

Race Director's Rant - 2016

Nothing, they say, ever remains the same. But since 1986, the Karapoti Classic is one event that has remained true to its roots.

Whereas once there was just cross country and downhill, mountain biking today is as varied as the terrain we ride. Cross country and downhill don't even resemble what they were in the sport's founding years, and they've been joined by new generation genres and an increasingly cluttered event calendar. Enduro, trail riding, brevet, stage racing, relays, trials, pump track... you name it and you can race it.

As recently as 2011, the Karapoti Classic would sell out every year. But with so many options and events splitting and diluting the sport, that may now be a thing of the past. Karapoti, itself, however, is anything but a thing of the past.

Established in 1986, its stature as New Zealand's original mountain bike race remains intact, as does our commitment to the grass-roots, adventurous "mountain biking" that the sport was founded on. The famously rugged route itself - 50k of remote old-school trails with granny-ring climbs, river crossings, drops, mud and bike carry - remains unchanged since 1988. That means a participant this year can visit the history page at Karapoti.kiwi and compare themselves with almost every Kiwi who has ever raced a mountain bike.



But that doesn't mean that Karapoti shouldn't evolve. As the sport evolves we need to evolve with it, staying relevant without losing track of our roots. For example, there are riders out there today whose entire experience on a mountain bike is single track trails within custom mountain bike parks. That's not good or bad. It's just how it is, and that sort of rider wonders why all races aren't like Makara Peak, the Redwoods, Woodhill or Bottle Lake. So, the challenge for an old-school race like Karapoti is catering for that rider without undermining the adventure.



No, we're not going to shift Karapoti to Wainui Mountain Bike Park! But almost hidden in the Akatarawa's is existing single track that could be tied into Karapoti's traditional route from Karapoti Gorge around Deadwood Ridge, Devils Staircase and Dopers Hill. It might come to nothing, but it's worth a recce and a chat to Regional Council and other user groups, and then you, the riders. More than anything we'd like to know your thoughts.



As the sport evolves so too does the event calendar, and not always for the better. For more than 20 years, K-Day has been the first weekend in March. But recently the increasingly and ridiculously busy event calendar has been made worse for us by two high profile events shifting without warning to the first weekend in March. So in 2017 the Karapoti Classic will be held two weeks earlier, on February 18th.

We've not happy about it, and to some extent feel it has been forced on us. But as keen participants ourselves we know that people want the opportunity to ride all sorts of events, and that it makes no sense to have so many high profile events on one weekend. So after consulting other organisers, riders and MTBNZ, K-Day is now on the third weekend in February...

... And we look forward to seeing you all lining up for what is your only remaining link to the adventurous beginnings of our sport.