



TEN YEARS ON TWO WHEELS IN AUSTRALIA

1971 - 1981

Murray Barnard

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Adventures in Australia

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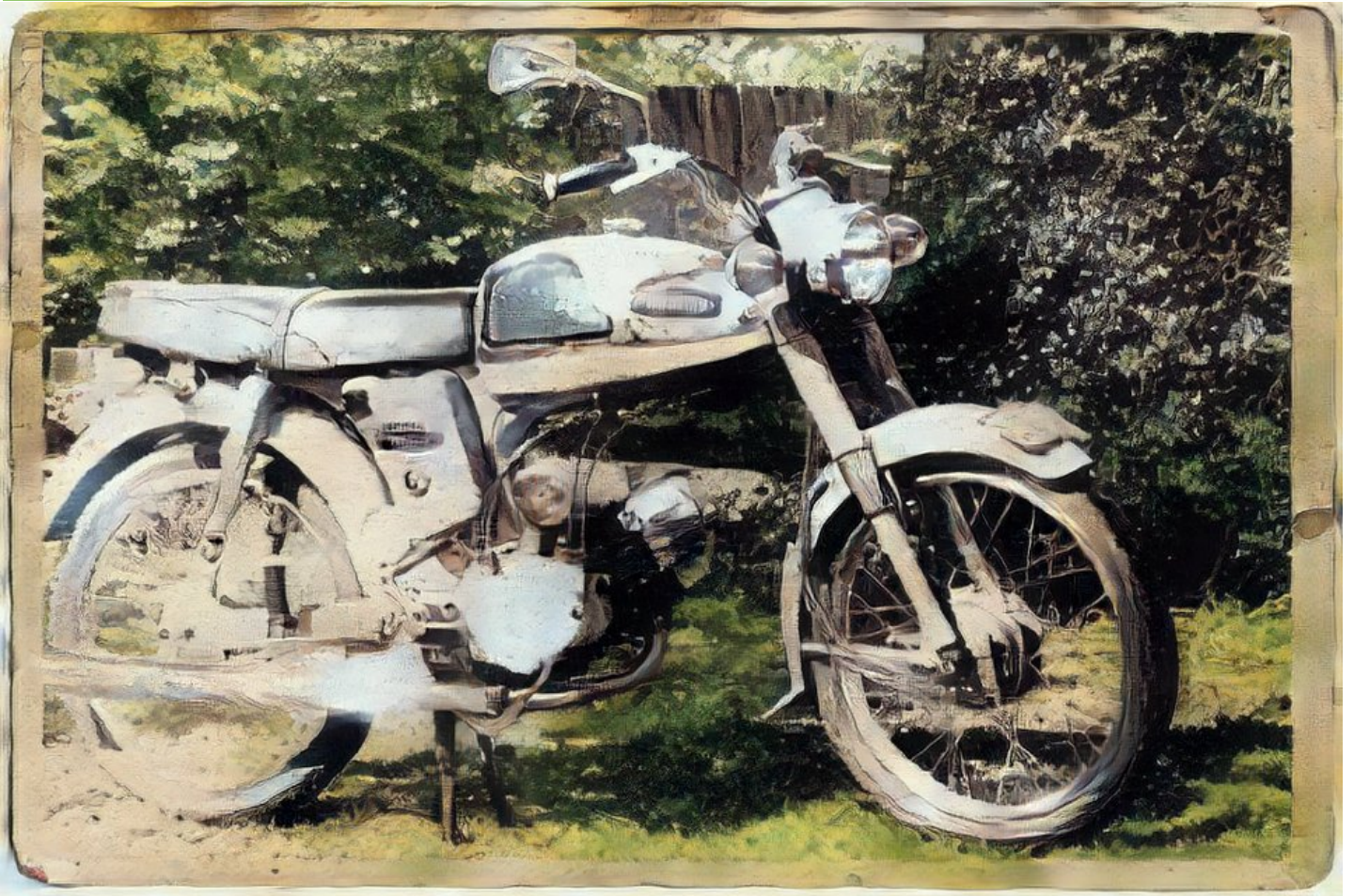


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FALTERING STEPS



My first motorcycle was a 100cc Yamaha, I had just turned 18 and it cost me \$200 second hand, a huge investment when I took home \$40 a fortnight and handed over half as board. I thought the Yamaha was a beast. I had been so perturbed by my Mother's driving when I was a kid that I was more satisfied with buying a motorcycle than considering a car. I figured I was only putting myself at risk rather than other people. Well at least that is how my angst ridden teen brain thought. This was reinforced when I saw a mate of mine pull into a service station to grab some fuel and he drove his Ford Anglia straight into the wall of the garage. Such was the standard of driving in those days. Another mate was driving along near the Porongorups and ran his Vauxhall Velox off the road into a tree!

A workmate gave me rudimentary lessons whilst I perfected my riding by darting about the much smaller Metropolitan area in 1970. The first time it rained I learnt that not wearing a helmet, gloves or goggles hurt at speed. Also just wearing a jumper was not the greatest wet weather protection.

In those days it was common for a large crowd to gather at the Perth Town Hall clock tower at Hay and Barrack Sts to see in the New year. So that is what I did on a damp New year's Eve. I then first discovered my limits by falling off a bit later after midnight on a wet road, turning from St Georges Tce into King St, and losing the back wheel on a metal manhole cover. It hurt hitting the road and sliding across the bitumen didn't impress any of the spectators. Still it was only a 100cc bike so no great damage done to the machine. More so my pride, knees and elbows suffered. Time to get a license so off I tramped to get legal. Somehow I passed the test at the Old Girl's School in Wellington St. Having been riding on the roads for months I guess I had learnt something, if not good sense!

I took off for Katanning one weekend soon after I got my license, I was going to see an old couple who had a large collection of old newspapers from the Boer War, death of Queen Victoria, WW1 and WW2 etc. They wanted to pass them on to someone who would preserve them, *(which I did, I only donated them to a Museum in Perth this year)*. To me, Katanning was a million miles away, this was my first independent travel out of the City. I got up at some absurd hour, it was only 5am when I went through Kenwick.



I had no riding gear at all, just a jumper for the cold. It was 200 miles to Katanning. That is 400 miles in a day return. A long way for a first country ride and especially on a 100c machine. Anyway I got there OK but almost lost the bike down an embankment between Arthur River and Wagin. I pulled over for a break, put my left foot down to lean the bike on to the sidestand and I only felt air. Somehow I regained my balance and did not go rolling down the embankment with the bike.



I discovered touring when a bunch of mates decided to go away to Busselton for a long weekend as New Year's Day approached at the end of 1970. My mates all piled into a friend's Morris 1100 for the journey. Now my disdain for cars was still strong and I had experienced my friend's erratic driving for most of the year before I got the Yamaha, thus I was reluctant to travel by car. So, I rode the trusty Yamaha.

We travelled down to Busselton, which was a lovely little town then, shaded by peppermint trees, and for a highlight went to dance at the local showgrounds. A sad bunch we were lining the walls and lusting after the Busso girls. Couldn't dance for nuts and too shy to talk to them. I knew a Capel girl so we went out to see her at her folk's farm. She wasn't home. Away working at the Dunsborough store we were told. So my friend took me to Dunsborough in his car. Dunsborough was just a collection of shacks in the bush then. He dropped me off whilst they went on to Yallingup; but, she wasn't there either. So romance forestalled I went back to the Busselton Road to hitch-hike back. Not one car stopped for me. I trudged on wearily and then my friends coming back from Yallingup pulled up and gave me a lift. I never tried hitch-hiking again. I never saw the Capel girl again until 20 years later when she got a job in the same place where I worked. Neither of us recognised each other for a couple of years until I mentioned a common acquaintance and to our great embarrassment we realised we had met two decades earlier.

We all decided to go to Capes Naturalist and Leeuwin so off the gang in the car trundled and I rode the Yammie. Caves Road was dirt then and heavily corrugated. I bashed down it on the Yamaha and the car ate my dirt. After clambering around the water wheel etc we headed back up to Busselton. I decided to test the Yammie's performance potential and after seeing the needle crawl into the 70s figured that there was not much more I could wring out of it.

Soon after that brilliant speed test, unsurprisingly, things started to go wrong. The clutch nipple broke on the way home from work one day soon after, leaving me somewhat distraught at home at my lack of mobility. My motorcycle mad work colleague, who was more mechanically capable, came over, re-soldered the nipple and got me mobile again. Andrew was a keen scrambles rider and ended up riding Speedway at Claremont and eventually riding League in the UK.

I was keen on more performance so early 1971, I sought out a Kawasaki 250 Samurai at Cowies in Canning Highway. The Samurai was out of stock and my feeble 18 year old self was easily convinced by the able salesman, Kevin Cowie, that I really wanted the newly released F7 175cc trail bike. Within days I was riding on Scarborough Beach Road when the Yamaha started to sound like steam engine and ran rough. The engine had shat itself. I rang Cowies and told them and suggested they might not want to trade it in now. They eagerly agreed to honour the trade in and closed the deal on the rather expensive trail bike I had "chosen." I cannot recall the trade-in valuation now, but I guess it was a pittance. The trailee cost close to \$800 bucks and the Commonwealth Bank wouldn't lend me the money. One look at my pimply self would have told them that I was not a good risk on a motorcycle. My work credit society came to my rescue and thus the Yamaha was retired and I moved on to my adventures destroying a Kawasaki F7.

After nearly twenty years of limited vistas, it was time to spread my wings.....

NEWCHUMS TO THE GOLDFIELDS

In 1971 I bought a Kawasaki 175 F7 trial bike. One of Kawasaki's first series of purpose built trail bikes, the Kawasaki was fast and no great shakes in the dirt. Better than the 175 Bushwacker which it replaced, however. I saw a Bushwacker break in half on Buckland Hill in Mosman Park one day doing jumps along a track between the gun pits and Stirling Highway. The frame clearly left something to be desired. In those days we could ride up and down the tracks of the old Harley Scramble course.

The Kawasaki F7 had adjustable axle positions for trail or road. In the trail position if you rode on the road at any speed you could get up quite a speed wobble. Jumping over the berms at Buckland Hill I landed front wheel first and just about knocked my teeth out on the handlebar cross brace. The forks didn't have much damping! Riding on the road on knobbly trials tyres was a challenge. I think I fell off half a dozen times before I mastered the lack off grip under brakes on the road.

I didn't go into Cowies on Canning Highway South Perth to buy a trail bike. I went there looking for a new Samurai 250 road bike. I liked the look of the Kawasaki rotary valve twins and thought at that stage of my motorcycling career a 250 was big enough. A 500 Mach III sounded like a sure way to kill myself after only 3 months of riding motorcycles. I was just 18yo and a callow youth.

I was easy pickings for a salesman of the calibre of Kevin Cowie. He told me he had no Samurai's on the floor, had I considered an F7. No, of course not; but, after a while he'd persuaded me to buy one. \$720! I went to the Commonwealth Bank to borrow the money; but, of course they wouldn't lend me the money to buy a motorcycle. Somehow I got a loan from a credit society and soon I was in possession of a 175 trailee!

Off I went to try it out. The closest bit of off road land was along the front of the river in South Perth. It was undeveloped swamp and grassland then. I opened up the beast and she rocketed across the grass. As I zoomed along, I suddenly espied a large drainage ditch in front of me, the grass was wet, so I applied the brakes and somehow stayed upright and also just avoided the ditch. Cartwheeling into and out of a ditch on a brand new bike, would have done the bike and I no good at all!



A mate of mine, Carl, had a 250 Triumph which we took to the Herne Hill scramble track for a bit of dirt riding. We rode back to his place and he heard a noise so leant down next to the motor to listen, gave the throttle a blip and the motor exploded into bits. Carl took the bike in bits to Herb Watson in Vic Park who traded it in and for a big wad of cash sold him an F7 as well!

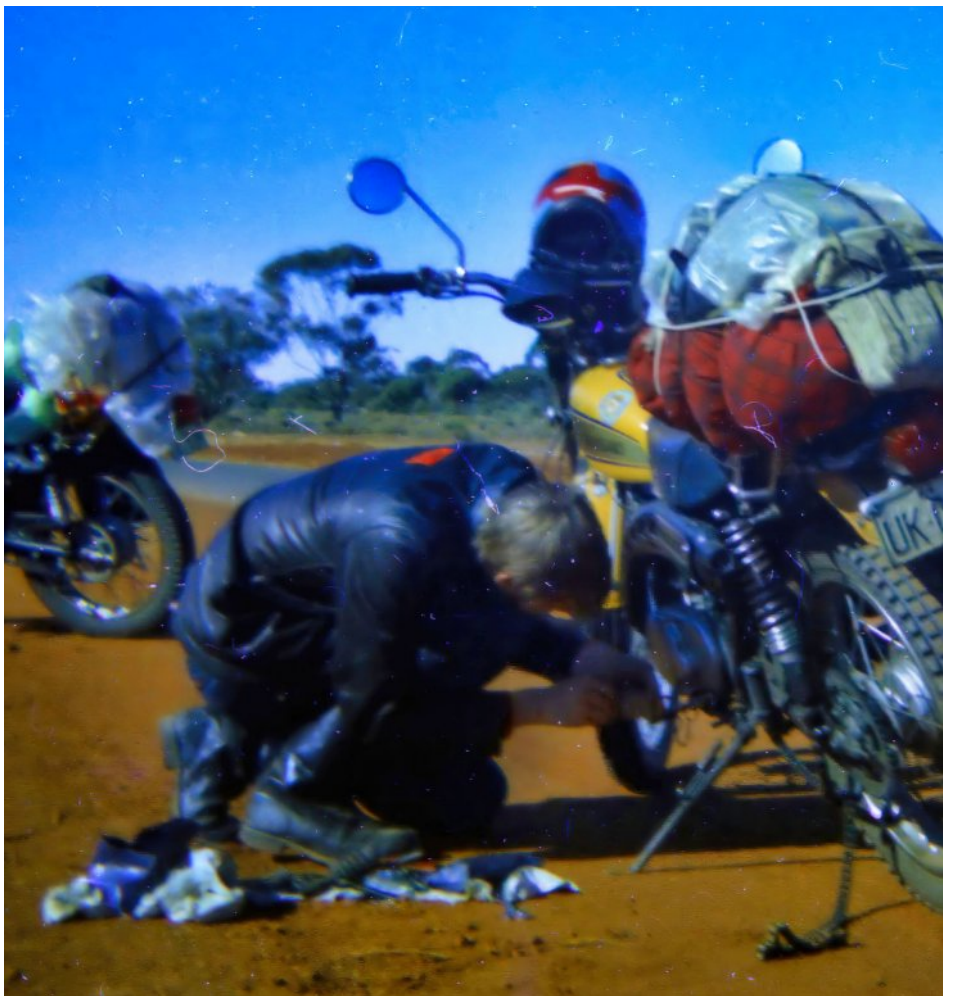
The Kawasakis were claimed to produce 21.5 hp, which was pretty good for a 175 at the time. The Kawasaki F7 ran a rotary valve and these engines pumped out the power. Once I was filling up the tank in Doubleview and a guy, I remembered from school, pulled in on a Suzuki 185 trailbike. He was a real bully in High School and had given me a hard time. Seeing me on a bike though he suddenly was great mate of mine (in his view anyway). He dared me to a drag, so we lined up on Sackville Terrace and then we were off. The Kawasaki left his 185 for dead. He was surprisingly reasonable about it. A few years late but finally had my revenge!

Carl and I decided on our first big trip was to be to Kalgoorlie. So we loaded up the bikes and took off on the F7s for the Goldfields in July. We found we could easily sit at 55mph all day on the Kawasakis. The little old two stroke single returned just on 90 mpg at that speed! We got as far as halfway between Southern Cross and Coolgardie by dark, so we pulled into a lay by and put down groundsheets and got into our sleeping bags, with the bikes next to us. Being right next to the Highway we had road trains going by all night, also at this time the railway went past on the other side of the pipeline, so the odd goods train and the Westland frequently disturbed our sleep. We woke up covered in dew and freezing cold, it was July after all! To our surprise, parked right next to us was a huge road train. Finally getting to sleep we hadn't even heard it pull in, fortunately the driver had seen the bikes. Being run over in a sleeping bag would have been uncomfortable!



Still cold, we headed off towards Coolgardie. On the way we took a side track to a pumping station, it was abandoned; but, still had all the machinery, steam boilers etc and the the enormous tools, spanners etc on the wall. It was like the workers had walked out the day before. We had a look around and then headed back to the main road. Twelve miles out of Coolgardie and suddenly my bike had no drive and rolled to a stop. The chain's split-link had come apart and the chain lay useless in the red dirt.

We didn't have a spare link, we were so technically ignorant then we didn't even know about a split link! Carl towed me into Coolgardie, Being towed on a bike is a pretty hair raising experience. We went to Ben Prior's shop which in addition to a collection of different fuel bowsers had an assortment of everything ever made on his crowded shelves inside. We asked if he had any drive chains or split links but he had nothing the right size. We had a look around his amazing open air museum. Today it is just a shell of what it used to be.





So late in the day Carl towed me into Kalgoorlie. it was dark by then and it was a terrifying experience. Stability is difficult when being towed as is not colliding with the tow bike. When I saw the lights of Kal in the distance it was relief. I was towed through Kal and out to where we were staying. We camped there and it was freezing! We kipped at a girlfriend's Grandad's place. She was up there at the time. It was all very innocent. She was a trainee nurse and was due to fly out to London as soon as she qualified.

The next day we rode around Kal to all the bike shops we could find, holding up my sad broken chain. Every shop we went to said the



same. "Nope we don't carry that size chain and nope, we don't have a split link!" Dejected we had a quick look around Kal and decided to book passage on the Westland back to Perth and put the bikes in the goods wagon. The train travelled by night to Perth.

Best thing we did on the whole trip. The Westland was old as can be. The carriages came out the early 1900s by the look of them, with old hand basins and leather seats. They were great. The train was awfully slow and it was daylight as we came down through the Avon Valley.



We unloaded the bikes and accessed a split link from Kevin Cowies. It was only later we realised what newchums we were. A different size chain would have run on the Kawasaki's sprockets. We could have grabbed a Suzuki TS185 or Yamaha DT 175 chain! What got me was why none of the shops at Kal thought laterally as well. None of them suggested fitting a new chain on the bike.



Above: Ben Prior's service station at Coolgardie & Below: the Kawasakis arrive back at the Perth Central Railway Station



SNOWY MOUNTAINS HIGH



1972 and the new-chums, i.e my high-school mate Carl and I, felt the urge to travel to regions unknown. In my case the urge was also propelled by the urge to meet my pen-pal, a young lass who lived on a dairy farm outside of Orbost in the Gippsland. In those days, Annual leave from work had been two weeks a year, by 1972 I think it had crept up to 3 weeks a year, so getting away was a luxury and generally a once a year opportunity and necessarily fairly rushed. As such we had no time to ride across the continent, especially as a large part of the Nullarbor was unsealed. We needed our machines and air travel was a rich man's venture, so shipping both the bikes and ourselves by train was the go.

We had little idea about anything; but, we did manage to get our bikes, both Kawasaki 175cc F7s, out to the Kewdale freight yards and onto a train which would take them to Spencer St Station in Melbourne. Couldn't have cost much as we had very little money at such a young age. We drained the fuel, bundled up the bikes in our sleeping bags and blankets to protect them from knocks and bouncing around and strapped some gear on the carrier rack. We kissed the bikes goodbye and hoped that the railway company would not pile too much freight on to them. The idea of using shipping crates was completely alien to us back in those pre-container days. The bikes just went into a goods van like all the rest of the freight and mail bags!

To get ourselves to Victoria we hopped on the Trans-Australian Railway, although by then they had built the standard gauge and probably called it something else. We took on board some nibbles and books and retired to our cabin in the sleeper car, and comfortable it was.



First stop was Kalgoorlie and Carl suggested we try to visit as many pubs as we could in the hour stop we had available. Stupid as it was to go anywhere too far from the train, it was not long before Kalgoorlie was treated to sight of two naïve teenagers sprinting from Hotel to Hotel as fast as they could go. We achieved 12 pubs in the hour and were lucky enough to still get back on our train in time to head over the Nullarbor. (Note: *we didn't stop at the Pubs to drink, we just darted past as many as we could*).

The Nullarbor passed as the Nullarbor does with short stops at remote stations such as Xanthus, Cook and Forrest along the way. Eating in the dining car and laying back enjoying the Nullarbor was very relaxing and a great way to travel before train travel became the pursuit of the rich and air travel the choice of the cattle class of society (i.e. me).

You don't actually see a lot from the train crossing the Nullarbor, it certainly is a flat featureless affair largely. A lot of the journey was at night. We reached Kalgoorlie early evening, woke up in the middle of nowhere and stretched our legs at the odd stop on the Nullarbor, being wary not to wander too far!

Night fell and we rattled into Port Augusta which had a grand station then. Changed trains for a slow commute to Adelaide, wobbled over a shaky bridge across the dregs of Spencer Gulf, across the salt marsh flats, past the Gaol and off Southwards with the Gulf on one side and the Lofty Ranges on the other. A stop at Port Pirie where we risked lead poisoning from the billowing smokestacks of industry before slowly progressing closer to the South Australian capital. Through Snowtown, which was later to be the scene of grisly murders. During the short stop there some clearly desperate men ran madly from the train to the pub to buy a few bottles of beer and returned in time to reboard and imbibe in their precious plunder!



We reached Adelaide with time to wander the streets near the impressive Central Station, satiate our appetite at the pie cart, although without the pea slurry and rejoined the train for the night ride to Melbourne. Arriving at Spencer Street Station we sought out the freight yard to reclaim our motorcycles. Being advised that they had arrived we were directed to a platform where the freight train was standing. With the help of some railway staff the machines were removed from the goods van to the platform where we set to unwrapping the bikes and preparing them for the road again. Next second some very officious men came bounding up demanding to know what we were doing and said we had no right to be there. They were railway police it seems and they marched us off to their office for interrogation. They were very brusque and officious and threatened with all sorts of consequences. A great welcome to Melbourne I must say so. Of course, after a while they settled down and had to accept we had the correct papers and had been directed to the platform to collect our machines. I guess the sight of two scruffy young guys with motorcycles was too much for them to comprehend.

Sadly, my poor Kawasaki trailbike had not survived the trip unscathed. Goodness knows how much bouncing it had experienced or how much freight was thrown in the van as well, for it's sidestand mount had broken off the frame. This was an issue as the bike had no other stand.

The other problem was, we had too much stuff! We had heavy suitcases with clothes and enough gear to furnish a four bedroom home, or so it seemed as we tried to strap it all on the back of the bikes. I had a cousin in Melbourne, some 12 years older than me who kindly offered to put us up for the night, so we struggled out of Melbourne, as it got dark, along Whitehorse Road to Boxhill. It seemed a long way and by Perth standards the traffic was terrifying. We arrived safely and my kindly cousin allowed us to leave our ungainly suitcases with him, to collect on our return. *(Cardboard suitcases were the norm still, in my socio-economic society, held together by a leather strap. Even at the time they were probably 30+ years old and heavy. Backpacks and soft luggage were unknown to us then and anyway we probably couldn't afford them even if we had known about them!)*

Somehow, we had managed to take leave in July, which is survivable in Perth, but in Victoria could be a challenge akin to Scott's attempt to reach the South Pole. We were absolutely unprepared for such cold and wet weather. We somehow found our way out of Melbourne through Dandenong to the Princes Highway and headed for the Gippsland. Somewhere at Warragul we found a workshop where the owner rewelded the sidestand mount on to my Kawasaki. Heaven, I could park the bike again without looking for a wall or fencepost and best of all he didn't charge much for a repair that lasted for the life of the bike, as far as I know. We refueled at Traralgon after passing by the massive heavily smoking cooling towers of Yallourn power station. Whilst refueling a chap on a Honda 350 twin pulled in and was surprised to see the WA plates on the bikes. He asked about the fuel consumption of the little two stroke rotary valve singles and was astonished when we told him 95-100 miles per gallon was the norm sitting at 55mph all day. *(55mph was a comfortable cruising speed on the bikes).*

We rolled on and down into Lakes Entrance and then on towards Orbost which we reached late in the day after descending down into the valley of the Snowy River. It felt very adventurous and iconic. Beautiful and so green.

From Orbost, we rattled on to Brodribb River where my pen gal (Karen) lived on a dairy farm. We were welcomed by her family and met Karen and her girlfriend Vicki, who was especially staying overnight, as three was a crowd presumably. We enjoyed a country dinner of rabbit and vegetables and picked a few shotgun pellets out of the meal. Carl and I the two young ladies then retired to the lounge for a long evening getting to know each other and no doubt a lot of nonsense in front of a wood fire and sipping on copious amounts of strong alcohol. Carl and I retired to the spare bedroom eventually only for me to be woken suddenly by loud vomiting noises as Carl proceeded to projectile vomit across the room, even spattering the ceiling. The drink had not suited him. I drifted off again as he dealt with the mess, I hoped. After this inauspicious start, we explored the dairy farm and discovered just how smelly cow poo is and how many flies there are on a dairy farm. We were soon off with the girls on the back of the bikes to explore the beautiful Orbost region.



Rode into Orbost, visited the bean factory (for Karen to meet a friend), explored the main street and went to a football match, where some strange dynamics played out. As we sat on the bikes, a group of girls came over and started abusing Karen and Vicki. Calling all sorts of names, presumably for hanging out with some out of town bikies (*NB. I doubt bikies actually ride Kawasaki F7s*). So, we took off and did what young people do and just hung out. That night we went out of town to the Newmerella Rodeo. Weren't there long and same thing happened, a group came up abusing us and one guy punched out at Carl in the dark, fortunately without serious injury. We took off and went back to town. Never did work out what the problem was. Presumably some history there that we don't know about. Back in town Karen and Vicki took us to the Post Office where we tried to ring home using Subscriber Trunk Dialing, but without success, we couldn't raise anyone. Calling long distance in those days was heaps expensive anyway. Carl took off the next day riding all the way back to Bairnsdale to ring his girlfriend in Perth. A long return trip, but I guess he was keen. I had to fight the girls off all day and well into the night before he got back. One of the girl's sat on Carl's bike when he got back and twisted the throttle wide open. The little Kwacka screamed. Carl screamed. The bike developed an ominous ticking noise soon afterwards, which rightly troubled him considerably.



I had mentioned that I had never seen snow and Karen proposed we all ride up to a shack their folks had in Bonang and stay overnight where it would be certain to have snow. Great idea, but Karen's Dad wouldn't permit it. So wild oats unsown, Carl and I decided to move on for now and ride on to NSW, time was passing and we would have to get back to work soon. We headed off to towards Eden and on a winding stretch of road came across a huge Mountain Ash that had fallen across the Highway. Wouldn't have wanted to be there when it fell! Took a while before machinery arrived and cleared the way. Despite that incident, the scenery was magnificent. We rattled into NSW and on past Eden, Merimbula and reached Bega as night began to fall. The roads and mountain views were great along the South Coast.



As we refueled, someone warned us about Mount Brown as we had indicated we were going to continue on in the night. We had never heard of Mount Brown. It actually is the highest mountain in the Monaro region and the road ascends it to get to Cooma. It rises 4,000 feet and the road is dark and winding. To add to our concerns, the Kwacka trail bike 6V headlights are pretty pitiful.

As we would up Mount Brown, it got colder and colder. Bear in mind this is mid-Winter and we only had miserable secondhand Perth riding gear on which is worn all year round. We didn't really know what cold was! By the time we reached the top of Brown Mountain and were on the Monaro high plains we were freezing and our nails ached as our gloves were totally inadequate. After riding for a while we saw a dim light in the distance and eventually rode into Nimmitabel.



The light was on our saviour, an old Hotel which was now a B&B. We were able to get a room and in our frozen state the owner took pity of us and brought a couple of electric radiators in for us to warm up our hands. It was too late for dinner so we toasted some bread on them as well. I soon remembered that Nimmitabel held the record at that time for the coldest town in Australia, elevation 1,070m. We should have known better, but where in WA do you ascend near 4,000 feet in a few miles, by motorcycle. The next day we headed straight to Cooma and into the first ski store we saw and bought some ski gloves. What a difference they made. I am sure they were Chinese dog skin, but I didn't care they were bulked up, warm and comfortable!

Fuelled up we set off towards Jindabyne and the Australian Alps. The scenery was superb, so different to WA and it was getting more Alpine the further we went. We crossed the Snowy River again at Jindabyne. refueled up and well fed we headed towards Kosciuszko National Park. Through the checkpoint at Sawpit Creek and we entered the park.



The road wound up and ever up. It was getting cold and the wind was howling. Through rain, sleet and ice we could hardly see. A number of cars were fixing chains to their wheels. Further up the road several cars were crawling along and hardly moving on the steep road. We pulled out to pass them and as we went by several drivers yelled out their windows, through the driving wind...."turn back, turn back!" We kept going, the Kwacka knobby tyres were hanging on OK. Soon the road was surrounded with snow and a mound of ice and snow covered the centre line.



We stopped for photos when the wind died down a bit and Carl stepped into the snow beside the road and disappeared up to his waist. Ever upwards and onwards we rode, feeling unsure of ourselves in these conditions. We finally reached Smiggin Holes which was a ski resort with lots of people milling around.

We parked the bikes and went into a shop/Hotel. Dressed in our bike gear with snow on our jackets, we didn't feel out of place with everyone padded out in their ski gear and boots. Their gear was probably more effective than our moth eaten old leather jackets.

After a bit of a break we found the road was closed and we couldn't go any further into the park, so we went back to the parked bikes to find them covered in ice and snow.

We rode gingerly downhill as the conditions were pretty bad. Passing cars and buses was hairy as we had to ride over the snow and ice bunched up over the centreline and then cross it again once we got by.

We escaped the blizzard conditions and were riding below the snow line back to Cooma. After passing Jindabyne, I realised my foot was aching. My old boots had a hole in the sole. Snow had packed in and it was now thawing as I rode along. I had to stop. We pulled into a siding which had a small fireplace fortuitously. Collecting firewood we lit a fire and I took off my boot and held my foot over the warming flames. Slowly feeling returned to my foot and the boot and sock had dried out. Relieved from the threat of frostbite (*not really*) we rode off and found a cheap Hotel in Cooma where we holed up for the night. Next day we headed South to Bombala, riding across alpine plains with few trees and many piles of large granite rocks. It reminded me of areas where glaciers had retreated and left their spoil. It was still very cold as we still in the high country.



We rode back into Victoria along a dirt road, the Cann River Highway it was grandly called, now the Monaro Highway. The road wound through mountains, tall forest, huge fern trees and thick bush and was quite an adventure. We paused at Fiddler's Green Creek for a photo. Little did we know it would be the scene of a cruel and grisly murder many years later.

Reaching Princes Highway again we turned West for Bellbird. My Kwacka started playing up and the engine struggled and began slowing down before I heard a mighty crack and the engine casing on the left split open. A nut on the end crank had slowly unwound and then rubbed and pressed against the casing. As it wasn't far, we pressed on to Brodribb River to Karen's place.

We sought some Araldite to try and seal up the gaping hole in the casing and hoped it would hold. We also tightened up the rogue nut of course. After a day or so of also trying to milk cows, it was time for us to head off again and we gave our sad goodbyes.

We pressed on to Melbourne, recovered our stupid suitcases from my cousin, delivered the bikes to the freight yard and saw them safely on the train to Perth. We then boarded the train to Adelaide and settled down for a nice soothing night's rest in the sleeper car.

After a few hours, I was awakened at Ballarat by a light and through sleepy eyes saw 3 or 4 men in suits in our cabin standing over Carl. I said "what's going on?" They said, "Nothing, Sonny, go back to sleep." So I rolled over and went back to sleep.



Next morning I quizzed Carl, "were there guys in the cabin last night?" Carl said yes, they were police detectives. Someone had reported us to the Police as looking like some guys on the run. After raiding the train, they soon realised they had the wrong guys, after Carl showed them his drivers license. So there we have it, almost arrested on arrival In Victoria and almost arrested leaving Victoria! We were innocent, m'Lord!

The rest of the trip back by train across the Nullarbor is rather foggy, not helped by a bottle of Gin. Again it was a relaxed journey, sitting in the lounge car and eating good meals in the dining car and being rocked to sleep by the train wheels clacking along. I do remember having Kevin Cowie replace my cracked and leaking Kwacka case and also seeing Carl's tick, tick, ticking motor explode like a hand grenade not long after we got back when he revved it up down a lane in Shenton Park, whilst showing off with a girl on the back. The piston had developed a crack way back in Orbost but made it home.

NEW CHUMS MOVE UP A NOTCH by Murray Barnard

The Kawasaki F7s were finally retired in November 1972. Carl and I both bought Suzuki T500Js having admired their performance on the road and track. Initially our thoughts had turned to the new BSAs and Triumphs, but as our need was for cross continent reliability and touring, we were put off this choice by reports of their loss of quality control and by our mates' British bikes frequently breaking down. With respect, 1972 was not a very good year to buy British. Often we had to rescue people stranded by the road at night, so our focus was on reliability, easy maintenance and good fuel consumption. We briefly considered the Norton Commando, which was a lovely machine. Two Wheels magazine did a cross country test ride of one; but, when the test Commando dropped it's valves on the Nullabor, we were not impressed. Never mind the cost of buying one.

I foolishly approached Stolarki's in Milligan St and enquired about the new BMW R75. Stolarski, looked at 19 year old me and just laughed, "you can't afford one of those!" He was right, the BMW was \$1875. We were keen on two strokes anyway and then considered the Mach III but it's fuel consumption, narrow power band and lightweight engine construction did not make it a suitable choice for continental touring. We also were mechanical retards so we didn't want anything requiring too much nous.

In those days we were prone to go to Gilkinson's dance studio in Hay St on Friday nights, to stand by the wall and watch the girl's dancing, that we were too shy to approach. For months a Suzuki T500R was parked on the street by the entrance and we were duly taken by it's design and utility. We devoured the test reports and were impressed by it's performance and durability. Also we were impressed by Jack Findlay riding a TR500 Suzuki to victory in Ulster. The first two-stroke to win a 500cc Grand Prix and the closest thing to a road bike to achieve that result. So, good enough for Jack, good enough for me. The T500 Suzuki was our bike of choice and at \$990 it fitted our budgets as well.

New, the T500 was the shiniest bike I had ever seen, everything was chromed or polished. Carl chose the red one, I went for the green (Suzuki has fancy names for it's colours, but if I used their names, you wouldn't know what I was talking about i.e. Candy Orange and whatever). The T500J had fancy plastic chrome features on it's sidecovers. I left mine alone; but, Carl took his off and discarded them. So many people did the same and know those chrome sidecovers are rare and fetch a high price.

Touring, the big cowhorn handle bars had to come off and I put my preferred flat bars on. Crash bars were also mounted as we were going to do a lot of riding on unsealed roads. Next I went to Gillie's in Leederville and had them fabricate a frame to carry two leather saddle bags.

Of course, we weren't slow in running them in and soon enough we went on our first long run, to Geraldton. In those days the Brand Highway wasn't anywhere near complete and our route took us up inland through New Norcia, Moora, Three Springs, Mingenew etc.

New Norcia was an eye opener as we had never been there and it was still a working Mission with heaps of kids in the schools. The old buildings were amazing, such a throwback to the past.

We wandered around having a look and came across a low door leading down into a basement room of the monastery. It had a small sign on it saying Art gallery. An ancient monk appeared and

for a small fee (it had to be a small fee because we were near broke) he lead us into some dark rooms where the walls were covered in really old religious art. We were blown away at the standard of the paintings and there age, they were clearly very precious to the monks from listening to the aged monk. We never knew this place existed and had never seen such



magnificent paintings. Our exposure to art at this stage had been limited to Arthur Streeton's "Down on his luck!" in the WA Art gallery in an annex of the old Museum.

(Note: Sadly, the New Norcia monastery was rocked by the theft of most of it's art in 1986. Two Sydney thieves-for-hire broke into the Benedictine monastery and stole 26 priceless old master paintings by the likes of Murillo, Raphael and Titian. Many art works were damaged and some never recovered.)

We rolled on through the Northern wheatbelt and reached Greenough mid-afternoon. The old town of Greenough was on either side of the main road then and passed and it was largely abandoned.

We were fascinated by these old buildings which even then were quite historic, Sadly, no-one was preserving them at the time. Up the road at a farm there was a museum in an old stone barn where we spent some time browsing around learning about the early days, the floods and privations. In one disturbing moment, Carl climbs into a wooden coffin and pretends to be deceased. Such is teen humour!



We hit Geraldton late in the day and after a quick look around were unsure why we had come all the way there. We grabbed a Motel room and got some rest as we had to ride back the next day.

The return trip was uneventful and we took the Mogumber road for a pleasant change. The T500s had performed flawlessly and had easily met our expectations as touring mounts.



Christmas arrived and we had four days which gave us the opportunity to explore the South-West on the Suzuki T500s.



Now, where did I park my bike, again?



We packed our gear, mostly Army Surplus kit, pointed the bikes up Great Eastern Highway and purred through Mundaring and on to Northam. There we came across four bikes packed with



touring gear which caught our eye! They had UK licence plates and we soon were in conversation with the riders.

Two were on 750cc BMWs and they had ridden down through Africa and were now heading across Australia. To ride through Africa struck us a great feat and we were impressed. The other two riders had come from England and had linked up with the BMW riders for the Nullarbor crossing. One was on a 650cc Norton Atlas and the other on an 850cc Moto Guzzi Eldorado. They invited us to ride with them, by which we felt very honoured, being such new chums, on rather commonplace machinery compared to the international tourists.

There was an extraordinary postscript to this meeting with the international riders. Six months later, Carl and I, having crossed the Nullarbor, were heading into Melbourne at night and stopped on a busy main road to check our maps. Next second a bike going the other way did a U-turn. It was the chap we met the year before on the Moto Guzzi Eldorado. He guided us to our destination!



We soon rumbled away heading East through Merredin and Southern Cross before nightfall suggested a stop was wise. We found a turn-off to a microwave tower and we camped beside the facility as the sunset.

The microwave towers were fairly new then, having only become operational in July 1970. Fifty-nine towers were built and they



became a very visible feature of the open landscape between Northam and Port Pirie. When the system opened Perth was finally connected to the East Coast. Simulcasts could take place on TV on the East and West coasts together and you could finally make a direct connection by phone (although at a considerable cost that few could afford).



The next morning we headed off towards Coolgardie and Norsemen. The overseas tourists found the summer heat tiring and frequent stops were the norm. Nearing Norseman the



tourists took a break beside the road, some laying down for a rest whilst the rest of us chatted and waited to resume the ride. Perhaps touring was a slower affair than we realised.

We ride on to Norseman and we all re-fueled and had a bite to eat and then the moment came to say goodbye. As we watched the tourists head away East on the Eyre Highway, we felt an intense urge to follow them and to experience the adventure of crossing the Nullarbor. Sadly, our weekend break was short and we had to get back to work! *(Later next year, by chance, we found out the Norton Atlas rider had hit a dead roo on the Nullarbor, was badly injured and had to be flown out by the RFDS).*

Carl and I headed South towards Esperance, pausing to check out Salmon Gums and the Gibson Soak Hotel and it was evening when we arrived in Esperance. The place was eerily quiet and empty, guess Christmas Eve is not the time to find the shops open and the joint bouncing! Accommodation was scarce on the long weekend and we cruised out towards the Pink Lake having hear that a caravan park was out that way. Before we got too far a police car came whooping up behind us and the occupant demanded to know who we were, where we came from and where we were going. We explained that we were just passing through and wanted somewhere to camp. He told us to keep moving and added, "we don't like your kind around here!" I am not sure what kind he meant, maybe he didn't like Commonwealth Public servants riding stock Japanese motorcycles spending money in town. Maybe he had been told Santa wasn't coming for him this year, anyway we got the message, found the caravan park and camped the night warily keeping an eye out for a lynching party!

The next morning, after a quick tour of the scenery, we re-fueled



and headed out towards Ravensthorpe. Being Xmas Day there was very little traffic and everything was closed except for one service station. The road to Ravensthorpe was also very quiet and nary a car or truck did stir. We arrived at Ravensthorpe and we stopped at a little servo on the way into town. Unfortunately it was closed. We headed off without a thought about anyone else's intentions on Xmas Day. We bopped and burbled into Jerramungup and headed to a building with some fuel pumps. The place was also closed and no-one was around. There were no opening hour signs, nothing! Not a soul was to be seen! So we pressed on towards Gnowangerup.

Somewhere on the way, Carl went onto reserve. Hmmm, this isn't good. It was still a way to the next sizeable town and if Carl was on reserve, it can't be long before I was as well. We pondered our options and decided to decant Carl's remaining fuel into my bike tanks and I would see if I could reach the next town. Not sure now why we thought that this was good idea!



Anyway, off I rode, trying to conserve fuel and I must have made about half way to Gnowangerup when I ran dry. It was a barren place to be stranded and not a good day to expect assistance.

Not being loaded up with food or water did not brighten my day.



I can't remember how long I considered my fate for before a ute came along and actually stopped to check whether I needed assistance. When I said I was out of fuel he said he had some in the tray and offered me enough to get to Gnowangerup. So Santa does exist! Mind you he took \$4 in return, enough then to fund a weekend of fun, but I guess he needed to feed the reindeer. I was thankful at any price to get moving again.

I rattled into Gnowangerup and found the service station. It was closed and out the back the family was having a rousing Xmas dinner. A small scribbled sign said they would be open again later in the day. A small ray of hope. I waited about whilst they feasted on their roast meat, vegies and gravy and drank copious quantities of giggle juice.

Finally, the station reopened and I refueled and grabbed a can of fuel for Carl. A long ride back towards Jerro and I found Carl quietly going mad beside the road, bereft of shade or refreshment. No mobiles in those days so he had no idea when I would return. Refueled, we headed out for Gnowangerup so that we could both top up our tanks and grab a bite to eat.

Having seen more of Gnowangerup and the Jerramungup road in one day then anyone could be expected to bear, we finally off down the Chester pass road towards Albany. We were expected



there and our friends had no idea where we were.

By now it was getting dark and Chester Pass road was not the place to be on a motorcycle at dusk and we roared along with our weak headlights watching out for roos, emus and the odd stray. Somehow we survived and we made it Albany to our relief. We greeted our friends and settled down enjoy what was left of Xmas Day.

Our Albany friends were God-fearing, kind and tolerant folk and they tilled a market garden on the outskirts of Albany, now bulldozed and turned into a cardboard cut-out tree-less and dull housing estate.

Their kids were toddlers, loud and demanding. Just what we needed after the day we had just survived. At least we had food and drink and company. To top it all off one toddler came tottering out from a bedroom carrying used condoms, not mine I haste to add. Xmas Day 1972 was complete and we were primed for adventure. The Nullarbor had a grip on us now!



NEW CHUMS GO TRANS-CONTINENTAL - March 1973

Having run in the new Suzuki T500J models by riding to Geraldton, Esperance and Albany, Carl and I decided to attempt a cross continent ride and attack the unsealed segment of the Eyre Highway between Eucla and Penong, some 400 miles of corrugations, bull-dust holes, loose sand and cattle grids.

Having 4 weeks in which to go across and back again we decided to aim for the Bathurst Easter races in March 1973. The bikes required no modification for long distance touring, they were a solid reliable machine, low revving with good torque and could sit at 70mph all day and return just under 50mpg, loaded up. My machine had flat bars which made for a comfortable touring position and leather saddlebags and a rack for some luggage. As well I had a tank bag which was good for leaning on whilst highway cruising. We had a big farewell party at Carl's place and a lot of people came from work to see us off on this big adventure. One work colleague brought a huge bucket of KFC (which was reasonably new to WA). He was instantly popular. When leaving I got a big passionate kiss from a girl at work that I fancied.

Whilst the bikes were ready to roll and we had some camping and ex-Army gear, my budget hadn't extended to decent riding gear although I did have a good quality Bell full face helmet. I still only had an Op shop leather jacket which had some holes in it and the zip was broken. I used a leather belt to wrap the jacket round and hold it together. I used to tell people, much to their amazed attention, that it was an old Spitfire pilot's jacket and still had some bullet holes in it. One chap even believed me. My boots were also starting to wear out and the sole of one of them was developing a hole in it. We headed out of the city and followed the well travelled route towards Kalgoorlie and had a trouble free run to Coolgardie where we turned South and headed towards Norseman.



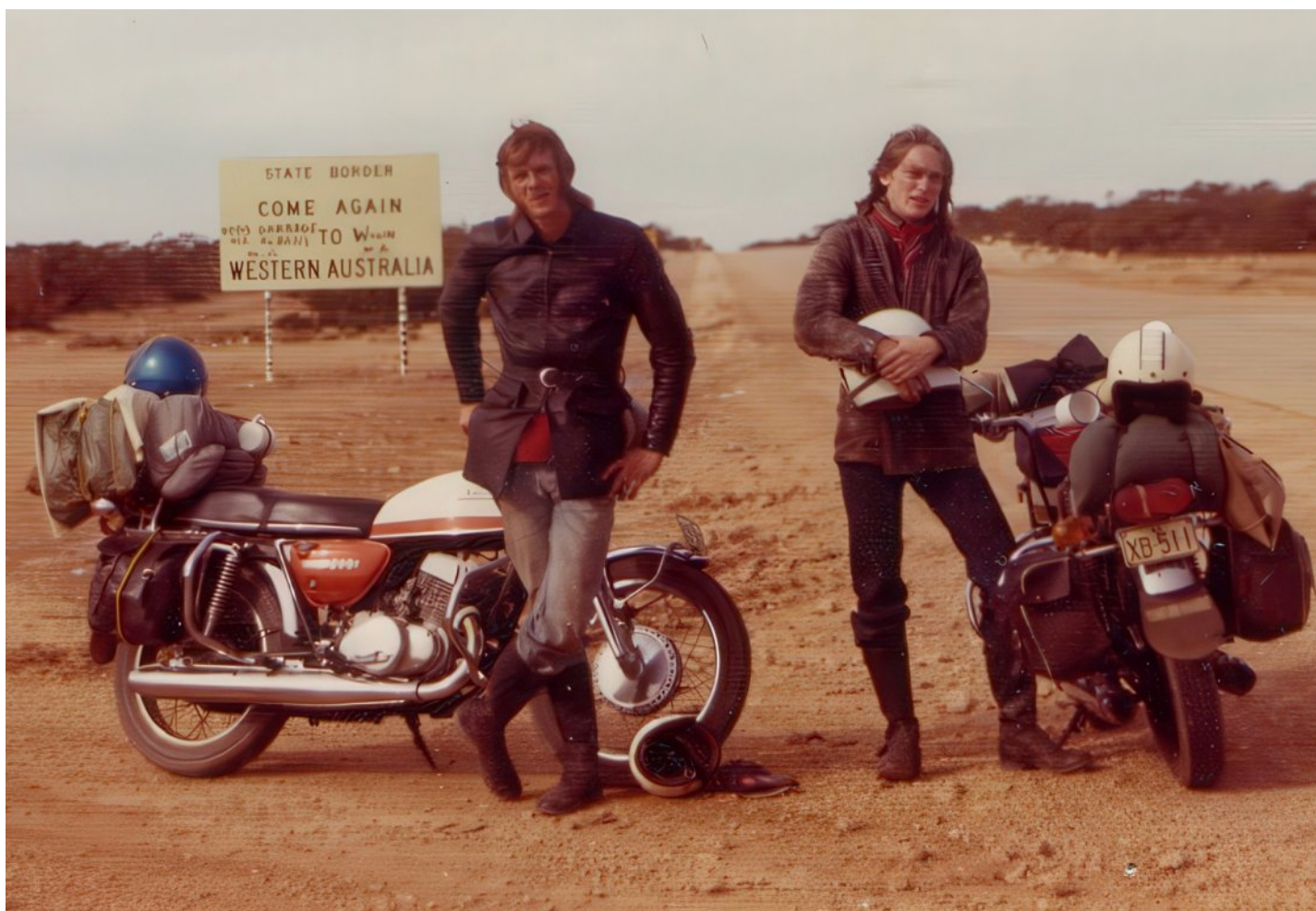
Dusk fell so we pulled off into the bush and camped, using tarps strung between the bikes to make a temporary tent.



Burbling on to Norseman to fuel up in the morning, we made good progress to Balladonia, refuelled and after a quick look at the old Balladonia Telegraph Station we headed on to the 100 mile straight. We made good time to Madura pass where we refueled after taking in the view. At Madura Station a bus was parked and they were trying to shoehorn a VW engine into the cargo bay, presumably to send it off for repair. We continued to Mundrabilla for fuel and then on to Eucla.



From Eucla we continued a short distance to the State Border where we stopped for the obligatory photograph. Before we got to the border a Morris Mini zoomed past us as at great speed. As we started on to the unsealed section of the Highway we had not gone far before we passed a stranded Mini with it's sump broken and oil spreading out underneath the motor. The Mini had found that speed and bulldust holes don't mix.





Fraser Range



Madura Pass



WA-SA Border



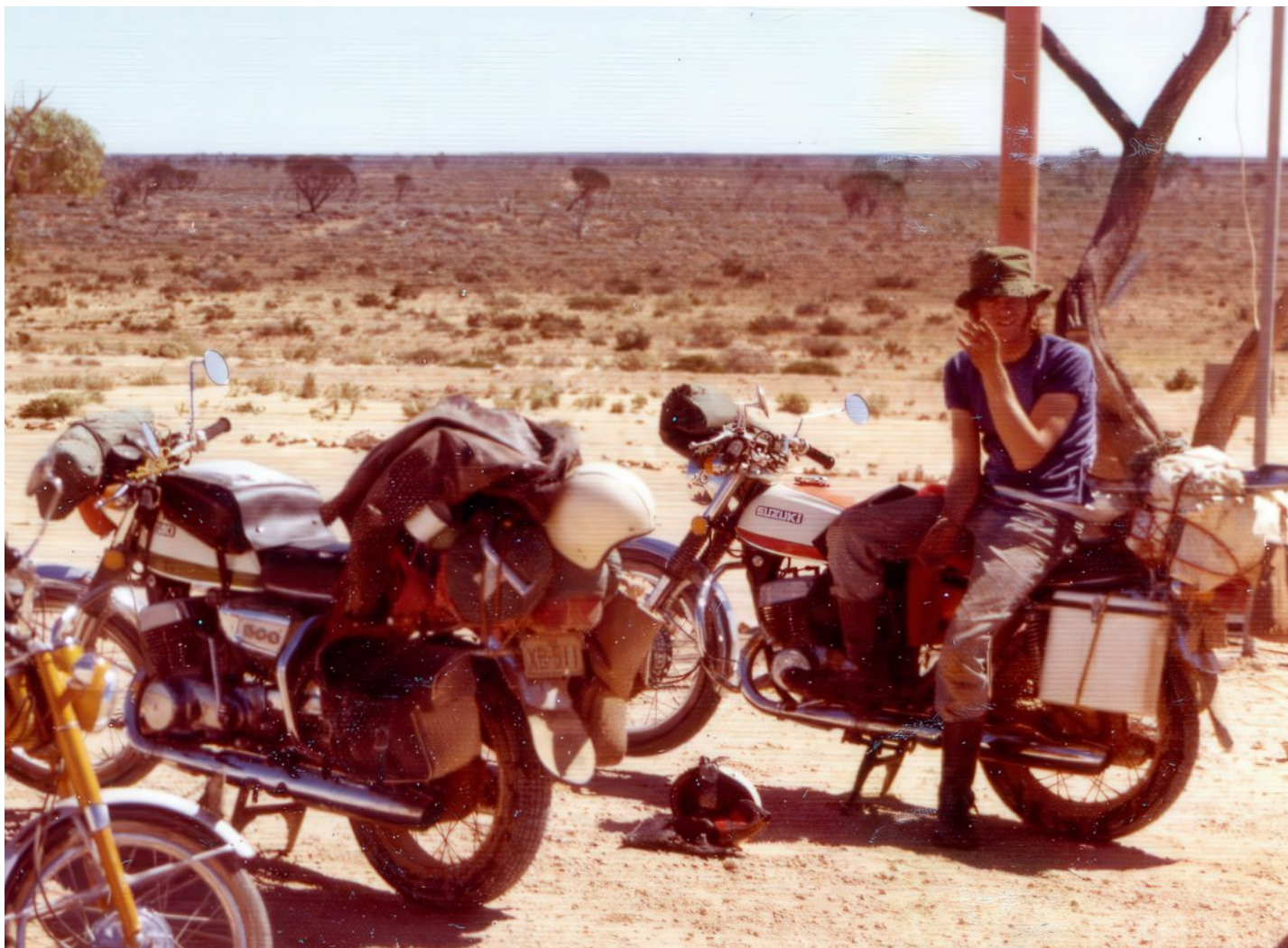
Nullarbor Plain

Dusk started to settle after only about 20 miles of creating billowing clouds of red dust and juddering up and down and on the corrugations. As kangaroos were hopping in great numbers across the road ahead of us, we decided to call it a day and pulled into the bush to setup camp. In those days the Highway was further inland and did not go near the Bunda cliffs and there was very little traffic at night.



The next day we headed off East after getting back on the main highway. The road was rough as guts and you had to avoid the bulldust holes. There was very little traffic; but, what there was threw up a lot of dust. People waved at us, probably thinking we were crazy. The road got worse and worse and we even tried riding off the road on the hard surface of the plain. This became a questionable practise due to tree roots, branches and rocks. Up ahead we saw a grader on the highway and we thought this would be the answer to our prayers. Sadly it wasn't. After negotiating the berm of rocks and sand built up in the middle of the road by the grader we found that the road surface was now too soft for easy going. It took even more concentration to stay upright and we still had bulldust holes, corrugations and cattle grids to negotiate. There was a lot of car wrecks scattered beside the road and even the odd rolled over truck and even a tour bus on it's side. Crossing the Nullarbor was still a challenge. We turned off the highway and went up an access track to Koonalda Station to get some fuel. Koonalda Station had a small shed with an old fashioned hand pump fuel bowser. The woman at the bowser asked how much fuel I wanted, so I guessed and off course it was too much and the tank overflowed dripping fuel over the hot engine. Fortunately the bike and I got away unscathed. Koonalda station is not far from the trans railway line and a lot of the station buildings were made from railway sleepers. Wrecked cars were parked in abundance nearby. From Koonalda we headed on to Nullarbor station. We stopped at a cattle grid on the way as Carl could hear a rattling sound so he tightened up the muffler mountings and anything else he could find and then we continued on our way. Nullarbor station was a small assembly of buildings a fair way from the highway and we grabbed some fuel there to be on the safe side.





From Ivy tanks we had to ride with even more caution as the surrounding sand dune country had left fine wind blown sand over the road surface. The corrugations were nowhere near as bad as on the Nullarbor. We soon arrived at Penong and just before the tar started again there was a dip in the unsealed road surface caused by vehicles leaving the road surface and hitting the dirt at speed. Carl had the misfortune to hit the tarred surface with quite a thump and claimed afterwards that he thought he had buckled his front wheel somewhat. We continued on to Ceduna and checked into a Motel to shower and clean up. Ceduna fish and chips were the order of the day.





We continued on the Port Augusta and eventually Adelaide without any mechanical worries from the bikes themselves. Leaving Adelaide we took the inland road to Melbourne, being surprised by Hahndorf's German village appearance (it has lost a lot of its charm over the past 50 years). Reaching Ballarat near dark, we pushed on to Melbourne and were soon lost in the busy roads of the Capital after dark, so we pulled over to try and check our map. Just then, a Moto Guzzi Eldorado going the other way did a u-turn and came over to us. It was the chap we had met at Christmas from England who was heading over the Nullarbor when we were heading to Esperance. It was remarkable coincidence. He pointed us in the right direction and we soon found our accommodation.

The next day, Carl asked me to try his bike and see if I thought his front wheel was buckled. I took off down the road and concentrating on the bike's front end I applied the front brake on hard and it locked up and I went down hard. I hadn't notice a patch of blue metal. I wasn't wearing a jacket only wearing a t-shirt and had no gloves on. The blue metal tore the palms of my hand, took out a chunk on my elbow (which needed stitches at the hospital) and turned my back into a bleeding and weeping mess. It was a lesson learned the hard way and ensured I wore protective gear in future when riding a bike! I was a mess. I never noticed any wheel buckle by the way!

After a day or so to get over the worst of the pain, we headed out of Melbourne into the Gippsland. We were heading to Orbost on the Snowy River to meet up with some friends of mine. It was very difficult holding the bars with my palms all cut up and the recently repaired elbow and lacerated back made riding difficult.

We got to Orbost and went to my friend's parent's dairy farm at Brodribb River. My friend friend had moved to Bega in New South Wales which was fine as it was on the way to Bathurst for us. After unpacking we went back into Orbost to catch up another friend; but she was at the Marlo Pub on the coast. So Carl and I headed out to the pub and found our friend who was there with a lot of her girl friends. They were all excited by the visitors from the West Coast and were begging for rides on the back of the bikes. I opted out as my injuries were still raw and painful. Carl took a girl for a ride and I lent her my spare helmet.

He never came back. I waited; but then, I can't really explain it, I had a vision of him crashing, from his point of view, on the bike. I left immediately, grabbed my bike and headed back up the Marlo Road towards Orbost. I had gone a fair way when an ambulance with siren blaring and lights flashing went the other way. I turned around and after it. The ambulance tore off down the Cape Conran Road. To my dismay half way along I came across Carl's crashed bike and the ambulance on a curve in the road.. Carl was laying on the verge, his right leg compound fractured. The girl on the back was in a bad way, The helmet she was wearing had split in half. She had head injuries. Both Carl and the girl were flown out to Austin Hospital in Melbourne.

I was devastated and even though still suffering from my now minor injuries, to visit him in hospital I cadged a lift on a fruit and vegetable truck travelling from Orbost to the Melbourne Markets. Some time later I rode back to Melbourne to see him. Carl ended up requiring 18 months to recover from his injuries.

We never made it to Bathurst together.

I did get to see my pen friend Karen eventually, in Eden NSW, before heading back to Melbourne; but that is another story. Once my hand and back lacerations enabled me to ride again, I rode back to Melbourne and visited Carl in hospital for best part of a week. He was in a bad way with a serious compound fracture. His Dad turned up and I asked him what I should do as I was supposed to be back at work. He said go home. I put the bike on the train and I flew home. Carl's girlfriend moved to Melbourne to support him. I was at a loss at what I could do. I felt that I couldn't leave my old Mum alone, nor could I risk my employment. I felt really bad about it all. I wasn't brave enough to uproot everything, I had a fear of poverty still. Carl and I never made it to Bathurst together.

1974, a big adventure together, Evelyn, I headed off East. I loved exploring the dirt roads in the Flinders, the scenery was spectacular and also enjoyed the coastal ride from SA to Melbourne, Sydney and on to Canberra and the Snowies, to the top of Mt Kosciusko, over the Bogong High Plains, down the Tambo River to Melbourne and back to Adelaide and finally home. The T500 never missed a beat.

GO EAST YOUNG MAN

By late 1973, Evelyn and I were in a steady relationship and Evelyn was happy to go pillion on the motorcycle and even enjoyed camping out. We were very well suited for each other at this stage of our young lives. Evelyn was just finishing up at Graylands Teachers College and was required to undertake a country posting in order to gain permanency with the Education Department.

We decided to go on a trip over East to have some adventures before she was posted to South Stirling primary school, a good 270 miles away from Perth. Val Cousins and Rob Pike agreed to come on the trip as well. Riding across the Nullarbor was not really an option due to time constraints; but, also because Rob's motorcycle was a 350 Ducati single which was unsuited to long distance touring and unsealed roads.

So we chose to ship the motorcycles to Adelaide and take a bus across the Nullarbor. The bikes were packed with out touring gear and wrapped in blankets for protection and loaded on to a train at the Kewdale freight yards.

We caught the bus from Perth and settled in for what was to be largely a long non-stop journey. We carried some food and drink to keep ourselves nourished. The bus trip would take 2 days basically and travel overnight. That was probably a big mistake as we arrived in Adelaide late evening absolutely shattered from the journey having had little sleep. The worst part was on the unsealed section of the Eyre Highway across the Nullarbor. The bus shook, banged and rattled across the corrugations and we could not get a moment's rest. The on board toilet took on an all pervading and decidedly unflavoursome odour as it sloshed around.

Near Yalata some of the locals laid on the road in front of the bus to get it to stop and then proceeded to sell some wooden artefacts such as carved wombats, lizards or boomerangs. A couple of the locals joined the bus for the run to Ceduna.

Having arrived in Adelaide shattered we needed rest and a good sleep. We camped in the backyard of a friend of Val and Rob's. We had a good shower and couldn't

believe the smell of the water. At this time Adelaide's water supply was pumped from the Murray River and whatever filtering they did certainly didn't remove a very musty, muddy smell.

Val and Robe decided to stay a few days with their friends, so Evelyn and I chose to go for a quick run up to the Flinders ranges to the North of Adelaide. We had by then collected our bikes from the railway

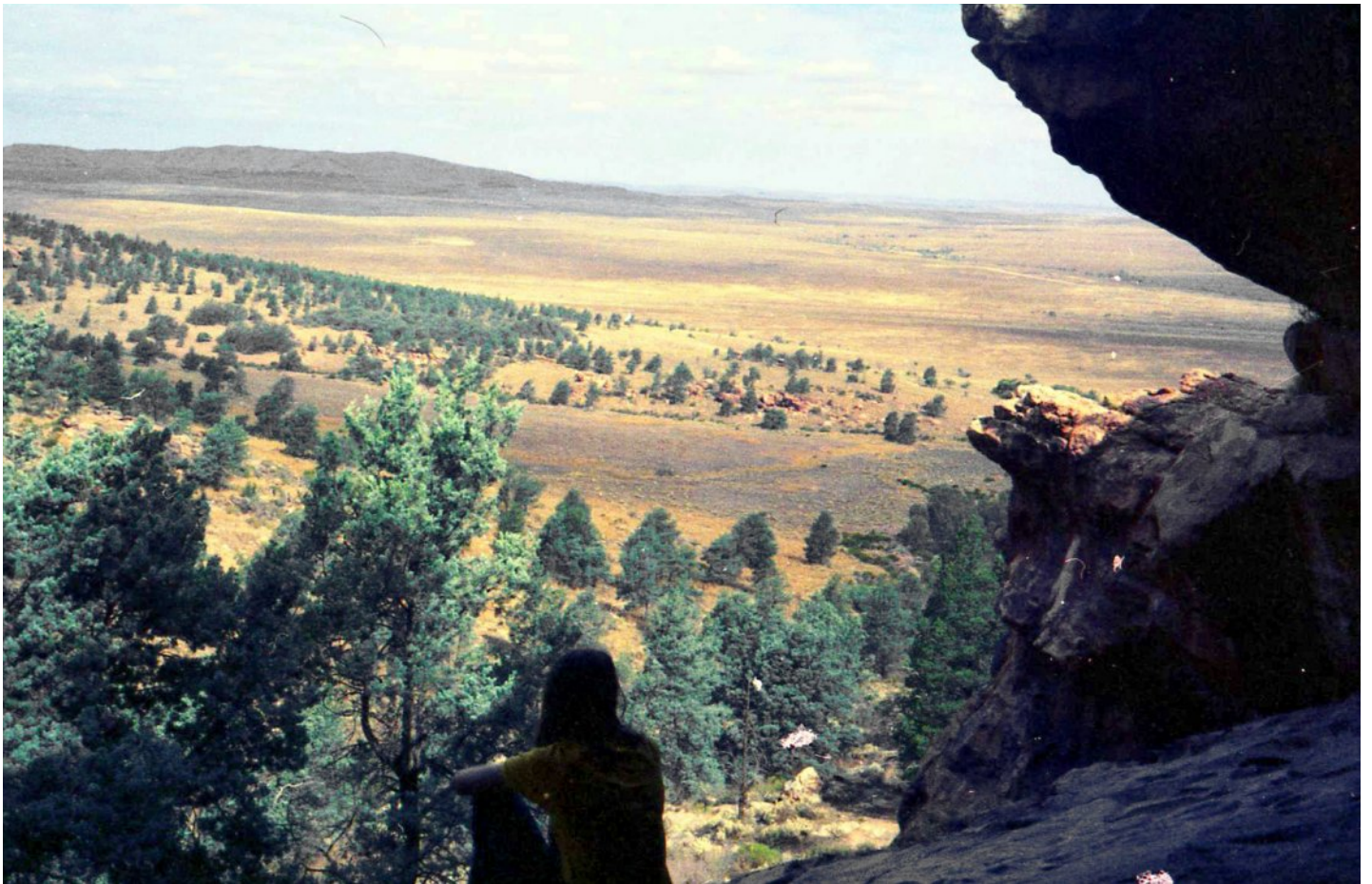
freight yard and once loaded with our camping gear we headed North. Keeping the Lofty Ranges to our right we went almost to Port Augusta before taking the Flinders ranges road through the picturesque Pichi Richi Pass (see left) on the way to Quorn. Quorn is a small town and railhead in the Flinders Ranges 24 miles northeast of Port Augusta. It is renowned for it's heritage-listed buildings as well as being the terminus of the Pichi Richi Railway. I had to have my photo taken outside of the old mill.





Heading out of Quorn we came across the the Yourambulla Caves which sit about 10 kilometres south of Hawker. Yourambulla is home to some well preserved aboriginal cave paintings. The actual caves were quite difficult to get to, involving a climb up the rockface. These days there are some metal stairs to help. The aboriginal art was quite interesting as most rock art is hard to access. The views of the surroundings and the cave paintings themselves make that all worth while though.





us. Hawker was an interesting, almost frontier town, with many heritage buildings remaining from it's mining days. Hawker was our last chance to grab some fuel and supplies before heading into the Flinders Ranges proper.

Most of the countryside was fairly dry and empty; but, there were many old ruined farm buildings scattered about. These were reminders of when farming spread widely during some very good seasons in the 1880s and the Goyder Line. In 1865, George Goyder, then Surveyor-General of the colony, was tasked with mapping the boundary between areas with good rainfall and those suffering from drought. He submitted his report and map to the colonial government which featured a demarcation line, where areas north of the line were deemed "liable to drought" and areas to the south were considered arable. Goyder advised farmers against planting crops north of this line. From 1867 to 1875, ample rains encouraged farmers to ignore Goyder's report and settle in the north, starting farms and planting crops. However, within a few years, many had to abandon their properties as the land proved unsuitable for crops, validating Goyder's warnings. Ruins of farmhouses can still be seen near Goyder's line. One of the most prominent is Kanyaka Station which Evelyn and I came upon during our ride North.

Kanyaka Station was established as a cattle station in February 1852. Under subsequent owners, Kanyaka station grew in size until it was one of the largest in the district, with 70 families living and working there. Kanyaka station grew to include a large homestead, cottages for workers, workshops, huts and sheds, mostly built from local stone. Severe droughts resulted in massive losses of sheep and eventually the station was abandoned. Due to its stone construction, many of the buildings survive today as ruins and are an impressive feature on the landscape along with it's own cemetery, which gives you food for thought about the hardships of the time.





Above: approaching the entrance to Wilpena Pound, with Rawnsley Bluff in the background.

Wilpena Pound is an immense basin surrounded by weathered mountain peaks. There is only one accessible entrance to the pound and it is quite a hike and climb to see the stunning views of the landscape. In January 1974 there was a nice shady campsite at the entrance to the Pound and a small basic resort hotel and restaurant/shop. So once we setup camp we wandered over for a meal. The highlight of the evening as when the waiter spilled a cup of coffee all over Evelyn's lap, fortunately without injury. The next day we hiked into the pound and being young climbed up to appreciate the landscape.



Next day we headed back to Adelaide to catch up with Rob and Val. On the way we stopped at Alligator Gorge near Wilmington. The gorge is an impressive feature cutting through the Lofty ranges. It was quite a steep ride up a dirt road to get there.



When we got back to Adelaide we found that Val and Rob had moved on so we headed off after them; but, there was no way of knowing where they were in the days before mobile phones. In fact, there were no credit cards then either and you had to make sure you had cash and you couldn't collect from any old bank, you had to get your bank to send your signature through first to a designated branch! We headed down through South Australia, Mount Gambier, Cape Otway, the Great Ocean Road and on into the Gippsland. Some stretches were still unsealed then. *Below: at Orbost again (Brodribb River)*



From Orbost, in Victoria, we rode up the New South Wales south coast until we got to Woollongong where we powered up Bulli Pas and stopped at the lookout at the top of the range (later I heard from my absent friends Val and Rob that their Ducati 350 was passed uphill on Bulli Pass by trucks, so overloaded were they for the poor single cylinder machine). There was a great view of the city of Wollongong and the coast. A group of motorcyclists parked there noticed our loaded bike and WA plates and came over for a chat. They asked where we were headed and I explained we had to get to Mona Vale, north of Sydney, that night, but, we weren't sure which way to go. They promptly offered to show us the way, such is the generosity of fellow motorcyclists. They tore off and we followed as best we good. I remember racing through George St in the middle of Sydney, across the Sydney harbour bridge (glimpsing the Opera House, which had only recently opened) and arriving at Mona Vale at dusk. Thanking our guides profusely we settled into a Motel to recover our breath.



We later moved to a caravan park at Lane Cove to be closer to the City. After exploring Sydney and taking a ferry cruise we wanted to head bush again so we steered towards the Blue Mountains and Katoomba. It was a great ride up to Katoomba except for when we got there the whole was misted in and it wasn't clearing. We went to have a look at the Three Sisters and Katoomba Falls, but, could see nothing but mist. The mist didn't clear and it didn't feel safe on the narrow winding road to Lithgow so we grabbed a van for the night at a low grade caravan park located on the site of the old Catalina park race track.



even more scary cable car which travels ravel across the gorge above the Katoomba Falls, 270 metres (886 feet) above the valley floor. Seeing the valley below through rust holes in the floor of the cable car was not too reassuring.

The next day the mist had cleared and we went back to the lookouts and were astonished at the view and the drop from the fences we fruitlessly leant over the day before. The view was spectacular and well worth the effort. We went on the scary funicular railway down the cliff face (it was built to facilitate mining years before) and wandered around exploring the damp valley below and the waterfall, managing to get leeches on our legs in the process. The steepest section of railway is on an incline of 52 degrees (128% gradient) contained within a total distance of 310 metres (1,020 ft) so it is fairly thrilling. It was originally constructed for a coal and oil shale mining operation in the Jamison Valley in the 1880s, in order to haul the coal and shale from the valley floor up to the escarpment above. From 1928 to 1945, it carried coal during the week and passengers at weekends. The coal mine was closed in 1945 after which it remained as a tourist attraction. Fortunately we survived. Next we went on the



Heading South from the Blue Mountains we reached Canberra and spent a few days visiting the War Memorial, Art gallery and the usual attractions before escaping for the bush again. This time the Snowy Mountains, which I last visited at the height of Winter.



We camped within the Kosciusko National Park at Sawpit Creek which cost us the sum total of \$2.40 for the night. The next day we headed up towards Mt Kosciusko, via Smiggin Holes and Perisher valley. Surprisingly there were still patches of snow around. The road to Mt Kosciusko was dirt and despite the altitude the Suzuki did not miss a beat. The road took us all the way to Mt Kosciusko, something you cannot do any longer. There was a post box at the top so we posted a postcard home.



We retreated to Jindabyne and headed through the Crackenback Valley to Thredo and then headed out on the torturous rough, sealed road that skirts the Snowies and is now known as the Alpine Way. The Suzuki burred up and down valleys and around tight corners high above valleys. We went through Dead Horse Gap and on to the Murray River Gorge and the very wet and muddy stretch of road at Tom Groggin. From there we headed to Khancoban, which was constructed to house workers involved in the Snowy Mountains Scheme in the 1950s. Khancoban is 13 miles from the Victorian border. At Khancoban I discovered all the rough riding the Suzuki had experienced over the Nullarbor, in the Flinders and the Snowies had opened a seam slightly and some fuel was leaking from the tank. Fortunately I could get some araldite at Khancoban and managed to stem that leak.

From Khancoban we crossed the Murray River into the scenic Corryong valley and then took the exceedingly twisty unsealed mountain road through the Victorian Alps to Benambra and on to Omeo, an isolated mining town at the foot of the Alps. In 1845 gold was found in the Livingstone Creek which runs through Omeo, this caused the population to boom and by 1901, Omeo was at its peak with a population of 9400. Now it has a population of 400. It is a picturesque place with many heritage buildings nestled in the Omeo valley.



From Omeo we took a rough rocky track now called a Bogong High Plains Road which took us over this stretch of the Alps and on to Falls Creek. Being Summer, Falls creek was deserted and we never saw any traffic. The weather was threatening but the rain mostly held off long enough for us to get off the high plains. The Suzuki had no difficulty traversing the rough roads two up or in handling the altitude. The T500 twin is built tough and the engine is durable.

From Falls Creek we descended through Howman's Gap, Fainter Falls and the steep and twisty sections at Cranky Charlie and descended into Mount Beauty and the Towong Valley. This part of Victoria is stunning; but, very cold in Winter and often snowed in. From Mt Beauty we continued on through Bright and camped just outside of Melbourne.





In Melbourne we explored the Victorian Art Gallery, Elizabeth Street motorcycle shops, the Old Melbourne Gaol where Ned Kelly was hanged and the City centre. Walking past the Melbourne Town Hall we unexpectedly ran into Phil Haynes, a friend from High School and another friend Gillian who was part of our social group in Perth. Phil was in the Air Force and had been posted to Laverton. What a small world we figured to happen to be in the same place at the same time so far from home. The next day we rode down to Laverton to visit Phil and Gillian and have lunch. Little did I know, that only a few miles away, lived my birth Mother and half brothers. It would be another 20 years before I met them for the first time.

From Melbourne it was time to swing for home. We rode to Ballarat and checked out the Eureka Stockade, the Sovereign Hill gold mining village, the Ballarat Art gallery and the open air galleries at Lake Wendouree. From Ballarat we rode the spectacular Grampian Ranges and the McKenzie Falls. We through Horsham and Bordertown heading for Adelaide. We hooked up with a chap riding a Honda 750 Four to Adelaide. He accompanied most of the way there. He remarked that he was amazed that, despite being two-up and loaded up with luggage and camping gear, each time we refueled, we got better fuel consumption than he did, despite sitting at the same speed. He also had to adjust his rear chain, which we didn't. The Suzuki was an excellent touring bike for the time. We crossed the Murray River again, this time by punt at Tailem Bend and rolled on to Adelaide. We decided to fly back to Perth rather than face the terrible bus trip again. The Suzuki came home by train and within weeks completed a Three Hour Production Race at Wanneroo. The bike continued to perform strongly.



Quorn SA



Yourambulla Access Road SA



Yourambulla Caves SA



Mt Kosciusko Road NSW



Tom Groggin NSW



Omeo Vic



Bogan High Plain Vic

Racing days in the 70s. In mid 1973, after the tragic trip East, I decided to go road racing. Safer than touring perhaps, who knows where my head was at that time after Carl's injury? I bought some racing leathers at Lloyd Chapman's in Guildford Road at Bayswater. Rode to the track, took the lights off and sidestand and went racing on the Titan, then rode home again. Jim Howe at Pal & Panther in Angove St North, Perth sponsored me. He gave me 250 Hustlers and T500s to race. I raced at Geraldton, did four 3 Hour Production Races and numerous other events over the years at Wanneroo, mainly on 500s. *Below left: Suzuki T250 Hustler in very wet 1973 3 Hour Production Race. Ching Shen tyre's let go! Below right: The same Suzuki T250 at Geraldton "Round the Houses meeting in 1973.*



Above left and right and below left: Suzuki T500 in the 1974 3 Hour Production Race. This bike had just returned from it's second tour of the Eastern States. Below right: Suzuki 125 racer in development. Bottom of page: Suzuki T500 in 1975 3 Hour Race.



BEATIN' 'BOUT THE BUSH



BEATING 'BOUT THE BUSH IN 1976/77

(These were simpler Days)

December 1976, the great side-car trip came to a halt on a hot Summer's Day. After a run down from Perth , via Lake King , Evelyn and I are having a holiday in Esperance for a few days , swimming and relaxing , before hitting the Nullarbor and attacking the dirt of the Stuart Highway to Ayers Rock.

The trip began on 27 December when one grossly overloaded sidecar and Suzuki GT750 struggled up the Darling Scarp and along Brookton Highway. On to reserve before reaching Brookton, only 114kms, what type of fuel consumption is this, just how much luggage are we carrying? Any hill requires a drop to fourth gear. The weight being too much for the low revs in top. Hmmm?

Brookton to Corrigin and boy, is it ever getting hot! Corrigin to Kulin and hotter still. Stopped to give an empty Honda some fuel to get him going again and we pushed on to Lake Grace. Heat is getting so oppressive we have to stop every 50 kms for some water and a splash on the face. Thank goodness for the waterbag. Lake Grace – Newdegate – Lake King, hot and empty country. 42 C in Perth what is it out here? Suzuki still pushing all the weight at 110/120km/h and not showing any signs of over-heating despite the heat coming off the road. That water -cooling and radiator really works. Turn South towards Ravensthorpe and hit a headwind, 4thgear work all the way. 11 litres for 80kms, where did all that fuel go. Exhausted by the heat, we spent the night at Ravensthorpe, only 350 miles from Perth. Away early on the next day, much cooler today; but it is still early. Next second an Emu runs out on the road ahead. "How interesting," I think. Sign ahead says, "Emus next 40 kms." Ride on confidently, 10 kms on Emu jumps in front, dead ahead. Slam on the skids, front Metzler squeals and over-loaded sidecar and passenger try to overtake on my left! Emu towers over us, does a little dance and clip-clops off of the road. Very close call. Didn't see the Emu until we were right on to him. We were very lucky however, they are nasty things at speed on a bike as their body weight is at handlebar level.

Day getting hotter again. Stop often for some water; but finally make Esperance. No vacancies at any caravan park in the town. Not certain if they really are full or that bikes are verboten! Not impressed. Finally ended up at a Motel; but, not before being told that motorcycles are not normally allowed and we must be very quiet. How marvellous? Not the last time we will be told bikes are not allowed. Maybe we should have brought the Holden Kingswood from home rather the bike? Esperance has a beautiful scenic drive to the West that skirts the cliffs along its beautiful coastline. Headland, islands, rocks and clean beaches, clear blue water around every bend and a motorcycle rider's dream run. That is to the West, to the East lies Cape le Grand National Park, some 60 kms of good road followed by some terrible gravel and sand; but the sights are worth it. Incredible granite peaks and rocky bays, wind and water sculpted granite rocks and coastal heath. We decided to climb Frenchman's Peak, a steep granite peak 1100 feet high. After a scurry up the cliff face we found a cave near the top big enough to drive a bus through it. At the very top there is a magnificent panorama of the Southern Ocean and the islands of the Recherche Archipelago. Oh, by the way, sidecars handle corrugated roads better than solo sand are a pleasure to hurl through a bumpy, sandy corner on the gravel.



After we had recovered from the mountain climb we headed back to Esperance for a boat cruise . A two hour island cruise to Gull, Rabbi , Button Islands and Devil's Rocks. These rugged granite islands in Esperance Bay are well worth seeing. Cape Barren geese, seals, wild goats and sea- eagles aplenty . Not sated by our Cape le Grand sojourn & the Island Cruise we rode out to the Pink lake to climb aboard a tiny Cessna for a flight over Esperance and the Islands. Magnificent scenery from the air if you had a mind to appreciate it. The little plane bucked about in the strong wind so much that one's attention was not on the scenery for long. Now we took the time to recover from the plane ride.

On the 31st of December, the loaded chair and Suzuki fired up, burbled away and with a deep drone from the 3 into 1 Bromlech exhaust, headed off for Norseman, all full of hope and joy, looking forward to the run over the newly sealed Nullarbor. Good dry road on the way to Salmon Gums and the day was only just starting to warm up. Decided to check the sidecar mountings in Salmon Gums and noticed a fair bit of excessive movement in the wheel. A few roller bearings are poking out, what could this mean? Placed the combination on a couple of blocks and removed the sidecar wheel and picked out pieces of sidecar bearing and metal filings. The bearing had collapsed, fortunately discovered before something catastrophic happened. Who would have thought 40 year ball bearings held in with a piece of cord would have sufficed? Had a conference and five minutes later the chair was dis-mounted and we had a solo motorcycle instead. Then a job to sort out the massive pile of gear we have and thanks to the kindness of the Caltex garage chap at Salmon Gums, the excess gear is locked away in a shed and the poor old sidecar chassis and body is put out of sight in the corner of his fenced backyard.



Now sans cooking gear, camera and lenses , spare tyres , jerricans etc. we take off on a solo journey instead. Thoughts of attacking the Stuart Highway abandoned we will travel over East instead. We will collect the chair with the car and trailer when we get back. We experienced some weird handling at first as the tyres were worn flatter and unevenly by sidecar usage and the load we were carrying. We battled on to Norseman, refueled and were unsurprised to see that better fuel economy had returned, but actually not much better.

The reduced load obviously helped. Out we rolled on to Eyre Highway, riding through the ancient Fraser Range to where the land and the horizon stretches out forever, the road straightens and the country becomes sparser and drier . Cross many cattle grids and keep an eye peeled for roaming cattle . When we see them standing next to the road, we cross our fingers and burble past them a bit slower than normal. They become harder to see as dusk approaches . Several motorcyclists have come to grief out here; but, only by riding at night, an absolute no-no as far as I am concerned. I have had too many encounters with wombats, cattle, kangaroos, sheep, emus, donkeys, buffalo and even camels over the years to take the risk.

Pull into Balladonia, and has it changed from before the road was sealed! A modern Motel, Restaurant and snack bar, luxury! Before there was just a shack here, have a fine meal, except I made the mistake of putting too much pepper in my soup. Water to slake my thirst is a precious commodity out here! Then to sleep, on a thin air mattress in the 2 man tent, spread on the dusty soil in the bush. Up early, as it is New Year's Day. What happened to New Year's Eve? It was awfully quiet out here in the middle of nowhere!

Away East again, into a strong head wind. It is 181 kms to Caiguna and for 100 miles the road is dead straight, littered with dead kangaroos. Twice on this stretch my mind dozed off and I slipped into sidecar mode! I couldn't figure out why the bike was spearing towards the side of the road. I had dropped into sidecar steering and that is the opposite of solo steering. Quickly I pulled myself together and recovered before we got into big trouble. About 40kms out of Caiguna had to go onto reserve, slow down from 120km/h and start praying. Putting along at 95-100km/h and finally Caiguna comes into sight, although still far ahead. Two Kms to go, heart beating faster, sweating palms and 1km sign passes. Finally, we rolled into Caiguna, filled her up and still had one litre left. What were we worried about?

On to Cocklebidy and the vegetation really begins to thin out and the horizon seems to get very close as the landscape is very flat. Roll down Madura Pass and fill up. The place has also been transformed since the road was sealed. New Motel building instead of a crazy lean-to. Madura pass is quite a change out there, abruptly dropping down to the coastal plain and following the old coastline from aeons ago! The road rises to the Nullarbor Plain again at Eucla and the cliffs continue to form the incredible sea-cliffs along the Bight. From Mundrabilla to Eucla we are confronted by clouds of grasshoppers which splatter us and the bike with their guts and body parts. At speed they can hurt as well, especially on the gloved hands and exposed neck. These locusts are everywhere from Brookton to Adelaide. Very thick clouds in places and every vehicle and bike rider is covered in their remains and pity those without wire mesh on their radiators. At Eucla we cut down a bumpy and sandy track to the old telegraph station and jetty. The old buildings are pretty well swallowed up by creeping sand dunes and it is quite an eerie sight late in the day. The isolation is so pervasive, the early telegraph operators must have been a hardy lot. We helped a guy whose car got bogged and later at the Border Bar I discover the driver is the brother of a chap I work with! Small world. *(50 years later my brother meets a guy at a caravan park in North Qld, gets talking and discovers he is the chap I used to work with whose brother I rescued!)*



Camped overnight at Eucla, good camping, Motel/Hotel facilities newly constructed on the border just inside SA. At the old Eucla site in WA there is an old Army DUKW which the locals use for going out to sea to shoot sharks. The water here is as bad as anywhere on the Nullie. From Norseman to Ceduna there is no freshwater and the bore water is very salty. We advanced our watches 45 minutes at Caiguna, now we do the same again; but this time 1 hour 45 minutes as SA has daylight saving. Doing so, sure makes the riding day short! From Eucla the road now skirts the coast and stopping at several cliff-top viewing points cuts back the amount of time you can cover in a day, however, the view is worth it with sheer cliffs stretching to the horizon. Turn around and you have a flat desolate plain as far as you can see, quite a contrast.

The road no longer goes to Koonalda and Ivy tanks so the next fuel stop is Nullarbor Station. We made Nullarbor Station after riding a 95km/h to preserve fuel. We covered 185kms with a strong headwind and went onto reserve 30kms out. Nullarbor Station is the only stop which is actually on the Nullarbor Plain . There is not a tree in sight . There fueling was conducted at the actual station, the modern roadhouse did not exist then. Forward on to Yalata Mission Reserve. The road skirts the old Reserve (no longer a Mission) and avoids the dreaded Nanwarra Sands which made travel so difficult in earlier days. Last time I went through here the locals laid on the road to stop traffic to sell carved souvenirs. None this time, presumably because traffic travels so much faster on the sealed road!

Fuel up at Nundroo and Penong & the Nullarbor crossing is done. Camp at Ceduna by the Ocean and enjoy great fish and chips. Ceduna is 490kms from Eucla. When I did the unsealed road in 1973 the road was dirt from Eucla to Penong or 420kms. Now the trip still takes time but you don't have to worry so much about breaking down or falling off!

From Ceduna we headed South down the Eyre peninsula to Port Lincoln. The first stop was Streaky Bay, where Eyre started his epic trek around the Bight to Albany. The road now runs close to the coast and a very rugged coastline it is. At Talia Caves the sea has gouged deep channels out of the limestone leaving huge tunnels undercutting the cliff face. From Streaky Bay to Elliston there is 80kms of dirt road and very bad dirt road at that.

The road further along towards Port Lincoln passes through some very pretty farmland with some strange light blue lakes in between the road and a range of hills. Before reaching Port Lincoln the road winds up a steep hill called Winter hill and at the top is a glorious view of the town and coastline with many bays and large islands in sight.

Port Lincoln looked like a nice place; but, it was my New Orleans! (*Note: Easyrider reference*). When we get to the Council Caravan Park there is a sign which says, "No Bikes permitted" in large print. (This now leaves a very sour taste in my mouth whenever I think of Port Lincoln). We were very tired and there was only one caravan park in the town, so we left Port Lincoln vowing vengeance. We finally camped in a very pleasant place by the sea 10 miles up the road.

4 January 1977 saw us pass through Whyalla and Port Augusta and on to the Lofty Ranges, following a real good road. Up and over Horrocks Pass and on to Wilmington. The road to Adelaide now goes along the Eastern side of the range and through many old farming communities with lots of old building made out of the local stone. Many deserted and old houses are scattered about beside the road a reminder of farming conditions before the Depression and drought brought them to their knees. From Clare winegrowing is abundant culminating in the Barossa Valley. We then hit Adelaide and the traffic! Two days of laying around the pool at a Motel in Adelaide took its toll and I grew fat and lazy, (something I have never shaken off). One can swim in the water at Adelaide but don't try and drink it. The muddy, smelly water is pumped from the Murray River and has a somewhat strange taste (even compared to Perth water)! Adelaide was sweltering, tucked in beneath the Mt Lofty Ranges, the heat forcing us to stay in our air-conditioned rooms. Thus we missed the sights of Adelaide.

On the morning of the 7th, we finally moved out into the hills back towards the Barossa Valley and into huge clouds of locusts. There we swept through crowds of wine imbibers and wound our way from Gawler to Tanunda and on to Nurioopta. There the ride came to a sudden temporary halt when a bee stung me on the belly after making its way down my jacket! After half an hour's incapacitation we droned on out of the hills and into the Murray Valley. We crossed the Murray at Blanchtown and headed towards Renmark. The Murray was broad, murky, winding and twisting whilst bringing life to the dusty plains. Every mile the river seems to have pump and pipe in it for the orchards and vineyards, Where the water doesn't reach is basically desert. Renmark was packed with normal tourists so we by-passed the town. One thing about the big Suzuki is how smooth the triple is and trouble free. Rarely needing chain tensioning, just fuel and occasionally some oil. The GT750 is comfortable two-up and handles well. The Sturt Highway cuts into Victoria for a short stretch and we stopped at the first petrol station we came across as the heat was unbearable. I stuck my head under a water tap and tried to drink it but it was foul, so stuck to cool drink and orange juice! Finally made Mildura and it was packed with people. I have never seen so many caravan parks in my life. At Red-Cliffs we struck off across the flood plain to see them. After bouncing over dirt tracks for miles we never found them but did find the river. There were many big fish along the bank sticking their heads out and eating insects, I guess they were carp.

Cutting back to the Calder Highway we headed for Hattah Lakes to camp overnight. After talking to the Ranger we set up the tent near the lake. Went for a quick walk and saw that there were heaps of big Grey Kangaroos & Mallee-Fowl. The lake is part of the old course of the Murray. By morning the river water even tasted sweet from the old water bag. Rose early and went for a walk to photograph some of the roos. Stepping ever so quietly through the long grass so as not to disturb the roos I came within inches of stepping on a Brown snake. I glimpsed it through the corner of my eye whilst filming and I just caught my step in time. I gasped with alarm and the snake took off like lightning under a bush. I carefully stepped around it and stuck to the middle of the track after that fright!

We packed camp and headed away following the river to Swan Hill and Echuca amidst hordes of grasshoppers. We reached



Cobram and crossed into NSW only to cross back into Victoria at Yarrawonga. The river is dammed at Yarrawonga and the place was packed with swimmers and skiers. We camped in a massive caravan park and settled down among a horde of conventional tourists and insects. Next day accompanied by clouds of grasshoppers we were off to Albury-Wodonga and the Hume Weir. Finally some hills again as we crossed the Weir and followed the road to Corryong. It was a beautiful road and great on a motorcycle. The Murray was now a swiftly flowing stream and soon we were back in NSW and heading for Khancoban and the Kosciusko National Park. As we ride the steep winding road up the heights the exhaust changes tone. The colder high speed plugs haven't taken kindly to the slow dirt road and the change of atmosphere amongst the forest. Easily fixed, out with the hotter standard plugs. Never touched the plugs again on the entire trip.

We checked out the Yarrangobilly Caves, which are in a 300 foot deep gorge, at the end of a winding dirt road. On again and we soon pass through Cabramurra, the highest town in Australia. Next Kiandra and the tombstones at permanent Creek from the goldrush in the 1850s. Camped at Adaminaby beside lake Eucumbene. On to Canberra to visit relatives and look around.

Thus, the rest of the trip was a repeat journey, only this time via Cann River, Orbost, Melbourne, the Great Ocean Road, Adelaide and back across the Nullarbor. The GT750 Suzuki performed flawlessly, even two up with a ton of gear. We did carry a lot for sure. At one stop on the way home, a couple of guys on Honda 750s commented negatively on our load. At Nullarbor Station, we found one of the guys disconsolate with a collapsed rear wheel. I reached into my saddle bag and gave him a handful of spare spokes. I trust he rebuilt it, I'll never know.

On the run to Eucla the GT750 stopped running, fortunately it was only petrol. I had strapped a container of fuel on the back at Ceduna, knowing the headwind going home would chew up fuel. Filling the tank again, we were soon off again and to cut things short, eventually made our way safely home. We had done it, again, crossing the Continent without incident, somehow, thank goodness & the Suzi Waterbottle was reliable, comfortable and faultless.

In August 1977 we took the little Mazda on an adventure, touring the North-west. It was quite a test of the little car as a large part of the journey was along unsealed roads. This was, however, before the advent of large four wheel drives and the roads whilst rough and dusty had not been cut-up by heavy powerful vehicles. We took the North-West Highway to Cue and onwards to Mount Newman. At that time Mount Newman had not been turned into a hole in the ground as it is today. Going inland to the North-west was fairly quiet and remote in those days. There was little traffic. Cue was interesting as many of the old mining buildings were still in place. The old gaol was being used as a camping site so we stayed there, having only a small two man tent to sleep in. From Cue we headed up to Newman and then took the dirt road to Nullagine before turning off to visit Wittenoom and Wittenoom Gorge. This entailed along and dusty drive alongside the Hammersley Ranges. Whatever we were expecting, we found Wittenoom pretty empty. Asbestos mining was in the bad books and the town was dying on it's feet. We took the road down the Gorge; but, once we sighted the asbestos mine and it's huge asbestos tailing heaps we hightailed it out of there despite the picturesque attractions of the gorge. We backtracked and somehow got the little Mazda up to Dale's Gorge. Today the area is known as Karijini National Park; but in those days it was wild and empty country with few tourists and no amenities. Evelyn and I climbed down to Fortescue Falls and explored the area. We moved on and camped in the bush with a view of Mt Bruce which at the time was thought to be WA's highest peak.

F



Old Clubhouse at Cue



Cue main Street



Well on road to Newman



Road to Wittenoom



Camp near Mt Bruce



Mt Tom Price

From there we travelled on to Mt Tom Price and enjoyed a visit to the top of the mountain and viewed of the iron ore mining operations. Now, Mt Tom Price has gone down a hole and the town is just called Tom Price. From Tom Price we headed North towards the Chichester Range. Along the way we followed the iron ore railway for a while and saw some tremendously long ore trains. We eventually reached Millstream where we camped and replaced a flat tyre. We fortunate not to suffer another puncture on these unsealed roads as we only had the one spare wheel. We visited Roebourne and went out to Cossack which was deserted. Since then the town has had it's old Court House, gaol and several buildings restored; but at that time, everything was abandoned.

We headed South to Exmouth and visited the town and Shothole Canyon. We camped in town and were amused by how many emus walked the main street. Travelling South we headed out towards Shark Bay and visited Hamelin Bay and saw the stromatolites along the shore. We had no idea what these strange things were. It wasn't until months later when we saw David Attenbrough's Life on Earth TV series that we learned what they were and their role in developed life as we know it. We were astonished. We drove the Mazda along a sand track until we reached the Nanga Road and went on to Denham and then took another dirt road to Monkey Mia. There we were astonished to see the dolphins coming right up to the shore to be patted and fed fish. Monkey Mia at this time was just a couple of fishing shacks and the dolphins were pretty well unknown. Now it is huge tourist park. We camped the night by a claypan. We went on to Carnarvon and even took a long dusty run out to Quobba Point to see the blowholes, which were a disappointment. Soon enough we were heading back to Perth, via Kalbarri, after a somewhat foolhardy trip; but adventurous trip. One these days we would only take a 4WD drive on prepared for rough roads.



Chichester Rangeview from Chichester Range road



Shothole Canyon North-West Cape

We did many trips around the South-West and rides with the touring motorcycle club. Life was good. I had an interesting job with the Department of Army as Military Secretary for the 5th Military District before joining Defence Audit in order to achieve promotion. These jobs gave me the opportunity to visit Defence establishments all over Perth and Western Australia and also trips to Canberra to Defence in the Russell Buildings. Evelyn came with me on one trip and we visited her sister Helen in Canberra who had a young child.

In 1980, on an Easter run to Nungarin with the motorcycle club, Evelyn was sick during the night and was vomiting. We never thought much about it; but, not long afterwards, back home Evelyn announce that she was pregnant. This was exciting news and before long we welcomed Michael into our lives on 11 December 1980. It was to be quite a while before we slept soundly again. Michael was a happy baby, but, the house was small so I set to, taking out an old unused kitchen chimney and converting the side verandah into a bedroom and a dining room. The like of which was never seen before and never seen again. I was not much of a handyman; having never been taught anything by my Father and never having much inclination either. The extra bedroom came in handy because we soon welcomed Graham's arrival on 16 April 1983. Despite these renovations, it soon became clear that we required more space and we sold up and bought a real brick and tile house in Parkwood for \$53,000, an absolute fortune then. We barely got our money back on the white-ant ridden shack in Gosnells.

SUN, SAND & SPINIFEX

Four European motorcycles and one Japanese motorcycle left on a dismal August morning in 1981, planning to do a loop- Perth - Darwin - Adelaide and back to Perth, but only the four Euro-bikes made it back intact. The five bikes and riders, all members of the West Coast Motorcycle Touring Club, were: Carl - 1978 Motor Guzzi 850T3, Shane 1978 1000 cc Laverda Jota, Kathy - 1980 BMW R65, Clyde 1978 Kawasaki Z650 and myself on a 1978 850cc Moto Guzzi le Mans.



The rendezvous point was Bullsbrook 45 kms North of Perth. As I pulled up, Carl was already there, lying on his back, looking very pale and decidedly unfit. He was in the throes of a bad attack of Gastro-enteritis. (Setback No 1. to our tight schedule?) Shane and Kathy arrived on time but Clyde set the pattern for the trip by arriving an hour late. Heading North along Brand Highway we rode through a gathering rain-storm. Our first petrol stop was Eneabba where we noticed Carl still staggering about clutching his guts so he was sent off to the local nursing sister. She gave him some Staminade and clay to swallow and told him to go straight to bed! Fat chance of that on the first day of the trip. We pushed on through the drizzle to Geraldton where we rapidly heated up in our wet-weather gear when the sun finally came out. Carl hobbled about like a broken old man and was clearly well and truly stuffed so we threw our itinerary away and settled into an on-site van so that he could sleep the afternoon away.

The next morning we were up and packed by dawn. The rain was still around and the Chapman Valley was swathed in clouds of mist. Overlander Station, adjacent to Shark Bay was our morning tea-break stop and here we chatted with the only BMW we saw on the road during the whole trip! Overlander is where the enterprising tourist can detour 10 kms West to Hamelin Pool which is the southernmost arm of Shark Bay. Here there are no currents to replenish the sea-water and the high evaporation rate has left the water too salty for marine creatures to survive. As the sun set, the rain began to pour. Blinded by the rain, we stupidly pushed on after dark, scared silly of hitting roos, emus or cattle, At long long last the lights of Fortescue Crossing shone up ahead, just as we zoomed past a steer standing on the road, in the dark! We'd covered 1000 kms and Carl was still very crook and none of us felt like going on. A road-train had rolled over, just up the road, and 69 injured and very angry cattle were waiting for us in the dark. So we decided to call it a night.

Carl was now placed in quarantine as we were all in dire fear of catching his virulent wogs. The next day we took Carl to Dampier Hospital and he spent the whole day recuperating whilst the rest of us pushed onto Pt Hedland. Just past the Whim Creek Pub we passed a patrol car going in the other direction. He was going slow, holding a little black box at us as we were going very fast luxuriating in the thrill of the open road. The thrill evaporated quicker than methylated spirits on a boilerm when we noticed the patrol car slam on the skids and swing violently off the road in a huge cloud of dust, to commence a U-turn. He never did catch us, so we can only presume he stalled his car in his excitement!

The next day Carl caught up with us and we headed up the coast to Broome. The country began to flatten out with few features to talk of as we travelled on what used to be known as the Madman's Track. The road is now beautiful smooth bitumen and was only



sealed early in 1981. After 300 kms we stopped for fuel at the Sandfire Flats Roadhouse (half way to Broome). Sandfire is the only Roadhouse between Hedland and Broome and makes some fine sandwiches. The mechanic seems to be continually under the weather so don't breakdown and need something repaired whatever you do. The first bloke through here in 1879 had written in his diary that the sun played upon the scrub in such a way that the sand appeared to be on fire! That's how the place received its name and just as well as there is nothing else there of distinction. We didn't see the sand on fire but we certainly got burnt by the price of petrol; almost \$10 to fill my tank (5 gallons).

By the means of some more slow night-time riding we made Broome and camped at the Cable Beach Caravan Camp right next to the zoo (which has gone now along with the caravan park). Not a bad spot but a bit pricey. Whilst parked in town Carl's bike fell over destroying a mirror and knocking the headlight housing around. Only minutes before Carl had been in desperate need of a tom-tit and yet the local garage refused to let him use their dunny. So much for Broome hospitality and so much for Carl's day!

That night the Laverda's centre stand broke so we had to stay the next day to get it welded.

The most noticeable thing about Broome is that it is full of hippies and has the biggest Commonwealth Employment Services office I've ever seen. Streeters jetty in Chinatown still had pearl luggers tied up at it and by the jetty men were sitting cross-legged in a tin shack opening pearl shell by hand. The tourist bureau was an Indonesian DC3 that had crashed at the airport one day and was written off (Initially built by Americans for use in the second world war, then later used as a passenger plane for Garuda Airlines, the DC-3 then belly flopped in Broome in 1974. It then spent a decade as a tourist information centre, before spending several years in pieces in a suburban backyard in Armadale - a wing hanging over the neighbours fence. Last heard of, in 2014, seven decades after it was built, the old plane is now perched on a hill at Amelup, near the Stirling Ranges, getting ready to be used as a tourist accommodation facility).



Cable Beach is beautiful and full of bare bums and naughty bits (a man could waste his whole life upon the sands of Cable Beach!). The first night we went to a Chinese restaurant (not hard then as there used to be one on each corner at China- town) and we all fell instantly in love with a very cute and sexy young waitress. Heading back to camp Clyde said he had arranged a rendezvous with the young woman. We all were very jealous when he headed off but he was soon back all despondent. He went back to where she had said to meet her; but, she never turned up. We saw her the next day in the arms of a wealthy Japanese pearler. Guess his charms were more attractive than dusty old oil stained Clyde!

On day 6, we heading off to Gantheaume Point to try and see the dinosaur prints. Carl decided to show us all how to ride on the dirt and promptly ended up on his posterior. Kathy immediately copied him and the road was soon packed with caravaners getting hernias helping to pick up the grossly overloaded bikes. We never saw any dinosaur prints but the view of the red cliffs was worth it.

Broome has a fascinating but grim history. There are still 5 pearl luggers operating but the industry's history is ugly. Hundreds of



aboriginals were doomed to die when pearling began in earnest in the 1860's. To obtain labour, raiding parties would scour the bush to impress the aborigines as divers. In the depths mishaps and drownings occurred frequently and cyclones took a heavy toll (150 men were drowned by a willy-willy in 1908 and 140 in 1935). Diver's paralysis also took its toll and in 1914 alone 62 men died from this cause and uncounted numbers were crippled. In Broome itself there is a huge and interesting Japanese cemetery with a memorial to 40 Japanese drowned in the 1908 blow. Scattered about the town are numerous corroded aircraft engines. These are reminders of the Japanese air-raid in 1942 which sank 16 flying boats in Roebuck Bay and destroyed 7 planes on the air-strip, killing 75 people.

Leaving Broome behind we began to notice the heat and found the 400 km ride to Fitzroy Crossing exhausting. We stopped at Willare Bridge for a break and a welcome ice cream but standing by our bikes we had to protect our rapidly melting treat from the whistling kites. The bush surrounding the roadhouse was littered with disposable nappies. Not a good advert for caring for country we thought. After stopping to cool off at the odd Boab tree on the way we headed to the Fitzroy Crossing pub for a drink and a rest on the only patch of green grass we could see. I headed to the bar but couldn't get served. After a while it dawned on me, I was standing at the "black" bar! Walking around the wire mesh fence I was soon able to acquire a cold drink (one assumes this sign of apartheid has long gone). All around the pub, the track back to town and local bush was covered with scattered cartons bottles and cans, glinting in the sun. I was advised that each year the Fitzroy floods and washed the litter away.

Like lambs to the slaughter we next headed up the Geikie Gorge road. Just down the road the track crosses a creek bed and the Guzzi struck a lump of concrete curbing going into the creek bed. Whack! All was OK, but Fitzroy was no place to put a hole in the Guzzi's extended sump. The number of bulldust holes, sand drifts, creek crossings and corrugations in the next 20 kms soon had us wondering how far we would get on the trip. The road was abysmal and the bikes and riders were soon over-heating. Delighted at arriving, but hot and tired, we set up camp near the river and went for a swim. Despite the warning signs of crocodiles, we went in taking care not to dog-paddle too much.



Signs warned no dogs or children, but not having any on us, we were unperturbed. The beady eyes of freshwater crocs watched us but we didn't care, the water was so refreshing, that is until they submerged and we lost sight of them! Geikie Gorge itself was a beautiful sight as the sun- set lit the limestone walls up in its red glow. The Gorge was cut by the Fitzroy River through a fossilized reef (the Oscar Range). The Range winds across the countryside for 300 kms reproducing the original reef topography of 300 million years ago. The Fitzroy river is stocked with barramundi, crocodiles, stingrays and sharks, which normally inhabit the sea. The area we camped in was surrounded by beautiful cajuputs and river gums which were covered with climbing vines. It was hard to visualize that during the Wet our campsite would be 7m under water! That evening the Ranger came around and gave us a beautiful Barramundi he had caught that afternoon. We enjoyed a great freshly cooked meal in a wonderful setting (note: camping is no longer permitted in the park).

In the morning, we took a boat tour up the Gorge with the Ranger which was a bargain at \$3 per person. The ranger caught Barramundi as we went. We then attempted the Gorge Road again and banged and bounced back to Fitzroy Crossing but not before Kathy had dropped her BMW four times and Shane's Laverda had fallen over in sympathy.





Fitzroy had no petrol! we tried the Pub but they didn't even have any beer, which explained why there were no locals around the place! (Set back No 2 to our fabulously well planned itinerary!) A helpful local finally informed us that petrol was available at Brooking Springs Station, so with sinking hearts we set out some 12 kms back out along the Geikie Gorge Road! Riding into the setting sun we rode into Brooking Springs station along a dusty track and filled our empty tanks. Brooking Springs looked like a scene out of a Marlboro ad with horses and stockmen all around.



Struggling back into Fitzroy in the dusk we avoided several near get-offs and finally set-up a bush camp, down a rough track, 10kms East of Fitzroy where the bitumen road had come to an end.



Day Eight arrived and we bounded onto the dirt road to Hall's Creek all fully refreshed and confident. Clyde confidently told us that the only way to tackle the dirt was flat-out, within minutes however the road had shaken him out of his complacency. We had to learn to hang on for grim death in the dust and loose gravel. After 30 kms of battering the Kwacka stopped dead when it's battery lead broke. The Kwacka was quickly bodgied and we carried on only to have Carl's mammoth pack almost bounce off his bike despite having at least 300 "ocky" straps holding it together. While we were stopped for that problem, the Laverda rolled up with its petrol tank sitting on the rocker-covers. The weight of the extended tank (up from 19l to 36l) had bent the tank mountings. A great quantity of rag, torn-up tea towels and T-shirts wrapped around the frame soon fixed that. Another 30 kms of fighting for control passed and this time the stitching on one of my saddle-bags had broken apart and all my tools were draped along the road for miles. Not worrying about the tools, the bag was quickly laced up with wire, permanently fixing the problem.



Sitting at 80 km/h on a good stretch of dirt, 150 kms out of Fitzroy, Kathy tried to change from one wheel-rut to another without slowing down. As she crossed the mound of dirt between the ruts the BMW bucked, propped in a huge cloud of dust and crashed to the ground. Kathy landed heavily on her shoulder didn't move. Her shoulder was badly bruised and Kathy was unable/unwilling to ride the BMW any further (Setback No. 3). Fortunately, a concerned group of caravaners arrived and took her into Halls Creek for a check-up whilst Clyde and I waited with the bike. Shane and Carl went on to Hall's Creek and the plan was for Shane to get a lift back to pick up the BMW.



Clyde and I sat out there for the next 20 hours in country so bare that even a wallaby would need a cut lunch to get a feed on it. We crawled under a shrub trying to keep out of the burning sun whilst the flies, and Clyde, drove me raving mad. We soon used up nearly all my water and were reduced to eating cold bully beef. We waited and waited, slowly dehydrating. Shane arrived after dark so we pitched camp to the sound of wild donkeys braying in the near-distance.

In the morning, we started on the remaining 160 kms of dirt to Halls Creek but found the glare of the sun and the dust was so bad that we couldn't see the loose sand drifts. We solved that by taping paper to our visors to use them as sun-shields. When we made it to Halls Creek we found that Kathy couldn't ride for at least another 5 days (Set back No 4!) Halls Creek however was about to have its annual races and the town was full of stockies and desert aborigines. A side show was in town and it was an eye-opener to go down and watch the locals throw their money away and beat each other up. The lock-up was chocka full the next morning.

Day 10 came before we knew it and Shane and Kathy hadn't decided what to do with the BMW so we booked a plane flight to Wolf Creek Meteorite Crater which is 130 kms south of Hall's Creek. The plane barely got off the ground in the heat and hugged the hills closely on the way out. What with the engine noise and heat it was only a matter of time before the 1st liquid laugh occurred. Just as we had a good view of the crater there was a muffled shout from the back seat and as we all turned around a huge fountain of vomit sprayed out from Shane. Reacting to the sight and smell I soon imitated him, using my camera bag as a receptacle. The pilot, regardless, flew sharply down into the crater. Carl panicked and grabbed at the controls so the pilot gave up - banked over and circled to gain height, levelled the plane out and flew back to Halls Creek. Shane and Kathy, amidst the retching, didn't dare look out the window and missed seeing the second biggest meteorite crater in the world.



That afternoon, after recovering, Carl, Clyde and I explored the rugged surroundings visiting Old Halls Creek, Caroline Pool and the China Wall, a quartz formation well worth the rough road to see. Gold was found at Halls Creek in 1885 and the diggers poured in from Derby across 750 kms of trackless waste and faced disease, thirst, crocs, mosquitoes and hostile locals as a reward. Diggers were speared by the war-like Kimberley aborigines and in one shocking case 200 aborigines were reported slaughtered by miners near the town in retaliation.



Day 11 arrived quietly in Hall's Creek and Shane had decided to carry Kathy as pillion on the Laverda and put her BMW on a truck to Darwin. The road to Wyndham was enjoyable after the dirt and it was good to be moving again. Wyndham retains some of its old character, clinging to a narrow strip of land between the Bastion Range and Cambridge Gulf. There is a particularly worthwhile look-out, at Wyndham, called the Five Rivers Look-out. From there a panorama of the Gulf and the King, Pentecost, Durack, Ord and Ivanhoe Rivers can be obtained. The road to the lookout is very rough, rocky, steep and difficult as Clyde soon found out to his cost. Battling the road and 40°C of heat, Clyde hit a huge rock which speared the Kwacka off into even more bigger rocks. The end result was that the Kwacka was left lying upside down on a steep slope with a broken fairing and a bruised rider underneath. Little did we know this as the rest of us had fought our way up the loose and rocky steep road to the lookout. "Where's Clyde?" was my plaintive cry as I stood hot and bothered at the lookout trying to take in the magnificent view. Everyone looked at each other in the hope that one or the other knew. No-one made a move, being hot, dusty, thirsty and tired. I reluctantly eased the Guzzi off its centre stand and made my way down the difficult road keeping an eye out for an errant bike and rider. Half way down I espied a Kawasaki poking above the rocks beside the track. Parking the heavily loaded Guzzi with difficulty on the steep slope I helped Clyde to his feet, checked he was OK and together we got the bike back on the track. Deciding we had both had enough we rode back down the hill to await the others.



The heat was by now oppressive and it was a relief to get back on the road and to reach Kununurra where we camped for the night beside the Diversion Dam. Kununurra is a town of 1500 people mainly public servants who service a mere 28 farmers. The farmers are in fact outnumbered 2:1 by Dept of Agriculture employees. Over the last 20 years over \$1 Billion has been poured into the area with very little to show for it except 2 large lakes. Lake Argyle itself is very scenic but very little of it can be seen from the Dam in a fleeting visit.



Next day we crossed into the Territory and noticed an immediate deterioration in the road surface.

Heading towards Timber Creek Carl discovered an unexpected hazard when a galah or some similar parrot swooped low and exploded in a cloud of feathers on his chest and helmet at 70 mph. Dazed by the impact and the shock of it all, Carl managed to pull up OK and we were soon busy removing the remains from his bike and riding gear.

Riding was now very hot and tiring work and by the time we reached the Victoria River we were ready for a swim. The river however is tidal and even though we were 200 kms inland it is packed full of the biggest and most dangerous salt-water crocodiles you would never want to meet. Swimming was out of the question.

We met another particular hazard 100 kms out of Katherine when we came up behind a slow-moving road-train. The road was only one-lane wide and the next moment he pulled on to the shoulder and we were instantly blinded by a shower of red dust as his wheels went off the sealed surface. Riding blind is no fun and we all unintentionally ended up heading in different directions, on and off the road. In the cloud of red dust I tried to stay straight but then I saw a white guide post pass my left knee and then in a flash a car zipped by, also on my left, being barely visible in the haze. Whoa, that was close, a few feet further to the left and he would have cleaned me up! The truck had suddenly gone onto the shoulder because of the oncoming car.



We had no warning but fortunately everyone survived albeit somewhat wiser. Eventually we passed the truck by taking to the bush beside the road and motocrossing the bikes to the front. We made it to Katherine where we camped at the Katherine Gorge National Park. The infamous "man-eating" Emu at the park, in fact, had a preference for Moto-Guzzi tank-badges, a sign of good taste, perhaps?

The next morning we went on the boat trip at Katherine Gorge which we in general we felt that after Geikie Gorge was interesting if somewhat disappointing. That afternoon we cruised into Darwin. We had a very difficult time finding anywhere to camp. After numerous phone-calls we finally found one on the outskirts of town near the Airport. That night we found out why it had places left. The US Air Force/Navy was conducting touch and go exercises at night with their fighter jets on the RAAF strip and the noise was incredibly loud when they quickly went back to full power. Sleep was difficult to say the least.

We found Darwin so soon after Cyclone Tracy, a grotty place and the street verges were covered in litter, mainly beer cans. Quite a few buildings were still in ruins with many a house just being a pad on stilts. After replacing back tyres, chains (on the Kwacka and Jota) and oil we were ready to leave for the Red Centre. But where was Kathy's BMW? It had not arrived from Halls Creek we were told and there was a transport strike on and no fuel to be had down the Stuart Highway (Set back No 5 and our itinerary is in rags!)

While we waited for the bike, we went for a boat-cruise down the South Alligator River, where we spent the day hanging out of the boat looking for crocs and buffalo and expected Tarzan to come out wrestling a croc at any moment. We chewed on delicious barbecued buffalo steak and barramundi beside the river for lunch and basically had a relaxing day for a change. The highlight of the day was the jumping croc. Almost unknown at the time, but since become famous, the jumping croc was a huge salty that came up beside the boat and leapt straight up out of the water to grab a lump of meat hanging from a boat hook. The croc was invisible in the muddy water and came lunging up out of nowhere at least 8 feet out of the water. Reminded us to keep our hands inboard at least!



On the road we came upon a car which had hit a water buffalo at speed. The front end of the car was shoved back to the wind screen. We rode with wary eyes looking out for water buffalo after that.

We found Darwin interesting as there were signs of the war still evident in the fortifications at East Point, the museum at Mindi Beach was well put together, the prison at Fannie Bay eye opening and the Air Museum at the airport fascinating. The only problem was, we were all suffering from Darwin-type Belly, to varying degrees.

Day 18 dragged around and we are still stuck in Darwin without the BMW. Frantic investigation finally uncovers the fact that the bike is still in Hall's Creek for some unknown reason (setback # 6). To compound it all there is a truckie strike starting, making it impossible to get past Alice Springs, as there would be no fuel. Plus, Shane and Kathy are adamant that they were not prepared to ride the unsealed Stuart Highway to Port Augusta. There was no alternative but to abandon the rest of our, by now useless, itinerary and head back the way we had come and look at the things we'd passed by. For some reason Shane and Kathy decided they were in a hurry and took off ahead of us and disappeared. We looked for them in Katherine wondering if they had missed the turn. This to say the least was unusual behaviour. We were concerned for their safety at first,



thinking they may have crashed. Eventually we decided they had gone ahead to collect Kathy's BMW which was still at Halls Creek and head to Perth. For some reason they have misled us for days and lead us down a merry path. Now they have abandoned us in the middle of nowhere. This weird behaviour damaged the relationship and we broke off contact with them when we got back to Perth.

The rest of us were in no hurry and continued to meander back towards W.A. We paused to look at some Aboriginal Crafts at Katherine and tried to play the Didgeridoo and start a fire by rubbing two sticks together. The next morning, we rode to Victoria River and spent some time looking at the river and gorge. The cliffs form, more or less, a continuous barrier and have become the dividing line between Eastern Australian and Western wildlife and vegetation forms.

That night we camped out of Katherine on the road to Kununurra. Wandering about the scrub near our camp I came across a beautifully shaped aboriginal hand axe, just sitting on the sand and possibly been there for ages. The next day we crawled into Kununurra, feeling very tired and sapped of energy. The weather was very hot and for most of our trip had been consistently hot. Locals told us that we had been unlucky as an early wet season was approaching and it was 10°C hotter than normal. At Kununurra we finally tracked down Hidden Valley which is located almost in the some local kids. Hidden Valley is a cul-de-sac formation formed from sandstone which was laid down under the sea many years ago. The valley has many beautifully coloured narrow gorges and an eerie atmosphere exists possibly because it is a semi-sacred site and was used for centuries by the aborigines as a corroboree ground. There are aboriginal paintings if you look hard enough for them and evidence of spear sharpening and rock art.

Camped beside the diversion dam the chattering of several million birds woke us up very early. Lake Kununurra is a haven for birds as well as giant mosquitoes. The mosquitoes are so prolific that the Government could make a fortune by catching them and boiling them down for their fat. We went for a cooling swim in the dam only to see a freshwater croc sail by. Fortunately, salties weren't known in the dam at this stage.



That night we headed off South and camped at Halls Creek. Camped with us were 2 Swiss blokes on a Yamaha 500 and a Kwacka 9, a French West African on a Honda and a Canadian on a push bike. We were a real-life United Nations! My washing disappeared overnight from the washing line. The campground laundry being on the route between the town and the pub I guess I should have known. I only had what I was wearing now to get home to Perth. On day 21 we headed back onto the dirt section of National Highway No 1. Three hundred kilometres of disgusting sand and gravel again. The road was better than it was 2 weeks before but it soon deteriorated.

The sun was very bright and made it rather difficult to see the soft patches. Struggling through these problems I was amazed to see ahead of me a pair of attractive breasts. Attached to the bare breasts is a girl waving to me to stop. Without hesitation I pulled up to assist her in whatever manner she needed assisting. A fair change from dust and mulga, I thought at the time. The car she was travelling in had a mutilated tyre and although she was travelling out in the middle of nowhere she had absolutely no tools in the car! You wouldn't believe it if you read about it. With her were a couple of other hippie types who'd been having fun at Broome's Shinju Matsuri Festival and were now heading for Darwin. We got them going again but couldn't understand why people would travel so unprepared in such country. Anyway, she caught my attention.

At the Margaret River Crossing we stopped for some photos and Carl rode around in circles in the bull-dust for us. Just as I focused on him he rode into a deep hole and his front wheel almost disappeared. As the Moto Guzzi hit the ground I snapped the picture, thanks Carl for an action shot!

One hundred kms out of Fitzroy Crossing we stopped for a rest and began examining the hills around us. One of the Ranges consisted of layer after layer of sandstone tilted up and exposed by



some ancient earth movement.

Fossicking among the rocks we found layers of fossilized coral and primitive crinoids which had been laid down under the sea some 300 million years ago. Carl was most excited as he'd always wanted a fossil to put on his mantelpiece. Our saddlebags soon carried even more weight than usual.





That evening whilst having dinner at Fitzroy Crossing Clyde noticed that his back tyre was deflating. It was his first puncture in seven years of riding and the only one we had on the whole trip. By the time we'd fixed the puncture it was dark and we still had to find a spot to camp. We had no trouble however finding our planned turn-off as it was surrounded by bushfires. Being tired we beat out a small fire near us and then settled down for the night in a non-flammable blue-metal dump.

Day 22 arrived and the road to Leopold Downs wasn't too promising. It was narrow and varied between being soft and rocky. The first section was very sandy and loose however it improved once we had passed through the Oscar Range. We reached a point where the track went off in at least 7 directions. We were sitting there wondering what track to take and concerned about how far we could get on our fuel tanks, when a Toyota Landcruiser stripped back to the basics came roaring up one of the tracks. Hanging off the 4WD were half a dozen stockies. They soon pointed in the right direction which we considered very fortuitous.



The track was just two-wheel tracks through sand and as we had to use a lot of care to negotiate several creeks and bull dust drifts. For some obscure reason I was always nominated to lead. The inevitable had to come and whilst negotiating one particularly long stretch of bull dust the sand built up around the front wheel sending the Le Mans into a wobble. I brought it to a stand-still but still lost my balance and the bike tottered over onto its side.





Still, time for a photo before picking it up. (Postscript: nowadays the track is a wide gravel road frequented by Grey Nomads and caravans and bears no resemblance to what it once was). We finally made it to our objective, Tunnel Creek, after 75 kms of rough riding. Tunnel Creek was well worth the effort and the highlight of the trip. The creek has eroded its way through the Napier Range and formed a cavern 750 m long. The cave was a welcome relief from the heat & flies and we waded through from one end to the other looking at the stalactites hanging from the roof and resting in the middle reaches which are lit by a collapsed cave leading to the top of the range. Tunnel Creek is a

natural wonder well worth a visit. It is also renowned as the last stand of Jandamarra (Pigeon) whose story as an outlaw was popularised by Ion Idriess in the 1930s, but these days is better known as a Bunuba freedom fighter. About midday we covered the remaining 35 kms to Windjana Gorge along a loose bulldust ridden corrugated road. The Gorge is a picturesque narrow canyon which has been cut out of the Napier Range by the Lennard River. The Gorge is walled by vertical cliffs of dark lime-stone which reach up to 100 metres in height. The cliffs cut the skyline with sharp pinnacles and rugged patterns and the screams of cockatoos echo in the depths of the Gorge. Just before reaching the Gorge we paused for a look at the ruins of the Lillilamoora police out-post. In 1894 an aboriginal uprising, led by the renegade Police tracker Pigeon (Jandamarra), erupted at this remote spot. Pigeon murdered a police constable at the outpost and freed the prisoners in the 1st act of a 3-year war against invading white settlers. The gang's next attack was on 3 drovers at the entrance to Windjana Gorge. The drovers were shot down on the sands of the river's dry bed.



This was later followed by a battle between police and aborigines in the Gorge itself, involving the now notorious Police Inspector, Pilmer. Pigeon used Tunnel Creek as a hideout but was finally tracked down and killed in a shoot-out outside the tunnel entrance. The story of Jandamarra and his resistance fight is well worth a read.



The Napier Ranges were where this recent history was conducted. They were formed 300 million years ago and were formerly a massive barrier reef comparable with the Great Barrier Reef today. This fossil reef complex is recognized as the best example of its kind in the World and is a source of wonder for anyone lucky enough to visit the area. Leaving this fascinating area behind we traversed the Gibb River beef road to Derby. The corrugations along this road were so bad that the Kwacka's carrier fractured in 4 places under the load. The next day after welding the Kwacka's rack doing oil changes and cleaning the Guzzi's air filters we left the Kimberleys behind and rode to Broome in time to catch the final events of the Shinju Matsuri Festival. The judging of Miss Cable Beach received our unanimous vote for the most interesting tourist attraction. That night we decided to wash some clothes and headed out to the local laundromat. Whilst waiting for our washing to finish we noticed the local taxi head out on a call. Later we saw a bloke walk into the Pearl and souvenir shop next door. We noticed he couldn't raise anybody, grabbed some smokes and took off. We checked and found the shop open and no-one there. The Office was open as well. The shop owner was the local taxi driver and had forgotten to close up. Realising that if anything went missing a group of scruffy motorcyclists would be the prime suspects we blocked the door and Clyde went down into town to tell the Police. Not long after being advised by the Police the shop owner roared back in alarmed and concerned. He started checking if cash and stock was intact and we took off back to camp.

I don't think he we even got any thanks, but at least we weren't going to be hauled up by the Police! Heading south we detoured to Eighty Mile Beach near Wallal station. After riding up a pretty bad dirt road, dreaming of a beautiful deserted beach, we crested a sand ridge and sighted at least 2 dozen caravans stretched out before us! It was hard to visualize the sight 90 years ago when a cyclone pushed a pearling fleet ashore drowning 200 men. Cattle at the station were panicked and blown onto the mud flats only to be drowned when the tidal surge came in.

We continued to Port Hedland rather than face all those friendly caravanners. The remainder of the trip back to Perth was uneventful except for Clyde who never satisfied decided to upstage us all. He was only 70 kms from home when he parked beside the road for a call of nature. Just as he was about to climb back onto the bike a woman driver came along and drove straight over his Kawasaki, writing it off. To add insult to injury, the woman suffered a flat tyre in destroying his bike and Clyde had to change it for her. Not the best way to end a great trip.



