

Could Southland pitch a better day...I think not.

It was with some trepidation that I entered the inaugural Hokonui Moonshine ride in March this year. Being a novice to mountain biking, let alone racing, and with a little knowledge on the Hokonui's from past hunting experience's, I was slightly nervous to say the least.

Any such trepidation was quickly washed away with the early morning mist that my cycling mate, Bill Cook, and I broke through at Riversdale at 7.30 am where a startling Southland day greeted us as we pulled into the domain.

Having driven through from Queenstown we were now privy to some of the course that we would be cycling on driving through from Mandivale, and it looked great! The course that was laid out for the 300 plus cyclists proved to be quite challenging, but spectacular in every respect. Lots of short hill climbs that were followed by great little downhill runs. Running largely through rolling farm land with some tussock tops, the track varied from well groomed farm roads to narrow tussock sheep trails.

Two flat tyres put a bit of a dent in my final time across the line but I was pleased, but for the fact that I was beaten by Bill. There was the added hill climb up Ships Cone towards the end of the race, that was optional to all competitors, but some how the scenery to my left distracted my attention to the Marshal's at the right encouraging people to attempt this rather steep grunt.

The Gore district did not only turn on a stunning day, but also fantastic local support for what, I am sure, will become a successful annual event. For us the day was just beginning, although the race had finished. With a number of other Queenstown folk we decided to pop into Gore and check out the Moonshine Festival before the prize giving at 6.00 PM. This proved to be an excellent choice. With a light cover charge we experienced an assortment of delicious foods and wines, at great prices. The entertainment was fantastic, and all in all a great afternoon was had by all.

After prize giving the drive home was spent reflecting on what a fantastic day Southland and the Gore district had turned on for us. The highlight being the race through the Hokonui hills. I for one will be back next year, this time with tubeless tyres, and a mission to better my time, and just maybe have a crack at Ships Cone.

Beau Rapley