



The Country Road Newsletter

15th December 2009

It's started.

Destination Manawatu's first steps in launching The Country Road are underway. The Country Road is an exciting project where we can work with our local community to open up our world-class countryside to both locals and visitors.

Last weekend we took Marika Hill from The Dominion Post on a part cycling, part car journey to parts of The Country Road. She will be writing a travel feature for the paper that will appear sometime over the next 3 weeks. Our pitch to her was quite simple: hop on a bike, ride along The Country Road with us and meet the locals. The Country Road really is starting to come to life since Helen Worboys, Feilding Promotion, first discussed the concept with Lance Bickford earlier this year. It's been great working with Helen and the Feilding community in developing this concept into a series of touring loops originating from Feilding. Unfortunately the Feilding team were pretty busy over the weekend with Feilding Christmas Parade etc, so we didn't get a chance to spend much time there.

Warren Jones (of Reel Earth fame) came along for the weekend to grab a photo and video record of the trip – magnificent work as you will see. Thanks mate!

We were warmly welcomed wherever we went and would like to extend a special "thank you" to all of you who kindly opened up your homes and businesses to spend time with us. Our place is special but our people make it memorable. A more humble, sincere and welcoming community you simply won't find.

Highlights

Pouring rain made us a little nervous at the beginning of our trip, which was a therapeutic body cream making workshop at **The Herb Farm** with owner, Lynn Kirkland. Fortunately the rain eased off enough for us to have a quick look around some of the themed herbal gardens, and see the newest resident, Alfredo the human-size wooden elf.



Manawatu Mountain Biking Club secretary, Bill Russell and Mayor Ian McKelvie sort out Marika Hill's bike for the ride ahead.

Jack the beagle/huntaway cross met us at the gate of our next stop - **Pohangina Valley Estate**. Hardly able to wait for us to get out of our cars, he took us to the tasting room to meet owner, Fiona McMorrان. From wine lover to the part owner in a successful boutique vineyard, Fiona recounted the story of her family's life-long dream.

Meanwhile the keen cyclists in our group had gathered at the nearby **Waterford Café and Bar** and enjoyed a coffee with owner, Greg Drohan and Manawatu District Council Mayor, Ian McKelvie. We set off along **The Country Road: Pohangina Valley** at 11am by which time the driving rain had stopped, the wet stuff not to be seen again for the weekend!

Only a novice rider, the short distance to Pohangina Village was ideal introduction to the saddle for Marika. Before setting off Bill Russell and Mayor Ian McKelvie helped Marika with a few bike set up tips.

Light-as-air homemade scones at **County Fayre** were fantastic fuel for the journey ahead. Volunteers, Anne Pilone and Bob Passy were wonderful hosts, and local history enthusiast and photographer, John Brock shared some interesting stories.

Having the gravel road to ourselves to **Spring Grove Farm Park** made it 'easy', although the hills were challenging (written by Katherine from Destination Manawatu who observed from the support vehicle!). Baby and Ivan (black Russian terriers) bounded out to meet us, along with owner Pete Mitchell and neighbour Michelle. After a delicious light lunch and dessert kindly prepared in advance by Jude (away in Wellington), we headed out onto the farm to see the animals.

Keen to explore further we hopped back on the bikes and accompanied by a tail wind, and a display of power riding by Chris and Lisa Foggin, crossed over to Pohangina Valley East.

At **Pilgrim's Rest Tea Rooms** we caught up with owner, Margaret, and were soon joined by Chicken (the deer) pressing his nose against the window to say, "Hello". As well as loving visitors, Chicken is a scone connoisseur testing each batch as it comes out of the oven. Come to think of it she's probably never eaten a visitor! A short wander outside and we were treated with world-class views of the Pohangina Valley.



Far Left: Chicken the deer

Left: The keen explorers – Katherine Huynh (Destination Manawatu), Bill Russell (Manawatu Mountain Biking Club secretary), Julie O'Brien (Destination Manawatu), Lisa Foggin (Pohangina Valley resident and keen cyclist), 'Pohangina Pete' (Pohangina Valley resident and blogger), Chris Foggin (Pohangina Valley resident and keen cyclist), and Warren Jones (Reel Earth). Sitting in front are Marika Hill (The Dominion Post) and Lance Bickford (Destination Manawatu).

A short distance up the valley some of the group stayed over at **Boulder Lodge**, and held a community barbecue dinner. Owners, Glenys and Travers Moffat couldn't make it for the dinner, but had gone to great efforts to prepare for our visit. Hilton and Christine Digby, Pete McGregor, Hugh McIntyre (Makoura Lodge) and Bill's wife Tresta and daughter Meg, joined us for dinner. What a magnificent setting and a rejuvenating electricity-free night. A few lies and half truths seemed to be lurking at the base of some of those wine bottles. 😊



It was an early start the next morning for a 7:30am ride at **Table Flat Trekking**. Owners, Sandy and Jim Warren were there to greet us along with their helper, Kahurangi, from Apiti village. After receiving basic instruction we rode up a nearby hill and were treated to stunning views of back country farmland and a small taste of the entry to **The Iron Gates Experience**.

The cooked breakfast at **Apiti Tavern** was delicious. Owners, Bruce and June Winter sat down with us and treated us to true country hospitality. Hilton arrived for a feed too! Breakfast over, Bruce serenaded us with a Christmas song and sent us on our way up "that road" (Steve and Mary Bielski were away at a wedding for the weekend so unfortunately we missed the greatest muffins on earth!).

Michael Burke's Wetlands were like an oasis on the gravel road north of Apiti. Zak, the golden Labrador puppy, ran around our feet as Michael explained how much he's enjoyed developing his hunter's playground. And why did he start building dams? "Dad had a bulldozer 😊". Dairy farming became a severe hazard!



Further up the road we paused at **Pinetum**. Consisting of around 1,500 conifers this volunteer managed plantation is a great picnic spot. Another reminder of extraordinary locals doing extraordinary things.

Ngaire Hancock of **Ruapuna Park** recounted the story of her grandmother receiving 'the dead man's penny' from King George V following her husband's death only a few months into World War I. Only 220 medals were minted in anticipation of the numbers of New Zealand troops that the King believed the colony might give up in his service in defeating the Kaiser. Very sadly, he was very far short of the mark. This item and the antiques and pieces of kiwiana in Granny's Cottage are real treasures. Her workshop and various sheds full of classic tools and engines left Bill and Warren drooling. We felt honoured that she shared her family story. Ngaire is certainly a special person and is custodian of a beautiful place.

And from there onto **The Country Road; Peep-o-Day**. An old edition of The Edmond's Cook Book lay open on the bench in Bridget's kitchen, no doubt referred to for the mouthwatering afternoon tea she'd prepared for us of oat biscuits, Christmas mince tarts and chocolate cake. With coffee in hand we wandered past her well-travelled house truck, and viewed her inspired creations in the former dairy factory, now home to **Junk and Disorderly**. If you haven't seen Bridget's work before, make sure you visit Festival of Cultures next year and watch out for the stilt walkers.

On the home straight now we stopped off at the Peep-o-Day lookout, let the cyclists out (with Bill and Meg on the tandem) and made our way to **Heritage Park** near Kimbolton. It was another fantastic cycle trip with almost a bird's eye view of the valleys on either side. Awaiting us at the Park were many members of the wider community keen to know more about The Country Road and share stories about their businesses. Artisan breads and homemade fare – yum and thank you.

A most memorable experience for all who participated. Marika had no idea that we had so many hills, so much pristine native forest and so many hidden treasures. We hope her memories of her weekend with us translate into a great story of a bunch of cycle tourist/wanderers meeting a special band of people in mighty Manawatu.

We've got a brilliant photo record of our trip courtesy of our paparazzi (Warren and Pete McGregor seemed to be lurking behind every large tree). We will be cutting a disc and sending out copies to the community along the route. Warren has spent most of yesterday editing his moving footage into a short documentary. This will also be sent out for the community to enjoy.

And all up on our website too – take a look - http://www.manawatunz.co.nz/out_and_about.html

The Country Road map is now ready to go to print and will be distributed in early January to *i*-SITES and other distribution points in the lower North Island.

Thanks again to all who helped (special mention to the Big Fella who turned off the taps in the clouds above us on Saturday morning).