

# Karapoti's Youngest Female Finisher

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At 13 years old, Wellington's Hannah Barnes became Karapoti's youngest ever female finisher.

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## In the Beginning

When first confronted with doing Karapoti, the immediate reaction was 'Isn't that the 50k one that is REALLY hard?' But after a little thought I figured that I am a sponsored rider now so I had to do something big, and it was ages away with yonks of time to train, so really I had no excuses. But the three months we had from Christmas to D-Day (Doom, Do or Die, and other daunting things like that) passed with amazing speed. One moment it was still two months away, the next it was only a week away.

## Training

I started my training, with a 20km circuit every other day, but in early January we did a pre-ride of Karapoti's Deadwood climb and I realised just how much more I needed to put in.

Dad and I decided that training rides from then on had to be minimum 25km, with the steepest 4WD at Makara Peak often incorporated. I got into the routine of riding this hard every second day. I was still racing track twice a week, and in between I'd take my younger brother and sister for an easy ride. Every week I would have a well-earned rest day, before getting stuck into another week of training.

I did a couple of 70km road rides with Dad too; over Haywards, and the Akatarawa Road too, to build up that essential endurance. We also went into Karapoti again, this time from the Maungakatukutuku Valley, down Big Ring and up Dopers and out at Karapoti Gorge. We did this ride with Bernie and Eden Cruise; Eden has become famous as the nine-year old boy who did the Karapoti Classic in 3:35 (also on a bike from Bike Barn).

## Along The Way

North Island Cross Country Champs: The weather was in a bad mood on 18th January, so racing on Mt Vic was an absolute mud-slide, particularly as much of the race was on the newly built downhill tracks. I finished with first place, a few more bruises and a very, very muddy bike!

The Akatarawa Attack: This was one of the main training events for Karapoti. Dad and I made up a team in the open mixed, just for the four hour option. We hadn't done any riding in the area before the event, so we set ourselves a guideline that we would go out for two hours collecting controls, and then we would turn back. We hugely over-estimated how long it would take to get back, but still managed to win our category and had a great day.

## D-Day - The Karapoti Classic

Looking out the window I was slightly horrified to find that the rain was pelting down in bucket loads. Much to my delight the rain eased during the drive there, but in a brief terrifying moment I thought I had left my race food at home, then found it with my other stuff and by the time we arrived the rain had almost stopped. But the damage had been done - the Karapoti 2009 was an epic.

Lining up waiting for the start hooter was one of the most nerve wracking moments of my life. Is it just me, or do they wait for a whole hour between each supposed "second" on the count down? Personally, I think it cruel to start with an icy cold river crossing, but then you have to either have a screw loose or be into self-harm to actually do Karapoti in the first place. So I guess it makes sense.

The first kilometre along the road is remembered for being the only part where I was not getting steadily covered in mud. The Deadwood climb was unrideable in a lot of places and by the time I finally got to the top to have my banana I stuck my hand in my pocket and found lots of yellow mush in the skin. After slurping this down I continued down the Rock Garden, which wasn't as bad as I had imagined thanks to a narrow ride-line that wove its way around the worst rocks and drops.

What to say about Devils Staircase? The name suits it well. But it was easier than I imagined, although still very energy draining. The huge clay steps were very slippery because of the recent rain and I fell over at least half a dozen times, so it was a relief getting to the top of Titi and the downhill on Big Ring Boulevard was really nice and enjoyable, though I passed lots of people who had crashes.

The Pram Track up Dopers Hill was agonisingly slow and painful. I was feeling the effect of the 35km covered and the false summits were endless. There are no words to express the massive relief when I finally reached the top. It was all downhill from here, all the hard bits were done. Or so I thought.

The hardest part of the whole race was the last river crossing. I was shaky with fatigue and all I wanted to do was collapse. The fast flowing river was much deeper than it appeared and even though I went through one of the shallower bits I was still up to my waist in the icy cold water. Just staying upright was a mission, but I managed to avoid being dunked in sight of the finish line.

As I rode to the finish I knew I had achieved something big. Later, stumbling back to the car, I knew that I had set out to do something and had done it. That was when the fatigue lifted and that gleeful feeling of knowing you have done something that will raise eyebrows settled in. On what had been the worst day and the very best day of my life, I had survived the Karapoti Classic.

## I Couldn't Have Done it Without You

A huge thank you to my sponsor, Bike Barn Wellington, for always fixing my bike quickly and for providing me with the gear I need to be competitive. Everyone in there is always really friendly and helpful. It also just feels really cool to say I'm a sponsored rider. To Gary Gibson, the PNP juniors track coach, you are one of the hardest working and devoted people I have ever had the pleasure to meet. Without all your encouraging support I wouldn't be where I am today. Peter Reynolds, thank you for your patience during the skills courses, you have taught me some essential skills that I wouldn't otherwise had the chance to learn. To all the people out there who said "Hi" to me, it's almost scary how many people know my name whom I barely know. It is always nice to feel people know who you are. Finally to my parents, Peter and Pauline Barnes, who never give up on me, even when I give up on myself. They are always there to work out new training routes and take my bike into the bike shop, not to mention the financial side of things.

Hannah Barnes

