

ALICE IS WONDERLAND



*NOT ALL RACING IN THE NT IS DONE QUITE BY THE BOOK...
OR IF IT IS, IT'S A DIFFERENT KIND OF BOOK!*

WORDS AND PICS: HUW KINGSTON

Beakers bubbling on Bunsen burners. Fingers purple with potassium permanganate. Test tubes and teat pipettes. Ancient memories of school chemistry lessons. For the first time since then, I have a glass laboratory beaker in hand; a beaker filled with an intoxicating, bubbling reaction of barley, hops, water and yeast.

The 2018 Singlespeed Nationals has come to Alice Springs and these beakers, etched with a childish rendition of boy on bike, are our gift for attending. But Alice gives a lot more than beer in beakers.

Locals and well-travelled riders have enjoyed for some time the network of mountain bike trails bang in the centre of

Oz. This is about to become more widely appreciated with the NT Government investing in new trails, improvements to existing trails and new signage.

Much is already in place: ultimately, more than 80km of trails for all abilities will be on offer within a spit of Alice. The big project, though, is the \$12 million Red Centre Adventure Ride, a 200km purpose-built trail following the line of the West MacDonnell Ranges west of the Alice. Designed to be of an easy grade, it will encompass a number of camps and should make a superb three- or four-day ride. Have you thought yet where to go for your next winter mountain bike holiday?

For those not enamoured of the idea of singlespeeding you probably never will be. It's the simplicity I love – any opportunity to lessen the engagement of brain to bike should be taken. But ultimately, it's about not being too serious. Even at a race there's an atmosphere of 'anti-racing'. Our race plates were laminated pages from Alice in Wonderland; mine was page 35. The Mad Hatter, Queen of Hearts, White Rabbit and Alice, too, all prowled the long-established and recently improved Old Telegraph Station singletrack.

There's invariably a beer shortcut at a singlespeed race. Alas, licensing laws in the Northern Territory prevented such, or so the organisers told us, grinning like a Cheshire Cat (hang on.. it was a Cheshire Cat!). When riders reached the allocated spot, there was the beer alternative: dry Weetbix smeared with wasabi paste. It actually didn't surprise me, given last time I was in Alice I dined at a Swiss Indian restaurant, now sadly closed. Tandoori cheese fondue, anyone?



Left: Alice Springs trails suit the singlespeed

Above: The Alice Springs Camel Cup

Right: Keeping it long and low



Racing over, it was camel burgers for lunch washed down with a local (well, from just up the road in Darwin) brew, served by the Beer Doctor. Talking of doctors, there's a heap of new official trail recently built on the west side of Alice; imaginatively called the Westside Trails. This includes a technical, tyre-tearing trail hiding the fearsome Black Slabbeth, challenging all riders whether geared or ungeared. Should an incident occur and help be needed, then the Flying Doctor is not too far away; it's a much more flowing, mellow experience.

Some 70 riders were at the Nationals. Some had ridden to Alice from far away (everywhere else is classed as 'far away'), others had made the long drive or easy flight. A good number of locals got into the spirit of the event. Those without specific singlespeed bikes avoided temptation by taping over shifters or covering them with cardboard tubes scrawled with 'Just Keep Pedalling'. Mountain biking around Alice

actually suits the singlespeed well, there being plenty up and downs but none too long or too steep.

Having watched the camel cooking on the BBQ, I madly spun the 10km on bike paths in time to catch singlehump racing, as the annual Alice Springs Camel Cup was on. The crowd may have been a little different, but the beer was still flowing.

My mission to the Camel Cup meant I missed the challenges to reveal the host for the 2019 Singlespeed Nationals. A combination of rule breaking, bribery and shenanigans in the sandy bed of the Todd River saw Anglesea in Victoria claim the honour over Margaret River, WA and Tathra in NSW. Who actually won the Championships? I honestly can't remember. 🤔

Huw would like to thank Tourism NT for getting him to Alice and to all the locals involved in putting on a superb weekend of riding and entertainment.

PAUL DARVODELSKY



Mountain biking and Alice Springs lost a towering presence just a few weeks before the Singlespeed Nationals when Paul Darvodelsky lost a long battle with cancer.

A big man with a huge heart, Paul raced in many events over the past 20 years. He represented Australia in Mountain Bike Orienteering, was a regular podium winner in many other races and a real competitor.

Paul always had on offer a keen smile and some wise words. He moved to Alice some eight years ago with his partner Cath. He became President of the Alice Springs MTB Club and left his stamp on the club through mountain bike events like Easter in the Alice and was a mentor to the organisers of the Singlespeed Nationals. He was also the owner of the cinema in Alice.



HANDY LINKS

Alice Springs MTB Trails:
www.mtb.northernterritory.com

Alice Springs MTB Club:
www.centralaustralianroughriders.asn.au

Outback Cycling Bike Hire & Tours:
www.outbackcycling.com

The Redback MTB Race:
www.theredback.com.au

Easter in the Alice Event:
www.easterinthealice.com

Tourism NT:
www.northernterritory.com