



12 Apostles MTB Classic

Words by John Groves | Photos courtesy of Big Hill Events

There are many reasons we ride a mountain bike. It's always an enjoyable form of exercise with a large social component on and off the bike. Sometimes it's the adrenalin rush we crave along with a fix for our competitive nature. However, the most memorable time in the saddle is often when these things are combined with exploring spectacular, and often new, parts of our beautiful country. This is how the three day, five stage, 12 Apostles Mountain Bike Classic came to fruition. From the organisers of Cape to Cape in Western Australia and based in the beautiful Great Ocean Road town of Port Campbell three hours west of Melbourne, our hopes were high to have all our 'why we ride' boxes ticked...we weren't disappointed!

Well suited to the local area, and appreciated by those that sampled too much of the local lager the previous night, stage 1 had a very relaxed midday start a little down the road in Childers Cove. It took the form of a 25 kilometre jaunt to Peterborough. This was a drag race straight along a very rarely used 4WD track which ran parallel to the coastline. Constant cliff top views of the ocean were the biggest obstacle as taking too long a glimpse would see you fall victim to the endless high walled ruts hidden by the grass. Many a laugh were shared as riders ahead partaking in too much scenery-gazing were seen to suddenly have a little lay down in the track side bed of shrubbery. Tales were then retold and an opportunity to really take in the view arose during a 12 kilometre neutral stage back to Port

Campbell.

The afternoon of day one took the shape of eating fish and chips on the beach without a care in the world. The logistics were hardly challenging, with the start of stage 2 scheduled for 5pm, all of 20 metres away. Stage 2 was an eliminator on a 500 metre course. The top guys and girls were racing for time bonuses and this format resulted in some entertaining bingles with no real harm done. The rest of us relished the opportunity to try and match it with them, and in a couple of surprises some high profile scalps were taken. When it came time for the finals though it turned out that those who were fastest over 25 kilometres were also fastest over 500 metres. Peta Mullens and Jack Haig were officially presented as overall leaders that night as we



all converged on the pub.

Day two was far ruder with an 8am start on the main street of Port Campbell for a fast and furious 20 kilometre 'sprint' to Princetown. Predominantly double track and either up or down, but neither of it for very long, this stage was done at a blistering average speed of nearly 30km/h in the lead group. It would have no doubt been even quicker had overall honours contender Adrian Jackson not been taken to the ground by a wallaby that came bounding across the track at 40km/h as the lead bunch agreed to neutralise racing to allow AJ to re-join. I know you're wondering so, yes, there is video footage, available via the event website (www.12apostlesmtb.com.au).

After a seven kilometre neutral roll we found ourselves at the 12 Apostles visitor centre. We were given a few hours to take in the views, get the mandatory photo in front of the famous rock formations and refuel for the queen stage, which would see us set off again at 11am for a 57 kilometre journey that would conclude in Port Campbell. A horrid little starting climb had everyone reminded of the effort that had

already been undertaken that day. However it was soon forgotten as we entered a wonderfully flowy fifteen minute loop of virgin single track. Challenges came again in the form of ever-deepening sand where creative line choice was the secret, cyclocross skills were invaluable and many a tale of a lay down in the sand were later to be shared.

This wasn't the queen stage for nothing though and it challenged everyone. Most went through some emotional times but it only made the sense of achievement in crossing that finish so much greater. Both Peta Mullens and Jack Haig again took the spotlight at the pub during presentations that night, having extended their respective overall leads.

Day three took us away from the coast into the luscious forest town of Timboon. Starting and finishing in the town centre amongst the Sunday market, this town had welcomed mountain biking with arms open. We welcomed it too as this 47 kilometre loop proved to be quite enjoyable. The climbing was gradual and shaded, the descending was fast and flowing and there was enough single track

to put a smile on your dial. We were also lucky enough to have exclusive access to the rail trail to race along which had some additional twists and turns added that challenged the limits of traction. Plenty of fresh soil roost was sent as tyres drifted through unexpected corners and riders got carried away with their speed.

Jack Haig once again proved too strong and was followed home by Adrian Jackson and Peter Kutschera with the final stage placings replicating the overall result. Peta Mullens was all class in the women's category completing a clean sweep of all stages to take the overall in front of Melissa Anset and Katherine O'Shea.

We look forward to returning for the second edition of the 12 Apostles Mountain Bike Classic. If you've never visited that part of the world, or even if you have, make sure you get your entry in for next year. With amazing views, untouched countryside and very friendly off the bike vibe you can't afford to not have this event on your calendar. Word has it more of that virgin single track will appear each year as well.