



PART 3

Melbourne to Birdsville return

DECEMBER 2015-JANUARY 2016 | 14 DAYS

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PICKED UP MY BIKE FROM MY BROTHER'S IN MOE (EAST OF MELBOURNE) ON THE 24TH DEC 2015 AND HEADED TOWARDS YARRA RANGES NATIONAL PARK AND IT WAS THERE THAT I NOTICED THAT MY BACK SPROCKET MAY NOT MAKE THE DISTANCE SO I RODE TO A BIKE SHOP IN RINGWOOD WHERE AN AUSSIE THERE WAS SO UNHELPFUL AND RUDE I LEFT TO FIND ANOTHER SHOP. I MET A GUY ON A BIKE IN THE CITY AND HE SUGGESTED I GO TO BALLARAT MOTORCYCLE LAND. THIS GUY PHONED THE BIKE SHOP AND SAID I WAS COMING AND WHAT I NEEDED. REMEMBER THIS WAS CHRISTMAS EVE. I RODE THE 1 ½ HOURS TO BALLARAT WHERE THEY PUT NEW CHAIN AND SPROCKETS ON. ABSOLUTELY TERRIFIC SERVICE AND I COULDN'T THANK THEM ENOUGH. BEHIND SCHEDULE I DID A FEW MILES ON BITUMEN ROADS TO MAKE UP SOME LOST TIME. OFF TOWARDS AVOCA WHERE I FOUND A NICE CAMPING GROUND FOR CHRISTMAS EVE.



Christmas by myself while my wife Carol was with family and friends, Scott (my eldest son) was on a plane coming back from America, and Jay (my youngest) was in Taurunga with mates. Had a quick look at my map and headed up towards St Arnaud via all dirt roads and small towns like Warracknabeal, Jeparit, crossing the Murray River and then to the Big Desert Wilderness Park which was a little daunting especially with a temperature of 48 degrees. The heat I could cope with while moving but the flies drove me mad. I stopped to check my map and I couldn't see it for flies. They completely covered the map, they were in my ears, eyes and up my nose. Unbearable, so I put my helmet on and got moving again. This road was soft and sandy in places but an awesome road for my Transalp. I reached Murrayville where I had a cuppa and topped up with fuel then went on to take on another desert. This time it was Murray Sunset National Park and just like the last desert I didn't see



one other person. Apparently it is only crazy kiwis that ride at this time of the year. Saw my first snake on this trip sunbathing on the road. Another cuppa and something to eat at Renmark, and a full tank of gas but I didn't top up my bladder which turned out to be a big mistake. I know now to keep it full all the time. Renmark to Broken Hill didn't seem that far on the map, but I got a little lost and carried away on the dirt roads and kept taking turnoffs because I was busy exploring everything. I got to the Silver City Highway after two hours of riding and I still had a long way to go with very little fuel. I rode at 80 km to conserve fuel to try and get to Broken Hill. It was getting dark, kangaroos were on the road and I only met one four wheel drive and he only carried diesel. Finally made it with a teaspoon of petrol in the tank. Just set up my tent in a sports ground when it poured down with rain. Perfect timing in the end. I was a little worried earlier.

Don't run over
dead Kangaroos
as the bones will
puncture a tyre.



Next morning the rain had passed, so after fuelling up early, I rode the dirt roads on the eastern side of the Silver City Highway to Camerons Corner where three states meet. Fuelled up here again as distance between fuel stops were longer, and some fuel stations were closed. You do have to ask directions, road conditions and next fuel stop at every opportunity you get. I was told there was fuel at Merty Merty but there wasn't. It didn't matter as I missed that turnoff and found myself on the old Strzelecki Track and experiencing some real sand dunes for the first time. There were no wheel marks or signs of anyone being here for a very long time. While emptying my fuel bladder into the bike it was the first time I actually thought about my safety as I didn't have a Sat Phone or Spot Tracker. Very irresponsible really. I made it to Innamincka about 6 pm and was setting my tent up by the dry river bed. There were so many Bull Ants and other insects on the ground and the air was thick with flies, so I decided to ride 300 metres to the pub for a nice Ham Steak. Set up camp under some trees by the dry river bed nearby in the dark where there were no flies, and the Bull Ants had gone.

The next morning I had about four hours of nothing, except Emus that ran out in front of me. You could see the curve of the earth and no landmarks. I had underestimated how big the outback was.

I did plan on doing the Strzelecki Track but even with my fuel bladder I would have run out of fuel. Apparently the owner of the only place I may have got fuel, had gone away for a few days as the busy season was over. A guy had just come up the Strzelecki and said I had only one way to go and that was up to Birdsville or I wouldn't make it with the fuel I carried.



Driving around Australia should not be underestimated as distances between fuel stops can be further than your fuel capacity.

1. An airstrip in the middle of nowhere. **2.** Very important signs. **3.** Only place for fuel for miles.

Riding towards Birdsville via Cordillo Downs the road varied from soft sand to dirt and were very confusing with lots of signs on side roads. These signs turned out to be names of gas fields not townships. No wonder I couldn't find them on my map. I found this out by stopping a road train, otherwise I would have gone an extra 50 km the wrong way. I passed through a large Hereford farm which was about 1 million acres and every now and again I'd see a few cattle.

Birdsville Racecourse track was on my right as I rode into a small sleepy looking town. Hard to imagine thousands of people here when the famous horse races are on. Stopped here for an ice-cream and fuel. Talked to a guy who had driven from Perth and was heading to Brisbane. He said I needed to phone Phil at the road house in Mungerannie to make sure he was going to be there as it's the only place to get fuel between Birdsville to Marree which was 517 km away. Apparently he was closing for a week the next day. Birdsville Track was graded two weeks earlier and then it rained so road workers' vehicles went home causing big ruts for miles. Riding on the road edge was okay for most of it although there were some big holes, big enough to lose my credit card and Aussie phone somewhere along the track.

Arrived at Mungerannie, where Phil was expecting me. Phil said to just sleep on the grating in front of the toilets as it was a very hot night. Up went my tent on the grating because I was scared of snakes crawling over me at night. A cold beer with him, a sandwich, filled up bladder and bike ready for another early start after another hot night in the tent. Loved the large sign hanging high saying McDonald's coming soon.

From here I kept heading south to Marree then Lyndhurst and Leigh Creek. Because I had lost my phone I had no way to contact anyone so maybe someone was worried about me. (Probably not). Until that happened I would phone or text my mate Steve Sparrow or Nick Budden on someone else's phone just so that someone knew roughly where I was. Especially before entering into a desert.

Kara-Flinders Ranges National Park was another place bikers had said I must visit and I'm glad I did. This place is amazing with its beautiful trees, hills that showed an array of colours, Wilpena Pound Camping Ground was hidden away amongst the trees. I had tea at the restaurant and found a nice flat camping spot. Not under a gum tree as they always drop branches. Before day break I headed off and I know that you should never ride at dusk or dawn due to the wild life on the roads, but I thought that even if I only rode at 20 km per hour it would be better than lying in bed. Kangaroos and deer on the road, in the paddocks everywhere at that time of morning. It was exciting for a Kiwi to see all this but very scary in another way when one would run out in front of you. Lucky I was going very slowly.

Arriving in Hawker I purchased a phone but I wasn't clever enough to get it working so I continued on to Petersborough and a keen biker sent me to the local post shop where a lovely lady and her daughter spent a few hours setting it up for me. Great service. Now I could phone home.



1. A rough Birdsville track. **2.** An old ruin in the outback. **3.** Mungerannie. **4.** Awesome riding in Flinders Ranges.



From Hawker I headed through Adelaide to Fleurieu Peninsula where I found a beautiful spot to camp overlooking the sea and Adelaide. The signs said 'no camping' so I had to wait for dark to put my tent up. Didn't make much difference as people came up to the lookout at night and disturbed my sleep.

Next morning I was Great Ocean Road bound but first it was to Portland where I spent New Year's Eve. Spent the evening listening to music in the park festival on the waterfront which was awesome. About 10 pm I decided to go and find somewhere to pitch my tent. Found a bridge by the river where I could still hear the music. Unbeknown to me I had put the tent up just below a pathway leading to the suburbs. So all night I had drunken party goers walking by and occasionally someone would look down and see my bike. I could hear them say "look there's a bike down there" and next thing people would be down to steal it. "Bugger off", I'd yell, "leave my bike

alone", from my tent hidden in the darkness. Then some young ladies thought they would have a leak under the bridge. What a surprise they got when I chuckled from my tent. A very interesting night.

With very little sleep I headed towards Melbourne but due to devastating fires with the loss of 14 houses and closure of the Great Ocean Road I had to head back into the hills from Wattle Hill. The road to Lavers Hill and then through the Great Otway National Park was winding and very picturesque. I kept looking for dirt roads as I knew it wouldn't be long now before I was on a plane, on my way home. Bypassing Melbourne City via Hurstbridge Yarra Valley and back to Moe.

Another trip of a lifetime and can't wait for the next one.



1. Lots of wild life around Flinders. **2.** Good sign around Australia. **3.** The Twelve Apostles. **4.** Fleurieu Peninsula.

