



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: A tippie of whiskey celebrates the end of the ride in Oamaru's Victorian Precinct; cyclists follow the trail through the Rakis tunnel on the disused Windsor/Tokarahi railway line; gracious B&B accommodation is offered in the Burnside Homestead and backpackers' facilities in the old coach house.

NOTEBOOK

Costs: There are no fees for using the A2O cycle trail.

Daily bike hire: \$45 for entry-level bikes, \$80-\$90 for high-end mountain bikes and from \$100 per day for electric bikes.

The helicopter ride over the Tasman River costs \$120 a head, minimum two. Some cyclists are entirely self-sufficient while others engage a tour operator for a fully guided and managed tour. Other operators offer everything from simple cycle hire to the full service excluding a personal guide. Prices vary accordingly.

How to get there: Most tour operators provide a shuttle service between Christchurch, Dunedin and/or Queenstown airports and

the designated A2O starting point. It takes 3-4 hours to drive to Mt Cook from any of these centres and there are daily bus services to Mt Cook from Christchurch, Queenstown and Twizel.

What to take: Well-padded bike pants. No matter what time of the year, several thermal tops and leggings – items that can be easily added or taken off – also cotton t-shirts for those 30°C+ days in summer plus a lightweight rain jacket. Insect repellent and lip balm, Vaseline or pawpaw ointment for the saddle chafing. If you are on a guided tour, pack at least one après-bike outfit for casually elegant dining.

For more information: alps2ocean.com



Riding in the van for much of the time is always an option. In that context, I rode an electric bike when I rode at all. You could tell it was an e-bike because everyone who trialled it would set their faces in a broad grin and go “Eeeeeeeeeee” for the first few metres until they became used to the sensation of being borne along with only the slightest effort on their part. I had a splendid sense of achievement in pedalling at 17.5kph in a stiff head wind. The e-bikes are being trialled by several tour operators because they suit the needs of less seasoned cyclists.

However, the experience of riding the A2O is about much more than biking and taking in the views. That was the consensus we reached on the last night of the trip, as we shared a meal at Oamaru's multi-award-winning restaurant Riverstone Kitchen. There's great pleasure in getting to know fellow travellers but most particularly in being exposed to so many different Kiwi ways of life in just a few days.

When we stayed in the shearers' quarters at Braemar Station, we sat around the open fire in the evening talking with the owners, Julia and Hamish Mackenzie, about schooling options for kids in an area that is still relatively isolated. The following night most of us enjoyed a few post-prandial whiskeys in the pleasantly worn lounge of the Lake Oahu Lodge with hosts Mike and Louise Neilson (in A2O parlance this is known as 'getting Ohaued') while teasing out details of the potential offered by the trail to the local community.

We ate like royalty in the ultra-modern private holiday home where we stayed in Otematata, the meal being catered by a chef from Fleurs Place in Moeraki. And we spent an evening of grace and elegance with Bruce and Alison Albiston in their 1870s Burnside Homestead in the Waiareka Valley.

Most of these people have lived in the area for 40 years or more and every one of them marvelled at the increase in business they've seen since the A2O opened in the summer of 2012. You could call it a cycle-trail led recovery in the local economy.