

## Dirty Boonah Ride Report (by Coogs)

Dirty Boonah has rightfully gained a fearsome reputation amongst the graveleurs as being Australia's equivalent of 'Dirty Kanza'.<sup>1</sup>

The Dirty Boonah Triple (as named in the Audax calendar) was held on Sunday 7 July 2019 and unsurprisingly had 3 ride distances to choose from - 50km, 110km and 150km. It is still in its infancy (this is its second year), but the 150km (with 3,000m of climbing) remains the ride of choice for the hardest of randonneurs – unless you're the ride organiser (but more on that later).

I was unable to participate in the Dirty Boonah last year but as a 'random randonneur' (people who know me, know I do Audax rides in school holidays) and so this was my third and final Audax ride for the June/July school holidays. I had read Daz Murray's ride report for last year so I knew it would be a tough but fun ride – see <https://medium.com/@dbmurray/dirty-boonah-recap-of-a-beaten-body-aa9b554dd1dc>

I registered late after a wet week (I did the classic sign-up on the last afternoon of the day before) for the 150km ride. My thinking was that I had done a 200km Audax two weeks before, and a 400km Audax one week before, so how hard could a 150km gravel Audax be? I'd soon find out.

We gathered at Boonah for a 7am rollout with the ride organiser, Justin Bennett, giving us a detailed briefing (which I half listened to – always an error, but that's what I tend to do). There were 24 intrepid gravel riders lined up for the different routes and we all pushed off at around 7am.

I was riding my commuter bike, which is actually a gravel bike, that I put my gravel wheels and tyres back on for these sorts of adventures. Justin had described the 150km ride as being 85% gravel so I had opted for a 35mm rear tyre and 40mm front tyre. That seemed to suit my imperfect bike perfectly. After suffering from rain and cold in the 400km Audax the week before, I decided to pack every piece of clothing I owned including my heavy rain jacket which not only filled up an entire frame bag but also weighed as much as a medieval knight's chain mail armour. I also packed a number of Clif bars and some real food too.

Justin said (as best as I could recall) there was no water until the control at the 60km mark and the first food stop wouldn't be until the 106km mark.

Like any Audax ride, there is the initial excitement where the ride starts at a little bit of a pace and then settles down as the randonneurs spread out across the course.

True to form, Justin put together a beautiful route and we hit gravel roads within about 2km of the start and the gravel from there was just beautiful – I heard Paul 'Witzo' Witzerman describe it as 'hero gravel' but then he describes everything from loose sandy gravel to sharp flinty gravel as 'hero gravel' so you can never be too sure.

The pace was reasonably quick and I decided after the first hour and a half of riding that I'd drop off one of the main groups and take my time to enjoy the beautiful sights of the Boonah region and the mountains of the Scenic Rim. I rode for a little with Vaughan Kippers, stopped to take photos (not something I do much of to be honest and certainly not enough), stopped to eat and generally took my time. I was feeling good riding at this pace. The gravel was great, the hills were steep but doable even on my gravel bike (which made out of aluminium is quite heavy).

However, riding around at a sedate pace had the usual consequence of ending up riding with nobody. In fact, after having ridden around the base of Mt Maroon, I began wondering whether I was on the right course. I reached the 60km mark and could not remember where Justin had described the first control to be located so I stopped, took off some of my cold weather gear, ate some of my real food and wondered where I could get water because I felt like I must've missed the water stop altogether.

I set off again thinking about whether I could drink water straight out of the Maroon Dam even though there were cows lolling by the edges and then finally, as I rode up a hill, emerged the first control point and what seemed like every single cyclist doing the ride having a chat, enjoying the water and something to eat.

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<sup>1</sup> You may have heard it here first.

At this point, a few people had asked me what was wrong, that is whether something was wrong with my bike or myself. I must have been taking it R E A L S L O W. I filled up my water, had a little bit to eat and took off just after one of the groups to ride out.

We were now riding in some beautiful scenery between Mount May and nowhere in particular. We then came across the infamous and creatively named Strava segment 'Lot 126 – Fletcher Road climb', which was a brute even for someone who likes climbing. It consisted of some loose gravel in the steep hairpin sections and general and nasty 15% to 20% incline before tapering off to about 10% for what felt like forever.

By this stage, we had reached the 70km mark and I resisted the urge to tell the few people I was riding with that I felt the gravel had been great up until now. I'm glad I didn't because as we turned the corner and headed down the gravel Carneys Creek Rd, I hit corrugations so large and at such a pace that that I almost got thrown off my bike with the shock. I watched Thomas Matjya speed off into the distance on his hard tail mountain bike and observed Witzo to generally lose control and spear off the road behind me. Naturally, being a good mate, I didn't stop and rode on hard and fast to put some distance on him. Eventually, the corrugations came to an end and we reached some more bitumen before the paths between the 110km route and 150km route diverted.

We hit some more gravel and more steep climbs around the base of Mount Moon and headed towards a long gravel stretch towards Mount Greville to our left and Lake Moogerah in front of us. Absolutely beautiful scenery with the Scenic Rim towering around us. Our next control point and the place to have a lunch was Mount Alford. We climbed to the top of the ridge and then bombed down a bitumen descent into Mt Alford that saw me reach speeds of 75km an hour on the gravel rig. Thomas later told me that he got speed wobbles on his mountain bike on that descent so I was glad he was behind me when that happened.

We rolled into Mount Alford and saw a small crew of those doing the 110km ride having some lunch and some beers at the Scenic Rim Brewery. At this point, I said hello to Justin Bennett, Roger Hawley and Cam Taylor, who I knew had suffered from two flat tyres that day. I asked Cam how he was going and said he had had three flat tyres but his face looked like he'd had about 15 and he said he was opting out of doing the 150km. It was clear those punctures had got the better of him and, frankly, I don't blame him.

I opted not to have a beer (I did want one but sadly I was conscious that, while I had only ridden 106km, it felt like, at that stage, 250km on a road bike and I knew that I still had a long way to go on the gravel). So, a half double decaf, half caf, soy piccolo it was. After slow service (it was very busy and I think my coffee order baffled everyone including me) and a hugely slow stop of one hour(!), I rolled out with Witzo and Thomas for the remainder of the 150km ride. There was more bitumen than gravel on the remainder of the road but there was also some long, steep climbs.

Interesting. This had proven to be a much tougher ride than I had expected. Justin Bennett had put together this marvellous ride but when I nervously enquired of him at lunch how harder the remaining part of the ride was, he had told me that whilst he had driven it, he had actually not ridden it and he wasn't sure if he would be able to ride the 150km ride himself. WTF, Justin?! It was at this point that I realised it was going to be a tougher day than I had first thought. Thankfully, everyone told me at this point that it was a ride of two halves so we had the second half to go. I did not have the energy to tell the smart arses that we'd actually done 70% of the ride as I feared simple arithmetic would have been lost on them.

Despite this, the remainder of the ride proved uneventful as I shared chats with Witzo and Thomas and let Thomas tow me along behind his hardtail. The only butt-puckering moment came when I was following Witzo down a gravel hill and we hit corrugations at enough speed for Witzo's chain to drop off and for him to lose control and move straight across in front of me. I decided I'd either join my bike with Witzo's to construct an impromptu tandem or move into the now looming barbed wire fence. Fortunately, I managed to come to a skidding halt before either of those two things happened whilst Thomas was cackling away behind us having witnessed the ridiculous event. I left Witzo at the bottom of the hill to put on his chain as penance for his act. He later described himself as being out of control. That made two of us.

It then rained a little, got cold, stopped raining and eventually we rolled around the base of Mount French and back into Boonah.

It was a great ride that Justin had put together and one I would love to do again or even try it in reverse to see what it was like and how much easier or difficult it would be. This is the sort of ride that if it was done by corporate organiser would get hundreds of people signing up for. That's the beautiful thing about this

Audax ride. It's understated, it's in its infancy and when the ride organiser hasn't even done it, it makes for a smashing good time.

I see that there's another Dirty Boonah Triple on the Audax calendar for September that Justin has put together. You should not confuse the rides as that ride is different to this one that's conducted in July. I wonder if Justin has done it??



