

# 'Rangitikei' – A Large Sky

## The 2018 Mangaweka MGF/TF Festival

Once again, for the fifth time, MGF and TF owners gathered on the weekend of 23-25 February 2018 for what has become a well anticipated annual weekend in the Rangitikei. The mere thought of a gathering of like-minded folk who thoroughly enjoy the prospect of driving in convoy in their quintessential cars over country roads and chatting together over a fine wine or a tasty beer brought 32 drivers and navigators from all over the North Island and even a couple from the UK to meet at the Gumboot Manor Restaurant in Taihape on the Friday evening. It was a busy and happy night as people reconnected with others, as new attendees were welcomed and we wined and dined on beautiful food generously served by the restaurant.

Saturday morning found us gathering at Awastone, Mangaweka, parking our cars side-by-side down at the Rangitikei River's edge for a photo opportunity with a difference! It was a beautiful day with clear blue skies and as we parked and chatted we observed the tall sky-reaching cliffs of white papa while the sound of an overgrown bee buzzed over us. A camera-equipped drone flitted around, gazing at us and our cars – we were being filmed and it did feel rather strange – one didn't know whether to smile or wave, or simply ignore it! After a superb lunch provided by the Awastone Café and a briefing on the next phase of our weekend, we were given instructions and a map for the run, plus a sheet of 20 questions, all of which needed to be answered correctly if you were to win the quiz at the end of the day.

24 cars ventured out of Awastone, across the charming old bridge and out onto SH1 where we were instructed to turn left. At Vinegar Hill we took SH54 which we followed to Waituna West, checking for any hints along the way to answer the quiz questions. Taking Dunolly Road took many of us into new territory, venturing along roads surrounded by sheep and cattle farms as far as the eye could see on the Rangitikei Plains, wide vistas and the large blue sky accompanying us, interspersed by the sporadic farm buildings and the occasional historic church and Marae. The journey continued until we met and followed the Halcombe Road to SH1, then turned into Wings Line which took us through the outskirts of Marton. Our itinerary then took us back across SH1, and east onto the river plains for a short loop, before crossing SH1 again westward, climbing steadily upwards into the hill country, where after wandering down Leedstown Road we called into "Maungaraupi Country Estate", a superb original homestead built in 1906. Our host Rita told us about the history of the farm and its buildings and provided a delicious afternoon tea. Wandering around and looking over the Rangitikei plains, then climbing up the little tower on the roof of the homestead you could see forever with the large sky again showing the extraordinary beauty of our country.

Finally we dragged ourselves away, driving our cars off the well-manicured lawn of the homestead, venturing out onto more backcountry roads towards Hunterville. Given the considerable number of historic buildings we passed it was plain to see the memories of this area are many and fascinating. After more up hills and down dales we found ourselves back at Awastone, Mangaweka where we sat among those majestic papa cliffs and socialised until dinner was served, another scrumptious meal.

Once well fed and watered we were treated to an amazing portfolio of events, discovering one of our fellow travellers was Greeta Hulme, former wife of the late Dennis Hulme, who gave us a

fascinating insight into the high and speedy life of a racing driver. Ian Grant who has established a register of MGFs and MGTs in New Zealand, told us about his register, in which he has tracked nearly all the F and TF models of MGs in New Zealand, identifying their movements from the MG vehicle assembly plant in the UK, to our own private garages!

Sunday saw us gathering at the Mangaweka Camping Ground, again surrounded by those stunning cliffs, where a gymkhana had been set up on the playing fields. How fast can one drive one's MG around a reasonably tight and twisty course? The competition became quite rampant as the day progressed – husbands, wives, partners and friends competing against each other. It was great fun as a competitor or as a spectator. Meanwhile the camera drone soared into that blue sky to spy on our enjoyment while Ian Grant roamed from vehicle to vehicle, checking on car numbers and his register, ensuring the information he held was accurate. Finally, a winner of the gymkhana was identified, Bill Denize, and the quickest woman was Rachel Dean. The winner of the quiz was announced: Trevor and Sandy Hardy. YAY! An awesome weekend, gorgeous weather and a beautiful big blue sky.

Thanks must go to John and Viv and Rachel yet again, whose creativity and planning gave us all a great weekend, an opportunity to discover yet more beautiful parts of the Rangitikei and we await with interest the planning of the next MGF/TF Festival.