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Roberta Updates Us On her Great Australian Bike Ride

Tasmania

Tasmania was a whirlwind of eight days riding 100kms every day with 65 riders. Devonport, Burnie, Warratah, Penguin to Strahan. Beautiful days, stunning coastline but oh, the hills in Tasmania! Needed the "Granny Gear" often. Tom Brown, 71 from Mission Beach Rotary Club and I are about the same standard riders so we have teamed up as the other two riders have their partners with them. Only four riders doing the lot with others just to Sydney where we pick up more riders and my two cycling buddies from Noosa. Tom and I are respectively the Patriarch and Matriarch of the group on the Victorian ride to Sydney. Some jottings....Lake St Clair for lunch in an eco centre then stayed at Tarraleah near the awesome hydro electric scheme with pipes down the steep hillsides. It turned cold to freezing and driving rain to Hobart and up the centre where the hills were sooo steep and the cross wind freezing so had the winter gear on. Sadly, we lost several riders on a railway line in wet conditions. The 80 year old fractured his femur and was taken to Hobart where he had a pin put in and was flown home to recover but I believe he will join the ride again in six weeks! Geoffrey Hawkins is a very tough fit ex cyclist who rode the boards in his youth. Loved the old world lolly shop at Richmond, so bought my chocolate aniseed rings and licorice allsorts then scored an interview with Channel Nine news. When I went to breakfast the next morning the oldies on a bus trip there were so excited as they recognised me! Loved Oatlands our halfway stop out of Hobart. My billet was at Carlington Mill a huge old sandstone dutch mill with the original piggery and stables with timber shingles. It was a highlight. The couple are renting there 'til the Council does it up. It had a unique farrier business making farrier knives with Tasmanian oak handles exported all over the world as the owner was a farrier and knows what specialised knives are needed.

Victoria

On 29th March we went from Launceston back to Melbourne at 10am then on the bikes to Healesville and the next day off to Alexandra through the fire devastated depressing bush where the soil is still ashen grey. Only the open areas and grass trees are sprouting life even the bracken hasn't taken off with lack of rain and the larger trees are sending out what I call powder puffs of shoots straight out of the bark. Stayed with the local doctor and went out to a smorgasbord dinner with Rotarians who all had bush fire stories to tell both sad and amazing. The tenterhooks the people were on waiting for days not knowing if they had to vacate or not with smoke all around. The day following the fires it took two hours to get down the main street with strangers hugging each other and telling their story. Continuing the ride, Brett Cottee was stung on the tongue and was whisked off to hospital for a few hours and rode the next day in the bus all dosed up. Another, Malcolm Nicholson, lost concentration in the heat from Yarrowonga to Wangaratta touching the wheel in front and badly grazing his arm and knee so I did my lifesaver bit and dressed it. Malcolm rode on but slowly. April 1st took us from Mansfield to Benalla taking in the Tolmie Hill where I rode my dirty bike to a bike shop as we didn't have a mechanic with us and I needed some adjustments as the bike cables had stretched. Went to a fabulous vintage bike show in the museum. I can't believe the women had to wear huge bloomers to look like a skirt to hide their ankles with their boots or they would not be let into the Ladies Lounge. I then managed to have some time to myself and went for a swim before another gourmet meal with a Rotarian billet in a magnificent home and gardens, very much like a luxury B&B! On April 2nd our media person in Sydney, Gerardine Grace, had teed me up for a prime time interview on ABC radio five minutes before the news.

A short day is 77 kilometres with most around the 100 kms. Even the Tour de France only ride six days! Up to now I have raised around \$38,000 with \$8,000 pending. So far on the trip I have been too well fed! I know I need it but still not healthy food, too much white bread! On 3-4th April at Rutherglen we stayed at the Victoria Hotel in the main street, so it was great to just walk out the door and be in the main street. Rooms were olde worlde with comfy beds and shared bathrooms. We grabbed one whole day in Rutherglen without getting on a bike so I wandered around town and chatted to farmers at the stand pipe filling up their 1000 litre water tanks for \$5 as their dams are empty despite a thunderstorm just after we pedalled in (14mm rain) and a black-out for an hour. Took some photos of the old water tower which is the centre of heaps of controversy – it is a wonderful landmark but the brickwork is breaking down and the water authority don't want the responsibility. After lunch at the famous Parker Pies with my sister Sue from Wodonga we went out to Morris Wines then another Rotary dinner at the hotel. Great food, lamb shanks slow roasted or chicken breast. Sun 5 April was a 116km ride stopping for coffee in Dean St, Albury then rolls for lunch in the park with the Mayor. In the afternoon off to Culcairn and Henty where I was billeted out to ex-teachers in another luxury B & B converted bank with old world gardens, dahlias and flowering creepers surrounding it. Coming up first thing Monday an interview with ABC Wagga.

AND SOME ADDITIONAL NOTES FROM NEW SOUTH WALES

Tuesday 7th April saw the Sir Donald Bradman statue on the Cricketers Walk through the park. We then visited the house where he was born and checked out the wash house where his nappies were boiled in the copper!

We had a picnic in the lovely park at Lockhart (the verandah town) with Rotarians before pushing off to busy Wagga Wagga. Still riding 100kms a day and looking forward to a day off in Canberra on Good Friday.

Rotarians are home hosting us ..luxury B & B's! Stayed in a beautifully renovated bank in Henty, the town where McKay invented the header which revolutionised cereal cropping world wide.

Junee, the railway town after a sizzling morning ride and very ravenous for lunch. We went to the licorice factory which employs 40 locals and you can watch the licorice being made from spelt grain, licorice root and the healthy sugar rapadura....sooo all good for you..and my favourite dark chocolate and ginger from Buderim.

In Canberra we had Good Friday off and it was like a ghost town. The highway was chockers as we were leaving so we had a good ride in and the only reasonable place open to eat at was the huge Greek Club.

We arrive in Sydney on Thursday night and whoo hooo! two days off as my saddle is not soft enough then off sailing Pittwater with friends if good weather.!

Roberta Gordon.