

Tussock Buster, the best two day trail rides in NZ?

The last weekend in March looks set to become an annual "locked and loaded" event for any serious trail rider in the North Island. This is to be the only weekend of the year that the NZ Army will open up all of its 63,000 hectares, or 160,000 acres for a massive trail ride. The organisers are called "Off Limits", a brand under which outdoor events will be conducted in the Army Training area at Waiouru. Off Limits is a charitable trust, and a non commercial organisation, whose sole aim is to raise funds for the Army's Multisport Club based at Linton. As well as trail riding, Off Limits hopes to expand in the future into 4X4 tours, adventure racing, guided adventure bike tours and mountain biking.

Two of the prime movers behind this whole project are David Greenslade and Mike Ross. Dave is a long term trail rider, and his son Sam is a more than handy MXer who is rapidly climbing the Cross Country and Enduro ranks. Mike is still serving in the Army and has competed in Enduros for ages and competed in the Army team in the ISDE a couple of years ago. Each year he also runs the round of the National Enduro Series that is raced in Santoff Forest near Bulls. So as you can see, these organisers have a heap of experience between them. Add in a massive crew of riders from the Multisport Club to help with all the marking out, running fuel stops, catering, bike retrieval and all the other behind the scenes work, and you get a very slickly run event. Even the clearing up on the Sunday evening was a breeze, with a squad of recruits marching to the camp site from the Waiouru base, cleaning up and then marching back again!

So how was the riding? In one word, awesome! There can not be too many events that provide nearly 200ks of trails to go and play on, on land that is usually off limits (pun intended!) Starting with the littlies, there was a 1.5k loop adjacent to the camp ground that wove in and out of a stand of pine trees. Being next to the camping, it makes it easy for parents to keep an eye on the youngsters. Next up was a 22k loop called Marsden's. This one held no terrors and was easily ridden by any rider with basic skills. The Tussock Trail was the next longest at 32ks and had a couple of steeper hills and a bog, but nothing that could not be negotiated by a bit of team work and a bit of effort. Hey, you won't improve those skills unless you start to push yourself, will you? Next up, Sniper Alley, a 54k trail that featured a long a twisting down hill through a huge stand of tee-tree, ending in one of the longer river crossings which claimed more than one unwary rider. Moral? if in doubt, walk your bike, it's less embarrassing than a motor full of river water!

The jewel in the crown had to be the Dam Buster loop, an 85k trail that takes you right out to some spectacular scenery. Two fuel stops were available for the thirstier bikes, so there was no excuse to get caught short. On the two longer trails, there were some gravel road sections, where you could just cruise and soak up the Central Plateau views, and regain your breath before heading back onto the trails. On these longer loops, some of the riding was on tank tracks, some on access roads, through areas of scrub and of course there were big areas of tussock, hence the name "Tussock Buster"

At the camping ground, the event was supported by Huka Honda and Taihape Honda who took along their farm service truck. This kept up with a steady supply of punctures, broken levers and had a stash of gloves and goggles for those who'd been too excited packing their gear bags. Huka Honda also supplied a range of display bikes and we appreciate their support.

HRCNZ had been lucky enough to be invited to a couple of the reconnaissance rides in the preceding months, so we thought we knew what to expect. Wrong! On these two earlier rides, the weather had been cold and wet, with plenty of slippery rocks in places. The Tussock Buster weekend was as dry as, with some dust, but nothing too major if you used your brains and hung back from those in front. Being dry there were no traction issues and there was the added bonus of your bike not being hard to clean after two days riding. Both days were brilliantly sunny, although there was a frost on the Sunday morning to greet you when you got up. Nothing that an army cooked fry up could not solve though. Catering was available all weekend and was substantial and cheap. The Waiouru Army Rugby Club bar proved popular on the Saturday night with heaters, Army bar prices, and a big screen TV which ran a series of photos of the event and riders, plus footage from someone's helmet cam.

The camping was based at the rugby club, so there were showers available, plus the luxury of not being dependant on chemical port-a-loos. It's the little details like these that help make Tussock Buster a premium event, as well as all the organisation and array of trails, one that every trail rider should keep an eye out for. For more details and photos, you can go to www.offlimits.co.nz See you there next year!

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Emergency repairs to bridge 1



Hence the name 1



One of many river crossings 1



One of the reasons for staying left! 1