

The world's first ever fossil fuel free multisport event

By Steven Muir, 17/9/2011, steve@cycletrailers.co.nz

I have a great respect for multisport athletes. They are generally way fitter than I am and do some very gruelling events. However, I have always had this niggles in the back of my mind when I watch hundreds of large expensive SUV's, laden with gear on their roof rack, driving hundreds of kilometres around the country to train for and take part in multisport events. While the participants are impressively healthy and fit, the health of the atmosphere seems to be suffering as a result of their activity. Surely, I thought, there must be a way of training for, and doing multisport events, that doesn't involve burning such a gratuitous amount of fossil fuel. Particularly during training, where the idea is to get as much exercise in as possible, towing your kayak by bike to paddle in a waterway makes much more sense than driving around with your kayak, and only getting half the training.

The answer to this dilemma is the world's first ever fossil fuel free multisport event, in which the only stated rule is not to burn one drop of fossil fuel. The event was held on 17th September 2011 and was timed to coincide approximately with world car free day, and a day of action on climate change (<http://www.moving-planet.org>).

Seven participants biked from their homes and converged in Christchurch's central city for leg one, which was cycling North, towing their kayaks on trolleys 10 km up Hills & Marshland Road to the Styx River. The ride went without problems, successfully negotiating earthquake damaged roads and busy roundabouts. Motorists were all very courteous to our unusual lineup of vehicles.



Lining up to start



Kind of the council to provide dedicated kayak lanes



Travelling on earthquake damaged roads



Up hills Road



QEII roundabout



Turning into Lower Styx Road

There was a short dirt road section to a farm adjacent to the Styx River, where the bikes and trolleys were left and leg two began which was the kayaking section. It was a very pleasant 6km paddle downstream to Brooklands admiring a few TV's dumped in the river, an intriguing bicycle sculpture and some river bank slumping from earthquakes.



Preparing to kayak at the farm



Admiring river bank slumping



An unexpected sculpture

The third leg was jogging 6 km back along the road to collect our bikes and kayak trolleys at the farm which spread the field out a little, some people being very fast runners, and others having hardly done any running at all, but everyone got there successfully and a couple of people managed to fill up an old bucket with discarded reflective road bumps and other rubbish found along the way.

The fourth leg was biking 6 km back to Brooklands to collect our kayaks. The experience of having carried kayaks and trolleys on a bike before began to show, as some trolleys were mounted on a wooden cross bar and were very stable, where others swung wildly, dangling off an improvised bracing rod extending from the back of the carrier.

One commercial trolley used was collapsible and so the rider avoided this challenge, by carrying the trolley in his kayak. The smaller, nylon-bushed wheels on this trolley, did make the biking legs more of an effort.



A couple of the less-stable methods of carrying the kayak trolley

An extra kayaker had joined us at the farm who hadn't quite sorted out his trolley for the fifth leg, and so we attempted to piggy back his kayak on top of another kayak back to the farm. It can be done easily if you are prepared with suitable padding and fixing points, but it proved to be more of a challenge than expected (not having planned for this extra load), and the first attempt to secure it on top of the longest and most stable trailer only lasted one kilometre before it began to slide slowly but surely off to one side. The extra kayak was transferred to wider but shorter kayak which provided a more stable surface to fix the second kayak to, but because the tail protruded so far behind the wheel base it was very prone to fishtailing, so the section of the journey from Brooklands back to the farm was significantly slower than anticipated, as a result. Placing the wheels well back along the length of the kayak avoids this problem, but was difficult to achieve with this combination of kayaks.



Attempt one for piggy-backing kayaks



Attempt two at piggy-backing. Slow but we made it

We had a slight mishap along Marshlands Road when a 30 year old piece of thin nylon cord broke, that was holding one kayak to the bike carrier. The plastic kayak bounced happily on its nose a few times before coming to rest at the side of the road with no damage done and it added to our list of lessons learnt. A quick stop to refuel proved to be a brief and inexpensive exercise.



Stopping to refuel

We made it back to central city around 1.30 for the real re-fuelling, a well earned cuppa and muffin. We were travelling together at a leisurely pace and it all took just over five hours to complete the course, then many continued biking a little further back to their homes. Kayak trolleys were mostly made by Steven Muir from cycletrailers.co.nz and utilised second hand wheels from old kid's bikes. You can borrow these trailers for a free month trial if you live in Christchurch and give it a go. One marshall kept an eye on the kayaks during the jogging section. The marshall of course biked to the kayak end point at Brooklands. Future events may be in the pipeline with varying degrees of difficulty, maybe even cycling over the Port Hills to Cass Bay, paddling to Quail Island, running around the Island, then returning home.

Major lessons learnt

Lesson 1: fossil fuel free multisport is great fun and highly recommended.

Lesson 2: don't use 30 year old thin nylon cord to tow your kayak.

Lesson 3: get as much slack out of the kayak handle as possible when tying on, as it doesn't jiggle as much.

Lesson 4: use a strong carrier with a cross brace for carrying your trolley. A couple of the carriers used were very flimsy and resulted in speed wobbles developing as the carrier was swung from side to side by the weight of the kayak. Stiffer carriers did not suffer this fate.

Leg times

Leg 1 (biking 10 km) 1 hr 8.30-9.30

Leg 2 (kayaking 6 km) 1.5 hr 9.30-11

Leg 3 (jogging 6km) 1/2 hr 11 - 11.30

Leg 4 (returning to kayaks with trolleys 6km) 1/2 hr 11.30-12

Leg 5 (biking home, 16km) 1.5 hr 12-1.30