



## **PART 10**

# Perth to Melbourne via Alice Springs

OCTOBER 2018 | 11 DAYS

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**WHILE HAVING BREAKFAST EARLY ON A SATURDAY MORNING, MY WIFE SUGGESTED IT WAS A GOOD TIME FOR ME TO GO BACK FOR A RIDE. SO WITH NO HESITATION I BOOKED A TICKET AND AT 2AM TUESDAY MORNING I WAS RIDING TO WELLINGTON ON MY GOLD WING, AROUND THE BARRIER ARMS AT THE AIRPORT PARKING AND PARKED THE BIKE BY ALL THE SCOOTERS OWNED BY AIRPORT EMPLOYEES. GOOD TIME TO GO BEFORE IT GETS TOO HOT AS I NEEDED TO GET MY BIKE BACK TO THE EAST COAST.**



Arrived in Perth where Conrad from 'The Honda Shop' Midland, Perth had my tyres changed and bike ready and the next morning after a quick rear wheel bearing change, I headed by myself towards the Central Highway and Alice Springs.

I was a bit nervous about riding 5500 kms by myself after the troubles Robin and I had on the last leg but this trip was well planned and I'd put extra heavy duty tubes in to avoid getting any more punctures. Good preparation is the key to a good trip.





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Know your limits.  
Don't ride beyond your  
ability and don't try and  
keep up with a faster  
rider if you don't feel  
comfortable.

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My preparation didn't take into account that the Mount Palmer Roadhouse would be closed for renovations and that was going to be a planned fuel stop. I continued on towards Coolgardie knowing that I may be a little short on fuel. Little, was an understatement as at 197 kms I ran out, 50 to 70 kms short of my usual distance due to higher speeds and a dirty air filter. I had only put 2 litres in my fuel bladder as I didn't think it would be needed, (bad decision). I continued on at a slow speed until eventually by shaking the bike from side to side used every drop of fuel I had and fortunately was near a cell phone tower where I hid my bike in the trees and started to hitch hike the 50 kms to Coolgardie. Not a good start to an eight day ride. After many cars flew by with no interest in picking me up, a few blokes in a work truck gave me a ride to the fuel station where I filled up my fuel bladder. Most truckies are not allowed to carry passengers but after about an hour's wait I found a driver who was happy to take me back to my bike. By 6.30 pm I was back at Coolgardie looking for a place to pitch my tent.



Today, after filling my fuel bladder to the max I headed to Leanora via Credo Station where my brother worked years ago. Credo was a former pastoral station and now is a 212,000 hectare conservation park available for camping and exploring. It also has a few working mines. It was a great 75 km ride on a nice gravel road alongside the water pipe that ran water from Mundaring Weir in Perth to Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie. This pipe line was completed in 1903. On the way to Credo I passed the old 10 bedroom Premier Hotel opened in 1901 and was one of the first to have electricity and was possibly the first hotel in Australia to offer counter meals in the bar.

After a few photos taken at Credo for my brother I continued on gravel roads towards Menzies and then back onto the Gold Fields Highway to Laverton. The only wild life I'd seen up until now was a kangaroo at the Credo caretaker's house.

I rode through Leanora to Laverton and topped up my fuel bladder and bike as this next leg to Tjukayirla was 305 kms of wide gravel roads in excellent condition after the rain the night before, apart from patches of soft bull dust to keep you focused. At 215 kms the bike coughed and spluttered so in went the 9 litres from the fuel bladder and just enough to get me to the roadhouse with about a teaspoon of fuel left. Very lucky. Another cuppa, a chocolate bar and more fuel I kept heading east along Outback Way on another long stretch of nicely graded road. There were more corrugations as I headed closer towards Uluru and it was easier to sit on 90 – 100 kms per hour. Any slower shook you around too much. Once in a while there was a detour



onto a temporary road as another new section of road was getting built. All of a sudden just north of Tjukayirla I came across a road worker's temporary camp where I hit another stretch of new sealed and very wide road.



Apparently the Central Highway will be sealed in five years. After a few kilometres of this I was back on dirt and amongst grass fires everywhere and lots of lightning. Not sure if the fires were from the lightning or the Aborigines as they light lots of fires. It was getting dark but I didn't want to camp here because of the fires all around so I kept going in the dark with the lightning all around. It looked really impressive towards Alice Springs.



After an hour's riding in the dark I thought I'd better stop before I caught up with the storm ahead. I set up camp in the middle of the new dirt road to avoid the fires getting to my tent during the night. Early next morning I woke up to a beautiful vista as I didn't realise that I camped at one of the highest points around. 100 kms first thing and I arrived in the Aboriginal community of Warburton at 7.30 am. The road house didn't open until 9am so I thought I'd go for a ride around. What an eye opener and very scary sort of place. Warburton is in the Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku and has a population of 474 with an average weekly income of \$465. Some of the streets were cordoned off with drums or rocks. The houses had steel mesh from the ground to the eaves of the roof with big padlocks to get in, and a few houses even had mesh above the roof. The fuel pumps at the Roadhouse were also inside a steel cage to prevent theft.





Pleased to be leaving Warburton heading to Warakuma Roadhouse 227 kms away on more gravel and dirt roads in pretty good condition, apart from the corrugations and a few more camels on the roads.

Kaltukatjarra, also known as Docker River was another 102 kms away with the road getting rougher and soft patches with very little traffic. I always thought that I was going to have a river crossing here but Docker River has no river. 300 residents live here and it is another rough looking area with rubbish scattered along the fence lines and I don't think registering a vehicle applies here with most cars having no rear window and some with no windows at all.

I had 236 kms to get to Uluru (Ayers Rock) and 200 kms was rough dirt, gravel, corrugations and lots of thick bull dust that was hard work with a fully laden bike. This was the toughest bit of riding so far on this trip. To make it worse, I had an electrical storm the whole way in my rear vision mirror and this storm that was catching me fast. I normally try to stop and walk around and stretch every 100 kms but I was racing the storm as this road would have been unpassable if it was wet. I reached Uluru just on sunset and there were lots of tourist buses and camper vans as usual every evening. People had their backs to the rock and were photographing the spectacular storm that was minutes away. As the rain came down I rode as fast as I could to the Uluru camp ground and found a site close to a shelter. Washed some clothes, had a shower and met some more campers touring Aussie.

Amazing how well you sleep when you've had a big day and the sound of rain drops on the tent during the night. I was looking forward to Kings Canyon on the Red Centre Way. It was 370 kms to the Kings Canyon turnoff then 4 kms to start the 45 minute walk to the Canyon. There is usually a two hour rim walk but that was closed. Another cuppa and fuelled up at Kings Canyon then continued on the Red Centre Way on the rough corrugations to Hermannsburg. This was hard work again and I didn't anticipate so much bull dust and rocks. The rocky scenery and trees were a change from the barren Central Highway. The mostly sealed road from Hermannsburg to Alice Springs was a pleasant surprise and very picturesque apart from the dead cattle carcasses that littered the road.

I'd been to Alice Springs before so after the fuel stop and chain lube I headed south to Erldunda 200 kms away, hoping to get there just after sunset but I didn't like my chances as my air filter blockage meant I was struggling to get more than 100 kms per hour top speed. A road train caught me so I waved him by and got into his slip stream and that worked well sitting on 110 kms per hour for about 45 minutes then it started to get dark and my headlight wouldn't go. I either had a loose wire or a dirty switch as that happens at times. I should at least have a full beam. Meanwhile I stayed very close to the road trains tail lights while pulling on wires and flicking the light switch. It was a bit dangerous and stupid but after about 60 kms in the dark my headlight came on and a short time later I arrived at the Erldunda Roadhouse where I camped in the camp ground for the night. It worked out okay but it could have turned to shit. I had spent New Year's Eve here two years earlier. Free wifi here was a chance to check work emails and update face book with a few photos.





First thing in the morning took my tank off and cleaned my air filter to hopefully get some power and economy back in the bike. Sure enough the bike took off with a wheel spin and I headed southward towards Cathney Park Roadhouse with a fuel stop at Indulkana on the way.



Sealed roads with more traffic than I'd seen for some time. This was the Stuart Highway between Adelaide and Darwin. Cathney Park Roadhouse was closed two years ago when I was here as they had no fuel for a long time and it was a rundown looking place. Now it looks very smart with a fresh paint job and nice owners. While I was fuelling up a local farmer who lived on the Painted Desert Road gave me directions and places to see along the way. He said that the road was closed for trucks but I'd be okay on the bike and there were four motor-cross guys putting their gear on to do part of the road behind me. I trusted local knowledge and headed on the Painted Desert Road to Oodnadatta. What a wonderful road with undulating, twisty narrow sections of dirt that I really enjoyed. It was so much different from the roads I'd been on and then all of a sudden I came across a sign that said Oodnadatta 97 kms and the road was under water. It just reminded me how quickly conditions can change in the harsh environment of the outback. Obviously there had been a lot of rain here but none further back. I wasn't going to turn back so I thought I'd try my enduro skills and have some fun. Worst case scenario if I got stuck I would camp and wait for help. I crossed the track backwards and forward looking for dry patches and every now and again I'd ride through the water but my bike was so heavy I had the risk of getting stuck. Lucky I had reasonable tyres on. This red dirt is different from the mud we have



in New Zealand. It sticks like concrete and doesn't seem to fall off the bike and it clogs up the wheels so much that the wheels just won't turn. I fell off twice crossing the track because the front was so heavy. First time I managed to pick the bike up using all my strength but the second time I had to unload the bag, fuel bladder and the tyre and then I only just got it up. Don't know how many kilos of mud was stuck to it. I was having so much fun but with the dark clouds ahead and lightning I was anticipating camping out here for the night but eventually I reached the Oodnadatta-Coober Pedy road which wasn't so bad. By 5.30 I arrived at the Pink Roadhouse just as it was closing. They let me fuel up and book a tent site for \$15.

As I put my tent up the rain came down along with very strong winds so I found an old shed to cook my spaghetti and make a cuppa tea. The wind continued through the night and I thought my tent was going to get airborne during the night.



Always reset your trip metre after refuelling so you know what distance you can roughly travel on your tank.



5.30am after very little sleep I packed up and hit the road to Coober Pedy. I was going to go down towards Williams Creek but I'd done most of that road before so I took the shorter option. The wide gravel and dirt road was drying out and I could sit on 120 kms per hour through Mt Barry Station with very little vegetation and some Poll Hereford cattle every now and again. Mt Barry Station is 4920 square kms and has 3900 cattle with an annual rainfall of 150mm.

Coobey Pedy is an opal mining town that I had passed through last year. I can remember all the piles of dirt that scatter the landscape where opal digging had been. It is one of the hottest towns in Australia and lots of people live underground. More fuel, oiled my chain and had a toasted sandwich then headed south down the Stuart Highway to Port Augusta Caravan Park for the night. There always seems to be more wild life as you get closer to built up areas. Must be because there is more feed there.

Temperatures had dropped and it was very overcast with rain in front of me as I left Port Augusta and rode over the Horrocks Pass Road towards Wilmington which reminded me of New Zealand roads and countryside. From Wilmington the countryside here was similar to Tasmania with Merino and Corriedale sheep, trees and large paddocks.

Orroroo had one of Australia's largest Red Gum trees. (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) Circumference of 10.89 metres and estimated to be in excess of 500 years old.

I was very keen to get home at this point to support my mate Robin who has done three previous rides with me. I just had news that he had just lost his mum who was 97 and one and half days later his dad died. They had been together for 76 years. His Dad died of a broken heart. Very sad, but what an ending, to get buried the same day.

Burra is a beautiful little town in the wheat growing area where you will find the largest cropping machinery in the country. Paddocks the size of small towns and wheat silos and wheat bunkers make up the area around Peterborough, Jamestown and south of Burra. It got cold so I put my jacket liner in and put my leggings on and decided to make a B line to Murray Bridge and Tailern Bend along the Murray River on good country roads. At this stage it was pouring down and I still had to put up with traffic on the outskirts of Adelaide. I made it to Meningie on the edge of Lake Albert where I'd camped a few years before. I had to put my tent up in the rain and throw my helmet, wet gear and my bag (no not my wife Carol), my gear bag in there and rode to the pub for shelter and a hot meal. Eventually I had to go to my tent and squeeze in amongst my wet gear. I slept well and I think it may have been the fumes that knocked me out.





Still pouring down when I got up at 5.30am so I loaded up and decided that I would not go around the coast. Instead I'd go 48kms to the Duke Highway and try to get to my final destination of Willow Grove, Moe tonight. This meant over 800 kms in cold pouring rain and low visibility. The roads were getting busier as I got closer to Melbourne, and there were more Road Trains heading west. Lots of harvesters for sale lined up in the small towns and more cereal crop paddocks for miles. The rain continued to pour down and I got saturated as the spray from the large trucks came towards me and all I could think about was tackling the Melbourne peak hour traffic. Lucky for me I came across a guy in McDonalds in Horsham who recognised me from the Australia Adventure Riders Facebook page and gave me advice on how to get through Melbourne. I still had over one hour's riding after I navigated Melbourne to get to Willow Grove by 5 pm. Wet and cold and 5575 kms covered I'd completed another trip and met some nice people along the way.



I have done what I set out to do and now I just have to Ride Tasmania to complete my adventure.

What a big tick off my bucket list.

