

500km GS daytrip loop; Perth-Dwellingup-York-Toodyay

You have the urge to get on the bike and get away for the day. Ideally, you want to be out of the city traffic and on back roads and tracks as soon as possible but you still want to be able to stop and have a café break or two. A mix of dirt roads and tracks as well as a smattering of good bitumen minor roads within areas of diverse scenery would suite, especially if you do not have to spend half the day transiting.

Here is a route that never gets more than 95 km from Perth yet will take you all day - with three excellent café stops thrown in for good measure! It will provide you with a mix of scenery that includes the Perth plain with its lowland lakes and marshlands, the Darling Scarp with its hardy jarrah forests and some wheat belt farming areas along the eastern edge of the Yilgarn Shield.

I first tackled this route several years ago on a BMW K1200 RS but it is eminently well suited to the BMW GS family of bikes as well as any dual-purpose bike.

On the day you want to be away make sure to get a relatively early start. Ideally, you want to be heading out of Perth in time to be in Dwellingup between 8:30AM and 9:00AM (weekend schedule) for a hearty breakfast and some of the best coffee around. I generally leave about 7:30AM for this run. There are numerous ways to get to Dwellingup. My preference is to head down the freeway to Mundijong Road and then cut across to Pinjarra via a series of minor roads that includes some dirt. This route has little traffic and takes in some of the wetlands that are ubiquitous to the Perth sand plain.

From Pinjarra, head up the Darling Scarp to Dwellingup along the Pinjarra-Williams Road. Stop off at the Millhouse Café for breakfast. The Millhouse is located on the main drag through town on the south side of the road. Generally, on any Saturday or Sunday morning you will encounter motorcyclists at this café. At about 95 km, as the crow flies from Perth, this is as far as you will get on this ride from Perth yet the majority of the day's ride is still ahead of you! Before getting back on the bike for the next leg it would be a good idea to set up your suspension for dirt riding. Check your motorcycle manual for recommended shock absorber settings. Make sure the tyres are not over-inflated. The next few hours will see a mix of dirt and bitumen. The next stop will be York but to get there you will be cutting across the Albany and Brookton highways.

Head north about 20km up the Del Park Road (back towards Perth) and take the Scarp Road turn-off. You are now on the dirt - a gravel track with occasional substantial potholes. Within about 2km take the right branch at a fork and head along Whittaker's Road past the old Whittaker's Mill site. Follow that road, take a sharp left onto North Road, and follow that north. North Road heads through jarrah forest. It eventually takes you north to Kingsbury Drive right at the Karnet Prison Farm. Just south of the Karnet Prison Farm is a section of forest from which firewood can be taken. Watch out for the occasional 4x4 with trailer full of wood in tow! Otherwise, there is very little traffic on this section. Indeed, from Whittaker's Mill it is likely you will not see any traffic. Turn right onto Kingsbury Drive and head to Jarrahdale. This black-top loop road sweeps around the Serpentine National Park and is a favourite for black-top motorcyclists.

At Jarrahdale, turn right onto Jarrahdale Road and head eastward to the intersection with Albany Highway. Turn left onto Albany Highway and about 200m to the west turn north-eastward onto Randall Road. There is a wooden barrier on this road (just 200m from Albany Highway) but I have only ever seen the barrier up once! Follow this gravel road eastward. It becomes McCallum Road for a short distance before intersecting Metro Road on a rise. Turn left (north) on Metro Road and head along it until it intersects Brookton Highway. These gravel roads traverse jarrah forests. I have always encountered one or two vehicles on this section. Metro Road is a haven for the off-road boys. On any weekend there are always a number of riders on KTM's and Honda's etc hooning around on a number of informal courses. On Metro Road, watch out for these people appearing out of nowhere! There are a few sandy sections and areas of potholes in some valleys on this otherwise reasonable gravel section.

Turn left (towards Perth) on Brookton Highway but do not relax too much on the blacktop because within 100m you turn right (north) onto Yarra Road. Yep – back on the dirt – more gravel. Yarra Road heads across open mixed wandoo and jarrah forest lands and eventually comes out on the Great Southern Highway just east of where it intersects the Great Northern Highway at The Lakes. The Great Southern Highway is the road you would normally take to get to York from Perth. About half way along this road it intersects a minor single lane track called Qualen Road. Turn left (west) on this road and it takes you into a maize of tracks associated with the Helena River Reservoir and, if you are lucky, you end up at Barton's Mill and the Pickering Brook Road, and Perth. At this point in the ride it feels as though you are kilometres from anywhere but in fact you are pretty close to Perth. Turn right (east) onto Qualen Road and head eastward until it intersects Ridge Road. This is a narrow and at times rutted track with a few sandy sections. It is very pretty along here with abundant wildflowers in the spring. Qualen Road takes the rider out of the wandoo forest and into the farming lands of the wheat belt. By so doing it has also taken the rider away from the Darling Range and well into the Yilgarn Shield. It is very rare to see another vehicle on Qualen Road.

Follow Ridge Road northward to where it intersects the recently sealed Talbot Road. Turn right (eastward) onto Talbot Road and it takes you to York. Just out of York Talbot Road becomes Knott's Road. It is Knott's Road that comes into York adjacent to the wheat silos on the south side of town. After several hours on the dirt, the twisting bitumen of Talbot Road provides an excellent foil.

York is an historic wheat belt town with a quintessential main street. I always head for Bugatti's Café where I order a coffee and my usual toasted cheese, tomato and pickle sandwich. It is after all, time to have lunch.

Unleaded fuel only is available in York.

The run from York to Toodyay via Northam can be tackled in several ways because there are two routes to choose from to get to Northam and another two routes to choose from to get to Toodyay. All of it is on the black-top and each runs along one side or the other of the Avon River. My preference is to head north up the main street (Bugatti's Café is on the main street) and to Northam along Spencer's Brook Road, mostly on the western side of the Avon River. Once through Northam I cross to the

northern side of the Avon River (the Avon heads north to Northam and then west towards the coast) and head along Katrine Road eventually joining back onto the Northam-Toodyay Road (the more usual road taken on the ride between Northam and York). This combination of roads provides for a very pleasant ride on minor black-top roads that are “less frequently travelled” by cars. The Katrine Road is a real little gem that winds its way down the Avon Valley from Northam.

Toodyay is another typical country Western Australian town located on the main rail line east and on the eastern edge of the wheat belt. It is on the eastern flank of the Darling Ranges. Toodyay is another motorcyclist’s destination and on any weekend, particularly in the winter months, there are always bikes lined up either at the Coke Café or at the pub. After the ride from York, it is always pleasant to stop and to have a coffee and chat to the bikers that may be about. You can also get Premium Unleaded fuel in Toodyay at the Caltex on the south side of town.

Toodyay would be the place to top up on fuel for the remainder of the trip – unless you have a range with your bike of about 500km.

From Toodyay it is time to head back to Perth. Depending on how the day has progressed you can make a beeline back by heading down Toodyay Road to Midland or you can take in a final dirt leg, cut through the Chittering Valley and wind up at Bullsbrook. Considering the traffic and way the Toodyay Road is policed I invariably choose to head down to Bullsbrook via Chittering Valley and then home; either by way of Midland or through Wanneroo.

Head north-westward out of Toodyay (over the Avon River bridge) on the Toodyay West Road and then onto Julimar Road towards Perth. About 25km west of Toodyay turn left (south) onto Plunkett Road, a fairly decent looking gravel road. Cut across (south) to Keating Road along a small dirt track called Beach Road. Keating Road eventually comes out onto the black-top Chittering Valley Road – another favourite for motorcyclists. Turn left onto the Chittering Valley Road and follow it through to Bullsbrook.

Pull off the road at Bullsbrook and re-set your suspension to normal road usage. By the time you get home, to wherever that may be in the Perth area, you will have covered about 500km and it will be time for dinner.

Now that is what I call a decent day ride for this part of the world!

Robin FC Morritt

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Important note:

Whilst this ride does not venture far from Perth, some of the minor roads are actually little-traversed and can be regarded as quite remote – especially if something goes wrong! Make sure you have all the usual gear along with you including an adequate water supply, puncture repair capability, first aid kit and if possible a means of communication. The usual digital mobile telephones are out-of-range for most of the “remote” tracks! Away from Perth these digital services are restricted to the vicinities of York, Northam and Toodyay.

It would be advisable to take a compass and map that shows all the tracks. Keep abreast of where you are at all times. There are a myriad of tracks out there and it is easy to be disorientated and lost! A GPS would be a useful adjunct for navigation, particularly the map plotting varieties.

Finally, make sure you let someone know your planned route and an ETA. Have a backup plan in place should assistance be needed.

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PHOTO 1: QUALEN ROAD AND YARRA ROAD INTERSECTION.



PHOTO 2: QUALEN ROAD. THE BUSHES ARE BURSTING WITH FLOWERS.



PHOTO 3: TALBOT ROAD SIGNAGE.



PHOTO 4: TALBOT ROAD – A WINDING ROAD TO “UNWIND” FROM THE DIRT...