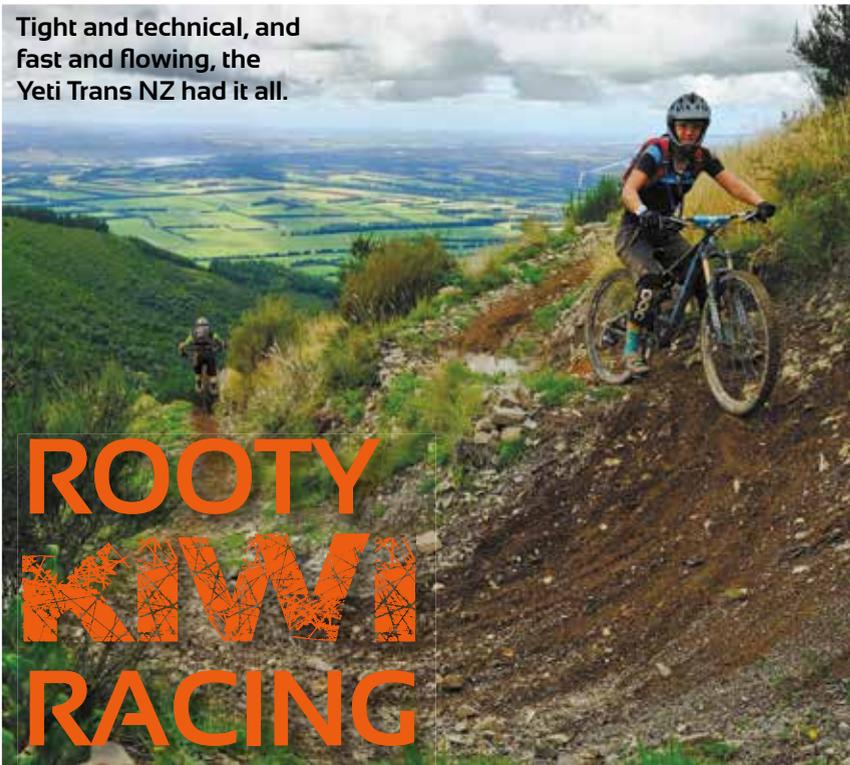


Tight and technical, and fast and flowing, the Yeti Trans NZ had it all.



**ROOTY  
KIWI  
RACING**

SAM BOSWELL | YETI TRANS NZ



Pin it!

**Leona Kadir's** wanderlust has taken her to the Land of the Long White Cloud, where the riding is a little different to sunny South Africa and damp England, but different in the case of New Zealand might well be better, as she found out on the Yeti Trans New Zealand Enduro.

**W**ith Enduro on the rise Worldwide, organiser Megan Rose spotted a gap in the market in her summer home of Canada, starting up the BC Enduro series in 2014. This proved a great success so she set her sights on starting something similar in her second summer home of New Zealand (yes, she gets to do both summers!).

New Zealand is a diverse country with wildly different climates, ground conditions and topography. With the plethora of amazing trails on the South Island, which attracts mountain bikers from all over the world, it was a no-brainer location for the inaugural Yeti Trans NZ Enduro. The first race saw 100 people from over ten countries join up for five days of relaxed liaisons interspersed with frantic, mostly downhill race stages.

The stages had been kept a closely guarded secret. With only a few hints on the event Facebook page to go on we had little idea of what to expect.

## Day 1

In an admiral feat of organisation, given we were coming from all corners of the planet, Megan managed to get everyone picked up from Christchurch and ferried out to Flock Hill which was to be our home for the first two nights. Fed and briefed, we headed to bed nervously listening out for the forecasted rain.

Despite the region having experienced one of the most severe droughts for over a decade, we

loaded into the shuttles on the first morning under heavy rain. Dropped off at the bottom of the Cheesemans ski field, the day's riding started with a 20 minute walk/ride/climb to get warmed up before the start of stage 1. The stage started steep and twisty but soon dropped into fast rooty fun. Stages 2 and 3 were even wetter, but even more fun, bouncing off the hidden roots, and giving up completely on avoiding the puddles.

Shuttled back up the road to the bottom of the ski field again, the 40 minute climb up to the top of stage 4 was very welcome to get warmed up. It was held on part of a well-known local trail called 'The Edge'. It is quite literally like riding on an edge; cutting right across the scree slopes with a hairy drop-down to the left should you get a bit overexcited. This was the most technical stage, given the conditions, with a few sections of gnarly off-camber roots.

The day finished with another really fun trail through tight switchbacks and ending just before the final wet part of the day, wading through a river to get to the shuttles. The sun decided to join us at this point so the rest of the day was spent trying to fight for places to dry kit.

## Day 2

Day two was to be the shortest, with

**"Queenstown is known as the adventure capital of the world with a big reputation for mountain biking so expectations were high."**



Chilled vibes at the trail head, waiting for a turn at the trail

ROWAN DUGGAN | YETI TRANS NZ

riders and volunteers being moved south to Queenstown after the day's riding, but it ended up probably being the hardest! Three stages awaited us and considering the conditions of the previous day, we were expecting mud. We were not disappointed! Stage 1 was a short but ride-able mud slide, then we were shuttled up for a walk/slide/skid down the length of a track known as 'Behemoth'. The first 3/4 of the track was optional. Very narrow, very steep and VERY slippery, no one made it down all the way without at least having a foot out and/or falling off several times. Some people loved it, some not so much... The stage started flat before dropping straight into the trees into an off-camber muddy wood. Mercifully short, we picked ourselves

up off the floor at the finish, washed our bikes in the river and set off for an hour long climb up the ski access road. Stage 3 more than made up for stage 2. A long track built by a few local riders, it traversed the hillside before dropping down a bit more and becoming slippery. Several full 180s and a few bum slides later and day two was done! We loaded up for the rather long but very scenic drive down to Queenstown.

## Day 3

As we arrived quite late the night before, for day three we were granted a bit of a lie-in and time to sort out our bikes after the not so favourable conditions the day before. Queenstown is known as the adventure capital of the world with a big reputation for mountain biking so expectations were high. We were shuttled to the base of Coronet Peak, and set off riding up the singletrack we were to come down on a later

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stage. Mostly ride-able for the first part, we eventually reached what looked like a vertical wall of dirt. This was the DH track which we were going to ride down. Once all 100 riders were at the top, we settled in to watch the people who actually knew what they were doing ride it. Many line choice decisions were made and changed at this time.

Though it looked quite intimidating while I was dragging my bike up it, the DH was actually really fun and once down the steep part, it opened into a really fast flowing singletrack back down to the ski station on a track aptly named 'Enduro track'. A short ride up hill and we were at the top of stage 2, one of the most famous local singletracks known as "Rude Rock" (Google it and you'll see why it's called that). Riding down most of Rude Rock, the stage continued into another local favourite, 'Pack, Track and Sack'. This was a monster stage, exhilarating, fast and flowing, it was exhausting but absolutely worth every bit of effort. Arriving at the bottom, we were faced with a steep grassy climb switchbacking up the canyon. I really enjoyed it but I think I was one of the few!

Stage 3 was completely different! Seemingly just randomly scraped through a wood it was littered with pine cones and mostly run through deep loam. It was more a case of good luck getting down it rubber side down, but there was no reason to hold back with soft landings if/when it went wrong.

After eating too many hot cross buns with peanut butter, (yum!) at the water point we set off on the 45 minute climb back out of Skippers Canyon for the next stage. Stage 4 was a short one, Zoot track is a bit of a spaghetti junction with the track crisscrossing along over little jumps and rocks. It was super fun, no line seemed to be better, just point and go as fast as possible!

A bonus brief shuttle ride (given how late in the day it was by then) and we were at the top of the penultimate stage, one that felt very familiar to those of us from the UK being a steep grass field with lots of bumps (though thankfully lacking the layer of sheep poo). Safely down and it was onto the final shuttle for the day, back to where we started at the bottom of the ski field. 20 minutes riding up and we were faced with a black graded DH run known as Slip Saddle. I was pretty tired at this point so having watched a few people part from their bikes on the first part made the tactical decision to run down the first bit. I was not alone with this, but I was probably alone in running most of the track. It was one long slippery rut and just a bit much for my fatigued brain!

### Day 4

An early start for day four and the rain and mud of the first two days were a distant memory. It was based in Alexandra, an hour and a half drive south of Queenstown and like a different world. Where Queenstown is all snow-capped peaks and glacial lakes, Alex is more arid rockiness with wild thyme everywhere and almost no greenery. It was a good five degrees hotter too! The riding there is epic, built straight over the massive granite boulders with pink dots to show you the way. Ignore these at your peril... It was the most pedally day by far which suited me well, featuring long stages with fast flowing singletrack over massive rocks with the constant smell of wild thyme in your nostrils. With the lack of greenery, you could see for miles which made committing to the blind rock rollers even more daunting. The pink dots were there to guide you through though! Phew!

The day finished with us riding straight into the beer garden of a local brewery for replenishing cold beers and chips. This is the beauty of enduro racing, so much more relaxed than marathon, no one is afraid to have a few beers every afternoon!

### Day 5

Back in Queenstown for the last day, we rode straight out of our hostel garden to start the first of two big climbs of the day. There is a gondola that runs up the mountain every day but in order for us to have access to the very best of the trails we had to be up there before the gondola started, which meant riding. Once we were fully in the trees, the dense mist made it seem pretty eerie. An hour's grind later we queued up for the first of three runs for the day. Bursting out of the trees at what felt like warp speed, we were enveloped in thick wet fog for the first few minutes of the descent before the temperature suddenly climbed and you could see again! This was what Megan classed as a 'true enduro racer's stage' with a bit of everything from roots to loam to rock, manmade, natural, even a minute long climb. Towards the end of the stage we rode through a jump park thankfully avoiding the massive gap jumps. We were spat out into a walking track for the final section just to make extra sure all the bases were covered.

Stage 2 was pretty short and sweet and followed by the final shuttle of the week, and the final slog too. Slog really didn't do this climb justice. Unride-able for everyone (a few tried after \$200 was offered to anyone who could clean it) it was a long walk up a very steep hill. We knew it had to be worth it and it absolutely was. We pushed for an hour through steep woodland before popping out into a grassy field. Below us we could see the queue for the stage so it was a

### How fast and fun does that look?



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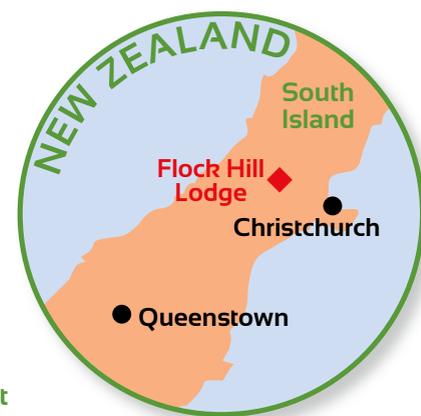
No power hoses, at the Trans NZ bike washing was DIY



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### Where are we?

The inaugural Yeti Trans NZ Enduro took place on the South Island of New Zealand with the first two days ripping up the trails around Flock Hill, an hour inland from Christchurch. For the final three days the riders trekked south into the resort town of Queenstown, arguably one of the best mountain biking destinations in the world. Visit [www.transnz.com](http://www.transnz.com) for more information.



short ride down some singletrack to the start. I'd heard the track was quite rooty. I think quite is probably a bit of an understatement but wow, what a stage to finish the race on! It was hold on and go as fast as you dare with line choice not so much being yours as gravity's and how grippy your tyres were.

I really didn't know what to expect from the week. Yeah I've done a fair bit of stage racing but Enduro is a totally different game. The atmosphere was totally chilled the whole week with no one taking themselves too seriously however well they were doing. There was something to suit everyone's riding preferences and strengths and

plenty of stuff to put you out of your comfort zone. That's what it's about though, isn't it? Challenging yourself and getting better. How perfect then to do that surrounded by really cool people in an amazingly beautiful country. FS



**Leona Kadir** is a British mountain biker, who came to SA to train for the 2014 Epic in November 2013 and ended up staying for eight months. She's currently checking out the trails and racing in New Zealand. Follow her adventures on Twitter at @kaleona.