

Gravel Road Riding – Five Day Ride (aka The Dusty Riders)

In 2016 Peter Tibbs offered to conduct gravel road riding training to be based out of the Masterton Menzshed. Initially this offer generated quite a lot of interest with 15 members wanting to participate. Training was undertaken on Saturdays and was weather dependent and Menzshed availability attendees came and went as they had time available. This training was also offered to members of the Wairarapa Ulysses Club and members also showed interest with several attending.

Peter planned a 5 day ride for those who had attended most of the training, taking in a range of gravel roads in the central and lower North Island at Labour Weekend. Peter and Ann Tibbs were joined by 4 Riders, 2 Dual BMWOR/Ulysses members and 2 Ulysses members and 2 BMWOR members in a car as Support Crew.

I had planned to go on this ride but had a non-motorcycling mishap which did some damage to my left shoulder making riding on this ride impossible. Peter suggested I might like to come along in the car as support crew which Jenny and I did. We were Tail End Charlie and as a consequence got a really good dusting on the dry gravel roads. The car went everywhere the bikes went and the drive was a great experience.

As a group we booked into accommodation as the 'Dusty Riders' and the ride started at 08:30 on Thursday 18 October at the Masterton McDonalds where we had one additional ex local Ulysses rider who rode with us as far as Whakatane close to his home in Ohope Beach. BMW bikes were the bikes of choice with one BMW 1200GSA, two 1200GSs one GS700 and one rider on a Vstrom DL1000.

The ride in included a lot of sealed back roads as more of the gravel gets replaced by seal, however, both sets of roads took in some spectacular scenery.

Day one – Masterton McDonalds to The Red Shed,



The first night's accommodation in Shearers quarters on a large farm South West of Putorino inland Northern Hawke Bay. The first gravel being from Bideford to Route 52 with final section being on Daggs Road parts of this area had been resurfaced or graded so the surface was loose in places. This next gravel was around the Oringi area south of Dannevirke a coffee break was taken 7 km north of Dannevirke this was followed by more sealed back roads through Ormondville and Takapau.

Both Dannevirke and Waipukurau were noted as refueling waypoints for those needing to top up. The ride continued on SH2 turning off in Waipawa for the ride through to the Patangata Pub for lunch. The ride continued avoiding the busier main roads in the Hasting Napier area with a refuel waypoint being the Z Taradale where we also stopped for coffee.

Moving North via back roads and briefly joining the Napier Taupo Road as far as Waipunga Road and then onto Darkies Spur Road. The view from the ridge was, for me, the most spectacular scenery of the day with a huge landscape away to the West. We descended from the ridge ultimately turning onto SH2 for the short ride to Matahorua Road to the Red Shed and the first night's accommodation.

This was basic comfortable accommodation and the farmer's wife produced a beef casserole with all the trimming in terms of vegetables for dinner as well as the cereals and toast bread and spreads for breakfast all for \$50 per person. The Red Shed faces the East and the sunrise the next morning was a magnificent site to behold.

Day two – The Red Shed to Whakatane

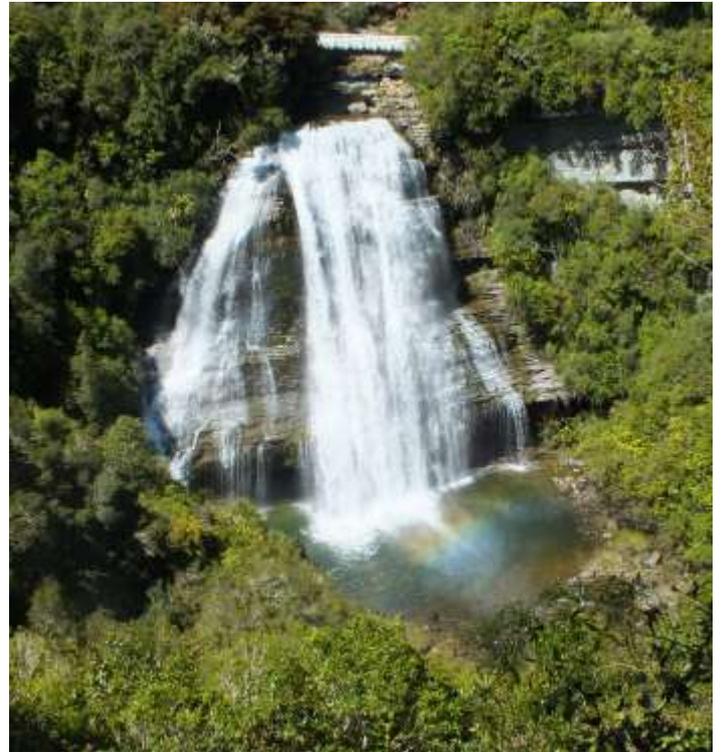


With the second night's accommodation in the Karibu Backpackers in Whakatane which can best be described as very basic and unorganized with some of our riders not getting what they had requested and the manager had agreed to.

On Friday morning we all had an early breakfast we departed down to SH2 North East passing under the Mohaka Viaduct.

We turned inland onto Putere Road passing Lakes Rotongaio, Rotoroa, Rotonuiaha before turning into Waireka Road gravel on this road in one stretch looked as though it had been resurfaced the day before which was a challenge that all met safely. This thick gravel led down to a bridge that one of the GPS's had raised a doubt as to whether the bridge existed. The bridge provided some quality photo opportunities and a comfort stop. Further on we joined Waihi Road more gravel which climbed up onto a ridge at this point one of the riders noticed a warning light which at first looked like a need for some oil however a check showed there was plenty of oil. The view from the ridge was a panorama of the surrounding hills which was duly videoed. From Waihi Road we exited onto Lake Road and then onto Piripaua Road for the ride down to Lake Whakamarino. There is a well-established community on the shore of this lake including a Lake Whakamarino lodge again video and photo opportunities were taken.

After leaving Lake Whakamarino on Rotten Row we turned onto Tuai Main Road and then onto Lake Road and ultimately into Waikaremoana Road where we stopped to look at and photograph the Mokau falls.



We continued the ride around and past Lake Waikaremoana to wind through the bush covered hills past small communities to the lunch stop at Ruatahuna. Ruatahuna was also a fuel stop with a card operated facility alongside a new Café where the food was excellent and very reasonably priced. After lunch we continued on Ruatahuna Road which is a winding gravel main road with bush down to the road for a lot of the way almost to Murupara. Ice creams were purchased in Murupara.

Exiting via Kopuriki Road and then on to Pokairoa Road (Gravel) then Galatea Road to SH30 for the ride around Whakatane and out on to White Pine Bush Road eventually leading to Stanley Road which is narrow, steep, winding and gravel. From the gravel we exited onto sealed Wainui Road eventually to Ohope Beach and to Greg Evans home (the rider traveling with us to his home) for a BBQ which was great. After a very enjoyable time with Greg and Yvonne we rode into Whakatane to the Karibu Backpackers for the night.

Highlight's for the day was the ride in, around and out of the Waikaremoana area which for me was new territory.

Day three – Whakatane to Awakino, the third day dawn sunny and warm the night in the Karibu

Backpackers was seriously unremarkable and most of us were glad to put this dump behind us. Breakfast was planned for The Town and Country Food Café in Kawarau and was excellent a large of range of food was on offer and they served good coffee. We departed on Kawarau Road turning into SH30 for the ride past Lakes Rotoma, Rotoehu and Rotoiti all of these lakes are very scenic particularly on a beautifully sunny day.

We turned onto SH33 to go across the Northern End of Lake Rotorua turning again onto Hamurana Road then SH36 to ride down the Western Side of Lake Rotorua. A leg stretch and comfort stop was taken at a lake side car park which also provided photo and video opportunities.

Continuing on SH36 to Oturoa Road turning right onto SH5, Whites Road, Leslie Road the first gravel riding of the day was in this area, eventually onto SH1 to Putaruru for a refueling stop at the BP 2go.

We exited Putaruru via Arapuni Road and stopped at the Arapuni Domain to visit a historic swing bridge over the Waikato River, built in 1925 to enable the Arapuni Power house to be constructed this provided some great views of the Waikato River.



We continued south via back roads to the lunch stop at Rosie's Takeaways in Mangakino. After lunch we headed out on to Mitchell Road (SH30) for the start of the afternoons riding.

State Highway 30 takes you through Barryville where we visited Pureora where some of the BMWOR riders attending the North Island RAG Rally camp the night before the rally at a DoC campsite

which appeared to be a tranquil place to stay. Continuing down SH30 through Bennydale and onto Kopaki Road through to SH4 and starting with Tikitiki Road, a number of back gravel roads to Aria.



Aria is a small hamlet visited on Tibsys 2014 Central and Southern 6 day ride, its only claim to fame is its Cossie Club which was a welcome relief from the heat of the afternoon sun.

Travelling in the car as Support Crew with the windows up to avoid the dust inside the car, in the heat, was not pleasant. Cold beverages were consumed to rehydrate.

From Aria we turned onto Totoro Road joining SH3 for the ride South West to the Junction Service Station to refuel and then a few hundred metres to the Awakino Hotel for the night.

Highlight's of Day 3, the visit to the Swing Bridge at Arapuni, the gravel roads into Aria, and the Aria Cossie Club.

Day 4 – Awakino to Stratford - The Awakino Pub Cook got up early and provided cooked breakfasts, two sizes large and small the large looked more like a 2 course meal rolled into one so we were all well fed. The day was overcast and with a breeze but mild. We headed out down SH3 turning into Uriti Road where we encountered an interesting rock cliffs and the first of three tunnels carved out of the solid rock.

The Iconic Kiwi Road in this area was avoided as the condition of this road apparently has deteriorated to the point where it is believed to be closed. We exited back onto SH3 via Kaka Road for the ride into Urenui for a coffee and comfort stop. After the stop in Urenui we turned into Ohanga Road for the start of the ride on sealed and gravel roads, stopping at

one point in Matua where a left turn would ultimately lead via Junction Road to SH43 or the 'Forgotten World Highway'. We turned right onto Mata Road and continued onto Stratford and a lunch stop at a Café very similar to the breakfast stop in Kawerau.

After lunch we started to ride around Mount Taranaki on a series of roads starting with Opunake Road continuing on the roads that followed with a comfort stop at Pukeiti Garden in Carrington Road. The ride continued joining SH3 riding through Egmont Village and a refueling stop in Inglewood continuing on and turning into Pembroke Road riding up the Mountain to the end of this road. The reward was, a panoramic view of the Eastern Taranaki countryside spoilt only by overcast sky and cloud obscuring some of the view.

We descended down Pembroke Road into Stratford and to the night's accommodation in Commercial Hotel comfortable apart from the building shaking every time a heavy truck went past during the night.

Highlights of Day 4 gravel roads, 3 tunnels and the view from the mountain for me the countryside we rode/drove through was not nearly as rugged as I expected.

Day 5 – Stratford to Masterton - Day 5 was another fine sunny day we are all morning people so breakfast was a self-help affair from the Hotel kitchen from around 6:30 and we departed around 07:15.

We started out on SH3 and turned off just North of Hawera on Ohangai Road to bypass Hawera and then back onto SH3 stopping at Patea for a comfort stop. Continuing south we turned inland again at Kai iwi on Brunswick Road to basically bypass having to ride through Whanganui stopping for coffee at The Yellow House Café. After crossing the Whanganui River we followed ANZAC Avenue turning onto Portal Street leading to No2 Line out through Fordell continuing until we reached the Turakina Valley Road turning onto Taurimu Road

(gravel) leading through Marton to SH1 for the ride to Vivs Café in Sanson for the lunch stop.

The afternoon ride started by continuing on SH3 through Palmerston North onto SH57 for the short ride to the Pahiatua Track and over to the Wairarapa. We turned off the 'Track' at Nikau Road and followed both sealed and the last, and some of the deepest gravel, on the ride, eventually turning onto SH2 South of Eketahuna. We then rode back down SH2 to Masterton passing the Start/Finish site McDonalds and onto Pack and Save to purchase food for a BBQ that rider Mike and wife Shona Purcell had kindly invited the group to at their home. The BBQ was great and it was much appreciated by all of the riders and support crew as it was a chance to relax with a sense of achievement.

Highlights of the day where the roads used to bypass the main Wanganui CBD, the final gravel roads in the Wairarapa and the BBQ hosted by Mike and Shona Purcell.

There were no mishaps and no mechanical issues on the entire 5 day ride and Tibsy's Garmin Maps were all spot on although the lads with Tom Tom GPS's had a few issues with the conversion. Thanks goes to Peter and Ann Tibbs for what must have been a major planning and mapping exercise and to all the riders for their great company.

Peter Nash – Wellington