



Starting in the abandoned mining town of Lyell, The Old Ghost Road climbs more than 4,000 feet up the remains of the never-completed gold miners' trail before traversing the mountains that stand high above the bush line. Photo: Richard Rossiter

TRUE GRIT

85-KILOMETRES, \$6.5 MILLION,
110,000 CONSTRUCTION HOURS,
30,000 VOLUNTEER HOURS,
16 NEW BRIDGES AND FOUR NEW
HUTS - WELCOME TO THE OLD
GHOST ROAD.

Deep in New Zealand's South Island, in the remote Mokihinui-Lyell backcountry, a ghost of days past has been revived and restored.

The tale is a compelling one; 130 years ago miners attempted to connect the profitable Lyell goldfields with promising fields in the Mokihinui, but the terrain proved too difficult and the route was never completed.

Then in 2007, in a strange fluke, a copy of the original 1886 reconnaissance survey made its way into the hands of Marion Boatwright, an avid adventurer who quickly enlisted three others – Phil Rossiter, Steve Stack and Wayne Pratt – to pursue his vision of a mountain biking trail along the same road and succeeding, in a totally different way, where the miners failed.

“It really did come down to happenstance. A range of variables miraculously converged at just the right time that meant the vision and will to take it on existed,” says Phil Rossiter.

“At the centre of it all was the discovery of [that] old map ... An exploration mission was soon underway and before we knew it, the fire was lit.”



TOP Six huts are located across the Old Ghost Road and are available for short-term stays. Photo: Matt Hage

ABOVE Crews labored tirelessly to blast kilometres of narrow bench into the hard granite of these peaks - but it's still a tight squeeze. Photo: Matt Hage



TOP LEFT The Old Ghost Road finally opened its 'doors' in December 2015, and is already highly regarded. Photo: Matt Hage

TOP RIGHT The trail along the Mokihinui Gorge was restored by hand. Photo: Matt Hage
ABOVE Riders must cross several suspension bridges to reach the end of the route. Photo: Jonathan Kennett



ABOVE Paul Jennens lived and worked at Ghost Lake high in the Lyell Range on The Old Ghost Road for years, helping to build the trail. Photo: Sven Martin

And what a fire it was. For nine years the four men toiled over the 85-kilometre trail, pushing for government backing and gaining the support of “more than 420 individuals from all over the world”, culminating in 30,000 volunteer hours so far. “From what we can tell, it’s right up there with the most notable volunteer endeavours of its type given the remoteness of the project,” says Rossiter. “Volunteering on The Old Ghost Road generally required days or weeks of commitment, not a few hours on Saturday morning ... it’s beyond doubt that The Old Ghost Road would not have happened without this input.”

However it wasn’t long before the core team realised they needed some professionals thrown into the mix and it was then that the Mokihinui-Lyell Backcountry Trust (MLBT) was formed, an organisation that Phil Rossiter now chairs. At the height of construction the trust employed 21

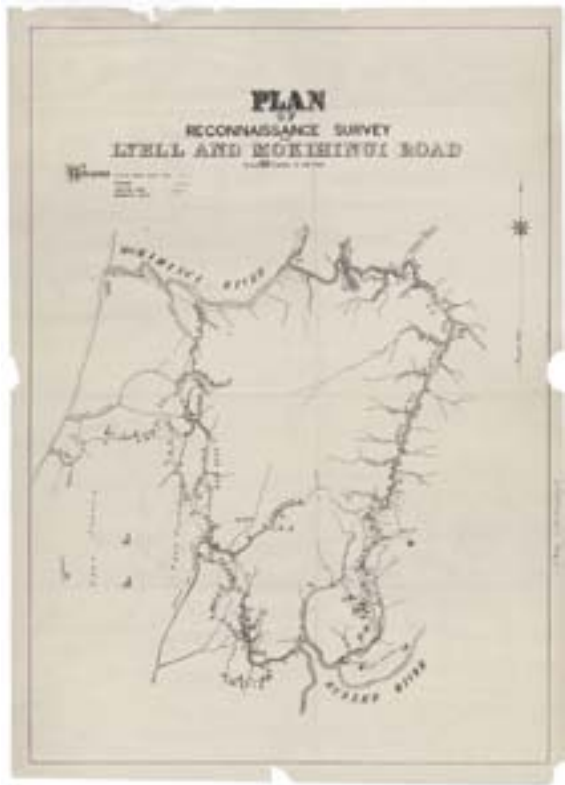
people, some of whom had been made redundant from the mines, and slowly, with many obstacles in between, The Old Ghost Road began to take shape. “Every ‘stage’ genuinely has a different character – we designed it that way. They all show a different face depending on the weather and season, yet they’re all stunning in their own right”, says Rossiter. There is something very privileged and special about riding across open alpine stops, especially having climbed up there, but the Boneyard (an other-worldly landscape created by an earthquake) is hard to beat, as is the cliff-hugging section of trail down the majestic Mokihinui Gorge.

Funding wise the \$6.5 million cycleway is part of the New Zealand Cycle Trail initiated by Prime Minister John Key in 2009, with 61 per cent of the cost being met by the Government. The rest was made up of “grants, sponsorships and public donations.”



TOP The entire route spans a total of 85 kilometres and is a true testament to the power of determination. Photo: Richard Rossiter

ABOVE Hamish Seaton setting out on another trail design mission. Photo: Steve Stack



“We estimate it’ll cost between \$300,000-\$400,000 per year to maintain all the trail, huts, bridges and facilities ... We aim to be entirely self-sustaining; we have no other revenue streams and are not subsidised to look after the trail ... this endeavour is proving to be as much of a ‘journey’ as actually constructing the trail was,” explains Rossiter. It was December 2015 that the trail was finally declared open and for just over a year it has been “outstripping all expectations, as has feedback and user satisfaction.”

“Visitors ‘get’ the magic of the place. That for us is very rewarding. It was the magic of the place and the sense of celebrating and sharing it that drove us all those years. Knowing that this belief was founded and was not folly has been wonderful.”

+++
oldghostroad.org.nz

TOP Magnificent only just begins to describe the view. Photo: Richard Rossiter
ABOVE A copy of the 1886 survey that launched the trail into existence.



Engineered Urban perfection.

The roads, no queues, no stress - the city goes together like, well, our only holiday camp. You can leave them all behind. Focus gives you the freedom. Super low, supple frame, and always ultra-light. No one believes everything you've never asked for is still there. To work, to the south, to your soul - the day is yours.



www.focus-bikes.com/uk | (08) 447 3344

