

'Cycling has now become normalised within the community'
Cycle Trail Coordinator, Far North District Council

Ngā Haerenga is a government funded project to build a network of cycle trails throughout New Zealand. Once constructed, Pou Herenga Tai – Twin Coastal Cycle Trail in Northland will be an 84 kilometre track spanning from Opua in the Bay of Islands across to Horeke in the Hokianga Harbour. This case study focuses on a segment of the intended route – Kaikohe to Okaihau.

The old rail corridor from Kaikohe to Okaihau has been transformed into a unique cycleway with facilities built for mountain bike activities adjacent to the trail. These include a pump track, a maze of wooden structures, a raised narrow track and a three kilometre mountain bike track. Along the mountain bike track there are two wānanga (learning) spaces and the track is set in native forest which has a flourishing birdlife and spectacular glow worms visible on night rides.

The Far North District Council (FNDC) embarked on a collaborative journey with Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Kaikohe under the leadership of Tumuaki Marea Timoko, to develop these mountain bike skills and activity facilities adjacent to the Kaikohe / Okaihau cycleway. This innovative relationship was fostered by Adrienne Tari (cycle trail co-ordinator), and contributed to the success of the initiative. It was intended the trail be used as a way of connecting students to their environment and mātauranga Māori (traditional knowledge). Physical activity was a positive by-product of the initiative.

The cycleway track is still a work in progress. Construction has been funded through central government and the build overseen by the Far North District Council. Other stakeholders are diverse and include Northland District Health Board (funder), Te Hau Ora o Kaikohe (Māori Health Provider), local kaumātua and kuia, Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Kaikohe, Te Hauāuru Takiwā, Rangihamama Omapere Trust, Taitokerau Forests Management Limited and the Department of Corrections. Once construction is complete a governance group will be appointed to manage the cycleway. They will work alongside local business operators to raise funds and continue to look for future opportunities to use, promote and enhance the trail. They will also manage cycleway maintenance.

There are four areas adjacent to the cycleway which have been engineered to challenge specific physical attributes such as strength, skill, balance and confidence. An innovative Māori concept of using a kaitiaki was effective in engaging the community. The inspiration and knowledge woven in each aspect derives from the kaitiaki (guardian), te wheke (octopus), pertinent to the local tangata whenua. Further developments will search for a more appropriate land based kaitiaki with connections to the rohe.

This is the first cycle track constructed which is based on an indigenous concept of learning. Dr Ihirangi Heke facilitated the connection with the iwi, sharing the appropriate knowledge with the bike track engineers who had the capacity to build the cycleway.



Kelly Yakas and her tamariki riding the Kaikohe -Okaihau cycleway. Photo Greg Lever

The local kura runs a special programme using the cycleway. The programme, Te Manawa Ora, teaches the principles of hauora through mountain biking and this local cycleway is vital to its success. Te Manawa Ora is targeted at senior wharekura students and encourages whānau engagement. As well as teaching physical activity, weather patterns, the significance of the natural environment the programme identifies certain atua related to learning in the environment, connects students with tūpuna and uses local knowledge. The programme is based on Māori concepts and traditions.

The track is frequently used by students, staff and whānau of the kura and the local community now join in on rides and special events. School staff also use the track for their own personal development.

Future plans are to coordinate with the Far North District Council to construct a track from Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Kaikohe directly to the cycleway. The plan is to use traditional pathways such as ridges and riverbeds, as travelled by the ancestors.

The Far North District Council anticipates an increase in both local and international visitors to rural inland towns of Northland once the whole trail is completed. They hope the consultation process with local iwi and the development of the similar recreational tracks for local communities and will be replicated throughout Aotearoa. The track currently crosses land that may be returned to the original owner as a part of Waitangi Land claims. The Far North District Council holds a 20 year lease for the rail corridor with KiwiRail. Regardless of who owns the land the council will negotiate with KiwiRail and/or land owners to preserve the cycleway.

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Key outcomes for the community:

- cycling has become normalised within the community
- the trail allows the community and visitors to connect to adjacent inland communities by bike
- a free family-friendly amenity is available to the local community
- an economic tool, e.g. to promote tourism, is new to the community.

Key outcomes for Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Kaikohe

- Mountain biking has become a motivational driving force for the kura to retain their senior male students to National Education Certificate (NCEA) Level 3 and University Entrance.
- The holistic hauora approach of Te Manawa Ora, has given students increased courage, pride and confidence.
- Students have discovered the practical benefits of cycling - as a quick means of transport, a way to maintain fitness, as a support for other physical activities and a way to provide action learning.
- In 2011-2012, the kura was successful in gaining a grant from Tai Tamariki Funding Scheme under the umbrella of Hauora Ngāti Hine. The main objective was to engage boys to stay at the kura to gain a qualification no lower than NCEA Level 2. The class of students identified in 2011, were then in year eight. In 2014 the whole class, including the boys, achieved NCEA Level 1. Now in 2015, some are already on the way to achieving NCEA Level 2.

- Students are learning bicycle maintenance and long term care of their own, and kura, equipment and property.
- Students, staff and whānau are now participating in mountain biking events around the country.
- As part of the Matariki celebrations, the kura has established an annual Twilight Ride to engage the whole kura community.

Key factors and learning points that lead to success included:

- The track construction process was an ambitious commitment that required perseverance and resilience.
- It was necessary to build trusting relationships with landowners throughout the process. Negotiation to find mutually beneficial solutions was necessary throughout the project.



*Tamati Rakena riding the mountain bike track.
Photo: Greg Lever*



*Kaikohe-Okaihau Section Opening - at Okaihau tunnel.
Photo: Peter de Graaf*

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