

Towong Day 1 and Day 2



Ben sent out an email letting us know Towong was open and places were limited. Having only been once before I was keen to see what the accommodation was like. I tried to get in a few Sunday Club rides before riding for four straight days. I remember how much the Jindabyne trip floored me earlier in the year.

The plan was to meet at Yarck. The weather forecasts were changing daily, mostly for the better which was great as all those who have ridden, or driven in the area, would confirm, the weather can change quickly. Ben sent out a final email including a list of who was coming with their details, and the route including fuel stops. He strongly recommended printing it out and bringing it with us. I could see his logic; if we got lost, had to split up due to Mr Plod blitz, or for any other reason, we had the route and everyone's mobile with us, making regrouping much easier. Nice work Ben.

Ben also reminded us to check the weather forecast: possibly warm trip up and back, with some very cold mornings, and possible rain and strong winds. That meant pack everything. Unfortunately for me, that means two Ventura bags as my wet gear takes up over half of one bag. Note to self: get smaller wet weather gear before next weekend away to save looking like a tosser. I looked at what others had on arrival. Aiden had the smallest bag, which he said was full of food, then showing me he had a backpack as well...

The last few days I had been so excited about the trip so when the day finally came I woke early. Since I'd packed the night before I was ready quickly and shot off. It was a fresh start. The road was mostly clear so I made good time, and I was second there. It was great to watch all the crew arrive.

There was a stack of other bikes coursing past, mostly in small groups. A question was proposed before everyone had arrived: who would be the last person to have a private blue light party? Unfortunately, that was possibly answered before the start with one of the crew scoring a three pointer. The race, oops, the ride had not even begun! Ben had not even started the morning briefing about how I'm going to win some brand spanking new front and rear tyres of my choice, just for riding and then putting my thoughts down in print. Anyway, my point is, is he really the first at the blue light party as the ride had not officially started?

There were 29 starters. I had already volunteered as rear and no one argued. Ben came around and handed out printed copies of what he had emailed to us all. I didn't notice anyone saying "No thanks, Ben, I've brought one." Thanks for looking out for us all, Ben! He called us all together as the last of the crew rolled in. It was going to be a great day.

This was my first time up this way, well past Mansfield anyway. I spoke with lots of guys in the Club about the ride and had read most of the reviews.

The 50 km of highway to Mansfield was better than I thought. Then there was a massive straight out of Mansfield before the roads started to bend. I was expecting things to be a bit tighter. I got to

sit behind some of the faster guys. I'm sure it was Dave in front of me for a while. I was surprised as I did not expect to see him, unless corner making, or at breaks. However, once things tightened up more, and we were further from civilization, I watched him begin to carve up the pack. Not sure how far up the front he got. It would have been great to follow him. I also got to follow Arc for a lot of the weekend. You're a brave man, Andrew, and you were riding great!

The ride into Whitfield was immense, with lots of twists and turns. There were so many events on the way up it's hard to recall them. There were not as many bikes as I'd expected, especially in the hills. I caught glimpses of the scenery. It would be nice to ride slowly through the area one day.

It was nice to see Rob Jones at Myrtleford, though a shame he was in a four wheel drive.

Happy Valley through to Mitta Mitta, what can I say? Great roads! Not many cars. Just 28 speed demons in front of me!

I was getting very tired by Mitta Mitta and chose not to go to Dartmouth Dam. It seems it was an eventful trip. I hear Rod showed amazing skills by riding off the road and back on again. Unfortunately, he was upstaged by Aiden a couple of corners later. I don't know all the details, but Aiden showed the crew what a complete legend/lucky bastard he really is. I can imagine he used his dirt riding skills, with that lanky muscle backed body, and youth, to bounce all over the road including up an embankment, making a partial mess of his new bike, boot, but not himself. Editor, what was the verdict on the damage? Swing arm, right mirror, and quick shifter? *[And footpeg mounting bracket...Ed.]* After determining he could not continue the ride safely, Aiden limped home down the freeway back to Melbourne, changing gears with his hand.

From Mitta Mitta to Granya Gap was grand with lots of open sweepers. But I find this form of corners are not my favourite. I need to practice these more. I find the crew always lose me when it opens up.

I was also having trouble over \$150. Usually I can go much faster. It took all day to work it out. My left shoulder protector would start to vibrate, \$10 more and the effect started to travel through me into the bike creating issues. I tried lots of things including changing body positions. Recently I brought a new back protector, a Tectonic 3.7, which feels great but as I'm a bit wide in the middle it was sitting too high on my shoulders as I leant over. After pushing it down into my pants more, it seemed to allow things to flow better.

I think my favourite section was the twisties in the hills around Walwa; I was just too tired to really appreciate them!

For the last part of the ride we split up as we were staying in different accommodation. Ben told me there was a left turn about 25km past Walwa at Tintaldra and to look for a corner marker. However, I saw no one. It seems there was a mix up between a wave on and a wave goodbye and the corner maker departed. Once people realized I was not with them they sent out a search party. Meanwhile, I followed Rod and a few others, not knowing where I was going. I was struggling to keep up, hoping not to get lost. Before I knew it I rode into Towong. I stopped and Google-mapped the address, which was 2km from where I had stopped! Yippee! Beer! Ben had put in our beer orders and James Boag was calling my name.

There were some unhappy faces when the search party returned. After a discussion we determined the cause. I'm glad everyone was safe and home for the BBQ.

It was my first time at Towong. It is great: the BBQ, the owners, the neighbour's dog, the beers, the crew, old and new. A great night! But I have to highlight the view. You stand on a balcony at the top of a small grassy hill looking down on the mighty Murray River that snakes its way through the foreground. In the background are various hills, including the Snowy Mountains and Kosciusko, the area where we planned to ride in for the next two days. The sun sets behind the property so you can watch the mountains change colour as they get the last rays of light.

Day 2

The room creaks. People were trying to be quiet that just made the footstep creaks last longer. The sun broke through the windows very early, and every bird around was awake and singing including noisy kookaburras. I woke early and headed off to the meeting point at Khancoban. But there were many people there before me. They must have remembered the terrible service. Last year everything was late. We joked, when John got his meal that it took over a year to arrive! The problem was the service was no better this time around. They kept coming out with things people had not ordered. I'm surprised people didn't just say "Mine!"

Ben rallied the troops and noted the strong police presence; I'd seen two police cars as I rode into the meeting point. We were advised the police would be hiding in the 60 zones - three candy cars. Not as fancy as the Vic cars, but still deadly for sports bikes with only the one road in and out.

We left Khancoban and headed for Dead Horse Gap. The guys in front of me were sticking to the speed limits. It was the strangest ride I have been on with the Club; I was keen for guys to go faster, but happy to keep my licence safe. We passed lots of oncoming bikes giving the universal sign for the police coming towards us as we entered the first 60 zone. Unfortunately, one of our boys was zapped when twisting the wrist too far and was pulled over for a 4 point talking to. Sorry to see that, man. Soon after there was an oncoming cop car with a heap of bikes chocked up behind it. I felt sorry for them. Then at the top of the hill was the last policeman, standing out like a hero. I was at the tail of our crew and we passed him about 50-55 km/h. I waved.

A couple of kilometres further on we stopped at Dead Horse Gap. I felt the wind start blowing. It blew my gloves off my bike. We were expecting strong winds, with possible rain around Jindabyne. It was cold, with a strong wind, and as we were on the top of the world, the gusts were getting stronger. Ben called for photo and then we were back to the race, splitting at the T-junction, left for Charlotte's Pass or right for Jindabyne. I chose Jindabyne because the wind was picking up.

As we left the Dead Horse Gap parking area most people experienced an issue with the black shiny snake lines on the road. They were very, very, very slippery. Some thought they had flat tyres and stopped to investigate.

The road from Thredbo to Jindabyne is great, just too many low speed limits and potential hiding spots for police. In Jindabyne I had lunch with the Jones' boys, minus Mr Jones. They're a funny bunch of guys. One was telling stories of the early settlers and workers in the area. Sorry folks, not fitting for this mag. No long after they decided it was *beer o'clock* and blew off for an early start.

The crew that went up to Charlottes Pass said the wind was mad... with them riding at an angle along the straights, just to stay upright. Unfortunately, this was to be the tone from Jindabyne through Dalgety, Berridale and Adaminaby. I was bitching in my head about how stupid this was, especially as my jacket zip had opened allowing the jacket to act like a sail in the strong gusts. I was so glad to get to Adaminaby as twisties were ahead meaning shelter from the wind.

It's a fantastic road from Kiandra through to Khancoban, but man, I was getting tired and very keen to get home. The wind had worn me out.

On getting home it was the usual beers, chats, washing of bikes, gear and selves. At one point I felt very funny, a deep down sick feeling. I stopped drinking. I could not eat my tea, nor drink my beer at the pub. Something was very wrong. I shrugged it off as exhaustion.

The pub was an interesting night, a funny (hilarious) group of guys with stories that cannot be printed. Mark Copeland produced some old footage of Club rides on the big screen. It was great to watch. I heard some people talking... why can't we film just for us, for times like this... interesting thoughts... It was mesmerizing to watch. *[The Committee decided earlier this year that the risk of footage going viral was too great ...Ed.]*

On arriving at home I went straight to bed hoping it was just exhaustion from two day's of riding and fun. Unfortunately, it was my tooth. It was not good before going away, but got better. I thought it would keep till after the weekend. I was so wrong. Pierre told me my face was all puffed up on one side. He was right.

So next morning I took pain killers, packed, said my good-byes and limped home down the freeway. Man it was cold. The trip to Albury was colder than the roads around Corryong. I got home in quick time. I only saw two candy cars on the opposite side of the road, looking the right way for me to slip past with my stealth exhaust. I only spotted one fixed camera on my side of the road.

I want to thank all those who I rode with on the weekend, a great group of respectful guys. I hope I was not too slow. My apologies if I was. I find these trips away improve my riding more than Sunday rides. Something about riding for days in a row, sleeping, talking, living it. The roads were also amazing. I feel like buying land in the area, especially if it has views half as good as where we stayed.

Thanks to Ben for leading and looking out for all of us, for Andrew and then Stoimen who took up the tail rider position when I retired sick, and for all my friends in the crew, and the new ones I made. See you on a ride. Ride safe and hard!

Nigel Oman