



by Jason Menard



MEET THE GROUP!



Jason Menard – 36



Amy Menard – 34



Everett Menard – 3



Romy Menard – 9 months



Bob (68) & Linda (61) Ireland



Rob Connolly – 40



Sid Connolly – 6



Tilly Connolly – 4



Kate Preston – 36



Jared Griffith – 39



Jan Kennedy – 47



Rebecca Ryan – 22



Zara Fitzgerald – 11



Gemma Fitzgerald – 10



Bridget Royce – 32

Our group featured riders of different occupations (schoolteacher, fork lift driver, reporter, stewardess, etc); a variety of home countries (U.K., Australia, U.S.A., New Zealand); and an age range from 9 months to 68 years. We came together to experience the Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail as a diverse group, and to chronicle our adventures from our different points of view. **A2O LET'S GO!**



A20  ALPS 2 OCEAN CYCLE TRAIL 
TASMAN RIVER SECTION
Jollie River Car Park 11 km
 69 km
Camaru 300 km

AORAKI/MT COOK TO TWIZEL



[photo: Rebecca Ryan]

SATURDAY APRIL 20TH

DAY 1: AORAKI/MT COOK TO TWIZEL



Mackenzie
Country Hotel
Twizel



Where: Twizel

Ph: 0800 500 869

Email: reservations@mackenzie.co.nz

Website: www.mackenzie.co.nz

There are 108 comfortably furnished guest rooms, with ensuites and private balconies/patios where you can admire the glorious mountain views. The hotel also features its own restaurant and bar. Complimentary storage for your bikes is provided in our garage. Packed lunches are also available.

KIDS EAT FREE! One free child's meal per adult main purchased. For children 12 years and under.

SHAWTYS

Where: Twizel

Ph: +64 3 436 0650

Email: troy@shawtys.co.nz

Website: www.grappalounge.co.nz

Experience delicious cuisine, excellent service and great atmosphere. Shawtys has an extensive breakfast, lunch and dinner menu including our famous gourmet pizzas. Check out our gluten free options and try the best espresso coffee in Twizel.

Situated in the heart of the Market Place, Shawtys Restaurant and Grappa Lounge Bar is the perfect destination for your next night out.

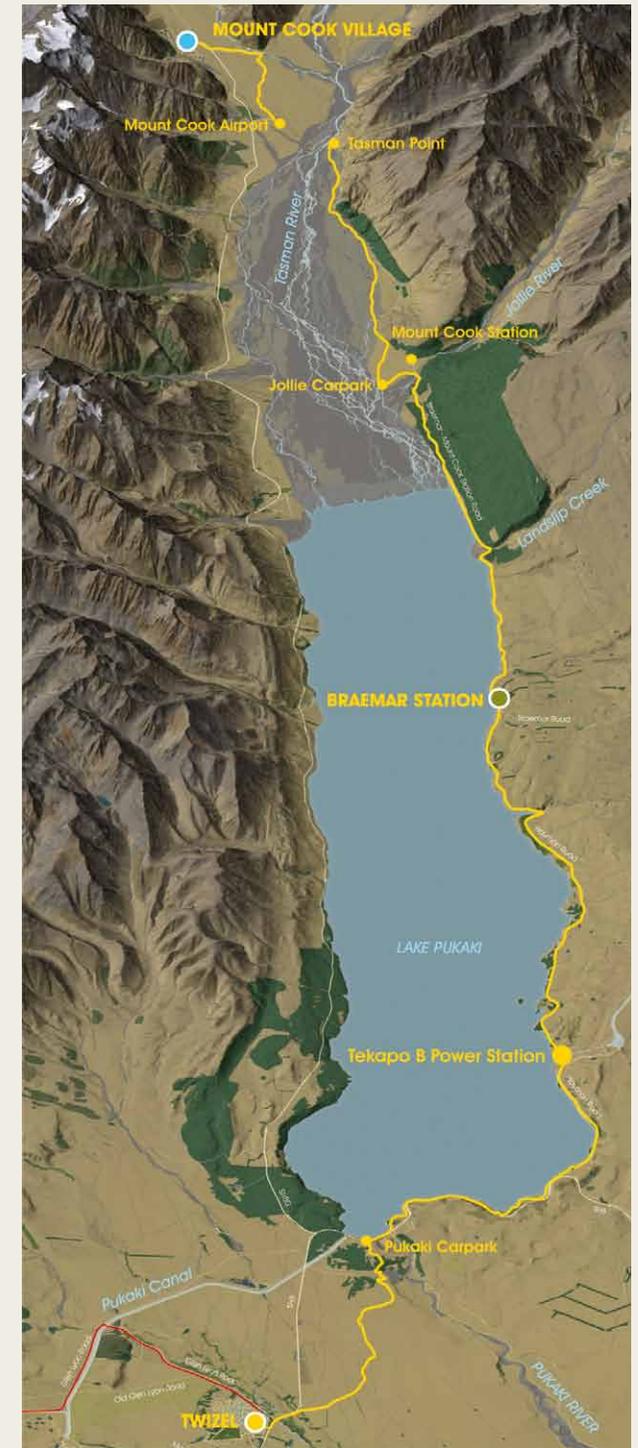
CYCLE: Aoraki/Mt Cook to Twizel
STAY: Mackenzie Country Hotel
DINE: Shawtys

After months of no rain in the Mackenzie District, the skies open up on the day we begin our trip. Starting outside the Hermitage Hotel, we are soon cold and wet. The first 6km down to the Mount Cook Airport finds me wondering what I had got myself into, and how the rest of the group are feeling about these adverse conditions.



My concerns are unfounded though as high spirits and a sense of adventure fills our hearts. The Helicopter Line fly us across the Tasman River, surprised that we would cycle in these conditions, and kindly offering to pick us up if it becomes too rough. We cycle to the Jollie River carpark and are greeted by a warm cuppa and biscuits from our guide Rob Connolly.

After a van ride to the Tekapo B power station, we cycle along the Lake Pukaki foreshore, stopping at the bottom of the lake. With daylight running out, most of us opt for the van ride back to Twizel, with only Rebecca & Jan soldiering on across the wide-open Pukaki Flats.





“ Aoraki hides behind the
wind, the rain fingers numb
from cold.

Welcome yellow kettle.

*Pulling, pushing children in
a carriage.*

*Huffing, puffing past the
taniwha in the bright blue.*

Night laps the shore.”

Kate Preston



TWIZEL TO LAKE OHAU LODGE



[photo: Bridget Royce]

SUNDAY APRIL 21ST

DAY 2: TWIZEL TO LAKE OHAU LODGE



LAKE
OHAU
LODGE

Ph: +64 3 438 9885

Email: reservations@ohau.co.nz

Website: www.ohau.co.nz

A 72 unit Lodge with warm, centrally heated, comfortable accommodation on the shore of Lake Ohau with views of Glen Mary Glacier, Aoraki Mt Cook and the Ben Ohau Range.

Lake Ohau Lodge facilities include a restaurant, bar, games room, spa pools and drying room.

Friendly and professional staff, a great log fire and hot outdoor spas are all there to greet you after a day on the mountain.



CYCLE: Twizel to Lake Ohau Lodge

STAY: Lake Ohau Lodge

DINE: Lake Ohau Lodge

Their feet encased in plastic shopping bags, the group set off from Twizel in drizzling rain, cycling along the canal road. My wife Amy and I prepare lunch at our house on Manuka Terrace. After a hearty lunch, we cycle along the Lake Ohau foreshore, my favourite part of the trail.

An interesting mix of native and introduced flora line the trail: bracken ferns impart a jungle feeling yet in other places the cacti-like stalks of woolly mullein remind me of the desert. The children sleep peacefully in the yellow trailer as we cycle smoothly and silently under a low grey sky.

Arriving at Lake Ohau Lodge we are warmly greeted by owners Mike and Louise Neilson. The sunset views across the lake are sublime, and the group is soon busy with showers and dressing for dinner. A delicious gourmet meal ensues (with an excellent vegetarian option for my family) followed by wine and a soak in the spa. Perfect!





*“Some people were born
to sing, some people were
born to dance, but I
was born to ride.”*

Sid Connolly



LAKE OHAU LODGE TO OMARAMAMA



[photo: Jason Menard]

MONDAY APRIL 22ND

DAY 3: LAKE OHAU LODGE TO OMARAMA



Ph: 0800 662 726

Email: stay@omaramatop10.co.nz

Website: www.omaramatop10.co.nz

Welcome to the Omarama TOP 10 Holiday Park, one of New Zealand's Premier Holiday Parks, set in the high country of New Zealand's South Island on the Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail.

Relax in one of our motel units with your own facilities, while guests in the standard cabins or campsites can make use of our well appointed communal facilities.

Finish off the day with a well deserved soak in the Hot Tubs Omarama to get your body ready again for the next ride!



Ph: +64 3 438 9703

Email: info@hottubsomarama.co.nz

Website: www.hottubsomarama.co.nz

Now is the time to soak in a private outdoor hot tub filled with fresh mountain water; no chemicals are added. A submersible wood firebox allows you to adjust the water temperature; hot in winter, cooler in summer. The tubs are cleaned and refilled with fresh mountain water after each use; used water irrigates the land.

Time to stop, relax, and allow the heat of the water to ease any delayed muscle soreness. Each site has its own changing room.



Today is the most adventurous part of the trail, and one that is often either the highlight or lowpoint of the A2O for many – it all depends on your expectations. From Lake Ohau Lodge to the highest point is 12.6km, with a 330 metre climb. The trail surface varies between smooth shingle, dirt track, bumpy rocks, grass 4WD track, gravel and sealed roads, returning to smooth shingle again.

After a hearty cooked breakfast, we begin our journey up into the hills (no rain today!). Along the way we pass through stands of native beech, with bridges gracefully spanning pure mountain streams.

CYCLE: Lake Ohau Lodge to Omarama

ACTIVITIES: Hot Tubs Omarama

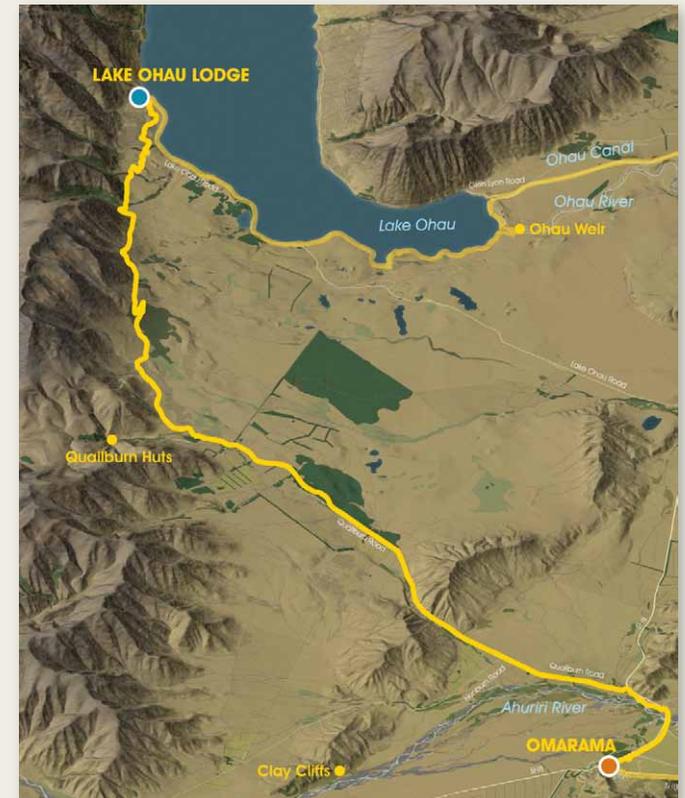
STAY: Omarama Top 10

DINE: Cook own meal



The Irelands handle this section admirably on their folding bikes with 20" tires, and my wife Amy and I are comfortable riding our road bikes – proving this section can be ridden with any type of bike. A mountain bike with suspension would be ideal, but is not necessary.

After lunch we go for an explore around the historic woolshed at the end of Quailburn Road. The ride into Omarama is pleasurable, the air smelling particularly clean and fresh after the recent rain. After checking into the Omarama Top 10 we head over to Hot Tubs Omarama. The hot tubs are the ideal way to reward oneself after successfully completing the day's ride.



A young girl with dark hair and freckles is the central focus. She is holding a bright green, knitted cloth to her mouth, as if she is about to take a bite or is simply holding it there. She is wearing a red dress with a white floral pattern. The background is a dense wall of autumn leaves in various shades of orange, yellow, and green. The lighting is soft and natural, suggesting an outdoor setting during the day.

*“ I loved riding in
the little trailer.
I loved the bumps.
I loved my bike ride.
The Alps 2 Ocean
is lovely. ”*

Tilly Connolly



OMARAMA TO KUROW

[photo: Rebecca Ryan]

TUESDAY APRIL 23RD

DAY 4: OMARAMA TO KUROW



WESTERN HOUSE BED & BREAKFAST

Ph: +64 3 436 0876

Email: westernhousebandb@xtra.co.nz

Website: www.westernhouse.co.nz

Western Inn was established in 1861 to cater for those going to and from the goldfields. It was an overnight stop for stage coaches and later became a hotel before reverting back to the now private home and bed and breakfast.

Guests are completely independent from your host's living quarters, ensuring your peace and privacy.

We are a cycle-friendly accommodation and look forward to meeting you!

WAITAKI HOTEL

Ph: +64 3 436 0650

Email: waitakihotel2012@xtra.co.nz

Welcome to the Waitaki Hotel, Kurow – where you will be warmly greeted by our friendly staff in a cosy, relaxing atmosphere.

Come in and join us for our fantastic meal from our extensive menu, which is available for lunch or evening dining. You can choose a locally grown wine to accompany your meal.

Accommodation we have available: 5 double rooms, 3 singles, and 2 twins.

Otematata Lakes Hotel

Ph: +64 3 438 7899

Email: otematatalakeshotel@xtra.co.nz

Website: www.otematatalakeshotel.co.nz

Take in the the surrounds of the Waitaki Valley while making use of one of our 84 hotel rooms. Our large open outdoor spaces and gardens combined with the backdrop of the spectacular and rugged mountains of the Waitaki Valley make it a great destination for any occasion – any time of year.

Our large bar, restaurant and function areas are ideal for anyone to enjoy. Come with a group of any size for any occasion.

We set out for the day's ride, taking the dedicated cycle trail to the top of the Chain Hills then onto Highway 83.

This was the first time taking my children in the trailer on a main road. My safety concerns were soon alleviated, as the vehicle drivers were very courteous to us – reducing their speed and giving us a wide berth as they passed. My advice is to ride in a group, as this ensures that cars pass you en masse.

Safety in numbers!

CYCLE: Omarama to Kurow

STAY: Historical Western House

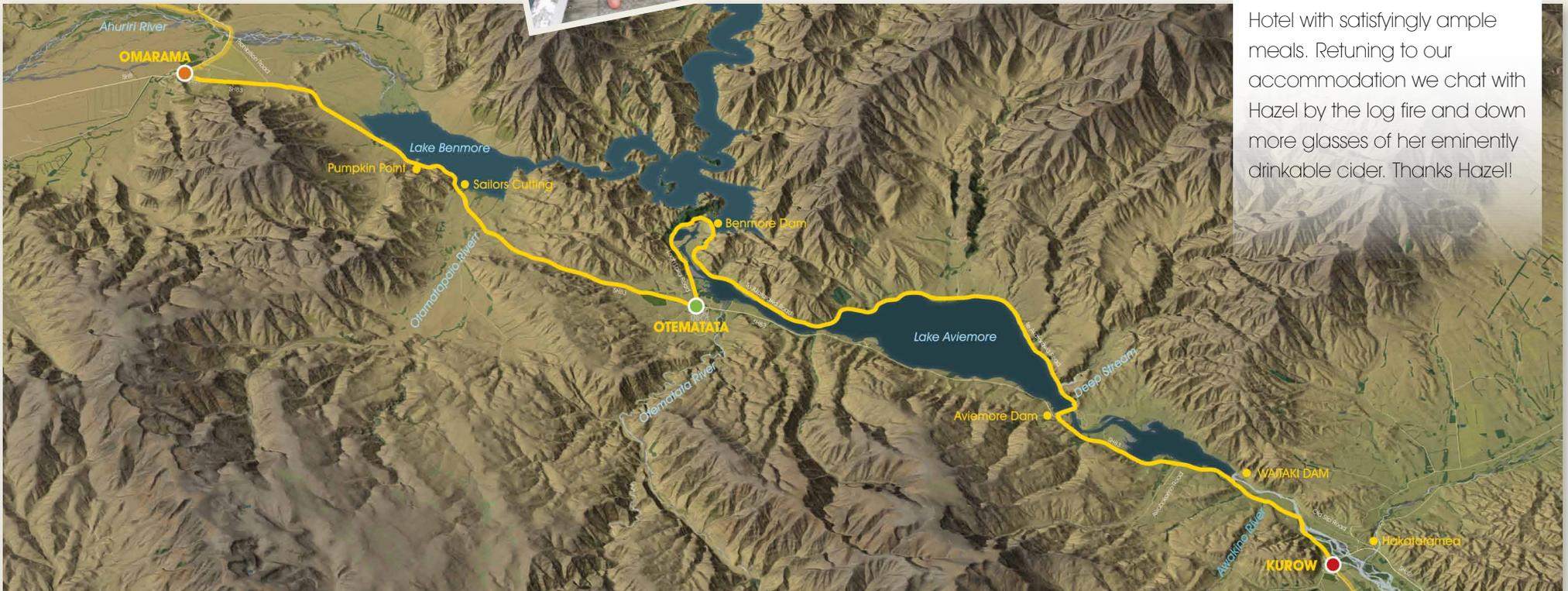
DINE: Otemetata Lakes Hotel
Waitaki Hotel



The recently constructed trail between Pumpkin Point and Sailor's Cutting is going to be another of the many highlights of the A2O. The track is still being smoothed out, but should be finished soon.

A tasty lunch at the Otematata Lakes Hotel is followed by a ride along the North side of Lake Aviemore. The autumnal colours are very beautiful. Arriving at the Historic Western House, hostess Hazel Gibbs greets us with snacks and homemade strong cider. Yum!

Dinner is at the Waitaki Hotel with satisfyingly ample meals. Retuning to our accommodation we chat with Hazel by the log fire and down more glasses of her eminently drinkable cider. Thanks Hazel!





“The tour was a great success and it demonstrated the continuing hard work that is being made on the trail. In only a few weeks since last riding the A2O I can see improvements on trail surfaces and the beginning of work on new sections.”

*Rob Connolly – guide
Vertical Ventures*



KUROW TO DANSEY'S PASS



[photo: Jason Menard]

WEDNESDAY APRIL 24TH

DAY 5: KUROW TO DANSEY'S PASS



Ph: +64 3 431 2564

Email: danseypass@gmail.com

Website: www.danseypass.com

Your hosts, Scott and Margie, are looking forward to meeting you! We are located only 10km from the official A20 trail.

Described as "one of the most relaxed and tranquil holiday parks in New Zealand," Dansey's Pass Holiday Park is deeply nestled in the peaceful, secluded valley of the Maerewhenua River. Swim in our private river pools and pan for gold at your riverside camp site.



Ph: +64 3 431 2024

Email: info@vanishedworld.co.nz

Website: www.vanishedworld.co.nz

The Vanished World Centre lies in the heart of the Vanished World Heritage Trail in the beautiful Waitaki Valley.

The limestones of the Waitaki region have "captured" the inhabitants of the ancient sea - many shellfish, sharks, large fish, penguins, whales and dolphins - and it is these that we now bring to you.

CYCLE: Kurow to Dansey's Pass
STAY: Dansey's Pass Holiday Park
ACTIVITY: Vanished World
Elephant Rocks climbing
DINE: BYO

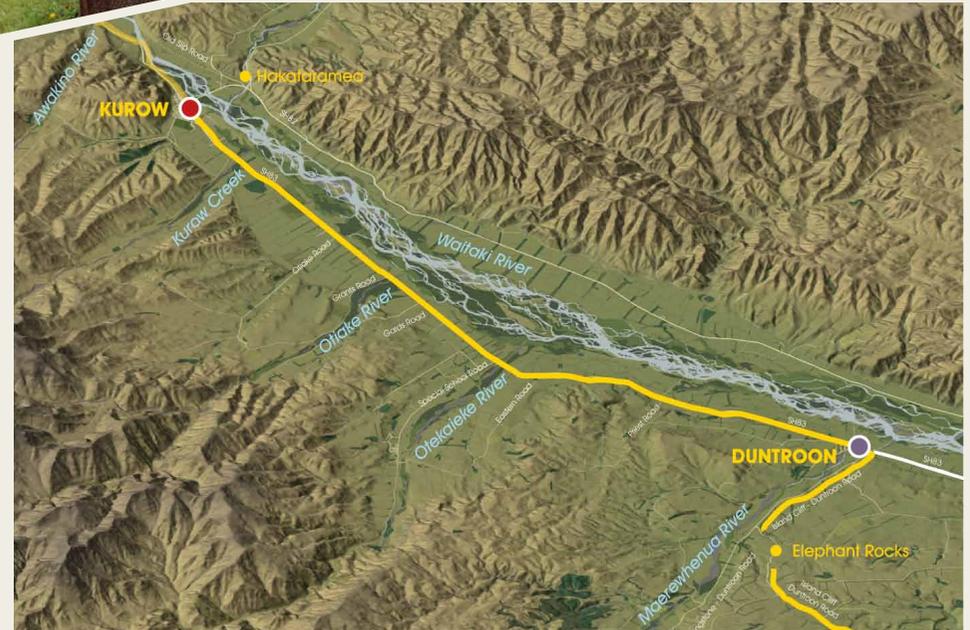
After a cooked breakfast at Historical Western House (and a trip to the old water wheel on the property), we head off towards Duntroon. The rest of the group blazes on ahead, while my family and Bridget follow behind. I strap my waterproof iPod stereo to the bike and we cruise along to the sounds of The Pixies, Neil Young, Bruce Springsteen, Chemical Brothers and other awesome bands. Great cycling music!



A visit to the Maori Rock Art site is followed by lunch in Duntroon and a tour of the Vanished World museum.

At the Elephant Rocks we go rock climbing. Ropes and tutoring are provided by our invaluable guide Rob Connolly. The children zoom up the rocks in a daring combo of youthful bravery and supple limbs – my own climb is far more lumbering and cautious. Still, I make it to the top (eventually!).

Sharing the A-Frame house at Dansey's Pass Holiday Park, we spend a relaxing evening, partaking of some local wine Rob has sourced.



A man with a beard and glasses, wearing a black bicycle helmet and a red jacket, is smiling and looking to the left. He is standing in front of a large, turquoise lake with mountains in the background. The sky is overcast.

*“ There is nothing else like it.
The vibrant turquoise colour of
the glacial lakes almost looks
cartoonish, like it was drawn in
vivid highlighter across the golden
tussock landscapes. Throw in
some snow-capped mountains, a
crisscrossing of canals, massive
lakes, and you’ve got some pretty
spectacular country here.”*

*Jason Menard
A2O Marketing & Sales*



DANSEY'S PASS TO OAMARU



[photo: Jason Menard]

THURSDAY APRIL 25TH

DAY 6: DANSEY'S PASS TO OAMARU



In the morning we depart Dansey's Pass Holiday Park and begin the end of our adventure. Riding amongst the rolling hills with limestone cliffs rising abruptly from bright green paddocks was a revelation for me. This is the first time I have ventured beyond the Elephant Rocks, and I am most impressed. We can finally see the ocean in the distance!

After lunch we explore the Rakis historic limestone tunnel. It's great to see disused attractions such as this being restored to their former glory for the Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail.

- CYCLE:** Dansey's Pass to Oamaru
ACTIVITIES: Blue Penguin Colony
Oak Villa Beauty Spa
STAY: Oamaru Motor Lodge
DINE: Tourism Waitaki



Ph: 0800 389 391

Email: info@oamarumotorlodge.co.nz

Website: www.oamarumotorlodge.co.nz

Oamaru Motor Lodge is found on Thames Highway on your way in from the trail. It is a superbly presented motel offering a selection of units at very affordable pricing.

All our units are double glazed and feature King Size beds. Our large family suites are ideal for a cycle group. Or what about a lovely double corner spa bath after a weary day on the trail? Lovely BBQ area to socialise in.



Ph: +64 3 433 1195

Email: bookings@penguins.co.nz

Website: www.penguins.co.nz

Since its establishment in 1993, and because of its conservation efforts, the Colony has observed very high breeding success in the penguin population with up to 300 penguins returning to Oamaru Harbour at night.

Little (blue) penguins are the smallest of the penguin species, and one of only 2 to nest underground. Day or night, visitors can be sure to view something special.



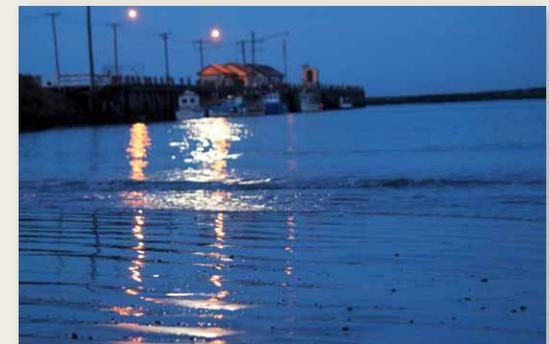
Ph: +64 3 434 3266

Email: oakvillaspa@hotmail.com

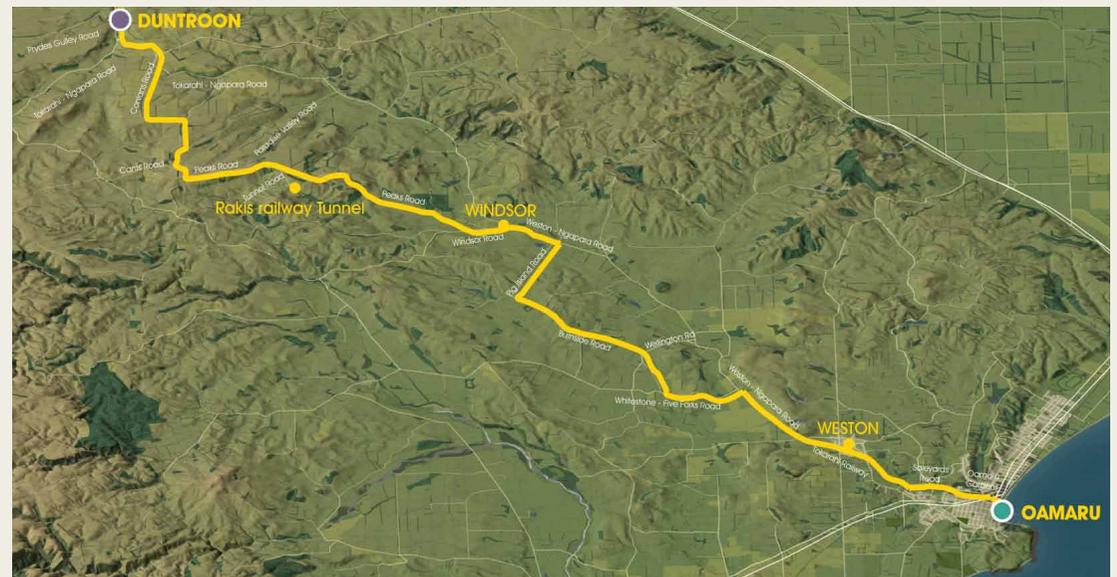
Website: www.oakvillabeautyspa.co.nz

Offering you the very best in everyday beauty, massage and ultimate luxury treatments for one or for parties and group bookings, with four treatment rooms, great ocean and garden views and an amazing outdoor area, we have everything you need.

Book in for a massage, from relaxation, sports and deep tissue to hot stone treatments, all in a private, professional and relaxing environment.



Coming into Oamaru at precisely 5pm the bells on the clock tower peal forth, seeming to herald our arrival. We are treated to cake and coffee by Scott Fitzgerald of Trail Adventures, then it's down to Friendly Bay for a final photo of us at the ocean. We made it! A tour of the Oamaru Blue Penguin Colony is a nice way to round off the day. Drinks and dinner are provided by Tourism Waitaki, and a wonderful post-ride massage is enjoyed by all the following morning at Oak Villa Beauty Spa. The massage is a well-earned treat – after all we have just finished a 312km cycle trail. Thanks to all who made it possible: we've had an amazing adventure!





“Like all good challenges, the Alps 2 Ocean taught us not only about the land which we traversed, but taught us something about ourselves as well. This was not just what we could achieve on bikes in our 60’s, but about how small we are on a vast and ancient planet.”

Bob Ireland

“If we’d wanted an easy holiday we would have been in a coach and lining up for bistro lunches. I really love cycling when it demands that extra something from me.”

Linda Ireland



“ The Lake Ohau to Quailburn section would have to be my favourite, whizzing downhill at what felt like an incredible speed was so exhilarating. Although I was back on the flat in no time at all, I was left with this buoyant joyous high for the rest of the day.”

Bridget Royce



A woman with short reddish-brown hair, wearing a black and white cycling helmet and black sunglasses, is smiling. She is wearing a dark green zip-up jacket. The background shows a scenic landscape with a blue lake, a dirt road, and a large mountain with snow-capped peaks under a cloudy sky.

“ The terrain is always changing and this keeps the motivation and interest high. There are no long boring sections on A20 – it’s all wow! ”

*Jan Kennedy – Tourism Waitaki
Event Development Officer*

“ Clouds lift to reveal the mountain.
Reflections gather of mother and son.
Euphoric! ”

Kate Preston





*“We pass through beech forest,
and over clear mountain streams.
There’s manuka on both sides
and native birds sing beautifully.
Far below us the water of
Lake Ohau is taupe silk.”*

Amy Menard



“ A2O is a great ride, and I was really excited when I saw the ocean in the distance!

Gemma Fitzgerald ”



Climbing on Elephant Rocks

[photo: Jason Menard]

vertical ventures



Vertical Ventures is based in Oamaru and offers adventure based activities in the region. Rob Connolly is the owner/operator behind the company and has over 20 year's experience of delivering high quality adventure activities and tours. Our aim is to provide bespoke, personal experiences that focus on our client's needs. We offer some unique backcountry adventures. The Alps to Ocean Cycle Trail has given us a chance to share our passion for the region and our tours give you real local knowledge, showcasing this fantastic region. The Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail is like no other in New Zealand offering the rider many different environments to conquer.

The services we offer for the cyclist range from cycle hire to fully inclusive tours. We cater for the family offering trailers, kid's bikes and child seats. As we are cyclists we understand your needs and can fit your bike with a range of accessories.



A20 LETS GO!



TRIP DIARY



JAN KENNEDY

DAY ONE: Saturday

Apprehension, trepidation, and a small amount of cynicism: how good was the trail, was it finished, would it be worthwhile biking road sections... would it deliver the wow!?

Arriving at the beautiful Mt Cook is always amazing even in the cold, driving sleet and rain. My first ever helicopter flight was a buzz albeit a short one. Attitude is everything especially when conditions are adverse – and this group of people definitely had that ‘can do’ attitude. The first 11km section is tough – rocky river bed riding and twice as hard into the wind and driving rain. Rob (Vertical Ventures) and his boiling billy – what a welcome sight. In a perfect world we should have biked the next section to Tekapo B but in the conditions it was nice to sit in the van.

The purpose built track from Tekapo B to the old info centre at Pukaki was awesome and Rebecca and I trucked on over farmland arriving into Twizel in the dark. Shawtys is my new favourite café and restaurant. Mackenzie Country Hotel accommodation was comfortable and satisfactory.

DAY TWO: Sunday

Burning legs in the night reminded me that I should have prepared a little better for this. The ride from Twizel along the canals to Jason's was a lovely ‘warm up’ and lunch at the Menard's cool little home nestled in hills and the wilding pines a must for all cyclists... haha. The track from the Ohau Weir around the banks of Lake Ohau was a complete surprise to me, and a definite highlight. A wonderful day ends with the clouds dispersing to give us our first sneak view of the mountains. Lake Ohau Lodge is in an incredible location: the accommodation, food, wine, and hot tub make it the perfect A20 stopover.

DAY THREE: Monday

Rob gave us plenty of warning of the 12km uphill climb ahead of us. Yes it was hard... yes it was relentless – yet it is doable and the crazy downhill ride was exhilarating, flattening off to a cruisy ride into Omarama – straight to the hot tubs. We had a good hearty pub meal at the Omarama Hotel, and satisfactory accommodation at the Top10.

Conclusion

This Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail has totally exceeded my expectations and I feel like a ‘cop out’ leaving it today at Otematata... I now want to get to ‘the ocean’ – even if it's on road. Travel experiences are shaped by your travelling companions and this group are totally fabulous. Rob our guide, bike mechanic guru is incredible – ‘Vertical Ventures’ are a locally owned family business. Rob, Kate, Tilly and Sid: you guys ‘rock’ and I hope that you do really, really well with your A20 guiding, bike hire business.

The weather on our tour definitely impacted on the scenery and yet it did not impact on the experience. The terrain is always changing and this keeps the motivation and interest high – there are no long boring sections on A20 – it's all wow! Note to self: do it again. Bring family/friends... do some training.



LINDA & BOB IRELAND

We are two retirees in our 60's tackling the Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail. The decision to ride our folding bikes the full length of the trail could have gone against us. However, an opportunity to join Jason Menard, Marketing Manager A2O and Rob Connolly of Vertical Ventures and a merry band on a trial run of this brand new track meant we were given professional support from beginning to end. (Our first contact with the A2O

experience was in a phone call from Australia to Jason Menard at Twizel. Jason, your warm and friendly phone manner makes for great PR. You got us hooked into the most amazing adventure biking holiday)

Australians in our 60's, we were entering entirely new biking territory and were not sure how our little 18 gear Hasa folders would cope. Folding bikes are so uncommon in NZ we have become something of a novelty. Everyone was keen to see how they would handle what is really mountain bike terrain. It was to be the toughest and most exhilarating cycling test for us and our bikes to date!

The first day threw us in the deep end, with bad weather at Mt Cook. A really tough headwind and rain made riding conditions very challenging. I couldn't smile for the camera because my lips were frozen.

Our little folders enjoyed the ride across the river strapped to each side of a helicopter. The pilots of the chopper weren't sure why a couple our age wanted to be dropped with bikes in extremely cold conditions in the middle of nowhere, so they were insistent that we ring them if we found ourselves in trouble. Nice guys showing the same big hearts and friendly manner we were seeing everywhere in this country. Is it something you guys put in the water?

The first 11km section from the drop off was to prove the biggest test of hardiness for both us and our bikes. Mountain bikes, ridden by the rest of the team, were built to handle the relatively uneven rocky surface, made slippery from rain. The 20" wheels of the folders, without the low gears of the mountain bikes, struggled over this section of the track, but we stayed upright. There was no soft option here for any of us, we just had to push on through that rain and headwind. This is what we came for: an experience that would push us past our comfort zone. If we'd wanted an easy holiday we would have been in a coach and lining up for bistro



TRIP DIARY

lunches. I really love cycling when it demands that extra something from me.

Rob and Kate Connolly of Vertical Ventures were always there at the end of every section with a snack, a picnic in a paddock or a hot cup of tea. I love the philosophy which they apply to outdoor ventures. They expect you to be able to do it, quietly acknowledge when you've done it, are professional in their readiness to support if required, then expect you to be back in the saddle and into it again the next day. I saw them apply a similar philosophy to their own children, especially 6 year old Sid, who was encouraged to be a part of the team through participation and responsibilities.

Rob and Kate, your energy and wealth of local knowledge really lightened the load for all of us. Having baggage transport was invaluable. I think that this probably made the difference between success and failure on our folders.

Even though we were clearly a lot older than the rest of the team, we were never patronized or offered easier options. I loved this about riding with this team of young people!

Who ever heard of a tourism manager having the tourists to lunch! What a funny day that was when we all rocked up to the Menard home on our bikes as a lunch time stop over on the second leg (one of several successful impromptu team bonding sessions).

What an incongruous little team we were, with our mixture of cycling Aussie seniors, babe in arms, toddlers, young men, women and families. Yet there was not one tense word exchanged, even when conditions were tough.

There is something in the human heart programmed to be uplifted by natural beauty. So it is that the stark and splendid beauty of this part of the the South Island insinuates its way into your heart. It is hard not to feel happy and awed biking against the backdrop of

snow covered alps, where low cloud actually curls itself across the lower ridges with the softness of a cat. The second section of the ride on an easy well laid track skirting Lake Ohau provided some stunning moments, with mountain tops reflected in the still lake waters, in a subdued afternoon light.

Arriving at Lake Ohau Lodge we caught the sunset on the snow tipped alps from our balcony. The Lodge has a retro cosy feel with comfortable rooms, friendly personable service and a great log fire in the lounge area. This part of the world, the lodge and its isolated, magic setting, tug at you as you leave: "Come back and bring friends."

I really thrived on the challenges of some of those tougher climbs. The track to the top of the climb out of Lake Ohau was not meant for a folding bike but those tough little bikes ground their way up that long slow haul like the little engine that could! I think I can! I think I can! Just keep that cadence going!

This section really challenged our little Hasa folding bikes. The long slow 12k climb and a track softened by recent rain make this mountain bike territory. However, our folders coped with the range of different surfaces and were geared to get us to the top where the rewards were an awesome view of snow capped alps, and a good ride downhill to grassy plains. The last third of the ride is on good track through to Oamaru. This has been the most challenging and rewarding section so far. Tip: make sure you have snacks to sustain you through the climb. Inexperienced riders should stick with bigger groups or a tour guide company for this section as it is very isolated.

Ever taken a hot bath outside in the winter? The folk at Hot Tubs Oamaru know the effect of applying these opposites. Somehow that hot bath outside in the chill NZ evening seemed just right as an indulgence halfway through our outdoor adventure. If you have

never given it a go, try a hot bath in the open air after a physically demanding day.

Any keen cyclist knows that there is always reward for effort. So after the slog of uphill comes the adrenalin rush of downhill. The standout run for me was the long, long downhill run after the steep climb between Oamaru and Otematata. Bob and Bridget stopped checking their speedos at 55 and Bob was setting a new speed record on his folder. It handled beautifully at high speed on a smoother tarred surface.

A couple of the short sharp pinches on the last leg between Dansey's Pass and Oamaru gave us some of the toughest riding of the trail. Watching the guy next to you continue to grind up through each false summit is one hell of a motivator not to get off that bike till you reach the top! That's why it's great to ride as part of a team!

We all got a fabulous sports leg massage in Oamaru courtesy of the friendly and highly professional staff at Oak Villa Beauty Spa. When you get to the end of several days of riding you should reward yourself with something special like a massage. After all, you have asked a lot of those legs!

Everywhere around you this ancient land is quietly telling its own story. There is so much deep history in the rock formations and mountains that you cannot help but fall into philosophical musings along this trail. A short walk across a field which was once an ocean, took us to a simple shelter protecting fossilized whale bones from weather damage and plunder. The contemplation of the time scales at moments like this, or when walking among a field of giant boulders at Elephant Rock raises questions. You find yourself reflecting on the great cycle of life, decay and renewal which binds us all on this tiny, vulnerable planet.

So it was too when we had the opportunity to witness the tiny fragile blue penguins making their way back to



TRIP DIARY

shore at the Penguin Colony at Oamaru. For how many generations had these little guys been making this tricky journey out to sea and back to land, programmed by the great forces of evolution beyond time's imagining.

Like all good challenges, the Alps 2 Ocean taught us not only about the land which we traversed, but taught us something about ourselves as well. This was not just what we could achieve on bikes in our 60's, but about how small we are in a vast and ancient planet.

REBECCA RYAN

Days 1 to 3

Snow capped mountains, bright blue lakes and golden autumn colours. I'm sure I don't have to tell you that Waitaki and the Mackenzie Country is known for its impressive and ever changing scenery, but how often do you take it in by drive-by viewing? On Saturday I got out of the car and onto my bike, joining a fantastically diverse group of people to come closer to the great outdoors, cycling the Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail.

As we kicked off in pouring rain, with a head wind on rocky terrain, I wondered what I had got myself into. It's isolated and freezing, and my lack of training is starting to show, but with great company and surrounded by ever-changing scenery, I felt intrepid and there was a great sense of achievement when we were greeted by Rob from Vertical Ventures 11km later for a cuppa and biscuit.

The rest of day one saw us weave our way around the edge of Lake Pukaki. It was a dull, overcast day, but the water was still bright blue, the leaves were orange and red and yellow and golden and the fog gave an eerie peaceful feel. From Tekapo B Power Station the track was also smooth, hard-packed gravel which was very easy to ride. Oh, and the rain stopped.

It started to get dark, but Tourism Waitaki's Jan Kennedy and I soldiered on for the last 6km along the Pukaki Flats section to Twizel as the others packed in the Vertical Ventures van and headed to accommodation for warmth and a shower.

A wine by the fire at the Mackenzie Country Hotel, followed by a feast of pizza at Shawtys (and more wine) topped off an already amazing day.

By day two, my gluteal muscles were becoming tender and I requested a gel seat cover from Rob – a life saver!

I still can't quite believe what I saw from Twizel to Lake Ohau Lodge. It seems the human mind, any human mind, has such an appreciation for nature. All day I was in awe of my surroundings. From aqua blue canals with salmon farms, to the Ohau Weir and snow-capped mountains, the scenery changed so dramatically at every turn.

Feet encased in plastic bags, following suit from an older Australian couple who have joined us, my feet remained dry all day, though the rain was minimal.

At stages I found myself alone, taking my time, breathing in the fresh cool Mackenzie air and taking in New Zealand at its finest. As the sun began to set behind the mountains which line the lake, we ended day two.

Mike and Louise greeted us at Lake Ohau Lodge, where we settled in for a three course meal of pumpkin and coconut soup, salmon and pudding, followed by a glass of wine in the outdoor spa overlooking the lake.

We had all been warned about day three. The first 12km were a steady uphill climb. It was going to be tough. And it was. But looking back with views across the basin to the Benmore Range, and regular breaks to take it all in, it was worth the burn.

The climb was slow, but it was all downhill from there and it was such a thrill to speed and weave my

way down the mountain, then through dry tussock grasslands as we came closer to our lunch stop at Quailburn Rd.

After eight years living in the district, our tour guides Rob and Kate are a wealth of knowledge. Rob slows down his pace considerably to pedal beside me and chat, teaching me good cycling techniques and we get to know each other better.

From there to Omarama the track was smooth, and while the rain started to set in again, we were enjoying each others company, as personalities started to really shine through, laughing and getting to know each other more as we cruised to Hot Tubs Omarama.

It was getting darker and the rain was drizzling as we stripped off into our togs and hopped into a hot tub – the perfect way to unwind with unique landscaping offering complete privacy and stunning views across a pond to the mountains.

While Rob and Jason suggest going out to tea straight from the Hot Tubs, the female contingent of the tour insist on checking into Omarama Top 10 first for a quick change and application of "war paint" as Rob describes it.

A dinner at the Omarama Hotel topped off my favorite day so far, mixing with the locals who are all incredibly friendly and interested in hearing our story.



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AMY MENARD

Day 1

A cold wind sends needling raindrops into my face and I suddenly realize that I'm one of those cyclists I've always felt sorry for from the comfort of my car. Tour busses lumber pass me and I feel intrepid and hardy as I cycle from the Hermitage to Mt Cook airport to begin the Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail. Once there I ask a silly question about helicopters which the pilot fields cheerfully – no, you don't have to run with head down past the chopper blades like you see in the movies: the blades are clearly well above our heads!

The helicopter floats off the ground with a strange sensation like being a bubble and a very short time later we're set down past the Tasman river. It's isolated and freezing; the pilot's bright blue eyes remind me of the brilliant Mackenzie sky hidden behind grey clouds as he kindly offers to pick us up if it gets too much.

The 11 km section of the trail to Jollie River carpark is rocky and I'm not a serious cyclist so I take it easy and find it okay; I'm glad for my reasonable level of fitness though. I find myself alone at one point and listen to the wind blowing in the fir trees. It's cold and wild yet strangely peaceful. 11 km later and Rob from Vertical Ventures greets us with tea from a sunny yellow kettle and chocolate-peanut biscuits.

We drive from the carpark to Tekapo B to save time but I can see it'd be a pretty ride with yellow-leaved Chinese and Lombardy poplars contrasting nicely with the blue lake. On the drive I sit with the older couple in our group who comment that it's a challenge but if they wanted easy they'd be on a tour bus with a walking frame; I admire their spirit and technique of encasing their feet in plastic bags. At Tekapo B Rob lends me dry socks and I wrap my feet up too – they're instantly happy!

We cycle up the road and I think I hear a stream but it's the wind in the poplars, sending yellow leaves dancing over me. The trail by Lake Pukaki is a highlight as it's smooth, hard-packed gravel and very easy to ride. Silver birches line the trail with bright yellow leaves and the lake is a beautiful blue. The rain's stopped too.

We skip the Pukaki flats section as it's getting dark and hot showers and dinner call us. We have pizza at Shawtys (herbivore with sweet roasted pumpkin and sharp feta) and the staff have made mulled wine just for us. It's warm and delicious and after being so cold all day I finally shed my merino jacket and follow the kids out into the dimly lit playground. We swing slowly in the crisp darkness and I feel proud of the 31 km I cycled today.

Day 2

The sky is low and grey but it's not too cold. I'm pulling the kids in the trailer today – they look so cosy and cute. I'm happy to be on my bike again and the trail around Lake Ohau is excellent and easy to tow the trailer on. It's very pretty with native plants on both sides: tall manuka, kowhai, mihimihi. We pass a lovely little bay with a large willow on the beach; a perfect picnic spot, or place for a refreshing swim in summer. Ben Ohau mountain rises majestically out of the water.

As we near the end of the gravel trail the sun comes out at last, striping the path and turning the water droplets on the plants into gleaming crystals. The waves gently lap the shore; it's so peaceful.

At Lake Ohau Lodge we relax with wine and beer in the comfortable dining room. The kids are happy in the lounge with all the toys, and cartoons on the TV. Dinner is delicious and us vegetarians are well catered for – I love the pumpkin-coconut soup.

Later we sit in the jacuzzi, watching steam swirl up into the sky where a few stars peek through the clouds. I go to bed feeling full, warm and very, very happy.

Day 3

Yoghurt and fruit? Okay! Eggs, mushrooms and tomato? Why not? Toast and jam? Oh, go on then. I devour a huge breakfast while admiring the lake views from Lake Ohau Lodge, knowing I'll burn off these calories today on the hardest part of the trail. We'll ride 12 km, rising slowly to 330 metres.

I'm keen to get on my bike and am starting to see how cycling could be addictive. We've already made plans to buy a bike trailer for the kids so we can cycle the 20 km from home into Twizel on nice days – plenty of those in the Mackenzie!

The trail is very good. There's manuka on both sides and native birds sing beautifully. We pass through beech forest, and over clear mountain streams. Far below us the water of Lake Ohau is taupe silk.

The climb gets steeper and I crawl up slowly on the lowest gear. It's okay but I'm pretty puffed! The gorgeous views help to take my mind off the grind. The trail's a bit rougher but I manage it perfectly fine on my road bike.

I'm fairly high now and there are lots of interesting alpine plants to look at: hebe, snowberry, totara, tussock. I stop by a bubbling stream and eat blue and white mihimihi berries while gazing at the mountains and lake.

At the top, we share licorice allsorts (thanks Rob!) then start our descent. I find it quite steep and go very slowly but the others fly ahead. Once I reach the grassy 4-wheel drive track I finally take my hands off the brakes and zoom over the smooth ground; it's like being a kid again.

At the start of Quailburn road, we have lunch and cups of tea then I catch a ride with Romy to the Omarama Top 10 Holiday Park. The grounds are spacious with many beautiful trees. After a refreshing beer at the Heritage hotel bar we finish the night at Hot Tubs Omarara, soaking in pure water, admiring the lush tussocks as steam floats about us.



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Day 4

I wake up with a bit of a dodgy tummy so no riding for me today, unfortunately. While everyone loads the gear I walk with the children to the river bordering the holiday park. It's fun playing under the gracefully hanging willows, pretending to fish in clear water. We meet up for lunch at the Otematata Lakes Hotel and I feel a little better after vegetable soup, bread and a half pint of Guinness. Music videos from the '80s play on a big TV and we laugh at the retro styles while secretly enjoying the hits from our youth.

Rob kindly drops Romy and I off at Historical Western House, which is a simply lovely place. Everywhere you look there's something interesting or pretty to look at: old paintings, wedding photos from the '80s (love the big sleeves!), fine china cups, flowers. Our immaculately appointed studio has peaceful field views.

We dine at the Waitaki Hotel, where the cook obligingly provides us with a large serving of vegetables to accompany our toasted sandwiches. After dinner, Everett and I run about outside in the drizzle; the light is orangey and dim.

Day 5

Hazel makes us a delicious breakfast which we enjoy at her beautifully set table; I love the blue and white willow patterned china, admiring that she uses it for everyday. I spot a quince tree outside and Hazel generously gives me some to take home. Everett and I watch her son let the ducks out: they follow behind him in a line to get their breakfast.

I'm feeling good today, glad to be riding again. We travel happily along the highway and while it's not the most exciting part of the trail, I enjoy the pastoral views: varieties of cows and sheep munching bright green grass, common yet pretty weeds like clover, yarrow and dandelion dotted here and there. I see signs for honey,

eggs, nuts and fruit. You could end up with a great lunch!

At the Maori rock art site I daydream about our ancestors, drawing by firelight. I imagine the mornings where they'd gaze out at the same hills I can see now.

We continue the short distance to Dunroon for a picnic lunch and a look at the fascinating fossils at the Vanished World Centre. It's interesting to think that this was all under water long ago.

At Dansey's Pass Holiday Park we get the fire roaring in our cute A-frame house. The kids watch a movie while we cook a hearty pasta dish with lots of cheese. It's homely and cosy, and after the kids have gone to bed we sit, talk and drink raspberry vodka with tonic water – one of those "make-do" holiday concoctions!

Day 6

Kate makes yummy porridge for breakfast, which I team with stewed quince, very nice. The kids play on the swing by the river, swooping out with delight, while I use the baby as an excuse not to try it. We're on the home stretch now and I enjoy the ride through farmland- all verdant pasture and rolling hills. It's a lovely day and we stop for lunch in the sun, using up our leftover food which makes for an interesting picnic.

At Windsor I admire a pair of graceful horses who are rather nonplussed by us, as we get ready for the last part of the trip. We're on paved road and at times it feels like riding through an enormous park, with large oak trees rising majestically above us. I stop to buy fruit in Weston then have to ride fast to catch up to the others (luckily Rob had waited around, keeping an eye out for stragglers!). As we cycle into Oamaru, I feel sad that our trip is coming to an end. The light is turning blue and there's a full moon rising. Lights reflect on the water at Friendly Bay and there's time for a group photo (well done everyone!) before we head off to the Blue

Penguin Colony. I love watching my son and daughter watch the adorable little penguins waddle into their nests. We have pizzas for dinner (thanks to Tourism Waitaki) and the Irelands have brought bottles of sparkling wine. We make toasts, and jokes, and I relish the loud laughter and good spirits. Suddenly I realize that I'm too tired to even finish my generous glass of bubbles so leave it in Jason's capable hands and collapse gratefully into bed.

Day 7

Delicious snacks and beverages (I especially like the sparkling ginger and lemon juice) await us at the Oak Villa Beauty Spa. My massage is wonderful, a great way to end the trip and say thanks to my faithful legs!

It's been a memorable journey with a fantastic group of people. I've made new friendships and have become closer to my other friends.



KATE PRESTON

There is nothing like adversity to bring a group together. The howling wind, streaming rain and freezing limbs made a great group bonding session. Dropped by the helicopter in what felt like the middle of nowhere we set off towards a horizon we could barely see. Head down, keep moving.

"I can't feel my fingers, lost feeling in my right foot, now my left"

We came up for air as the rain receded. A group reconnaissance at a midway point. Wow, what a start and what a welcome sight as we turned the final corner – Rob and the little yellow kettle. Never has tea tasted so good!

From here I took Tilly in the trailer. It was still cold but the extra energy needed to pull her soon warmed me



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up – *“faster mum faster.”* Jan very sweetly pushed me up some of the steeper climbs as we followed the shores of Lake Pukaki. Tilly and I kept our eye out for the taniwha in the lake. *“I saw it Mum, I saw it!”* Despite the heavy clouds the lake was jewel blue.

Today it was Sid’s turn to ride with mum, beside me on his own bike. It was great to see his perseverance and made me feel really proud. It was my favourite section. A beautiful meandering track, the cloud lifted to reveal Ben Ohau and the lake lapped the shore. There were moments of pure euphoria at being in such a beautiful place with one of my favourite people. As a mother of a young son it was precious to spend this time with Sid quietly observing his positive qualities of just getting stuck in even when the going gets tough.

I missed the tough up hill section that Ohau has to offer but it was fantastic watching Jan and Bridget’s faces as they came in after an amazingly fast downhill section (which follows the 12km slog uphill).

“We are sooo good, that was awesome!” they shouted, voices elated.

From here Tilly hopped back in the trailer. She sat back, relaxing with her collection of books and rugged up to protect her from the cold air. It’s a gentle ride into Omarama from here. Darkness was

approaching and cold nipped the air. The hot tubs were a very welcome sight and warmed our aching limbs. The champagne was another welcome sight, thanks Rob.

Another highlight for me was riding between the two dams. I had Tilly behind me and Sid beside me, gently cruising around the lake. It was awesome to see Jason flash past us at great speeds, a vision of fluorescent and trailer with Everett behind. Again it was great to see Sid trying his hardest on some steeper sections and figuring out for himself he could go a bit faster on the downhill. It was somewhere on this section that Sid declared:

“Some people are born to sing, some people are born to dance but I was born to ride”

We took plenty of fuel stops on this section to keep Sid going. It was a great family section. Easy enough riding and plenty of places to stop for a picnic.

I wasn’t so keen on the section between Kurow and Duntroon, but really enjoyed cycling with Bob who set a great pace. Duntroon made a great lunch spot before climbing up towards Elephant Rocks. The sky could not have put on a better display. The light touched the clouds with indescribable beauty.

All the kids put in a great effort at climbing, making

Jason and Bridget nervous – “what if we can’t follow in the footsteps of a 4 year old?”. Both put in a great job but thank you Bridget for putting in one of the funniest moments of the trip.

I think we all felt we could have stayed longer at the Dansey’s Pass Holiday Park. It was a great location for children. But possibly the hardest day was before us, certainly the hardest climb. After riding through an impressive limestone valley we all struggled out of Island Stream. Pushing our bikes or stopping for plenty of breaks up the hill. The hills didn’t stop there. So after a morning of battling some of the hardest climbs on the track, much of it with Tilly attached it was a welcome reward that the sun came out and as we topped out on Peaks Road we could see as far as the ocean. Our goal was in sight. It was fascinating checking out the tunnels and it’s clear they are going to make a really interesting part of the track when completed.

It was an interesting road ride into Weston and then we collected all the children to ride the final section together. Tired and happy we reached the ocean. The full moon greeted us. I felt a great sense of achievement but was sad this was the end of our road. The Alps to Ocean had been a great journey and I wasn’t ready for it to end.

