



PART 6

Mackay to Melbourne via Tennant Creek

DECEMBER 2016–JANUARY 2017 | 11 DAYS

PART 6

Mackay to Melbourne via Tenant Creek

BOXING DAY MORNING I FLEW TO MACKAY TO PICK UP MY BIKE FROM NICK'S WHERE HE HAD REPLACED MY CRACKED BRAKE DISC, DID THE VALVE CLEARANCES, TYRES, FILTERS, FITTED JUMPER LEADS AND A WHOLE LOT MORE. BIKE SOUNDED GREAT. THANKS NICK. PLANNED TO GO FROM HERE TO BIRDSVILLE, PLENTY HIGHWAY, ALICE SPRINGS, AYERS ROCK, PERTH THEN BACK ALONG THE BOTTOM TO MELBOURNE. SO I HEADED QUICKLY TO THE CLERMONT MOTOR CAMP FOR THE FIRST NIGHT OF A BIG TRIP BY MYSELF THIS TIME.



Up early and headed towards Blackall via dirt roads that I had ridden with Steve and Nick last year. Continued on more good roads to Birdsville via Windorah. 1203 kms today and from 12.30 to 9.30 pm I only came across three vehicles. It was a very lonely ride. Nick Budden had done 1193kms the week before so I had to beat that, although he did do his in 9 ½ hours so he keeps telling me. A thunder storm was half a day in front of me and some of the roads were very wet and slippery. Rode into the motor camp and set up my tent just as it started to pour down for the night.

Lucky I know to pitch the tent on high ground as by morning the motor camp was flooded. There was only one other caravan there and they were from Levin. Kiwis are tough.

I had to wait until 8am for the fuel station to open. The rain had closed lots of roads so I thought I would head out west towards Big Red which is a large sand hill in the Simpson Desert where four wheel drives and bikes go for a challenge. I rode out of Birdsville on the seal and for the first time there was no sign saying seal ends or gravel road so I hit the porridge like wet dirt in top gear, lost my front and went down sliding in the mud. That was five metres into a 45km ride. I got up and looked behind and could still see Birdsville so I straightened out my brake lever and went back for a cuppa. Not one for getting beaten I had another go and this time I was more cautious and aware of the mud. I got to the end of the road and to the Simpson Desert. I made it to the top of Little Red and in the distance I could see Big Red but I wasn't game to ride down the other side as I didn't think I'd get back up and no-one else may be in this area for a week. Turned around and headed back the same way to Birdsville. Yep, fell off again but I was only in third gear this time but it still took a side pannier off and bent my gear lever. The bike was too heavy to lift up this time because of all the mud on it. I had to take the 10 litre fuel bladder off and my tent bag.



Zip tied and duck taped the pannier back on and straightened the gear stick slightly as I didn't want to take the risk of breaking it. From Birdsville I headed towards Bedourie and Mt Isa. I had about 100km of wet slippery roads to encounter first. My plan was to do the Plenty Highway but due to the extreme weather conditions in front of me that road was closed so I had to take an extra day's detour around to Tennants Creek and down to Alice Springs. The ground was so wet that I spent two hours extra riding in the dark looking for a dry spot to pitch my tent for the night. Found a spot where the road had changed at the top of a hill. It was still about 38 degrees. I'm getting closer to the thunderstorms and I'm riding through more flooded roads. You can see why so many people drown in the desert.

Australian riders
recommend not
to ride a motorcycle
before dawn and
after dusk to avoid
hitting wildlife.

I was only 20 kms short of Mt Isa last night. Updated my Facebook at Hungry Jacks as their Wi-Fi was good. Carried on sealed roads to Three Ways which is before Tennant Creek. I finally caught up with the thunderstorms and got absolutely drowned for the last 50kms. It was the heaviest rains in 21 years. If you want it to rain in Aussie, send me over. I got a cabin at Three Ways and a nice roast pork meal at the road house.



My gear was still wet from the day before as there was no dryer here. It soon dried out riding at 125 kms per hour. I headed south to Alice Springs to change my front tyre as they tend to vibrate more as they get worn. On the way I came across what they call the Devils' Marbles. This was amazing. Big round rocks on top of each other and scattered about. I had never seen anything like this before. Reached Alice Springs and it was very hot but the rain up country caused flooding through Alice Springs and all the kids were swimming in the muddy waters. Bit scary in some of these towns. The crime rate here is extremely high. You can't leave your helmet or anything on your bike. I got my gear lever straightened and replaced my front tyre and left quickly, headed 86 kms south to a little road house at Stuart Wells and set up my tent in a dirt yard.



Up at 6 am and headed to Uluru (Ayers Rock). It was 329 kms away and the day before it was closed due to the heavy rains and some places were evacuated. This road was sealed and a bit busier with tourists like myself. I could see the rock in the distance and then I got closer and then I was riding away from it. I realised then that this wasn't Ayers Rock but another large rock just as big. The locals call this rock Fuluru (Mt Connor). I still had 40 kms to go. When I arrived at Ayers Rock it was 37 degrees and what a sight this place was. It was closed for climbing as the day before it was just one big waterfall. I walked around part of it and it is one place that everyone must view. I left there and back tracked to Erdunda where I was going to spend New Year's Eve. The local road house had about six people for New Year's Eve so I was in bed by 9.30 pm listening to more rain pouring down again. I was going to ride the Finke but the local Policeman said I'd never get through.





1. Ayres Rock (Uluru). 2. Oodnadatta Track. 3. Fuluru.





Left Erdunda at 6am and rode what turned out to be the most boring part of the trip as all the side roads that I had planned to do were closed and there is a \$5000 fine if you get caught on a closed road. Coober Pedy is an Opal mining area where a lot of people live under ground. It is so hot here you can see why they live in the old Opal mines. Turned off the main road at Pimba and went inland to Roxby Downs which is a rich mining town near a large dam. It looked more like a holiday town as there were nice homes and most people had a boat up the drive and the motor camp was \$25 which was \$10 dearer than most. I did 1107 kms to Roxby Downs. Another big day. Might need to buy an Air Hawke seat as my arse was getting sore.



Next day began with another very early start towards the Oodnadatta Track. Back on gravel roads which was wonderful. Nobody in sight and very barren all around. At one stage I kept thinking I had a flat tyre and what would I do if it was. The flies would drive me crazy if I tried to fix it and there definitely wouldn't be anyone else out here for days. I reached the Oodnadatta Track which I had always wanted to tackle. Turned right here and headed to Marree at the bottom of the Birdsville track which I did last year. After many flooded road sections I reached Marree and looked back at the road closure sign and everything was closed. No wonder parts were a struggle. From Marree I headed towards Leigh Creek,





Parachilna and the Flinders Ranges which is some of the most spectacular riding I've done in Aussie. Beautiful hills and countryside which change colours under different light. Lots of Emus and Kangaroos here so caution is a must. You never know when one will duck out from behind a shady tree. Stopped at Blinman pub for a cold drink and met two guys who had ridden from Perth just before the flooding. Off towards Wilpena Pound tourist camp ground. This is a real tourist area. Hawker was the next stop for fuel then just past that I turned off onto the R M Williams Way to a camp ground at Orroroo. Nice lady called Heather who gave me instructions for a good ride the next day. Went to the middle pub for a nice meal. Wi-Fi is on the main street here.

Ready to go home now as I'm over all these sealed roads. It has been very boring this trip, but I can cope with boring occasionally but not day after day. It was a bit cold first thing leaving Orroroo but it didn't take long to get the temperature back up in the high 30's again. Took Heathers advice, and headed towards Jamestown where I had never imagined so many grain fields and they went for miles. On to Burra, which is a very beautiful looking town. Met another adventure rider who showed me more good roads on my map. Reached Morgan at the top of the Murray River and crossed the river on the barge so I could ride past all the wine growing area and along the Murray River to Luxton. More fuel and off south to

I underestimated how big the Australia Outback was. Standing in one spot and not seeing a landmark in site.



1. Deer in the middle of Halls Gap. 2. Very lonely ride. 3. Termite mounds.



Pinaroo where I represented Tasmania in 1992 at the Australia Yard Dog Trails. This place brought back a few memories and I can't believe it was that long ago. Pinaroo to Bordertown on a sealed road through a desert and very hot again. Bordertown to Francis to Horsham where it was more like New Zealand back country roads and away from the main highway. Found a nice camp ground in Horsham and met another bike rider from Adelaide on his Harley. John was keen to buy an adventure bike so we got on well as most riders do.

John the Harley rider left about 6 am and I was right behind him but we were heading in different directions. I had heard of the Grampians National Park so I thought that would be a good ride on the way to Hurstbridge to stay with mates. Got such a shock to see four deer walking across the road in front of me at Halls Gap, just as I was heading into the National Park. Nice flowing sealed roads, but still needed to watch out for wildlife. I noticed my temperature gauge rising so I topped the radiator up, and kept going. However, the problem was getting worse so I headed to Ballarat Motorcycle Land. Only just made the 1 ½ hour ride without cooking the bike. Replaced my rear tyre and we found a small hole in the radiator which we temporarily fixed with 'Stop Leaks'. I'll need to replace the radiator before my next trip. Also, I think a small bottle of Stop Leaks needs to be carried in the bike. If this had happened two days earlier, I would still be there. Great guys at this bike shop. Continued on to Hurstbridge, but got caught up in Melbourne traffic. Four lanes and at a near standstill for about 5 kms. I sneaked up the inside lane carefully, but it was still scary. Very relieved to get out of the traffic and to my mates

Rob and Deb at Hurstbridge. I stayed the night in the pool house on the 18 acres surrounded by gum trees. During the night I got up for a leak outside as you do. I heard a rustling noise beside me so I shined my headlamp in that direction and there was a six foot Kangaroo standing up on his hind legs with its front feet out ready for a boxing fight. I didn't know if I should run and wet myself, or stand still. I finished what I had started, then ran back inside. That was scary. Rob said that Kangaroos graze around the house every night.

Today I was riding familiar territory and the best sealed roads in Australia. Yarra Glen and then Healesville for a cuppa and checked emails. Up towards the Blackspur Mountain to Marysville, then down to Warburton. The last bit is gravel, and this loop is awesome. Have to be very careful as there are a few wildlife and the occasional logging truck. The last part of the road to my Brother's house in Moe ended another good ride, although a little disappointed not being able to do the dirt roads I had planned from the start.

