

# 2011 - Birthday Boy

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Wellington's Craig Norman shares his 2011 Karapoti experience.

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It's my birthday today. I have trained hard for a personal best. I entered Expert to get ahead of the hordes. I smashed my mates best race time on a recce! I'm ready to ride fast... And sure enough, it's pissing down with rain... Happy birthday Craig.

We have sprinted across the river and hammered up the Gorge. My mate John is in my sights, I'm starting to get into a good rhythm and feeling confident as we hit the Warm Up Climb. But then, the beginning of the end - Chain suck!

At the time it didn't seem like a major. Half a bottle of lube later and away I go. John is now ahead and the chase is on. But it didn't last long.

Climbing Deadwood the search for another gear results in the chain going limp. Initially I think it has slipped off the front chain ring, but a glance down delivers disappointment. Sure enough, hopping off the bike as others walk and wobble past, I discover the rear mech has lost all spring and thus begins the first of many MacGyver-like repairs.

Impressing even myself, I salvage said rear derailleur with an innovative arrangement of tyre lever, zip ties, electrical tape and rubber band (where did that come from!). Somehow it holds enough tension to keep the chain in place (picture below) and i'm on the way again.

Ok, so it didn't last long. I am now near the top of Deadwood about 15km into the race and have stopped for the third time to make adjustments (improvements?) to the offending item. While tweaking madly at track side a fellow rider stops and asks without a hint of irony if I can help him!

Anyway, Fellow Rider is running tubeless, has a slow leak, has no gas canisters left and no pump. I have five gas canisters and haven't had a puncture, so give

him one. But just as he is putting the canister into his bag there's a huge 'hsssss!' Apparently his leak is no longer a slow one! My new best mate promptly asks for more gas, and I give him one, but with the stern advice to put a bloody tube in!

Eventually I manage to get going again and while no longer racing i'm starting to feel like my Karapoti has meaning.

**THE ROCK GARDEN:** I rode the rock garden without putting my feet down! Although it has to be said that with a rider right on my back wheel whooping and screaming all the way, I was scared to stop in case he couldn't!

Unfortunately, but not unexpectedly, the ride down the Rock Garden unsettles my repairs. As soon as I cross the river and start riding hard again the chain suck returns. But alas, not long after fate reveals that it is actually the chain pulling one of the derailleur jockey wheels up into the cluster, which eventually leads to offending derailleur arm getting caught up in the rear spokes... click, click, ping, ping, snap! I now have several broken spokes, a gaping hole in the rim where a spoke nipple used to be, and a horrendous buckle in my rear wheel. Oh, and my MacGyver derailleur is broken.

But I'm on a mission now. I improvise more repairs, including taping spokes together with electrical tape. The rear derailleur is minus a jockey wheel and thus pretty much useless, so i'm now single-speeding after setting it up in a granny gear determined to ride the last climbs and finish. I would learn about this error later, but right now it doesn't matter because i'm starting the Devil's Staircase, which is a bike carry for everyone. Inspired by this natural justice, I climb Staircase faster than ever.

When you are sitting around tinkering with your bike in the rain you get pretty cold, but also well rested. At the top of Staircase I feel surprisingly good and head off in granny gear thinking a climb can't be far off... Wrong... I am going soooo sloooowww I might as well be walking. No steep uphill arrive and I start to think about gear ratios and the shortened chain. The derailleur will hold the chain, but it won't change gears. So I take the chain off the granny ring and put it on the middle ring and find a ring at the back that suits the chain line, and presto, I now own a two-speed.

I am cruising along in second gear on my new two-speed, making pretty good time, and I come across another fellow rider walking his bike. He has a twisted chain and no means to repair it. I'm on a bit of a roll now, so for the eighth time today out come the tools. I remove the twisted links from his chain, get my spare chain link out, the type with two halves, and put them on each end of the chain. At this point fellow rider takes over, but lets one end slip and sure enough the chain flicks over the front ring, sending one end of the spare chain link flying into the bush... Shit! I send him off to look for the 'missing link' (get it!), but luckily I came prepared, so while he's in the bush searching for the missing link (get it!) I fix his chain with my 'spare-spare link'.

So I'm riding again now and the two speed is working well. On the rollers toward the bottom of Big Ring Boulevard I stop, slip the chain down to the granny ring, bike the uphill, stop at the top, pull the chain back up to middle ring, continue riding to bottom of next rise... You get the picture.

I am on the way to the finish and despite my goal of beating John being long gone, and despite my time goal of 3hr 20min having

ticked by almost an hour ago... here I am still out on the track.

### Enter Fellow Rider

Three: Hooting along on a downhill, in second gear, spinning like a maniac, I catch another rider walking his bike. Seeing he has a flat and knowing I have three spares, I offer him a tube. He is riding a 29er and rejects my offer. Incredibly he did not have any spare tubes but has patched the tube, so I am floored when he asks to borrow my pump! Unnerved by my incredulous stare Fellow Rider Three explains he lent his pump to another rider. So I hand over my pump without delay, arranging to collect it from the lost property after the race (yes I got the pump back) and ride off toward a date with my next gear change at the bottom of Dopers Hill.

By now I am riding with the tail end group, the heart of mountain biking, the weekend warriors, that's me. At the bottom of Dopers I stopped, slipped the chain to granny ring and rode nonstop to the top - being well rested this was not a major task and I was pleasantly encouraged by numerous walkers as I peddled past. I even caught up to Fellow Rider Two again, and by all reports his chain is still ok!

To paraphrase a well know advertisement: "Broken Rear Derailleur - \$169.00. Wrecked Rear Wheel - \$400.00. Gas canisters and chain links - \$24.00. Brake pads - \$70.00. Total time - 5hrs 05min. Total Cost - PRICELESS!

