



NELSON FAIRYDUST

There's something in the air

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SPOKE

Riding has always been a great way to clear my head, right from my early years living in Roa, on the edge of the West Coast's Paparoa Range. By the time I was a teenager I'd moved to Nelson, where I developed a taste for longer singletrack rides through Barron Flat, the Rameka, and the Queen Charlotte.

After a decade away, I found something had changed in my adopted hometown at the top of the south. The dust had stirred. Out of the corner of my eye yet another 9-year-old flew past, sending a sweet jump. It wasn't the Nelson I remembered: where was the jigsaw of fireroads and non-technical singletrack? Trailforks had exploded with awesome gnarly trails all around the city centre, we had gold ranked IMBA status, and were pulling in international-level races on the regular.

Freshly home from Godzone Fiordland, the trench foot had healed and I was raring to improve my bike skills. The fairy dust had got me. As winter set in I found myself in a routine of frosty night rides. Signs of addiction were becoming more obvious. My bathroom floor was constantly caked in mud and I started spending more on IPAs at the Freehouse.

I signed up for a ladies' day at Wairoa Gorge in July. As we rattled up the road I immediately felt at home amongst the steep native bush-clad hills. Nerves slipped away as I flew through the forest on slippery roots, trying to stay on local teen Zoe Nathan's tail. It was my first time riding in a girl gang, and with a group of local women ranging from 16 to late 50s, all shredding, it was inspiring to have a group of badass women to bounce energy off. Schemes for future biking adventures were eagerly made between runs.

A few of us decided to ride Involution eight weeks in a row—rain, hail, or snow—as a goal to get us through winter. On the first night, a group of five started the gravel grind up in a torrential downpour with two metre visibility. Mist swirled in and out of the trees and our arms stung with cold as we dropped in for the descent. The track was a stream. Visibility improved as we descended through the switchbacks. Grinning, we skidded into the carpark covered in mud and drenched to our underwear. Other nights were calm and clear, with morepork calling as we watched the city lights twinkling below.

I started ditching weekend powder days for mountain biking: backcountry rides like the Wakamarina and Kill Devil, and solo missions through the Old Ghost Road and the Heaphy in the snow.

When the blossoms were out in full force I found myself back at The Gorge a second time. There were no nerves; just pure excitement. What a difference four months can make. I've found riding with a group of women often has a more relaxing and supportive vibe, with less pressure to tick features off on the day. I've found myself becoming more adventurous, more likely to experiment and session a section of track I'd previously found intimidating. My increased confidence and technical ability has widened the scope for longer multi-discipline journeys involving mountain biking. I'm super stoked to keep up the buzz and see where the next season takes me! 🍷