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# Rainbow & Molesworth Cycle Tour

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We reached the beginning of the Rainbow Station road in wet weather, after cycling from Picton via Blenheim and St Arnaud. The Rainbow road is sealed for the first 15km, and provides delightful cycling across grassy river terraces and through beech groves. There was almost no other traffic.





Progress slowed dramatically as soon as we left the tar-seal. The gravel road surface was softened by rain, and the fords required care. They were not deep, but were fast-flowing and slippery underfoot. The pressure of water damming up against the panniers ended to sweep the bikes sideways, so on this ford we unloaded the bikes and carried our gear across separately.





Rather than camp for another night in the rain, we traveled a kilometre or so up a side-stream to the Connor's Creek hut.









What a pleasure to unpack under shelter, and dry out gear in front of the fire! Here we are about to leave the hut next morning; from L to R Bryan Taylor, David Reid, Brian Cox and Rachel Jackson.





Back on the Rainbow Road it was business as usual.





On the rough road we could manage a speed of about 10km/hr at best, but delays caused by fords and washouts such as this one meant that our average speed was much less.





The surrounding hills were scarred by erosion gulleys and rockfalls. It is dramatic country and worth seeing in any weather.





Our biggest hill for the day was the one leading up to Island Saddle. At 1,347 metres this is said to be the highest road accessible to the public in New Zealand. The road slanting up the hillside at left was a good deal steeper than it looks!

The saddle is the watershed between the Wairau and Clarence Rivers; this picture looks northward towards the Wairau.





On the other side, free-wheeling downhill towards the Clarence Valley.





We camped for the night at the SE end of Lake Tennyson. The campsite (arrowed) is in a very exposed position on the lakeside, but fortunately the weather was improving and we had little wind overnight. The Clarence Valley heads south into the distance in the centre of the picture, with the road on its right bank.





The sky cleared during the night, so we woke to find the tents coated with frost. It was cold until the sun reached the campsite, but a glorious day after that.





David on a bridge across the Clarence as we traveled south.





Soon after this photo was taken we climbed out of the Clarence Valley through Jack's Pass. Just south of the pass is Hanmer, where we spent a day drying gear, re-stocking with food, and making minor repairs to the bikes.





After our stay in Hanmer we re-crossed Jack's Pass and followed the Clarence River as it swung northwards. I took this picture from the hillside above the road, looking down-valley. The DOC campsite beside the Acheron Cottage is arrowed. We camped here in preparation for a long ride across Molesworth Station on the following day.





After the trials of the Rainbow, Brian and Rachel had decided to take an easier route back to Blenheim; so there were now just three of us (Bryan, David and me).





With time to spare in the afternoon I scrambled up a peak northwest of the campsite, and from the top gained great views of our route. This picture looks southward up the Clarence, (the road to Jack's Pass is on the left side, and the pass itself is hidden in cloud in the distance, centre).





Swinging left, this is the view to the northeast, with the Clarence River flowing away in the distance towards the sea. However that was not our route tomorrow; we would turn left up one of its tributaries, the Acheron River, (yellow arrow). Our campsite is marked with a red arrow.





Swinging further left, this is the view up the Acheron, with the road running on the river's true right bank.





On the road next morning. Camping is not allowed on the 60km stretch between the Acheron and Molesworth cob cottages, so we started before 7am in order to be sure of making the distance.









Late in the morning we crossed a low saddle to Isolated Flat; this picture looks northwards across the flat. The Acheron runs along the eastern edge of the flat, (on the right side of the photograph). We had lunch in the shade of the trees in the middle distance; and afterwards found our progress slowed by heat, rough gravel and a head wind.





At the northern end of Isolated Flat the road crosses the Acheron, and then climbs to Ward's Pass which leads across into the valley of the Awatere River. The ascent to Ward's Pass was steep, long and rough. None of us cycled it; we pushed our bikes slowly uphill for 40 minutes instead. Here Bryan and David are sorting out a minor chain problem.





Bryan (arrowed) toiling up the Ward's Pass road. As usual, the photograph under-estimates the steepness of the road.





Dropping down the eastern side of the pass into the Awatere Valley.





The Awatere Valley floor was quite different to the country we had earlier been travelling through; with lush pastures and gently rolling hills.





This is the Molesworth cob cottage, built in 1866 and used as accommodation for drovers who brought mobs of sheep across from Nelson to Canterbury 150 years ago. The walls of the cottage are a mixture of dried clay, dung and straw ("cob"). The roof was originally thatched with tussock, but that has now been covered with corrugated iron to reduce maintenance.





North of Molesworth Station we regained public road. We hoped that the hills might be fewer and the road surface better; but that was not the case. Here Bryan and David grind slowly up one of the many steep hills.....





.....and sadly we found that the grader and metal-spreading truck had recently been at work so that the road surface was too often evenly covered with sharp stones.





Our bikes suffered from the rough conditions, particularly brakes and tyres.





The farmers we met along the way were no happier with the road surface, but their tyres were better suited to it than ours.





The steep country of the upper Awatere Valley gave us hard cycling, but also some dramatic scenery. None the less we were very happy to regain tar-seal at last near the Jordan River, in the lower part of the valley; and from there it was easy cycling back to Blenheim via Taylor's Pass, and then on to Picton.





David flew home to Auckland, while Bryan and I took the ferry to Wellington and then the train to Auckland.

Looking back, our trip was a thoroughly enjoyable one. In the Rainbow we made the best of rough roads and wet weather, and then were lucky to strike three fine days for the Molesworth section of the trip. We were also fortunate to have Bryan to dispense spare parts, cycling lore, and good humour whenever it was needed.