

## **Border Run 2003 – the Rawlinna diversion**

Following on from the eventful 2002 Border Run and Off-centre rally, and earlier border runs, the 2003 event was a “must do” bike run. However, I was looking for ways to spice it up a bit...

Lang Lefroy and I decided to have a crack at riding eastward from Kalgoorlie on the Trans Access Road along the Trans-Australia railway line to Rawlinna and then south-eastward across the desert to Cocklebiddy where we would join the Highway One blacktop for the remainder of the ride east to the border. We did a bit of trip planning and agreed to head out on a Thursday morning to give us plenty of time to reach Border Village by Saturday afternoon. As I was to be at the Diggers and Dealers “gabfest” in Kalgoorlie by the Sunday evening, we agreed to head back to Kalgoorlie on the bitumen. I was to then stay in Kalgoorlie for a few days before heading back to Perth. Lang was to head on to Toodyay on the Monday.

Gear preparation for the trip was minimalist – simply be self-sufficient on the track. Key was managing our fuel between Kalgoorlie and Cocklebiddy because there are no fuel stops in that 570 km dirt leg. The twin-spark BMW GS Adventure is capable of coming close to covering that distance on the dirt with a single tank of fuel! It did so with less than a couple of thousand kilometres on the clock. This bike is not the same one I used for the 2002 Border Run. That bike was stolen from my home and used in a series of armed hold-ups in Perth. I decided to sell it once it was recovered!

As usual I was running late and after meeting Lang on Highway One near Northam we made it to Yellowdine just east of Southern Cross before taking a couple of “dongers” for the night.

Friday morning we headed out after an excellent sleep and made it to Kalgoorlie for breakfast. I topped up on some missing supplies that included a \$3.50 cigar so that Lang and I could properly accommodate some “secret men’s business” the next night. That business would involve the smoking of the cigars (Lang’s cost \$7.50) and the consumption of a bottle of “Stones Green Ginger Wine”. Nothing but the best I say... We made sure the fuel tanks were absolutely full-to-the-brim and headed east towards Mt Monger Station from Boulder. We were on the dirt within five kilometres after departing Boulder.

The run east along the Trans Access Road to Karonie Siding was uneventful as the road is a dirt heavy haulage runway of sorts. We passed several mines and I was proud to see dust from a haulpac rising from the Trojan Gold Mine. I was the exploration manager for Titan Resources a decade ago when what was then a small trial pit called Curtin was transformed by Titan Resources into a reasonable gold resource that is currently being mined. Near the Karonie Siding is the turn-off to the currently defunct Karonie Gold Mine. I am now involved in what I hope will be the revitalisation of this historic mining area. East of Karonie the dirt road deteriorates a little but remains respectable all the way to Rawlinna. Part of the reason for this is that limestone, quarried at Rawlinna, is rail-freighted east to Kalgoorlie and then north to the Murrin Murrin nickel mine that is located between Leonora and Laverton. The dirt road is used for re-supply to this Rawlinna quarry. The town of Rawlinna, a thriving little outpost into the early 1990’s, is all but abandoned.

En-route the track dipped into the only respectable (but dry) water course along the entire length of the Kalgoorlie to Rawlinna leg – Ponton Creek. Massive newish concrete pylons and abutments for the rail line stood proud against the sandy creek bed. This site was washed-out during Cyclone Bobby in the early 1990's. Upstream, this creek, through a series of elongate lakes passes through the town of Leonora. Downstream it terminates in Lake Boondaroo, now nothing but a vast elliptical depression on the Nullarbor. An excellent canoe trip from Leonora, across this desert landscape, is possible after a tropical cyclone, such as Bobby, dumps a few inches of rain in the desert!

We reached the outskirts of Rawlinna just before dusk on the Friday and rode into Rawlinna Station where we met a station hand. He suggested a reasonable camping spot just out of town. We settled in right on nightfall. The actual site for our camp was determined by the presence of a sun bleached dead tree – fuel for a campfire. A cluster of bright lights to the northwest of town marked the limestone quarry. I wondered what the next day would bring but at this rate, we would be at Border Village by early Saturday afternoon. We got down to the “secret men’s business”; the cigar was dreadful but the Stones Green Ginger wine hit the spot. The magnificent starlit night out in the desert made up for any shortfalls in the evening’s cuisine. Lang and I were in our respective tents by about 9:00P. It had been an excellent day of riding along the side of the Trans Australia rail line.

We broke camp and set off by 7:00A on Saturday morning and headed into Rawlinna for a bit of exploration. What is left of the town, and especially the rail siding, is in good nick. We topped up our water from a rainwater tank at the rail siding. It is a pity that there are no amenities, particularly fuel, in this historic railway town.

East from Rawlinna the track immediately deteriorated to a rutted limestone affair. The station hand at Rawlinna suggested that, rather than heading southeast from the Rawlinna homestead to Arubiddy homestead, we should head east to the N-S boundary between Rawlinna Station and Balgair Station and follow that dog-proof boundary fence southward. We picked up the boundary fence and headed south. The terrain was flat and made up of rubbly limestone. Occasionally the track would abruptly dip into a depression that was probably over the top of a complex of limestone caves. The lip of each depression was particularly rocky and in places quite treacherous – particularly considering the remote location.

At the start of this leg across the Nullarbor Plain, I was somewhat apprehensive but exhilarated by the stark beauty of the place. At one point, I left the rocky and rutted track and just rode unbounded over the desert floor. The going was in places at least, a bit easier. I had a keen eye out to avoid the dried twigs and bleached branches from the large and ancient saltbushes – a puncture just waiting to happen. I also had a keen eye out for kangaroos – there had been an abundance of kangaroos from about 50 km west of Rawlinna. As the hours rolled on with progress down to 10 km/h in places and as the day became quite hot, my apprehension about our location became acute. Then, ahead Lang came to a stop with a flat tyre.

We managed to fix Lang’s rear tyre without too much trouble but I was alarmed by the number of CO<sub>2</sub> bottles that were used – all of Lang’s supply! I was however,

quite pleased with myself that I had not had a puncture. As we rode dodging the sharp limestone rubble that made up the tracks I worried that a few more punctures would see us in trouble. Not far down the track Lang had another puncture and then I had a puncture. We were able to fix these but we had run out of CO<sub>2</sub> bottles. It turned out that I had a puncture right on the edge of a lug that leaked slowly and was not easily detectable. This was to be my undoing because we were unable to put air into the tyre fast enough with a high pressure hand pump to see just where the tyre was punctured. Indeed, the day was now so hot and we were so exhausted by the events that between us we could not put together enough spit to find the leak! We rode on a few more kilometres until I felt I could go no further without destroying the tyre and the rim. It is a very unpleasant feeling being disabled out in the desert. As it turned out Arubiddy homestead was in a cluster of trees on the south-eastern horizon. Help was, hopefully, not far away. Lang headed off to get help – in the form of a decent hand pump. I settled in for the wait. I assessed my water supply, took a slurp and lay down with my upper body shaded by a salt bush – we were in the hottest part of the afternoon. If the worst came to the worst, I had an EPIRP beacon that I could trigger. Usually I carry a satellite telephone but that was one of the items stolen when my home was burgled. It was recovered but was being held by the Midland TIG as material evidence. The police would not release the telephone to me!

I must have dozed off to sleep for a while because I was woken by the sound of an approaching vehicle. It was good to see a white Landcruiser tray-back ute pull up in a cloud of dust with Lang in the passenger seat. In the back was the world's largest motorised air compressor! We inflated the tyre and I headed off with the Landcruiser in tow. I had two "re-fills" of air before we made it to the machinery shed at the side of the homestead. In no time we had the tyre repaired. It is amazing how easy it is to repair a tubeless tyre if you have the right equipment – especially sufficient air. I swore that I would (really) have the right equipment to repair tyres next time I ventured into the desert. We thanked the brothers that run Arubiddy Station and headed on off on the last dirt leg into Cocklebiddy. The dirt road was now a veritable superhighway and we now made good time on this 30 km leg. By the time we got into Cocklebiddy it was late afternoon. We filled the tanks with fuel and were informed that, earlier in the day, a number of bikes had passed through heading to Border Village. It had taken us most of the day to traverse about 150km.

We left Cocklebiddy headed east on a very familiar piece of bitumen road. We were soon headed down the Wylie Scarp at Madura Pass and on to Madura. Our speed had to come well off as we approached dusk and the kangaroos came out to play. Night had long fallen by the time we headed up the Eucla Pass and across the border to Border Village.

I pulled up to the unleaded bowser at the servo, fuelled up and readied the bike for the return journey before checking into my motel room.

By the time Lang and I put in our appearance at the bar the gathering of motorcyclists from across Australia were well on their collective way to having an excellent night. Needless to say, I enjoyed myself but did not stay up partying into the small hours.

The next morning Lang and I had a casual start and headed back to Kalgoorlie along Highway One west to Norseman. A cold front made its presence felt by a sudden

change in wind direction and a dramatic drop in the temperature accompanied by rain. At Balladonia we encountered a chap headed east on a Honda Goldwing rig, complete with trailer that had a roof rack - also full of gear. Incredibly, it was the same chap on the Honda 250cc dirt bike I had met at Marree in South Australia during the Off-centre run the preceding year.

Lang and I made it to the Midas Motel in Kalgoorlie by late Sunday afternoon. It had been another wonderful day in the saddle. I unpacked the bike and changed into jeans and a tee-shirt and headed down to the "Top End Thai Restaurant" in Hannan Street. It was time to introduce Lang to my other life – that of a geologist in Kalgoorlie.

Lang returned to Toodyay on Monday and I eventually headed back to Nedlands on the Thursday.

Now, let's see... the 2004 Border Run. Well, that should be a good one. It will be a Border Run followed by the Off-centre Rally at Innamincka in South Australia. It will also be the time to celebrate 50 years of life along with a few other club members.

**Robin FC Morritt**  
November 2003



PLATE 1. EAST OF KALGOORLIE / BOULDER, THE START OF THE TRANS ACCESS ROAD. CONCEIVABLY YOU COULD TRAVEL ALL THE WAY TO FORREST AND BEYOND INTO SOUTH AUSTRALIA ON THIS TRACK. I WOULDN'T RECOMMEND IT! ROBIN MORRITT POSES FOR THE OCCASION.



PLATE 2: THE TRANS ACCESS ROAD BETWEEN KITCHENER AND NARETHA. LANG LEFROY SHOWING HOW IT IS DONE.



PLATE 3: THE TURN-OFF TO RAWLINNA STATION HOMESTEAD; “TURN RIGHT AT THE 44 GALLON DRUM 10KM WEST OF RAWLINNA”. LANG LEFROY SEARCHES FOR HIS CAMERA...



PLATE 4: THE FIRST PUNCTURE HONOURS WENT TO LANG LEFROY ABOUT HALF WAY BETWEEN BALGAIR AND ARUBIDDY HOMESTEADS. NO PROBLEMS – YET!



PLATE 5: THE “DINGO PROOF” FENCE MARKS THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN RAWLINNA STATION AND BALGAIR STATION.



PLATE 6: “HEAD DOWN THE BOUNDARY FENCE ABOUT 40 KM AND TURN LEFT AT THE 44 GALLON DRUM, THEN GO ANOTHER 50 KM TO REACH ARUBIDDY HOMESTEAD”. LANG LEFROY FEELING FOR SPARE CO<sub>2</sub> CANISTERS... STILL HAS A SMILE ON HIS FACE.