



DAILY DIARY FROM RIDE DIRECTOR GEOFF KENNEDY

Stage 6

May 25 - Day 66 Townsville to Charters Towers 140 km

It's raining, conditions confine the ride to 40 kilometres per hour, but the Winnebago does 250 km picking up all the equipment. The life of a stage manager come ride director - 30 telephone calls. Charters Towers Rotary Club provide a great meal and we have risen from sea level to over 1000 thousand feet. We even have riders down from Cairns who rode on stage one and have 25 in the group.

May 26 - Day 67 Charters Towers to Pentland 105 km

Back to the great weather, one of the great sights was 14 thousand head of cattle. The remoteness is obvious since leaving Townsville even the road kill has changed. Camping at Pentlands in great weather with much laughter.

May 27 - Day 68 Pentland to Torrens Creek 50km

Great to hear the laughter at breakfast - a very happy group. More great riding conditions through White Mountain National Park, great variation in vegetation with wattles and grevilleas in flower. We climbed over the Great Dividing Range at 2000 feet and are now camping beside the Exchange Hotel. This afternoon the part time riders are off on a recreational ride.

May 28 - Day 69 Torrens Creek to Hughenden 90 km

An early start from our camping and more easy riding into Hughenden. We are now into the flat grassland plains and it has become quite hot. The tourists are visiting Porcupine Gorge this afternoon and are hoping to have lamb shanks for dinner.

May 29 - Day 70 Hughenden to Richmond 114 km

A very early start riding before 7.00 am. The shadows in the early morning sunlight of the riders were quite attractive. Riding the Overlander's Way through the Mitchell Grass Downs where the population is counted as one person per 23 square kilometres. It's flat, the road is straight and the undulations are always upward. We are now in Richmond the fossil capital of Australia. One of the great sites is a huge flock of black Kites circling above. Tomorrow is Saturday and we are off to the races at Maxwellton for their annual race meeting.

May 30 - Day 71 Richmond to Maxwellton 51 km

A brilliant sunrise a brilliant start for the Maxy Races, their only race meeting for the year. We set up camp for 5 races and had a punters club going, we backed three second's and one third all for a win - naturally we lost everything. A great day, huge crowd, dirt track, a band till late, kids races and a tug of war.

Some highlights - \$1000 from the Race Club and the Public

- Auctioned off our riders for a bike race down the straight. Won by the weight for age specialist – John Rundell from the mystery rider a local female Jockey Dot Slack-Smith.

- the local stock and station agent who travels huge distances each year has already rolled three cars just got his pilot's licence, put the first plane through a fence so he's now on his second plane.

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– the huge size of properties stocking cattle amounts to 1 beast for every 20 acres.

May 31 - Day 72 Maxwellton to Julia Creek 105km

Up early disturbing the other campers in their swags. More flat country and an early finish into Julia Creek. Camping again but a welcome spa for tired and aching muscles. We enjoyed a three course meal created with red claw yabbies for entrée, an Italian/ Asian main course and rice pudding for dessert.

June 1 - Day 73 Julia Creek to Cloncurry 138 km

An even earlier start, long shadows cast in the early morning sunlight as we head further west. A long day with only six riders lasting the distance, welcoming the air-conditioned cabins at the end of the day. Tonight we meet with the Rotary club of Cloncurry and have a rest day tomorrow.

June 2 - Day 74 Rest Day

June 3 - Day 75 Cloncurry to Mt Isa 120 km

Commencing with another early start, the highlight of the day was the magnificent outback scenery in the frost of early sunlight. Rugged hills and rocky outcrops accompanied us into the outback through to Mt Isa centre for a late lunch and hosting by the Rotary Club's in Mt Isa. Tonight we are at the town's Leagues Club and it is State of Origin game night – I assume that is important?

June 4 - Day 76 Rest Day in Mt Isa

Rest day in Mt Isa following a combined meeting of Mt Isa and Mt Isa West Rotary Clubs. At the town's League's Club we watched the State of Origin - barracking for Queensland of course. Wonderful hosts and a visit to the Outback at Isa Centre and the Hard Times Mine. We had an interview with Mob FM radio followed by champagne at sunset overlooking a city of 24,000 people with Smelters and mining infrastructure surrounded by the landscape of the Selwyn Ranges. Dinner and dancing at the Buss Club while the band played oldies music. EXCEPTIONAL ORGANISATION BY ARH CHAIRMAN TERRY LEES.

June 5 - Day 77 Mt Isa to Burketown Junction 120km

After a McDonald's breakfast and a flag off by Mayor John Maloney we are back to the wide open spaces. With flat scrub country, good road, a warm sun light breeze and little traffic we drove on to Camooweal to camp.

June 6 - Day 78 Burketown Junction to Camooweal 70km

We travelled back and rode the distance into Camooweal. A magic sunrise, bigger ant hills, Wedge tailed eagles and many colourful wild flowers highlighted the day.

June 7 - Day 79 Camooweal to Avon Downs Rest Area 70km

Our first night of real camping; a toilet but no showers, rocky ground, bent tent pegs, howling south easterly winds – gee camping is fun! With generators going dinner was cooked on the open fire place in front of a beautiful sunset. But the full moon is a worry...

June 8 - Day 80 Avon Downs Rest Area to Wunara Store 105 km

A cold morning start but a highlight awaits us! On day 53 in Hervey Bay we were noticed riding past a particular house; a few days ago the couple from Hervey Bay met Gonny Rundell by chance at a roadside stop. They were on the way to Soudan Station managed by their son. They promised scones, jam and cream for morning

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tea. A chance radio contact with their son confirmed the arrangements. At the agreed time of 9.30 this morning we rolled into Soudan Station. Yes there was scones, jam and cream – as well as sandwiches and chocolate slice. An amazing place! Soudan station is an outstation of Alexandria Station; 4.8 million acres holding 95 thousand head of cattle supplying most of Woolworths in Queensland. The home paddocks of the horses is ten thousand acres, this section of the station covers 80 kilometres of the Barkly Highway and extends 200 kilometres north. The two children are among 156 in the area educated by the School of the Air and the Rotary Clubs in Mt Isa play a part in the children's visits into Mt Isa as part of their education. The January 2009 floods is also very evident. The pantry and cool room is quite a sight, catering for 16 people on the outstation. Alexandria station is the second largest property in Australia and the world at over 16000 square kilometres. The huge ant hills are an amazing sight reaching almost 2 metres high like herds of elephant grazing in the scrub.

June 9 - Day 81 Wunara Store to Barkly Homestead 80 km

Strong tail winds into Barkly Homestead and your correspondent is sporting new bike shoes and cleats - a generous gift from Shimano. John Bazzano could never accept the sneakers and toe clips on this ride... He has returned to Sydney via Mt Isa and his replacement Bill and Jean Shore have arrived.

June 10 – Day 82 Barkly roadhouse to 41 Mile Bore 120 km

Early start but the Barkly breeze from the south pushed the riders all the way in super fast time. Our bush camp has no facilities. Only one major mishap in the toilet tent with Kay Peacock. Gourmet three course meal of pumpkin soup, spaghetti meat sauce and fruit salad around the campfire.

June 11 – Day 83 41 Mile Bore to Tennant Creek 100km

A sleep in! ...Only until 6.30 am. Again the tail wind for 70 km but not pleasant for the last 30 km south to Tennant Creek. Small ant hills, wattle in bloom - lovely riding. We are now 500 kilometres north of Alice Springs.

June 12 – Day 84 Rest Day in Tennant Creek 65km

Visit to Devil's Marbles - amazing granite formations. 100 kms further south another tourist attraction nearby. Amazing hospitality by the Rotary Club of Tennant Creek with meal and Rotary plum puddings to go. Much shopping, as we need to stock up for the next six days.

June 13 – Day 85 Tennant to Banka Banka Station 100 km

A little oasis on the side of the Stuart Highway, even a slide show on the operations of Helen Springs Station. Riding through ridge country, rocky outcrops other areas flat with light scrub and many brilliant white tree-trunks.

June 14 – Day 86 Banka Banka Station to Renner Springs 65km

More flat scrub country, but our first mesa (table top rocky outcrop). Lots of military convoys on highway, I'm sure someone is invading Queensland. A relaxing afternoon with the leader asleep again.

June 15 – Day 87 Renner Springs to Elliott 95km

More flat country. Gone are the smooth white tree-trunks replaced by smaller rough bark trees, but great weather. A blustery but almost tail wind on good roads with lots of caravans.

June 16 – Day 88 Elliott to Dunmarra 104 km

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Fine weather again, but very blustery winds. The combination of side winds and the draft from road trains travelling south was difficult. Road trains can be up to 53 metres in length with a speed limit of 130 kilometres. Quite different vegetation after Newcastle Waters, thick impenetrable scrub, sub-tropical I do believe. The day ended with a birthday party for John Rundell.

June 17 - Day 89 Dunmarra to Larrimah 136 km

The wind has dropped leaving a fine sunny day again and an early start with the aim of finishing by 1.30 pm. Quick stops - only one coffee stop at Daly Waters and lunch on the road. Even the ride director beats the 1.30 curfew in Larrimah (by 1 minute). An interesting WW2 museum and a hotel with snakes, crocodiles, mini birds and rats on display.

June 18 - Day 90 Larrimah to Mataranka 76km

A cool morning with an early start, you appreciate travelling on a bike so much more with no phone service - so I have no messages. I can ride again! Gone are the birds of prey. No soaring Kites. No Wedge tailed eagles hunched over road kill. The road kill is different, often a cow or a bullock. Great variations in the ant hills. Some short and squat, others tall & pinnacle like or bulky and grouped together like a family portrait. Colour also varies from rich chocolate brown to dull grey. More vegetation changes as we approach Mataranka, the trees are much larger. A hasty snack break at 11 with most off to the thermal springs - except me.

June 19 – Day 91 Mataranka to Katherine 105km

The lifers are fast closing in on the 7000 km pedalled. Mataranka was a delight. Warm thermal pools and many other places to visit. It is a cold morning and a hot breakfast. Items of interest on the road to Katherine were?????? Well it's the ant hills again I'm sure I saw one like a Buddha, one like an Indian Temple, the close family portrait groups again - some with painted faces. Another like a troop of Monkeys. The discussion at lunch was the collective noun for Monkeys –is it a troupe or a troop? Me thinks I have been on the road to long!

June 20 – Day 92 Rest

A small Rotary Club with wonderful hospitality at the Rotary Fun Park. A free day with flights, breakfast, gorge, cruises, waterfall visits and huge meals at the Golf Club.

June 21- Day 93 Katherine to Pine Creek 91 km

Back in to some more interesting country. Rocky outcrops, even some water in the creek. Much bigger ant hills in haphazard shapes. Sadly a fall, the first in this whole stage. Tony Caruana now has slightly less skin, but is back on the bike the next morning.

June 22- Day 94 Pine Creek to Cooinda 168 km

Up hill for the first 40 km. Hot and humid we came to a basic camp ground with lots of people and mozzies. All very tired.

June 23 - Day 95 Cooinda to Jabiru 51 km

Shorter distance but still hard and very humid. Accommodation at Lakeview Park with a very good inner tropical setting. Some flights and tourist visits filled in the day.

June 24 -Day 96 Jabiru to Bark Hut Inn 135 km

Another solid day that's humid and hot with a great swimming pool at the end. Excellent camping facilities.

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June 25 - Day 97 Bark Hut Inn to Darwin 119 km

Almost a down hill run with heavy traffic on the Stuart Highway. A shoulder injury to Roz Townsend was a great pity with 3 km to go. An evening visit to Mindil Beach Markets.

June 26 - Day 98

A busy day in Darwin. Breakfast with Darwin Sunrise Rotary Club, business lunch, an afternoon civic reception with the mayor and seafood on the wharf.

June 27 - Day 99

Fishing in Darwin Harbour for some, but most to the Hidden Valley V8 track for a community bike event. Then reloading of all the vehicles for the start of Stage 7.

End of Stage 6