

Cliff and Pete's Excellent Motorcycle Ride

Eurobodalla Ulysses Branch has a small group of members who like to "tour lite" and preferably during the middle of the week. We had loosely planned a run for mid-July but circumstances conspired against us and we were not able to get away until Wednesday, 12th July. The tentative plan (we tend to run a very flexible schedule) was to be away for four days and three nights. The primary aim was to do a day's leisurely sightseeing anywhere between Sofala and Dunedoo. If time permitted we would include a loop out to Sandy Hollow and Merriwa. We have two firm rules for these rides; one, we stay at places our wives would never stay - mostly old-fashioned country pubs and two, we stop frequently in a quest for good coffee.

We started with keen interest from a number of Branch members but in the end it was only Cliff and myself who lined-up on a cold but fine Wednesday morning. I was particularly looking forward to the ride because I had recently turned the Hornet into a "tourer" (I acquired a new "motorcyclist's back-pack" and a tank bag). This would be real touring luxury, I could now pack a razor and a good shirt to wear in the pub each night, maybe even a book!

Day 1 - Batemans Bay to Tarana

The plan was to ride from Batemans Bay (for me) via Milton (for Cliff) to Nowra from where we would cut across to the Hume Highway via Kangaroo Valley and Bundernoon. This route meets the Highway at Marullan and from there we have a short drone down the Hume to Goulburn. At Goulburn we head north for Tarana via Taralga and Oberon.

This convoluted route was agreed because we always leave from "The Bay" and go via Braidwood! Anyhow, the first stop was Milton supposedly to pick up Cliff but in reality to have a coffee at Pilgrim's on the main street (the coffee is really good). The run up to Nowra is familiar



ground so the ride proper seemed to start when we turned off the Princes Highway to head for Kangaroo Valley. This is a great bit of road mid-week; on the weekend you get run over by up-market 4x4s and plastic super sports bikes, both wanting to do the round trip from Sydney as quickly as possible and spend as much time as they can on the wrong side of the road; well that's how it seems to us "slow" country folk. Road works on the way out of the Valley held us up for quite a while so we lunched at Bundernoon rather than going on to the Paragon Cafe in

Goulburn.

I forgot to write down the name of the cafe but its about half way along the main street opposite the railway line. The sandwiches were hearty and the coffee hot and strong. We even managed to recruit two junior members who each promised to join Ulysses when they grew up and got old!

I've done this run across the southern highlands several times and find it quite a good ride.

However, there can be few things more boring than riding a motorcycle on a freeway; the run down to Goulburn was best forgotten. Goulburn was our first stop for fuel; the weather was not looking good so I asked the girl in the shop if she thought it was going to rain - "This is Goulburn" she said, we were comforted. From here we are back onto good riding roads. We were up the Tablelands Way earlier this year and stopped at the Taralga Hotel for lunch (and very good it was too) but on this occasion we were there later in the day and had distance to cover. From Goulburn it was much colder than it had been during the morning. By the time we reached the Aberchrombie River we were freezing so stopped to put our wet weather gear on over our multi-layers of clothing. It was good for about ten minutes until the cold penetrated the thick plastic "wets". Still the road is a great ride so we can't complain. On our last trip we stayed in Oberon but this time we decided to try the pub at Tarana (I can never seem to pronounce this town's name properly, I say it like "Holden Torana"). The pub had a good review in the current issue of *Australian Road Rider* magazine.

Well the review was spot-on! The pub was a good, if a little pricey, choice. It doesn't have your traditional pub rooms; instead it has cabins (\$99 per night but they can sleep up to five). This was the start of my run of bad

luck with the sleeping arrangements. The cabins have a lounge/kitchen room, bathroom, bed room (with double bed) and three bunks in the corridor. We tossed for the bed room and I lost - as usual! The bar was very cozy, our host had a wood fire going to get enough heat to start the coal. We encamped at a table alongside the fire and only moved when it was time for the next shout. The Shepherds Pie was ideal fare after such a cold ride and I'm reliably informed that the Bangers and Mash was pretty good as well (I can't mention who gave me that recommendation for fear of retribution against him on the home front).



The cabin was quite warm and cosy; the bunks, surprisingly, were comfortable. You can see from the photo that there are three small windows down the side of the cabin, these correspond to the three bunks. What was really nice was that you could hear the trains coming and because the pub is so close to the main east-west railway line you could watch them go by from your bunk window - really neat. The cost of the cabin includes breakfast "makings" so we took our time over our toast and coffee before packing the bikes and heading off about 9:00 am.

Day 2 - Tarana to Dunedoo

The day started badly when I decided we would follow Tarana Road into Bathurst. Unfortunately it changed from tar to dirt not far out of town. Last time we were up this way I lead us onto a dirt road much to the annoyance of another member of our ride so this time I thought I should stop and ask before proceeding. We were not bothered by the road surface more the odd direction the road was taking. Better be safe we thought and turned back to Tarana to take the O'Connell Road to the Tablelands Way and on into Bathurst. The O'Connell Road is a good ride; there is one section where it dips down through a small valley and either side is lined with poplars. At this

time of year they are ash grey with no vegetation - it was a very pretty scene (where's the picture I can hear you say - I thought about it but didn't stop - a mistake we seem to make quite often).



Any body who read our previous ride report will remember my ebullience for the coffee at the Bathurst Visitors Centre cafe. This has got to be one of best coffees you can get anywhere in the State. We both rate this coffee at 11/10! What's the brand you are all eagerly asking! Again, I forgot to ask (I did think about asking if that's any help). Next time we are out this way I promise I will find out the brand and let you all know.

Bathurst to Sofala is mostly a very good road. The town itself is a real jewel from our gold mining past. We parked the bikes in the main street and walked the main town block. Several of the early buildings are undergoing extensive renovation. This is a town that seems to care about its history and want's to preserve it.

It would have been nice to have more time and properly explore this town. The pub looks like a good over-night stop.

The next picture below really appeals to my better half; she would like to get one of these things at home - "Keep you off that bl#@dy motorbike and at



home doing jobs..." I can remember her saying.

I had a "moment" as we were leaving town; Sofala is in a deep but narrow valley and I was trying to find a good vantage point to take a picture looking down over the town. I saw a "good spot" on the outside of a sharp bend as we drove up the hill to the north of the town. I pulled across but as I prepared to stop I noticed the ground was extremely loose shale and not a good place to park the bike. "Bugger" I said as I opened the throttle to continue back up the hill. However there was next to no traction and all I got was wheel spin. With great dexterity on the throttle I managed to clear the shaley verge only to have the Hornet jack itself up at the back and the engine die. "Bugger bugger" (or something similar) I said to myself. Three or four more goes but all with the same result. I know all you smarties out there know what had happened but I was not thinking straight at this point in time. Gingerly, I rolled the bike back and managed to turn it to face down this 45 degree slope then free-wheel back down into the town. The fact that it free-wheeled should of told me the stone in the chain had fallen out but rational thought had still not returned.

"What have I done to you *Horatio*?" I wailed inside my helmet. Stop in the town car park, put him up on the centre stand, start the engine, gently put him into gear, back wheel turns normally. "Bugger, bugger bugger" - then rational thought returned and I figured what had happened - "You stupid old ba#t*rd" I mumbled and we were off again on our way to Ilford



Sofala to Ilford is only 'so-so'; its quite rough in parts. The Turon Power Museum is along this stretch but unfortunately is only open on weekends - bugger! Coming into Ilford from Sofala means that you miss most of the town (well I think you do, perhaps that's all there was to it - sorry citizens of Ilford.

Ilford is where you join the Castlereagh Highway. However, we only stay on it for a short distance, just out of town you turn east to head for Kandos and Rylstone. Once again parts of the road are quite rough but

there are some spectacular views into the western side of the Blue Mountains. We did a quick lap of Kandos' main street but none of the eateries tempted us so hunger drove us on to Rylstone. I've been to Rylstone several times before over the last four or five years; I like it, its a nice town. As we rode down the main street I recognised a cafe I have frequented before and had good memories; it turned out to be the Bizzzy Birds. As you enter you can't miss the Ulysses flag and signs, seems both the owners are members of the Lithgow Branch and even better ride Hondas (must be nice people). The coffee (both iced and short black kinds) was good. My riding partner woofed down an enormous BLT while I buried my face in the scrumptious scones, jam and cream (please don't tell my wife about this dalliance).

The day was getting on and after some local advice we decided to scrub the loop out to Sandy Hollow (though its filed away in the "future trips" database). Given we wanted to make Dunedoo by the end of the day, Rylstone to Mudgee via Lue seemed to be the best option. Oh! No it wasn't! This has got to be the roughest bitumen road I have ever ridden on. I thought my suspension, particularly at the back, had been totally destroyed. I was leading and trying to average about 90 k/ht but that was at least 10 k/hr too fast. As a result we didn't have time to look around Mudgee (although what we saw looked very nice). We were back on the Castlereagh Highway and it is quite good south of Gulgong but very good from there to Dunedoo. Gulgong was famous as "the town on the ten dollar note". We did a circuit of the main street and stopped to stretch our legs. This really is a pretty part of NSW.

The the highway to Dunedoo seems to pass through what must be some of the State's most productive farm land. Rolling plains stretched out ahead with a great road threading its way through it. The sun setting on your left and you and your bike's shadow trying to keep pace on your right - does it get any better than this?

Our accommodation for the night was the Hotel Dunedoo (on the left as you ride into the main street from Gulgong). Ah! a proper old country pub. Rooms with shared facilities (you've got to walk down the corridor) was \$20 each; this included make your own cereal, toast and tea or coffee for breakfast and we were welcome to park the bikes in the locked yard out the back. The one sour point was (yet again) the allocation of the sleeping arrangements. Cliff scored a room

with doors opening out onto the first floor balcony (see the photo) while my room looked out to where the balcony used to be - bugger!

Meals can be served in the main bar (or dining room if you take your spouse). We both woofed our way through massive steaks, chips and salad (I had lots of salad dear! Honest!) for another \$20 each and washed it down with a cleansing ale or two. These pubs are great fun. The locals are mostly very friendly, particularly when they find out you are travelling by motor bike. There seems to be a quaint tradition in this part of the country. Boys, as they reach puberty, are given a silly big hat by their dads. These hats are then surgically sewn onto their heads so that they can never be removed. The hats then slowly decay as they are battered by life in the bush. Beats me how they would ever get a helmet on though! The crown in the bar thinned so we retired to the pool tables where I was given a comprehensive thrashing - it was obvious which one of us had the misspent youth. The beds were comfortable and the doona warm. The end of one of the most enjoyable days I've had on the road, it doesn't get much better than this!



Day 3 - Dunedoo to Young

My minimal pre-trip planning worked out that if we wanted to finish the day in Young then we were looking at about 370 Km "in the saddle" - a long day. The plan was fairly straight forward; there are not that many options. Our route would be via Dubbo (through which we planned to pass as quickly as possible), Peak Hill, Parkes (with a planned stop to look at "The Dish", Forbes and Grenfell.

The night before one of the topics of conversation (raised by me I think) was the lack of Highway Patrol vehicles so far; we had not seen a single rozzar. You ought not have these type of conversations when you are out touring; sure enough, within 30 Km of leaving Dunedoo we saw our first "lolly-pop" car then in Tomingley (that's that thriving metropolis 50 odd Km south of Dubbo in case you had forgotten where it is) we saw another. No problems however, not when you ride as slowly as I do.

Today's run was mainly flat and most of it is speed limited at 110 Km/h so it was relatively quick and easy riding. The main problems are grey nomads towing caravans (as opposed to riding motorbikes) and truck drivers (that's probably upset quite a few people). At one point on the Newell Highway we caught two caravanners who seemed to be in convoy and they were flying along at 60 Km/h (in a 110 Km/h zone) and because of heavy on-coming traffic they were difficult to pass - that ought to be a "bookable offence". The B-double and road-train drivers seem to occupy the centre of the road and bugger anyone else on the road. The bow wave and suction they cause at 110+ Km/h and their closeness to you is very unnerving.

On a positive note, the countryside, at least above Forbes, looks a real treat with massive paddocks of bright yellow canola flowers. We were told that most farmers were expecting their

first good crops for more than five years.

Back to the details of the ride. Riding through Dubbo seemed cramped and confusing and even dangerous after several days out on the open highway. Neither of us like the place very much (sorry Dubbo Branch members) so it was a quick traverse and on to Tomingley for our mid-morning caffeine fix. The BP road house is not a bad place to stop.



While I've been to "The Dish" (or more formally the Parkes Radio Telescope) several times before, I'm always in awe of what the astronomers do there and of the sheer physical majesty of the thing. There is a "FAQ" display in the visitors centre that tells you that the 64 metre radio telescope is **10,000 times more sensitive** now than it was when it was first built in 1961. I find the high definition pictures from space around the walls of the visitor's centre 'mind-blowing'. There is a rather neat exhibit outside the visitor's centre where the CSIRO has

erected two parabolic dishes several hundred metres apart. You stand near the centre of one and talk in a normal voice; anybody standing in front of the other dish can hear you as clearly as if you were standing alongside them - a neat way of demonstrating the work of the radio telescope.

We stopped for lunch at the Forbes RSL club because my riding partner had been there before and had enjoyed it. Well its still a good and a cheap meal; and like all these country towns the people are very friendly. Grenfell has, in my humble opinion, one of the prettiest main streets of any of the towns out this way. Sorry that I didn't get a picture for those of you who have not been there.

Grenfell to Young, along the Henry Lawson Way was our (or I should say mine) only "near death experience. I was leading and came upon two B-doubles (looked like they were hauling grain) coming towards us. As the first past there was the expected buffeting from the truck's "bow wave". I thought I would move towards the left of my lane to try and avoid the worst of the second truck. The second truck and I were about 50 metres apart, both **traveling at about 110 Km/h when a THIRD B-DOUBLE (which was obscured by the second) pulled out to pass onto my side of the road.** "Oh well its been a reasonable life" I thought as I scanned the left verge for a possible escape route. Luckily, I did not fixate on the looming leviathan. However, as I prepared to "head bush" I noticed out of the corner of one eye the truck pull back onto its own side of the road. My riding partner was several hundred metres behind and told me later, as I stopped to let my heart rate settle, that the back trailer of the errant B-double was fish-tailing several metres let-to-right because of the ferocity of the drivers swerve back onto his side of the road. I think I survived because I was on the left verge of my lane - that was just too close for comfort. I wondered later what might have been the outcome if I had been in a car rather than on my bike; I certainly would not have been as far to the left (without leaving the road) as I was on the bike.



A slow run into Young followed that bit of excitement. Young has about four pubs. The first we tried was The Empire. I would not recommend this place; it looks like a club inside and does not have any secure parking for bikes ("Leave 'em in the shopping centre car park" I was told "... they ought to be all right there") so we gave it a miss. The next pub we tried was The Great Eastern halfway up the main street. They had rooms at \$30 per night and allowed us to put the bikes in the yard out the back. This has to be the most secure pub parking I have seen yet. The yard has a high metal fence that is topped with coils of razor wire - bike ought to be safe there. This will do we thought. A bonus that we didn't discover until we went up to our rooms was that the amenities have recently been renovated and are the best pub dunnies and ablutions that I have seen so far - they were almost good enough for a wife to use!

After settling into our rooms we decided to do a spot of sight seeing along Young's main street. This seems to be a very prosperous town; there were no empty or for sale shops and,

even late in the afternoon, there were lots of folks out shopping. As we walked back to our pub we noticed the Criterion Hotel (well actually I noticed the wall painted with an add for Kilkenny Irish beer). The temptation was great and was assuaged when my riding partner confessed that he had never tasted Smithwick's Irish red ale. To add to my joy, the Criterion not only has Kilkenny on tap but also has Guinness on tap - ah! if there is a heaven then this must be what its like. Two rounds later and I had forgotten about my earlier near death experience.



We ambled back up the hill the the Great Eastern for diner only to find that the beer was flat (well the Tooheys Old was) and the meals were quite expensive. It was a 'no brainer'; back to the Criterion where we knew the beer was good and it turned out that the food was almost as good, cheap and hearty serves. I think the Criterion has a couple of rooms available so if you are in Young and looking for accommodation, give it a try first.

One of the nice things about staying in pubs is the characters you meet and the enjoyable

conversations that almost always follow, especially when the locals find out that you are traveling by motor bike. So thanks to "Foo" and his snooker playing mates for an enjoyable and entertaining evening.

I am drafting these notes at about 10:00 PM, back in my room at the Great Eastern. Its Friday night and the extremely loud base of the juke box playing in the bar below me is going to ensure that I don't get to sleep for quite a while. Oh! well! Time to turn on my mp3 player and listen to some ABC Radio National podcasts.

Day 4 - Young to home

The Great Eastern turned out to be a good place to stay with its clean and cosy rooms, near new facilities and secure bike parking. However, the ambiance of the place lets it down. On Saturday morning I had to wait at the bar for nearly fifteen minutes to hand back my room key (and collect my \$20 key deposit). The young yob behind the bar made me wait while he did several minor chores then preferred to serve FOUR groups of early morning drinkers who all walked up to the bar AFTER me and were served first. Then we waited at least ten minutes for him to come out the back and open the gate so we could get our bikes out. Clearly, not everyone likes tourists in their town it seems. To be fair, I should add that the couple who manage the pub are much friendlier, shame their business is let down by one of their staff.

Another problem with the Great Easter was the lack of any breakfast service or even "do it yourself makings". No problem! Across the road from the pub is Sheehan's Sunnyside Bakery and it is a real gem. It opens early and in addition to a wide range of pastries you can have a cooked breakfast (all day I think). I can recommend the croissants. The coffee is not bad either.

It seems that the roads from Young to Boorowa and then from Boorowa to Crookwell were provided for us to make up for the annoyances at the great Eastern earlier in the morning. These were THE best riding roads of the whole trip. The surfaces are generally good with large sections only recently paved or re-paved and with little traffic in either direction. This was a great morning's ride!

From Crookwell we turned south and headed for Gunning. Once again, this is a good riding road although I find that many of the corners need to be treated with some care. I rode this road eleven months ago and the countryside was much greener and attractive; this time it is very dry and quite bleak looking. Lunch was taken at the Merino Cafe in Gunning; another Ulysses-friendly establishment. However, it seems to cater for Canberra day-trippers and the prices reflect this.

From Gunning we crossed the Hume Highway and headed south to Gundaroo then east across the Federal Highway and on to Bungendore. Here we had to part; my companion heading on down to the coast and home and me back into Canberra for a couple of days stay with my kids. I rode home on Monday morning.

Thanks Cliff for a really enjoyable four days and thanks to the B-double driver for pulling back and sparing my life so we can do it all over again in a month or so. And lastly, thanks *Horatio Hornet* for putting up with my ham-fisted riding and getting me home safe and sound.

The Stats

- Total distance travelled: 1507 Km
- Average petrol consumption: 5.37 lt/100 Km
- Most expensive fuel (premium un-leaded): 146.9 c/lt at Fyshwick, ACT