

# Dean Johnson – Molesworth 2010

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## *The race that wasn't*

In 2007 I convinced my mate, L, to do the Molesworth Muster with me. At the finish line, he collapsed flat on his back and said "That's the hardest thing I've done in my life. I will NEVER do that again."

After the first beer, he started talking about getting a better bike to do it the following year. The race is like that – it gets to you.

The Molesworth Muster is an 80 kilometre mountain bike race. It is unique in that you drive to the start line and camp at the Molesworth Station the night before the race. In the morning, the drivers travel out to Hanmer before the riders. The cyclists then ride the 80km shingle road to Hanmer, finishing with a screaming descent down from Jollies Pass.

So there we were again in 2008, both with our new full-suspension mountain bikes. And we did alright, taking about an hour of our times.

That was enough for me. I thought I'd got it out of my system. I'd done it a few years earlier, so that was my third time. We took a break in 2009 and I wasn't planning to do it this year, but L turned the tables and talked me into it.



Five days out from the race the weather forecast was perfect. Four days out it started to deteriorate. It got progressively worse and on the day before the race the forecast was for howling Southerlies, including snow. Oh well, the course is an area that's often sheltered from the prevailing weather. L, his mate J and I loaded up and drove to Hanmer, where we met our driver (my Dad). We headed over Jacks Pass, into the Clarence Valley, then up the Archeron. The weather was threatening, but we remained optimistic. The optimism appeared justified, too, as the weather all around was clearly worse than in the Archeron Valley, which is where the bulk of the course is. The race start and camp site, at Molesworth Station, is just over Ward Pass, in the Awatere Valley. The weather was noticeably worse here. And so we convinced ourselves that while it would be a cold and miserable start on race day, we would soon be over Ward Pass and into the glorious, crisp sunshine of the Awatere.

We set about putting up camp as the weather continued to worsen. It was raining and sleeting and it started to snow. We three hardy athletes were rugged up in our multiple layers of polypropylene, polar fleece and Goretex. And there was my 73 year old Dad in short pants and flip-flops. We spent the evening huddled around the portable BBQ, "carbo-loading" on bangers and bread and telling lies. Dad eventually relented and put on long trousers.



The last message from the race organisers that evening was full of encouragement for the next day – Don't get up early. Stay in bed, we will come around and let you know.

So we woke the next day to a loud hailer informing us a decision would be made in about an hour.

At 8:00 am the news wasn't good. It was about zero degrees at the campsite, minus five degrees on Ward Pass and on the other side the wind chill factor made an effective temperature of minus ten degrees. Oh Joy.

So the word was out – it was to be an abbreviated race. Of the 80 kilometres, we would drive 60 kilometres back to the Archeron / Clarence confluence and ride the final 20 km into Hanmer. We would still get to do the flying descent of Jollies Pass, but in sub-zero temperatures with added mud.

Oh joy, oh joy, oh joy.

So we broke camp, loaded up, put the bikes back on the car and joined the enormous convoy snaking its way through the rain and snow and mud at not much more than riding speed.

Arriving at the alternative start point, we were still quietly hopeful of riding. It looked like it might just be clearing. Maybe.

It was getting on for midday and someone in the crowd opened a beer. Someone else gave him a hard time about doing the ride after drinking beer. “It’s alright” shouted his mate. “He’s the driver”. Indeed.

Another hour of waiting around and the message came through the loudhailer. The weather wasn’t going to improve. There would be no riding.

In my opinion, it was the right call. Some of us – most of us – would have been fine. But enough people would have got into trouble and the race organiser had no choice. Good decision.

But damn, damn, damn. This was going to be my last Muster. Now I might feel obliged to come back in 2011.