

The Border Loop Route, Australia

An article in the Auckland Cycle Touring Association Spokesman from two years ago about a ride by Colin Quilter inspired Athol Berry to consider a similar trip this year. He approached Kathy Englbrecht about joining him and then I decided it would be a nice escape to warmer climates. Funny thing here was that poor Athol wasn't aware I was coming with them until 3 days before departure when he found out during a weekend ride at Raglan with the Auckland Cycle Touring Association that we all belong to.

The day before we departed I had arranged to collect a bike box from my favourite bike shop Cyco in Ponsonby, which I collected at 4pm. It looked a tad small for my bike but I was assured the box would be ok. After breaking the bike down it was clear that it was not going to fit. Frantic calls to nearby bike shops proved fruitless so I jumped in the car and headed to the electric bike shop in Browns Bay. They had boxes that were bigger than usual and I acquired a suitable pack for my trusty steed. It was the opposite extreme really. I could fit the bike in it with heaps of spare space! It also turned it into a package that was barely manageable!

Any way I got everything sorted and packed for departure the next morning. Popped Pai into the pannier bag and we were all set!

We were all booked on the same Virgin flight from Auckland to Gold Coast. At check in I had a rude overweight payment to make – a couple of kilos over cost \$130.00 flat rate up to 10kg! Kathy and Athol checked in later and found out that the airline scales were not calibrated. Kathy was nearly charged as well when her gear was well under the allowed 23kgs.



We arrived at Gold Coast to find the wet weather had somehow traveled with us. We collected our gear at which point the bottom of my oversized box fell apart and left me with a bike on the floor basically. I got through to immigration where the gear was inspected by a very friendly customs officer who must have taken pity on my box plight, as he helped to tape it together before wheeling the trolley out through the arrivals hall for me. Once the other two had cleared customs we took a shuttle to the Kirra Beach Camping Ground where we reassembled the gear between showers. We arranged to leave the boxes at the camping ground and found that Kathy's box fitted inside Athol's and that my box was able to fit those two. That fixed the issue of box storage! By late afternoon we had found a store to stock up some of our food requirements.

Day 1 Gold Coast to Springbrook

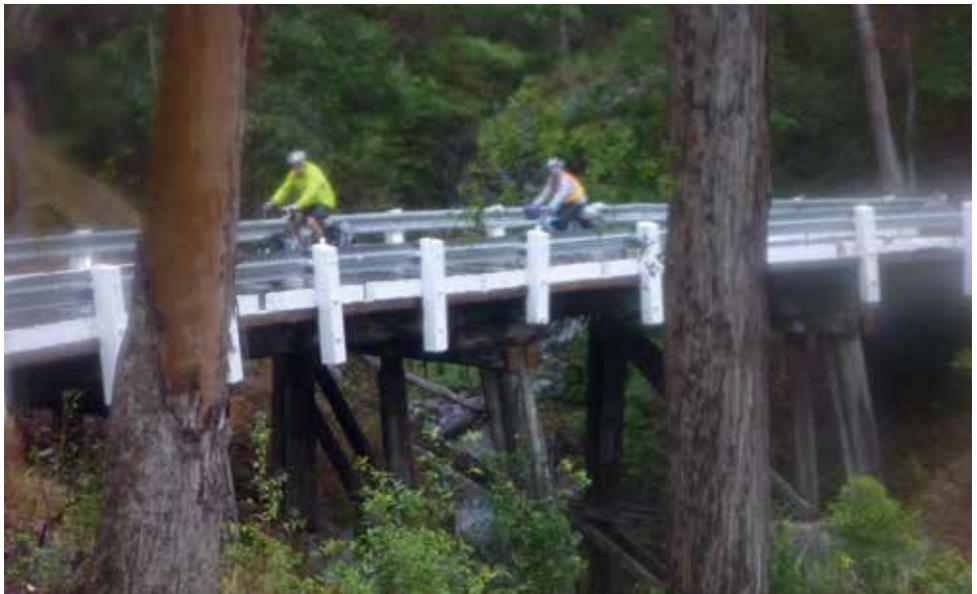
We had to get some gas for our cookers on the way out of town and had worked out there was a camping store on the way to Robina where the route officially starts. I have always found it quite difficult to navigate out of built up areas and this was no different! Between us all we found our way to the camping store and stocked up on the gas. The weather at this point was a bit suspect with some heavy showers coming through at times. We had a coffee at the place where we got the gas. At this point we weren't 100% sure how far we were to the start of the Border Loop Trail at Robina so I asked a guy at a nearby table. He informed us we were still about 7kms from the start and when we told him we were riding the road to Springbrook he informed us we probably wouldn't be able to ride up the road as it was the training ground for the Olympic road cycling type racers and not really something for us touring riders. It didn't look that bad on the profile I had of the route!



We passed through Mudgeeraba shortly after beginning the Border Loop Route. During the stop at some shops there we dodged a heavy rain shower. The roads were pretty wet when we departed but at least we had got away from the busy built up areas and were now on more quiet roads.

As we began the upward climb on the road to Springbrook we decided to have a lunch stop at a wayside with a covered picnic table. This was next to a stream with plenty of bush. Behind us was a group of flame trees that were full of birds. There was a constant tweeting in the background as we boiled the billies and made lunch. Even though it was a bit damp the spot was very pleasant.

As we continued the climb through Springbrook National Park we were riding through some pretty impressive rain forest. The road was narrow and winding and at several spots were bridges that clung to the side of the hills with timber trestle supports. These were single lane width and had very tight switch back turns. It was the primary reason that large vehicles were not recommended or allowed up this road.



We stopped at the lookout on the way up to the main road junction. The view would normally have been spectacular but due to the weather conditions we were simply looking straight into the clouds. The lookout was positioned on quite a bluff and there was an almost perpendicular drop to the creek down below that twisted its way through the valley towards the coast. Across the road from here was the Puddle Duck Café which was open but appeared to have no one visiting. We wandered in and found we could get a drink here so we left our wet gear by the entrance and huddled around the heater whilst sipping on a glass of wine! Eventually we headed back out into the weather again and continued a bit more climbing as we headed down the dead end road to the camping area for the night.



The Springbrook road passes through the national park and has quite a few houses along it even though the road is a dead end. We found the camping area that contained a set of toilets and a lean-to for cooking. The only other inhabitant for the night was a guy with a caravan set up which had a vast assortment of gizmos and these were all powered by a set of solar panels. It was pretty amazing to see someone camping in a fairly remote sort of area with all the electrical stuff.



During the night I was woken by a rustling noise and realized that some little critter had taken a fancy to my bar of chocolate, or was trying to party with Pai. It had been very industrious and eaten a small hole in the pocket of my inner tent and was in the process of removing the foil off the bar when I discovered what was going on. The poor wee creature had his prize stolen from him just when he thought he had found the mother lode! I was never aware of it after stowing the chocolate in a more secure place and had a peaceful night sleep but the evidence of the industry was clear the next morning.

Purling Falls - Top and bottom



Day 2 Springbrook to Murwillambah

After packing up our gear in the morning we rode down to Purling Falls which was off to the side from the camping area. This is an impressive waterfall that drops over 100 ft straight off the top of the cliff into the rainforest below. The weather conditions were still very overcast so the views were very limited but apparently you can see the Gold Coast on a clear day.

We had a short back track from the previous day to the Puddle Duck Café and then we commenced a descent to Numinbah. It was relatively flat as we rode to the Natural Bridge. When we arrived at the Natural Bridge it was wet yet again and we were ready for a bit of dry time and a coffee. The café was just opening and we again left our wet gear at the door and settled in next to the heater! It was pretty comfortable here so we hung around for quite a while before taking the side road to look at the bridge. We had a pleasant (although wet) walk through the trail down to the falls. It is a natural hole in the saddle between a couple of ridges that has formed the bridge.



The boardwalk down to the natural bridge was pretty wet and slippery!



Underneath the Natural Bridge where there was plenty of water cascading through.

After leaving this park we continued on to the border with New South Wales and started a very steep descent to Murwillambah. The road conditions were quite wet so we all took it gently going down. Once we got to the flat it was easy riding and we had plenty of time to think about camping. By the time we reached our destination we all agreed that a cabin would be a good option for the night. We found a caravan park and booked in for the night. It was great to be able to cook a nice meal and not have to sit huddled in a corner of an open sided lean-to to eat it. An added bonus was that we were also able to see the first half of the test between the All Blacks and the Wallabies. Something went a bit pear-shaped during the second half and we lost the TV signal. At that stage we were in front and looking pretty good for a win but it was a surprise to find out the next day that the win was so big.

Day 3 Murwillambah to Kygole

Today we left in the dry weather and headed down the main road to Kygole. Pai was able to have his usual perch on the top of my tent during the first part of today's ride. The road was busy and undulating, and we had quite a few cars going past us. One in particular had pretty



flashing lights on top and the dudes inside carefully pointed out to Athol that he may like to ride in single file or find himself off the road! The Peaks of Mt Warning were clearly visible to our right as we headed down to Uti. We decided to take a short 1km side road to Clarrie Hall Dam for coffee. It was a pretty place and we had a nice area with picnic tables to overlook the lake that is used to supply the water for the Gold Coast area.

Kathy heading towards Mt Warning.

As we entered Mt Burrell the heavens opened yet again! But not before we had found our way into a café where we had hot chips and coffee. This area is known for its hippie life style and some of the locals that were in this café looked the part. After the rain moved on we decided to do the same and continued down the road to Kygole. The road began climbing upwards and we settled in to a steady rythm as we approached the top. There was a bit of a lookout at the top so we decided it would be a nice spot for lunch looking back at the Mt Warning area. It was a bit of a surprise to get around the next corner when we set off again, to find the road still went up. We had decided to take a more direct route to Kygole and not go through Nimbin so we were not sure how long the climb would be.

We came to a very small community at Cowlunga and had a break before commencing the long climb for the day. At this point Athol and Kathy fixed some blister problems and I took the opportunity to get my tent out and expose it to some sun for a short time to dry it out a bit before the evening. The store was the general store for the area and had been there for

some time. The inside was all in the same style as when it had been built in the early 1900s. Dotted around the store was plenty of memorabilia from that time which gave it a wonderful character.

We began the long climb for the day pretty much straight away. The climbs usually took us up into the forested areas and the farms tended to be in the gullies and flat areas. It continued for some time but we had a good downhill through some rain forest and gum trees to complete the ride to Kygole. During the ride into the township I was dive bombed by an angry magpie. It managed to give me a slap to the side of my face to demonstrate its anger for passing through its territory. Kygole had a good supermarket and we stocked up with food and drinks for the night before heading out of town a bit for the camping area next to the show grounds.

The day's ride had been reasonably hard with several solid climbs and we were all glad to get to Kygole and settle down for the evening. The weather today has also been a lot better as we only had brief showers and we could cook and eat dinner beside the tents for a change.

Day 4 Kygole to Rathdowney

The morning started with a flat ride following the rail way through to Whangaree and on to The Risk. We turned off here to enter the Lions Road. At the turnoff at The Risk we came across a memorial stone to the early station owners. Across from this was the local school and we wandered in to ask the kids there how the area had got its name. They had no idea but the principal spied us chatting with the kids and came over and told us one of a handful of reasons – that the run was very remote and in an area that was hard to break in and that





it was a risk for the first landowners to take on. Hard work enabled the families to develop a pretty nice farming area that is still occupied today. The school had 2 classrooms and 26 children aged from 5 through to junior high school age. When we left one of the kids was heard asking the principal if they should shut and lock the gate when we had gone – obviously wanting to keep the riff-raff out!

We followed Grady's Creek and then the road began a 4 km steep climb to the Border Loop Lookout where we had lunch. The actual lookout was 500 metres from the road and descended quite a bit. We discussed the merits of going down after quite a steep climb to get up but it was worth the ride down to the picnic area. From the lookout you could see the road we had ridden up as it looked straight down the valley to the farm land we had ridden through. From here you could clearly see the spiral the

railway line took to get the train through this mountain range. It looked very similar to the Raurimu Spiral back home.

We began the descent on the other side which was a set of undulations with some of the drops at 17% and 14% which were offset by climbs of 19%! It was like a roller coaster! The



Lions Road had been constructed after the Lions clubs of Kygole and Beaudesert decided to join a short section between the two roads going into the farms in the Border Ranges. This opened a very pretty tourist route alternative to the faster main road. One of the features on this road is an old car on the verge. It was purchased by a guy who plans to rebuild it but in the meantime his group of old



Athol having a chat with the old fellow at the entrance to the Lions Road.



Kathy heading towards Rathdowney - a lot of downhill after the big climb for the day!

rusting parts are a bit of an attraction. The house next to these was pretty run down and we chatted with an old guy who came out and he told us how the road ended about 100 metres from where his house is. Shortly after this we started the long steep climb to the top of the ridge. Once we were over the other side the terrain mellowed to flat and undulating.

Once we arrived at the township of Rathdowney we located the showgrounds where we camped for the night. This was conveniently located across the road from the local watering hole so once we were set up we wandered over for a wine. Whilst there we spied the dessert menu of apple crumble and custard and decided to come back later after we had eaten the main course at the tents. The weather was nice and sunny when we were setting up but a pretty heavy shower passed through shortly after the tents were all up.

Day 5 Rathdowney to Beaudesert

This morning the weather was nice and sunny for a change and we finally seemed to be getting the weather we were expecting! The first stop for the day was at the lookout over Rathdowney. It had a rather rude little climb to the top that Athol and I decided was better to do on foot. Up the top we could see quite a distance around and had good views of where we had come from.



Looking back at the showgrounds where we camped from the lookout at Rathdowney

The ride to Beaudesert was along the main route and pretty flat, we also had the luxury of a good tail wind to push us along at a good rate of knots. We covered the 40 or so kilometers so quickly we were in Beaudesert for morning tea. At this time I had come into cell phone coverage and within a few minutes got a call from Roel back in New Zealand to say that his

brother, Bee Jay, in Holland was now seriously ill and not expected to live for much longer. Our pre-arranged plan in case of this was for me to make my way to Brisbane to join him on the trip to Holland.

Roel was organizing the plane tickets in New Zealand and several calls and text messages passed between us as we got the travel plans in place. Kathy, Athol and I found the Info center to find out what was the best idea as far as getting to Brisbane Airport for a flight to Holland the next day at 9am. There is no rail connection near Beaudesert but a bus service every hour goes to Brisbane. After waiting nearly an hour the empty bus arrived and the driver proceeded to inform me that he could not take the bike. By this stage it was nearly 11.30am so I decided the best thing was probably to visit the police station to see what they could suggest. The local shuttle service was not operating so my only option was to ride to Beenleigh about 65 km away. At Beenleigh I could board a train that goes directly to Brisbane Airport - sweet as!

The only complication with this plan was that I had to be there before 3.00pm as the train won't take the bike in peak hour. By this time we had been entertained by some poor, looney lady giving another officer a bit of an ear bashing and the time had moved on to 12.30pm.

I transferred my remaining food to Athol and Kathy and we rode together for a short time out of Beaudesert before I left them for my ride to Beenleigh and they continued the trip to Canungra.

On the way over I thought about how I could deal with the bike and decided that the best thing would be to pack it up and send it home as unaccompanied baggage with Air NZ. Shouldn't be too hard to organise.....

The ride over had been a hot, fast affair and I got to Beenleigh just in time to catch the last available train at 2.45. On arrival at Brisbane Airport I approached Air NZ and they suggested I see Qantas as they don't do unaccompanied baggage. Qantas was prepared to take the bike but it had to go through a freight company and after several attempts I finally managed to contact the appropriate person at the freight company. What then transpired was a highly complicated arrangement as the freight company was closing in half an hour and the bike hadn't been cleaned or packed. When I explained that I still needed to do this the guy said no problem drop it off to him after 8.30am the next day I was flying out of Brisbane at 9.00am to Holland so I would not be able to do that either! He kindly offered to collect it from my hotel which I had planned to be the one nearest the airport so we arranged he would collect from the Novotel the next day.

Unfortunately that hotel was full or too expensive. I finally booked a room at another hotel and then needed to send an email to the freight company in the hope they would still be prepared to collect the bike the next day from another place. By this stage the freight guy had gone home of course!

I provided plenty of entertainment for people waiting for flights as I cleaned the bike and packed it up before heading off to the hotel. I was able to fill out the paper work and have something to eat (the last freeze dried meal) by 10pm! All sorted. Roel's flight from Auckland

to Brisbane had been delayed by 4 hours so he was not due to arrive until 2am and during this time we had news his brother had passed away. It was a sad meeting at Brisbane Airport in the wee hours of Wednesday morning.

Ending A - Amsterdam

We have been in Holland now for four weeks and have been using some pretty old bikes that belonged to Roel's parents as our means of travel. We have not had any significantly long rides as upon arrival in Holland we learned that the wife of Roel's younger brother had a stroke the day after Bee Jay died. It was terrible news for us all but Liesbeth is slowly starting to recover and we have nearly sorted out the main issues over here in Holland before returning to NZ at the end of September.

Two weeks after leaving Brisbane my bike arrived in New Zealand and I got my daughter Melanie to collect it from the airport. An expensive exercise but a much better solution than carting it over to Europe and back.

Di Michels and Pai

Ending B - Kathy and Athol

Di left us at Beaudesert as she had to cycle 65km to a railway station and catch a train to Brisbane. Kathy and Athol cycled on to Canungra another small rural town. Passed through a small village called Wonglepond on the way. More life style blocks as we get closer to the coast. At Canungra we camped beside the river and Athol had a swim. Very bracing! The next day after leaving some gear at the campground we set off cycling up the road to Mt O'Reilly. This was 36km of steady climbing. We stopped for lunch at the Alpaca Cafe where Kathy fed the Alpaca's (they are so cute!).

Arrived at Mt O'Reilly camp ground with the wind getting stronger. Erected our tents in reasonable shelter. At midnight the rain started and the wind became stronger. At 5am Athol's tent blew down. Luckily it was near daylight. We went for a walk up to the lodge nearby where everyone was warm and dry and met up with a young American guy with a ute who offered to take us down the mountain. We were keen on that as there was a lot of debris on the road.

So back to Canungra and on our bikes back to the Gold Coast. We headed for Broadbeach camp ground south of Surfers Paradise. It took quite a while to get there as the area is quite built up and there were a lot of main highways to cross. Once on the coast though the cycle ways are very good and go from Tweed Head all the way to Surfers Paradise.

The next day more cycle ways down to Tweed Head. It was a public holiday and there were lots of people about and the weather was warm but the beaches were closed till the afternoon due to rough seas. One interesting sight we saw was sand being pumped out of a large pipe straight into the heavy seas pounding the rocks at that particular point on the coast. This we learnt later was part of the Tweed Head Sand Transfer System where sand

is pumped along the coast to replenish the various beaches towards Surfers Paradise. No sand means no tourists!

Our last night back at Coolangatta and then back to Auckland.

Altogether a good cycle trip with good company.

Athol Berry