



WAIKATO RIVER TRAILS

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On the Trails – Learning in the great outdoors

Whakamaru School's Jill McArthur is a walk-the-talk kind of principal. Literally.

When she told her senior pupils they could benefit in many ways from walking the Waikato River Trails, she meant it. And, to prove it, she went out and did it with them. Twenty year 6-8 students have been studying the great outdoors by walking all of the Waikato River Trails, accompanied by Jill and teacher Mel Pasco.

The students spent a day a fortnight on the trails from August to December last year. Jill says it was a way of building relationships between children and staff, and a good way to expose them to something wonderful in their local environment. Walking the trails

also slotted nicely into the health and PE curriculum. They started with easier local sections, eg from school to the local reserve and then moved to tougher and longer sections such as Waipapa to Te Waotu trail.

The Arapuni section, the greatest distance from the school, was one of the last tackled. It came with bonuses such as lunch at Rhubarb Café, and then an overnight camp at Little Waipa. Waikato River Trails General Manager Glyn Wooller walked this section with the students and explained the Trails project. The next day involved a walk to Pokaiwhenua to a water-ski club for an afternoon biscuiting on the water.

Jill says the experience was presented

to the children as a challenge, and that's what it became. They were joined on their walks by community figures such as the police, and then by South Waikato mayor Neil Sinclair. "The mayor shook the children's hands as they passed him at the finish and this really impacted on them," Jill says. And those who completed the walk were eligible to win a cellphone from Telecom Taupo.


This year the pupils are taking part in the William Pike Challenge Award, which involves eight outdoor activities over the year, plus community service, and they must learn a new hobby or skill.

In March they did their first challenge – a four-hour tramp, with packs on, to Waihaha Hut south of Whakamaru.

Dairy NZ staff join restoration planting project

Around 250 Dairy New Zealand staff planted more than 500 plants on the Waikato River Trails as part of their biannual get-together this summer. The Waikato River Trails Trust and Dairy NZ are both recipients of funding from the Waikato River

Authority for projects to help protect and restore the Waikato River. In the past year Waikato River Trails has overseen a riparian management project of more than 18,000 plants along the 100km trails, including 12,000 provided by the Waikato River Authority and co-funders

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An Australian cyclist bit off a wee bit more than he could chew when he tackled the Waikato River Trails in one day recently. Here's a poem he penned about the experience.

Glyn drives me to the other end
Of the Waikato River Trail
I'll do the hundred km in a day
That's easy, I can't fail!

But he talks about Australia
And the fact that it is flat
Inferring this ride will be hard
As I fasten my back pack

I'm off with great enthusiasm
The river by my side
I plan to do it in double quick time
I tell myself with pride

The first stage is pretty easy
Except where they're re working the track
Digging out the tree roots
Destroying good things like that

And what with showers overnight
Some parts have turned to mud
But I do handle it with grace
After all, I am a stud

Beside the river, through pine stands
And groves of native Beech
Unharrid by snakes or spiders
And not a single leech

Changing beauty and landscapes
It really is a treat
Cycling across New Zealand
With me bum on me seat

A snack and rest in a forest park
Soaking up the place
Then it's to the task once more
Maintaining a good pace

Till I encounter the open road
A headwind like no other
Pedalling flat out, going nowhere fast
Like a ship without a rudder

Who knows how long this lasts
But one thing I can tell
After many farms have rolled on by
My legs, they feel like hell!

I decide I'll take a lunch stop
At the 60 kilometre mark
Mentally that'll inspire me
That'll be a healthy start

Beneath dark foreboding spreading trees
Hill after hill I climb
Collapsing 3 km short
Exhausted, body and mind

Prostrate, flat out on a bench
I've never felt so spent
Except perhaps in younger days
An energetic running gent

Still, there's nothing for it
I push the bike uphill
I must carry on regardless
Devoid now of any thrill

Where I can, I cycle
As I muster on and on
Smaller hills I manage
Big ones? Legs are gone!

My water is long finished
And my Nikon weighs a ton
I chance the river water
To unstick my palette and tongue

I contemplate the wisdom
Of riding yesterday
As I negotiate a switchback
Fifty-seventh one today!

Still I must be grateful
The weather has been kind
And throughout this tough endurance
Many natural beauties I find

Meandering river banks
Shady forest glades
Ever stretching open fields
Carpeted with green blades

Finally the worst is over
I'm back on windy hills
Somehow on this open stretch
My legs are working still

Then into another glen
The trail leads astray
Is it left or is it right
It's hard to tell which way

Coz that way is over grown
No signage there to read
I do an extra loop
Of which there was no need

Now the sign says section end not far
Can it really be?
But there are four full sections
And this is only three!

Worst of all at Jones Landing
I leave the road once more
Over a mountain I carry my bike
Is this what I came here for!

With 15 kilometres remaining
I pause, I feel unwell
I'm shivery, cold, this isn't good
This old nurse can tell

With jacket on and a deep breath
We're heading off once more
Along winding flats beside the river
Suddenly we soar

Our twenty-seventh wind is here
We're soaking up the breeze
At one with nature's evening
We're a blur amongst the trees

Curving into the car park
I give a hoop and holler
Two unsuspecting strangers
Tomorrow they will folla

This arduous river adventure
Which today we have endured
And of this pastime called cycling?
For today, I have been cured!

With twitchy legs and aching joints
And long, long after dark
Reaching my accommodation
Finally, exhausted, I park!

Soaking in the shower
I have met my measure
Many thanks to you, Waikato
For the Pain and the Pleasure

Lester Cunningham, October, 2012

That said, I made it.
I experienced. And the
memory will endure!

Footnote:
So there it is.
I did make a few errors on this ride:
1. I didn't carry enough water
2. I took far too heavy a camera in my back pack
3. I should not have done a 3 hour forest ride the day before - had I realised how hilly this track was, I would have rested up so I would have been fresh and had more stamina
4. I underestimated what the Kiwis mean by "advanced".



A tale of two Steves – they take on the Trails

The Waikato River Trails team recently caught up with two Steves from out-of-town who had travelled to the South Waikato to enjoy the river trails. Steve Shaw, from Auckland, walked the trails with his son, Jonny, a university student. Steve Low, from Tauranga, tackled the trails on his mountain bike with a group of mates who share his enthusiasm for cycling and adventuring. Here's what they had to say.

■ Steve Low

We were deposited safely at the start of the track and soon settled into a nice hour of flowing, single track and an introduction to the incredible diversity of scenery and riding we would experience that day.

The promised breakfast stop at Whakamaru didn't disappoint – with dining choices ranging from blueberry muffins to "full cooked – with extra mushrooms." Not surprisingly the muffins beat the bacon and eggs up the hills every time that day.

The next few hours was a medley of superlatives. Stunning single track through the magnificent upper reaches of the Waikato River's hydro lakes and power stations; insightful dallies into the private backyards of some iconic Kiwi farms; and zipping through the many camps and villages which form the picturesque backdrops to endless summer holiday memories for countless Kiwi families. (We even strayed into what I suspect was part of the old film set for Deliverance!!!)

The track has been well planned, well signposted and is an absolute credit to the visionaries who conceived it, and the many who built and maintain it.

All on the trip were taken with the diversity of the ride – from the grinding uphill pinches, fast flowing downhill, and sphincter-puckering swing bridges



Steve Shaw (left) and his son Jonny enjoyed 3 days walking the Trails.

– it had something for everyone. We arrived back where we started buggered to a man (plus one woman) - all with that smug exhausted feeling of satisfaction which you can only earn one way.

For those who don't have a decent level of fitness and are confident on a mountain bike – I'd strongly suggest taking the ride on in bite-sized chunks. There is plenty of information on the Waikato River Trails website to assist in your planning, but it should definitely be right at the top of your list of great things to do with a bunch of good mates.

■ Steve Shaw

My wife, Bryony, and I were already familiar with the Waikato River Trails as we did the half marathon from Lake Maraetai to Whakamaru Christian

Camp as part of last year's Taniwha event.

I thought then 'what an amazing place and what a great place to come back to with my son'. And we did. We spent 3½ days walking the trails – covering about 70km. We started at the Christian Camp and went as far as the Little Waipa Reserve. We stayed at Lake Maraetai Lodge for two nights and at Putaruru Hotel for one, using the shuttle for transport. We walked at least 20km a day and had a total blast.

I think the trails have potential to be even better if the public is able to one-day travel from Atiamuri through to Lake Karapiro without road sections. We have recommended the trails to friends and showed them photos. They think it sounds and looks fabulous and they are likely to give it a go too.

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the Waikato Catchment Ecological Enhancement Trust and South Waikato Environmental Initiatives Fund.

"Our project is about improving water quality and the Trails' project has a focus on improving public access to the river, so there's a nice synergy between our organisations," said Dairy NZ chief executive Tim Mackle. "The Waikato River Trails involves dairy farmers who've given permission for access for walking,

biking and tramping trails along the mighty Waikato. We had a great afternoon and enjoyed helping out with such a fantastic project that's all about creating a better environment for everyone. This is what many dairy farmers are doing every day in terms of all the work they do on farm planting and protecting waterways and we had a taste of it."

Waikato River Trails general manager Glyn Wooller said the day's itinerary of riparian planting, fertilising trees, and a general tidy up of the

Huihuitaha Wetlands provided an opportunity to showcase the Waikato River Trails to a new group of people as well as discuss the potential for further collaboration.

"We'll continue to invite Dairy NZ staff to get involved in future initiatives," said Mr Wooller. "A priority for both our organisations is sustainability so for both the Waikato River Trails and Dairy NZ this sharing of information and creation of awareness will be critical to positive long term change in our region."

Let's tackle The Taniwha?

It's time to dust off the sports shoes ... the Taniwha is coming.

Entries open on May 1 for this exciting sporting event held on the Waikato River Trails. But, don't panic, there's plenty of time to train – the actual event will be staged on November 9.

This sporting fixture offers the opportunities to bike, run or walk sections of the 100km river trails, with distances ranging from 7km to 80km with different starting points along the trails.

The best of the Waikato River Trails will be on show, with tracks taking in boardwalks over wetlands, swing bridges, native bush, exotic forest, historic landmarks, interesting geological formation, open reserves, and even a number of dam crossings. The event is suitable for varying levels of fitness. For some it will be a competitive event, for some, more social. There will be different age categories including masters, veterans and legend.

Total Sport and the Waikato River Trails' Trust have teamed up for this event, which was first held last year, attracting 841 registrations.

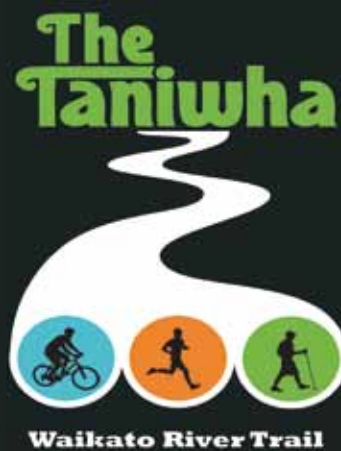
Organisers are expecting even more participants this year. Waikato River Trails' General Manager Glyn Wooller says the event offers the opportunity to

showcase the river and scenery. "It's a beautiful environment, and the event is also a great way to introduce people to some of our smaller communities along the way," he says.

Details - such as the different courses, start and finish points, cost - and entry forms are available at www.thetaniwha.co.nz The entry fee for locals is discounted. Part of each entry fee will go to the charity, Shine, which works to prevent domestic abuse.

Many South Waikato businesses got behind the event last year offering spot prizes. Those able to do so again are asked to contact the Waikato River Trails team.

The event is supported by the South Waikato and Taupo district councils, as well as the Whakamaru Christian Camp (which is where the event ends.)



Shuttle operation adds new services

The Waikato River Trails' Shuttle Service, which prides itself on being customer driven, is expanding its operations.

In response to customer demand the service will now include pick-ups and drop-offs at the popular Te Waihou walkway on the outskirts of Putaruru. Plus, van hireage is another new option. The shuttle – a Transit 12 seater coach - has been on the road for over a year providing a solution in terms of transport for walkers or cyclists and their gear.

The service not only offers trail users pick-ups and drop-offs and ensures luggage is deposited at chosen destinations it also comes with a custom-made bike trailer. The vast majority of the shuttle service users are cyclists. Hiring bikes, which come in various sizes, is also possible.

Both the shuttle service and bike hire are booked through the Waikato River Trails (WRT) office in Putaruru.

The shuttle is available seven days a week and usually departs from the WRT office although this can be tailored to suit. Advanced bookings are required.

Drop-off and pick-up options are varied, and prices differ according to numbers (as few as one and as many as 11) and the distance the shuttle needs to travel. Exact information on prices is available at the WRT office. The service carries the Qualmark quality assurance mark.

Waikato River Trails also has significant support from:

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