



Tony Stegmar (leader)	Honda CBR1000	Cliff Peters	Kawasaki ZX10
Paul Southwell	Honda CBR1000	Cindy Lee	Triumph 675
Misho Zrakic	Honda CBR1000	Pina Garasi (rear)	Honda CBR600
Ben Warden	Honda CBR1000	Phill Hotschilt	Suzuki GSXR1300

I arrived at Berwick second to last. Ronny was there to show us his new machine, a new Suzuki Bandit 1250. All our cajoling couldn't get him to come on the ride; he wanted to put a few quiet kays on it before a Club ride.

The sky was heavily overcast but the forecast wasn't meant to be too bad. Tony mentioned later at morning tea that only two millimetres of rain was predicted. That figure was broken many times during the course of the ride.

Tony tells us where we are going and Pina puts her hand up for rear rider duties. No one knows First Aid, which luckily wasn't needed. No one wants to do a write-up; in fact I haven't seen anyone volunteer for this job since my return. I wish I'd been listening because I've got the job of scribe now and I'm not sure of the places we went through on the first leg. But here goes.

We ride off down the Freeway to the Pakenham exit and head down towards Koo Wee Rup North, and on to Bayles. Somewhere around here it starts to rain steadily, then heavily, then steadily again. This pattern continued throughout the day with brief periods of sunshine mingled in. I could feel the water getting into my boots, producing that cold soggy feeling.

We took several turns on our way to Ranceby, passing through Athlone and Poowong East. Around Athlone we met some cyclists, one of which had crashed, or been run into, lying in the arms of fellow riders. Shows we aren't the only sickos out in this weather.

A little further on there's some beef on the hoof running loose; a cow and her calf. They couldn't make up their minds about which side of the road they wanted to be on, running back and forth between riders. It's still raining steadily, visibility and grip not good for hard braking. So playing dodgem with the cows is real heart in the mouth stuff.

Phil had a near high-side leaving the Ranceby intersection with possibly diesel on the road. Paul and I had slides straight-lining this corner on Ben's lead a couple of weeks ago. It is still extremely slippery.

We head to Arawata with the three kilometres of mud, dirt, muck and slosh. These words inadequately describe the mess called a road. We stop at the bottom intersection to regroup. Tony planned to go left and up through Mount Eccles and on to the Grand Ridge Road with more dirt roads. But Ben suggests we take usual route, given the weather and time delays.

Next it's on up through Hallston and Allambe South to Mirboo North for morning tea. All the outside tables are available today, little wonder the way the weather is. To think I got out of my nice warm bed to come here! I wring half a litre of water out of my gloves; Ben wrings a lake out of his. I don't even bother with the litre in each boot. I kid you not. It's warm, so leave it there ☺.

The coffees arrive. Yes I will certainly have milk with mine please. More milk? Yes, if you say so! (You had to be there.) Paul and Cindy decide they have better things to do. Paul's going home to watch the footy. We bid them farewell and continue with our adventure.

Off down the Grand Ridge Road to Limonite and the back road to Boolarra. Then on to Yinnar and past the Hazelwood power station and cooling pond. (It's an impressive sight with mist rising off the water). Next Loy Yang power station and the Hyland Highway down to Won Wron, finally taking the back way into Yarram for lunch and fuel. But not before we tangle with some more cows and calves. Tony barges his way through. The farmer is not looking at all impressed. Not to worry mate. I bet he doesn't have a permit to walk them on the road anyway. It's now a total of 236kms ridden before lunch. *[My odometer said 250 km, but I'm not running a 190/55 oversize tyre like most others. The guys with the GPSs reckon this 190/55 makes for a true reading anyway. ...Ed.]*

Tony shares his apple turnover with Misho and Ben. He reckons he hasn't had one for twenty years. We talked the talk. Something about dingoes and babies and Lindy Chamberlain finally found not guilty, and re-opening the Harold Holt case – dingo with a snorkel. I'm being called soft cause I want to sit in the sun on the other side of the street. It's around 1.40pm and we are sitting in the shade of the street buildings, Oh well, I can't be called a sissy, so I stay where I am.

A copper rocks up and Ben asks him if the Tarra Bulga National Park road is open. Yes, he says. Tony said it was shut on his reconnaissance ride on Wednesday. Well, the cop should know.

Saddle up and we are gone, turning left at Devon North and heading up into Tarra Bulga NP. We rode about twenty kilometres in and, yep, road blocked by water barriers. It was interesting getting this far too. There was bark, gravel and four wooden slippery bridges. No other choice but to return back the way we came. Pina was taking it very gingerly.

Did the cop know it was closed? Who knows? I suspect he did. *[In the police defence, there are two roads up to Balook, one dirt and one bitumen. Maybe the dirt road was open. ...Ed.]*

We head back up the Hyland Highway, past where the cattle were earlier. At the Grand Ridge Road sign we turn left and take a four kilometre scenic detour out to Carrajung to see how far the bitumen goes. It starts off great but quickly turns to dirt.

Back to the Highway and up to Traralgon, Yinnar, Thorpdale and down to Trafalgar, where we decide to break up, the time close to five o'clock, sunset at 5.08 pm, and effective darkness in another 10 minutes. Still raining, light fading, getting cold, winter solstice a few days away.

Trafalgar is roughly two hours and twenty minutes home for me. It was a spirited run to Melbourne up the freeway in the dark, rain and thick spray from the heavy traffic. It got pretty ugly when the traffic came to a halt around Berwick and we had to lane split for a couple of kilometres. No reason apparent, just a lot of traffic.

Official ride distance 414 km to Trafalgar but obviously we all had at least another 100 km to home. Thanks, Tony, for leading a good day's ride, Pina for rear riding duties, and everyone else for coming along. I don't think anyone expected it to be this wet, but I wouldn't have missed it for quids. See you next time.

Cliff Peters