

Batemans Bay to Walhalla and back

Cliff takes Pete to see the wonderments of Walhalla!

This is number 4 in the series of "Cliff and Pete's Excellent Road Trips". This was our longest ride so far, covering 2,159 km in five days (only 139 km longer than our last ride so probably not that much to crow about), and also our hardest. I have been the route planner for our first three rides so this time Cliff set the agenda and it included two "must do's":

1. Visit Marysville (and/or other towns effected by the February 2009 Victorian bush fires) and spend some money; and
2. Go to Walhalla in south-east Victoria because "*You got'a see this place!*"

The basic route to meet these goals was to start from Batemans Bay, head south through the Snowy Mountains (Alpine Way), cross the border into the Victorian high-country, skirt to the west of the Victorian snow fields down to Marysville. From there we would head south to the Princes Highway then east to Moe where we would turn back up into the ranges to Walhalla. The return journey was to be on as few roads that we had already covered as possible. This meant returning to the Princes Highway and droning east to Bairnsdale where we would turn north on the Great Alpine Road to climb back up to the alpine areas through Omeo and Mount Hotham and on to Tallangatta (to stay in the famous pub) via the Kiewa Valley. From Tallangatta there would be a short back-track before heading north again to the Snowy Mountains Highway and home via Canberra. Piece of cake, well that's what it looked like on the map!

The ground rules for this, and all our other rides were:

1. We travel about 400 km per day
2. We stick close to the speed limit (my riding partner over it and me under it 'cause I'm slow)
3. We try to stop and smell the flowers (and take the odd picture)
4. We stay in country pubs, the type of place where our wives would not stay
5. We **DON'T** go on dirt roads

By-and-large we were able to adhere to these rules; although rule #1 was pushed on several days and rule #4 has an implied sub-rule that we spend something like AUD25 per night for accommodation -- this is becoming quite hard to do, especially in the parts of the country we covered on this ride. The impact of the Global Economic Crisis means that we will have to double our accommodation budget and look at using motels or B&Bs more often.

On with the ride report!

Day 1 - Batemans Bay to Corryong

8:00 AM, Thursday, 25 March; Tourist Information Centre Batemans Bay -- The ride had been widely advertised amongst our Ulysses branch but once again only the two of us turned up for "the off". Ah! well there are advantages in touring with a "small" group; for one, there would only be one straggler.

In my previous ride reports I have neglected to tell you dear reader what we are riding. Cliff (the trip leader and stand-by rider for the Honda works MotoGP team) rides a **Honda Deauville**. With its 700cc V-Twin motor, full fairing and standard panniers, this has proven to be a very good one-up sports/tourer. Cliff supplements the standard panniers with a tank bag to give him the 5 to 6 days carrying capacity we need for this trip. This is my second trip on my **Honda SilverWing** maxi-scooter. The 'Wing is a 600cc parallel twin with all the weather protection a maxi-scooter provides and about 60 lt. of storage space under the seat. With six days worth of sox and undies and tee shirts in my duffel bag, jacket liner and wet weather pants this space is completely full. I find the performance and handling to be more than enough for this type of riding. Add to that the excellent weather protection and ease of getting on and off and it too makes a very good one-up tourer.

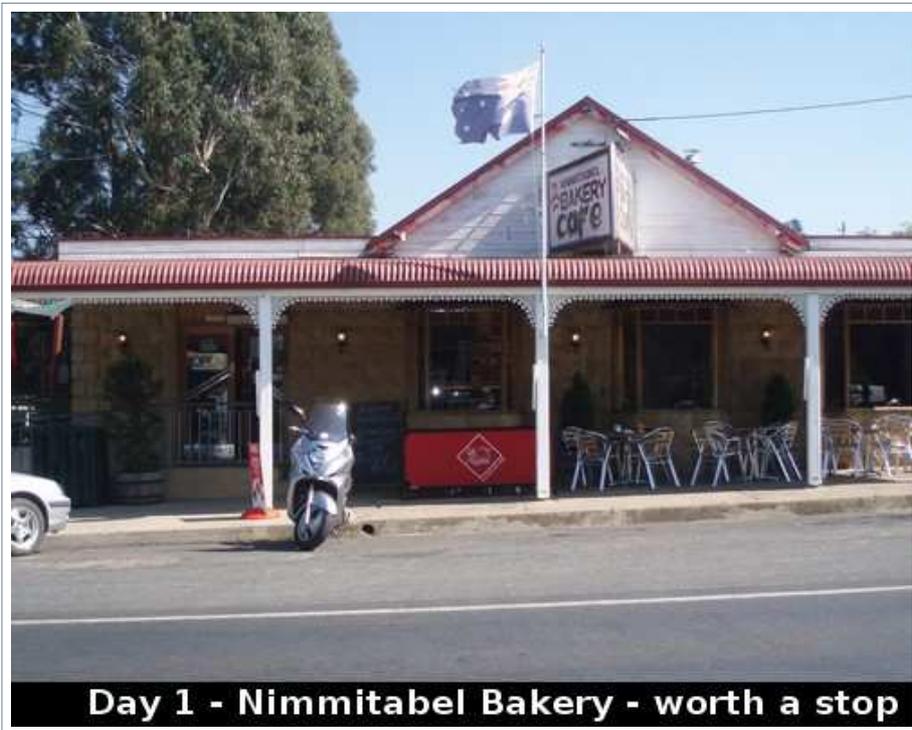
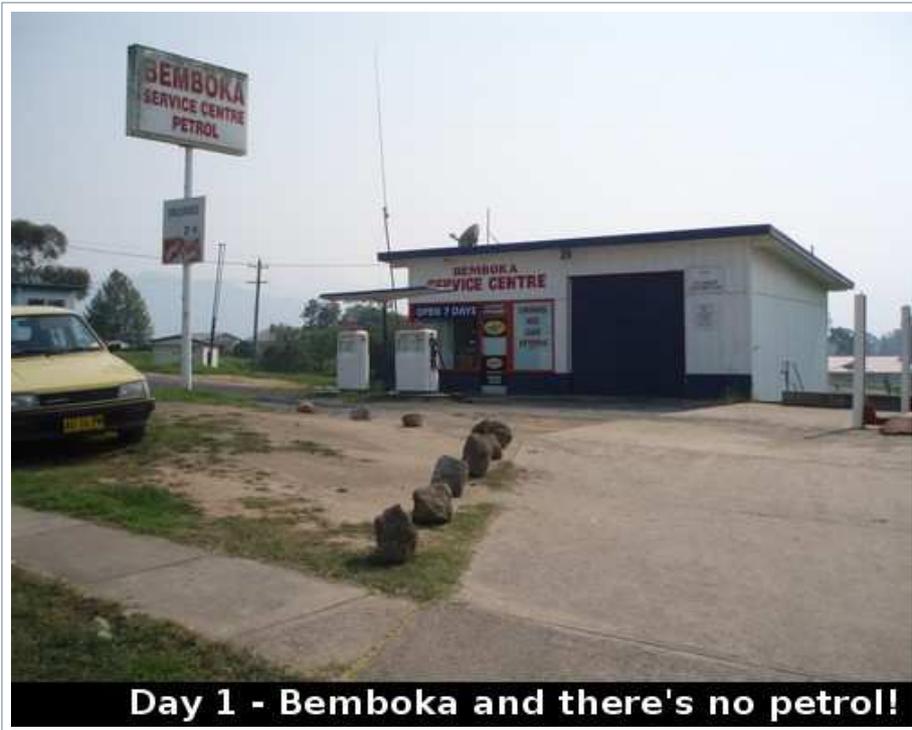


Day 1 - Batemans Bay - a 'wing and a ...



Day 1 - We're ready to roll

The planned destination for today was Jindabyne on the edge of the Kosciuszko National Park. The route was down the Princes Highway to near Bega then turn west onto the Snowy Mountains Highway and head for Bemboka for nourishment for bikes and riders. Bemboka has a very good pie shop and serves a reasonable cup of coffee as well. I started the day with a full tank of fuel, my riding partner had not; however, he had enough fumes in the tank to reach Bemboka and, as I thought, the choice of two petrol stations from which to fill his tank -- wrong! in the few months since I had last been there both establishments had closed! The closest source of fuel was Candelo, a small village about 24 km away in the opposite direction to our trip. Luckily for Cliff most of the 24 km was down hill and he coasted into town -- 390 km from a full tank -- not bad!



The diversion for fuel had cost us nearly an hour so when we got back to Bemboka we decided to "punish the town for not having any petrol" and ride on up the Brown Mountain to Nimmitabel and stop at the equally good pie shop there. The pie shop is a popular stop for motorcyclists -- 6.5 out of 10).

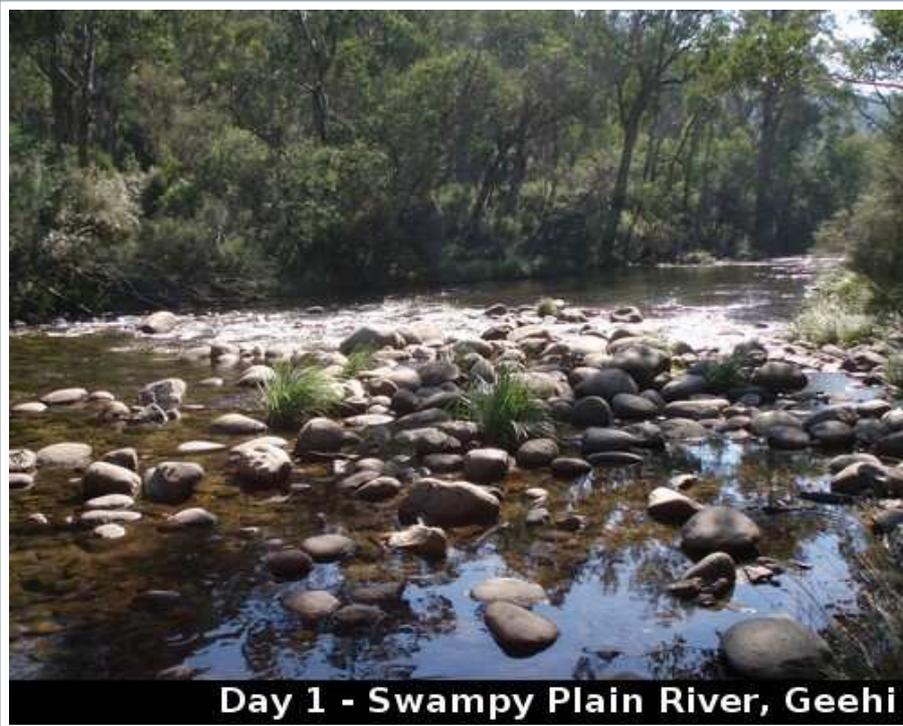
Nimmitabel to Cooma and then on to Berridale wanders across the Monaro Tableland. I really like this barren high plains country. After the recent rain it was green rather than its usual fawny brown. From Berridale the road begins to climb into the Kosciuszko National Park and Snowy Mountains ski resorts.

As an aside; the week before this ride my wife and I had been touring the south island of New Zealand. Looking across towards the Snowy "Mountains" reminded me of how big real mountains are and "truth in advertising" should make Australia rename this area the "Snowy Hills".



We reached Jindabyne by 1:30 PM -- much too early to stop for the night. So we re-fuelled, consulted the maps and decided to head for Khancoban on the other side of the ranges via the Alpine Way. The ride is much easier these days as it has recently been sealed for its full length. However, the 100 km is still very windy as it climbs and descends several high ranges and takes about two hours to complete (I will at this point be bombarded with contradictions from plastic rocket kamikaze pilots who do it regularly in 65 minutes flat -- all I would say is well I wish I was that brave!). Speaking of high speeds on tight and windy roads; this was the first of many times on this trip that we had to deal with on-coming traffic going much too fast on narrow roads with blind bends. 4x4 drivers seemed to be particularly bad at this caper.

Despite the narrow windy roads and ever present danger from out of control 4x4's there are several spots along the Alpine Way that give fantastic views of the main range and the surrounding high plains. Tom Groggan and Geehi are two such places.



Day 1 - Swampy Plain River, Geehi



Day 1 - Snowy Mountains main range

The National Parks Service has provided a picnic area rest stop at Geehi on the Swampy Plain River. We were there about 3:00 PM and the river was quite beautiful. We stopped for ten minutes, chatting with some trail bike riders who had been touring some of the rougher trails through the National Park and were now on their way home. These chats along the way add to the pleasure of these rides.

The only accommodation available at Khancoban was motel style rooms at the pub but the cost was too steep (it is a long way from anywhere I suppose) so we decided to press on to Corryong. This meant crossing into "Mexico" (the state of "Victoria" for any folks outside Australia reading this report). At this point, the border is the mighty Murray River and after drought breaking rain it was flowing strongly. As we rolled into town, the Corryong Hotel-Motel is on the right so we pulled in to check it out. The room rate was reasonable and they have good safe parking for motorcycles (the pub owner rides an old Harley). The accommodation is motel style with good comfortable beds and tea and coffee making facilities. Its around the back of the pub and away from any noise.



We were a bit early for dinner so we sat out the front of the pub chatting with a friendly local ("Ah! I us'ta 'ave a BSA when I was yung!") and watching the world go slowly by. Thursday night at the Corryong Hotel is "Steak Night"; so a few cold beers and a giant steak and salad was a real treat and a good way to end a great day's riding. We had covered just over 500 km since leaving Batemans Bay.

The Corryong Hotel-Motel is recommended if you are looking for somewhere to stay in north-eastern Victoria.

Day 2 - Corryong to Marysville

I wrote my diary entry for today in Marysville, scene of some of the worst devastation from the bush fires that raged through this part of Victoria some 15 months ago. We are staying in the Crossways Country Inn, one of the few buildings that survived the fire. Marysville is at the southern end of a long and steep-sided valley surrounded by eucalyptus forest. Almost all of that forest was burnt and the signs of the devastation are everywhere as you ride down the valley and into the town. The remains of the buildings that were destroyed have been removed but the cleared blocks of land are a poignant reminder of what was once here. To those of us who watched the devastation on TV, it was really horrible. However, you can't grasp the scale of the tragedy until you visit here. I should repeat, our visit was not to gape and gawk but to be positive and do our tiny bit to help its recovery by spending some money in the town.

While the day ended on a rather gloomy note by contrast it had been one of the best days of riding I have ever done. We left Corryong before 8:00 AM (the Corryong Hotel does not do breakfast) and followed the banks of the Hume Weir west to Tallangatta where we stopped for breakfast at MJ's Bakery in the main street. MJ's is not up there in the exalted heights of the Braidwood and Boorowa bakeries but its not bad -- 7 out of 10.



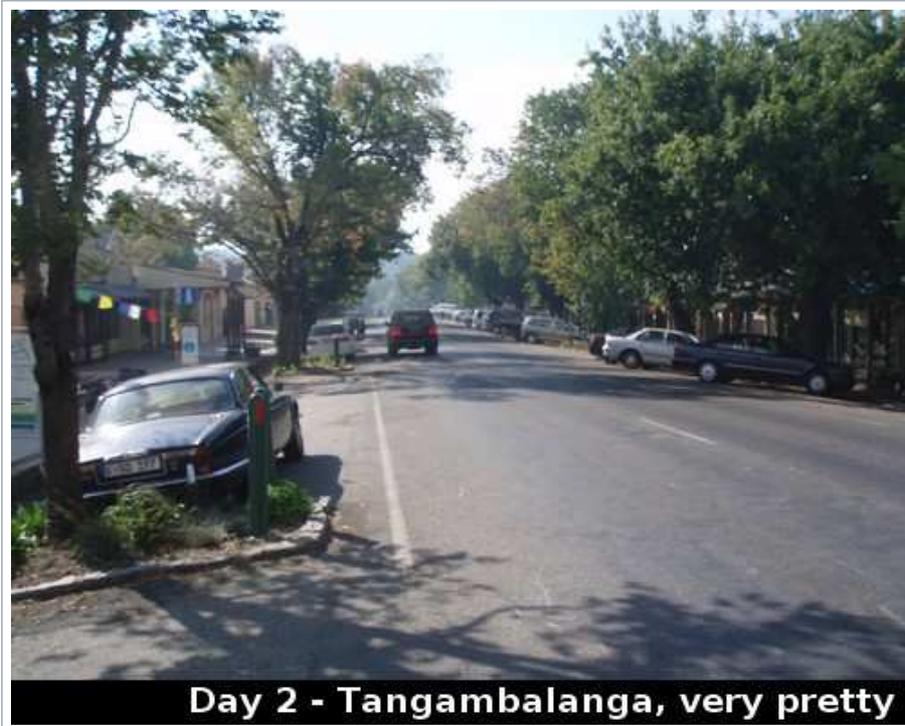
Day 2 - MJ's Bakery, Tallangatta



Day 2 - Tangambalanga, main street

After fuelling the riders we headed off on a torturous route to Yackandandah via Tangambalanga, Kiewa and Baranduda. My riding partner had driven most of these roads over the past few years so seemed to know where he was going (despite all the odd sounding town names). It was mid-morning, the sun was up, the temperature was in the low 20's (Celsius) and the roads were meandering across country - how good is this?.

Yackandandah is a very picturesque town with lots of arts and crafts shops. It dates from the 1850's gold rush period but over recent years it has been very tastefully restored; clearly the restoration has been done to a town plan because the main street has a sympathetic olde worlde charm. One shop has an eclectic collection of old wares including sewing machines, a Second World War signaling lamp, an ancient metal working lathe, a vintage printing press and a small collection of 1950's valve driven scientific equipment - how the owner ever expects to sell this stuff is a mystery, but perhaps I'm missing the point! Another gallery has some beautifully made timber furniture including a table with a river gum frame and top made from 9,000 year old timber dug out of a bog near the Murray River - a bargain at AUD17,000!



Day 2 - Tangambalanga, very pretty



Day 2 - A beautiful piece of furniture

From Yackandandah it's only a short run across to Beechworth for another coffee at the Beechworth Pantry in the main street. The Pantry is a cafe-deli; the coffee is very good, the cakes and pastries are all home made and there is a very good selection of jams and condiments; I can recommend the fresh scones, jam and cream, nearly as good as my wife's - 8 out of 10. It would have been good to have had time to explore Beechworth and its surrounds but that's a goal for a future ride.



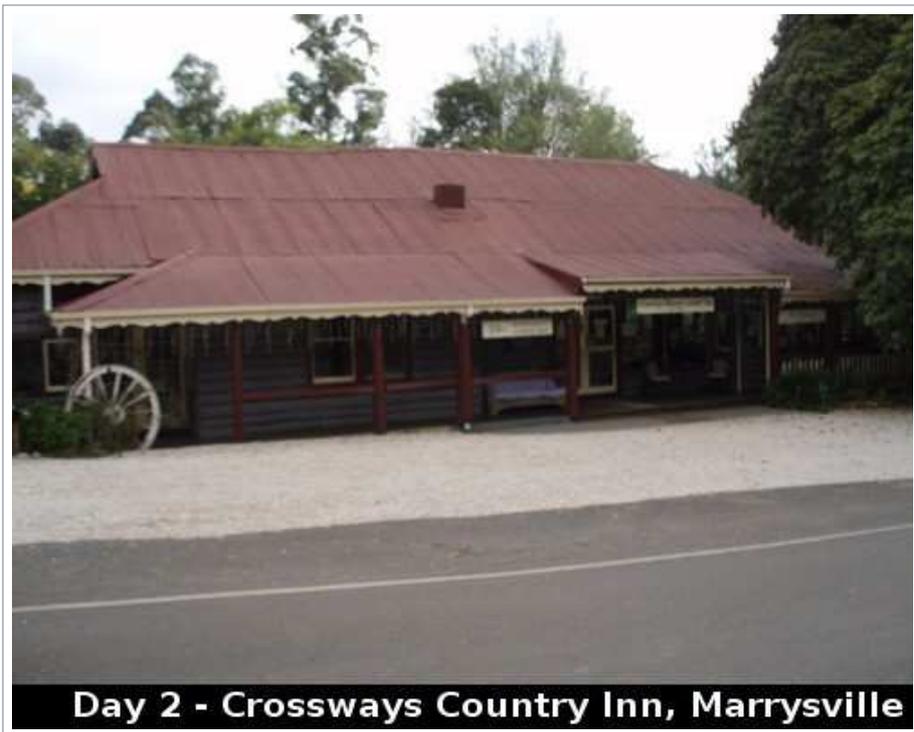
From Beechworth its a quick drop down the hill to Milawa, the home of Brown Brothers wines. Being sober and responsible motorcyclists, we passed up the chance to sample some of the esteemed Brother's products of viticulture and instead made for the Milawa Cheese Factory where we could safely sample the produce. What a wise choice! So impressed were we by the tastes of the cheeses available to sample that we decided to stay for lunch. We purchased a half block of 3 year old cheddar (thank you to the lady who served us for cutting the block) and a couple of sourdough rolls - what a magnificent feast! The Milawa Cheese Factory is a must visit location for the "discerning motorcyclist" - 9.5 out of 10.





Day 2 - 3 yr old cheddar on a crusty roll

The afternoon consisted of a determined dash to Marysville (or as determined as one can be in a State where road users are regarded as a major source of Treasury income). The morning riding was across undulating and moderately bendy hill country. The afternoon riding was mainly through wide flat river valleys on extremely good and well made secondary roads (perhaps some of the speeding fines go back into better roads). As I said earlier, a really great day's riding. The distance travelled was just over 400 km.



Day 2 - Crossways Country Inn, Murrumbidgee



We ambled around the centre of Marysville before dinner and had a couple of beers on the terrace outside the shopping centre before retreating to the Crossways Country Inn for a meal. I had a very tasty Thai chicken curry that, unfortunately, was to play havoc with my stomach over the next two days of the ride. **Lesson:** *avoid curries when on long bike rides!*

Day 3 - We get to visit Walhalla

The Crossways Country Inn provided a good night's sleep with a comfortable bed in a cabin style unit. Unfortunately the Inn does not supply breakfast (at this point in time) so we walked up to the bakery to be offered an extensive breakfast menu; cereal and toast for me, eggs and bacon for my companion - 7.5 out of 10 but bound to get better. The bakery was one of the few businesses to survive the Black Saturday fires and like others that survived or that have been re-established since the fires is having a tough time of it. Trade is only a fraction of what it was and they face difficulties getting staff because there is nowhere for them to live (catch 22) so if you visit any of these areas (and you should) be patient.

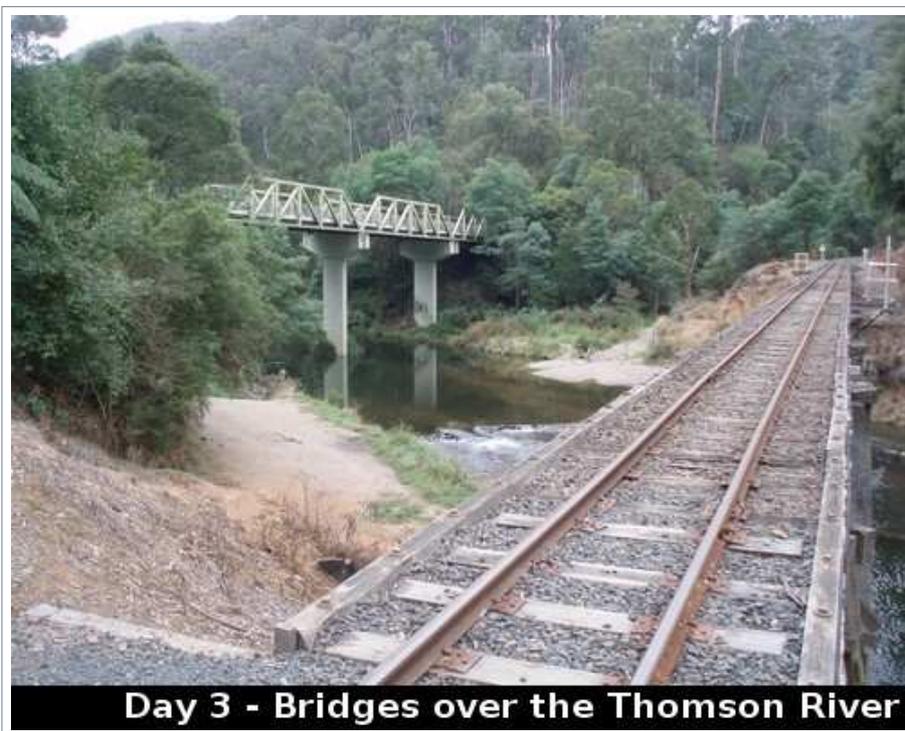
The walk to and from the bakery gave us another opportunity to see the devastation caused by the fires. It looks like one in twenty buildings survived. On one block of land there is nothing left except the cute picket front fence that had a portico over the front gate. I say had, because the roof of the portico was destroyed by fire, along with the house, but the fence still stands looking like there had never been a fire. This strange hit and miss damage is everywhere throughout the town leaving you to wonder at how fickle nature can be. While the property damage is devastating it is nothing compared to the loss of life suffered here and in other towns. Marysville lost thirty four citizens on that Saturday afternoon and evening. I found walking around the town rather disturbing and had to stop. Despite this seeming gloom, we both recommend you consider Marysville or any of the other fire ravaged towns as a destination for a ride; you can help their rebuilding by visiting and spending money.

The goal for today was to visit Walhalla; where we would end up for the night was not certain. The best route to Walhalla, based on advice from both the bakery and the Crossroads seemed to be south through Healsville to Pakenham and on to the Princes Highway then east to Moe and then inland to Walhalla. There are numerous cross country alternatives but the weather was starting to look grim and we were advised to stick to the main roads "specially on 'em bikes!".

The road to the south out of Marysville to Healsville passes through more devastation from the fires with small villages partially destroyed. Then you seem to cross a line and there is no fire damage at all. As the road rises into the Yarra Ranges you get an indication of what the forests around Marysville must have looked like. These forests are composed of giant Mountain Ash trees (one of the largest flowering trees in the world) with ancient ferns growing on the forest floor. Its fantastic riding through such a forest although the constant "Motorcycle Danger Zone" signs are a little disconcerting. The further south you go the closer you get to Melbourne and therefore the more traffic you encounter so perhaps the signs were not a bad idea.

Healsville looks like a "livable" place but we did not have time to explore. Pakenham looks like a suburb of Melbourne and was mildly difficult to navigate through to the M1 freeway which is also the Princes Highway. The M1 extends all the way to Moe and beyond. Freeway riding is boring so will not be discussed any further.

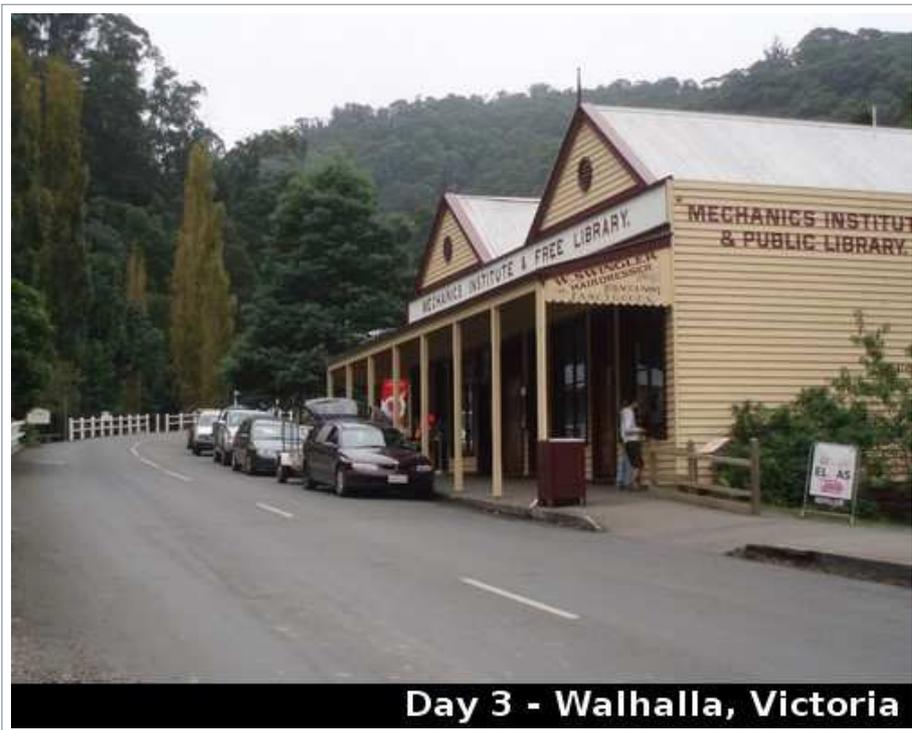
To get to Walhalla you leave the freeway at Moe (hurrah! they shouted) and head north on Scenic Drive 91. This was yet another great ride on narrow winding country lanes that snake their way up into the hills at Rawson then on an even narrower road into Walhalla. This last 12 km is very tight and on the day we rode it was quite damp which added to the "excitement". The Thai chicken curry was also beginning to have a devastating after effect (I'll spare you the details). The road and rail bridges over the Thomson River is the first evidence of the interesting things to come.





Day 3 - WGR Thompson River station

Gold was discovered at Walhalla in the 1850's. In the 1860's the consortium that owned the two mining leases sold them for GBP500 (or about AUD270,000 in today's money). The company that bought the leases established the mine and the surrounding town over the next 40 years and extracted GBP2,600,000 worth of gold (or approximately AUD1.4 billion in current value). The sellers must have kicked themselves till they bled!



Day 3 - Walhalla, Victoria



Day 3 - Star Hotel, Walhalla



Day 3 - Old bank vault, Walhalla

The mine closed in 1914 several years before a narrow gauge railway was built into the mine and the town. Part of this railway between the Thomson River bridge and the town is still operated by volunteers and provides rides for tourists. I'm a bit of an old train buff and would have liked to ride the train but time and the delicate state of my stomach put paid to this. I will NEVER eat curry on a ride like this again! Tummy problems aside; Cliff was right! Walhalla really is worth the effort to visit. I would certainly like to return with more time to spend and in nice sunny weather.

Walhalla is the halfway point in this ride. While our route planning is always loose the leader thought we ought to include the Victorian high country through Omeo, Mount Hotham and Bright before making for Tallangatta again then home through the Snowy Mountains and Canberra. This meant that first we had a long and rather boring drone along the Princes Highway to Bairnsdale for our third over night stop. The Highway across south-eastern Victoria has absolutely nothing to recommend it. Accommodation in Bairnsdale was difficult to find. There are several good looking pubs but some major sporting competition in town that weekend meant these were all booked out. In the end we had to settle for a motel room at the Best Western - definitely a place to avoid if you are looking for accommodation in Bairnsdale; it was expensive, the rooms were poorly cleaned (if cleaned at all) and they no longer bother opening their restaurant. **Lesson: DON'T travel on weekends!** Still a few cups of weak black tea, a comforting phone call home and a good night's sleep did wonders for my tummy problems. At this stage, I had been touring in New Zealand for nearly three weeks, home for three days and now three days on the road on my bike - all this travel was becoming tiring but some of the roads we rode were really making this one of our best trips so far.

Day 4 - Bairnsdale to Tallangatta

Sunday morning was bleak and overcast; it had rained quite heavily through the night and it looked like we might be in for more rain; not a good prospect given where we were planning to ride today. The good news was that today's ride ought to be much shorter than the three previous days. The road we were to take into the Victorian high country was euphemistically named "The Great Alpine Way". The 122 km from Bairnsdale to Omeo is a gradual climb, initially through rolling countryside then over several ridges around Ensay where for 20 or 30 km the road follows the Tambo River and then drops into quite picturesque valleys quilted with farm paddocks all the way into Omeo. This really is great bike riding country. From Omeo to Mount Hotham the road climbs more steeply but it's a good quality and relatively wide surface and begins to flatten out as you get above the snow line. What a great ride this is!





Mount Hotham is Victoria's main ski resort area. Its quite different to most other ski resorts I've seen in that its on the TOP of the mountain - people ski DOWN from the resort and use the chair lifts to get back up. The roads up on top of the ranges follow the tops of several ridge lines giving spectacular views over the Victorian high country.





The road down from Mount Hotham to Bright is very steep and tortuous with most corners posted with 30 or 35 km/h advisory signs. I really don't enjoy this type of riding (I'm more a rolling hills and gentle curves type of rider) and on this day things were made more difficult by more 4x4 drivers all bent on "setting the fastest time of the day" up or down the mountain. At the bottom of the hill is the extremely pretty town of Harrietville; its like a nice reward for surviving something awful. A short stop for fuel and a few moments out of the saddle then we were on our way again.





Day 4 - The famous Tallangatta Hotel

About 5 km before Bright there is a turn off to Mount Beauty and Falls Creek. We take this turn for the last climb of the day. I was beginning to tire of sharp winding roads but this climb turned out to be rather easy. At the top of the hill there is a look out stop which gives great views over the Kiewa Valley and Alpine National Park. The road quickly drops down to the valley floor and then wanders through lush dairy and beef cattle farming land. Based on the size of some of the homesteads many of these properties must be the hobby farms of Toorak cowboys (and cowgirls). The last 20 km of today's run into Tallangatta is over roads we covered two days before. We reach town by about 2:30 PM. The Tallangatta Hotel is a bit of an institution for motorcyclists and was somewhere I have wanted to stay since starting the touring caper. We had travelled 368 km today and decided that was enough. Being quite early in the afternoon there were plenty of rooms available at the pub. At AUD35 per night for a comfortable single room, shared facilities, breakfast makings and secure bike parking this place is a real bargain.

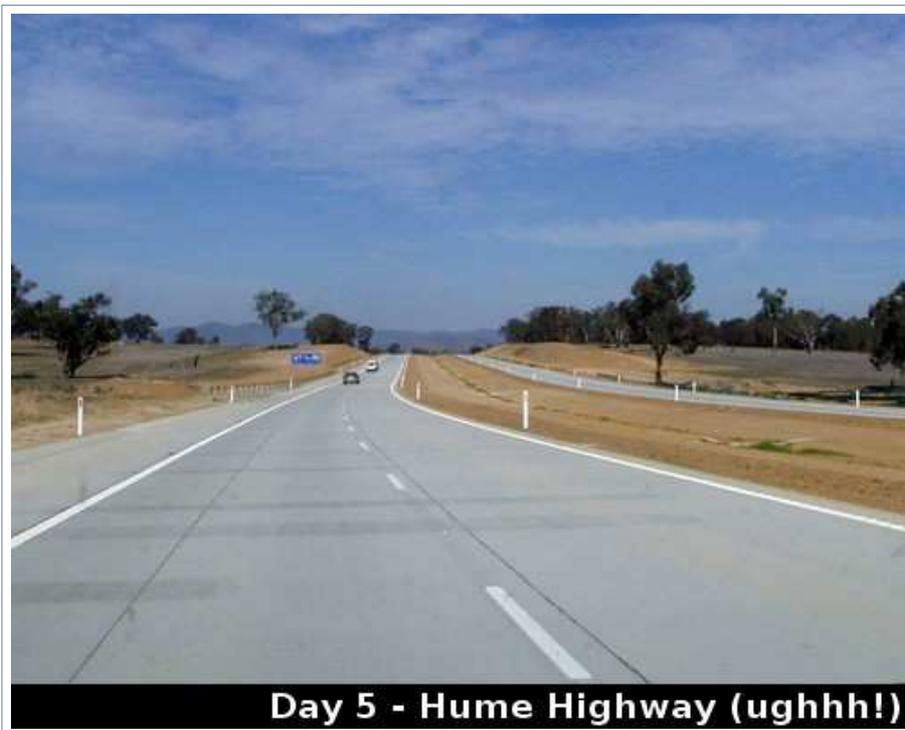
The Australian GP was on in Melbourne so after unpacking we settled into the bar with a few cold beers to watch the race and Mark Webber choke again! That night we dined in (the veal schnitzel and chips was delicious) then walked our meal off with a lap of the main street before turning in for the night. I think this pub rates up there with the the Dunedoo Hotel as one of THE BEST country hotels. This place should be supported because its good value and because its friendly to motorcyclists.

Day 5 - The run home

Yesterday afternoon was hot and humid and storms looked imminent. During our evening perambulation there were lightning flashes in the distance. I woke several times during the night and it was pouring rain each time. When we got up it was still raining quite heavy so we re-assessed our route for the day. We had intended to return home via Corryong, Cabramurra, Kiandra, Cooma and Canberra; however, the Corryong to Kiandra part looked daunting given the current weather conditions and a forecast for more rain. We abandoned our proposed route and chose instead to return to Wodonga and the safety (and boredom) of the Hume Highway

Its about 40 km from Tallangatta to Wodonga. I had never ridden in rain so hard; the drops that hit my face felt like hail and at the same time lighter drops seemed to swirl behind the screen like sleet or snow - great riding conditions. Despite the conditions the SilverWing wasn't such a bad place to be; the screen is large enough to keep most of the rain off your chest, the body work does a good job of protecting your lower body and legs (even my boots were dry). I wore a DriRider summer mesh jacket (you fool!) with the waterproof liner in and yellow wet weather pants. The only part of me getting wet was my hands through my matching DriRider mesh gloves (I'm a sucker for style over functionality!). Still after settling in, heavy rain (on a good road) is not so bad.

We refueled the bikes at Albury and ourselves at Morrisons Cafe at Euroa, near Holbrook. This cafe touts itself as "the best coffee on the Hume"; all I can say is it must be pretty awful every where else - 1 out of 10 stop only if you are desperate.



(This picture is from Road Photos & Information: New South Wales)

It continued to rain all the way to Gundagai, after which it just threatened to rain for the rest of the day. Our lunch stop was, once again, McDonalds at the Yass Service Centre for an Angus Burger (why do I do this to my body?) and a McCafe coffee (much better than at Morrisons). From Yass its a familiar run across country through Murrumbateman, Bungendore and Braidwood (one last stop for a coffee at the Bakery - 9 out of 10) and home to The Bay.

All up, we had travelled 2,160 km and the mighty SilverWing averaged 4.27 l/100 km. It was a long way to go to see Walhalla but it was certainly worth it. We travelled over some of the best riding roads in south east Australia. The trip has left the Corryong - Kiandra road still un-travelled and exploring the Beechworth - Milawa region by motorcycle has to be a priority for a future ride. Lastly, thanks to my riding companion for the great route and for the good company along the way.

Peter Anderson
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