

Destination: KARAMEA

Heaphy Track Mountain Biking

Starting May 1, 2011 the world-famous Heaphy Track will be opened for mountain biking for the 5 winter months of **May, June, July, August and September**. Generally, Heaphy Track travellers prefer starting in Golden bay and arriving in Karamea (northern Buller District, West Coast) for their R & R. Karamea tourism businesses are gearing up for this new influx of intrepid tourists soon to arrive in their community.

A bit of history surrounding this tourism activity:

Kevin Hague (New Zealand MP and keen mountain biker) reviewed mountain biking as the fastest growing sporting activity in New Zealand and detailed the government's long-range plan to continue developing a national network of biking tracks. Presently there are more bicycles being sold in New Zealand than cars, and bikes outnumber cars.

Kevin also explained that the Heaphy had been 'dual use' (trampers and bikers) for decades, until 1996. Prior to 1996 statistics indicate that there were more bikers than trampers crossing the Heaphy Track.

He profiled mountain bikers as being of all ages but mostly between 35 and 55. Mountain bikers are almost equally split between the genders, and families with kids being a significant part of the mountain biking community. Mountain Bikers are young and old, rich and poor, mostly fit and healthy and their bikes/gear are expensive.

There are mainly two 'styles' of mountain biking:

- 1) extreme action, downhill, thrill seekers
- 2) more relaxed cross-country bikers.

Heaphy Bikers would be made up of the latter group.

Cross country riders are a lot like trampers. They integrate with and have a strong appreciation for the natural world and the flora and fauna. They like to 'take in' the experience and the scenery. Many of these mountain bikers are also avid trampers, pursuing both activities in their spare time.

The Heaphy will be the premiere Bike track in the country, says Kevin, due to many unique features. It's natural, wide-ranging forested beauty is unrivalled compared to other tracks. It offers a medium challenge which only requires low to mid-level technical skills from riders, and it will be the only two day ride of any National Park track in the country. This fact (2 day ride) offers an endurance experience that will be attractive to a majority of bicyclists. And, the fact that the Heaphy was once a mountain biking track means that many older bikers from the 90's will be returning to once again enjoy this riding experience. **Already the hut bookings are filling up for the winter trial months. It is said that the Heaphy Track will be known as the 'best back country ride' in New Zealand.**

Riders will plan their Heaphy Biking experience in at least four ways.

- 1) start in Golden Bay and bike 2 days to Kohaihai, stay in Karamea, then use shuttle service to return to their cars
- 2) start in Karamea and bike 2 days to Golden Bay, stay there, then use a shuttle service to return to their cars
- 3) groups start from both ends and hand off their car keys to each other mid-way, driving home in swapped cars
- 4) groups come to Karamea then helicopter to other end of Heaphy (Brown Hut) and bike back to their cars here.

Websites to visit to find accommodation and information relating to staying in Karamea are:

- www.westcoastnz.com
- www.karameainfo.co.nz