



Wherever I Roam, The Coast Is My Home

January the 1st 2015.

The Coasters Club wishes you and your family a happy and prosperous new year. My name is Bruce Smith. I am a 4th generation Coaster and I would normally take you on a virtual trip somewhere on the Coast.

However this week is a first for us with the Westport Mayor Gary Howard taking you on his 5 day 85km tramp over the Old Ghost Road which was our pick of new events for 2015.

Gary is leading the development of a plan to manage the transition away from coal to other sustainable forms of employment in the Buller.

His plans sit well with the objectives of "The Coasters Club" and with our involvement with "The Events Incubator."

The West Coast of the South Island is packed with creators, thinkers and dreamers. Our incubator program aims to turn these big ideas into viable, events that fuel the West Coasts economy by providing access to the knowledge, networks and capital needed to take a new event to the market.

The events incubator aims to bring budding start up teams with their event into a community and surround them with the resources and support needed to turn an idea into an event. Every competitor for every event along with every support person creates an economic benefit of \$515 dollars to the GDP of the town that runs the event. (Source BERL report Wildfoods)

And now it's over to his worship the Mayor Gary Howard.

Tramping "The Old Ghost Road"

Wow! What a wonderful experience. Keen to experience first-hand this huge undertaking by the Mokihinui – Lyell Backcountry Trust, I decided to end a two year drought from tramping. My longest walk had been from the Council office to grab something for lunch. My lack of fitness was a concern when looking at five day 85km tramp that had a 1200m elevation gain over the first two days. Well, Sunday the 20th December was D-day, finishing Council emails at 1:26am and getting up at six to complete a few pre tramp chores not ideal. We set off with Joanne driving us through to the start at Lyell, woops we were at the Cross- Roads and Jo said, "do you think we've forgotten something?" Oh shit, my three tramping companions, Donny McLaren, John Marinovic and Peter Hawes were waiting at Carters Beach to be picked up. Well, by 10am we were all at the Lyell where there is an air of expectation as the helicopter lifts off with the cyclists heading off to Ghost Lake. Others are biking round in warm up preparation looking like colourful gazelles on the latest multi featured mountain bikes. There is a biking revolution going on with all types of suspension, hydraulic seats, electronic gear shifts, carbon fibre frames and fluoro attire.



We set off and from the first few metres travelling across the swing bridge we are struck by the beauty of the track. The track through to Lyell Saddle Hut is the 1880's horse and tray track that elevation is a steady 4 degrees. Just enough to know you are walking uphill but no problem to stretch out into a relaxing stride. A few cyclists pass us in very steady grind of mid to low gear and I'm pleased we are walking. This section of the track is steeped in history of gold mining settlements as they followed strikes of gold in the late 1800's. Remnants remain

beside the track including wagon wheels from the quartz rock wagons, stampers, anvils, kettles and old boots set amongst the absolutely stunning beauty of green moss in the beech forest.



After six hours and 18km we reach the Lyell Saddle Hut. It typifies the wonderful settings that each hut is placed to give outstanding views. The huts that we have booked (\$30.00 per night) are twelve bed huts and have two further four bed units in close proximity. Simple effective design with double glazing very comfortable and well equipped with cutlery, pots, pans and plates. A feature we note at the hut is the mouse traps on the wall? Clever mice or what? Out with the gas cooker and the first of our Back Country dehydrated meal backs and in no time we are tucked up and sleeping accompanied with Pete's raucous snoring.



Day two we leave early as we know the twelve kilometres has steeper elevation up to the ridgeline and a little more demanding on this very warm day. The historic track finishes and we are now on the new formed track of crushed shale, with sections corduroyed due to the mud base that has proved very challenging for the construction team that some days only made a few metres advance due to the trying conditions. We meet the first of the human goats that have worked tirelessly on the track for the past few years Rhys Bowen is on a motor bike and is one of the team starting as a volunteer, refusing to go home and ending up working for the Trust.

Rhys and all the workers and volunteers have a special “x” factor, being passionate and besotted with the mighty Ghost track. They have etched out of the mountainside this track with sheer determination, a few thousand explosives, perseverance and over 125,000 hours of toil, something so special for us to have the pleasure to enjoy. Up on the Lyell Range we look down into the valleys and appreciate the magnificent beech forests below that is looking very healthy.

Walking across the ridge you have a chance to check in with home, as mobile phone coverage is available.



The side ridge walk from Rocky Tor to Ghost Lake hut you wonder how cyclists have the gumption to weave around the cliff faced track, let alone the workers like Rhys riding a motor bike. How they picked the line and kept their nerve as they worked around the various rock faces is amazing. I love ridgeline walking and we pass Heaven's Door, The Tomb Stone and other inspiring features that only nature can carve. We arrive at Ghost Lake hut that is perched on a rocky knoll to overlook the small lake and Murchison Valley. Five bikers also arrive and we learn the mountain bike fanatical language of their equipment, puncture repairs and brake pad refits. Each hut has a selection of repair tools all set for the necessary adjustments that take place. We learn the reason for the mouse traps on the wall beside each bunk. This is where you place your booking sheet to indicate you have paid for the bed and facilities. One must remember that this is not a DOC track and maintenance is by the Mohikinui – Lyell Backcountry Trust although both DOC and Buller District Council contribute to the maintenance. As I walked the track I gave considerable thought to the power of Mother Nature and what havoc it may reek in the future but if you continued to worry about such eventualities you would not build anything.



On the third day we wake up to belts of heavy rain and very limited vision. Time is on our side as we are only going thirteen kilometres to Stern Valley hut and it's all downhill. We watch the cyclists take off and one forgets his small overnight backpack, only to return a short time later. These cyclists are very focussed and they need to be. A feature of the day is the staircase walk down a steep ridge and the rain lifts to provide misty valleys that provide another dimension to the trip. Stern Creek has

some intriguing rock formations that show the forces and power of the creek at times as boulders and shelves of stone provide photographers with stunning scenes to capture.

On the track we catch up with another two of the famed track builders, Paul Jennens and Aaron Harris with the 1.7 ton diggers and tracked haulers that have carted thousands of metres of gravel. These guys are infatuated with their work and rightfully very proud. We share Stern Valley Hut with them that is decked out as long term base, having fridge, gas stove and TV. Don't rely on these features as they move with the workers. I examine the consistent skill of the hut builders Art Corn and Dale Anderson as they stick to a hut model that appears to have Southern Carolina influence that has come with these two volunteers that have spent several weeks each year for the past five years building the huts in front of the track builders. An early start for the next 25 kilometres to Specimen Point hut proves to be a wise move as the day heats up. It is a day of striking change as you enter the Boneyard - a freak of nature where two tectonic events have imploded the valley sides filling the valley, leaving huge boulders scattered like a vast landscape of elephant's skeletons. Walking across what appears like a classier moraine that creates a series of lakes including the ironical Lake Cheerful; you look up at the zig-zag climb ahead that requires a few stops to suck in the air. Returning to the bush and the walk to Steve Stack's base camp prior to Goat Camp hut. Steve's hut has an external shower and very tempting to test it out. We branch off the track to catch up with Steve going for it, as he loads up the larger hauler wanting to get a few more loads before departing for his well-earned Xmas break. We have a small incident as Don walks on past us without anybody being aware. A little concerned until we pick up his footprints and stride out to catch up the thirty minutes we had spent chatting to Steve and then looking to establish where tail end Donny had gone too. It's a lovely walk down the south branch of the Mohikinui River. The many views down to the water allowing you can check its reputation of being a trout mecca. Mokihinui Forks hut is a welcome lunch spot and has excellent views back to the grassed flats that had an old landing strip. The three kilometres onto Specimen Hut allows stunning views of the gorge ahead. It is certainly a beautiful area. We are again in gold mining territory and the final day and seventeen kilometres out to Rough and Tumble lodge has a few relics in really good condition, pelting wheel, stamper and other solid pieces of cast iron that you have to wonder how they arrived there.



The section of bailie bridge that was part of the Karamea roadway collapsed into the river in the 1929 Inangahua earthquake. I'm amazed as how good a condition the segments are that lay in the river without any sign of rust.



The bench track that is 20m above the river is in very good order and I'm hoping Don is capturing the scenes on his camera. We have one 400m section with a steep climb but the rest is so enjoyable. All the way along the route markers indicate the kilometres and it is the final kilometre to Rough and Tumble that seems to stretch out but the warm welcome, beer and pizza provided by Weasel just cap off the best tramp ever. I've undertaken a good number of tramps throughout the South Island and The Old Ghost Road is the very best that I have been on. I don't like my chances biking from end to end but look forward to taking the helicopter to Ghost Lake and biking each way. The track has huge potential to be the iconic tramp and bike track in New Zealand.

I just hope that users will respect that facilities need their support and paying hut fees is essential. You don't need to be super fit to enjoy such a tramp. Our group's average age was 64 and it can be a walk in the park with the correct pack. I walked the track in treka sandals as boots not required at this time of year but strong soles essential.

I look forward to my next trip on The Old Ghost Road as it is a very special track that you can do a number of times and get different views on each trip.

Thank you Mohikinui – Lyell Backcountry Trust and all its supporters.

