



**MATTER OF HEALTH:** Proserpine pharmacist Robert Mackay (far right) was among local riders joining the Whitsunday leg of the Great Australian Bike Ride, which involves cyclists making a 17,800km trip around Australia for Australian Rotary Health in a bid to raise awareness about and funds for research into mental health.

## Hitting the road for health

The Whitsundays was included in the itinerary when a group of intrepid bike riders travelled through the region last week to raise funds for research into mental illness.

The riders are taking part in the Great Australian Bike Ride, an epic trip which sees four of the group completing almost 18,000km as they make their way around Australia.

The ride commenced in Melbourne on March 21 and a stop in Proserpine last Tuesday night signalled 5000km had been successfully completed.

Ride director Geoffrey Kennedy explained the event was organised by Australian Rotary Health and was about raising awareness and funds for research into mental health issues.

A ride was chosen as the event to illustrate the cause because of the connection between physical fitness and good mental health, he noted.

On Wednesday morning 25 riders set off from Pioneer Park in Proserpine to complete a leg around the Whitsundays and to Bowen, with a number of locals joining the group.

Among them was local pharmacist Robert Mackay, resident Rod Webb and Deputy Mayor Rogin Taylor.

Mr Kennedy said the welcome from the Whitsunday community had been excellent, with Proserpine and Airlie Beach Rotary Clubs looking after the riders on Tuesday night and also donating a total of \$5500.

Noting some of the lighter moments along the trip so far, Mr Kennedy said the number of tyres the group had been through was amazing.

"You would not believe the number of punctures," he said.

Fortunately the trip is sponsored by Shimano, which supplied bikes and parts including tyres.

People along the way had also been marvellous, he continued.

"At Miriam Vale this beat up old ute pulled up beside us and chugged along with the driver asking 'do you take donations'," Mr Kennedy laughed. "He then handed over a stubby holder full of coins. It's quite amazing the generosity of people."

The Great Australian Bike Ride averages 110km per day with people joining and leaving the pack of riders throughout the almost seven month trip. The ride will conclude in Melbourne on World Mental Health Day, October 10.