

F3C3 2021 - Fossil Fuel Free Coast to Coast to Coast 19-25th February 2021

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The idea of the Fossil Fuel Free Coast to Coast to Coast (F3C3) is to have a fun holiday, 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. This is the fourth time we have made this journey, taking seven days to complete it. We learnt a few lessons from the puncture-plagued 2019 expedition and upgraded several of the tandem tyres to wider & more puncture resistant ones and took a floor pump along rather than mini-pumps. Steve Muir provided the kayak trailers (cycletrailers.co.nz) and multiple friends provided the tandem bikes. Seven people participated, with an eight having to pull out at the last minute for health reasons, which meant a single person towing the fourth kayak. Participants were Steven Muir & Meg Christie (on a 40 year old tandem), Sam Beaumont & Shar Mathias on a 25 year old Dawes tandem, Alastair Brown and Annette Richardson on a Cannondale tandem, and George on his touring bike. Age-wise, most of us were in our 50's or 60's except for Shar in her 20's.

Day one started at 12:30pm getting the gear together and picking up passengers from Beckenham, Hoonhay then Annette's house in West Melton (with a stop for refreshments) and continuing around 2:30 pm to bike to Springfield, arriving around 6pm for a delicious BBQ dinner and sleeping at a friend's house. The light wind and fine weather made the journey relatively easy.



Sam and Shar on the Dawes tandem



George on the single bike

Day two had the challenging grunt up Porters Pass, and it was hot and sunny resulting in lots of sweat even at nine in the morning. The ascent seemed to go relatively quickly and we mostly walked the steep bit right at the top and enjoyed the higher speed zoom down the other side. After a stop at Castle hill for a lunch break, Steve was ahead and poised waiting for a video shot while Meg dipped in Broken River, but after a fifteen minute delay they got news via a mountain biker that Sam and Shar had got a puncture. Alastair and Annette assisted with the tube replacement and biked by Steve saying all was well, but Sam and Shar still didn't show for the awaited video clip, so Steve went back to find the narrow-fit tube had failed a second time and Sam was somewhat fed up with repairs, so Steve assisted with a better sized tube and the floor pump to get a better pressure, which proved to be very successful. Without the high pressure it could have kept puncturing for the rest of the journey like 2019, so the bigger floor pump earnt it's keep for weight & space.



At the top of Porters Pass



Puncture repairs

We stopped off for a fantastically refreshing swim at Lake Pearson, but didn't get the kayaks out due to time delays with the puncture and a vigorous head wind which was slowing us down and roughing up the lake. The rest of the ride to Bealy Spur had some fantastic scenery and we had a second dip at Bruce Stream to freshen up before walking the gear up Bealy Spur to the bach and brewed up dinner which was very welcome.

On day three we dropped Meg, Alastair and Shar off at Greyneys Shelter for the walk over the Mingha – Deception. The journey took around nine hours with some swims and Blue Ducks being spotted along the way. Steve, Sam, Annette & George rode the tandems solo down Otira and enjoyed a siesta to rest the legs a bit and dropped the tandem and single bike at the Deception swing bridge for the walkers to get back to the Otira Bach. Some adjustments were made to the chain tension on the Cannondale tandem which had started throwing its front chain off. Fortunately this year we were prepared for this and the adjustments went smoothly, removing two chain links and shifting the offset bottom bracket back. Some spare time went into preparing some delicious food for the next two days which was greatly appreciated.



Day four involved a 133km bike to Kumara Beach and back with some great West Coast scenery on the way. There was very little wind on the way down and the Westerly sea breeze picked up after lunch to blow us home again which was perfect. The swim in the ocean was great and the blackberries were again in season so we picked a couple of containers full for our pudding that night. Legs were getting pretty tired on the way back but a satisfying day.



Kumara Beach

Day five Steve, Sam and Annette walked up the Deception Valley, starting early as there was the possibility of a lot of rain coming in later in the day. The walk went very well with cooler weather and after nine hours, found the bikes left at Greynerys shelter only 30 minutes before. The others had the challenge of hauling the tandems back up Otira which had some challenges trying to get seat heights adjusted correctly, and a very close overtake from a logging truck which was unpleasant.



For day six we had been watching the forecast very nervously as there were threats of torrential rain, flooded rivers and gale-force winds in the brew. Reality was the Westerly was vigorous but not gale-force, and the rain had stopped at Klondyke corner and the river was still very low, so we decided to go ahead with the kayak section. Having hauled the kayaks up there by bike, the incentive to get them in the river is very high. After an early start we biked to the Mt White Bridge. Steve, Meg, Annette and Sam were kayaking and George, Shar and Alastair were taking the gear around, George carrying the spare tandem clamped to the kayak trailer. The Westerly wind was a reasonably friendly tail wind for the top section of river, and we were surprised by how few times we got stuck with the low river flow. Steve hit a rock just before the gorge and opened up a 30cm spit in the bottom of his kayak, so had to stop and tape it up. The gorge section was going very well till the Horseshoe Bends where the wind gusts went crazy and blew Sam off the sharp bend at the end of the horseshoe and pinned him into the eddy, resulting in a big delay trying to extract himself. The others were all in front of Sam and realised he was not following and waited. After being hammered by the wind gusts they went a couple more corners down river to a more sheltered spot where Steve and Meg got out to stretch their legs and Annette waited in her kayak. Steve lay down by his kayak to rest with his arm resting on the edge of the cockpit, when a gust of wind picked it up (approx. 40kgs with kayak, gear and water) ripped it from Steves arm and threw it at high speed straight into Annette's face, resulting in a severe bleeding nose. A very stressful few minutes then passed wondering if Annette had broken anything (e.g neck, nose, facial bones), trying to stop

the profuse bleeding and administer first aid, trying to stop the kayak becoming airborne again and wondering if something worse had happened to Sam. Fortunately the bleeding stopped, Annette felt fine, Sam turned up, and the rest of the kayak was peaceful and very pleasant.





The bikers suffered similarly, mostly enjoying a helpful tail wind, but then being hammered by the turbulent wind going up to Porters Pass and blown off their bikes, George rolling sideways several times in a huge gust and Shar being blown across the road before dismounting and struggling to prevent the bike becoming airborne. Fortunately there were no injuries, and over the other side of the Pass it was back to a peaceful tail wind. They enjoyed a second lunch a Springfield and arrived at the Waimakariri Gorge Bridge around 3:30pm half an hour before the kayakers and enjoyed a swim in the river.

While reassembling the tandem it was discovered that a front wheel quick release skewer had fallen out on the journey, as had one of the bearings from Sam's kayak wheels. The bearing was miraculously located in the gravel on the road down to the bridge and Alastair heroically offered to bike into Oxford to pick up a replacement skewer from our host for the night who had a spare one in an e-bike that Steven had given him. While we were feeling smug about having rescued a situation where we may have had to resort to fossil fuel usage (to drive a skewer out to us), a police car rolled up and asked about the emergency locator beacon registered to Sam that had gone off. Somewhat confused Sam extracted the offending beacon from his waterlogged kayak and discovered it's "completely water proof" claims were not living up to expectations and it had indeed set itself off. A few seconds later the Westpac helicopter flew in and completely blew our fossil fuel free aspirations to pieces, but they were very understanding about the situation and after taking some details, flew back home again, not noticing Annette who still had blood all over her face and was trying not to attract unwanted attention.



The bike to Iain and Beth's house a few kilometres out of Oxford was relatively easy for those who had kayaked, but there were some quite tired legs among those who had biked all day.

On Day seven we felt refreshed after lots of good food & sleep, and Annette had almost no bruising visible from her smash in the face which was incredible. We had a relatively easy grind across the plains back to Christchurch and out to Waimairi Beach for another swim in slightly cooler weather, then returned home with all our gear.

Overall it was a really enjoyable journey. The days were manageable for people of average fitness and the company was good fun and the food on this trip was excellent. The level of risk seemed to be higher on this trip than on previous ones but we managed to avoid any major injuries which was a bonus. The talk of a pack raft version of the journey is progressing, where everyone rides single bikes which are put on the front of the pack raft and all participants raft down the river without the need to shuttle kayak trailers around. Bike shuttles would still be needed for the walk section which is manageable, but it could be a very interesting variation. Let Steve know if you are keen to join in for 2023 and there may also be a shorter version somewhere around Banks Peninsula in 2022.