



## Travel Review: Cycling the Motu Trails

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I had been wanting to experience the Motu Trails for some time and in January convinced my wife that it would be "fun" when combined with some Bay of Plenty sightseeing.

The Motu Trails include three rides that can easily be combined to form a wonderful 90km loop - and yes it was "fun!" Opotiki is the starting base for the Motu Trails and after a four and a half hour drive from Auckland we arrived at the very pleasant seaside town that is more commonly seen as the jumping off point for a trip around the East Cape.

After a tasty lunch at the Two Fish Cafe we set off on our small adventure. The first section is a lovely ride along the Dunes Trail which flows in and out of sand dunes with wonderful sea views on one side and high bush covered hills on the other. On the cloudless day we had this was a lovely start to our ride.

After 10km the Dunes Trail ended and we turned inland to ride up the Old Motu Road to our accommodation at Toatoa. Although this is a public road the further we went the more it felt like a private track. The traffic was very light and over the two to three hours it took us to get to Toatoa we saw less than ten cars, all of which were extremely considerate, drove slowly and gave us plenty of room.

Reaching the top of the climb before Toatoa we came out at the gloriously named Happy Valley which has vivid green pasture on its lower slopes and bush on the upper reaches. It was extremely picturesque and felt quite remote.

An easy cruise for a few more kilometres through a picturesque valley brought us to the farm of Bob and Maxine Crowley who were our B&B hosts for the night. They were absolutely wonderful and represented the best of what New Zealand has to offer in terms of good old fashioned Kiwi hospitality. The farm is a menagerie of animals, with our arrival welcomed by a pet goat, a pig, a couple of dogs and under the watchful eye of a few cows and Bob's horse. The farmhouse is a step back in time and perfectly in tune with its surroundings and its owners. We loved it and everything about Toatoa was memorable.

After a great night's sleep and full breakfast we bade farewell to Toatoa and headed further up the Old Motu Road to the start of the Pakihi Track. For the hour and a half it took us we did not see a single car or person... highlighting the "we really have got away from it all" feeling!

The next section of the trail is the Pakihi Track, an old long neglected stock route, now reborn as a quality 20km downhill single track mountain bike ride. After the mostly uphill Motu Road this was a nice change and is a great ride through lovely bush with regular vistas of deep gorges, lovely steams and distant bush covered hills. The trail is not technically difficult but has long narrow sections with drops to a stony stream – so not a ride for beginners.

Half way down we stopped at the DOC hut to have the lunch supplied by Maxine and enjoy the bush and plentiful birdlife surrounding this isolated spot. Then back on the bikes for more single track with this section mostly along a very pretty stream with some appealing swimming holes... maybe next time?

After about two hours riding we emerged from the Pakihi for an easy 20km ride back into Opotiki.

Arriving in Opotiki slightly weary but very pleased with our adventure we were met by Maxine - back from Toatoa - who offered refreshments before we packed our bikes and headed 10km out of Opotiki for a night's relative luxury at our B&B overlooking O'hiwa Harbour.

Our third day dawned clear and warm and after some time exploring the O'hiwa Harbour, including an old Maori pa site with magnificent views in every direction, we set off towards Auckland. We stopped for coffee and a swim at Ohope and enjoyed a great walk through to a secluded bay at the northern end of Ohope Beach. Pristine water and no crowds!

Next and last stop was the Te Puna Quarry Park, just off the main road north of Tauranga. The 32 hectare quarry pit has been transformed into a variety of lovely gardens and was well worth the visit. Two hours later we were back in Auckland very well satisfied with our three day adventure seeing some of the best of regional New Zealand.