

2004 - The Year Summer Never Came

I think it was Mark Twain who said, “the coldest winter I ever spent was a summer in Wellington”. OK, maybe not, but a strange thing happened on the way to 2004’s 19th Karapoti Classic... It rained and it blew! And it rained and it blew some more. All summer in fact, and for organisers and entrants alike the end result was the toughest Karapoti ever.

Just two weeks before this year’s Karapoti there was no way we could have run the race. Wellington’s summer-that never-happened had turned the course into a maze of washed out tracks, fallen trees and major slips. The Gorge was cut off by several huge slips, there was a two metre drop before you even reached Deadwood, tree-falls made Deadwood Ridge more like the Grand National Steeplechase, the Rock Garden was a waterfall and Big Ring Boulevard was sporting a five metre wide and two metre deep hole that would engulf a 4WD vehicle let alone a mountain bike. A week after the worst storms our first recon ride took 7hrs!

Luckily for us the Wellington Regional Council and Upper Hutt City Council have always been huge supporters of the event. And nobody there blinked when they saw the amount of work to be done. In a normal year the Karapoti course needs a touch of trimming and bog drainage. Ordinarily it totals a days work; this year we spent two and half days clearing trees, but the councils spent close to a week on track maintenance and parts of the course were only cleared 24 hours before race day.

This drama continued right up until race day when with only 12 hours until the start a big slip came down across Karapoti Road, just 300m into the course. So when you guys and girls were carbo-loading and power napping - or whatever it is that endurance athletes do the night before a big race - the Upper Hutt City Council were working through the night so you could have a clear start.

All this and more is why we were once again blown away by the turn out come race day. Sure we had done everything possible to get the course ready and sure

we’d organised another great show complete with a great list of sponsors, the biggest ever prize pool and some superb television coverage. But frankly, we were a tad worried that the weather might have ruined your fitness and enthusiasm for a course that was promising to be the toughest ever.

But apparently you like it like that, because come race day we had a full field of 1000 riders standing on the Akatarawa River start line. So once again we have been reminded that the success behind New Zealand’s favourite mountain bike race revolves around your passion for the culture that is Karapoti.

Next year we celebrate the 20th Karapoti Classic and befitting of New Zealand’s longest running mountain bike event we’re lining up a weekend long celebration of that culture... and we’re counting on your continued passion to make the 20th the best Karapoti ever... See you there!

