

# First Timers Take On The 20k Challenge

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*Nelson's Nikki White kindly shared a diary account of her first Karapoti.*

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“Challenge” - What a great word for summing up the 20km alternative to the 50km Karapoti Classic, and to be honest it was exactly that. In August last year I booked my place for the Karapoti Challenge. I was determined to complete the race - it is just one of those events you must do in your life.

I knew I would not be fit enough for the 50km but the Karapoti team assured me the 20km was just as demanding, just less than half the distance.

To ready myself for the big day, March 3 2007, I did as much endurance and cross training as I could. Arriving at Karapoti at 8am in the morning it was a humming beehive of activity. There was a backlog of 4wd and station wagons finding parking; pretty much every known bike brand around; competitors talking up their abilities and what times they would be doing; and heaps of supporters and officials running around. It was super to see how many other Nelson riders had made the effort to get across the ditch. Great turn out!

After watching the Classic competitors leave the area it was time for a quick warm up and then head down to fight one's way to a good start position for the race.

The start area is in a river. What a blast. The Challenge is limited to 300 starters; standing in the water with your bike over your shoulder you can feel the anticipation of your fellow competitors, and as the countdown starts so does one's adrenaline. "3, 2, 1 go, go, go, go..." Yells the guy behind the mic. And clambering over rocks you attempt to run, praying you will not fall over as you feel a mountain bike tyre running up the back of your leg, and aware that there are over 300 people around, in front or behind you!

Once out of the water everyone quickly jumps on their bike and off up the scenic Karapoti Gorge to the turn off at the McGhie's Bridge. The condition of the track was good considering over 1000 competitors (the 50k Classic is limited to 1000 riders) had already been through! On approaching the bridge marshals gave directions and yelled support.

Off the bridge and uphill for 3k. There were parts that were reasonably steep and some competitors found walking them faster than cycling!

While making my way up the hill I met several competitors and it was motivating hearing the reasons why people loved the Karapoti race. For some it was their third time at the event! For others, like me, it was their first, and quite a lot of families were riding together too.

As the grind to the top started to come to an end the yahoos and screams of delight of some of the competitors could be heard as the 10km downhill section started. What a blast! I just could not stop smiling as I made my way past competitors, hoping my V-brakes would be okay. A super downhill section - quite steep in parts but completely rideable for an intermediate level rider.

Re-entering Karapoti Gorge we were met with lots of clapping cheering from the marshals, who also advised that riders in the 50k Classic would be coming along the track behind so to keep left. It was a fantastic last run; I jumped off my bike for the last river crossing and then rode the last section cheered by the crowds to the finish line. What an event! It felt great to be part of something with such great camaraderie.

Yes, I was in pain, but no crashes, great competitors all around, an amazing course and a superior team of marshals and organisers made for a great day I shall not forget in a hurry.

Will I be back? Of course... with a new bike (with disk brakes)... definitely! Hope to see you there.

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