

Cliff and Pete's Excellent Road Trip - No. 3

This trip, like our others, had a very loose agenda but does have some hard and fast ground rules that seem to be broken at will. The ground rules we try to observe are:

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

The aim of this trip was to traverse both Bucketts Way and Thunderbolt's Way. Bucketts Way is in the Port Stephens/Manning Valley areas of NSW and is about 149 km long, while Thunderbolts Way is a very long tourist road that starts in the town of Glouster in NSW and goes all the way north to Goondiwindi in Queensland, although the bit that interests motorcyclists is the southern section between Glouster and Walcha, about 161 km in length. (See Google Maps or Earth if you don't know where these are.) We sought advice on possible routes and had initially intended to link the two roads via the Waterfall Way, a 191 km run from Bellingen through Dorigo to Armidale. An alternative route that we were advised to try was the Oxley Highway which runs from the Pacific Highway near Port Macquarie to Walcha - about 173 km. We agreed that we would look at our options after completing Bucketts Way. The trip home would be from Glouster (the end of Thunderbolts Way across the Lower Hunter Valley through Stroud, Dungog, Singleton and across to the Central Tablelands of NSW via Denman, Mudgee, Bathurst, Cowra and Young. If you read Cliff and Pete's Excellent Road Trip - No. 2 trip report you will recall that one of us was very fond of the the Criterion Hotel which serves Kilkenny Irish beer on tap, a good reason for a re-visit. From Young there would be a compulsory stop in Boorowa for the bakery then on to Yass and across country to Bungendore and down the Kings Highway to home. That was the plan!

If you would like to follow our journey in a little more detail then the following links will let you download PDF copies of some useful maps:

Manning Valley Region map:

http://www.maps.com.au/PDFS/Maps/man_val/ManV_Region.pdf

Thunderbolt Region map:

<http://www.maps.com.au/PDFS/Maps/tbolt/ThunderboltRegion.pdf>

Golden Highway map:

<http://www.golden-highway.com.au/images/maps/goldenhighway.jpg>

Dubbo Regional map:

<http://www.maps.com.au/PDFS/Maps/dubbo/DubboRegional.pdf>

Capital Regional map:

http://www.maps.com.au/PDFs/Maps/cap_cntry/Cap_Region.pdf

Day 1 - Batemans Bay to Karuah - Day 1 is not really Day 1 (493 km)

I left Batemans Bay on Monday, 16th November at 7:45 AM.; the weather was fine, there are five days of interesting riding ahead and its my first trip on my new Honda SilverWing - what could be better? The first part of the trip is a quick run up the Princes Highway to Ulladulla to meet up with my riding companion at Haydon's Pie Shop. Haydon's has really good coffee and the bacon and egg quiche is supposed to be excellent - it must be, Cliff had TWO of them before we could get away. We left Haydon's at 8:45 AM. Next stop was Albion Park Rail (near Wollongong) for fuel. Our next task was to cross or skirt around Sydney to reach the F4 freeway to Newcastle. There are several options for getting around or through Sydney. My riding companion suggested we use Appin Way (a road I had not used before and would now highly recommend) which joins the princes Highway to the Hume Highway which leads onto the M7/M2 motorways which skirt Sydney to the west. This was a very good choice and we were in the northern suburbs of Sydney for lunch by midday. We stopped at McDonalds at Pennant Hills; this store doubles as McDonalds University and apparently offers MBAs in burger stacking and nutrition spin - hmmm!

I find the 130 km of the F4 freeway from Sydney to Newcastle a bore at the best of times; on a motorcycle it seems much worse. As I said above, this was my bike's first major trip and even with a fuel gauge I was not sure how reliable it was and what sort of range I could expect. Luckily there is a service station just off the northern end of the freeway and I was able to refuel the SWing just before it coughed to a stop - it had been about 250 km since refuelling at Albion Park Rail and the manual tells me there is another 4 ltr of fuel left when the reserve starts to flash - not bad.

Crossing the Hunter River over the Hexham Bridge (see photo) marked the real start of our "Excellent Road Trip - No. 3"; Batemans Bay to Newcastle was just the "transport stage". Accommodation in this part of the world tends to be mainly motels and up-market hotels; we were not aware of any "country pub" style accommodation so we took the liberty and pre-booked for the first night at the Karuah Caravan Park which was about as low-rent as we could get. Karuah is about 35 km north of the Hexham Bridge and a Caravan Park cabin was going to cost us \$40 per night each. We arrived at the Park at about 3:30 PM with the trip meter showing 430 km since leaving home. Most of the run had been very hot but our trusty Hondas had coped magnificently. After unpacking in our little cabin (see photo) we re-hydrated over the road in the Karuah RSL Bowling Club and stayed on for diner. The Chinese cuisine can be highly recommended. Night life in Karuah was a little lacking (if you ignore the bingo at the Club) so after a good meal it was back to the cabin for a cup of tea and an early night. The worst day of our trip was over.



Day 1 - Ready to go!



Day 1 - 60 ltr luggage, enough for 5 days?



Day 1 - Hexham Bridge, Newcastle



Day 1 - Karuah Caravan Park

Day 2 - Karuah to Walcha - the Rider's Day (413 km)

The Karuah Caravan Park cabins did not provide any breakfast makings; tea bags and instant coffee satchels and little containers of long-life milk were all you get for your \$40 each. So tea and coffee it was; we would stop somewhere on the road for brunch.

Karuah is about 10 km north of the Bucketts Way turn off so we had to back-track down the Pacific Highway. Such a momentous occasion required a photograph. Bucketts Way is approximately 150 km long and its first half heads north to the town of Glouster where it turns east and heads east to the town of Taree where it re-joins the Pacific Highway. Glouster also marks the change in geography over which this road runs. The road from Karuah to Glouster runs through the valleys of the Karuah and Wards Rivers. The western side of these valleys is the Barington Tops a rugged hilly region of forests and national parks. The day we travelled this road was overcast and often close to rain but the natural beauty of the region was plainly evident. On a fine day this would be a magnificent ride. The road undulates up and down over small ridges and winds along the valley floors. The road surface, however, was not good; it was heavily patched and there seemed to be many obstacles right on the line through corners. Its best to slow down a little and take in the view.

We stopped at Glouster at about 10:00 AM for brunch, choosing the Book and Bean Cafe in the main street. The coffee was good and the ambiance was "academic"; recommended! These trips are made more memorable by some of the characters you meet along the way. While we sipped our coffee surrounded by books we were joined in conversation by a fellow patron and he seemed to be pleased to have some "intelligent" company (you can tell he had no idea who he was talking to). What followed was an earnest discussion that ranged from ancient Troy actually being located in Cornwall to the voyages of Zheng He in 1421. Very interesting! Other bike riders were stopping at the cafe across the street or the adjacent bakery (we decided to try one of these on our way back through Glouster tomorrow).

The second half of Bucketts Way (Glouster to Taree) is quite different to the first half. It heads roughly east and crosses the low coastal ranges. While the geography is different the quality of the ride remains. This road is just one series of bends after another. If you are a golfer (there is bound to be another one out there) then the little town of Krambach will be of interest to you. It has a nice looking nine hole golf course as you leave town (heading towards Taree). What makes it interesting is the fences around the tees and greens that have been put there to keep the farmer's cattle out!

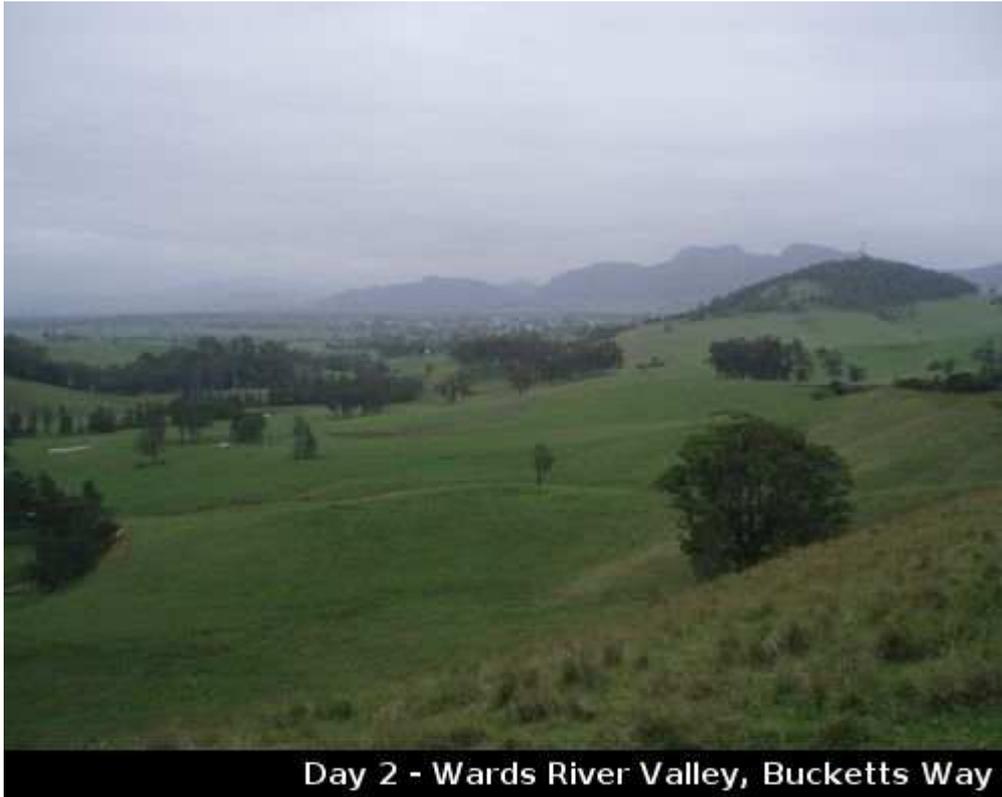
Glouster to Taree is only 63 km. There is a detour through Wingham which adds about 7 km to the distance. We didn't do this detour but from past experiences Wingham is well worth a visit. We reached Taree, on the Manning River, by about 11:00 AM absolutely raving about how good Bucketts Way had been - the best ride either of us had ever done - a fantastic ride! On the negative side, the road surfaces are generally quite poor. There are many places where the road surface is being improved but it sorely needs it.



Day 2 - The start of Bucketts Way



Day 2 - Village of Stroud Road, Bucketts Way



Taree was decision time; so while we refueled we discussed whether to ride up to Bellingen and take the Waterfall Way across to Armidale and perhaps Walcha via Dorigo or choose the much shorter route to Walcha via Wauchope and the Oxley Highway. Looking at the maps, the Waterfall Way looked like a really long way not only making Day 2 very long but probably Day 3 as well. In the end it was an easy decision to ride the Oxley Highway. The Australian Motorcycle Atlas says of the Oxley Highway - "This is how good motorcycling can be ..."; sounds like a good choice.

The 78 km up the Pacific Highway from Taree to the Oxley Highway turnoff is a boring slog made even worse by the constant road works and long stretches of 80 kph speed restrictions. This work has been underway for several years and looks like it will never be finished. Wauchope is the only major town between the Pacific Highway and Walcha; we arrived about 1:00 PM and found a really good cafe for lunch (Coffee on High - on the corner of the Oxley Highway and Bransdon Street). Sandwiches and iced coffee never tasted so good!



Day 2 - Manning River, Taree



Day 2 - Oxley Highway, heading west

Wauchope to Walcha is about 165 km and neither of us had travelled this road before. The first 20 km or so follows the meanderings of the Hastings River through lush farmlands and is quite twisty (see photo). Once you reach Long Flat you begin the climb into the Great Dividing Range. There is a road advisory sign that says "Winding Road - Next 45 km" and the corners become much tighter and the road just seems to climb and climb for ever. Some corners even have strange warning signs (see photo); we were not sure if they were saying its slippery for bikes or from this point you can really "give it some welly"!

My riding partner is generally much quicker than I and he reveled in these tight and windy conditions. I'm sure the SilverWing would have done much better with a braver pilot aboard, but I was really surprised at how well it handled these conditions. There was always plenty of torque available for the pull up out of tight bends and the engine braking really assists with sharp down-hill corners. A super-sports bike its not but a competent quickish tourer it certainly proved to be.

The road up through the Great Dividing Range runs through State forests and national parks. There are several places that give great views back down over the Hastings River valley. When the road eventually emerges from the heavily timbered country and the bends begin to open up you have reached the top of the hill. There is still another 80 km to go before you reach Walcha. This area is part of the New England tableland and has some of the most picturesque grazing country you are likely to see anywhere (see photo). The cloud was beginning to lift and the afternoon sun trying to poke through - really nice. And to complement the vista the posted speed limit increases to 110 kph and the wide tarmac surface gently snaked between low hills off into the distance. We reached Walcha at 4:45 PM and just like at the end of Bucketts Way we were babbling away to each other about what a great ride the Oxley had been. On my recommendation, we booked into the Apsley Hotel for the night. It was late in the day and we were pretty much exhausted so we didn't complain too much about the \$55 per night EACH for a simple room with shared facilities. The pub does allow motorcyclists to use their semi-secure parking area out the back. The bistro menu looked simple and hearty (if not particularly heart friendly). There were breakfast makings in a shared kitchen so at least we could fuel both man and beast before we headed south on Thunderbolts way tomorrow morning.

Over several beers before and after diner we marvelled at how in the one day we had travelled what must be two of the best motorcycle riding roads in Australia - just fantastic! While the Oxley had been much windier than Bucketts Way its road surface is generally much better and corner alignments were much truer. In addition, the Oxley only had several places where repairs were being made. If I had to rate them I would give the Oxley Highway 9.5 out of 10 and Bucketts way 8.5 out of 10. (I think the score would have been higher if we had not ridden the Oxley Highway on the same day.)



Day 2 - Oxley Highway, into the ranges



Day 2 - What does this mean?



Day 2 - Over the range, near Walcha

I've mentioned our coffee companion in Glouster; Walcha saw us chatting with a group of back-packers who were earning a little extra travel money by planting forest trees BY HAND! Now that is hard work! We sat on the front verandah of the Apsley Hotel, slowly sipping our beer and engaged in interesting conversation - very pleasant.

I'm writing this diary note at about 9:00 PM and I'm knackered! Its time for bed because we have another great ride to do tomorrow.

Day 3 - Walcha to Denman - In the wake of Captain Thunderbolt (375 km)

Its 5 minutes to 10 on Wednesday evening and I'm writing up my trip diary before turning in for the night. Today we have covered 373 km from Walcha on the New England Tablelands to Denman in the upper Hunter Valley. The days on this ride just keep getting better and better, let me tell you how this one went.

I have already mentioned how we were surprised at the room rate of the Apsley Hotel; well breakfast did nothing to change our view. There were breakfast makings (an improvement on the Karuah Caravan Park) - a small choice of breakfast cereals, some bread for toast on which you could spread anything you liked as long as it was butter. Milk was available from a motley assortment of opened plastic containers of unknown age or used-by date. I shouldn't complain, at least it was real milk and there was instant coffee satchels and tea bags.



Day 3 - The Apsley Hotel, Walcha



Day 3 - Walcha, NSW

We were fuelled up and on the road by about 8:30 AM and heading south on the third of our "great motorcycle rides" - Thunderbolt's Way! This is a tourist route of some considerable length; however from a motorcyclist's perspective its the bit between Walcha in the north and Glouster in the south that's important - a distance of 161 km.

Thunderbolts Way can be divided into three sections: Walcha to Nowendoc (74 km), Nowendoc to Bretti Reserve (55 km) and Bretti Reserve to Glouster (32 km). The first section is through mainly open grazing land and the road surface is mostly good. The second section is very twisty and winds up and down over part of the Great Dividing Range. At about the mid-point of this section you round a corner to see Carson's Pioneer Lookout on your right. A short stop is recommended as the views are very good (see photos) over Corroboree Flat to the Barington Tops in the west.

Thunderbolts Way is used as a short-cut by semi-trailers and these can be a nuisance if you catch them on an up-hill section or an absolute terror if they catch you on a down-hill section. The narrow windy road and heavy vehicles have taken their toll on the road surface; care needs to be shown on tight bends. The third section into Glouster is very pretty. The road opens up as it meanders through a series of river valleys then opens out even more into pretty grazing country. The road surface is generally good with many open and well aligned bends. This section will give you an opportunity to loose all but the quickest semi-trailers. My notes say that at least half of Thunderbolts Way can best be described as rough with many sections of broken tarmac. Despite this its certainly a ride worth doing. We felt that it was not as good as the Oxley Highway or Bucketts Way but still a very good ride; perhaps 8 out of 10!

Thunderbolts way is named after Captain Thunderbolt aka Fredrick Ward who roamed the area as a bush ranger and horse thief in the 1880's. Click here [http://www.thunderboltsway.com.au/resources/thunderbolt_legend.pdf] if you would like to know more about the Thunderbolt Legend.

Morning coffee was taken in Glouster, our second visit in two days. This time we patronised Cafe 57 opposite the Book and Bean. This or the adjacent bakery can be recommended. Glouster has some interesting folk to chat with, we met our amateur historian friend on the way up and on the way down we met a group of local Ulysses members, one was riding a Honda Deauville so my riding partner was pleased to meet a kindred spirit. We chatted about roads we had ridden and roads we were yet to ride. One interesting tit-bit was that they call the Oxley Highway "Death Road" because of the number of motorcycling fatalities (including several of their former members) that have occurred on that road. Ummmm! Makes you think! Still we were immortal so nothing like that was ever going to happen to us!



Day 3 - Carson's Pioneer Lookout, Thunderbolts Way



Day 3 - Carson's Pioneer Lookout, Thunderbolts Way

With our morning caffeine fix taken care of we headed south on Bucketts Way to Telegherry (not really a town, just a spot on the map) where we turned west and headed for Dungog. It is only about 22 km across to Dungog but the road is quite tortuous and very rough in parts (although it presented no real problems to the SilverWing - writers perquisite :-). Just short of Dungog we both had a seniors moment; there was a large temporary illuminated road sign advising that some bridge was being worked on and a detour was in effect so without reading the fine print we headed off on the detour. We learnt later that the detour is called the "Fosterton Loop" (no doubt because it loops to the north through the map point of Fosterton then back into Dungog).

This country track turned out to be THE most interesting road of the whole trip. It starts out as a narrow one-lane bitumen road but quickly turns into a very twisty gravel road. The surface was fine pebbles and dirt, no rocks or boulders. I hadn't realised Honda made a trail bike version of the SilverWing as once my bike's rider got confident with the road conditions it just sailed along. Much of the road courses through farm land with no boundary fences so you need to keep a look out for stock. At about half-way through the loop the road crosses Williams River (see photos) via a low-level timber bridge at a truly picturesque spot on a bend of the river with gravel rapids. The road from here turns south and wind its way back to Dungog. This was a really nice ride; you can't go too quickly (at least not on a maxi-scooter) but the fabulous scenery makes up for that.

Turns out the "fine print" on the detour sign said that the detour only operated at night! We could have missed this great little road if we had been paying more attention. Sometimes seniors moments can be a good thing.

Dungog is famous for being the place where we stopped for lunch and to re-fuel on the third day of our third "Truly Excellent Road Trip". After lunch it started to really warm up (a taste of things to come as it turned out) as we navigated our way over more rough and winding roads towards Singleton.

We probably should have stopped to look around Singleton but it was very hot and we were getting quite tired. So we just motored through town heading south on the famous Putty Road until we reached the intersection with the Golden Highway where we turned west and headed for the town of Denman. On this 9 km stretch of road we probably passed more motorcycles than the rest of the trip combined; we will have to try the Putty Road some day.

The Golden Highway runs for about 311 km from Singleton to Dubbo in the central west of NSW. Its a major route connecting the central west with the port of Newcastle so is built to a high standard and allows you to make good time. Today we only had about 47 km to go to find a stop for the night.



Day 3 - Near Dungog, NSW



Day 3 - Fosterton Rd., near Dungog



Day 3 - Williams River from Fosterton Rd. by-pass



Day 3 - Williams River bridge, Fosterton Rd.

Again, we had not anticipated the demand for accommodation caused by the high demand for workers by various industries. This time it was the new coal mines that were being opened up to feed the power stations and blast furnaces of China. We were able to snaffle the LAST room in Denman at the Denman Hotel. Once again the meagre accommodation budgets that our good wives allow us for these trips were to be severely dented. However, \$50 each bought us a nice new motel room with en suite and AIR CONDITIONING - lovely! The hotel has been extensively refurbished and the motel units are near new. Meals in the restaurant were a little expensive but very good. The spare ribs were mis-named as they were anything but spare and watching a hungry bike rider devour them was not a pretty sight. The SilverWing rider chose a more genteel pizza which was consumed with decorum.

The tradition of finding interesting folks to talk with on these trips continued after dinner. We retired to the front veranda (yet again) of the Denman Hotel and started up a conversation with a group of coal mine contractors who were proceeding to consume as much alcohol as they could before 10:00 PM - why you might ask - well it turns out that its a well know medical fact that any alcohol that enters the body before 10:00 PM will be completely purged from the body by the time you wake up the next morning. The site these blokes worked on has a zero tolerance to alcohol and all workers are breathalysed before they start each morning; any trace of alcohol and its a no start. Good luck chaps!

We have decided that tomorrow we will head for Young for our last night. We had the last night of our "Excellent Road Trip - No. 2" in Young and really enjoyed it. Our choice has absolutely nothing to do with the fact that the Criterion Hotel has both Smithwick's Irish red ale (aka Kilkenny) and Guinness on tap. Can't wait!

Day 4 - Denman to Cowra - into the jaws of Hell (417 km)

Last night we decided to head for Young for tonight's stop so the heading for today's ride might look confusing! All will be revealed as we head south.

The Denman Hotel (see photo) provides quite good breakfast makings in your room: choice of cereal, toast, coffee, tea and orange juice - nice! The weather forecast for Thursday was for a very hot day and possible afternoon thunderstorms all across central NSW so we decided to get away early, leaving about 8:00 AM. We had not had the inclination the night before to explore the town so we did a lap of the main street on our way out. The town itself is not the attraction, surrounding vineyards and scenic drives are the main attraction (oh! I forgot to mention the huge open cut coal mines if you're into ugly great scars that deface the landscape).

The Golden Highway is a very good road, its wide with nice fast flowing bends and for the first 25 km or so through Sandy Hollow (I think that's a really quaint name for a town) it was very picturesque as it flows along the valley of the Hunter River with wineries and horse studs spread out across the valley floor. The sides of the valley are high sandstone cliffs and they dramatically contrast with the wide flat valley floor.

We slowed through the town of Merriwa to check if we needed fuel. "Don't bother here!" my riding companion advised, "Cassilis (the next town) is only 50 km away, we'll get some there." I check my fuel gauge and that plan seemed Ok so on we went. Cassilis has been by-passed with new highway alignments so we turned off with the SilverWing about to 'flash' that it was going onto reserve. Lovely little town but I can't see a petrol station. "Ah! there's a local - I'll ask him" I thought. "I've been liv'n 'ere fur TWENTY YEARS mate an there 'asn't been a petrol station 'ere in that time!" Bugger! I thought as I contemplated pushing a quarter metric tonne of SilverWing 51 km back to Merriwa. "You'se could try the pub" suggested our helpful local "'e keeps a couple a jerry cans up there, just 'n case." "You life saver!" I exclaimed. So we motored around town to find the 'uniquely named' Royal Hotel (almost every Australian country town has a 'Royal Hotel') and interrupted the publican from washing down the pavement and road in front of the pub (in the middle of a drought!) to ask if he could spare me some petrol. "Gi's a moment mate, an I'll 'ave a look!" He returned with a huge plastic jerry can and we poured about 10 ltr into the near empty tank. When I judged I had enough it was time to negotiate the price (given it was a seller's market); \$20 was the agreed amount (\$1.34/ltr was the highest price we paid at a service station on this trip so \$2/ltr seemed expensive but was better than the alternative!). Our publican friend was clearly not a conservationist, but certainly a good soul in other respects - thanks mate! With life juices back in the SilverWing we returned to the Golden Highway.

Its only 9 km after Cassilis that we left the Golden Highway and headed south on Ulan Road towards Mudgee. Yet another well made country road. The road between the Highway and Ulan passes through very thick scrub and is liberally sign posted with kangaroo warning signs - given the amount of road kill along this stretch the warnings need to be there. Ulan is not a town but an enormous open cut and underground coal mining complex. It looks really hideous from the road but if you have a look at it via Google Earth it is environmental vandalism on a huge scale. The rest of the run into Mudgee was easy going and quite quick. There are some very good roads through central NSW, probably a by-product of the mining.

Our Excellent Road Trip - No. 2 skirted Mudgee but we didn't have time for a look at the town. It has been a "something to do" in my mind ever since. It seems to be a really nice town. One of its attractions is the vineyards. The two amigos differ in opinion on the style of Mudgee wines but the SilverWing pilot really likes the strong earthy reds the produce in this part of the world. The Deauville pilot had been here before and had reconnoitred the town for good coffee shops - "The Butcher Shop Cafe is the only place to go!" I was advised (or was it a veiled order?) Once again his judgement on these things was spot on! The coffee (hot and iced) is very good, choice of cakes and pastries is adequate but the ambiance is unique - well worth a stop if you are passing through this part of the world.



Day 4 - Denman Hotel



Day 4 - Denman, NSW - main street



Day 4 - Sandy Hollow, NSW



Day 4 - Vineyards around Sandy Hollow

Mudgee to Bathurst was the next leg of our journey. We used the Castlereagh Highway as far as Ilford. Once again, this is a very good quality road and it is possible to maintain quite a brisk pace (on or about 100 kph of course :-)) - it occurred to me that a future trip might involve the Putty Road, the Golden and Castlereagh Highways, ummm! While the roads out here were very good the temperature was really starting to rise. We turned off the Castlereagh at Ilford to head for Bathurst. By the time we got to Sofala we had to stop for something to drink. We had been this way on our Excellent Road Trip - No. 2 so originally had not planned to stop but it was just too hot to keep going.



Day 4 - A well earned rest (for bikes and riders)

Three schooners (or pints for South Australian readers) of lemon squash in the Sofala Hotel barely quenched our thirsts. Again we had an interesting conversation with a local. We walked into the Sofala Hotel bar in riding jackets, Draggin Jeans, boots and carrying helmets and gloves - "You'se ride'n bike are you'se?" the barman asked. "No we are auditioning for the next series of Red Dwarf!" I was tempted to reply (now now Pete! its hot and you're tired and thirsty!) "Yes! (how did you guess - we were going to add)" we replied. After the first round (drank in a single gulp) he began to tell us about a local expert we might like to take our bikes to for any mechanical work we might need. Seems this chap lives down the road at Wattle Flat "on a bit of a bush block". Well it seems he is some kind of mechanical guru and is in high demand from the various Japanese motorcycle manufacturers. While the "Japs" have got teams of engineers and designers working on their race bikes they end up with a hotch pot collection of bits that they don't know what to do with so they crate them up and send them off the Wattle Flat. Sorting out these jumbles of parts is aided by this chaps expertise and by the weather - it seems that it is so hot around Wattle Flat that the parts are layed out in the sun to warm up. The technician uses a (solar powered?) pyrometer to measure the temperature and when the parts

reach their optimum heat his skill enables them all to just slip together - voila! from an odd collection of bits that the "Japs" didn't know what to do with you have a Yamaha YZR-M1 fit for Valentino Rossi to ride - marvelous! We would not have known these facts if we hadn't stopped at Sofala to quench our thirsts. If you ever buy a new motorcycle and its delivered to you as parts in a crate; fear not help is at hand in Wattle Flat.

While we were stopped we thought we may as well have lunch - \$8 for a corned beef sandwich from the town cafe - OUCH!

We had intended to stop in Bathurst for coffee at the visitors centre and another run around Mount Panorama (to test the fastest scooter in Australia) but it was just too hot and we decided to press on. We had originally planned to stop in Young for the night but by the time we got to Cowra we had had enough. We have stayed at the Hotel Cowra before and were happy to stay there again. The accommodation budget is back on track! Rooms are \$25 per night with shared facilities and the choice of makings or full cooked breakfast in the morning. I'm writing this journal entry sitting in the main bar with the air conditioner and a giant fan blowing behind me and a cold glass of beer next to me. Tomorrow we head for home via the Boorowa Cafe for good coffee and great pastries.



Day 4 - Sofala Hotel



Day 4 - Sofala, NSW

Day 5 - Cowra to Batemans Bay - The Dash for the Coast (322 km)

I'm sorry about this, but there are no photos for Day 5; we were still concerned about the heat and our aim for the day was to leave early and get as much of the ride home done before it got too hot. So on with the journey!

We were awake just after 6:00 AM and had our toiletries completed and luggage packed before 6:30. Last time we stayed in the Cowra Hotel there was a choice of light breakfast (toast and spreads, tea or coffee) included in the room rate or rather cheap, but filling, full cooked breakfast. This morning we presented ourselves in the dining room and looked for the light breakfast makings - there were none! So we asked Ziggy's daughter what we had to do to get breakfast. "Oh! I'm busy today, (somebody) is away so there is no breakfast this morning!" "Bugger!" we thought. We were quite happy to put up with the old and rather shabby rooms, we were happy to put up with the constant smell of stale cooking fat that permeates the whole hotel, we were happy to put up with the 'quaint' shared bathroom facilities, we were even happy to put up with the cockroaches that were the size of a small cat (well maybe we were not that happy about the cockroaches) and we even enjoyed the company of some of the unusual clientele - what we were not happy about was not having any breakfast. [As an aside, those of you who have read Cliff and Pete's Excellent Road Trip - No. 1 will recall that we recommended the Cowra Hotel highly; well we have now revised our recommendation. If you plan to stay in Cowra you might like to have a good look at the Imperial Hotel which has recently been completely refurbished.] So we stormed out hoping the local McDonalds store would be open, and of course it was. (Where would we travellers be without McDonalds?) So we fuelled up the bodies and then the bikes and set off down the Lachlan Valley Way (named after Lachlan Macquarie (1761-1824) and Governor of NSW from 1810-1821 - see www.lib.mq.edu.au/lmr/biography.html for more details). As a former resident of Canberra, I know this road well; it has always been quite a good road running through open pastoral land. However, it seems to have been considerably improved with a better surface, widening and corners opened up over recent years so that now the 85 km to Boorowa passes quickly and safely.

Heat or no heat, you can't ride through Boorowa without a stop at the bakery for coffee and pastries. The pies and sausage rolls are apparently very good, but I can't seem to get past the apple turnovers with lashings of fresh cream or the cream buns (Oh! Pete! What are you doing to your body?). So stop we did. A bottle of cold Italian mineral water and a light Caesar's Salad should have been the go, but alas it wasn't.

The Lachlan Valley Way continues on until it intersects with the Hume Highway just south of Yass. From here its a short drone up the freeway to the Barton Highway turn off. We only used this road for the short run to Murrumbateman where we head across country to Bungendore, stopping for fuel, and on to Braidwood.

Braidwood (9.5 out of 10) has a bakery that is almost as good as the one in Boorowa (9.75 out of 10) so one last stop before the descent down the Clyde Mountain. We reached the round-about at the intersection of the Kings Highway

(the road we had travelled from Bungandore) and the Princes Highway (the official starting and ending points for our trip) at about 11:30 am - roughly 4.5 hours for 319 km with three stops. My riding partner still had some distance to ride back up the coast to Ulladulla and while he was doing that I treated the trusty SilverWing to a thorough wash at the Batemans Bay Car Wash before heading home.

Some recollections

\$50 per night for accommodation seems to have become the old \$25 per night.

Despite the Global Economic Crisis there seems to be a great deal of work in many rural areas (tree planting in Walcha and coal mining in Denman) which significantly impacts on the availability and cost of casual accommodation. You probably need to plan ahead.

We covered a total of 2020 km and my Honda SilverWing consumed fuel at the rate of 4.14 ltr/100km which seems good given that it was still being "run in". The most expensive petrol was at Hexham (near Newcastle) at \$134.9/ltr, excluding the petrol from the publican's jerry can at Cassilis.

Yet again we had a really great run, made even better by good companionship and the interesting folks you meet along the way. Both bikes ran like clockwork (they're Hondas!). I was particularly happy with my SilverWing; it goes and it handles well and I had no aches or pains throughout the entire trip - what more could I ask of it?

When are we going again? And where are we going?

Peter Anderson
Ulysses #48070