

Late spring ride north of Perth... northern wheat belt and north-eastern goldfields

I remember someone at a club meeting suggesting Ellendale Pool on the Greenough River to the south east of Geraldton as being a good destination for a long weekend ride. Whilst I was prepared to give it a go I was reticent to choose such a tourist destination. For me the weekend represented the last realistic opportunity this year to venture into the north-eastern goldfields.

As no-one had come forth with a detailed plan for the weekend I spent several hours pouring over maps and planned a trip up to Wooleen Station, returning through Cue and down through Paynes Find and south to the east of Lake Moore. With a bit of luck we would take in the last of this year's wild flowers for that part of the country. I called Lang Lefroy to see if he was planning on coming along and told him of my plan. Firstly, he told me he would not be able to get away for the weekend and secondly, he made it clear that a trip to Wooleen would have to include him so I would have to change plans. We spent some time on the phone revising my plans to cut south of Wooleen and across to Cue before rejoining the original trip south past Paynes Find. The trip included a lot of dirt and a few quite remote tracks – excellent. I hoped that there would be one or two “adventurous” riders along to join me. Just in case, I had planned alternatives for road-only riders so that we could reach common destinations along different routes.

I plotted the journey on my Garmin Map Source software and transferred it to the GPS. The night before the trip I printed off a map of the journey and left it with my wife along with rescue instructions just in case. Whilst I have a sat-phone I cannot use it as it is languishing as material evidence at the Midland TIG. One of the many consequences of the home invasion I experienced some months ago.

I arrived at Perth Car Park 4 right on 8:00AM on Saturday the 27th September. Paul Keller and John Padgham were there ready to go. It was going to be just the three of us. I briefed them on my plan but it was met with consternation. We agreed to head to Bindoon and then north on Highway 116 to Moora. From Moora I had plans to coax the boys onto a neat dirt road that heads north to Three Springs. As part of the plan I intended to provide some limited instruction on riding on the dirt and would check the basic bike set-ups. If they didn't like the dirt we would head back onto the black-top.

At Bindoon, we stopped at the local bakery for a coffee and snack. As agreed, we stopped at the southern end of the first dirt section to check tyres and suspension settings. John had been complaining of poor handling from his BMW R1000 GSPD on the last section of bitumen. His tyres looked pretty sad. The front had worn into a triangular section – it reminded me of the poor handling I experienced on my BMW K1200 RS as the front wore down to a triangular section before Metzler up-graded the tyre specifications to specifically handle the particular characteristics of the RS suspension. There was little wonder that John's bike wasn't handling too well! Then we checked the tyre pressures; 17 psi in the front and 27 psi in the rear! We would have to put some air into those tyres as soon as possible. Paul's tyres were at the other end of the scale with pressures in the mid-to-high 40 psi. We let the pressures down on Paul's bike to 32 psi in the front and 36 psi in the rear and adjusted his front suspension – preload up to one off the high setting. The rear preload was adjusted to mid-range but the rebound grub

screw was frozen so that setting was left without adjustment. Paul had a smile on his face from then on whilst on the dirt, even though his camping gear was perched high over the back wheel.

The wheat belt looked beautiful – the farmers are heading for a bountiful harvest in 2003. The wildflowers were still out and about and looking spectacular even though, for the most part, they were restricted to the narrow road verges.

We traversed the first dirt section without incident and rode on into Three Springs. From there we tracked on into Mingenew where we refuelled and put some much-needed air into John's tyres. Then we continued north-westward, mostly on the dirt, to a late afternoon arrival at Ellendale Pool. As expected, the camping facilities were pretty much packed-out with vehicle and caravan campers. We found a grassy spot and settled in for the evening.

Ellendale Pool is on a cut-bank meander along the Greenough River. Stagnating pools along overbank depressions make for great mosquito breeding ponds. They attacked us with vengeance as night fell over the camp. I had to put on a woollen jumper and gloves to try to escape their probing... Dinner was a quick affair and after a slurp of Paul's schnapps I headed for my tent and respite from the mosquitos.

You can keep Ellendale Pool! Now who was it that suggested this place as a destination for our ride?

The next morning we were up at a reasonable hour to an overcast sky with a low cloud base. We took off to the north-east on the dirt to meet up with the Highway 123, the Geraldton – Mt Magnet Road. It was a beautiful ride through green pastures bursting with crop - Greenough Shire farmers will do well...

We got onto Highway 123 and headed east at a steady 90 to 100 km/h in a 110 kph speed zone – there was virtually no other traffic. Just a few kilometres out of Mullewa we passed the turnoff to Mingenew and within a few minutes we were in Mullewa. Paul had trailed behind me and John some distance behind him. Paul was always in sight but John had stayed quite some distance back. On the dirt I had been very careful to keep both bikes in site but on this last peaceful leg I simply took in the sites. After all it was a straight piece of road with just a single turn-off to the south. In Mullewa I wanted to see if I could get a coffee but this didn't look like the place.

Within a few moments I realised that John was no longer in the group. Where was he? Paul couldn't recall having seen him for some time. My recollection was that he had been in sight only a few kilometres away. We turned and back-tracked. Unbeknown to us John had taken the Mingenew turnoff and was heading south!

We tracked almost back to our starting point at Ellendale Pool, just to be on the safe side, and then back to Mullewa. No John... I called my home and had a message left with John's wife. I then called the BP Roadhouse in Mingenew and surprise, surprise, John had just left there heading for Three Springs and, we assumed, a track back to Perth. Oh well, all that was important was that he was OK so we pressed on with our journey east to Yalgoo.

East of Mingenew the temperatures rose sharply as we entered the classic eastern goldfield mulga and sand plain country. The wildflowers had for the most part, gone to seed.

Yalgoo is an old gold mining outpost. We took on water and then struck southeast to Paynes Find, another old gold mining outpost. We initially headed out on the old dirt track – it looked pretty shabby. We then headed back and got some directions from some local inhabitants and headed east for a couple of kilometres before striking southeast on the beautiful Yalgoo-Ningham Road. The bitumen extended south to the Golden Grove Mine turn-off. We were back on the dirt about half way to Paynes Find. Here we encountered some sand drifts on an otherwise hard-packed Paynes Find – Thundelarra Road but nothing to cause concern.

After a little side-track distraction that took us to a lovely creek meander with some clear water we made it to Paynes Find by mid-afternoon. We took on fuel and grabbed a bite to eat. I also purchased a few cans of Emu Export beer for us to enjoy at our camp that evening. Paul appeared to be enjoying his dirt riding.

We headed southeast on the Maranalgo Road, a dirt track that soon heads south along the eastern flank of Lake Moore. About an hour before nightfall we turned off the track into the bush where we made camp. The occasion called for a decent fire to sit by while we chatted, had a few beers and enjoyed the starlight. If I am not mistaken, I think we were in our respective tents by 8:00PM. All in all an excellent day on the bike... Too bad John had to take a wrong turn and headed south!

I was tempted to sleep under the stars. Good thing I didn't because a huge band of mid-level cloud came over some time during the night. It was a cold and overcast morning when I kicked the fire back into life at 5:10AM. I had some hot tea down my neck in no time. Paul enjoyed a coffee. I pulled on all my warm clothes in expectation of a cold day. Good thing I did so because that is exactly how the day panned out; cold and at times very wet. We were off and headed south at 7:00AM. Not that we needed to be on the track at that time – it just turned out that way. We enjoyed another relaxed and peaceful ride south on the dirt before getting back onto the black-top at about Remlap homestead, the most north-easterly cropping land in this area. At Koorda we managed to find a café that served up a toasted ham and cheese sandwich along with a hot chocolate drink.

As we prepared to mount up for the next leg of our ride there were the first tentative drops of rain. We both put on wet weather gear in preparation for riding through an approaching cold front. By the time we reached Wyalkatchem we were in some pretty severe squalls. The rain got rid of much of the dust and some of the bugs by the time we reached Toodyay late on Monday morning.

Whilst Paul and I enjoyed a coffee and some grub at the Coke Cafe we managed to get John at his home on the mobile telephone. John explained what had happened, firstly to me and then repeated the whole process for Paul. It is hard to believe what actually transpired! Ask John...

Paul and I rode back into Midland along Highway 50 and parted company on the Roe Highway.

I headed off the Great Eastern Highway to cross the Causeway over the Swan River and was immersed in my thoughts whilst stopped at a set of lights when I realised that this chap was waving frantically from a car in front of me. It was Kenny Gawenda! Kenny would have enjoyed the ride.

I was back home in Nedlands early in the afternoon. It had been a very pleasant ride.

Robin FC Morrith
September 2003



PHOTO 1: THE ELLENDALE CAMP. THE GREENOUGH RIVER IS AT THE BASE OF THE CLIFF. THE MOSQUITOS WERE EVERYWHERE!



PHOTO 2: GATEWAY TO YALGOO WITH PAUL KELLER LOOKING VERY MENACING. THAT IS AN OLD STAMP MILL TO THE RIGHT...



PHOTO 3: PAUL KELLER ON THE BANK OF AN EPHEMERAL STREAM EAST OF PAYNES FIND.



PHOTO 4: ON THE ROAD EAST OF LAKE MOORE. ROBIN MORRITT'S BIKE IN A PATCH OF WILD FLOWERS.



PHOTO 5: ROBIN MORRITT ON THE ROAD BETWEEN LAKE MOORE AND KORDA. CHECK OUT THE WHEAT CROP!



PHOTO 6: CHECK OUT PAYNES FIND IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR CHEAP AND PERMANENT ACCOMMODATION...