

Saddle up for Paradise ride

Cyclists burn gourmet calories on a pedal into heavenly countryside, writes **Pamela Wade**

Three days cycling around Lake Wakatipu? That sounded like work, so I bookended the expedition with self-indulgent luxury. My night beforehand at the St Moritz backfired, though, when I stood on my fancy suite's balcony overlooking the lake and saw the TSS Earnslaw disappearing into thick cloud. Worse, by morning there was snow down to 300m.

But there was no way that a trifling unseasonal snowfall was going to put a dent in the cheerful enthusiasm that is Matt's and Kate's default mode. The owners of Revolution Tours, they swept the 10 of us, mostly Jafa Baby Boomers, along the Esplanade in an icy shower to warm up again with coffee as we waited for the Earnslaw. This set the pattern for the next four days: a bit of a pedal, then a treat. No one will ever go hungry on their watch.

Fortified after the crossing to Walter Peak by scones with jam and cream in the Colonel's Homestead, and cheered by the clearing sky, we set off on Paradise Trail to the top of the lake.

Each of us, on a personally-fitted touring bike, enjoyed the padded seats and higher handlebars that allowed comfortable appreciation of the scenery. And, oh, the scenery! Lake, mountains, grassy farmland with sheep and cattle, back-grounded by bushy slopes: there's a reason why film producers flock here.

We felt a little like movie stars ourselves, Matt towing a trailer loaded with everything we might conceivably need, from gloves to defibrillator, and Laurence meeting us in a van with more food and a cafe selection of tea and coffee.

But first there was pedalling and hills. The first thing to notice a gradient is water, and the second is a cyclist, and these were hills. The upside of a hill is its downside: skimming down a slope with stones pinging out from under the tyres is a thrill no-one ever grows out of.

After lunch at Mt Nicholas station, where a two-season fleece had everyone's jaws dropping, we were treated to a water-taxi leapfrog along the lake to rejoin the trail at Greenstone Valley. Three fords, 17km and several hills later, we arrived at cute little Kinloch Lodge, where travellers have been welcomed since 1868.

There was a brief ouch moment next morning, as we mounted up again, but the tail wind and glorious surroundings took our minds off our own tails, and the roar and swirl of the Dart River jetboat as we crossed the bridge was a triumph of timing.

Our destination was Paradise, literally: Paradise Lodge, north of Glenorchy in Rees Valley. It's absolutely the best: 100 per cent pure. Mountains, glaciers, river flats, beech forest,



Checklist

MT ASPIRING NAT'L PARK

DETAILS

The four-day, three-night Paradise Trail tour, all-inclusive, guided and supported, is priced at \$1685; October to April.

ACCOMMODATION

Treat yourself to real luxury before and after at the St Moritz. stmoritz.co.nz or the Sofitel Queenstown sofitelqueenstown.com

ONLINE

paradisetrail.co.nz



On Paradise Trail with Revolution Tours, in Mt Aspiring National Park, between Kinloch and Routeburn Valley. The bikes are configured so riders don't get kinks in their necks while admiring the scenery. Picture/Laurence Belcher, Paradise Pictures

golden tussock . . . what more could you ask for? Pizza, possibly. Well, Matt and Kate had that covered, too, with a drive into Glenorchy for gourmet nosh, surpassed only by Laurence's banquet the following night in the lodge's heritage dining room.

Day Three was bike-less, but involved an optional two-hour walk up the Routeburn Track past turquoise water holes. The well-made track allows for heads-up walking to appreciate the sun slanting through beech trees, glimpses of rocky peaks and, finally, the wide, grassy river flat with its view up to the Pass — hands down the most picturesque picnic spot in the country.

It's run a close second by the last day's lunch stop, out on the Rees River flats. I wasn't the only one who slowed down on the way there, reluctant for the cycling to finish at the end of Paradise Trail. Cheerful, friendly company, healthy exercise, great food, magnificent scenery, sunshine: it had been just perfect.

Returning to Queenstown was a bit of a downer; but if you must have civilisation it doesn't come much more civilised than the Sofitel. Their Bathology experience with a bottle of champers beside the tub was great consolation.

● The writer was a guest of Revolution Tours, St Moritz and Sofitel.

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