

2013

Seven States

in

Seven Months

Jane Laws

Around Australia



Ride the Nullarbor

The longer the list of "things to do," the more the open road beckoned. When we finally pulled out of our driveway on Wednesday 9th January 2013, I never looked back, not even to make sure the gate was closed. The house had the last laugh of course. Steve thought he had a win by remembering to move the bikes out of the garage and onto the driveway before the reticulation fired up. Unfortunately he overlooked the strength of the south westerly wind and when we were ready to leave my bike was soaked to the frame with bore water.



Coffee at Gibson Soak

It seemed like it might take 1000 miles before the magic of motorcycling found us but luckily only half an hour from home I was chasing the vanishing point and looking for the road markings and the tree line around every bend.

Steve's Red Dwarf (R1200GS) and my Red Devil (F650GS Twin) are not equipped with radio communication. The second rider has only two messages to convey to the rider in front. 1) Stop as soon as it is safe to do so (hazard lights flashing). 2) Stop at the next available opportunity (left indicator flashing); there is nothing else to say. The rider in front can do whatever they like.

The sweltering weather at Southern Cross and Coolgardie forced us to ride south from Perth in search of a more temperate latitude to begin our journey eastward. We stopped for tea at Williams. While Steve was admiring his new Kevlar jeans he noticed they were covered in oil. Turned out the oil filler cap was loose. From Williams, Red Dwarf led all the way to the Kojonup Bakery. On the outskirts of town, a lone emu made a nuisance of himself by standing in the middle of the road. We slowed to a stop waiting for the big bird to move out of the way. When we finally got going again, the emu decided to race us to the bakery and I clocked him loping along the road verge at 40km hour.

I led the way from Koji to Mt Barker. While we were queuing for fuel, a car full of local dudes pushed in. When it was our turn at the pump, Steve decided to mention the error in their ways. Perhaps he hadn't noticed the large dog sitting on the back seat. Luckily the dudes just mumbled and carried on their way.

We were safely tucked away at the Porongurup's by mid afternoon. Before we were allowed a cold beer, our bikes were checked over and our helmets cleaned ready for the next day's ride.

We crept out of the Porongurup National Park long before the kangaroos had gone to bed. We enjoyed the view of the Stirling Range until the mountains disappeared in our rear view mirrors and by 9am we were fuelling up at Jerramungup. The weather was



Day three breakfast near Fraser Range.

cool and the riding most enjoyable. I peered down many a gravel road and wondered about the remote communities that live within their boundaries. The old town halls tell the tale of a time long ago. We stopped for tea many times. At Salmon Gums Steve popped the question “how about pushing on to Fraser Range?” But me and the Red Devil were looking forward to happy hour and were psyched up to end the days ride at Norseman. While we were registering at the caravan park at Norseman, our hostess said “it was 45 deg here yesterday.” I said to Steve “looks like we dodged that bullet nicely.”

Our little three man tent is a breeze to put up and take down and it was easy to self cater at the camp kitchen in the caravan park. We were back on the road at dawn and there is something magical about turning eastward at the start of The Eyre Highway. A pink ribbon, tied to a roadside post, confirmed that the wind was slightly behind us. People in cars started to wave, so I did my bit for motorcycle awareness and I waved in return. We always enjoy hanging out at the remote roadhouses. At Caiguna we met Andy, a fellow biker on a new Triumph Tiger. Andy was riding bare knuckled as his riding gloves were rolled up inside his sophisticated biker tent. He said it was easier to wear sunscreen that to unpack the tent again. East of Caiguna the road was covered in road kill; a large wedge tailed eagle standing proudly on each fresh kill. When we arrived at Eucla, Andy was there too and we talked and laughed about the wild horses we had seen, and the camels we hadn't. Life on the road was turning out to be as good as we remembered.



No shortage of trucks across The Nullarbor.



Eucla campsite.

We were riding out of Eucla town just after sun up for the last day of our Nullarbor crossing. While we were negotiating some slippery blue metal at Nullarbor Roadhouse, I noticed a tourist filming us from inside a tour bus. I said to Steve “whatever you do, don't fall off now because it will be all over Youtube in an instant.” Apparently during the Christmas – New Year break, six cars filled up with fuel at Nullarbor Roadhouse and left without paying. The guy, taking the money for fuel, though it was caused by a lack of preparation and some people simply didn't realise how far and how expensive it would be. The weather remained kind to us until we were 100km west of Penong. Then a fierce SE wind set in; if I had remembered the lean angle of some of the trees I wouldn't have been surprised. We stepped

up our concentration and we allowed the bikes to drift with each and every gust. Luckily I narrowly missed clipping the wing of a large wedge tailed eagle; that would have been ugly for both me and the bird.

We arrived in Ceduna and checked into the tent friendly caravan park right in town. That night we drank beer and celebrated with fresh scallops and prawns from the local fish and chip shop. We had just completed our easiest Nullarbor ride.

Ceduna to Phillip Island

If you want to upset the locals, who live in the arid parts of this country, all you have to do is complain about riding in the rain. We were delivered the speech specially prepared for inconsiderate people like us. At Poochera we refused to believe that the rain would continue and we only donned the bottom half of our wet weather riding gear. Our leather jackets will keep us dry in a light drizzle but when it turns into steady rain, slowly but surely the leather gives up the struggle. By the time we arrived at Kimba we were feeling a little wet and weary. The lunch time temperature of only 15 degrees is basically unheard of in this neck of the woods in January. The roadhouse was full of travellers escaping the rain and we joined the queue for homemade pumpkin soup and a bowl of hot potato wedges. We stayed a while, enjoying the warm dining room and talking with other travellers. All of us were concerned about travelling in extreme heat – the fear of breaking down first and foremost on our minds. One guy had given the problem some thought and said “the first thing I would do is put the tent up.” Good thinking.

That day we rode in the rain for over 400km, and we were relieved to arrive in Melrose late in the afternoon. We managed to erect the “big tent,” for the first time, with hardly a cross word spoken. The bikes were filthy, covered in a white wash that lay foaming and frothing in the road. In 2008, water restrictions in South Australia were so severe that we were not even allowed a single bucket of water to wipe away salt spray that had collected on our bikes on a rough ferry crossing. Although the seasons have moved on, and there is water in the lower reaches of the Murray River, we didn’t dare ask if we could clean our bikes, we just grabbed the hose and washed away.

With clean bikes we were back on the road again, enjoying the lanes and towns as we rode south towards the Adelaide hills. If someone had told me that one day we would ride through the Barossa Valley, one of Australia’s premier wine regions, carrying a bottle of New Zealand wine and a six pack of Mexican beer,” I never would have believed them. One of the big conglomerates made us an offer we couldn’t refuse and we voted with our hip pocket. Drinking our BYO New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, on the pavement in Tanunda, felt like a criminal offence and we kept the bottle well hidden away.



The big tent, known as the Cabin, in Melrose.



With plenty of time up our sleeve we made the maritime town of Goolwa, on the Fleurieu Peninsula, home for nearly a week. Our camping character was well and truly tested when one of the days reached a maximum temperature of 45 degrees. I lost the battle with the caravan park kids and the door remained open to the air conditioned camp kitchen; in the end there was nowhere to hide. That night, when the cool change arrived, the tent was tested, too, with wind gusts exceeding 30 knots. The big tent moaned and groaned a little but she stood her ground and in the morning everything was intact.



Causeway to Granite Island, Victor Harbour.

On Tuesday 22nd January, we left the comfort of Goolwa and started a three day ride to Phillip Island in preparation for the Island Classic Motorcycle weekend. The little tent came in handy for a good night's sleep in Naracoorte. Unfortunately, the following morning, I didn't fasten the lid properly on our thermos flask and one litre of scalding water trickled out all over our maps and the laptop's transformer. Steve went ape, although I did notice than an hour later he was reading one of the sodden maps with a half smile on his face.

We stayed on the back roads, some only one lane wide. The navigation was difficult but with hardly a car in sight it was wonderful riding. We touched down on the Great Ocean Road at Lorne; big mistake. Lorne was preparing for the Australia Day long weekend and there was barely standing room in the trendy seaside town. We tried to book in at the town's caravan park but when the receptionist said "\$60," (twice the amount we were paying), Steve protested and mumbled about a bed and breakfast up the road for only \$99. The receptionist retorted "off you go then" and turned her attention to the next paying customer. Although we were hot and thirsty we rode out of town. Unfortunately a copper, riding a motorcycle, hopped onto my back wheel and you could almost hear him laughing "gotcha, you West Aussie dude." He rode with me for almost 10km, tracking my every move as I navigated one slow corner after another. Once I realised he was just along for the ride, I relaxed and did my own thing; you don't want to run out of talent on a road like that. When I'd had enough, I moved over to the left to give him chance to go and find Steve; a couple of bends later he had disappeared from view. It was late when we set up the little tent in Torquay for \$65 per night; after a long day on the road we had stopped counting the money.

By 10am the following day we were on the car ferry which runs from Queenscliff to Sorrento on the Mornington Peninsula. We could have relaxed for hours on that ferry, enjoying the scenery of Port Phillip Bay, but 40 minutes later we back on the bikes and riding into the clutches of congested Melbourne traffic. "Stay as close as you dare," said Steve, "or we'll get separated at the traffic lights;" We only had to stop twice to regroup. Our pre booked camp site was waiting for us in Cowes on Phillip Island. The big tent was up in no time and by 5pm we were drinking beer and being eaten alive by sand flies. Welcome to Phillip Island.



Steve and I on the Queenscliff to Sorrento Ferry.

20th International Island Classic 2013 – Phillip Island

The Island Classic is a race meeting for motorcycles born before 31st December 1990. This year's event sported teams from Australia, United Kingdom, New Zealand and USA, with top guns Ryan Farquhar (335 career wins, including three wins at the Isle of Man TT), Jeremy McWilliams (12 years competing in the world GP championships) and our very own Cameron Donald all putting in an appearance. Giacomo Agostini was the guest of honour and when you saw the crowd of press photographers, at the start of each of Ago's demonstration laps, it was obvious that the event committee had made the right decision.

On Friday 25th January, after the early showers, we cruised down to the Phillip Island Circuit to collect our tickets and T Shirts. As soon as we arrived at gate 1 we were totally absorbed by the magic of this amazing racing venue. Racers love this track and spectators are well rewarded with many vantage points where you can see the action in every direction. The pits were open to everyone, all weekend, and it was pure entertainment to saunter from one pit garage to another, admiring the hundreds of classic bikes and sidecars that were participating in the weekend of racing. It difficult to tell who was who as the Island Classic is an unpretentious affair and there wasn't a pit garage sign in sight.

Our bikes were parked at Doohan Corner and we were sitting in our big camp chairs when the racing commenced on Saturday afternoon. The event had attracted a large number of competitors and the racing was excellent with some divisions sending 40+ bikes scrambling for a position in the first corner. We stayed a while at the 50 meter braking zone, observing the different techniques and trying to learn something.

We were at Siberia for one of Agostini's demonstration laps and I found myself arguing, with another spectator, about whether Ago was waving at him or me. Once we had settled that score, our new found friend tried to talk us into joining in on Monday's track day. Reading between the lines, the slowest rider in the slowest group is still circulating at a fair lick of speed. It would be great to ride the circuit and try out the bends but the Red Devil and I are not interested in doing 200km an hour down the straight.



The Red Devil, main straight, Phillip Island.



Cameron Donald.



Ago's waving at me.

grid line-up and race starts are great, too. Watching a motorcycle whizz past at 280km hour isn't as much fun as a vantage point at Siberia or MG, the slowest corner of the track. As promised, Agostini made an appearance before lunch and with the patience of a saint he signed each and every piece of memorabilia that was presented to him. Some punters abused the system and turned up with a dozen things for him to sign. Ago never faltered, and his film star smile was ready for every clicking camera. I thought his visit was tinged with sadness as he said "It has been a long time since my last visit and will probably be the last time for me to come to Australia." At 70 years of age he still has an eye for the pretty young babes with long hair.

The catering staff must be forgiven for serving lunch when race three of the International Challenge was underway, but when you are in the corporate lounge it seems the focus is on different things.

It seemed like the weekend was only just getting started when the last race was being run; Steve and I would quite happily have kept turning up at the track day after day. To help dissolve the post race meeting blues, we retired to Cowes for pizza on the pavement.

Would we do the Island Classic again? You betcha!

While we were watching the action at MG corner, we met a true motor racing enthusiast. Not only had this guy attended over 1400 race meetings, but he had catalogued all the programs, including the race results for every race. It was amazing to see him meticulously documenting the results for even the support races.

On Sunday we were wined and dined in the club classic lounge overlooking pit straight. In between eating dainty quiches and Danish pastries and drinking copious amounts of coffee, we stood by the window to catch a glimpse of the day's events. The best part about the lounge is you get to look down on the pit area and watch all the bikes assembling in preparation for the next race. The



Ago signing my poster and pass.



A little older than my beemer.

Spirit of Tasmania



The ferry about to dock as we arrived.

Once onboard, we dumped our gear in our little cabin and headed straight to the ships galley. Dinner was paid for by the plate full; \$25 for a large plate, \$18 for a small plate. You get to stack your own plate and no one complains if you stack your plate higher than what would be considered reasonable; we had a plate each but we noticed a lot of couples were sharing one plate.

When we retired to our cabin, we were sailing along in calm waters as we hadn't cleared the heads to Port Phillip Bay. Once we were into Bass Strait, the wind was up and the ships shuddering motion kept me awake. I lay in my bunk for hours wondering if the



At Melbourne.

We timed out run for the ferry with military precision and at 7pm on Monday 28th February we rode our motorcycles up the ramp and onto deck 5 ready for tie down. Red Dwarf (R1200GS), with the trailer in tow, was sent away with the tin tops while Red Devil (F650GS Twin) and I were herded to the motorcycle tie down point amid ships. Spirit of Tassie crew were quickly in attendance with the tie down straps and one over enthusiastic dude grabbed Red Devil's hand guard, instead of the handle bars, gave it a tug, then realised the error in his ways. The strap was quickly released and secured to the correct position. I was left alone to inspect the new angle of the hand guard; luckily no damage had been done.



Looks like we will be leaving on time.

welds were going to hold. Steve slept like a baby and refused to believe that we'd had a lively crossing until he saw the salt spray on deck 9.



There's always a queue, but only an hour this time.

After an early breakfast of a “bring your own” apple and a bottle of water, we were back on our bikes. A quick answer to the question, “Are you carrying any fresh fruit or vegetables?” and we were through quarantine and onto Tasmanian soil ready for a three week adventure.

Motorcycle Tasmania - North East

When we stepped out of our big tent, on our first morning in Launceston, Steve looked up at the clear sky and exclaimed “we’ve got to ride the mountain today.” As soon as the flasks were filled with hot water, and the esky was packed with cheese, biscuits, nuts and fresh fruit we were off on our first Tasmanian ride.

We rode on easy through the little village of Longford and then up we went past Poatina. The road was quiet and the views spectacular as we looked across at the Great Lake. We stopped for morning tea at Flintstone, to take in the wonderful views over Arthurs Lake, and then we lunched at Miena. I placed

a chunk of cheese on a dozen crackers and then tried to protect our fair from the savage wind that was blowing across the lake. While we quizzed a local about the condition of the gravel road on the western side of the lake, he said, “We’re expecting a drop of rain this afternoon.” Any mention of rain when I’m at altitude with my motorcycle and I start hopping around all over the place and I said “gotta go, gotta go.” Five minutes later we were packed up and heading down the mountain as quickly as we could.

The gravel section was upon us in no time but the road was flat and the going was easy. Steve had done most of the map reading for the day and I was unaware that there was a second section of gravel. When we arrived at gravel road number two my heart sank, especially when the sign said 19km. Onwards and upwards we went. Dark clouds were gathering around the hills and a few spots of rain collected on my visor. I wanted to wave my fist at Steve but I needed both hands on the handle bars. With the weather closing in and some steep hair pin bends to negotiate, I wanted to turn back but we were past the point of no return. Luckily the 19km sign had been a joke all along and we were soon riding on bitumen again.

I can cope with a little light rain, but then the fog rolled in. I was in front and it was some comfort that I could see the dim glow of Steve’s headlight as we started the steep descent, with only the white lines on the edge of the road to guide us. Thankfully we were soon out of the fog but I was a little spooked by the gravel, and the rain, and I descended that mountain like a hairy dog; luckily only Steve was around as witness.



We are heading up there.



The Great Lakes - Western Tiers - 1300m, getting use to the gravel.



Cataract Gorge, Launceston.

When the sun decided to shine once more, we took the bikes on an easy run to the historic towns of Campbell Town and Ross. Of the 200,000 convicts sent to Australia, Tasmania received an incredible 70,000 prisoners. These guys were so resourceful that the bridge they built in Campbell Town is able to withstand modern heavy vehicles and is now part of the main highway connecting Launceston and Hobart.

I remembered enjoying the Ross Rodeo when I was a child. It seemed like poetry in motion that the day I rode into town on my motorcycle, the rodeo was actually taking place in the little village. While we ate our lunch I could hear the rodeo's PA system in the distance and it took me back to a time long ago.

On Sunday 3rd February we moved our camp to St Helens. The road twists and turns all the way to Scottsdale and beyond. It's easy to forget that although the distances are short, the ride time is long.

You learn something every day. Getting two motorcycles through a caravan park boom gate, with only one access key, used to seem like a circus trick. Steve would operate the key. As soon as the gate opened I would shoot through, leaving Steve to perform the hero's part which was to try and sneak past the gate before the boom came down and knocked him off his bike. What we hadn't realised is that as soon as I went through the gate, the gate sensors said "vehicle through, close gate." All you have to do is line up and ride through together; it's as easy as pie even though the warning sign on the gate says "No bicycles or motorcycles."

We stopped to rest at the bakery in Deloraine. It was wonderful to watch our host make us an iced coffee with so much care and attention, even piping fresh cream on top. Riding in the mountains lived up to its expectations – four seasons in one day.

Be careful what you wish for. Our big tent was dusty and Steve was overheard to have said "a shower of rain will clean her up." When we arrived back at camp, the rain arrived too and we settled in for a night and a day of continuous drizzle. The locals said it hadn't rained for weeks. That's what they always say and we didn't believe them. The rain gave us the opportunity to enjoy the streets of Launceston which made a change from motorcycle riding.



Convict built bridge, Campbell Town.



Great fish and chips, afloat at St Helens.

are signs around that say things like “don’t even think about blocking this gate...” and “uncontrolled children will be taken care of.” So when I lifted the lid on the sugar bowl and saw a lizard sitting inside I thought it was a joke – until his eyes moved and he slithered onto the table. I gave a controlled yelp, which I felt I was entitled to. All the other patrons laughed and the waitress said, “That’s what you get when you live in the bush.” Then she continued to serve tea and coffee and didn’t even pretend that the sugar bowl would be cleaned out. I can report that the pancakes were excellent but be warned – this restaurant only accepts cash and the pancakes are quite expensive.

By the time we made it back to camp it was time to replace the ice in our esky. We freeze two litre orange juice containers, the square ones are the best as they fit neatly inside the esky. Steve went to the camp kitchen but our container was gone. The manager just happened to wander past our campsite and I mentioned it to him. He said that “the girls” had probably cleaned out the freezer and thrown our bottle away as the park does not tolerate the freezing of plastic bottles; it doesn’t leave any room in the freezer for food. On this occasion the freezer was like the park – empty. I thought about this for a moment and then asked to be shown the sign which indicates that you cannot place bottles of water in the freezer. There was no sign. I told the manager that “the freezer needs a sign” because everyone freezes bottles and how were we to know. I said to Steve “if there isn’t a sign on the freezer by the time we leave the park I’m going to write to the management.” The following day the manager wandered over with the news that our bottle had been found and it was back in the freezer! All was forgiven and no letter was written.

On Thursday 7th February, it was time for a ride to Hobart. There is something magical and exciting about moving our camp from one destination to another. When I look back on our days on the road, one of my favourite moments will be when we ride out of town, both bikes loaded up and the trailer in tow. At that moment we are carrying everything we need and it feels good.

If you stay at St Helens you’ve got to have fish and chips. Our host talked us into trying travella, claimed to be one of the best table fish on the planet. The travella was soft eating and very good but these days we have developed a taste for flake which is our favourite.

From St Helens we took the bikes on a run to Bicheno. We timed our ride perfectly so we could enjoy the famous Elephant Pass and then have lunch at the Elephant Pancake Kitchen. While I was waiting for my all berry pancake to be served, I decided to inspect the contents of the sugar bowl. Now I should tell you that the dudes that run this establishment have a sense of humour and there



Elephant Pass.



Bikes all packed and on the road, Triabunna.

temperature kept falling, half a degree at a time, until it felt cold at 22 degrees. Then I noticed the wind had picked up and bark was being blown off the trees. As we rode past Prosser Bay I saw a cloud of sand approaching the road. I called out “steady up” and me and Red Devil just managed to pull up in time to watch a willy willy cross the road. Five minutes later it was 30 degrees again!

We were hot and hungry by the time we arrived at Richmond. A scallop pie and a Tasmanian made ice cream calmed us down and made the crew smile again. By 4pm our canvas cabin was up once more and we were on the net, checking out the program for the Australian Wooden Boat Festival. Boat show here we come.

We picked a warm day for our ride to Hobart and finding a shady picnic spot can seem like an impossible task. The roads are in exceptional condition here in Tasmania and they are a pleasure and a privilege to ride on. We stopped for a break at Bicheno, Swansea and Triabunna. At Triabunna the ferry captain approached us and said he was trying to encourage biker dudes to enjoy a trip to Maria Island by offering secure parking near the ferry terminal. We suggested he should advertise in the Ulysses Club “Riding On” magazine.

The temperature was a humid 30 degrees which made riding a little uncomfortable. As we approached Orford I noticed it felt a little cooler. I looked down at Devil’s LCD and it said 27 degrees. The

Australian Wooden Boat Festival 2013

You don't have to be a wooden boat enthusiast to enjoy the [Australian Wooden Boat Festival](#). The Tasmanian government have seen the wood through the trees and cleverly made the festival a free event. This concept lifts the attendance levels and gives the festival a wonderful atmosphere.



Couta boat in the pavilion.

The festival is a four day event. When we arrived and saw the boats and the display pavilions before us I said to Steve "where do we start?" We wandered along the jetties of the Kings Pier Marina and Constitution Dock and it was a little overwhelming to gaze upon the selection of wooden boats. *Landfall* (1935) and *Sirocco* (1939), two historic [Sparkman and Stephens](#) design yachts, nearly brought tears to my eyes they looked so grand. These boats are lovely to look at, but it sends a shiver down my spine when I imagine the hours of work that are spent to keep them in such immaculate condition.

I was thrilled to catch up with *Cartella*; this old ferry is now a centenarian. I remember being onboard her in 1975 after the Tasman Bridge collapsed. *Cartella* helped move commuters back and forth across the Derwent River.

There were over 600 boats on display and the festival is a true celebration of both new and old wooden boats. Boats of a similar design are displayed together, this makes it easy to wander the jetties and pavilions and enjoy the eclectic mix of vessels on display. Each vessel has an information board which tells you her name, designer, year launched and the construction material. I'm particularly in love with Huon Pine and vessels built out of this material received a big tick from me. I couldn't help spare a thought for the large number of boats that remained on the waiting list and couldn't exhibit at the festival; there was simply no more room.



Landfall and Sirocco.

I particularly enjoyed the colourful display of Fazackerley Dinghies. It is estimated that Reg Fazackerley built over 100 of these dinghies and about 40 of them are known to be in existence because of the quality of their build and their collectability. One of the defining characteristics of the clinker Fazackerley dinghies is there are no ribs forward of the front seat.

The owners of *Notorious*, a full size replica of a 15th century Portuguese caravel (the type of ship that carried the early European explorers to the Far East), were enterprising with their fund raising and for \$5 you could climb aboard and take a look around. However the replica Viking ship *Russich* which had sailed all the way from Russia, had only a donation box on the dock and would have collected only a fraction of the amount.



Cartella



We noticed that *Sea Shepherd* was also in port. *Sea Shepherd* belongs to [Sea Shepherd Conservation Society](#) (SSCS) which is a marine wildlife conservation organisation. Looking down at her from the dock *Sea Shepherd* has a mighty presence. A film crew were conducting an interview with Bob Brown (former Australian Greens leader). Bob is now actively involved with *Sea Shepherd* activities and he looked much younger and fitter than he looks on TV. I overheard him say “I am 67 years old.”

Over the four festival days we wandered along the jetties and through the exhibition halls and learnt about model boats, wooden canoes and boat building. Everywhere we went there was an unpretentious volunteer ready and willing to answer all of our questions. Whenever we needed to rest for a while it was easy to find somewhere to sit down and something delicious to eat. From Persian fair to a good Tasmanian scallop pie, everyone’s taste was catered for.

There was a good mix of talks and presentations to choose from and we particularly enjoyed [Lynn and Larry Pardey’s](#) presentation on storm tactics – how to hove to. Lynn is an expert presenter and she gained our full attention. I learned so much from her presentation.

The AWBF is a great place to hang out and we turned up every day. At times you would find us in the Wooden Boat Tavern listening to folk music and at other times we’d be in the pavilions again learning a little more about wooden boats.



In 1975, when I was just a child living in Hobart, my dad started to build a Hartley 17ft cabin cruiser. I can see him now using a hand saw to cut the ribs out of King Billy Pine. After attending the festival, dad's boat project means so much more.

The festival was far and beyond any expectations we may have had. It is estimated that over 200,000 people attended the four day event which must have put a smile on the faces of the entire organising committee. I will never forget the sight of hundreds of dressed ships in the harbour and when the curtain finally closed on the 2013 Australian Wooden Boat Festival, I felt certain that one day the festival would lure us back to Hobart again.

Motorcycle Tasmania – South and West

We left the caravan park in Cambridge, Hobart, just in time to join the rush of cars trying to get their drivers to work on time. We detoured to the shopping centre, to restock the esky and the food box, while the traffic on the Tasman Bridge had time to clear.

Soon we were on our way, Dover bound. I wondered many times, while we walked the jetties at the [Australian Wooden Boat Festival](#), “why are there so many boats in Hobart?” Then I laid eyes on the D’Entrecasteaux Channel and the reason became clear. This wonderful waterway, flanked by [Bruny Island](#) on the east, and the mainland on the west, is full of bays and beaches. The scenery was spectacular and as we rode south along the Channel Highway we had to remind ourselves about the importance of keeping our eyes on the road. Salmon farms do exist but not enough to spoil the view.

We stopped for a cup-a-soup and a homemade ham sandwich at a lookout near Garden Island Creek. A shower of rain around the hills to the south kept us looking over our left shoulder. Steve picked blackberries and willingly shared them with me. At the visitor information centre in Hobart we asked, “Where should we stay Cygnet or Dover?” Without hesitation the guy said “Dover, there isn’t much going on in Cygnet.” Unfortunately we believed him and we rode on through the sophisticated little town, with its boutique wares and interesting port, before we realised we had missed something.

Although there wasn’t much happening in Dover, it was a true sanctuary away from the madding crowd and we took the opportunity to cook all our own meals and relax for a while.



Mouth of the Huon River with D’Entrecasteaux Channel and Bruny Island in the background.



This Houn Pine is 450 years old, they live for up to 3,000 years.

We hopped on the tourist band wagon and paid \$25 each to enjoy the [Tahune Forest Airwalk](#). We learned a little more about the famous Huon Pine. On the huon trail we were introduced to a 450 year old tree. They call these trees the “old folk” of the forest. Apparently they only grow in the wettest areas of the state so I have stopped looking out for them on the hills and in the valleys as we ride along the many scenic roads.

A good day on the road is worth more than a good day at camp so when we saw that the weather looked clear we decided to ride for two days all the way from Dover to Ulverstone. The big tent was packed up and we were back on the road by 8am. We shopped at Huonville and then settled in for the ride through the city. Steve likes to take all the back roads and we had soon turned left and were winding our way along the lower slopes of Mt Wellington. This is one of those roads that probably should say “local traffic only,” but Tasmanians are kind to motorcycle riders and they allow you to ride everywhere. You have to settle in and ride at your own pace along these lanes because the consequence of trying to keep up with someone else doesn’t bare thinking about.

We have fallen in love with Tasmania's [Valhalla ice cream](#) and it was no surprise that after lunch we were devouring a two scooper on the pavement in New Norfolk. Then we were back on the road again, trundling long the Lyell Highway. I don't think there is a single straight road in Tasmania. Sometimes the corner speeds are indicated as a warning shot, but mostly you are left to your own devices regarding entry speeds. As I was riding along towards Tarraleah, it occurred to me that if you could get a giant rolling pin and iron out all of Tasmania's hills and mountains, so that the apple isle was flat like Western Australia, I think the footprint would be quite large.

We pulled into [Tarraleah](#) late in the afternoon. There were two types of powered camp sites available. The grassy sites were covered in possum poop. I picked the poopless site, and Steve picked the grassy site, so we drew straws and Steve won. Next thing I know I'm down on my hands and knees picking up possum turds! Timing is everything and Steve happened to open the tent just as I swept up one of the drier pieces of poop. Unfortunately a gust of wind caught the dustpan and blew at least half a turd inside the tent. I'm still laughing about it now.

The ride from Tarraleah to [Queenstown](#) is simply stunning. The Red Devil and I looked after each other and the purr of her engine, as we wound our way along some of the steep mountain passes, was music to my ears. I only heard the word "crikey" once inside my helmet, now and again I heard myself cackling away; it's just so much fun. On these roads you have to participate in the ride – constantly making decisions and changing up and down through the gears tires you out. I think four hours on the road here in Tasmania is more like riding for six hours on a conventional pavement.



The road into Queenstown (which you can see at the bottom of the valley).
Yes, the Red Devil and I are in the picture.

Except for the locals and the super talented bikers, I don't think the steep descent into Queenstown could really be described as a great motorcycle road. It's just about survival as you negotiate the change in elevation from high to low. Queenstown is a wonderful historic town and if you stop for a moment you can almost hear the clatter and chatter from the time when the town was living its heyday. I just hope the [West Coast Wilderness Railway](#) train to Strahan keeps running so the tourists keep turning up.

If you have the opportunity to ride Tasmania, include Anthony Road (B28) which runs from Henty Glacial Moraine in the south to Tullah in the north. On the day, as we rode on easy, admiring the breathtaking scenery that is part of the world heritage [Cradle Mountain](#) – Lake St Clair National Park, it occurred to me that this was probably the most beautiful road I had ever cruised along.

Steve wasn't finished with the back roads yet and although we were enjoying a good lick of speed along the Murchison Highway, Steve soon found the B18 and then a couple of "C" roads. These roads slowed us down as we navigated our way through the farming communities of Upper Natone and South Riana.

We ended our "Ride Tasmania" in Ulverstone. While we were resting in our big camp chairs and musing over three weeks of wonderful riding, a bird flew past and pooped right on my foot. "That's supposed to be lucky" said Steve, "perhaps we should buy a lottery ticket?" to which I replied "perhaps we have been lucky enough!"

World Superbikes – Phillip Island 2013

By 10am on Friday, me, Steve, Red Devil (F650GS Twin) and our two king sized chairs were waiting at Gate 1 for a slice of the action. When we arrived the World Supersport riders were enjoying a free practice session. As soon as we found our first vantage point, at the braking zone for turn 1, we were off the bike and watching; awesome.

When you first arrive at the track it's hard to know what to do because there seems to be so many options. After a cup of tea, and a gentle reminder that we had all weekend, we headed over to the [Australian Motorcycle News](#) (AMCN) Expo. I spent a long time pouring over the merchandising. In the end all I wanted was a stubby holder but when I found Steve he said "you already have a stubby holder" and that was the end of that. Steve liked the MV Augusta track bike, which for \$8500 seemed incredibly cheap; I said "no" to that too.

The [California Superbike School](#) had a stand at the expo. Steve Brouggy runs the school and when I said "I always read Steve Brouggy's articles in Two Wheels Magazine," who should turn around but Steve himself. Steve willingly talked to us about motorcycle skills and techniques and we nearly booked in for two days tuition when the school meets at Queensland Raceway in June; maybe next time around.



Tex & Bundy Charity Fundraisers at the Expo.



Playing at being a media photographer.

After lunch we took advantage of our paddock passes and wandered up and down at the back of the pits. At that time, all the garage doors were down but we still managed to catch a glimpse of [Carlos Checa](#) and [Marco Melandri](#). By the time Steve activated the camera they had both slipped behind closed doors.

On Saturday we were down at the track early enough to plonk our chairs in one of the plumb spots at MG, the slowest corner of the track. MG provides the best option if you want to see the bikes up close and personal. We are so lucky that [Phillip Island Circuit](#) still has low fences; long may this be so. It was a hot day, at one stage they were reporting a track temperature of 50 degrees. I kept wetting my shirt and that kept me comfortable for at least half an hour.



Marco Melandri at MG corner.

One of the wonderful things about the WSBK's at Phillip Island is they allow the bikes to park inside the circuit. We left our lunch in Red Devil's aluminium panniers and I was the one sent on the mission to retrieve it. Lying there, right beside by bike was an ignition key. There were plenty of bikers taking a breather in the shade but no one had lost their key. We placed the key on an old Akubra hat and laid the hat down in a prominent place. We all thought that if we had lost our key the first thing we would do is retrace our steps.

While I was collecting lunch there was a bit of banter going on between the bikers. One guy asked me "Are you going to upgrade the BMW when Volvo releases their motorcycle?" I just smiled. Surely this was a case of the pot calling the kettle black; this guy was riding a Suzuki V-Strom! When I found a wicked looking Husqvana motorcycle, I said "It could be handy to ride a bike that can sew a patch on your jacket too." Luckily the owner didn't hear me.

Superpole was good value and I think it made nearly everyone smile when old favourite Carlos Checa, riding his Ducati Panigale 1199R, took out pole position.

On Sunday we sat ourselves high on the hill at Siberia. The day was hot and even Bass Strait failed to deliver a cooling breeze. We slow cooked in our denim jeans but at least we weren't getting sunburnt. The atmosphere amongst the spectators at Siberia is great. The entire audience clapped for every rider at the conclusion of each race and when a local girl sang the National Anthem some dude called out "You F..... beauty;" everyone cheered.

The racing was spectacular with Aprillia taking out the entire podium in the first superbike race. Unfortunately, our man, Marco Melandri, was taken out of the race by pole sitter Carlos Checa. Race two was a little more democratic and although the Aprillia's of Eugene Laverty and Sylvain Guintoli were first and second, we were delighted to see Marco Melandri, on his BMW S 1000RR, taking out third place.



Race day action at Siberia.

On Monday morning, still high on our latest motor racing fix, we rode away from Phillip Island in a heavy sea mist. I noticed I had a lump in my throat and I felt certain that one day we'd be back for more.

Great Ocean Road

Devil and Dwarf (F650GS and R1200GS) made a special request after the World Super Bike event came to an end, “Please take us for a run along the Great Ocean Road as we don’t know when you will bring us this way again.” How could we say “no” to our old faithful bikes, the ones that had carried us safely around the roads and lanes of this great land?

To avoid Melbourne’s highways and byways we took the easy way out and caught the ferry from Sorrento, on [The Mornington Peninsular](#), to Queenscliff. We stopped for a pie at the award winning bakery in the little seaside town, and then we were off on one of Victoria’s busiest and scenically beautiful roads to ride along. The good thing about riding from east to west is most of the lay-bys are on your side of the road and it makes it easy to stop and marvel at the most spectacular coastal scenery.

The distances are short but the travelling time is long on the Great Ocean Road and we enjoyed Apollo Bay for a few days before continuing on to Port Fairy.

The traffic thins out and the ride becomes more relaxing once you reach Lavers Hill. However it is a good idea to remain on permanent watch for locals, who seem to know every twist and turn in the road, pushing it along, sometimes on the wrong side of the road.



Red Dwarf (and Steve) at the start of the GOR.



I jumped on the back of Red Dwarf for this photo.



The Twelve Apostles.

We stopped at several vantage points to admire the Twelve Apostles. I thought some of the Apostles looked more weathered than I remembered from six years before. We know someone who remembers London Bridge before it “fell down.” It seems all the debris, after the collapse, had been washed away as there was no sign of it at all!

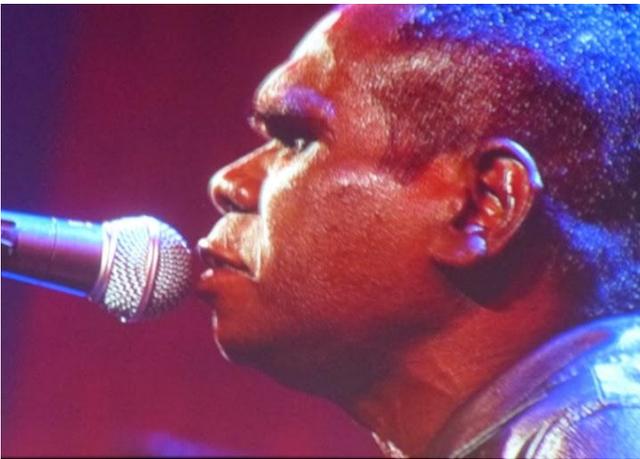
The Great Ocean Road heads inland after the Bay of Islands and seems to continue on for another 30 kilometres in name only. When we arrived at Port Fairy I thanked Devil and Dwarf for taking us on this ride. It would have been a shame not to ride the Great Ocean Road on our trip around Australia.



Port Fairy Folk Festival



Southcombe Camping.



Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu.



Arlo Guthrie.

Steve and I were [Port Fairy Folk Festival](#) virgins and spent five nights camping on-site. We enjoyed the experience but probably won't return unless some changes are made. Here are some of our likes and dislikes:

Likes:

Line-up

It was a great line up. We enjoyed the headline acts of Tim Finn, Arlo Guthrie, Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu and Xavier Rudd. We also thoroughly enjoyed Eric Bogle, Chris Smither and Sara Lee Guthrie and her husband Johnny Irion.

Camping

The camping facilities were very good considering the number of people. We turned up one day early and were just in time to find a level tent site.

Catering

There was a great variety of good quality, reasonably priced food at the festival village.

Dislikes:

Festival Chairs (low backed, fold up chairs)

It is a basic requirement of this festival to carry a festival chair as most of the venues don't have chairs. Festival chairs are a nuisance to carry around and they take up a lot of room in the venues. The chairs also lead people to feel like they "own a space" in the audience. We bought two festival chairs after suffering abuse on Friday night for sitting in our high backed chairs (in the high backed chair zone); people who turned up after us had low backed chairs.



Hour long queue for main stage.

Pressure on the main venue

We were told that 15,000 tickets were sold. The main venue, where most of the headline acts were staged, holds about 4,000 people. Most of these headline acts only performed twice which meant that only half the people had a chance to see them. The program scheduling caused people to set up their festival chairs and remain in the same spot all day. We did the same on Saturday; we didn't go back to our tent for dinner as we would lose our spot and we would have missed out on seeing Gurrumul. If you leave your chairs unattended for a toilet break, you may return to find they have been moved and you have no leg room at all!



Rushing to get a spot between acts, stage 2.

Programming

There was not enough simultaneous scheduling of the popular acts to spread the crowd. An example was the "Women in Voice" concert on Sunday morning. Hundreds sat outside the full house, just listening, because there was nowhere else they wanted to go.

Full House

We felt discouraged from attending the venues outside the festival village in case we arrived to find the "full house" sign on the door. We also spent the festival feeling tense, wondering whether we would find a place in the audience before the "full house" signs were displayed.



Outside Women in Voice concert, Sunday morning, stage 1.

Sound Spill

Even some of the performers mentioned playing in time with the thump, thump coming from the venue next door.



I finally found some leg room.

Port Fairy Shuffle

A process where the audience is continually asked to move the chairs closer together even when there is no room left at all.

Camping

The camp site portable toilets and showers were removed the day before checkout. Some consideration should be given to allocating powered camping sites by ballot.

FOLK festival?

There were some folk acts but there were many bands presenting with a full drum kit and electric guitars. Surely this means Port Fairy is no longer a FOLK festival.



It looks like we were the last to leave,
but there were many other campers packing up at the same time.

Australian Formula 1 Grand Prix – Melbourne 2013



Mark Webber.

For Formula 1 week we took up residence in a clean and tidy one bedroom apartment within walking distance of the Albert Park race circuit. One of our GP Advantage privileges promised us a pit walk at 9am on Thursday morning and we were waiting, with thousands of others, by 8:30am. For some reason the pit walk was delayed by half an hour, but Victorians are a patient bunch and everyone waited quietly and calmly in the queue. When the pit walkers finally arrived in pit lane the group stopped moving while hundreds of digital cameras snapped away. Even security, who kept barking “move along, move along,” seemed to have no impact on the large group of punters. At one stage it looked like they wouldn’t be able to clear pit lane in time for the first event at 10am. We stopped long enough to take some great photographs of the F1 pit garages. Many of the photographs were the same ones we had taken in 2009, however it was important to get the new and updated images.

There is plenty of on track activities but there is no racing on Thursday so it was a great day to enjoy some of the grand prix’s off track entertainment. We browsed through the merchandising stalls and noticed that Red Bull T shirts and caps were the most

popular. Ferrari merchandising seems to be taking a back seat after the departure of Michael Schumacher.

The FLAIR Moto Trials Show was very entertaining but it’s difficult to compete with the motorcycle and bicycle acrobatics of the Nitro Circus; those guys are truly insane. There seemed to be a lot more entertainment aimed at children and teenagers and I thought the age demographic was younger than it was in 2009.

On Friday the F1 cars took to the track for the first time and we were treated to three hours of F1 entertainment during the course of the day. Since 1985 I have always been a McLaren fan. When Lewis Hamilton joined the McLaren it seemed like a match made in heaven for both me and the team. Unfortunately Lewis is now driving for Mercedes and I missed him. First and foremost I always hope that Australians Mark Webber or Danny Ricciardo win, no matter who they drive for. If the Aussies can’t win McLaren is my team.



Nitro Circus.

Rain stopped play after the first qualifying session on Saturday and we were thrilled with our undercover seating while we watched the high tech sport of Formula 1 use brooms to try and sweep the standing water off the track. Eventually race control rescheduled the second and third qualifying sessions until 11am on Sunday morning.

We couldn't take our undercover seating home with us and we were drenched walking back to our unit in South Yarra. A hot shower, a plate of Peking Duck and a bottle of Red from a local Chinese restaurant and we were all smiles again.

Because of the rescheduling of qualifying, gates opened at 10:00 on race day Sunday. Luckily Steve remembered that GP Advantage ticket holders could enter the circuit from 8:30am on Sunday so we didn't have to queue with the masses. With a quickly drying track the final two qualifying sessions were a nail biting experience. Eventually the two Red Bulls, Sebastian Vettel and Mark Webber, took out the first row of the grid.

Steve and I always choose our seats so they overlook pit straight as we find there is always something going on in pit lane or on the starting grid to keep us entertained. On Sunday we stayed in our seats for most of the day and enjoyed the support races which included V8 Supercars, Porsche Carrera Cup and International Sports Cars. Moto GP retiree, Casey Stoner certainly brought a touch of celebrity to the Ultimate Speed Comparison and I made sure I was in my seat each time this event was on track.



Saturday Qualifying in the rain.



Front Row: Vettel and Webber.



The Podium.

Sunday's race is always full of drama and Mark Webber was the first victim, losing several places before the first corner. Kimi Raikkonen surprised everyone and took out the win using good tyre management; Kimi only made two pit stops instead of three. Ferrari's Fernando Alonso came second and Sebastian Vettel, the current world champion, third. Mark Webber finished sixth and Danny Ricciardo retired in the late stages of the race. The fans were quickly on the track after the completion of the race so they could join in the celebrations on the podium. When the Premier of Victoria was introduced an audible booing came from the crowd. This happened again when Sebastian Vettel was awarded his third place trophy. I hope, in Sebastian's case, the booing was delivered with a touch of humour as Aussie Mark Webber is his team mate.

We stayed a while, watching the celebrations and soaking up the last glimmer of this amazing event. The Melbourne F1 Grand Prix just keeps getting better and better and it felt like a pleasure and a privilege to be there in 2013.



Ride Melbourne to Canberra

“Apartments can rot good bikes and good blokes.” I had grown so comfortable during our week in the little unit in South Yarra that, for a moment, I felt I could quite happily have spent the rest of my days there. Simple tasks, like making a cup of tea, were a dream in the tiny kitchen and I found the comfort difficult to leave behind.



Camping beside the King River, Whitfield.

We were checked out by 9am but the thick Melbourne traffic seemed reluctant to let us go as we crawled along Toorak Road, clocking only five kilometres in one hour. Devil and Dwarf hated idling in the heavy traffic and Dwarf’s temperature gauge and Devil’s engine fan kept telling us “this can’t go on much longer.”

We started to relax once we made it to Healesville. We took a pit stop at the town’s bakery and then we gave the bikes a burn up the Black Spur all the way to Marysville. We took all day wandering through the roads and lanes and by happy hour we had arrived in the little town of Whitfield. We pitched our tent at the beautiful Gentle Annie Camping Reserve. For only \$20 you can camp down by the river. It’s a great spot as long as you don’t mind the smell of fresh dog poo, deposited by the resident pooch, before you have finished your breakfast.



Beachworth.

The following morning we were on the road again as soon as the breakfast dishes were washed and put away. When we arrived at Beachworth we were pleased to find the town full of historic cars participating in a RACV rally. I am always delighted when I find a MKII Jaguar; these old cars bring back fond memories of the car my dad bought in 1968. I was in for a treat as there were several old Jags in the historic fleet.

It is easy to forget about the concept of remoteness when travelling in Victoria and no matter how hard we tried we couldn’t find fuel in Tangambalanga. When we finally fuelled up in Bonegilla, Steve poured 19 litres into Dwarf’s 20 litre tank. I gave Steve “the look,” nothing more was said.



Red Dwarf and Red Devil.

While we were drinking tea at the Hume Weir, a local dude, full of his own importance, wandered by for a chat. He had ridden thousands of miles on his 1980's BMW motorcycle. When I said to Steve, "there you go, there are plenty of miles left in our bikes" he proceeded to put down the longevity of Devil and Dwarf (F650GS, R1200GS); you don't make friends like that.

We trundled along the Murray Valley Highway and set up the big tent amongst the trees at a delightful caravan part in Colac Colac. We were exhausted from our week in Melbourne and when the weather settled in and rained all of the following day neither of us complained about taking it easy.

We were camped in The Man from Snowy River Country and the towns and villages in this neck of the woods embrace the wonderful story of Jack Riley. Jack Riley was the inspiration for Banjo Paterson's famous poem. The spirit of Jack Riley seemed to be everywhere and on that rainy afternoon I wrote this little ditty.

I thought I saw The Man from Snowy River late one afternoon,

He appeared to me beneath the trees amidst the rain and gloom.

We were camped near Jack's home of Tom Groggin, his grave site not too far away.

I guess he knew I was passing through and he came to say G'day.

As soon as the rain cleared we took Devil and Dwarf on a day ride through the hills in the upper Murray Valley region. We stopped for refreshments at the general store in Tintaldra. Our knowledgeable host made tea in a pot and kept us entertained with stories about stockmen and drovers from the distant past. We then rode on through the villages of Jingellic and Tumbarumba. These roads are so amazingly quiet, it's a wonder they have been converted from gravel to bitumen.



Item number 16 on our "Things to do before I die" list reads "Climb Mt Kosciuszko." When the weather became clear and calm we took our chance, moved our camp to Jindabyne, and climbed the mountain. Of course the navigator took us the long way around to Jindabyne and we passed by Cabramurra and Mt Selwyn; a

signpost told us we were riding along at 1500 meters. In the cold mountain air, Adaminaby provided a great lunch stop and we were pleased to feast on hot chocolate and bacon and egg burgers in the warm and cosy cafe.

For our assault on Mt Kosciuszko we took the chair lift from Thredbo and then walked to the summit along the easy, well prepared 6.5km track. As we stood on top of Australia, and looked out across the Snowy Mountains, it seemed there was no way through, even though we had been riding in those mountains just the day before. If you get the chance, climb Mt Kosciuszko. I will carry the memory with me for the rest of my life.

The National Folk Festival, in Canberra, gave us somewhere to go and something to do for the Easter holiday. While I rode into the capital I felt so happy and inspired I wrote the chorus to a new song.

Before I make it home again I'll ride the Snowy Mountain Highway,

And I'll climb the highest mountain in this great and southern land.

And I'll write about Jack Riley as I ride along the byway

Singing more about this country than I will ever understand.



Lake Jindabyne.

National Folk Festival 2013

We rode into Canberra on our motorcycles and checked in at the [festival](#) camp site on Wednesday afternoon, the day before the opening concert. We cruised around the camp site for a while, trying to establish what was available in the fowls, the quiet, camping area. We were off to a good start as a new found festival friend invited us to share his powered site. The great aspect about camping onsite is you can wander back to your own patch for a little RNR and then immerse yourself in the festival again.



[Red Molly.](#)

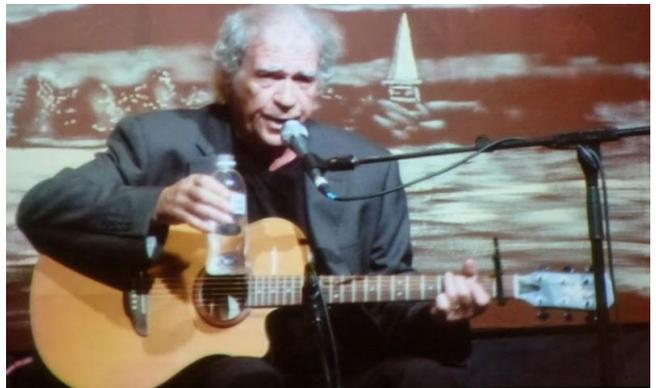
favourite. Apparently they “are not a mens group;” they said so in one of their songs. I also spotted a Spooky Men poster which read “Spooky Men in acronymimus dispute with FCUK.”

[Red Molly](#) were a must for anyone who enjoys country pop and [Chris Smither](#) if your poison is blues. [Finbar Fury](#) delighted the audience with his Irish charm and humour; I could quite happily listen to Finbar spinning a yarn all day long. During Himmerland’s performance I was drawn to the character and deft touch of their percussionist, Ayi Soloman, for the entire fifty minute set. If you ever need a session drummer he’s your man.

At times we wandered through the Session Bar. The number of people participating in jam sessions was amazing. Then we would check out the dancers in the Coorong, I wanted to have a go but Steve said “I don’t dance no more.”

On Thursday we poured over the program with a highlighter pen. Without my guitar in tow I didn’t pay enough attention to the incredible experiences on offer. If I had, I would certainly have joined in the Festival Choir, led by [Spooky Men’s Chorale](#) choir master, Stephen Taberner. The Festival Choir performance, at the Farewell Concert, was testament to Stephen’s ability to create something quite magical under challenging circumstances.

We just hung out at the festival over the four day Easter weekend and enjoyed many performances including fiddler, Alasdair Fraser and cellist Natalie Hass. I was thoroughly entertained by the synergy between these two musicians and they were a pleasure to watch. Spooky Men are a festival



[Finbar Furey.](#)



Judge Judy.

Judy Small surprised us all with her decision to retire from performing in the pursuit of her new role as a Judge. I first heard Judy's song "Mothers, Daughters, Wives" on my car radio way back in 1995. Judy's farewell concert, to a full house in the 3,000 seat Budawang venue, earned her a standing ovation. It felt surreal that we may never see Judy perform live again.

The catering was great and we chose to dine on Thai, Mexican and Turkish Gozleme. With Pizzas, Indian delicacies and Moroccan fair amongst the large choice of culinary delights, every one's taste was catered for.

We were lucky to buy souvenir festival mugs before they were sold out. In the mornings we filled these mugs with coffee and in the afternoons we filled them with beer. When I washed them and put them away I could feel the slight touch of the potter's hand and they are a wonderful souvenir of our first National Folk Festival.

There were so many wonderful musicians in residence that I couldn't help compiling my "2013 National Folk Festival Super Group," the line up is as follows:

- ♪ Fiddle - [Alasdair Fraser](#)
- ♪ Cello - [Natalie Hass](#)
- ♪ Acoustic Guitar - [Graham Mcleod](#) ([The String Contingent](#))
- ♪ Bass Guitar - [David Woodhead](#)
- ♪ Percussion - [Ayi Soloman](#) ([Himmerland](#))
- ♪ Duduk - [Tigran Aleksanyan](#) ([SANS](#))
- ♪ Vocals – [Kavisha Mazzella](#) ([I Viaggiatori](#))



A group setup while we were having lunch.
They played some Swedish folk tunes.

This festival is the friendliest event I have ever attended. I never saw a sad face all weekend and the level of participation is unprecedented. The musical groups didn't just congregate in the black board venues and the Session Bar, they also formed out in the festival streets, under trees, and around picnic tables; each group playing quietly in their own space without becoming a nuisance to anyone else.

On Easter Monday I knew the carnival was nearly over when I started brushing my teeth to the tune of a little jig playing inside my head. Thanks to the organising committee and the hundreds of volunteers who make this event happen, long may it be so.



In the tent on a cold Canberra morning.
Updating my blog and drinking coffee from my festival mug.

Ride Canberra to the Ulysses AGM in Maryborough

As much as I enjoyed the [National Folk Festival](#), after six days living at Canberra's EPIC centre, I was happy to be on the road again. Unfortunately my reverie was short lived. When we pulled into a local fuel station there was a problem with the payment mechanism; no one was moving. Steve stood with his arms folded while we waited fifteen minutes for the driver of the car in front to appear. When it was my turn to hand over the money, some dude was trying to pay with a debit card that didn't have enough money on it. By now Steve was gesticulating to me through the window. His arms seemed to be waving all over the place so I said to the attendant "is the pump working?" "Yep, that's \$32, thanks." I paid up and marched out to see what was wrong. "Where is the water?" he demanded. Water provides some moveable ballast for Devil's (F650GS) panniers and I held the key. When we pulled out of the fuel station we were both a little agitated and I forgot to put my sunglasses on. Five hundred meters later we were stopped on the side of the road; take two.

Steve quickly redeemed himself by finding some back roads and took us on a wonderful ride all the way to Goulburn. A wrong turn somewhere on the approach to town and we found ourselves at the Goulburn bakery, eating custard tarts and asking "how do we get out of here?" In between making cups of coffee, the manager drew us a mud map on a paper pie bag and our passage was made easy.

As we approached Oberon we came across a nasty piece of road works. They had just laid thick gravel all over the road and then proceeded to escort us to the other side before the dirt had been compacted. I tried to ride in the thin tyre track made by the escort ute. I felt myself tensing up every time Devil crept into some of the thick stuff. I managed to keep going but the escort vehicle was going too slow for Dwarfie (R1200GS) and he had to stop, ankle deep in mud. I haven't been so pleased to make it through a stretch of road works for a long time.

The towns high up in the mountains are beautiful and Oberon was no exception. We made tea, and watched the world go by while we sat on a park bench right in the middle of town. Unfortunately we couldn't stop for long as we were heading to Katoomba and there was still some riding to do.

As we rode on, the views of the Blue Mountains in the east were simply stunning. I kept saying "wow," and when I considered how close we were to Sydney I said "wow" again.



Katoomba, misty one day, raining the next.

What we didn't know, when we paid for three nights accommodation at the caravan park at Katoomba, was by the following morning the fog would roll in and we weren't going to see anything of The Three Sisters, or any of the spectacular scenery. After two days stuck in the tent, with the wet towels and jackets, I couldn't wait to get out of the place. Steve didn't dare suggest we stay another day. We made do with a quick glimpse of the mountains as we rode the scenic route back out onto the highway.

Lithgow was soon just a dot in our rear view mirrors and we were on the road to Mudgee. We turned off towards Rylstone and the quiet back road was a delight to cruise along. At one stage we came across a

horseman mustering a herd of cattle. Devil slowed to a crawl and I felt a swell of importance when the cows seemed to think I was part of the muster team and they moved obligingly to the side of the road. The run through the Goulburn River National Park was slow but rewarding and it was 3pm before we arrived in Muswellbrook. A quick pit stop and we were back on the road again for the nonstop ride to Tamworth. Half an hour before sunset the tent was up, the weather was dry and we were happy.



The mandatory stop at the Golden Guitar.

From Tamworth we took the New England Highway in search of the [Tenterfield Saddler](#). We found Tenterfield but the saddlery was closed for renovations. I still took a moment to sit on the veranda and remember Peter Allen's grandfather, George Woolnough, who was made famous in the song.

By now daylight saving seemed to be a distant memory and we missed the longer evenings immensely. Living in a tent we prefer to have the daylight at the end of the day rather than the beginning. The beauty of the high country had brought with it bouts of mist and showers and the summer weather we had enjoyed so much seemed to be gone forever.

We like to avoid rain on ride days and we left Tenterfield with a smile on our faces and a clear forecast up our sleeve. All the Australian states seem to have quite distinctive architectural styles and nothing is quite as striking as the beautiful Queenslander houses. As I ride on by I like to dream about a romantic life on the land.

Unfortunately the caravan park we chose was a construction site by day. On Saturday night the barbeque area was taken over by a group participating in a Variety Bash. Thankfully Sunday arrived, Variety left town and the caravan park fell quiet again.

While we were looking for things to do in the Tamworth Visitors Centre, Steve spotted a poster for our favourite comedian. [Ross Noble](#) was performing at the Town Hall on Sunday night. We bought tickets ten rows from the front; amazing. Why Ross plays in such small venues could be something to do with the DVD market. I'm sure the Tamworth Show will be available in store soon.



The Tenterfield Saddler.



[Bald Rock National Park.](#)

Because of the incredible damage caused by the floods, there were road works everywhere as we headed northwards towards Kingaroy. At one stage we were stopped in the Lockyer Valley waiting for our turn to traverse. I looked up to my left and I was shocked to see the most unstable looking cliff face I have ever encountered. It was the type of thing you might find in a third world country but not Australia.

When the clouds gathered and a few spots of rain appeared on our visors, Steve pulled over and said “what do you reckon?” We chose not to put on our wet weather gear and five minutes later a short, tropical shower made us realise we had made an error of judgement. Steve stopped again and we

both agreed that our gear would blow dry in no time at 100km hour. The only trouble was we kept riding in and out of the same rain cloud as the road twisted and turned. By the time we reached the day’s final set of road works we were soaked through. Once again the tent was full of wet clothes trying to dry out; next time we’ll be wearing the wet weather gear.

On Monday 15th April we will leave Kingaroy, the peanut capital of Australia, and ride to Maryborough for the [Ulysses AGM](#); motorbikes and friendship – we are looking forward to that.

Ulysses AGM in Maryborough - 2013

By lunch time on Monday 15th April we were riding around the AGM village in Maryborough looking for a suitable place to pitch our tent. We were looking for some high ground, but we needn't have worried as someone cleverly arranged for the onset of the dry season to coincide with the start of the AGM. Eventually we settled on a position amongst some friendly trikers from Innisfail.

On Monday night we introduced ourselves to the Piazza, a licensed meeting place which holds 1200 people seated at tables of eight. Live music played, every night, from 7:30pm till late and you could dine on anything from Mexican fair to sweet pancakes depending on your fancy. We found the Warnbro Sound Wanderers crew and it was wonderful to see a familiar face again.

The AGM is a great place for bikers to hang out for a week. On Wednesday, while Devil (my F650GS) was still sleeping, I sneaked off to test ride the new BMW F700GS. I must admit that the new machine was a little lighter and more nimble under foot but I didn't tell Devil. When I arrived back at camp Devil was still sleeping and she knows nothing of my infidelities.



Camping at Maryborough Showgronds.



Collection of Douglas motorcycles.

On Friday we joined a group ride out to Biggenden to see a private collection of Douglas motorcycles. It would be an understatement to suggest that owner Alan Cunningham is a collector. For a small fee, which all goes to charity, we were allowed to wander around and enjoy the eclectic mix of motorcycles, old cars and farm equipment. Afterwards we were treated to some good old Queensland hospitality at the local pub, which served home-style meals at very affordable prices. On the way home we broke the journey with an ice-cream at Childers. Unfortunately I missed the rider briefing outside the ice creamery. Apparently Jack, our ride leader, arranged with the other riders in the group to show them the way back to Hervey Bay. I didn't know this and, as second man, I marked the corner, waited for everyone to ride on by, saw Tail End Charlie in my rear view mirror and then I took off, like a woman possessed, after the others. I hadn't realised that I was supposed to go straight on. Steve was Tail End Charlie and he was riding on one wheel at times trying to catch me.



Wambro Sound Wanderers at dinner.

the hospitality offered to us in Maryborough that one lady held up a sign which read “thank you for coming.” I could have wept inside my helmet, but I managed to hold back the tears and concentrate on the bikes in front. On Saturday afternoon Steve and I attended the AGM meeting and then we went back to camp to socialise in the Hoecker once more.

The week spent messing about with bikes had been so much fun that while we were packing up our tent my thoughts turned to the AGM in Alice Springs in 2014; tempted.



Red Devil and me enjoying the Grand Parade Maryborough.

Friday night’s dinner in the Hoecker was great, especially for those who brought along their head torches as the portable toilets had no lighting. This situation provided a bit of amusement and it was nearly a shame that by 8pm a floodlight had been delivered and we could see what we were doing again. For Saturday night’s dinner the toilets were moved to the other side of the Hoecker where the lights were so bright you needed sunglasses.

Saturday’s grand parade was wonderful. The assembly point, for the 1300 bikes, was orderly and organised. The ride into town brought tears to my eyes as I acknowledged the locals who lined the streets and avenues along the way. So humble was



Grand Parade Maryborough.

On The Road Again

After the Ulysses AGM in Maryborough, we placed the bikes in a storage facility near Brisbane Airport, and flew home to Perth to check on the house and enjoy some home comforts.

When the time came to fly back to Brisbane, and resume our motorcycle ride around Australia, we had developed a taste for our reclining lounge chairs and the big TV; we didn't feel ready for life on the road again. Fortunately there is something about airport lounges that can flick switches in the brain and as soon as I saw our flight number on the monitor I started to remember the wonder of travel. By the time we touched down in Brisbane I was feeling a little excited about being reunited with Devil again.

The storage facility, [Storage King](#) at Eagle Farm, lived up to our expectations. When we opened the roller door, there they were, Devil (F650GS Twin) and Dwarf (R1200GS), just as we had left them. The bikes seemed pleased to see us and they both started with the first push of the button. By now it was 3pm and we proceeded well through the thickening city traffic until Steve decided to dart into the inside lane which was for left turners only. This little sojourn separated the bikes and it took two goes, with Steve waiting for me and then me waiting for Steve until we rode together again. A GPS and bike to bike communications would help avoid situations like this but we like to keep it simple. After this episode I noticed a little frustration creeping into my riding style and we were lucky that the caravan park was only fifteen kilometres away.



Devil and Dwarf wait patiently at Eagle Farm.

Unfortunately our allocated tent site was lying six inches under water and the last thing we felt like doing was heading back to the office to negotiate moving to higher ground. Still these small things are sent to try us and by sunset the big tent was up and we were wining and dining at [Ghazal](#), an Indian restaurant which serves authentic cuisine at affordable prices. Steve and I chinked glasses many times and we both said "it's good to be back."

Brisbane to Roma

As we rode away from Brisbane, we both knew we were taking the first steps towards home. Steve picked an easy route along the city's suburban streets and we were soon riding in the countryside and passing through the little township of Samford. The bikes enjoyed a burn up the hill to [Mt Glorious](#). We stopped at the rest area close to the summit but we didn't make tea or bother to put on our wet weather trousers. Instead we decided to scurry down the mountain side as a light mist was filling the air and we both sensed that rain wasn't far away. Too late. As soon as we rode out of the rest area the rain came and the descent became a wet and miserable experience. The tight hairpin bends seemed steep and menacing but there was nowhere to stop. We rode on past Lake Wivenhoe and the heated grips stayed on until the bikes were parked outside the bakery in Esk. Bacon and egg burgers and a large plate of chips provided welcome relief after two and a half hours in the saddle.



From Crows Nest we took the back roads through Haden and Peranga. Outside the pub in Quinalow we relied on a roadside mud map to tell us which road to take next. The bitumen soon turned to an unexpected stretch of gravel. The gravel road was short and sweet but it managed to make a terrible mess of the bikes.



We stayed the night in [Dalby](#) and then we trundled along the low road, through Kogan and Condamine, all the way to [Roma](#). The hills of the Great Dividing Range had given way to open plains and cotton fields. When a bend appeared in the road we leant into it as we never knew when we would find another. We had to share this minor road with a few road trains. Sometimes the empty cattle trucks filled our nostrils with cow poo but we didn't mind because riding in the outback is pure magic. When the road became only a single lane, we kept a keen eye on the state of the road verge; we only had to pull off the road twice but that was enough.

This is the busy season and there was no room at the first caravan park we tried to book into. We took this as a warning shot and from now on we will be phoning ahead.

I will always remember Roma as the home of the [Bottle Tree](#). These beautiful trees line the streets in the CBD and the local nursery sells young ones for those who would like one of their own.

We are now relaxing at our campsite, drinking beer, and watching a flock of at least 100 kites

Roma to Emerald

As we tried to pull out of the caravan park in [Roma](#), three road trains and three utes sneaked in front of us. The exhilaration of a morning ride was replaced by frustration as the road trains lumbered up the hills and the work utes, manned by drivers paid by the hour, seemed reluctant to overtake but insisted on driving close to the trucks and only a couple of car lengths from each other. Overtaking seemed like a hazardous procedure so we stayed in the queue, down to 40kph at times. Eventually, one by one, the road trains took their leave but we didn't have the road to ourselves until we reached Injune nearly one hundred kilometres away.

We topped up with fuel and sipped a cup a soup while we enjoyed the warmth inside the visitors information centre at Injune; it was only 12 degrees outside.

From Injune we continued northwards. We had settled down by now and had fun with a few twists and turns along the way. Now and then we passed cattle grazing on the side of the road. We slowed down for each one but these old timers just looked at us as if to say "what are you slowing down for, we ain't goin' nowhere."



We easily found the turning to the [Carnarvon Gorge National Park](#). The first 25km is a narrow, sealed road. Then there's an undulating stretch of gravel for a further 12km. We both got our boots wet on a creek crossing by making a slight misjudgement on the depth of the water. There were many young steers lining the unfenced road. These feisty beasts galloped away when we rode by and it gave us an uneasy feeling wondering which way they were going to turn. When the road turned to gravel we trundled along at an easy pace to the [Takarakka Bush Resort](#) campground.

As soon as we arrived we could feel the peaceful atmosphere soaking into our bones. It was like everyone who stays there is under the spell of the Carnarvons (as the locals call them). No one rushed around, everyone spoke in a quiet tone; it is something I will never forget.



[One of the many creek crossings.](#)



[Carnarvon Creek at the campground.](#)

We stayed at Carnarvon Gorge for three nights. On the first day we walked 14km along an easy track and enjoyed the moss garden, the natural amphitheatre, and Aboriginal cave paintings. When I was alone in the amphitheatre I couldn't help myself and I sang. I was surprised that some of the low notes resinated more than the high notes.



When we rode away from Takaraka, and the gravel track turned to bitumen once more, I noticed that I didn't want to "kiss the pavement;" off-road motorcycle instructor, [Simon Pavey](#), would be proud of me. The cattle were still grazing close to the road, some of them locking horns over a tuft of grass. We were both pleased when the cattle properties were fenced again and we could adopt a more relaxed riding style.

We made [Emerald](#) (named after the green pastures and not the precious stone) home for a few days and we wasted no time before visiting the eccentric gem field towns of [Sapphire](#) and [Rubyvale](#). Sapphire is the only miner's common left in Queensland. Under common law, each miner is entitled to own two head of cattle. These cattle are allowed to graze, untethered, in the confines of the common's land. On the day we visited, a small herd were making themselves at home in the main street of town. If you accidentally run over one of these beasts you are required to pay full market value as compensation. I dragged Steve into every jewellery shop I could find to gaze upon the beautiful sapphires. Lucky for Steve I found the selection of sizes, cuts, and colours completely overwhelming and I left town with only a souvenir to remind me where I'd been.



Main crossroads at Rubyvale.

In Emerald we borrowed a hose and tarted up the bikes ready for the next part of the journey. When I settled down onto my sleeping mat that night I felt happy in the knowledge that we'd be riding the outback again in the morning.

Emerald to Winton

The road runs west between [Emerald](#) and [Longreach](#) and we felt pleased to be heading in this direction if only to gain a little more daylight at the end of the day. We stopped for morning tea at the little town of [Alpha](#). We chatted to an old lady who was manning the “free coffee for driver” station. Alpha is coal country and this old lady made a point of telling us that the townsfolk had nothing but praise for [Gina Rinehart](#) who made charitable donations where ever she could. As we walked away I overheard he say “I wonder how much she’s donated for the races?”

I always enjoy musing over the names of places and creek crossings that we pass along the way. Billaboo Creek worked its way into my mind and by the time we arrived at Barcaldine I’d written the first verse to an outback poem.

We sat on the pavement at [Barcaldine](#) while the girls at Ridgee Didge Cafe cooked us a good Aussie burger with fries. The cafe was on an intersection of a busy cattle road train run. We enjoyed watching the trucks pull up at the stop sign and then negotiate the right hand turn. The trucks kicked up the dust as they accelerated down the road and when our burgers arrived we had to protect them from being seasoned with something that wasn't pepper.



[Barcaldine.](#)



[The Tree of Knowledge monument.](#)

We couldn't leave Barcaldine without visiting The Tree of Knowledge. I spent a quiet moment contemplating where the founders of the Australian Labour Party held their first meeting, to negotiate better working conditions for the shearers, all those years ago.

By the time we arrived in Longreach, the landscape and the wonderful outback riding had made such an impression on me that the only way I could try to describe what I had found here was to finish the poem I started on the road to Barcaldine.



The black soil plains from a Jump-Up.

Jump-Up

There is a place called Poverty Plains and I know what they found there.

If you take a peek at Billaboo Creek you might find a dingo's lair.

Cattle trains, running on lunatic soup, pass with a yaw and a sway,

The wild pigs and roos who didn't hear them coming, took their last breath that day.

We called at a pub in Longreach, and there was an old bloke propped up at the bar.

I said "Are you a local around here?" He said "I'm no local by far.

There ain't many locals in this town and there's none in 'ere to be found.

You only thought of as local if you got someone in the ground."

We rolled out the swags on a jump-up and looked out over the Black Soil Plains.

They call this land Channel Country, she keeps pushing up fossilised remains.

This year the drought has taken hold, even ghost gums are struggling to breathe.

If it doesn't rain in the next three weeks, all the sheep and cattle must leave.

The next morning we're drinking billy tea and warming ourselves in the desert sun.

"Where to next, south or west?" "Let's try out luck at Opalton."

In the distance, cattle are kicking up the dust, taking part in a bangtail muster.

There's a stockman, cracking his whip in the air, getting the beasts to do what they ought a.

The folks out west seem to smile a lot as they go about their day.

Bush poets and balladeers, they all pass this way.

As we roll up the swags and head on down another dusty track,

I know part of me will always ride free, in the outback.

Winton to Daly Waters

Luckily there was no overnight dew and we rolled up the big tent dry as we wouldn't need it on the three day ride from Winton to Daly Waters. As we rode out of town we were surprised by a sign post telling us there was no fuel at Mckinlay (240km). Where fuel is concerned we always play by the rules and we obediently filled up at Kynuna (160km). As we rode through Mckinlay we couldn't help notice the thriving roadhouse!

The south easterly trade wind was still assisting with our fuel consumption and Devil was purring along the Landsborough Highway consuming only 3.5 litres per hundred. Just south of Cloncurry a forest of ant hills appeared and we saw our first wedge tailed eagle since the Nullarbor Plain. I really enjoy these days out on the road. Life seems incredibly simple when all we have to do is ride, rest, and ride some more.



50m long road train dwarfs the bikes.

I remembered riding the road between Cloncurry and Mt Isa in 2010 and I was delighted to be back for a second turn. The road meanders through rocky hills and valleys and we both enjoyed leaning into one sweeping corner after another; this has got to be one of the best outback rides in the country.

By 4pm, the little tent was up in a caravan park in Mt Isa and we were kicking back in our big camp chairs, drinking beer and musing over the days ride.



Little tent at Daly Waters, where we met some other bikers.

When we are using the little tent everything, clothes bags and food boxes, stays in the bike panniers and the trailer. This keeps us tidy and minimises the work load when we are packing up and preparing for the next day's ride.

Steve set the alarm for first light and by 8am we were queuing for fuel in the middle of town. We usually like to fill up with fuel the night before and while we waited we remembered why. Then we were on the road again. With the sun behind us we rode along as happy as can be. At lunch time we rested on the veranda at the old pub in Camooweal, while our hostess served homemade apple and rhubarb pies with delicious coffee. The Northern Territory border is only a few kilometres from Camooweal and we

stopped at the border crossing, horrified at the graffiti on the welcome sign. While Steve took photographs I stood in quiet contemplation, excited about the road ahead, and at the same time, wondering when we would visit Queensland again.



[Barkly Roadhouse](#) was a welcome site when we pulled in for fuel and a camp site at the end of the day. We had the pick of the grassy sites and then made haste towards the unisex, ensuite style bathrooms. Communal ensuites simply don't work when the campsite is busy because no one can use the toilet and shower at the same time and queues usually eventuate. Despite the ablutions, Barkly Roadhouse is a great place to rest up for the night and the tucker in the roadhouse looked excellent. I like the little sign at the front of the roadhouse which makes no apologies for the extortionate price of fuel, explaining that the roadhouse used 500 litres of diesel everyday to run the generators; point taken.

The next morning we were back on the road as soon as we felt the kangaroos were tucked up in bed. It is about 560km from Barkley to Daly Waters and we had to get on with the ride so we could be off the road by 4pm; kangaroos start becoming active around this time. The tail wind was still with us and the riding was sweet and easy. [Three](#)

[Ways](#), where the Barkly Highway meets the Stuart Highway, is a real staging post and it is only here that we felt we had arrived in the Northern Territory.

As we rode north, the south easterly wind which had been kind to us for so long, caused turbulence when we crossed paths with the south bound road trains. You don't appreciate how many road trains are on the road until you have to make allowances for them every time you meet. As we trundled northwards the temperature started to rise, half a degree at a time, and by 2pm it was 30 degrees.

We stopped for afternoon tea in a free camping rest area. These rest areas are full of travellers and if you don't claim your spot by early afternoon you will find there is no room at the inn. I attempted to use the pit toilet but was turned away by the swarm of flies when I lifted the seat. It amazes us how many people are prepared to spend the afternoon sitting in a lay-by when, for example, Daly Waters pub only charges \$7 per person per night for an unpowered tent site which includes a hot shower and a flushing toilet.

We fuelled up on the highway before making our way to the [Daly Waters pub](#). Our road map showed the road out to the pub was gravel. When I was paying for the fuel, just for something to say, I asked the attendant if the road was gravel and she assured me it was. No one was more surprised than me when it was bitumen all the way. I guess they spin this yarn to try and get punters to camp at the highway roadhouse instead.

The Daly Waters pub lived up to all the hype and that night we dined on outback steak and wild caught barramundi. We drank cheap wine in the beer garden and thoroughly enjoyed Chilli's outback show. Chilli is the resident bush poet and balladeer and he made us laugh and cry. So here we are, chilling out in the Northern Territory and it feels good.



Chilli and Jane at Daly waters pub.

Daly Waters to Katherine

After a night partying at the Daly Waters pub we were pleased that the ride to the Mataranka Hot Springs was only a short one. With the promise of a homemade pie at the Pink Panther pub in Larrimah, we made haste to the little outback town, only to be told “it’s too early in the season and we haven’t started making pies yet.” The cafe on the highway was also closed, they had gone shopping. The folks up here call it Territory Time and it’s something you have to get used to. Smiling all the while, we joined the other travellers in the town lay-by and brewed our own cuppa.

By lunch time we were setting up the big tent on a dusty camp site at [Mataranka Homestead](#). When we were last at Mataranka, way back in 1985, the camp sites at this park were grassy. Now the seasons have changed and the continuous flooding has washed all the grass away. The hot spring was just as wonderful as we remembered and we lazed around in the 34°C shady pool for hours. Millions of litres of water flush through this pool every day and to swim in fresh water, without the smell of chlorine, is wonderful.

I should report, on the day we left Mataranka, the town’s roadhouse had sold out of the famous Mataranka pies by 11am and the cafe, which allegedly makes awesome fruit scones, had run out of scones and run out of flour too; Territory Time!



Jane and Arnold.



Mataranka Hot Springs.

We made the town of Katherine home for a few days so we could wash and shop after over two thousand kilometres on the road. At the town markets I met Arnold Jalapala from [Barlib Aboriginal Arts and Craft](#). I spent a long time choosing a set of Arnold’s music sticks. When I’d found my set of sticks Arnold played a tune with me on the didgeridoo. Sometimes magic moments just happen and this was one of them.

It takes a while before you realise how hot it is up here in the Top End. On the day we went walking in [Nitmiluk National Park](#), we lazed around our campsite drinking tea and it was 10:30am before we headed off on the 8km [Windolf Walk](#) at the gorge. There are warning signs everywhere about heat stress and carrying enough water. I know when I’m beaten and I bailed out of the walk after the 4km Baruwei Loop, by now it was well over 30 degrees and we were walking in full sun. Steve took our

last two litres of water and an apple and continued on to Pat’s Lookout. I waited for Steve at the visitors centre for two and a half hours before he turned up sweating and bedraggled and with not a drop of water left. After half an hour Steve still hadn’t cooled down so and he rode the 30km back to Katherine in shorts and a T-shirt.



Katherine Gorge from Pat's Lookout.

There is nothing like a swim and a few beers to wash away the cares of the day. We had learnt that we need to set out early, in the cooler hours of the day, to enjoy walking in the Top End.

Kakadu National Park



Yellow Water.

wonderful to gaze upon the wetlands at Yellow Water and we were fortunate that the flood waters had receded and the boardwalk had just opened. Near the boat ramp, a 4.5m croc was showing off in the water. He seemed to be having fun parading his full length and strength to the punters on the cruise boats.

We picked Kakadu Lodge, in Jabiru, for our Kakadu experience and by mid afternoon we had checked in for four nights. By now we were so hot that we decided to swim first and put the tent up later. While we were cooling off in the pool, Steve counted the number of times we had put the tent up on this trip and he came up with 42.

The following morning we joined in our first ranger presentation at Nourlangie. Kakadu National Park employs six rangers during the dry season to provide interpretive presentations at various cultural and geological sites around the park. These presentations are free and provide an interesting way of learning about the park. Most national parks have information boards for you to read. Kakadu has these too, but to join in a ranger presentation takes the learning experience to a whole new level. The rangers bring along artefacts, like a crocodile skull and ancient Aboriginal tools and you have the opportunity to ask questions. I was really taken by the lessons on Aboriginal kinship and law. We enjoyed our day at Nourlangie so much, that during our stay in Kakadu we joined in presentations at Mamukala Wetlands, Ubirr, and a slide presentation on Estuarine Crocodiles. While we were enjoying the rock art in the main gallery at Ubirr, ranger Joel pointed out the intricate detail in the paintings. We couldn't see this detail with our naked eyes, but through the binoculars the level of detail was amazing. Through the ranger presentations, our visit to Kakadu was transformed into an enlightening experience and has left us wanting to learn more about Aboriginal culture.



Nourlangie.



Ubirr rock art.

with Kakadu and I know one day I will return.

The bird observatory at Mamukala Wetlands is a bird watchers paradise. We spent hours watching the little Jacana's walking on the water lilies. Timing is everything and if you happen to be at Cahills Crossing, the border to Arnhem Land, towards high tide, you can watch the crocodiles feeding on mullet and barramundi as the fish are swept upstream in the swirling water. From the safety of the lookout the crocodiles came so close to us that you could see the colour of their eyes. I am still amazed that they only have a brain the size of a walnut.

When we rode away from Jabiru, I peered into each little billabong and looked in wonder at the beautiful Pandanas trees. This is the first place we have visited that I didn't want to leave. I feel a strong connection



Darwin

Oil changes and new tyres are a necessary evil when you travel long distances and we made contact with the BMW service agent, in Darwin, well in advance of our arrival on 29th June. \$2300 later and Devil (F650GS Twin) and Dwarf (R1200GS) were back in our care. If everything is still working when we are 1000km down the road we'll forgive them for making us feel like we were ripped off.

We arrived in Darwin just in time for firecracker night. This once a year event is held on Territory Day and punters take the opportunity to buy fireworks and enjoy their own firecracker show. We stayed home on the 1st July, but unfortunately our home was next door to the show grounds which were a designated "safe" zone for letting off crackers. Consequently from 5pm until midnight we were subjected to a continuous barrage of bangs, cracks and pops. The following morning, news radio reported that the fire brigade attended 200 call outs and eight people were taken to hospital with minor injuries; only in the Territory.



Sunset from Seafood on Cullen,
Cullen Bay Marina, Darwin.

Dining out in Darwin can be an inexpensive experience if you pick the right places and we made the most of our city stopover and gave the caravan park barbecue's a rest. We fully recommend the all you can eat steak and seafood buffet at [Seafood on Cullen](#); at \$38.50 this meal represents excellent value. We gorged on salt and pepper squid, scallops, chilli mud crabs and garlic prawns.

The [Darwin Sailing Club](#) still makes visitors feel welcome and we thoroughly enjoyed sitting in the shade and looking out over the yachts anchored in Fanny Bay. Twenty years ago, when we were travelling aboard our yacht, Roma II, most of the visiting yachts anchored off the Darwin Sailing Club and the club was a hive of cruising activity. These days, Darwin boasts three marinas and the visiting

yachts are spread far and wide in the Northern Territory capital; we felt a little of the cruising charm has been lost as a result.

Our week in Darwin seemed far too long, however I always take something with me from every place we visit. From Darwin I take the knowledge that white ants are not ants, they are cockroaches.

Darwin to Western Australia

As we rode south, away from Darwin, I felt myself bunker down in the saddle, happy to be riding again. I could have ridden all day long and I didn't really feel like visiting [Litchfield National Park](#) which was only an hour and a half down the road. Still we have come so far, and who knows if we will ever pass this way again, so I forced Devil (F650GS) to turn right and enjoy the run through the park to Wangi Falls. The road into the park twists and turns and tightens up, and is challenging for those who don't wish to obey the 80km/hr speed limit. On one bend, a menacing tin top was half way into my lane before his forgiving front wheel drive vehicle brought him back onto his side of the road.



Wangi Falls.

We found a good camp site at Wangi Falls and the \$13.20 per night National Park camping fees made a welcome change to the \$40 we paid in Darwin. The swimming hole at Wangi is dramatic beyond anything I could have imagined. The beauty of the twin falls tumbling 50 meters into a natural pool surrounded by palms and pandanas trees must be seen to be believed. Even though signposts said "fresh water crocodiles inhabit this area," I joined hundreds of Darwin day-trippers and spent hours exploring the length and breadth of the 50 meter pool.

At Wangi Falls we met Jose Garcia and Pilar Moreno ([Aventures En Moto](#)). Jose has completed two Dakar rallies and now he is one year into an overland tour from Spain, on an R1200GS, two-up. From my king sized camp chair, I enjoyed watching their simple setup, knowing all along that I wouldn't enjoy long term travel without the creature comforts of our big tent and a cold beer at the end of the day.



Steve, Jose, Jane & Pilar.

After three days fending off mosquitoes every time I went to the toilet, I wasn't sorry to leave Litchfield. The part of Litchfield that we explored just seemed like a bunch of beautiful swimming holes and didn't have the spiritual aspect that I found in Kakadu. Unfortunately I'd picked up an insect bite in Darwin which had formed into a ripening blister in the sweltering heat and was showing signs of infection under the skin. When the ranger did his rounds I showed him the bite and he said "Oh, are you sure that's a mozzie or a sandfly?" The pharmacist in Katherine made a similar comment.

We spent a comfortable night in our little tent in Katherine and then we set off for Western Australia. I absolutely love these days on the road. It is a time when I am all alone, just me and my bike. My thoughts drift from admiring the stunning scenery and landscape, to things I have learnt along the way. I may recite a poem or sing a song. Sometimes I think of the folks back home and the ones who have passed on long ago. All the while I am smiling and every mile is like magic; therapy for the soul.



We felt like we had arrived in Western Australia about 200km before the border, when the landscape changed to what we have come to know as The Kimberley. We were quickly through the border quarantine inspection point and by 3pm we were relaxing in the infinity pool at [Lake Argyle](#). Both the cold water and the sweeping views took our breath away; some folks spend two weeks convalescing in this spectacular man made attraction.

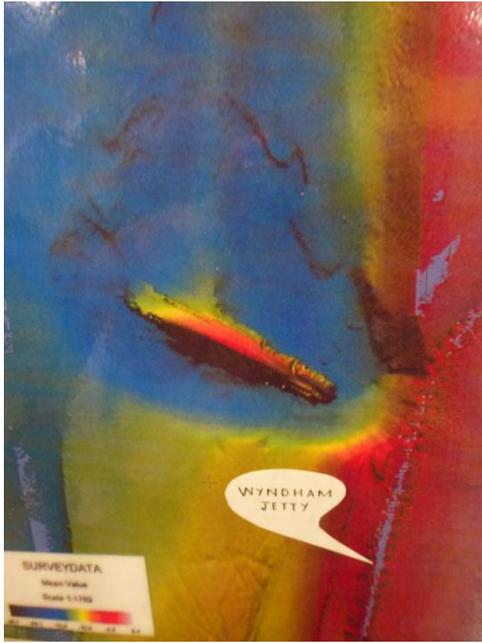
So here we are, back in our home state. By the clock it's dark at 5:30pm; something we will have to get used to.

Only 3,500km from the border to home.



Lake Argyle.

Kununurra to Broome

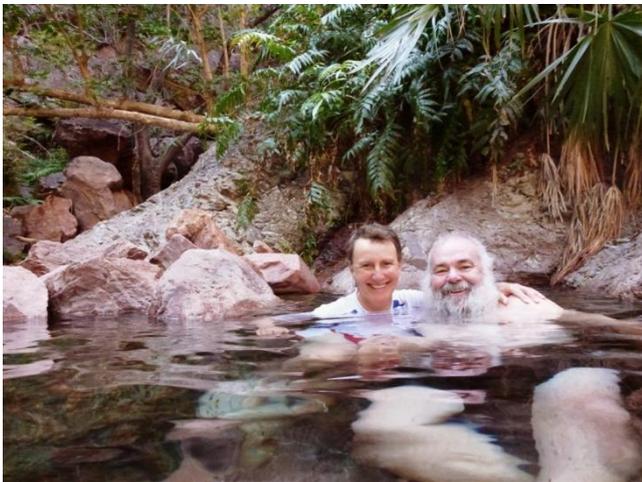


Koolama resting in Wyndham Harbour.

We made [Kununurra](#) our base for our East Kimberley tour and we settled in on the dusty powered site allocated to us. The outback town of [Wyndham](#) will always hold a special place in my heart, as the old harbour is the resting place for the state ship Koolama. I was so taken when I learnt about Koolama's last voyage, I wrote a song about her for my "[Songs in the Key of Sea](#)" album. As I looked out to sea from the five rivers lookout I noticed myself singing "*Koolama, Koolama, how are you? I'm resting in old Wyndham harbour.*"

We were sucked in by all the hype and we took Dwarf (R1200GS) for a run out to Zebedee Springs. Zebedee is part of the [El Questro Wilderness Park](#) but it's a wilderness that is found by hundreds of people every day. As you enter the car park a signpost reads "If the carpark is full, so too are the springs. Please visit another time." We were lucky to arrive just as group of people were leaving the top pool. Steve and I took ownership of the tiny hot tub but that didn't deter a family of five joining us for a bath. The pressure on this thermal spring has to be seen to be believed. The general public must vacate the springs by midday, then the tour busses move in; wilderness? I

don't think so. Emma Gorge was more able to absorb the numbers and we enjoyed a walk and a swim in the natural pool at the top of the gorge.



Zebedee Springs.

The ride from Kununurra to [Halls Creek](#) is nothing short of spectacular. The Kimberley landscape, with towering hills and escarpments in every direction, is impenetrable and I felt the environment seemed more hostile than the Nullarbor. At Warmun roadhouse I spoke to one of the locals and we both agreed that it was the rocky hills and valleys that made it seem this way. When the terrain returned to open plain it seemed "safer" in my mind's eye.

The roadhouse at Halls Creek was full to the brim when we pulled in for fuel at midday. Amongst the hustle to complete the refuelling as quickly as possible, Steve pumped 12 litres of diesel into the R1200GS. Steve realised when he tried to put the slightly larger diesel nozzle into Devil's (F650GS) intake and Devil said "no." The air was blue for a while but luckily Steve hadn't started the big GS and she looked like a beached whale, tucked away in the corner of the roadhouse car park, while we figured out what to do. We got the RAC involved, as the roadhouse had no means of siphoning and then disposing of the contaminated fuel. A quick call to our BMW dealer in Perth confirmed that our strategy of siphoning the fuel out of the tank, then half filling the tank and siphoning again should work out just fine. Some of the local kids were fascinated by the bikes and they wanted to know "how much?" while they stroked the BMW badge on Devil's tank. When I said "hey guys, just look, please don't touch," they did what they were told. Under the stress of the moment Steve and I started snapping at each other and I noticed an old Aboriginal man looking sad and concerned as he watched what was going on. All is well that ends well and the big GS ran as sweet as a nut on that lick of diesel.



Red Dwarf.



Geikie Gorge, Fitzroy Crossing.

We spent the night in the caravan park at Halls Creek and when we walked into town for a bite to eat we found the best biltong ever at the local butcher. The chef at Russian Jacks cooked us a great pizza and the waitress told us to help ourselves to a complementary bowl of salad; when we went to bed that night we were all smiles again.

Fitzroy Crossing was another wonderful outback surprise. When we last passed this way, way back in 1985, Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing were places to avoid. These days you can pitch your tent on a patch of grass, and at [Fitzroy River Lodge](#) you also get the use of the resort pool; excellent value.

The scenery on the ride from Fitzroy Crossing to Broome is less dramatic as the Kimberley landscape gives way to the red dusty plains that are reminiscent of the Pilbara. There are plenty of stray cattle on the side of the road but you begin to feel a little more street wise, after thousands of outback miles, and you start to make judgements on what the cattle are likely to do. I slowed down for one lone beast that was facing the road and sure enough he galloped to the other side just meters in front of me.



Sunset at Cable Beach.

Perth.

When we arrived in [Broome](#) we checked into the [Palm Grove Caravan Park](#) only to find that the camp site they had allocated to us was in “tent city,” an area full of backpackers working for a living. We stood there for a while looking at the dust bowl with no shade while one of the friendly dudes explained that they party pretty hard and he had been evicted from Cable Beach Caravan Park not long ago. After listening to this we did something we had never done before. I went straight back to the office and asked for our \$220 back. Our rent was refunded without a question and now we are happily camped at Cable Beach.

We will hang out in Broome for a while, soaking up the last of the warm weather before riding home to

Broome to Perth

Once we had made the decision to ride straight home after our Broome stopover, we both started to look forward to four days on the road.

On the first day we had a wonderful outback ride to Port Hedland. The wind was behind us and Devil's fuel consumption was down to a mere 3.6lt/100km. South of Port Hedland we took the inland route and the scenery all the way to Newman was nothing short of spectacular. We pitched the little tent at Kumarina Roadhouse and enjoyed sharing stories with the dudes that escort the wide loads on this section of the Great Northern Highway. With the falling temperatures, our cold meat and salad didn't seem very appetising so Steve cooked up a storm on our little camp stove so we had something warm in our bellies.



Saying goodbye to Cable Beach, Broome.



Great Northern Highway, near Port Hedland.

The following day we trundled southward some more, through the desert country and the townships of Meekatharra and Mt Magnet. It's hard to see that anything could live out here but we still had to keep an eye out for the cattle on the side of the road. The comforting tail wind had been replaced by a strong south westerly headwind and the turbulence, at the rear of the trucks, made us hang on tight when we passed each northbound road train. The heated grips were on all day and by the time we pitched the tent at Paynes Find Roadhouse the sky was completely overcast and we had to deploy all the guy ropes to prevent the tent collapsing in the 60km/hour wind.

Further south, some of the wide loads had to delay their departure because of the 100km/hour wind gusts. We picked a good night to dine in the roadhouse tavern and I devoured a delicious plate full of lamb chops, mash, and veggies, swilled down with a glass of sauvignon blanc. I love staying at outback roadhouses. At around sunset, when the road trains drivers stop for dinner, I get the opportunity to gaze upon the awesome splendour of the trucks.

Of course it's not over until the fat lady sings. When we crawled out of our tent at 5:30am on the last day, the air was filled with a fine mist. Daybreak revealed that Paynes Find was clouded in a thick winter fog. We both went quiet as we packed up the little tent for the last time and by 7am we were ready for the road. Steve took the lead. 80km/hr was the fastest we dared to go in the poor visibility. Several road trains caught us up as they had less to lose by driving at 100km/hr. When they appeared in my rear view mirror I put on my hazard lights until I was sure they had seen me. Steve was riding four seconds in front but I couldn't see him. We rode on, but without a breath of wind the fog wasn't lifting. Instead of being able to muse over the wonders of our six

month ride around Australia, we had to endure our most difficult and dangerous 100km of the entire trip. At one point I shook my fist in the air and called out something that was unrepeatable. Every time we passed a lay-by, and Steve didn't stop, I called out something else. After an hour it seemed like we would be riding in fog for the rest of our lives. Then about 30km outside Wubin, the fog cleared and before us lay the most beautiful green pastures I had ever seen. The sun shone and the fog was soon forgotten and we had a wonderful winter ride all the way home to Safety Bay. As we rode the last 50km towards home I didn't feel elation for our home coming or commiseration for the life we were about to leave behind. It was just time to come home.



Only 1,000km to home.