

KOSCIUSZKO TO KIAMA – 19 to 27 February 2005 Second Time Around – Bruce Hackett

Last year I subtitled my Big Ride article “A Novice in Adventure Land”, and recalled that one of the many things I had learned was how to pitch a tent. For the 2005 ride I resolved to restrict myself to one travel bag, which was subject to a weight limit of fourteen kilograms. This meant acquiring a smaller, lighter tent and restricting my other luggage to essential items. By certain devious means I managed to get my overweight bag through the checkpoint, but then had to lump it on to the luggage truck on each of the next nine days, and have decided that perhaps there is some merit in the “two bag” concept after all.

There were eighteen of us on the bus which set out from Wagga on a fine, sunny afternoon. After an uneventful trip we reached Jindabyne in daylight to face a not unusual confrontation with the camp manager about bringing the bus on to the oval. But eventually we unloaded, erected our tents in record time, and set off to enjoy the delights of the mountain town. It was too late and too cold for a swim in the lake but dinner at one of the many local pubs proved more than adequate compensation. Next morning we were bussed up to Charlotte Pass where we mounted our bicycles and assembled for the massed start from near the Kosciusko Summit. The ride down the mountain was sheer bliss, especially the twelve kilometre decent from Rennix Gap to the Thredbo River, and the spectacular views of the lake as we approached Jindabyne Township.

The ride from Jindabyne to Dalgety was notable for the summer grass and snow gums which dotted the hillsides. At the disused Rocky Plains School we met up with some of John’s relatives who live locally. In Dalgety we viewed some antique cars and (I’m told) drank the pub dry, before retiring to our tents for the first of two rainy nights on this ride.

The light rain continued as we crossed the treeless Monaro Plains on Day 3 to “Spring Well”, the 100-year-old homestead. The ladies of the Cooma Hospital Auxiliary had provided a sumptuous array of scones and cakes and it was a bit of a shame that the rain prevented the garden setting being enjoyed at its best. However, John did get some spectacular photos of the front of the house. The ride into Bredbo was along the Monaro Highway with some spectacular views of the Upper Murrumbidgee.

Continuing along the Monaro Highway to Queanbeyan on Day 4, the country became more timbered and undulating. A highlight of the day was the morning tea stop at Michelago School, where the thirty-eight children and their parents provided a momentous feast, and one of our cycling families enacted a spectacular circus display on its three-man tandem.

The rest day in Queanbeyan provided a welcome respite and for some a chance to go hot air ballooning or visit the national capital. It was also an opportunity to renew our acquaintance with Canberra’s “Pedal Power”, which group organised cycle tours of the city and around the Lake.

Highlights of the “Teams Day” ride to Gunning were the lunch stop at Dick Smith’s “Bowylie”, with its stone-walled garden and narrow gauge railway running from the airstrip to the house, and the historic village of Gundaroo, made famous by Mike Hayes and his “Prickle Farm”. I’m afraid I found it all a bit bizarre.

The 109-kilometre ride from Gunning to Marulan proved something of a challenge. Some “team” members actually had the temerity to suggest that I needed lower gears on my road bike, and although I admit I struggled a bit on the Bungonia Road, I don’t remember walking any hills. But we were all glad to finally reach the lights of Marulan.

The next day the 82-kilometre ride to Robertson was a breeze. Unfortunately the day was shrouded in fog, which prevented us from enjoying the lush green beauty of the southern

highland towns. We had our second rainy night in Robertson and there was some official apprehension about the ride down the mountain the next day. The Jamberoo Pass road was closed to all but local traffic and cyclists, and proved scary and hazardous – real Mulga Bill territory. But we all made it safely to the bottom and the massed ride into the streets of Kiama amid cheering crowds lining the streets made it all worthwhile and reminded one of the Russian Army's triumphal entry into Berlin! Well, perhaps not quite!

The 2006 ride is from Holbrook to Binalong, via Tumbarumba and Gundagai. I think I am still recuperating from the 2005 ride, and so am undecided about next year. But this year the oldest rider was in his eighties, so I guess there is hope for me yet.