

An eclipse trip in South Australia

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By Rod Flannery, Australia

30 November 2002 - Start - Cabramurra / Kiandra

I had a long trip planned, so leaving early wasn't going to make much of a difference. That being so, we had a leisurely, lingering breakfast. I was reluctant to go, but also keen to get away. Sandra, Josh and Rhys got extra hugs and at about 10 am I headed off.

I stopped for the first of many fuel stops at the station on the freeway near Wyong. Then it was on through Sydney, which was a drag and on to the boring bit of the Hume Highway. I got caught in a downpour somewhere near Goulburn and hid on the side of the road under a sheet of plywood that I found.

Another fuel stop at Gunning and back onto the Hume. I was starting to get a bit sleepy as I cruised down the Hume at 120 km/h and had to stop a few times for a break and to wake myself up. The Hume is such a drag. Too many cops and way too slow. No wonder people fall asleep and have accidents.

Some time after Yass I had a bit of a scare as I drifted off for a second, the dreaded Micro sleep. I stopped on the side of the road and lay down on the ground and managed about half an hour's sleep. This made me feel much better and I continued on. I knew that when I got off the Hume that the roads would be more interesting and that I would be OK. It was just getting off the Hume that was the issue.

I refuelled at Gundagai and headed out along the Snowy Mountains Highway to Tumut, Talbingo, and Kiandra. It started to sprinkle again near Kiandra and as I climbed the mountains further I rode into the cloud cover. It was cold and wet above 1 500 metres and it was getting close to dark. I had passed a few good campsites a bit earlier, but it had been a bit early to stop. Now that I was keen to find somewhere to camp for the night, there was nothing good anywhere. I was looking at every roadside layover as a likely spot. Somewhere after Cabramurra I rounded a bend and there before me was an alpine survival cabin. It was a rough tin shed, but it had verandas for me to put the bike under and it was dry. I unloaded my gear and set up my bed on the wooden floor. Then I cooked up a cracker dinner of spaghetti and had a couple of good hits of my butterscotch schnapps. Next a fire was in order and I sat under the front veranda, out of the drizzle, and watched the last of the day fade away. There were not many trees at that altitude, mainly alpine heath and meadows. Life rarely gets as good as this.

It got dark about 9 pm and I was in my sleeping bag not long after. I didn't sleep very well, it continued to rain throughout the night, which kept me awake, then it got quiet and still and that kept me awake and finally it started to get windy and the roof flapped and that also kept me awake.

687 km covered.

01 December 2002 - Rye, Mornington Peninsula, Vic

As soon as there was a hint of daylight I was up and heating water for coffee. I sat outside and watched the day lighten as I drank my coffee and had breakfast. I was keen to take the chance for a relaxing few moments, as I knew damn well that there would be precious little relaxing in the coming week.

I packed the bike and headed off for Kahncoban and then on to Corryong where I filled up. I was already sick of refuelling the bike. Theory has it with a range of about 350 km, but there is never a fuel stop exactly when you want one and so I was filling it early all the time so as not to get caught out. Oh, for a 30 plus litre tank.

I went through Tallangatta, Mt Beauty (and filled up) and then up the mountain to Falls Creek. The road up to Falls creek was pretty cool. I got into it a bit and had a good ride. The scenery on top of the mountain was spectacular and I look forward to taking Sandra and the kids there one day. I found a really nice camp spot for future reference. There was a bit of dirt on the Falls Creek to the Omeo Highway section.

Where I joined the Omeo Highway the road was really windy and fun and I also had a good ride here. It is cut out of the side of the hill with the river just below. I really carved up all the cars and was diving heavily into each corner under brakes. I was brought back to reality when a guy on a sports bike carved me up, but we were both having fun, just at different levels. He also had no gear and was probably only out for the day. I had a long way yet to go.

I topped up at Omeo and headed down to Bairnsdale. I had a bright idea at Bairnsdale. The plan was that I could ride down the South Gippsland Highway to the Mornington Peninsula and catch the ferry across the heads of Port Phillip Bay to Queenscliff. That way I could have a ferry ride and give Melbourne the slip. I have been keen to check out the entrance to Port Phillip Bay for years after reading about the dreaded 'The Rip' entrance in nautical books.

I had a few hundred kilometres to cover if I was to get to the ferry on time. I did the sums in my head and had enough time, just. I arrived at Sorrento just as the ferry was leaving the pier. Not the worst thing as it was a nice place with a long reserve right on the waters edge of the bay. I pitched the tent right next to the water at Rye and relaxed with a great view and schnapps.

The Mornington Coastal Reserve was a great place to spend the night. Free, if you could dodge the Ranger. I had a chat to a Swiss couple that were touring the world for a few years. They had been everywhere apparently. I cooked up a nice rice dinner and had a spot of schnapps on the beach as the sun set. I had visions of going for a beer at one of the nice pubs, but was too tired and lost interest when it got dark and I was soon asleep.

872 km covered.

02 December 2002 - Meningie SA

Woke to a lovely day and packed the bike in record time. I rode the few kilometres to Sorrento and then cruised on past and down the road to Portsea. I just spent about an hour cruising around and looking at the coast down into Bass Strait. I then headed back to the pier at Sorrento and organized my ticket on

the 7 am ferry. Just as I lined up another bike turned up and we chatted for a while. He was taking his bike over to the other side at Queenscliff so he could ride for the day down the Great Ocean Road as far as Apollo Bay and back. Just a days outing. He wasn't a bad sort of guy and very informed about Port Phillip Bay and the Rip. He was in fact an engineer on the pilot boats that bring the big ships into port.

We disembarked at Queenscliff after about 40 minutes and we went our separate ways. I wanted to look at the infamous Rip entrance to the Bay and so I road out to the lighthouse to a look out. While I was there I had some breakfast and cleaned my teeth while I checked out 'The Rip'. It looked as tame as a kitten, but I understand it wasn't always like that.

I continued on and went to Torquay for fuel. Then I continued on and had a look at Bells Beach. Supposedly a place of legend for surfers, but it looked fairly ordinary to me. I guess you have to be a surfer to appreciate it.

I rode on to Lorne and stopped at a hot bread shop for some morning tea. I fed a magpie by hand as I sat in the park eating. Lorne was as far as Sandra and I had been able to go on the Great Ocean Road (GOR) the last time we had been there. Rain had washed away a bridge causing us to detour around the best part of the road, with us joining it at Apollo Bay. This time however, was going to be different. Lorne had changed somewhat in the last 17 years, but it was still recognizable.

I left Lorne and started the best of the GOR. It was windy and picturesque and a bit scary, but I got into it just the same. Not that I went stupid, but I was there for a bit of fun and fun I had. The road was basically one tight corner after another until Apollo Bay, winding around the cliffs. The weather was overcast and cool.

At Apollo Bay the road left the coast and went into the forest. At the turn off to Cape Ottway I turned left and did the 18 kilometres into the lighthouse. When I arrived there I found that the Nat Park Corporation ran it, quite nicely, and they wanted an entrance fee just to get onto the grounds. I wasn't interested in this, so I had some lunch and continued on.

The road joined the coast again at Princetown. Sandy and I had stayed a night here on our last visit and it looked almost the same now. Between Princetown and Pt Campbell was the Twelve Apostles. I stopped to look at the Twelve Apostles and it was devastatingly hot. Like last time this section of road takes forever as I was inclined to stop and look at everything. There is a lot to look at. The coastline is spectacular. I stopped at Pt Campbell and fuelled up (again).

We had stayed at Peterborough last time and it was exactly as I remembered it. After leaving Peterborough a headwind stated to plague me. It was very strong and gusty and made riding very difficult. I pushed on going through Warnambool and Portland. I left the main road at this point and hugged the secondary roads closer to the coast, stopping just short of the border at Nelson for petrol. The road between Portland and Nelson was largely pine forests. I continued on and went through Mount Gambier, Millicent and then continued on the lesser coastal roads through Beachport and Robe until I reached Kingston SE and joined the main Princes Highway again.

It was getting later in the afternoon and I had to start thinking about somewhere to stop for the night. I thought that I might be able to find a camp somewhere on the side of the road in the Coorong Nat Park, but as I rode through

here into the setting sun it all looked very uninviting. I ended up getting into a town called Meningie just before dark and there was a lovely little camping ground on the edge of the Albert Lake. The lake was really quite large as it was barely possible to see across the other side. By the time I had cooked dinner and had some schnapps it was dark. I had a nice hot shower and crawled into my sleeping bag and slept the sleep of the innocent.

920 km covered.

03 December 2002 - Port Augusta, SA (30km south)

Woke to another nice day. Packed up and headed off for Port Augusta. I turned west before getting to Taillem Bend and the main Highway. Freeways are to be avoided at all cost. I was trying to avoid highways as much as possible. I crossed a ferry into a nice little place called Wellington and then continued on to Strathalbyn. This was largely through wine country. I was forced to join the main freeway into Adelaide at Mt Barker. This bit of road has been upgraded in the last few years. In times past there was a very windy section of road from Mt Lofty down to Adelaide. This has now been replaced with a freeway all the way to the bottom. It is very steep, but an engineering masterpiece.

I rode through Adelaide as quickly as possible and got onto the road heading north. The road north of Adelaide through Pt Wakefield and a bit beyond is divided into four lanes. At this point I had my first scare of the trip. Not far after it returns to just two lanes an approaching truck decided to overtake another approaching truck. I had them both coming down my throat. I had plenty of time and slowed down and got off the road. By the time the truck had seen me he panicked and locked it up. Blue smoke erupted from the trailer and then he managed to get the trailer a bit sideways. He eventually got it all back together, but it was looking to be interesting. He gave me a sheepish wave as he went past.

I had a quick stop at Crystal Brook for fuel and then headed into Port Pirie for a few supplies. I was also keen to check out Pirie again. I spent the night of my 24th birthday there with Roger Stanmore. It was one of those nights to remember. We had been caught in town while my bike (Harley) had been broken down after the Birdsville trip in 1986. We had drunk heaps and on the night I was a pool-playing god. Way in the past, time to move on.

In Pirie I purchased a 'shade 14' welding lens and a new gas cylinder for my stove. I left Pt Pirie and made a dash for Pt Augusta, as I wanted to get well clear of it that afternoon. The eclipse was in about 28 hours and I wanted to be well on my way to Pt Lincoln that afternoon. I bought some food at Pt Augusta and headed straight out and down to Whyalla where I filled up the bike and chatted up the girl at the service station. I continued on to Cowell, which is where it all started to come unstuck. As I approached Cowell I stated to wonder how my back tyre was faring. I was checking it each morning, but I was doing big miles. I stopped for an inspection and was shattered. The rear tyre was stuffed. It was going to be at least another 1 000 km round trip down through Pt Lincoln and then up to Streaky Bay and Ceduna and back to Pt Augusta. There was no way I would get a tyre before Pt Augusta so there was no option but go back. I was 180 km away from Pt Augusta and not able to get back in time to get a tyre that afternoon, and that is assuming they had a tyre in the right size. If they didn't have anything to fit then it was probably back to Adelaide, perhaps 500 km. I was in a pickle.

I turned around right then and did the 180 km I had just ridden, most of the way back to Pt Augusta. I found a nice looking sand hill off to the left of the

road about 30 km out of town and rode the bike into a clearing to spend the night. As I was riding the bike up the sandy track I over balanced in the sand and dropped the bike on the left side. I couldn't stand it up, so I left it and unpacked the gear carrying it up to the campsite. Then I picked up the bike and rode it to where I was going to camp and put it on the side stand. As I was setting the side stand I looked down and found a 2-dollar coin on top of the sand. I looked as if it had been there quite a long time. Strangely enough, the last time I had been in Pt Augusta in 1986 I'd had bike trouble and had to camp on the side of the road on the southern side of Pt Augusta. As I was parking the bike that time I had found a 10-cent piece on the ground at my feet. Synchronicity!!!

I pitched my tent and drank the last of my schnapps. I cooked dinner and as the sun set I had a great view of the Spencer Gulf and Lincoln Gap on one side and the orange desert on the other. I passed the time by ringing a few people up as I had excellent mobile service. Isn't technology wonderful?

836 km covered.

04 December 2002 - Pimba, SA

I woke early and packed up my gear. I had to carry it to the road before riding the bike down and parking it so I could tie my gear on. I rode the 30 km back into Pt Augusta and sat at the bike shop and waited for it to open.

I was very doubtful that he would have a tyre for my bike, but without it my eclipse was over. I didn't trust my tyre to even get me the 200 km each way to Woomera and back. I would be stranded until a tyre could be shipped in. It was not the sort of area that you wanted to be stranded by something as mundane as a tyre wearing out. Well as luck would have it, he had a tyre for the back, which I got him to fit up for me. While he was doing that I checked on whether he had a front tyre. The front rim on the BMW is a really odd size, but as luck would have it he had a tyre to fit. Even though I didn't need it there and then I thought it prudent to buy it and carry it with me. At least if I had the tyre I would have options if I needed it.

All kitted out I was on the road again at 10:30 and stopped to get fuel (again). I was going to make the shortest line to Ceduna as I could at 464 km. I had a good 7 hours to get there, but after talking to another biker at the servo I started to have doubts about the sense in going to Ceduna. They were predicting cloud and 50 000 people. The centre of town was going to be closed off to traffic for a street party. That would mean not pulling up in front of the pub, parking the bike and sauntering in for a beer. It would mean designated parking areas out of town, parking fees, porta loos. I was quickly losing interest in all that. I headed off anyway and after about 30 km I looked ahead and all I could see was overcast skies. Looking right over my shoulder I saw clear skies. I sat and contemplated for a few minutes and then turned around. I had been to Ceduna in the past but I had never seen an eclipse and that was the purpose for my trip.

I turned around and headed for Pimba. It was a tedious ride but I stopped at a few of the salt lakes for a look and took a few pictures on some of the scenic lookouts. I made it to Pimba and was amazed at the crowds of people. Bus loads of Jap tourists all wearing suits and ties in the desert heat. Very strange. It was hot windy and dusty and there were people everywhere. There was even a line to get fuel. I topped the bike up and headed north again. I had to be about half way between Pimba and Glendambonear Wirramina Station to be on the path of the Totality.

It was obvious to tell where the path of the eclipse was going to be. There was a sign saying so, and also speed signs to slow people down to 60 kph. There were also crowds of people all lined up and parked on the side of the road. This was such a bizarre sight in this particular place. Gibber plains and salt lakes in the distance surrounded us. It is usually one of those places where there is no one. How unbelievably weird.

I stopped near another guy on a bike, who had come from Sydney. It turns out we had mutual friends. We chatted the afternoon away. It was good to have someone to talk to. The wind was howling in at about 65 km/h with nothing to break it. The afternoon drifted on and another bike turned up. He was from Darwin and we also had mutual acquaintances.

It was way too windy for me to cook dinner so I had a can of salmon and a can of peaches cold. Filling but not very appetizing.

Eventually the sun started to be eaten up by the moon and it began to get dim. I watched the eclipse through the welding lens that I had bought. It was such a bizarre sight, all the people lined up on the side of the road trying NOT to look at the sky. It got closer and closer to the moment of Totality and then it was happening. It was dark all around with a few stars out and the ring of the eclipse in the sky. It was over all too soon.

I waited for the sun to set and then I headed off with the other biker for the ride back to Pimba. It had been my intention to camp the night where I had watched the eclipse, but with the wind blowing like a bastard and there being no decent place to put a tent I decided to get going. We lobbied back into Pimba and I had three beers before putting my tent up in the car park and crashing out.

388 km covered (sooks day).

05 December 2002 - Cobar

I woke the next morning with a fierce headache and a very crook stomach. Must have been something I ate. I was keen to get away fairly early, but I was just not up to it. I wandered down to the Pimba roadhouse pub and ordered some bacon and eggs for breakfast and struggled through them, but felt better for it. I still can't understand how I can have been so sick on only three beers. Anyway.

I finally had my tent and gear packed and I headed off at about 07:30. I did manage to get a look at a really nice desert sunrise as I packed.

I made my way to Pt Augusta and continued on through Wilmington, Orroro and then to Peterborough. I had morning tea at Peterborough and then continued on toward Broken Hill. It had been my intention to drop down further and travel through Burra and head over through Renmark and ride across the Hay Plains, but the closer I got to Peterborough the more the sky threatened and at Peterborough it started to rain. The sky toward Broken Hill looked a bit clearer and I decided to make my life easy and get home the shortest way. I was keen to see Sandra and the boys as I was really missing them. I had to stop before Broken Hill as I was having stomach problems, need I say more?

At Broken Hill I stopped for lunch at a hot bread shop and rang Sandra to say

that I was on my way home. My intention had been to meet up with the other Pluckers at Oberon and spend the weekend at Thrashers, but now that I was on my way home.... I WAS ON MY WAY HOME. Nothing was going to stop me.

I had a few more emergency stops after BH on the way to Willcania. The road between BH and Willcania was the driest place I have ever seen or been. There were dust storms all the way with wily willy's everywhere and rivers of sand blowing across the road. It really was hideous. I stopped to talk to a couple of German tourists that were having car trouble just before Willcania. They said they may stay the night there and I advised them against it. Advice I was planning to heed myself. I filled up at Willcania and kept going, but it meant that I wouldn't get into Cobar until after dark. As dusk approached the roo's started to come out. They were everywhere; as thick as flies.

It had to happen. At one point an approaching truck had a roo jump out in front of it, right when it was in front of me. The impact made the animal explode and it sprayed me as it went under the truck, only to pop out between the wheels right next to me. It was very close to hitting me on the way past. I increased my vigilance and eventually arrived at Cobar about an hour after dark.

I stopped at one of the pubs and had a few schooners of Toohey Old (Black) and then went to the caravan park and set up camp. We had stayed at this park before. I cooked a late dinner and crashed out right away.

1 084 km covered.

06 December 2002 - Home

I woke to a perfect day. It was my day to arrive home. Packed and showered I headed off very refreshed and set a lively pace. I had 710 km to cover and didn't want to waste any time. There wasn't anything really eventful in the day other than arriving home. That was the best event of all. It was Friday afternoon and Sandra and the boys were almost on their way to swimming club. I changed quickly and went with them and had a nice relaxing stretch on the grass while I talked to Sandra and watched the boys swim.

710 km covered

Total distance: 5 497 km

The bike had performed flawlessly. To think that I had nearly talked myself into getting rid of it and buying a new one. The new 2002 model R1150R had not felt greatly different to my 95 R1100R. I had been talking myself into how bad the bike felt for quite a while, but in reality all it needed was a new front shock and a decent tune up. As usually happens. After I have been away, I get home and the first thing I did is to get the maps out and to start planning the next trip. One thing is for sure, though, any future trip will be on my current BMW.

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