

## 2010 - Repeat Offender - Alastair Rhodes

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In 1986 Alastair Rhodes was the eldest participant in the inaugural Karapoti. He was 43. In 2010 he completed his 23rd Karapoti, and found himself bemused at no longer being the eldest.

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My diary of 26 April, 1986 says, "Off road bike race, fell off a couple of times, came 18th, 3hrs 15min." There was a photo of the start in the newspaper. We had back packs, running shoes or rugby boots, motorcycle gloves, swandris and leg protectors. Not everyone had a mountain bike; some were on 10 speeds. There was even a BMX.

In the early 1980s I was into running. From the mid-80s I drifted into veteran road cycling, so an off road cycle race didn't seem too far removed. I hired an off road bike, as they were called back then, but I had never ridden off road and I doubt many of the riders had. It was a totally new experience introduced by the pioneering Kennett brothers.

The day was fine. I did quite well in the field of around 49 due more to my fitness than bike skills. It started at the Akatarawa Summit and was about 30kms. After prize giving I had to ride the bike, a Healing Mountain Cat, back to the summit for my car. When I got home I washed off the mud & returned the bike to the Tararua Outdoor Centre.

I didn't return until 1989, when I had my own mountain bike. Early on I met Peter Schmidt, who was also a starter in the inaugural Karapoti. Other familiar names were Brenda Clapp, Jenny Visser, Tom Clarkeson and Gordon Hyde from Happy Valley Cycles. My friend Kevin Stent and I had a friendly rivalry.

In 1991 I did 3hrs 57min 56secs. Inspired by this performance, the next year I trained harder and rode more aggressively and knocked a whole 13 seconds off. My son Fergus, aged 15, beat us all.

For me the mid-90's were the golden age of mountain biking, with Karapoti growing and Brent Hoy, who I caught up with at Karapoti a couple of years back, organising other events like the King of the Forest series and Ngamu

Challenge. Every weekend we loaded cars with bikes, our sons and their friends, and headed off to a race or epic ride.

Karapoti is never the same. Weather can make it dry & rough or wet & very slippery. In 1999 I slipped and fractured my left ankle & had to come out in Murray Feist's old Land Rover. Another year I won a watch for oldest participant. I had mixed feelings.

Since then some much older guys have turned in amazing efforts. But I keep coming back to be part of a great event. I am so pleased I was there at the start of it all.

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*Alastair Rhodes ripping it up in 2008*

