

A Volunteer View

An anonymous insight from one of the 70 or so volunteers that make Karapoti happen.

They say Karapoti is the one race that every mountain biker wants to do. Well if you're not riding, it's also one of the best races in which to be a volunteer.

The day starts with the sparrows fart, but regardless of how early we kick-off the setup, there always seems to be only just enough time before the 1000-odd entrants start turning up. In short, there's never a dull moment. That is never more so at Karapoti, because with volunteers ranging from riders who can't race this year to spouses, community groups and even sponsors, many hands make light and humorous work.



My day started with directing cars into farm paddocks hired for car parking. The sun was shining and with drivers/riders eagerly anticipating the day ahead, the mood was light and the job enjoyable.

Just before the 10am start time the car park was declared full, so I jumped on my bike and hightailed it back to the park to get pics of the start.

The Karapoti start is a sight to see, with hundreds of riders sprinting across the river with bikes on shoulders and hundreds of spectators watching from the bridge beside the start line.

Once the race was started it was back into volunteer mode, taping off the approach to the finish, constructing the finish chute and organising a bridge across the ditch directly in front of the finish line.

The bridge is something of a Karapoti tradition; after 50km of the toughest mountain biking, riders have to risk life and limb getting across a 1m wide bridge that looked ready to topple into the deep ditch that it covers. Looks, however, can be deceiving and to my knowledge no one has ever broken said bridge or limb.

This year the bridge was held tight by a mixture of discarded timber, corrugated iron and carpet scavenged from the

neighbouring farmer's rubbish pile. An assortment of dirt and rocks held it in place and when we stood back to consider this masterpiece someone wondered aloud if the race shouldn't build a permanent structure. Perish the thought; such traditions are what Karapoti is all about.

When I've ridden Karapoti the four hours or so it takes me seems a long time. But when volunteering the time flies almost too quickly. No sooner had we got the area ready and the first finishers were coming back across the river and a volunteer's work is underway again.

The excitement never stops at Karapoti. When the first finisher approached we realised the tape across the chute keeping spectators out was still up. The winner was only about 10m away when cut the tape.



The finish area is a sort of organised mayhem as some keep spectators away from the finish area, others usher finishers through the chute, while still more hand out medals, lollies and drinks.

During all this there is always some small disaster to attend to. While clipping race numbers a competitor mentioned that the tape across the road section was down. So it was a run across the bridge to put the tape back across the road, then back to hand out more medals and drinks. Then someone mentioned a woman had driven her car into a ditch and was blocking the car park, but investigation revealed no woman and no car. Back handing out still more medals and another finisher announced the tape across the road was down again... etc, etc, etc.

During all this the good company and free food lightens the volunteer's load. The free t-shirt helps too. And with live music and some way out competitions like the "bike toss", there's always something to watch and someone to laugh with... And did I mention that volunteers get free entry the following year!