

F3C3 2017 - Fossil Fuel Free Coast to Coast to Coast 18-24th February 2017

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Introduction

The idea of the Fossil Fuel Free Coast to Coast to Coast (F3C3) is to have a fun holiday, raise awareness of climate change and to encourage the use of active (fossil fuel free) transport for as many journeys as possible, particularly those journeys that involve carrying loads and are made regularly, like commuting, shopping or training for multisport events. The participants were all from the ICECycles free bike maintenance group in Christchurch, who encourage more people to bike by fixing and giving away bikes to people on low incomes. Steve Muir made the kayak trolleys to tow the kayaks and he also makes strong, low cost, custom designed cycle trailers for shopping and general load carrying.

Day One Saturday 18 February (3½ hours). Christchurch to Springfield



Route information



Cycling



distance

69.86 km



energy

7785 kJ



Ascent

395 m



Descent

8 m

The day of the trip began with drizzly weather and Annette ringing in sick with bronchitis. Alastair confirmed that he was happy to ride solo, pulling her kayak in case she was able to join us in 6 days' time. We arrived at Annette's West Melton home from 3 corners of the compass — Meg and Steve from the east, Alastair from the south and Chris and Emily from Nelson (collecting Bertha the Canadian canoe en-route). After a prolonged lunch the infamous five set off with a cool, gentle tail wind. Perfect!



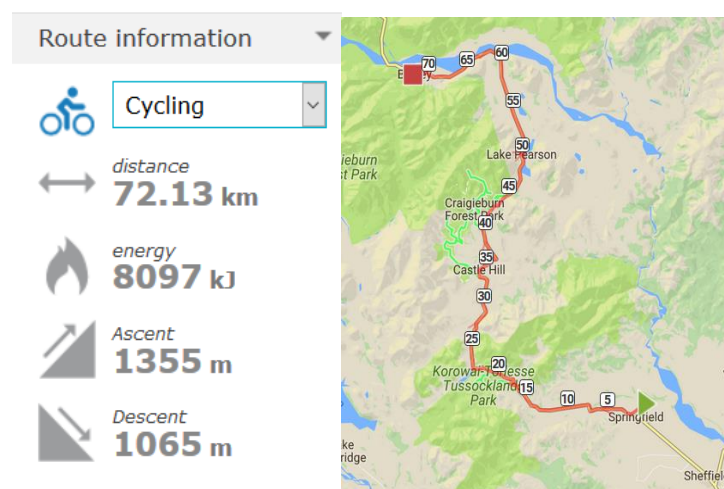
Leaving Annette's home in West Melton around 2.30pm



The Old West Coast Road

Bertha was tracking well (after some make-shift strengthening of the towbar to reduce fishtailing when Chris stood up to rest his backside). She created a great slip stream to ride behind as we rode the slight incline up the Old West Coast Road. We dropped our gear at a friend's house (Paula and Paul), set up the tent and headed back into town for a greasy pub meal chased down with some of Tom Innes' hoppy homebrew. We had a night of deafening silence and glaring star light (not complaining). Meg felt ill for most of the night from the heavy-on-the-grease-and-lack-of-vege meal but was fine by morning.

Day Two Sunday 19 February (8 hours). Springfield to Bealey Spur





About to leave our camping spot in Springfield

Awoke to a misty morning after a 7.45am sleep in. Steve made the first of what was going to be seven porridge breakfasts. After a relatively leisurely pack up we were off at 9.50am. We rode the gradual 30km incline up to the foot of Porters Pass in cool weather with low cloud. The sun came out in time for our rather sweaty ascent. Alastair and Chris and Emily managed to cycle all the way (only stopping to take photos) but Meg and Steve had to get off and push Retro Rita, the 40 year tandem for the last and steepest bit. Some signs of mechanical issues came to light with weird clanking and grating sounds coming from her derailleurs hub and chain. Lunch was a Castle Hill.







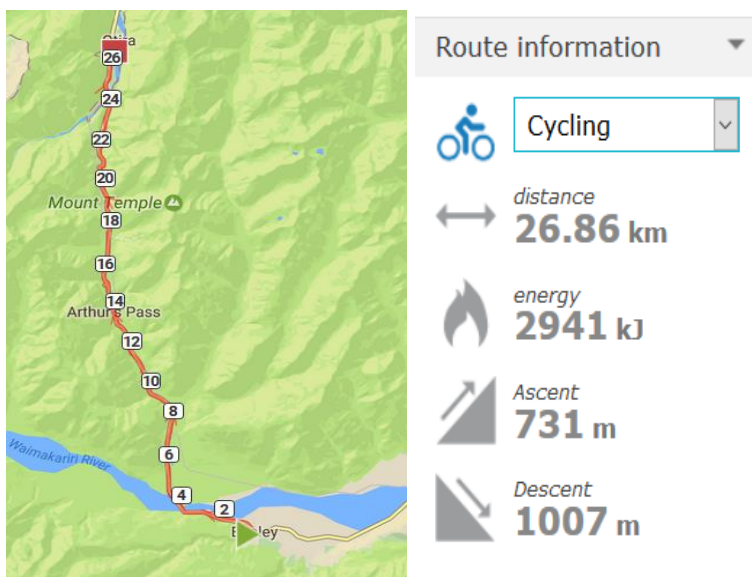
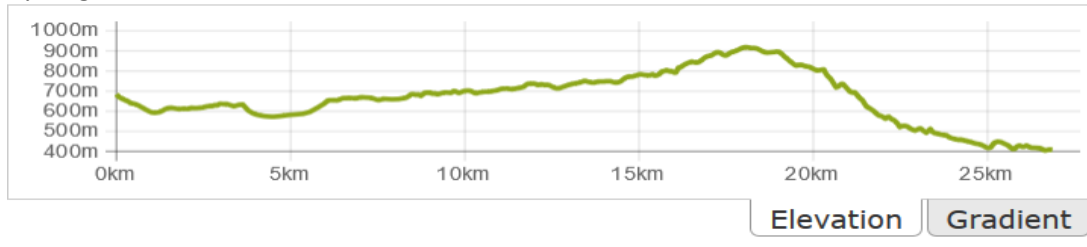
Next stop Rua Moana/ Lake Pearson where we all had a paddle in Steve's kayak. Steve attempted to fix the cluster on the old tandem which, after 40 years of reliable performance, had lost some bearings somewhere between Porters Pass and Lake Pearson. This created over 1cm of sideways slop in the cluster which made gear changing very temperamental and often resulted in the chain flicking off. The downhill were exhilarating and the views through the Alps were spectacular. The bach at Bealey Spur was a welcome sight at 6pm. Our homemade dinner was an improvement on last year's meal at the hotel.





Day Three Monday 20 February (Chris and Emily 3 hours biking Bealey to Otira; Alastair, Steve and Meg 9 hours tramping Mingha/Deception)

Cycling Elevation and Route.



As Alastair had run the Deception-Mingha for the Coast to Coast several times, he was keen to tramp it in the opposite direction. Emily and Chris were also interested in running it together on Day 5, so Steve, Meg and Alastair tramped this day and Chris and Emily took the gear over Arthurs to Otira with the bikes. We all biked the Greynsey's Shelter, shuffled the gear around, then went our separate ways.



Emily carried Retro Rita on the kayak trolley using a front fork clamp, and rode Alastair's bike while Chris took the Cannondale tandem.

Emily and Chris had morning tea at Arthur's pass village. On the steep descent Chris attempted to video and ride simultaneously. He reported that this was 'a bit dodgy'! They saw a couple of terrible overtaking manoeuvres with first a bus and then a SUV overtaking them on the descent causing up-on-coming traffic to brake and pull-over to the road edge to avoid a collision. They saw amazing rata - sweet to be in the rain forest! Otira Art Gallery was curious and fun with the women in the shop was Chris' old work mate. Only in New Zealand. It was another mild, slightly cloudy day but when the sun did come out it was reasonably hot



Coming up to Arthurs Pass

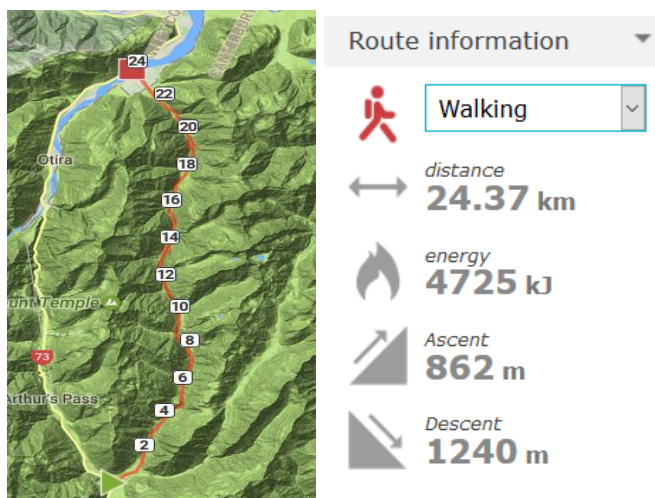


Made it to Arthurs Pass



If we'd only known...

The Tramping Elevation and Route:





Meanwhile, the trampers were enjoying a leisurely but firm pace in near perfect conditions...



...and it was hot enough for Meg to have a dip in a beautiful green pool where they stopped for elevenses

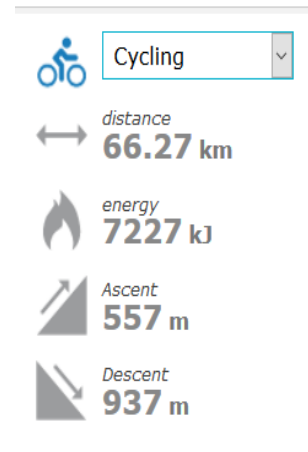
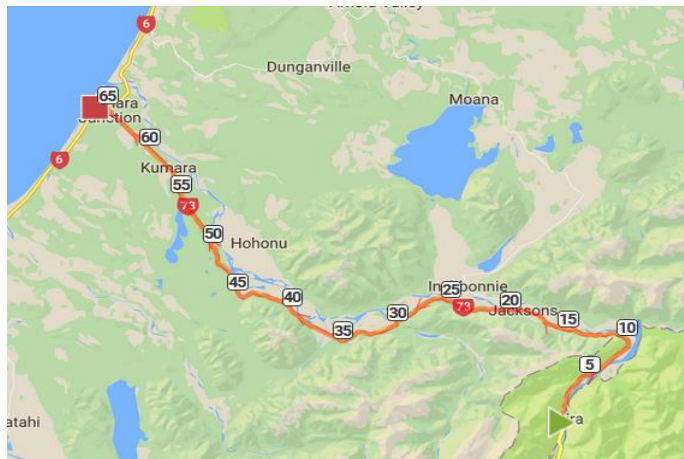
The walk over the Mingha/deception went well though Alastair's wallet may still be somewhere along the Mingha — it certainly was not in his pack at the end of the tramp! A lone kea escorted them across Goat Pass. Arriving at the west, they had a slight bit of weather but nothing to worry about.



Dracophyllum on the West Coast side of Goat Pass really do have a Dr Seuss look to them

Steve did some landscaping en-route, rearranging a river bank and bringing a massive boulder down on his right hip and souveniring a rainbow bruise. Meg counted 30 river crossings, which were benign with their weather conditions this day but would have been another story with the torrential rains of 2016's trip — it was a good move turning back in 2016! Chris and Emily had left the tandem and single bike at the Deception footbridge and we rode the 6km back to Otira. It was great to arrive at the Beaumont's batch for hot showers and with dinner practically ready. We chilled out the rest of the evening by watching Hunt for the Wilder People.

Day 4. Tuesday 21 February (8 hours) Otira to Kumara return





In somewhat claggy weather we left Otira but things warmed up pretty quickly



Kumara Beach: Half way point and feeling great

Retro Rita was still playing up so we limped along down to Kumara with the rumoured prospect of a bike shop with some spare parts. However, the dairy only supplied a few standard bike bits and not useful for our back wheel rebuild. We had a pleasant ride down to the beach for congratulatory photos and eating of left-overs before stocking up with store goodies and dinner provisions. We bought some figs, tomatoes and strawberries from gate-sales en-route. In Kumara Steve contacted Annette who was still laid low with her bronchitis but he did manage to persuade Sam Beaumont to come up and paddle the kayak down, meeting us on the Thursday at Mt White Bridge. This meant Alastair and Meg would not have to tow Annette's kayak back unused. An uneventful ride back with a slight tail wind which got stronger the closer we got to Otira. Kereru diving over-head putting on a great display.



Any time's' a good time for a scroggin stop



This was the day that proved that tandems (no matter how old and clanking) are faster than a single mtb with knobbies. Retro Rita was fast becoming Wretched & Rooted Rita. Steve plundered the Beaumont's collection of rusty near dead bikes in the garage and managed to find a 27" wheel with a perished sidewall on the tyre, to replace the 700c dysfunctional wheel which was a huge improvement and it performed admirably the whole way back. The evening was spent playing 500 and plotting about how to run future trips.

Day 5. Wednesday 22 February (Chris and Emily 6 hours running Deception/Mingha; Alastair, Steve and Meg 3 hours biking Otira to Bealey Spur



Transport shuttle to the start of the Deception River



Leaving Otira

It was an 8.15am start for Steve, Meg, Chris and Emily biking the 6km to the Deception bridge for the start of Chris and Emily's run, while Alastair swept, vacuumed and generally tidied up the bach. The riders were on their way by 9.30am, Meg on Chris and Emily's Cannondale tandem, Steve on Retro Rita and Alistair hauling the trailer. Meg and Alastair had the gears to ride the whole Otira road and viaduct but Steve walked up the steep bits aided by a makeshift shoulder strap around the seat post which made it more ergonomic, and of comparable speed to the bikers. Meg was entertained by a kea who was not impressed with the strobe setting on the Cannondale's bike light or her tuneless whistling of Brothers in Arms.



They stopped for elevenses at Arthurs Pass and stocked up with more mealtime supplies. On leaving the village Steve offered the spare seat on the tandem to a hitchhiker who had been waiting for a ride for three hours. Sadly (for him) declined and missed out on a whole new adventure, returning to the village to give up on hitching until the next day. We dropped off Chris and Emily's tandem at Greyney's Shelter and headed back up to Bealey Spur for the usual cups of tea, showers, and washing of our sweaty kit. Meanwhile Emily and Chris enjoyed the early morning misty mountains, traversing gravel, boulders, bush, streams and rivers and gorges and Te Araroans (both nobos and sobos). They took 3 hours to get to Goat pass, then Chris' knees and

ankles gave out. He hobbled down the Mingha - still beautiful but achy (the track was beautiful - Chris was achy). Luckily Emily could carry his gear. Saw kea, moromiro (tomtits) and robins. It was a big relief to get onto the flat where Chris could walk without mincing and wincing.





Practice run of fitting Rita and the large trailer in the Canadian Canoe

We had a dry-run of fitting the tandem & trolley into the canoe, then lively discussion, dreaming and refining of what a F3C3 could look like in the future over another cup of tea, now with Emily considering actually competing in the actual Coast to Coast event, with the F3C3 team doing the supporting. Not a bad look for the main sponsor Kathmandu who are supposed to be showcasing greener and more sustainable practices. Logistics, logistics...

After dinner, the longest ever game of 500 was had in the history of the F3C3 — about 15 hands- due to some desperate bidding strategies. Steve and Meg finally emerged as the victors!

Day 6 Thursday 23 February (8am-8pm)



At the Mt White Bridge turn off: a cool start with a promise of head winds for both kayakers and riders



Crossing Mt White Bridge



The proof of Bertha's pudding was whether we could fit a tandem and trailer in her and if she would still be river-worthy.

Everyone rode to the Mt White bridge and packed the old tandem and large canoe trolley into the Canadian Canoe. Fortunately we were prepared for the sandflies there and were covered up, but they were still pesky. Sam Beaumont joined us to make use of the third kayak (unfortunately he did use fossil fuel to get there). Meg and Alistair had a long cycle to the Waimak Gorge Bridge loaded with team gear with a testing grind up Craigieburn Cutting which was gravelly with road works underway (both managed to stay moving and upright). They had a couple of very pleasant pit stops at Castle Hill Village and under some shady trees at Lake Lyndon for sammies and muesli crumble. A frustrating descent behind a selfish and slow campervan down Porters, then Yello Shack for civilised coffee and cake. Nice weather, patchy winds, traffic OK.



The canoe proved useful in the braids as Emily could stand up to make decisions about which braid to take.

Due to the advanced navigation skills of Emily standing in the front of the canoe, Steve was favourably impressed with the lack of walking and kayak-dragging needed in the low river conditions. The first rapid with rocks made it hard to get the canoe at the preferred 45 degree angle, resulting in some wobbles from Bertha and a bit of spillage over the bow, but she stayed upright. They only had to pull over twice because the waves began to fill Bertha. After a lunch break, Sam began to feel unwell (possibly from some tinned creamed rice pudding that had been in the van “quite a while”) and never really recovered. He took quite a few swims and was efficient at getting himself back in the boat but despite a brave face, he was suffering. He left the team at Woodstock and hitched back to the main road.



The gorge was spectacular because of the incredible blue of the deep pools and the relentless sunshine.



Some strong winds made Emily and Chris work hard to keep Bertha headed downstream, but rather than strengthening, the wind eased during the day which was a relief. At the take out point at Waimakariri Gorge Bridge, Meg, Alastair and Sam's parents had been waiting for over 2 hours (Alistair and Meg enjoying a "non compulsory" swim in the meantime). The kayakers hove into sight at 7pm, Bertha towing Sam's kayak from Woodstock. Everyone pitched in to make the transition smooth and efficient and loaded up with all bums on all five seats again. We headed for Oxford accompanied by a stunning sunset and a vegie-rich dinner thanks to Fresh Choice being open until 9pm. Beth and Ian were great hosts despite our late arrival — thanks!!

Day 7. Friday 24 February (3 hours) Oxford to Christchurch



Leaving Ian and Beth's ranch in Oxford

Chris had to work in the afternoon so we left at the early (for us) hour of 7.30am. The plains are flat, and long and Chris got saddle sore. With more of a fizz than a bang, we slightly anti-climatically said our goodbyes on Marshlands Rd and Emily & Chris went with Alastair off towards Main North Rd, while Steve & Meg took a more easterly line, stopping at two road side fruit and vegetable places to pick up about 30 kg of bargain fruit which was conveniently carried inside the kayak.

Conclusion

It was a really enjoyable and satisfying trip through spectacular country with an interesting mix of activity, helped by reasonably friendly weather and great company. Sickness prevented the 6th person making it, but we are keen to try the journey again in 2018 and there's room for more to join in. The pace was good for people with an average age of 50 years, with average to slightly-above-average fitness. Other fossil fuel free journeys are also being discussed, such as a Banks Peninsula tour, towing kayaks to one of the many beautiful bays in the afternoons, camping the night and going for a kayak in the mornings (before the wind picks up). Get in touch if you are interested.

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