

WIDEN YOUR HORIZENS

John Nick describes what it's like to ride an Adventure Trail ride.

New Zealand has some of the best trail riding in the world. On top of the riding available to individuals, our network of organised club and charity trail rides are the envy of visiting riders, no country in the world in my view has such a surplus of opportunities. Yet, despite our off road riches, most organised trail rides only deliver around 40-80 km of trails. That's about as much as most organisers can find in one off completely off road area.

But what about a really big day's trail ride, say over three hundred kilometres, no repeats, all fresh track. Am I dreaming? No, that's just what Britton Motorcycle Adventures served up to riders on the two day 2010 Yamaha sponsored Mohaka Adventure Trail Ride, based at the surprisingly well appointed, Mohaka Adventure Lodge.

I usually associate horizon-width views with the South Island, but within 15 minutes of the start of the Mohaka, here we were at over 3000 feet in the Maungaharuru Ranges. You have to stop to appreciate views like this one, and it must be admitted, to navigate yourself by route sheet through country like this. Swinging around the compass below us, to the west, snaked the Mohaka River, to the north, range after range of Hawkes Bay hill country. Into the glare of the rising sun the Esk Forest and the sea glittering beyond promised a fine day ahead. To the south we could make out Napier, the port and the town, while far away to the southwest we could see Ruapehu, peeking over the Kaweka Ranges.

Conditions were perfect, especially for riders from parts of the country still, parched by several months of drought. Here was perfect damp loam, green grass, even a touch of mud to slither through. The morning's ride featured several large station properties in the Maungaharuru Ranges, where after climbing to the tops, there would inevitably be a high plateau of sorts, where the tracks would snake around impressive limestone formations, or duck through remaining stands of native bush. Then the inevitable plunge down to the valley with barely a moment to take in the views, before the mind and the body becomes fully committed to staying on the right line.

Lunch was laid on, just in time, at the Tutira Hall by the local play centre group, as a fundraiser. What a spread it was, everything from a choice of hot soups, cold meats, salads, rolls, cakes of many types and orange juice, tea and coffee. Lunches like these are a real hazard of Adventure Trail rides - it takes forcible will power to get back on the bike.

The second half of the day was no less exciting as we rolled over the stunning Hawkes Bay terrain. Rocky bottom creek crossings, moderately challenging hills, both up and down of course, steep snaking farm tracks, pine forests, native bush and lush downland paddocks, we had it all.

The Mohaka River also featured in the plot. Winding about as we were, the river appeared from all angles, far below, cutting through a native bush gorge, then away on the other side, sparkling over shingle, or cold and close up as we threaded along the bank.

As the day progressed the riders spread out and unlike a mass trail ride, it's possible to ride for hours without banging bars. Those who like to press on, do so, while those who like to stop, take photos and savour the scenery, can also do as they please- as long as they stay ahead of the sweep crew.

Back at the lodge as the evening mist drew in riders began congregating in the bar and inevitably talk flowed towards the day's happenings, the 'offs' and the 'near offs' and more colourful stories which everyone knows are part bullshit, but still enjoyable. The serving of dinner shuts everyone up, for there's nothing like eight hours on the track to work up an appetite, the massive lunch long forgotten.

Day two's ride was, in Adventure Trail Riding terms, a short ride, just a quick 110 km, planned so those travelling from distant parts of the island can get home and ready for toil on Monday in decent time. For this day the Britton team laid out more fresh trail, but packing in the same fabulous mix of ingredients seen on the first day. The final section was a truly stunning climb back into the Maungaharuru Ranges for a last look at the inspiring views, before dropping back to the Mohaka River and the lodge for another great lunch. Then time to pack the bikes, say goodbye to old mates and new friends and head back to the real world and Monday morning.