



DAILY DIARY FROM RIDE DIRECTOR GEOFF KENNEDY

Stage 9

Day 204 – Saturday 10th GEELONG TO MELBOURNE 101KMS

Final day! Very early start at McDonalds, with great cooperation from the McDonalds' team to get us underway early. More than 36 extra riders with us today. A scenic wandering ride selected by the Victorian Police through Lara, Point Cook, Altona and Williamstown. Three teams on the road. One team able to ride the whole way but the hairy turtles team were uplifted for part of the way. Sadly the 2nd team including day riders from Werribee & Altona were late into the finish. A great reception at Lincoln Square in Carlton; a ride to the Melbourne Town hall for a civic reception and an awards presentation concluded the ride. The next day all of the vehicles head to Healesville for a cleanout and repacking of all gear before they were sent off to Sydney.

Day 203 – Friday 9th Ballarat to Geelong 90km

It's 2 degrees but a warm farewell from the Ballarat Town Hall by Councillor Samantha McIntosh. We narrowly miss disaster! A young motorist appears to have a blackout and spins her car amongst the riders and vehicles.

Some hills but better conditions into Geelong. We are late but are welcomed to a lunch and a great evening function at the Grovedale Hotel with a presentation and reminiscing with a new version of the Song "My Way", but slightly changed to "Geoff's Way". Also an interesting vehicle incident with the Healesville bus in the carpark of the pub and the driver doesn't even drink!

Day 202 – Thursday 8th Bendigo to Ballarat 122 km

Actually from Camp Getaway into Bendigo then a transport stage and a big fuel problem for David Brown. This reduced our riding time to Castlemaine for morning tea at the Theatre Royale and onto to Hepburn Springs Spa for lunch. Another cold hard day climbing the Great Dividing Range before we arrive in Ballarat. The cold, the wind and the hills are really taking a toll. Dinner with Rotary Clubs from Ballarat at the Wendouree Fire Station.

Day 201 – Wednesday 7th St Arnaud to Bendigo 111 km

How do you describe living in a 100 year old plus convent? I won't even try – so unique! Even a blessing and prayer for our safety in the chapel by Father Paul Mercovitch from the Church of Immaculate Conception in St Arnaud. A frost this morning. It's cold and very hard riding with buffeting winds. Through the gold fields country of central Victoria and a police escort to the final run into Bendigo for a civic reception with the Mayor Kevin Gibbons. Out to Axedale and District 9800 Camp Getaway- a great facility being upgraded. A combined meeting involving the six clubs from the Bendigo area is very well attended and well organised by Jacques Olivier who road with us in Tasmania.

Day 200 – Tuesday 6th Boort to St Arnaud 90km

A cold morning but fine and storms are brewing. Most riders are wearing black arm bands today. Last evening a solemn ceremony was held to mark the end of the GABR in a few days time. The body of GABR was duly laid to rest in a splendid coffin. All mourners dressed in black to mark the sad passing of the phantom bike rider Gabriel. The 23rd Psalm was read - suitably amended to give it a cycling flavour. The coffin was respectfully carried to the shores of Lake Boort and with much wailing and lamentations it was cast adrift. The eulogy was read and the wake followed a dinner in honour of the deceased which was well attended

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by his family and friends at the Railway Hotel. The coffin was later retrieved from its watery grave and then cremated to ensure the bugger is dead. A flat ride today. All saddened by the terrible loss. Gale force head winds before lunch with Charlton Rotary and then on to St Arnaud. Tonight's accommodation – the Convent of Mercy. How appropriate... And dinner with St Arnaud Rotary.

Day 199 – Monday 5th Swan Hill to Boort 116km

A McDonalds breakfast and farewell by the Mayor with a police escort out of town (obviously keen to have us leave) and two police cars keeping a helpful eye on us all the way to Kerang for lunch with Rotary. A brief stop for some at the Catalina Flying Boat Museum at Lake Boga. Then south towards Boort and into the head winds. A fall just before Boort involving Peter Mayer and Karen Brown – just when Karen's speedo was on 9999 kms... No damage done but tonight we have a solemn ceremony cremating the body of the GABR.

Day 198 – Sunday 4th Balranald to Swan Hill 100km

Again cool and cloudy but no wind. Miles of flat country, some crops and stock but at least the road is smooth and the traffic light. Still, the leading team miss a turn to Stony Crossing and Swan Hill. Lunch at the information centre and staying at the Pioneer Settlement Lodges in dormitory bunks. Dinner by Swan Hill Rotary Club before a sound and light tour of the Pioneer Village. Only six days to go. It's getting harder; lots of Rotary Commitments; much info and planning to be worked into the daily schedule. Riders and crew need to be kept happy and safety is becoming an even greater emphasis. With fatigue and thoughts of finishing upper most in our thoughts.

Day 197 – Saturday 3rd Robinvale to Balranald 86km

Last night a great meeting with Robinvale-Euston Rotary Club. Lots of yummy pasta and a great speaker in Professor Michael Sawyer. Today is a much better day - cool cloudy and sort of a tail wind. Crossing the Murray River again and leaving Victoria for NSW. It's pretty flat country with the usual undulations through Malley scrub into Balranald for lunch. Way behind the very fast group of riders who were given their head today. A huge chicken stir-fry for dinner - the last evening meal for the ride from our chef Tony Caruana. A bit sad really.

Day 196 – Friday 2nd Mildura to Robinvale 87km

It's raining. It's cold. It's still raining and it continues raining - a horrible day. A quick change to our finish location puts us into a sports stadium with hot showers and heating.

Day 195- Thursday 1st Mildura Rest Day

A rest day with boat cruises and winery visits.

Day 194 – Wednesday 30th Renmark to Mildura 143km

A McDonalds breakfast but then a very hard day's riding with almost gale force winds from the north. A long undulating road with many views of the Murray River. We cross into Victoria with the Renmark President Carol Bristow and their exchange student from Belgium. Lunch at Lake Cullullerine and a late arrival into the wharf area in Mildura. Some more great hosts from the Rotary Clubs in the Mildura area.

Day 193 - Tuesday 29th Waikerie to Renmark 81km

Great riding conditions - cool but sunny. Not too much headwind and many crossings of the Murray River which has a very unpleasant grey/ green colour. Some skulduggery on the road with the B team beating the A team into town. Even after the ride director found himself spread-eagled on the bitumen! We received a civic reception by Mayor Neil Martinson with an outstanding lunch spread. Another first – 16 of our group stay on an 8 bedroom, four

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bathroom houseboat on the Murray River. Another great meal with Renmark Rotary Club which included Barramundi.

Day 192 – Monday 28th Nuriootpa to Waikerie 103km

More grape growing country. Heavy transport on the Sturt highway. A stop at Sandleton and we are not yet following the Murray River. Lunch on the river and dinner with the Rotary Club of Waikerie. A great donation of \$5,000 concluded a cold night.

Day 191 – Sunday 27th Adelaide to Nuriootpa 76km

A 10am start, farewelled by the lord mayor of Adelaide. The ride coincides with the Bay to Birdwood Asic Car Rally and we cross its route twice during the day. We negotiate a long gorge road for a very steep climb out of Adelaide through very spectacular country. Light rain is no deterrent and the ceaseless hills are all conquered. We finish at railway park before home hosting and motels followed by an evening function with Barossa Valley and Barossa Districts Rotary Clubs. At last we are away from Adelaide and all the traffic and navigational issues.