

# Postie Bike CHALLENGE



## Hobart to Alice Springs 7 - 16 August 2013

*We have listened to your suggestions and in 2013 we will include Tasmania as the launching pad for another Postie Bike Challenge adventure. We currently have our team scouring over the best routes, roads and fire trails through Tasmania. Our route through Victoria is still being planned but I can say that we are making a beeline for the edge of the Flinders Ranges in South Australia before taking the Oodnadatta Track to our final destination in Alice Springs, Northern Territory. As in previous events we will be looking for all manner of roads and surfaces to challenge you. If we can find a good sand track ... we'll take it! If we can find a water crossing ... we'll take it! If there is a fire trail to the top of a mountain ... we'll take it!*

*We are planning to be part of the Henley on Todd event which is a huge yearly event in Alice Springs over the weekend after our arrival. We are still early in the planning process but expect that all riders will be invited to take part in the Grand Parade and also get free access to the Corporate boxes for food and drink while enjoying the best seats in town for the Henley on Todd festivities.*

I've already done two Postie Bike Challenges<sup>1</sup> and I really, truly, honestly wasn't going to do another one ... until I read about the fantastic route being planned for the 2013 Postie Bike Challenge.

A Postie Bike Challenge ride through Tasmania was definitely the most enticing part of the proposed route for me - it's a wonderful (and my favourite) place for motorcycling<sup>2</sup>. Also, and because I already knew how well Postie Bike Challenge routes are planned, I was confident that the route chosen for Tasmania would be awesome - there is so much on offer in Tasmania that it really couldn't be anything else! Added to this were the bonuses of riding through the Flinders Ranges and along the Oodnadatta Track, and taking part in the 'Henley on Todd'. In the end I couldn't resist the irresistible and I signed up for another Postie Bike Challenge!

By the time the 2013 Postie Bike Challenge started 50 other adventurous motorcyclists had also signed up - I was one of 40 men and 11 women who rode a Postie Bike out of Hobart on 7 August and I was one of 37 men and 10 women<sup>3</sup> who rode a Postie Bike into Alice Springs 10 days later. I was also one of about a dozen riders who had completed at least one, and up to five, previous Postie Bike Challenges - evidently many other past Postie Bike Challenge riders also thought the fantastic route planned for the 2013 Postie Bike Challenge was irresistible!

There were several family groups on this year's Postie Bike Challenge including four couples, two father/son sets<sup>4</sup>, one brother/sister set, and one father-in-law/son-in-law set. There were also a few groups of friends who were 'just a bunch of mates going for a (Postie Bike Challenge) ride together'.

<sup>1</sup> 2009 (Brisbane to Melbourne via the Outback) with my husband; and 2012 (Perth to Broome) with my brother-in-law.

<sup>2</sup> I first rode around Tasmania in 1980 on a Honda 400/4 and I've toured there many times since: twice by motorhome; several times by car; and once again by motorcycle.

<sup>3</sup> Three riders (one woman, two men) sustained broken bones in falls and one rider (a man) withdrew for personal reasons.

<sup>4</sup> Despite both fathers crashing out their sons continued on and completed the 2013 Postie Bike Challenge!

As with all Postie Bike Challenges the riders came from many walks of life and had varying levels and types of riding experience - some had never ridden on unsealed roads and one was a learner rider. The riders ranged in age from 19 to 72 this year - Ross Challenger, the oldest rider (and my riding buddy for most of the Challenge), had given himself the Postie Bike Challenge as a 72<sup>nd</sup> birthday present!

While most riders were from Australia there were also six riders from New Zealand and one rider from the United Kingdom. (This was the fifth consecutive Postie Bike Challenge for Chris Wright from the UK - he's seen more of Australia than most Australians!)



*Chris Wright from the UK - back for a fifth Challenge!*

For the first time in the history of the Postie Bike Challenge all riders received comprehensive details of the complete route (eg, run-sheets with GPS coordinates and maps with the route highlighted) a few weeks before the Challenge started. In previous Challenges riders had only received basic details of the route (eg, run-sheets without GPS coordinates) the day before the Challenge started. Even though I had already worked out the most likely routes for some sections of the Challenge (eg, from Marree to Alice Springs), I was pleased to receive the detailed route information ahead of time because I was keen to know where we'd be riding in Tasmania ...



*The planned route ...*

So even before the Challenge started we knew the whole route, where we'd staying each night and, if the organiser's calculations were correct, how far we would ride each day and the total length of the Challenge (almost 3,200 kilometres):

- Day 01 - Hobart to Cradle Mountain (344 kms)
- Day 02 - Cradle Mountain to Devonport (377 kms)
- Day 03 - Melbourne to Horsham (291 kms)
- Day 04 - Horsham to Loxton (340 kms)
- Day 05 - Loxton to Orroroo (353 kms)
- Day 06 - Orroroo to Parachilna (251 kms)
- Day 07 - Parachilna to William Creek (382 kms)
- Day 08 - William Creek to Oodnadatta (198 kms)
- Day 09 - Oodnadatta to Marla (205 kms)
- Day 10 - Marla to Alice Springs (441 kms)

Another difference this year, and something we only found out about the day before we left Hobart, was that there wouldn't be any brightly coloured strips of surveyor's tape to guide our way and mark the turns. (In the other Challenges I'd done one or two of the support crew left before the riders each morning and marked the turns with surveyor's tape.) This time around we were going to be much more reliant on the run-sheets and our Hema 'Atlas of Australia' maps - I knew from past experience that Postie Bike riders did not always head off in the right direction or turn where they should!

During the Challenge we were accompanied by two support crew (Dan Gridley and Mick Gridley) and three mechanics (Richard Howard, Andy Boyd and Scott Peterson) in three support vehicles - two 4WD dual-cab utility trucks and the official 'Postie Bike Challenge' truck. Even though the support crew and mechanics encountered the same road and weather conditions as the Postie Bike riders they had the added benefits of better weather protection, more comfortable seats and air-conditioning!



*The 'Postie Bike Challenge' truck*

As well as carrying oil, chain lube and some spare parts for the Postie Bikes, each support vehicle was also equipped with a comprehensive First Aid kit and satellite phone. The support vehicles also had spare seats but, barring significant illness or injury, every rider was expected to sit astride their Postie Bike all the way from Hobart to Alice Springs!

One dual-cab ute carried a couple of spare Postie Bikes and towed a box trailer for refuelling (it had an extra 5 litre fuel can for each Postie Bike and several 20 litre fuel cans). The other dual-cab ute towed a long, flat-bed trailer capable of carrying up to six Postie Bikes: this was also the designated 'Tail End Charlie' support vehicle and it always travelled behind the last rider - no matter how slowly they rode or how often they stopped!

In addition to carrying the personal effects and camping gear for all the Postie Bike riders, support crew and mechanics the 'Postie Bike Challenge' truck also doubled as a mobile Postie Bike workshop and spare parts store. When the truck arrived at our final destination each day the mechanics setup a workshop and, in addition to carrying out scheduled maintenance tasks, they worked their magic with repairs. All three mechanics did a great job day in and day out and often worked on well into the night - and even out in the open and freezing cold at Cradle Mountain - while everyone else relaxed.



*Andy and Richard fixing a Postie Bike*

When and where possible, and because one of the aims of the Postie Bike Challenge is to support local communities along the way, the meals are provided by local charities and/or community groups. This year, however, most of the meals were catered for by local businesses because many of the very small towns where we stayed for the night were also quite isolated.

Mobile phone reception was good most days and this enabled us to maintain regular contact with our family and friends. It also gave those so inclined and equipped the opportunity to update their blogs and social media websites with photos and tales - both tall and true - of our shared experiences.

Compared to the previous Challenges I'd done this year was unusual in that we didn't have to pitch our tents until the fourth night - we stayed in cabins for the first two nights and camped in large, heated sheds on the third night. Some riders, however, avoided the whole 'camping thing' whenever they could by staying in a cabin, pub or motel.

By the time we arrived in Alice Springs we had ridden our Postie Bikes more than 3,300 kilometres over 10 days (and we'd ridden between 250 and 450 kilometres each day). We had also travelled almost 1,000 kilometres on unsealed roads (and we rode more than 650 kilometres of this distance over three consecutive days). The condition of the unsealed roads varied from smooth, hard-packed dirt - on which we could comfortably travel at 60-70 KPH - to deep sandy patches, bone-rattling corrugations and long stretches of large, loose gravel (some of which also had lots of sand thrown in for good measure).

The daytime temperatures ranged from just above 0°C on the first two days to almost 35°C on the last day. In Tasmania we struggled to keep our hands, feet and bodies warm (although we were warned ahead of time about how cold it might be<sup>5</sup>). By contrast, it was so hot as we made our way to Alice Springs on the final day (which was also the longest day in terms of the distance we rode in a single day) that some riders became dehydrated. Although the weather was mostly fine we did encounter heavy rain, strong winds and thick fog some of the time - but that was only while we were in Victoria!

All the riders met each other, the support crew and the mechanics at the Hobart Showground the day before the Challenge started. Each rider was assigned the Postie Bike that would (hopefully) carry them all the way to Alice Springs and attended a briefing given by the mechanics on the all-important daily maintenance routine for their Postie Bike.

<sup>5</sup> Several days before the Challenge started we received a message from the organisers advising: 'There is a high chance of snow/rain/ sleet and high winds in the highlands with wind chill of below 0 degrees ... but beautiful scenery! ☺'

Each rider also received a Postie Bike Challenge polo shirt and baseball cap, a Hi-Vis vest, a Hema 'Atlas of Australia' and a printed set of run-sheets. Every Postie Bike was fitted with a milk crate that could hold a 5 litre fuel can, a First Aid kit, a lunch box and a couple of drink bottles (I replaced one with a Thermos for hot drinks) - it also had a bit of extra space for whatever else we could stuff in! Apart from fitting a lid or cover to the milk crate (to keep its contents on the inside) some riders also added accessories - I fitted a SPOT GPS Messenger to my bike<sup>6</sup> - or personalised their bike with a ride mascot.

Many riders also fitted one or more types of weather protection to their Postie Bike to protect them from the freezing cold conditions that were expected in Tasmania during the first two days. Fairings made from corrugated plastic, custom made hand-guards and fur-lined handlebar muffs were the 'must have' fashion accessories for the Postie Bikes this year! I fitted a fancy blue fairing that Murray Nettheim, a veteran of every Postie Bike Challenge since 2008 (including the two I'd already done), had designed and made for me. (Murray also gave me a pair of plastic hand-guards - these were great for providing protection from the cold, big bugs and flying rocks.)



All set up and ready to be Challenged!

<sup>6</sup> This nifty little device updated my website with details of my current location every 10-20 minutes during the Challenge.

## Day 1: Hobart to Cradle Mountain

Despite being ready bright and early to leave Hobart on the first day our departure was delayed for an hour while the organisers waited for confirmation that the unsealed road through Liawenee in central Tasmania was open. This region had experienced a -12°C night (the coldest since records had been kept in the area) and very heavy snow falls four weeks earlier and the roads were still subject to closures.

Even though it was still quite cold when we finally left Hobart the temperature dropped steadily as we headed north-west and by the time we stopped in Tarraleah for a much needed break - and a hot drink or two - it was so bitterly cold that some riders, including Murray, were shivering uncontrollably.

After leaving Tarraleah Ross and I took a detour from the official route to see a 100 year old wooden pipeline that still carries water from Laughing Jack Lagoon to Bronte Lagoon. The pipeline was made using a construction method similar to wine kegs (eg, wood staves and hoops) and I'd only found out about it a few months earlier. (I was hoping to get a chance to see it during the Challenge - after receiving the run-sheets ahead of time I realised it was very close to the route we'd be taking!)



Wooden pipeline

As Ross and I were riding back along the Lyell Highway to rejoin the official route a Postie Bike rider whizzed past us in the opposite direction - I didn't think much of it at the time as I figured they must have been heading off to do some sightseeing of their own. (We found out that evening the rider had missed a turnoff and continued on for another 30 kilometres or so before realising their mistake!)

After rejoining the official Postie Bike Challenge route Ross and I continued along the unsealed and snow-lined Marlborough Highway and Highland Lakes Road and passed through Liawenee and the Great Western Tiers (which, at more than 1,200 metres, was the highest elevation we reached during the Challenge) on our way to Deloraine to refuel. (Dan told us that evening that some Deloraine locals were not aware the Postie Bike Challenge was passing through the town - a local radio station broadcast a call from a disgruntled resident complaining that *'the Posties are riding up and down the main street but not delivering any mail!'*)



*Great Western Tiers scenery*

From Deloraine we headed west through Chudleigh and Mole Creek and past Mount Roland on our way to Cradle Mountain. Due to our late departure from Hobart it was almost dark - and very, very cold again - by the time we arrived in Cradle Mountain.

## Day 2: Cradle Mountain to Devonport

We woke to a freezing cold and very frosty morning on the second day and everything that had been left out in the open (eg, bikes, helmets, gloves, etc) was covered in a thick layer of ice - the overnight temperature had dropped to a rather chilly -6°C! While most riders had come well prepared for very cold weather I don't think anyone had expected the mornings to be quite this cold. Also, and even though the temperature was hovering around 0°C when we left Cradle Mountain, the wind chill factor when we were riding along meant that it felt much, much colder (according to the thermometer on my jacket the temperature got to as low as -3°C).

With an early morning start and the freezing cold conditions there was a high risk of ice on the very damp and shaded roads that would take us towards the west coast after we left Cradle Mountain. With the support vehicles slowly leading the way we rode our Postie Bikes carefully behind them all the way from Cradle Mountain - and for almost 30 kilometres - to the Murchison Highway. Thankfully we didn't encounter any ice and we were able to pick up the pace once we reached the Murchison Highway.

Not long after I turned onto the Murchison Highway I realised the throttle on my Postie Bike was stuck wide open and the only way I could slow down was to use the brakes. Fortunately the road conditions were such that being stuck on a Postie Bike going flat out (with a top speed of about 75 KPH!) wasn't too scary. However, with the turnoff to Waratah only a few minutes ahead of me I needed to work out fairly quickly how to slow down enough to make the sharp left turn without causing a Postie Bike pile-up by doing something sudden or unexpected. I figured the best thing to do was slow down as much as possible using the brakes, then use the kill switch to stop the engine, and then coast around the corner until I could safely stop on the side of the road. Thankfully the throttle started working again just as I reached the Waratah turnoff and I didn't need to test out my plan ...

After a quick stop in Waratah to get the mechanics to check the operation of the throttle on my bike (the diagnosis: the freezing cold conditions had caused the slide in the carburettor to stick) Ross and I headed off in the direction of Savage River.

Believing the risk of icy roads was now behind us a long stretch of black ice in a deeply shaded downhill corner just after we'd left Waratah caught everyone out by surprise. Ross and I were very lucky not to run off the road or crash into anyone else when we literally slid around other Postie Bike riders on the very icy corner. Nine or ten Postie Bike riders had accidents while trying to negotiate the treacherous conditions and sadly Kathy McPhail's second Postie Bike Challenge ended when she broke her wrist.



*Kathy - still smiling despite her broken wrist*

Ross and I took it easy the rest of the way to Savage River just in case there were any more icy patches waiting to take out unsuspecting Postie Bike riders (fortunately we didn't find any). The bitumen road ended at Savage River and from there we continued along the unsealed Corinna Road before turning onto the Western Explorer Road. (The surprisingly bright white gravel surface of the Western Explorer Road, which winds its way through beautiful wilderness forests and vast button grass plains, is made using the tailings of a silica mine in Savage River.)



Somewhere along the Western Explorer Road

Most of the surface of the Western Explorer Road was in good condition and firmly packed (although Trevor Vuillermin's Postie Bike Challenge ride ended when he came off and broke some ribs after hitting a patch of loose gravel). Also, and even though the road was very steep in some parts the steepest sections were sealed. (We were lucky the Challenge started when it did - a major landslide 10 days later closed the Western Explorer Road for 8 months!)

Our Postie Bike Challenge ride along some of the best unsealed roads in Tasmania ended when we reached the bitumen again. Our destination this day was the 'Spirit of Tasmania' ferry terminal in East Devonport from where we would catch the overnight ferry to Melbourne. After refuelling at Detention River we all sprinted - as much as one can sprint on a Postie Bike - across north-west Tasmania to reach our meeting point near the ferry terminal on time. (I arrived with just enough spare time to sample a delicious Tassie Scallop Pie from a nearby bakery.)

Staff from 'The Advocate' newspaper were there to interview and photograph us as we arrived at our meeting point - they were doing an article about the Postie Bike Challenge and it was published the following day with the title '51 postie bikers begin 3800km trek to deliver for Rotary fund-raiser'.

After boarding the ferry and settling into our cabins we were treated to a sumptuous buffet dinner after which we relaxed together in the bars and lounges. (With the 'Postie Bike Challenge' truck and all the Postie Bikes safely stowed in the hold the mechanics had their only night off during Challenge). Fortunately the conditions in Bass Strait that night were calm and it was smooth sailing all the way to Melbourne - I'm sure Dan was relieved when he didn't have to deal with seasick Postie Bike riders, support crew and mechanics the next day!

### Day 3: Melbourne to Horsham

It was cold and wet (and still quite dark) when we arrived in Melbourne and our first stop - when I eventually found it - was a nearby service centre for breakfast and to wait for the support vehicles to arrive. The weather conditions deteriorated as we left Melbourne and, as a result, we had to contend with strong winds and heavy rain for the first part of the day. After riding through thoroughly miserable weather for almost an hour many of us stopped at a cafe near Ballarat and, even though some of us were literally dripping wet, we were made to feel welcome. While I was waiting to be served I noticed a daily newspaper nearby and was amused when I saw the very prominent title of a front page article. The very same day almost 50 Postie Bike riders had arrived in Melbourne on the 'Spirit of Tasmania' ferry the Herald Sun newspaper had a front page article with the big, bold title 'BIKIE DRUG BOAT'!



We're not bikies - our colours are Hi-Vis!

Not long after Ross and I left Ballarat my Postie Bike started running poorly and it eventually broke down 25 kilometres from Ararat. As I waited for one of the mechanics to arrive Ross rode on to Ararat to let Dan know I'd broken down. While I was standing in the rain near my bike, which was parked on the very narrow sealed shoulder of the road, it was blown over by a strong gust of wind caused by a passing B-Double truck - I managed to catch it before it knocked me over as well! After a short wait Richard arrived in the 'Postie Bike Challenge' truck - he managed to get my Postie Bike running again and I was able to continue on to Ararat to meet Ross.



Broken down on the way to Ararat

My Postie Bike broke down again twice before I got to Horsham - fortunately Richard and Andy were able to coax it back into life each time. It received some TLC in the Postie Bike workshop that night (where the cause of the problem turned out to be a mix of bad fuel and a dirty carburettor) and after that it ran perfectly for the rest of the Challenge.

Chris Wright (the rider from the UK) withdrew from the Challenge for personal reasons after we arrived in Horsham. Chris had completed all four previous Challenges - some of which were very difficult - and it was really disappointing for all those who knew him that he could not stay and finish this Challenge.

When Jenny Whitlock and I arrived at the Horsham Showground we were greeted by mutual friends we'd made during the two previous Postie Bike Challenges we'd done together (Ian & Sally Trigg from 2009 and Ray Ottey from 2012). It was great to catch up with them again - especially as each of them knew from personal experience what a Postie Bike Challenge was all about! (Plus Ian and Sally treated us to afternoon tea at a great cafe in town.)

In Horsham there was plenty of undercover space for our Postie Bikes (and the mechanics workshop) and large, heated sheds for us to camp in. Many riders took advantage of the industrial strength fan heaters to dry out their water logged motorcycling gear - jackets, pants, gloves and socks were hung or draped from every possible vantage point and the floor space near the heaters was covered in boots!

After dinner Dan informed us of a route change for the following day - he'd received advice that part of the planned route, the unsealed Nhill-Murrayville Road, was in poor condition following recent rain. Apparently, and even though he was sure the Postie Bikes would cope with the very muddy conditions (even if their riders did not fare so well), Dan was concerned the 'Postie Bike Challenge' truck (which is not a 4WD vehicle) would get bogged. As a result of the changed route and a forecast for warm, fine weather we would have a longer but easier ride - and given what we'd been through since the start of the Challenge this change was welcomed by all!

#### Day 4: Horsham to Loxton

Despite the predicted fine weather Horsham turned on a very cold and foggy start to the day and we had to ride through a pea-soup fog almost all the way - and 75 kilometres - to Nhill. We then continued on to Kaniva, with its Sheep Art statues lining the main street, before crossing the South Australian border. Thankfully the weather improved as we headed west and it was fine and warm by the time we stopped in Bordertown to take a break and refuel.

From Bordertown we headed north towards Pinnaroo along the Ngarkat Highway, passing bright yellow fields of canola along the way. When we stopped at a rally point near Paruna, about 30 kilometres from Loxton, we were welcomed by a group of local motorcyclists who had ridden out to meet up with us - including one with his own beautifully customised Honda CT110. We then rode in a group formation to the Loxton Showground where we setup camp - this was the first night of the 2013 Postie Bike Challenge on we'd had to pitch our tents!



Not your usual Postie Bike ...

The Rotary Club of Loxton put on a great meal for us and while I was chatting with one of the Rotarians after dinner he told me that, and courtesy of my SPOT GPS Messenger updating my website, he'd been following our progress ever since we'd left Hobart! Later that evening we helped Richard celebrate his birthday - Andy (who is also Richard's brother-in-law) had rather tastefully decorated the 'Postie Bike Challenge' truck just for the occasion!

#### Day 5: Loxton to Orroroo

Our ride to Orroroo started with a ferry ride across the Murray River at Waikerie - and avoiding a flock of sheep - as we headed north-west towards Morgan.

One of the first Postie Bike riders who arrived in Morgan realised a motocross meeting was being held nearby and organised for the Postie Bike Challenge riders to do a lap of the track. Quite a few riders (including Ross, Jenny and I) passed up the offer but many others decided they were up for the challenge and 25 intrepid Postie Bike riders lined up at the starting gates at the Morgan motocross track! When Mick and Andy arrived in Morgan they also realised a motocross meeting was being held nearby and, not knowing that's where most of the Postie Bike riders had disappeared to, they decided to check out some of the local action before continuing on to Burra. They arrived just as the starting gates dropped and were very surprised to see 25 fully-laden Postie Bikes take off. (Apparently it was quite a sight to behold - especially as some riders even managed to get their Postie Bike airborne over the jumps!)



Ready, set, ...

An accident during 'The Great Morgan Postie Bike Motocross Race' also ended the 2013 Postie Bike Challenge for Terry Mavay - he came off and broke his collarbone after another rider collided with him. While Mick and Andy took Terry to the nearest hospital (50 kilometres away and in the opposite direction to which we were heading) everyone else continued on to Burra - and a long, unplanned stop as we waited for Mick and Andy to catch up.

From Burra we rode through Jamestown and Appila on the way to Orroroo. There was a last minute change to the planned route when a creek crossing turned out to be quite a bit higher than expected - apparently Postie Bikes aren't amphibious vehicles!

Despite leaving Loxton under clear skies it became increasingly cloudy during the day and just after we arrived in Orroroo it started to rain. With the threat of more rain overnight most riders opted to either pitch their tent undercover in the stands or sleep in one of the many outbuildings at the sportsground where we were staying. Jenny and I chose the latter option and shared a large disabled bathroom together (this also gave us the chance to recharge our mobile phones and camera batteries).

After enjoying a great roast dinner and watching a video of 'The Great Morgan Postie Bike Motocross Race' we were entertained by John O'Dea (an Orroroo local who is also an Australian country music songwriter and singer) for the rest of the evening. In addition to performing the songs of many well known artists - including Billy Joel's 'Piano Man' for which he played both the guitar and the harmonica - John also sang many of his own compositions. He's a very talented artist and it was a really enjoyable way to end the day!



John O'Dea performing at Orroroo

## Day 6: Orroroo to Parachilna

For me this day marked the beginning of the most interesting part of the Challenge as we were now heading for lots of places I'd previously only seen on postcards and in travel guides and documentaries.

The route for this day had been planned to give everyone plenty of time to do some sightseeing along the way. At less than 300 kilometres this was a relatively short day so many riders took the opportunity to stop at the Cradock Pub for a latte - and to check out the quirky sculptures nearby - before continuing on to Wilpena Pound to refuel.



Flinders Ranges from Razorback Lookout

From Wilpena Pound we continued on through the spectacular Flinders Ranges National Park via the Bunyeroo and Brachina Gorge Roads before passing a rocky ridge line known as the 'Great Wall of China' on the way to Blinman. After taking a short break in Blinman we headed west through the steep and rocky Parachilna Gorge on our way to Parachilna.

After setting up camp we spent the evening at the Prairie Hotel (where we also had one of the best meals of the Challenge) and were treated to one of the beautiful Parachilna sunsets John O'Dea had sung about in one of his own songs the night before.

Unfortunately a livestock truck parked near our campsite that night and our sleep was broken by the sounds of restless cattle moving around all night ...

## Day 7: Parachilna to William Creek



Getting ready to leave Parachilna

After a great breakfast at the Prairie Hotel - which included a delicious egg and bacon roll - we set off for William Creek nearly 400 kilometres away. Almost 270 kilometres of the distance to William Creek was unsealed - this was the longest stretch of dirt roads we rode in a single day and it was also the first of the three days we spent riding along the unsealed Oodnadatta Track (almost 620 kilometres). This day also marked the start of the very warm weather - and the millions of pesky flies - that would accompany us for the rest of the Challenge.

After riding through Leigh Creek and Lyndhurst we stopped in Marree for a break and to refuel. Marree is where the southern end of the Oodnadatta Track begins. It's also where the very distinctive pink and white roadside signs that highlight points of interest along the Oodnadatta Track (many of which had been hand-painted on the lids of 44 gallon drums) began to appear. To those in the know we were clearly on our way to the iconic Pink Roadhouse!



Pink Roadhouse sign near Marree ...

The first part of the Oodnadatta Track took us past the southern end of Lake Eyre and the Mutonia Sculpture Park with its imposing sculptures including 'Plane-Henge', 'Big Dog' and 'Windmill Flower'. Even though the Oodnadatta Track was, for the most part, in good condition there were some sandy patches, a few sections of bone-rattling corrugations and lots of dry floodways filled with deep sand (and occasionally loose gravel as well). These variable conditions caught some riders out by surprise and resulted in a number of accidents - fortunately, and apart from a few bruised egos, all the riders who had spills only sustained minor injuries.

Many riders opted to stay in cabins at the caravan park in William Creek and, after not getting much sleep the previous night, I was one of them! There was a beautiful rippled cloud formation at sunset in William Creek and it prompted one rider to quip 'even the clouds out here are corrugated!'

## Day 8: William Creek to Oodnadatta

Jenny chose to camp at William Creek and while I was chatting with her as she packed up her tent and gear she said 'I think some funny shit went on here last night - one of my rubber thongs is missing'.

I told her we'd been warned the previous evening not to leave anything outside our tents or cabins as the local Dingoes were in the habit of stealing stuff. Apparently Jenny hadn't heard the warning and, from the look on her face, I could tell she thought I was joking - until I found her missing rubber thong (complete with a set of fresh teeth marks) off in the bushes a few metres away from her tent!

When we arrived in William Creek the previous day we were met by a reporter (Bryan Littlely) and a photographer (Barry Skipsey) from the 'Centralian Advocate', an Alice Springs newspaper. Bryan and Barry had travelled almost 700 kilometres to gather information and take photos for an article they were doing on the Postie Bike Challenge<sup>7</sup>.

As we went about our usual morning routines of packing up, checking our Postie Bikes and preparing to leave Bryan and Barry spent time mingling with us. Bryan chatted with us while Barry took photos of individuals and small groups. Barry also setup some group shots of the 47 Postie Bike riders who ended up completing the 2013 Postie Bike Challenge - the photo below appeared on the front page of the 'Centralian Advocate'



Postie Bike riders at William Creek

<sup>7</sup> It was a front page story the day we arrived in Alice Springs with the title 'Postie Pack - Special delivery for Alice'.

At just over 200 kilometres this was the shortest day of the Challenge and the scenery was both striking and diverse as we rode through the gibber plains that form part of the landscape along this section of the Oodnadatta Track. Just off to the sides of the road were the ruins of old buildings, the skeletal remains of several abandoned trucks and numerous reminders of the Old Ghan Railway (including the Algebuckina Bridge which, at 580 metres, is the longest bridge in South Australia).

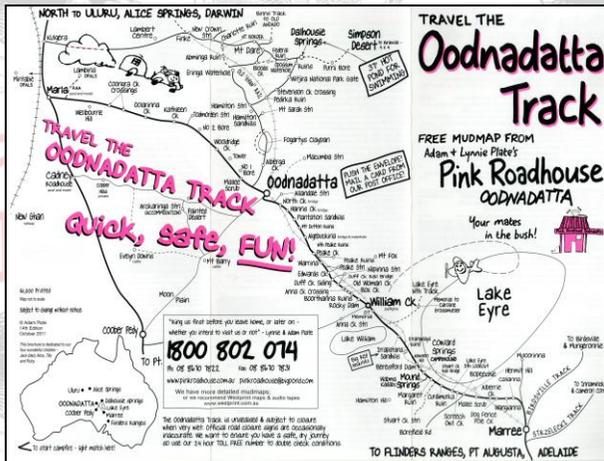
Some parts of this leg of the Oodnadatta Track were very rough and anything that wasn't firmly secured inside - or onto - our milk crates was jettisoned. When I stopped to collect another Postie Bike rider's motorcycle jacket liner (which also had their mobile phone in the pocket) I discovered my wet weather gear was missing from the lid of my milk crate. ☹

The very rough road conditions also resulted in a number of Postie Bikes getting flat tyres and as I rounded a long, sweeping left-hand bend I noticed the 'Postie Bike Challenge' truck stopped up ahead with a Postie Bike. As I was riding in the far left wheel track I had to cross the long, deep ridges of sand that separated the wheel tracks so that I could pass the truck on the right side of the road. I had just made it to the centre of the road when I saw it - the driver's door of the 'Postie Bike Challenge' truck was wide open - and I was heading straight for it! I knew another Postie Bike rider was just behind me and to my right and I needed to move into the wheel track they were riding in so as not to hit the open door. Thankfully the rider behind me saw my predicament and slowed down to allow me to move over in front of them and safely pass the truck!

The rest of my ride that day was uneventful and I arrived in Oodnadatta, which has the unenviable claim of being Australia's hottest and driest town, about mid-afternoon. After I'd setup camp in the very dusty caravan park I found my missing wet weather gear in a milk crate that contained lots of other 'lost' stuff that had also been rescued from along the Oodnadatta Track that day! ☺

There's not much to see or do in Oodnadatta but thankfully the Pink Roadhouse (in which almost every piece of furniture and souvenir is some shade of - well - pink!) was open for business and it was cool and spacious inside. We spent a very relaxing afternoon there, and after a great evening meal, we helped Jenny celebrate her birthday with a cake!

The Pink Roadhouse was established by Adam and Linnie Plate in the early 1980s - they had lived in Oodnadatta's very harsh conditions since 1974 and also raised their family there. Adam had personally named the Oodnadatta Track in 1979 and he was responsible for the informative pink and white road signs we'd seen dotted along its length. Adam also promoted tourism in the region and provided a lot of assistance and free information sheets to travellers - including the Oodnadatta Track Mud Map.



Oodnadatta Track Mud Map

Most Postie Bike riders probably weren't aware that Adam, a passionate motoring enthusiast and keen motorcyclist, had been tragically killed almost exactly one year earlier while competing in the Australian Targa Championship Rally in Adelaide. Even though the Pink Roadhouse had been for sale since before Adam's death Linnie had only sold the business a month or so before we arrived and she left Oodnadatta for the last time a few weeks later.

## Day 9: Oodnadatta to Marla



Almost time for us to leave Oodnadatta too ...

We woke to a lovely fine, warm day and after being welcomed to - and farewelled from - Oodnadatta by Linnie we set off for Marla. This last section of the Oodnadatta Track was also in great condition and with not much to see or do along the way everyone had arrived in Marla by lunchtime.

The northern end of the Oodnadatta Track marked the end of the unsealed roads for the Challenge and, to celebrate, many riders stopped at the large 'Oodnadatta Track' information sign near Marla to have their photo taken - some were even spotted kissing the bitumen nearby! There was a collective sense of achievement when every one of the 47 Postie Bike riders who had started riding their Postie Bike along the Oodnadatta Track at Marree also rode into Marla - we had all survived the most difficult parts of the 2013 Postie Bike Challenge!

As we pitched our tents and setup camp we had to contend, yet again, with the millions of pesky flies that, over the last few days, had seemed to appear out of nowhere whenever and wherever we stopped. Fly-swatting made the process so frustratingly slow that one Postie Bike rider even resorted to wearing a mesh helmet bag over his head for protection!

## Day 10: Marla to Alice Springs

With a 450 kilometre ride ahead of us this was the longest day of the Challenge and we had to make an early start and maintain a good pace all day. Also, and despite the very overcast morning, this also ended up being the hottest day of the Challenge.

Prior to leaving Marla, and as part of the morning briefing from the mechanics, riders were reminded to regularly check the engine oil level in their bikes. Andy had devised a novel way to remind riders to do this during the 2012 Postie Bike Challenge - when he called out 'Aussie, Aussie, Aussie' the Postie Bike riders were to answer with the call 'Oil, Oil, Oil'.



Oil, oil, oil ...

When I stopped at the Kulgera Roadhouse I noticed oil all over the left sidewall of my Postie Bike's rear tyre. When Andy arrived a short time later I called out 'Oil, Oil, Oil' and, thinking I needed some, he brought a bottle over. However, when he saw the rear tyre Andy realised an engine oil seal had blown. Fortunately he knew it wasn't a serious issue and told me that, provided I kept checking the oil level, I could ride my Postie Bike the final 270 kilometres of the 2013 Postie Bike Challenge to Alice Springs. (I was pleased I didn't have to change Postie Bikes or travel the rest of the way in a support vehicle.)

As the day progressed it became increasingly hot so as I approached Stuarts Well Roadhouse, about 90 kilometres from Alice Springs, I decided to stop for a much needed rest break and to check the oil level in my bike again. I put my left indicator on, started to slow down and checked my mirrors - there were two slip-streaming Postie Bike riders a short distance behind me on my left and a road-train a bit further back behind them. Incredibly, and just as I started to turn left into the roadhouse driveway, both Postie Bike riders 'undertook' me using the shoulder of the road at the same time as the road-train overtook all of us and I had to take evasive action to avoid colliding with the other riders and/or ending up under the road-train. I was really shaken by the near-miss - I couldn't believe I'd nearly been taken out by two fellow Postie Bike riders so close to the end of the 10 day, 3,300 kilometre long Challenge!

Ross arrived at Stuarts Well Roadhouse while I was still there and as soon as I saw him I realised he was not very well. As a result of the combination of a long, hot ride, not drinking enough water and riding gear that was more suited to cooler weather Ross had become dehydrated. Fortunately Mick and Andy recognised the symptoms and Mick bought him a sports drink. The sports drink did the trick - Ross recovered quickly and after also having a rest in the shade he was able to ride his Postie Bike the rest of the way to Alice Springs - and become the oldest rider to complete the 2013 Postie Bike Challenge!

Rotary put on a great reception in a shady park and 47 Postie Bike riders shared their achievement of completing the 2013 Postie Bike Challenge with each other, their family and friends, and the support crew and mechanics. On the final night of the Challenge we stayed in the luxurious Chifley Alice Springs Resort, shared one last evening meal together and watched a slideshow of photos taken during the Challenge by some of the riders. After dinner Ross surprised everyone with his very clever '2013 Postie Bike Challenge' adaptation of the well known Australian song 'I've been everywhere, man' and we all joined him in singing it.

## The 52<sup>nd</sup> Henley on Todd Regatta

The 52<sup>nd</sup> 'Henley on Todd Regatta' was held the day after we arrived in Alice Springs and Rotary invited all the Postie Bike riders to take part in the Grand Parade and to attend the Regatta event afterwards as VIP guests with our family and friends.

Before the Grand Parade started some Postie Bike riders wrote a short message about themselves and the Postie Bike Challenge on the petrol tank of their Postie Bike so that the new owner could learn a little (there's not much space on a Postie Bike tank) about the history of their 'new' Postie Bike! Following the Grand Parade all the Postie Bikes were donated to the Rotary Club of Alice Springs and then sold to the public (the sale proceeds were shared with the Glenorchy Rotary Club in Hobart).



*Postie Bikes - only ever ridden to church on Sundays ...*

Following the Grand Parade we spent the rest of the day in the VIP tent and, with some Postie Bike riders participating in the novelty races and taking part in 'The Imparja Battle Boat Spectacular' (the very loud and equally colourful event finale), it was a very enjoyable, entertaining and relaxing way to celebrate the end of the 2013 Postie Bike Challenge!

Kathy Leslie (#19)

*So that's it for me - I really am done this time. I've completed three Postie Bike Challenges (each a route that had not previously been offered) and I've ridden Postie Bikes almost 10,000 kilometres through every state and territory (except the ACT); through strong winds, torrential rain, hail storms and scorching heat; and through dirt, sand, gravel, mud and snow. In addition, and with the help of my husband Ron who also took part in the 2009 Postie Bike Challenge, I've raised almost \$10,000 for several charities.*

*The Postie Bike Challenge can be a very demanding event, both physically and mentally, but it gives those who take part the chance to ride (rather slowly) along roads less travelled and visit some amazing parts of Australia; to meet interesting people and make lifelong friends; and to support local communities and very deserving charities.*

*Don't just put it on your bucket list - do it!!*



*The key tags from my three Postie Bike Challenges*

# 2013 Postie Bike Challenge

*(I've been everywhere, man)*

Well, I was humpin' my bluey on the dusty Oodnadatta Road,  
When along came 47 Hondas, ridden by some Aussie coves,  
A few Kiwis, a Pom, and a crazy Italian called Luca.

One said, 'If ya goin' to the Alice, with me you can ride.'

So I jumped into his milk crate, and settled down inside.

I said, 'What ya doin' ridin' these Hondas that ya mob is astride?'

He said, 'Well, listen mate, this is the great, Postie Bike charity ride.'

And we've been everywhere, man, started in Hobart Square, man,  
headin' for the Alice up there, man, doin' it 'cause we can, man,  
of travel we've had our fair share, we've been everywhere.

Been to Hobart at the start, can't tell us all apart,  
Hamilton, Burnie, Gretna, Tarraleah,  
Mole Creek, Waratah, on our bikes, we go far.  
Balfour, Brady Lake, in the back is where I ache,  
Bronte Park, Middlehole, I need a Panadol,  
Deloraine, Devonport, that's where the ferry's caught.

And we've been everywhere, man, started in Hobart Square, man,  
headin' for the Alice up there, man, doin' it 'cause we can, man,  
of travel we've had our fair share, we've been everywhere.

Been to Melbourne, Ballarat, Horsham, Ararat,  
Jeparit, Underbool, Murrayville, Lamaroo,  
Beaufort, Hopetoun, bugger me, I hit the ground,  
Murra Warra, Black Heath, Antwerp, Glen Lee,  
Kiata, Kallee, Dodswell, Netherby,  
Aubrey, Robinvale, love being on the trail.

And we've been everywhere, man, started in Hobart Square, man,  
headin' for the Alice up there, man, doin' it 'cause we can, man,  
of travel we've had our fair share, we've been everywhere.

Been to Moorook, Emu Downs, rode through the river towns,  
Loxton, Waikerie, Paruna, Yinkanie,  
Morgan on the Murray, we don't have to hurry.  
Carrieton, Booleroo, Jamestown, Pinaroo,  
Lyndhurst, Copley, Carrieton, Maree,  
Dan an' his mob have done a bloody good job!

And we've been everywhere, man, started in Hobart Square, man,  
headin' for the Alice up there, man, doin' it 'cause we can, man,  
of travel we've had our fair share, we've been everywhere.

Been to Marla, Mintabie, nothing much there to see,  
now we've hit the highway, it's just like child's play,  
Erlidunda, Wallaway, 450 ks today,  
dry river, no rain, I'm startin' to feel the pain,  
we've gotten to the Alice, an' it's just like a palace,  
we're at the end of the ride, and I haven't even died.

And we've been everywhere, man, started in Hobart Square, man,  
headin' for the Alice up there, man, doin' it 'cause we can, man,  
of travel we've had our fair share, we've been everywhere.

We've been here, there, everywhere,  
from Hobart to the Alice.  
Oh yeahhhhh ...

Ross Challinger (# 6)