



SHIMANO GRAVEL MUSTER VIRTUAL COURSE RECCY

Howdy riders,

If a picture tells a thousand words...

Surely a dozen pictures with a thousand words tells a heck of a lot more?

That's the theory we're rolling with anyway 🤔

Below, we have done our best to paint a day-by-day, "word picture" of the Shimano Gravel Muster so you can **smell**, **taste**, **see** and **feel** what it's like to ride through the desert... on a bike with no name (see what we did there?).

Have a read. Fall in love. And then [come and join us in the outback](#) >>

Entries are over 50% sold out so it's shaping up to be an unforgettable 4 days.

The (wordsmithin') Rapid Ascent Team



EVENT OVERVIEW

WHAT: 4 day gravel stage race (all inclusive)

WHEN: Thurs. 21 August to Sun. 24 August 2025

WHERE: Alice Springs, East MacDonnell Ranges, NT

STAGES:

- Day 1: 4km Prologue + 47km stage, incl. 1 racing segment of 17km
- Day 2: 148km total, including 2 racing segments of 84km
- Day 3: 90km total, including 2 racing segments of 47km
- Day 4: 95km total, including 1 racing segment of 43km

TOTAL: 384km riding, including 191km of timed racing segments / 193 untimed cruise segments

RACE IT. RIDE IT. EXPERIENCE IT. CAN YOU MUSTER IT?



PROLOGUE: "THE BLATHERSKITE BURN"

WHEN: Thursday 21st August, 12:30PM (TBC)

WHERE: Alice Springs, East MacDonnell Ranges, NT

DISTANCE: ~4km (50m ascent)

START/FINISH: Blatherskite Park, Len Kittle Dr (5km south of Mercure)

SURFACE: Gravel roads, double track and twisty CX-style singletrack

RACE FORMAT: Individual time trial, riders start every 15 seconds

THE SCENE:

It's Friday afternoon. You're at Blatherskite Park on the outskirts of Alice Springs. The smell of eucalyptus hangs in the air and the heat haze shimmers off the red dirt.

THE MOOD:

You're cheerful and alert with a hint of pre-race nerves. Sam is on the mic welcoming you and explaining the final details. Banter is flowing and fellow riders are fiddling with gear, introducing themselves, and generally buzzing around in a muddle of anticipation.

THE RIDING:

One-by-one, riders are released from the start line, separated by 15 seconds. When it's your turn, you launch for a short and fun individual time trial (spurred by adrenaline and probably going out faster than you planned).

Get aero and push if you're "racing it to win it". Sit up and cruise if you are here to soak in the scene.

Whatever your goals, this 4km circuit – with doubletrack and playful CX-style bends – is the perfect "advanced warning" to your legs and lungs ahead of Stage 1.

WHY A TIME TRIAL?

The opening stages of Stage 1 are a bit narrow in places, and with the pre-race nerves pumping, a mass start proved slightly chaotic last year. For this reason, we are running a short prologue in 2025 ahead of Stage 1 to seed the bunch into smaller start-groups of 5 people and keep things safe and controlled.



STAGE 1: "SIMPSONS HARD EARNED THIRST"

WHEN: Thursday 21st August, 1:30PM (TBC)

DISTANCE: 47km (280m ascent)

START/FINISH: Blatherskite Park

SURFACE: 15km gravel, 14km asphalt, 16km sealed bike path

RACING SEGMENT: 17km bike path from Simpsons Gap to Flagon Hill
(starts at 28km mark)

RACING FORMAT: Wave starts (5 riders per wave), separated by 60 seconds.

THE SCENE:

You're back on the start line, lined up next to your 4 "starting companions" and debriefing about the high-octane prologue that's just been raced.

You might be thinking "this place is leafier than I imagined"...

But you know that the tall gums of Alice are hiding the endless expanse of red sand, and spectacular gorges just a few kilometres out of town.

THE MOOD:

With a bead of sweat on everyone's forehead, the nerves have given way to pure excitement. "Let's get this show on the road!" is the sentiment of the group.

THE RIDING:

The opening kilometres are relaxed and scenic – a chance to find your rhythm and soak up the majesty of Central Australia.

You pedal past Honeymoon Gap, then follow the winding ribbon of road toward Simpsons Gap, where you arrive beneath soaring cliffs carved by millennia. (Get off your bike and look around. This place will move you.)

Once the sight seeing is done – the racing is on!



A 17km timed segment launches you back toward Alice Springs on the silky smooth, sealed Simpsons Gap Bike Path. It snakes through spinifex and desert oaks, a corridor of speed through an unforgiving landscape.

Just when your bike computer is telling you the finish line is close...

WHACK!

The final ~200m up Flagon Hill, is STEEP, loose and ruthless. Grind, spin or get off and push. Anything goes to get you over the line.

Atop the hill, a pop-up bar waits as your prize. Cold beers. Salty chips. Sunset views. This isn't just the end of Stage 1 – it's the start of a four-day adventure and camaraderie that will last long after the dust settles.



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STAGE 2: "LED DOWN THE GARDEN ROAD"

WHEN: Friday 22nd August, Starts at 6:45am

DISTANCE: 148km (810m ascent)

START/FINISH: Alice Springs Telegraph Station to Hale River Homestead

SURFACE: 115km gravel road, 35km asphalt road

RACING SEGMENT:

- Segment #1: 48km segment along western end of Gardens Road to Pinnacle Rd water point. Starts at 49km pt / ends at 97km pt of the stage.
- Segment #2: 36km segment along eastern end of Gardens Road to Hale River Homestead. Starts at 117km pt of the stage.

RACING FORMAT: Mass start, beginning with un-timed segment.

THE SCENE:

It's early Saturday morning and, after a night of luxury at the Mercure, you're rolling out from Telegraph Station with the chilly desert air clinging to your jersey. The sun is peeking out from behind the horizon and already casting long golden fingers across the terrain.

THE MOOD:

Yesterday's nerves are gone. You're feeling sharper, more grounded. Yes, the legs are a little heavy. But the motto of the day is "let's go exploring" and the vibes are high.

With everyone swapping notes on tyre pressure and talking about the sting of Flagon Hill – you can tell there's a growing sense of unity in the group. The Gravel Muster is properly underway!

THE RIDING:

You begin at first light, rolling out en masse. The asphalt hums beneath your tyres as a rolling escort leads the way north along the Stuart Highway. Time to chat, bank some kilometres (with effortless speed) and soak it all in.



Then, after ~40km of cruising North – BOOM – the riding makes a drastic change. You turn right onto Gardens Road – a legendary gravel corridor slicing across the desert like a Ginsu knife. Here the race opens up with two timed segments that reward grit, pacing and teamwork. Find a bunch. Lock into a rhythm. Feel the wind in your helmet and the heat on your back as you drive through rolling terrain, flanked by distant ranges and cloudless skies.

There's a reason many riders say this is their favourite day – it's raw, it's remote, and it has all the ingredients of a gravel "epic".

After a long day in the saddle, you arrive dusty, spent, and exhilarated at the Hale River Homestead. This green oasis in the remote red centre is the ideal place to unwind, bathe in the pool and treat yourself to an afternoon nap (or beer) before dinner. This is a holiday after all!



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STAGE 3: "ARTLUNGA & THE RANGES"

WHEN: Saturday 23rd August, 8:00AM

DISTANCE: 90km (720m ascent)

START/FINISH: Hale River Homestead to Ross River Homestead

SURFACE: 73km gravel, 17km asphalt

RACING SEGMENTS:

- Segment #1: 17km (starts at 0km, ends at 17km)
- Segment #2: 30km (starts at 37km, ends at 67km)

RACING FORMAT: Mass start, beginning with racing/timed segment.

THE SCENE:

As you peruse the open-air, breakfast buffet the sun peeks over the ranges. There's dust in your ears, caffeine in your system, and a growing affection for this "Great Southern Land" deep in your soul. Hale River Homestead is stirring to life – people emerging from cabins and rustling out of tents. Some riders are already stretching sore quads under ancient gums.

THE MOOD:

You've hit your stride. The awkward introductions are gone, replaced by nicknames, inside jokes, and an easy-going chat that comes easily during a shared hardship. You've found your tribe and you might think to yourself "why can't we live like this back home?".

THE RIDING:

The riding kicks off with excitement – A mass-start racing segment straight out of the homestead, past the old stockyards of Ambalindum Station and onto the vast, Arltunga Plateau.

Spin through wide valleys and craggy ridge lines before hitting the ruins of Arltunga – the first settlement in Central Australia. In this place, time seems to stand still, and in Stage 3 it's where the race clock stops (fitting, aye?).



At the end of the first timed segment, you'll find yourself at Arltunga Bush Pub, where stories will flow as fast as the refreshments.

From there, an untimed roll takes you into the heart of the East MacDonnell Ranges. This is where the landscape truly changes—ghost gums tower over the road, jagged escarpments frame the skyline, and dry riverbeds pulse with a mysterious energy.

The second race segment is 30km of fast, flowing gravel as cliffs close in and the red rocks warm up in the sunlight. Ultimately, the racing ends at the spell-binding Trephina Gorge.

Pause for a meander and photo before a gentle ~23km cruise to the charming Ross River Homestead. Dinner, drinks and pool-side-stargazing await.



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STAGE 4: "THE RED ROUBAIX"

WHEN: Sunday 24th August, Starts at 8:00am

DISTANCE: 95km (600m ascent)

START/FINISH: Ross River Homestead to Alice Springs Brewery (6km south of Mercure)

SURFACE: 64km gravel road, 23km asphalt road, 8km shared cycle/walk track

RACING SEGMENTS:

– Segment #1: 43km segment from the Ross River Rd to Ross Hwy. Starts at 21km pt / ends at 64km pt.

RACING FORMAT: Mass start, beginning with un-timed segment.

THE SCENE:

It's the final day. The air feels lighter – like the land knows something big is coming to an end. Riders are packing bags, buzzing around breakfast, and sipping coffee with that mix of satisfaction and sadness you get at the conclusion of any grand expedition.

THE MOOD:

It's mixed. On one hand you're excited to get back to civilisation and tell your friends and family all about the adventure; on the other, you don't want it to end. One thing is for certain, today you're going to squeeze every drop of energy from your legs, and soak up as much of this stage as possible.

THE RIDING:

Setting out from Ross River's shady grounds, you start with an untimed cruise amidst the craggy ridge lines and peaks of the Gorge. Then you ride south on the narrow Binns Track as it criss-crosses the dry Ross River.

This section of the course is often a bit sandy and loose but provides a real sense of momentum as you move from the ranges to the open plains below.



This long, straight section of road is the quickest way home, but potentially the roughest of the whole event with enough corrugations and loose rock to keep any rider honest (depending when it last rained and when the grader went past!). Time to harness your inner Mathieu Van der Poel and apply the power while threading the fastest line.

Respite comes with a return to asphalt at the 64km pt before a final fling down the road to the water point at Jesse Gap.

With racing done and very much dusted the course follows the sealed Ross Highway along the flank of the range past Emily Gap and directly into the beer garden at the Alice Springs Brewery. Time for the celebrations to commence with ice-cold frothies on tap (could it be anymore Australian?!).

CONGRATULATIONS! YOU MUSTERED IT!



WANT TO EXPERIENCE IT FOR YOURSELF?

We know our words can't do this event justice... But hopefully, alongside the photos and with some imagination, you get the point we're making:

This truly is the adventure of a lifetime – equal parts bike race, wild expedition, and boutique holiday with mates.

If it sounds like your cup of tea, we'd love for you to join us!

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