

## OTAGO RAIL TRAIL

Once or twice in a lifetime one should do something completely different. The Otago Rail Trail was one of those times.

On March 14th Carol and Den Downey, Carolyn and Des Carter, Helen Kuck and myself set off to have a few quiet days in Queenstown before starting the trail, staying at the local Y.H.A. situated right on the edge of Lake Wakatipo. Queenstown was as beautiful as ever taking some of the lakeside walkways and breath-taking views from the gondola, the ascent was quite scary, but two goes on the luge soon sorted us out - very exhilarating.

A bus trip to Arrowtown was next on the agenda. Wandering down the main street we bumped into Dave Bugden and his wife, had a chat with them before panning for gold and visiting the village where the Chinese settlers lived. Walking through the bush we came upon some historical homes and art galleries and the old cemetery, heading back to town for a well-earned pie and ale in the local garden bar.

On the Monday morning we took the bus to Clyde which took us to the depot of Trail Journeys where we were fitted with our bikes and helmets. After watching a video about the trail and the safety factors we were presented with passports which were stamped at each stop along the trail. After arranging for our luggage pick up we cycled to Antique Lodge. After settling into our rooms we walked down the road to the local pub and Restaurant for tea, great food, Helen was not allowed any of their famous ice cream until she ate all her veges - a hard case Aussie waitress made sure of that. At the next table was a large group of JAFAS; we seemed to be staying at the same places as them along the trail.

Up nice and early Tuesday morning, had breakfast and ready at 9:00am for the off. We decided to do the extra few k's and take the river trail to the start of the track. Quite scary because it was like mountain bike country all ups and downs with beautiful bush land that ran along the side of the river - well worth the extra few k's.

Heading for Chatto Creek via Alexandra, 25 km of undulating track good surface over little wooden bridges tracks through the hills, arriving at Chatto Creek at midday ready for lunch, a lovely little pub full of cyclists. After eating our whitebait fritters - and flat white of course - we set out on the next leg 19km to Lauder.

Over Tiger Hill and another steep hill we arrived at Omakau where most people were staying. We travelled on a bit further to Ophir, a historic goldfield village - a whole street of old homes and shops just as they were in the 19th century in fact. The post office opened every morning and hand-franked the mail, we took lots of photos of the jail, police station, grocery shop, etc.; the roses were magnificent.

We stayed at Black's Hotel, an old Hotel renovated to accommodate the influx of cyclists. After a good meal and night's sleep we set off for Ranfurly and then on to Hyde - once again beautiful scenery, bridges and tunnels - arriving at the very old Otago Pub stripped back to its original outer and refurbished inner. Very pleasant stay, once again very friendly people - even let us catch up with Coro St which they had recorded.

Next stop Middlemarch. Unfortunately we missed out on the dance where they bring lots of single Ladies in for the lonely farmers - too bad. After a well-earned lunch at the only decent café called the Kissing Gate café we returned our bikes etc, picked up our luggage and waited for the bus to take us to catch the Taieri Gorge train. Really nice with a commentary telling us about the history of the places that we went through and how the rail road was made by pick and shovel and how many men lost their lives building it. Back to civilisation we booked into Moray Place Motel in Dunedin, very comfortable. After having a pleasant tea and a glass or two of wine we settled in to watch the Chiefs win their game and to end a perfect holiday we watched Changeover win his race in Sydney. Then a good flight home. Thanks team for a great and different trip.

Rita

