

Day Fourteen - Nelson to Hokitika - 471 Km

The majority of us rose before sun-up this morning, as the planned route for today's adventure was set to be the second longest of the event. I say planned, as this is regularity rallying after-all and after the traditional sweep's car park party had taken place the night before, there would likely be a few navigators not quite as sharp as their trusty pencils.

The dawn was signalled by the rising sun, and the optimists looked forward to another day of great weather. Sadly, the metrological reports predicted heavy rain as we got further towards the west coast and despite attempting to barter with Zeus, Jupiter, Mariamman or any other weather gods that might be listening, clemency from the incoming storms was refused and the inclement weather slowly made its way towards us.

Before that though there were two regularities completed under the sun, though such was the dust expelled by the wheels of the cars that much of the sun's light was blocked out. Indeed, in amongst the thick trees of regularity one, eclipse like conditions were encountered where the undergrowth was at its thickest. The light did break through in places, reaching through the boughs and into the dust storms with finger like beams, it was tough to see ahead up the road in places, and I'm sure that one or two of us were caught out by marshal shaped apparitions amongst the confusion whilst looking for timing points.

Whilst the mileage today was on the heavy side, the competitive elements were about average in length, with some time built in to explore the attractions that this part of the island has to offer. So much time is spent hurtling along on these events, one often laments what is missed along the way, but today the daredevils amongst us were able to sample the Buller Gorge Swing Bridge and accompanying zip line. Precarious isn't the word, I'm sure Indian Jones himself may have thought twice before stepping out onto the netting masquerading as a suspended walkway. I'm told it was great fun, but I prefer to keep my feet on good old terra firma, you know where you are with that.

The expanse of the Buller River would guide us on our journey to the coast today, along the Buller Gorge and as the elements rolled in the low cloud hitting the mountains that soared above valley floor had an ethereal feel to them. Indeed, with the cloud overhead and dense greenery that clad the hills I was half expecting Dian Fossey to appear, such was the beauty of the backdrop, juxtaposed as it was against the hard blacktop and almost constant swathe of camper vans that seemed to inhabit this particular pass.

Our path would lead us to the coast road that ran parallel to the Tasman Sea, and with the storm blowing in we were all treated to a dramatic scene as large waves battered the beaches and rocky outcrops. A stop for lunch at Punakaiki allowed us all time to view the power of nature over many millions of years, at Pancake Rocks. The strange, stacked limestone rock formations forged some 30 million years ago from the immense pressure of the sea, also exhibit surge pools and blowholes that saw spray and jets of water being fired many metres above the immense swell that raged below.

It was an awesome projection of mother nature's wrath, one that would reach its pitch upon the car's arrival into tonight's hotel on the coast of Hokitika. The rain came down in droves and the wind showed its hand as well, leading to Clerk of the Course Mark Appleton to complete a hasty amendment to this evening's 'route'; tonight's highlight of a sunset over the Tasman Sea will no longer take place.

In fact, can anyone even see the Tasman Sea?!

Syd Stelvio.