

Adventureland

Words & Pics: Fraser

The 2009 Yamaha Hanmer Springs Safari covered some amazing parts of the South Island while providing plenty of adventure along the way. The Ed was lucky enough to be one of the 150 participants to take part in this South Island Adventure...

My start to the Yamaha Hanmer Springs Safari was typical of me for any adventure including domestic air travel - I was late. This seems to be a recurring theme for me when flying within home airspace (something always comes up!) but luckily I made it to the airport gates on time (thanks to the new self

check-in system) to find Peter Payne from Yamaha New Zealand and two other motorcycling scribes waiting to board the flight to Christchurch.

Three hours after departing Auckland Airport, the four of us arrived at the picture postcard town of Hanmer Springs, and made our way to the Hanmer Heritage Hotel - the base for

this year's event. Yamaha banners adorned the front lawn and entrance of the hotel, riders were arriving by the minute and with the row of brand-new Yamaha WR250Rs lined up at the front door, my excitement levels were already starting to build and I hadn't even swung a leg over yet.

Although this is a Yamaha sponsored event, there's no rule stating you can only ride a Yamaha and the range of bikes parked up around the hotel grounds by dinner time was as impressive as it was diverse. There were 150 riders on this year's event and the mix of machinery shows there's no real set rule when it comes to what constitutes an adventure bike – there were Yamaha TTRs, WR250 and 450s, XT660s and Teneres, KTMs from 250cc to 990cc, Suzuki DRs, BMW 1200 and 800 GS models, a Xchallenge, a HP2, and even a Kawasaki Z750 with knobby tyres fitted.

Proud History

New Zealand has a reputation for having some of the best motorcycling roads in the world, and of course some of the finest scenery on the planet to boot. We're also very fortunate in that we have some very kind land-owners giving NZ motorcyclists one of the biggest playgrounds and arguably

the best land access on the planet. This combined with the inherent Kiwi sense of adventure has seen not only our off-road and trail riding markets remain strong, it's helped the adventure riding market expand steadily over the last few years and events like the Yamaha Safari become a 'must do' on many riders' calendars.

"What exactly is a Safari" all you leather-bound sportsbike may riders ask? Contrary to what you may think, it's not a big trail ride on big dual-purpose bikes but a navigated ride (360 – 410km each day) on a mixture of gravel roads, 4x4 tracks, trails and sealed roads. The bulk of the course is hard based off-road and gravel roads designed to be rideable wet or dry on any capacity dual-purpose bike (or a knobby-tyred Z750 like Des Trubshoe). Many experienced riders often ride with passengers and this year was

no exception with nine pillars attending. Additional to the base route are optional trail extensions for the more experienced riders. There are no guides to show you the way, navigation is via a strip rolling route sheet, which provides detailed instructions for each part of the route. Therefore a rolling route sheet holder is essential (ours were of the Click Clack lunchbox variety) and most riders had one mounted to the left-hand-side of their handlebars. Route sheets are supplied at riders' briefing (held daily) the night before each ride and come in an A4 format that is designed to be cut into 60mm strips and rolled into your holder. This daily task took a wee while, but gave many riders the chance to swap tales of the day's adventure over a beer or two while paper, sellotape and scissors worked furiously.



Route sheet holder



The Britton Adventures crew: Mike Britton, Angela Bruce (Daughter), Ngahuia (Son), Mikaere, Dave 'Racing Dave' Britten, John Sinclair, Jevon McSkimming and Bruce Allen.



Day One

With an excess of 350km to be covered each day an early start is essential to make sure all the bikes make it from start to finish with plenty of time to spare, so breakfast starts at 6.00am and riders are encouraged to be ready to roll by 7.30am and out the gate no later than 7.50am, when the sweep riders leave. Day one saw us head east and into the Marlborough countryside towards Waiatu. Just over 8km in and we came upon the Hanmer River crossing, which had been washed away during the winter storms. This meant we had to follow the river bed to find the crossing point, after which we were off-road proper, climbing up the hills of a typical South Island farm. The off-road terrain wasn't a problem for me on the WR250R I was riding, but guys on the bigger adventure and dual-purpose bikes had to take it a bit easier. One chap on a R1200GS reinforced the adage 'you go where you look', when on said trail he had a small front wheel washout. He managed to recover it, but as he did, he looked



down the gully and that's exactly where he and his Beemer ended up – upside down. Help wasn't far off fortunately and many helping hands saw him and his bike on their way again.

With 75km showing on the odometer it was in to Cheviot for our first fuel stop and a quick coffee. From there we headed on through the beautiful Gore Bay and onto Port Robinson and Hurunui Mouth before heading via the Blythe Valley and Scargill to Waikari for our second fuel stop about 90km later. I locked in the tank of the WR and it appeared to be half full at least, so I decided to flag fuel stop number two

as the next stop was apparently 100km away and I reckoned I'd be sweet.

Lunch was held at the Hawarden Rugby club, which consisted of a buffet of good Kiwi tucker. Loaded up with carbs and fluids, after lunch it was back on the road and to the first of the trail options. I was really looking forward to the trail options as trail riding is high my list of favourite things to do, however 12km out from lunch and my fuel light came on! I had to flag the first option (which was closed by the landowner for some reason) and spent the next half an hour gently on and off the throttle while keeping an eye on the trip meter stating how many kays I'd travelled since eating into the reserve fuel. I had just passed the 56km mark and was on the outskirts of the mid-afternoon fuel stop (at Harwaden) when the WR began to cough and splutter. I frantically began shaking the bike from side-to-side in a vain attempt to get gas over to the fuel pick-up, which seemed to work a couple of times. I had just hit the 50kph sign on the edge of town when the 250 farted its last bit of petrol through the injectors and the engine died. Fortunately I had enough momentum to coast to the petrol station forecourt, much to my relief. Adventure riding lesson one learned – always fuel up when advised, even if you think you've got enough gas!

After Hawarden we travelled on the tarseal for just under 60km, heading through Culverdon on the way, before getting back to the first part of the day's route, which we ran in reverse back to Hanmer. Arriving back at the hotel just before 5.00pm showed 360km on the clock. Our first day was a great introduction to the Safari and the WR250R, which I was really starting to appreciate as a serious little tool. With sign on completed, day two's route sheet installed in the holder and the dust washed from places I didn't know you could get dust into, it was off to dinner for a massive feed and the riders' briefing for day two.

Day Two

Unlike yesterday we were not to receive a ride map for days two and three, only our route sheets, due to the landowners



not wanting people coming back uninvited – fair enough. With riders allowed to leave a little earlier, when I rolled past the hotel's main entrance at 7.20am, it was deserted and clear that many riders had taken the opportunity to get away sharpish. Those that did would've certainly avoided being in the mob and therefore avoided a fair bit of dust. Today's route was marked out by John Sinclair and consisted of a ride through the mighty Molesworth Station, out to Blackbirch for lunch and back again. If you haven't seen the Molesworth Station, you really are missing out on some prime Godzone real estate. Fine gravel roads cover the bulk of it and they are in great condition, making it accessible for a wide range of bikes. The other standout feature of the Marlborough high country was the flora. Due to a relatively wet spring, Blue Borridge (Vipers buglass) flowers had gone off and carpeted much of the rolling landscape, looking spectacular in the process. You also get up to some impressive elevations, like Wards Pass which is 4000 feet above sea level. As our route for today didn't pass any petrol stations, the organisers had arranged for two fuel tankers to be on the route for refilling and the first of these was about 85km into the ride at Cob House. After refuelling it was onwards and upwards – quite literally. Option time meant those with the skill and desire could tackle the Muller Station, where the trail option includes boulders, creeks, single track and lots of steep up and downhill sections – magic! After crossing the Tone River it was up, up, up and away. The climb to this vantage point was so much fun and the view of the inland Kaikouras and Mount Tapaeunuku was simply stunning. At 10,000 feet 'Tappy' is the highest mountain outside the Southern Alps and Sir Ed Hilary used it for training.

THE BIKE WE RODE – YAMAHA WR250R

Last Year's Omarama Safari also served as the launch of the Yamaha WR250R Supertrail, so it was no surprise that the boys in blue had lined up a fleet of these little bikes for the journo in attendance.

This was my first ride on the WR and I was mighty impressed with the little bike that mixes competition performance with everyday convenience. Its lightweight characteristics on and off road, good acceleration and throttle response, decent brakes and twelve-grand price tag make it a bargain buy for me. Comfort-wise the WR is good, especially in the seated position, but being 6'3" it was a little cramped when standing, but nothing a higher bend bar and a riser kit wouldn't fix.

Another standout feature of the 250cc liquid-cooled four-stroke DOHC four-valve engine is the 10,000km service and 40,000km valve service intervals. This is unheard of for a run-of-the-mill four-stroke enduro or trail bike.

Sure it's borrowed looks, style and components from other bikes in the Yamaha range, but the Supertrail is a bike in a class of its own. The power is ample from just above bottom of the rev range all the way up to max power output, which tops at 10 grand and makes for a fun ride. A good amount of usable torque also comes on somewhere around 3-4000rpm and when you're in the meat of it, the WR is like a mountain goat. Traversing over rough ground is a cinch thanks to the smooth fuel injection which has no nasty surges and the traction available even on loose gravel and farm trails is impressive.

While the WR sports a six-speed box, you had to be onto it when selecting gears on tight switch backs and rocky terrain, where first gear was a little short and second was a bit long to have you in that awesome torque range. Gearing it down a little, perhaps two more teeth on the back would certainly benefit those owners with a penchant for more serious off-roading, but obviously this will be at the expense of top speed.



Fraser atop the Muller Station with the Inland Kaikouras in the background

YOU & YOUR BIKE

The organisers have no control over the weather and due to the time of year the Safari is held it is likely to be warm or even hot (like this year), so it pays to take the correct riding gear. Some parts of the adventure route go to higher elevations which are cold if it's wet and can be a bit chilly even if it's fine. Layers are best; merino thermals against the skin, plus wind and waterproof pants and jacket. Strong motorcycle boots, or at least calf length strong leather boots, are mandatory. You will also need light and warm gloves and good goggles or visor - if the weather is dry it will be very dusty (Scott Desert goggles are the duck's nuts for dusty conditions). You will need a small backpack, to carry spare clothing, drink, snacks etc. The best type is one with a drink bladder built in. Cell phones are a good safety item - put in a waterproof bag, but coverage can be sporadic.

As per the organisers recommendation, I wore ear plugs for the duration, applied lots of sun block, and kept well hydrated with my Fox hydra pack, which also carried my fire extinguisher (300 gm extinguisher is mandatory for all riders).

It goes without saying that your bike must be in good working order and have a current WOF and rego. Also useful is a fully operational speedo and odometer to keep you on the right route. A rolling route sheet holder is another must as you don't want to be pulling bits of A4 paper out every few kays to make sure you're on the right track. Other points of note include having a good chain and sprockets, suitable tyres in condition and run at the correct pressures, carry spares and tools (including tubes front and rear, tyre levers, puncture repair kit, chain link, spare sparkplug, brake and clutch levers, chain lube, and axle tools) should you need to repair a flat.

No fuel is permitted to be carried outside of the fuel tank - no exceptions due to high fire risk, so it pays to know the fuel range of your bike. Maximum distances between fuel stops vary between 100km and 128km over the three days and you'll need cash - denominations of \$10.00, \$ 5.00, \$2.00 and \$1.00 are best.

The ride down to the Winterton River was just as fun as our previous ascent and flying along the torquise blue river's edge was a real highlight for me - it was mind blowingly beautiful. Blackbirch - a 5500 feet climb could be done before or after lunch depending on how one was going for time and those who went loved it. Lunch was courtesy of Ron and Sue Small of Blackbirch Station who've allowed bikes access on their land for many years and the proceeds from lunch were going towards a defibrillator for their neighbour.

After our much need vitals it was back the way we came, well almost, the second trail option of the day the Upcot Saddle was about 40 kays in. The climb up the 5300 feet moun-

tain was the steepest encountered thus far and while not suitable for pillions, was a real hit with the more experienced riders and the view was again breathtaking. Back through the Molesworth saw us refuel again at Cob House before the final 85km stretch. It was on this stretch where I was riding on my own, truly feeling like I was in the middle of nowhere, when I came upon a small herd of horses crossing the road. Half of them crossed as I approached while the other half waited for me to pass, at a sedate 30kph or so. I was so impressed by these fine looking animals and thinking of how they would've been the main form of transport in this area for many years,

The Blue Borridge carpeted Molesworth Station was a real highlight



The Putaruru Posse aka R & R Racing - Dan Shaw (Spanky), Duncan (no gates), Bluck (sideshow Bob), Jamie Dover (DDRSR - Dover, Dover, Root, Slide, Rover). Tee-shirts courtesy of Jamie's wife, Tania.



that I made adventure riding gumbly mistake number two and ran off the side of the road into a ditch. Luckily I was able to recover and get back on the road without falling off and more importantly with no witnesses!

Day Three

After another great meal and plentiful liquid refreshments, rising at 6.00am was a bit harder on day three, the body starting to show signs of wear after two full days in the saddle. It was looking like another fine day and that was all the motivation needed to gear up and hit the road at 7.15am. Today's route would take us to the other side of the Molesworth and out towards the Rainbow Station and on to the Nelson Lakes area and back again. The organisers advice on wearing layers was welcomed here as the mist hugging the bottom of the hills was pretty cold until the sun burnt it off, but when it did clear blue skies were upon us. To say the scenery through the likes of Isolated Sad-

Aussie journo Tom Foster shows us how it's done



ple was impressive is doing this area an injustice, again I was blown away by the rugged beauty of our country. The ride through the Rainbow Ski field area enroute to St Arnaud was one that will stay with me for a long time. The trails and gravel roads in and out of the native beech trees were amazing, and the 30-odd kays of tarmac before emerging on SH6 was one of the best I've ever encountered. Had the WR been wearing road rims and tyres it would've been supermotard heaven.

After refuelling at St Arnaud it was onto Lake Rotoroa via the Prika Track. This trail had lots of little technical sections to keep you on your

toes and the view of the lake as we descended the other side of the track was once again, picture postcard. The only downside of this fantastic area was the sandflies. Never have I seen sand flies this big or vicious, so it was a very quick stop at the lakeside before hitting another trail option at Nuggety Creek. Again this was another great section of the ride over farmland and I was revelling in the hot sun aboard the WR. At the end of this option we crossed the Buller River on our way to Murchison for lunch at the local rugby clubrooms.

Another big hearty lunch in us, we headed in the direction of the Owen River and up Mount Murchison for

another spectacular vista. This was a tricky hill up and down with lots of course gravel to keep you honest and the speed for the two-way traffic down. From Mount Murchison it was back through St Arnaud for the last fuel stop of the day and time to tackle the fabulous Rainbow Station in reverse. As we came back on to the Molesworth and then back down in to Hanmer Springs for the final time, I was relieved the 413km day was over, but also a wee bit sad that the Safari was drawing to a close. If I had my way, I'd have kept exploring this wonderful region till I'd seen it all.

Our final dinner was another feast fit for kings and the atmosphere buzzed with camaraderie and a small sense of achievement. This truly is a fantastic event and a credit to both the Britton Adventures crew and Yamaha Motor NZ. I had a brilliant three days and felt privileged to have seen some of the South Island's hidden gems. Next year's Safari is rumoured to be in the East Cape, and if Mike Britton can swing it, the lucky attendees will have access to land never before allowed to the general public, so it should be another cracking event. Watch this space. **BRM**

SAFARI STATS

- This is the second Safari Mike and Ange have done. The event received great feedback from the participants and the residents of Hanmer Springs - which is great for the public image of adventure riding.
- There were 150 bikes on this year's event (up from the previous max of 125), including 9 pillion and three crew riders on the go each of the three days. Plus there's the support crew in the van and at fuelling stations on day two.
- Cost per person - \$1250 including accommodation at the Heritage Hanmer, \$925 excluding accommodation, but includes meals etc.
- Additional cost - Petrol - we spent \$100.00 on a 250cc bike and that doesn't include fuel to and from the event.
- Bookings for next year will be starting asap
- Britton Adventures are running two Vietnam trips this year and two Bali trips. For more info on these trips and the 2010 Safari, visit www.adventurerides.co.nz, or call Mike or Angela on 07 855 6132, 021 284 9047