

Special ride report
By Carol Dooley

Stormbusters Take South West by Force

Bridgetown

Northcliffe

Walpole

Denmark

Rocky Gully

Manjimup

Bridgetown

Ever tried cycling through continuous rain on 8°C days, hail storms and lightning strikes? Six Audax bikers set off from Bridgetown on Friday 18th with a Nissan Patrol and large trailer on a five day tour of the Southern corner of WA. It turned out to be a bit of a "Boys Own" adventure with wild weather, variable accommodation and many undulating hills, but as with most adventures which end well we all had a great time and there has been much talk of "next time".

We car pooled down to Bridgetown and met up with Ejner who has some very kind friends there, with a place to leave the vehicles, and who also generously loaned us the use of their 4wd and trailer. Unfortunately Sven couldn't also be support driver, as he was taken seriously ill at the last moment, we gathered he was more upset about not being support driver than his illness. Ejner drove the first day and did an excellent job of showing us the way through the back roads and forests to Manjimup. We encountered a few showers but remained optimistic regarding the weather when we reached 'Manji' and had a lunch break.

By the end of lunch we realised it wasn't going to be easy to reach Northcliffe before dark but we set off in good heart. The route was excellent with quiet back roads through forested undulations. The weather wasn't quite as we had hoped and we continued to be drenched time and again by con-

tinuously passing showers. We managed to arrive at our Northcliffe accommodation just before dark, three of us in the vehicle and three on bikes by that time. We were wet through; cold and a little disheartened by that stage and looking forward to a nice hot shower and possibly a strong heater. The caravan park we had chosen, didn't quite live up to it's internet shine though we did manage to have a hot shower and then all crammed into the Nissan and headed to the pub for a welcome hot counter meal which cheered us up. In the morning we fought our way through the kangaroos and joeys waiting for their 'Skippy Mix' from the caravan park owners and headed out on the 165km run to Denmark. There were occasional showers once again, many large "undulations" and beautiful forests. Grant was driving the support vehicle (complete with a flashing light on the roof) behind the last riders and this helped to slow down any traffic before they passed the riders.

We stopped briefly after 45kms in a Park and then carried on the next 55kms to Walpole where we all indulged in huge burgers – not a good idea for some who relived the experience all the way to Denmark. Denmark was a welcome stopover and the holiday house we had booked was perfect with two bathrooms, two double rooms and two twin rooms, not to mention a very efficient combustion heater that we all enjoyed sitting around in the evening for a drink and a chat.

Initially the 'rest day' in Denmark

was to involve a ride to Albany and back, instead we opted for a car trip to Albany with sightseeing and lunch high on the agenda. We also heard 'wild' tales of the "very hilly and rough" Denmark – Mt Barker road up to the Muir highway, our planned route for the next day heading to Manjimup via Rocky Gully.



In the morning, four less determined members of the group jumped into the vehicle with bikes in the trailer while the "Baltic Express" (Mike and Ejner) hit the road for the 39km run up to the Muir Highway. Caroline dropped Grant, Carol and Rod off at the intersection of the Denmark Mt Barker Rd and the Muir Highway in a light drizzle and temperature of about eight degrees. The forward contingent of three stayed together at a steady pace into a slight headwind, hoping for what was now undeniably rain to stop. The weather only deteriorated from there and by this time we were soaked and frozen. We huddled behind a farmer's letterbox trying to get out of the wind and eat a snack for a few minutes, shoes squelching full of water. When we set off our frozen muscles felt like frozen wood. Eventually Rocky Gully appeared, not in a gully but at the top of a hill, strangely! It is a quiet backwater and the only place of refuge was the general store. Three sodden cyclists arriving at the same time as a school bus trip considerably brightened up the young man behind the till, the dollar signs were flashing in his eyes. Two instant



coffees and a toasted cheese sandwich later we were no warmer and sinking towards hypothermia rapidly. Rod went and paced up and down outside ready to flag down the Baltic Express and support vehicle, who all pulled in just over an hour later, good time made really. The Baltic Express fed, had clothing changes/additions and took off again, one by one this time. The less determined of us, climbed into the vehicle and soaked up the heater. Seeing Ejner ahead all alone prompted me to join him and get some more kms in. Within ten minutes the rain changed to hail, strong, straight in your face hail. After nearly being blown off the road we kept going and shortly after there was a red flash right before my eyes, lightning strike, followed about two seconds later with an outlandishly loud thunder-clap right overhead. We decided to get the message and pulled over to huddle once again in the vehicle. The remainder of the Baltic Express refused to cave in and urged us on to Manjimup, which we did and settled into the lovely Warren Way caravan park. After unloading the trailer and gear Grant and Caroline went back to try and co-erce Mike into the car or at least support him. Meantime he was having only the second puncture of the whole trip and they arrived to inflate his tyre with the foot pump and follow him the remainder of the way. We were glad to see him arrive safely, all not so secretly thinking rather him than me, 200km in an icy storm. We enjoyed our dinner at the Manjimup Hotel all cosy and warm that night.

The final day was a 55km run from Manjimup to Bridgetown, the weather though cloudy was fine and we stopped at Donnelly River for a cappuccino and the remainder of Caroline's delicious chocolate cake while Grant fed the emus the remainder of his trail mix. Overall it was a challenging trip weather wise but we all enjoyed the camaraderie in the evenings and the day's adventures gave added to the evening's warmth and enjoyment. One thing is for sure, next year's trip will be later in the year, possibly Oct/November.

