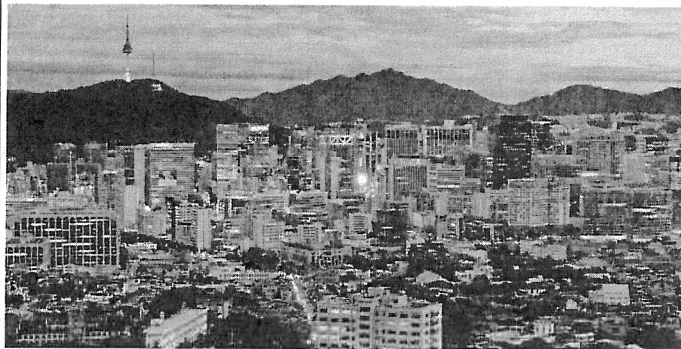


It's good to be back



Travelling overseas always has a sense of adventure and regardless of the reason for travelling, you can be assured of seeing something new, meeting some interesting people, and somewhere along the way, being thrown into the odd uncomfortable moment.

My trip to Korea was no exception, and while no holiday, it was an adventure made all the better by being in the company of 14 young athletes, five other staff, and getting some top results on the world cycling stage. The Junior Track Cycling Champs held in Seoul from 8th to 12th of August were contested by 34 countries over 19 different events. Teams ranged in size from just 2 competitors to the largest which was 21 competitors.

With 14 riders we had the same number as the Aussies who with friendly rivalry were both friend and foe as they have been every year. In recent years our two teams have become the pre-eminent teams at junior level and while we didn't win as many medals as we have done the last two years, the competition was tougher and our results very creditable for the size of our country when up against some of the biggest cycling nations in the world.

My trip started out back on the 25th of July where I flew to join the team in Cambridge at the new Avantidrome for their final week of

coaches and staff before packing up to go to Seoul.

On Friday 1 August we checked in at Auckland airport for the long haul to Seoul via Tokyo. In all our group of 20 had 20 suitcases and 46 boxes of bikes and equipment to get to Seoul. After 11.5 hours to Tokyo, 2.5 hours stopover, and another 2.5 hours flying we made it to Seoul. First problem – only 12 of our 46 boxes came off the conveyor and the writer spent the next hour frantically trying to find \$200,000 of missing equipment. This eventually turned up and I made it with the truck to the hotel where the team had gone ahead by 1.30 am.

After two days acclimatisation the riders were back on the track training where we had 4 days to find our form before competition started. 34 degrees sounds great until you throw in 80% humidity at which point it gets very hot and staying hydrated becomes a real challenge. Despite this the team applied themselves to the task and were ready for competition.

Competition went really well and we were really stoked to come away with 2 World Champions, a silver medal, and 2 bronze. Its been 5 years since NZ had our last Junior World Champion so for one of our guys to come away with 2 World Champion medals &

preparation. This involved intense training sessions, heat acclimatisation sessions, and some off the bike team building work. There was one opportunity to ride the new velodrome in a competitive session between

jerseys in the two marquee events (Points Race & Madison) was almost unbelievable.

Unfortunately I didn't get to see anything of Seoul beyond the hotel, bus, and velodrome. We did manage to get out of the hotel for a few meals and enjoyed the Korean BBQ where you cook your meat at the table.

We were on an early flight out of Seoul the morning after competition ended. This meant packing up all our equipment over the last few hours of competition ready for loading on a truck. We were up next morning to catch a bus at 4:00 am, go to the velodrome and load up, then to the airport where it took 2.5 hours to check in and get our equipment sorted. The excess baggage bill to get our gear home was NZ\$7,000.

Once on board in Seoul it was plain sailing home despite a 7 hour stopover in Tokyo. It was good to get home on Thursday and back into cooler temperatures even though the contrast of 34 degrees back to 2 degrees is a shock to the system.

It was a busy time with some very long days lugging equipment from lock up the track pits; getting groceries and ice; doing laundry; and planning the next day. During competition duties ranged from helping the mechanic; helping the coaches; to being a chaperone for the mandatory drug tests that the winners have to go through.

It was a lot more work than last time I was team manager of the NZ team which was for the World Champs held in Invercargill however there was something special about everyone being away from home. As an experience it will be something I will never forget and I recommend that anyone who has the opportunity to do something like this – give it a go.

JOHN GREEN