

Christchurch – Nelson- Blenheim – Christchurch in a long weekend... Sam's Mission!!

Well, a good learning experience - but the full Christchurch to Nelson and back wasn't to be this weekend. Next time...

Planned to perfection by deciding to do the ride a few days before and buying the bits I thought I was missing the day before. Hah.

I started by figuring what I needed, then chucking out anything not absolutely essential. Camera was out, as it's big and heavy, and would need a cover to be water/shock proof. Sunglasses were OK, but their case wouldn't fit - I had to be pretty brutal to fit everything.

In the end I fit a lot into a kayaking dry-bag, which I put on a small rack I bought for over the rear wheel. Everything else fit into my camelback, or the food bag on the bike. I had a 3L bladder in the camelback and 2 bottles on the frame.

Gear included thermals, wet weather gear (which the weather said I'd need), a bit of first aid gear, wallet and cellphone. Along with the standard tools, tubes, a spare tire, batteries etc. Enough reflector strips to look like a geek and enough headlamp power (care of a Night Lightning kit) to make cars dip their lights. Sorted.

The first day I got up and headed out just after 6am before sunrise, so I'd maximise sunlight hours. The weather was sunny, with a very light headwind breeze. I hadn't gotten much sleep the night before, so wound up feeling a bit sleepy the whole day, which wasn't a good sign.

As I started up the Lewis Pass I got my first puncture, and found that one of the two spare tubes I'd packed had a manufacturing defect which left it with a rather large hole. So I actually had only a single spare - which didn't exactly delight me. I also got somewhat eaten while changing the tube, so three lessons learnt:

- double-check that everything you take is actually going to function (regardless of if it's new)
- two spare tubes isn't enough for a really long mission on public holidays when bike stores will be closed
- take some insect repellent

The sun was setting as I went down the other side of the pass and past Maruia Springs. As I was expecting heavy rain that night, had no spare tubes, and was still feeling sleepy so I decided I'd find a room in Springs Junction and get some sleep. I was pretty tired and had found the day pretty lonely, so was actually considering turning around - I always seem to find the early stages of long trips to be the hardest for some reason.

The second day I realized that there was no chance I could get to a bike store in any city during hours it'd be open, so I'd just have to be very careful with puncture repairs. I also decided that I wanted to at the least make it to Nelson, so I'd keep going and see how things went at the end of the day. I woke to heavy rain, so my bags were light as I put all the wet gear on.

The trip to Nelson was probably the most painful day. I started feeling reasonably fresh, but it didn't take long before things started hurting, even on the flats around Murchison. The rain was pretty steady all day - my wet gear (shoe covers, over trousers, and 2 waterproof jacket layers) got a thorough workout! The Hope saddle hurt a fair bit, and the Spooner saddle was worse. None of the normally excellent views to be enjoyed due to the rain, so I only stopped for one flat.

I made it to Nelson quite late, and oddly the most painful bit of the day was one of the cycle lane bridges over the main road. Super-steep grades were not what my legs wanted, even in small doses. I eventually found a room to share in a backpackers - you know it's packed when the backpackers are full.

I was a bit slack and slept a bit much that night - you know you've mucked up when the sun beats you up. I started in light rain, and was expecting the hills out of Nelson to be really bad - but they're actually really well graded, so I picked up and started enjoying the ride. The rain only got heavier though - the Rai valley was a big brown flooded torrent, and the township had lost power.

The rain finally eased by Blenheim, and I even got to see a few of the warbirds flying overhead. I caught onto the wheel of one of the local roadies out for a ride to Sefton and back, although he dropped me up a hill when I realised my 4 layers were way too much for going that hard. A bit down the road I caught another puncture and he was awesome enough to flick me a spare tube on his way back to Blenheim. Cheers to that man!

It turned out to be pretty important as I caught another flat just at Sefton and wound up using that tube. Despite trying to be extra careful I had another flat about 5k out from Ward (my bad, pinched tube). I was actually feeling pretty good that evening, but all the flats had burnt far too many hours, so I decided to stay at Ward rather than peddle through the night to try and make Kaikoura.

The rain returned with a vengeance for the final day, and a southerly change made for a strong headwind. Combined with me running out of repairable tubes, it put ChCh out of the question (had work the next day), so I rode down towards Kaikoura then got a ride the last 180k or so to town.

Day 1: 214k, day 2: 214k, day 3: 162k, day 4: 53k

<http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF&msa=0&msid=211014584721928566932.0004a1b6cac8b1ed7e697>

So I'm going to have to have another crack at that one!

Things to sort for next time:

- MORE INNER TUBES
- more durable bag or box for the rear rack
- waterproof, durable camera
- second rear light - just in case...

Hope you're keeping well, I'm back to eating lots and resting again for a week :D