunt deer or go salmon fishing as part of a remote high country experience.

Within minutes of beginning the ride we had to put on all our clothes as it was getting cold and there was a fine rain. The road followed a river course but we hadn't really given much thought as to possible creek crossings and quite soon we had one. Not relishing the idea of cold wet feet we were still all staring at it when Michael said he'd carry anyone across for a cup of coffee. Without hesitation I said "You're on," so gallant Michael made five trips across in ankle deep icy water to get himself, bikes and me across. All the others managed to walk or ride across. (he did get his cup of coffee but not for several days) In fact we had another crossing much later but by then our feet were so cold the water actually felt warm.

Soon after that just as we were about to begin the five kilometre climb from the valley a touring cyclist appeared from the mist. He was a hardy Scot with very ruddy skin tones, wearing shorts, sandals and riding a very heavily laden bicycle. He told us about the road surfaces ahead and that he had ridden from Mavora Lakes which was our destination. I think we all privately thought that if he had ridden that far, fully loaded since breakfast, then it couldn't be too difficult.

We began riding up the long hill for five kilometres away from the river but as the weather came in and we had a headwind most of us ended up walking a lot. At the top the land levelled off to a beautiful tussock filled plateau with only slight undulations and gorgeous panoramic views of the high country. We regrouped and ate something quickly as it was too cold to linger. Our hands in particular, were very cold so gear changing and braking were extremely difficult and done very slowly. Conditions deteriorated to light snow blowing into our faces which made seeing ahead difficult. After riding on for some time we really needed to eat something and the only shelter we could find was a large earthmover by the road so the last five of us stopped, ate and with a bit more energy rode on. The dirt road was actually very smooth at this point and slightly down hill so we were doing about 19 kilometres an hour. Then quite quickly we come off the plateau, the snow stopped, trees returned then farmland and we were reunited with Clarrie and Michael up ahead who told us the much anticipated news that we had reached Mavora Lakes. We were euphoric and imagined the warm bus waiting for us but it was not to be. We actually had to wait about 25 minutes in the drizzling rain until we were picked up. We were very cold and a couple of the group were very wet so it was concerning, but all recovered and it was a very memorable adventure. Looking back I certainly did not think about how quickly the alpine weather can change or what we would have done had we had a puncture or breakdown and none of our hands would work. We had been lucky. The crew were Eric, Sara, Joe, Michael, Clarrie, Paul and Robyn.

Robyn Davill



Below zero - the white dots are very real snow

