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ABOVE AND TOP RIGHT: Gate Pa Primary School students go for a spin on the new bikes provided through the Rotary Club of Tauranga's Bikes for Schools campaign. RIGHT: A team of Tauranga Rotarians and friends work with the students to assemble the bikes.

Gate Pa school bike project

The Rotary Club of Tauranga, NZ, became involved in the Bikes for Schools campaign at Gate Pa Primary School after a request from Principal Richard Inder. His vision was to provide bikes for school children to use for exercise and fun, as well as transform a disused field behind the school into a biking area for the community.

After strong support from local council and businesses, the school was able to build two tracks around the school. One is a pumice track surrounding the field's perimeter; the other utilises some of the eight hectares of neighbouring bushland for a more adventurous mountain bike track.

The Rotary Club of Tauranga used a district grant, with additional funding from the Bikes in Schools Charitable Trust, to purchase 50 bikes and 50 helmets, as well as a container in which to store them.

As they arrived in pieces, a team of Rotarians and friends worked with the students to assemble the bikes. It was then time to join the students on the track for what was a new experience for some – many children in the community do not own bikes of their own.

Following a lap around the school grounds by the Minister of Transport, Simon Bridges, the Gate Pa Community Cycleway and Walkway was officially declared open to the public in February this year.

The top track is now used daily before and after school hours, developing students' fitness and confidence. They are also taught essentials, such as bike safety and how to change tyres.

The children have now planted native trees and shrubs along the track, in the hope more bird life will be attracted to the area. In the future, picnic tables will be installed for community use.

Gate Pa is a finalist in the 2017 Bike To The Future Awards, organised by the New Zealand Transport Agency and Cycling Action Network to celebrate people and projects making cycling a better way to get around.