

Border Run 2012

The coming of August each year signals the approach of my annual ride to “The Border Run”. This year marked the fifth year in a row I have attended. If you’re unfamiliar with this event, it started as a meeting point in 1977 for two friends who lived in WA and SA, the border being the half way point. Others decided to come along for the ride and it has been going ever since, strongly supported by the BMW clubs of both states. As an aside, during their last dinner before they left for their respective states, a can of Big Sister pudding went uneaten. It was brought to the first Border Run and again uneaten and to this day, this can of pudding travels Australia by motorcycle to be reunited each year with the Run participants. The can has been encased in resin, so it’s not as bad as it sounds!

So after months of planning (who am I kidding, about 1 hour lol) I packed the bike on the Thursday night to get to the Saturday meet. Tent, sleeping bag and mat, clothes, tools, cameras, food and drink. You need to be pretty self-sufficient on a trip to the Outback.

I would normally leave on the Friday but decided to take an extra day this year to look around Port Lincoln and the Eyre coast. I also booked a ticket on the ferry across the Spencer Gulf which meant I had to be at Wallaroo for the departure by 1.30pm EST. This would mean less time on the road and a 2 hour break while sailing across the Gulf. The distance from home to Wallaroo is 826kms, so I would have to leave early. Nine hours should be plenty of time as I try to maintain an average 100km/h on these trips, including stops.

So the plan was to leave at 4.30am. Thursday morning dawned and there was a heavy frost and below zero temps outside. Brrr! It was going to be a brisk start to the ride. Unfortunately, I didn’t get away until 4.45am but reasoned I still had time given the higher speed limit in SA. So off I go into the early morning darkness. I’m well rugged up. It’s cold but no rain and I feel quite warm with the heated grips of the ZZR at 70%. I cover the first 250kms to Horsham easily and stop for brekky and fuel. I try to get this all done within half an hour but it takes 36 minutes. Only 6 minutes over but combined with the 15 minute late start I’m 21 minutes over time. It all adds up.

The sun is up now and it starts to warm up a bit. I cross over into SA and start to think about whether to bypass Adelaide, which I normally do, or not. It’s a little longer but there’s no stop/start and the scenery is better. However, I think it may be quicker to go through Adelaide this time. I need fuel at Tailem Bend and make it a quick 15 minute stop. Feeling good, I push on to Adelaide.

Down the hills and through the tunnels and you’re into suburban Adelaide. It is slow going as there’s no freeway across the city like Melbourne. Eventually, I leave the last traffic light behind and hit the freeway and back up to 120km/h. Through Port Wakefield and then head West towards Wallaroo. I’m right on schedule but fighting a very strong headwind. After 60kms, I arrive at the ferry terminal at exactly 1.30pm EST. Not many vehicles making the trip. I count only 6 and there’s room for at least 30 I think.

The first half of the crossing is quite rough. I grab some lunch and settle down in a seat for a sleep. After 2 hours, we arrive at Lucky Bay. Not much there. Just a few shacks for fisherman and weekenders. Time for more fuel at Cowell and then I push on to Port Lincoln. On the way I call into Port Neill for a look. Nice little town and I think about calling it a day here but I would like to be further on, so I continue.

I arrive in Port Lincoln at around 6.00pm. Around 1,000km for the day. I look for a nice pub to stay in and settle into the Pier Hotel for \$65.00. I grab a meal, a couple of drinks, then settle back into my room to watch the Olympics. Day one over. The riding today was easy except for the headwind later in the day. The roads are nothing exciting but this trip is about the open road and long distance riding, not the twisties. It feels good to get a solid day’s riding in.

Day 2 dawns. There has been quite a bit of rain overnight and it continues as I’m packing the bike. Unlike the day before, I don’t have to be anywhere at any particular time. However, I would like to be within 500kms of the border by the end of the day.

After a quick brekky at the pub, I head out of Port Lincoln. It is raining but there is blue sky about. I decide to call into Coffin Bay for a look. As with Port Lincoln, it is very well developed. This area

of SA is renowned for its tuna fishing and there are some nice looking homes in both these towns as well as an airport and all the infrastructure you would see in most major country towns. I prefer Coffin Bay. It's a little smaller and quieter. If I'm through this way again I think I'll stay there instead. Out onto the road again.

This part of the Flinders Highway is quite interesting with mountain ranges and waterways surrounding the road. The road is fast and flowing with little traffic. After an hour or so, the sky clears to a bright sunny day. I'm enjoying the ride and the bike handles these roads very well. Soon I come up to Elliston. I've heard about bike groups staying here before so I head in for a look. To be honest, it doesn't look like much of a town. It probably has good fishing or surfing... I was thinking about lunch here but there doesn't appear to be any food shops so I continue on.

The road now opens up more with long straights and less to look at though there are some interesting looking old homesteads in some of the fields. Most are ruins with one or two restored. I arrive at Streaky Bay. I've stayed overnight here the last 3 years. It's a very nice town with good amenities. I see the first bikes that are clearly heading to the border and I stop for lunch – fish and chips, then head off for the 110kms to Ceduna. This part of the road is straight and with a head wind, which affects fuel economy. I really enjoy the wide open roads here. There is little traffic and I quite enjoy the solitude of the highway. The bike hums along nicely and is eager to cruise a little more quickly. I resist the temptation as there are many dips in the road and I really don't feel like adding to SA's tax coffers.

So into the main BP servo in Ceduna, on the highway near the quarantine inspection point. I consider staying the night but it's still early and I would like to be a bit closer, maybe to Nullarbor. I fuel up and head west.

After 70 kms I arrive in Penong. I see a few bikes around and decide to check out the caravan park. If it looks okay, I'll stay. I head into the office. A very nice couple run the park and say there are several bikers staying the night including a young lady named Mel in the camp ground. As it turns out, I know Mel from previous border runs and a few other rides in the Snowies. She comes from Canberra. So I decide to stay. They have a three sided shed that you can stay in as well so I stay there where I can just throw out the sleeping bag on the floor. Cool.

Dinner in the pub with Mel and her friend from Adelaide where we get chatting to a local farmer or two. He tells how tough it is to farm in this marginal farming country and also the cost – around \$500,000+ each year. He says his mate who farms on the Yorke Peninsula has a licence to print money with the amount of rain they get there compared to Penong but he is born and bred in the region and would never leave it. A tough breed out here. Off to bed early and it's going to be cold... only 476kms today.

Day 3. I wake to a clear sky and it is very cold. Easy pack up with just the sleeping bag and mat. Head to the cafe for breakfast with the girls. They are going to take it easy to the border today so I decide to head off and leave at around 10.00am. Just a lazy morning and I want to have lunch at Nullarbor roadhouse. They have a nice hamburger with the lot, albeit a bit expensive at \$14.00. Then again, everything at the roadhouse is expensive including the fuel at \$1.92 per litre.

Once out of Penong, you can up the pace a little as there are long straights with a good view of what's ahead. I pass quite a few bikes sitting on the limit. The scenery here changes from farming country to light forests. Again today, the headwind is vicious and I'm getting 50+ kms less per tank, so I need to be mindful of this.

Around 10-20 kms from Nullarbor, the country flattens out and the trees disappear as you begin crossing the legendary Nullarbor Plain. Here I need to switch to reserve on the ZZR but I comfortably make Nullarbor roadhouse after 300kms from the 24 litre tank with around 3 litres left.

I scoff down my burger, chat to a few of the people I met the night before in Penong, fill up the bike and head out for the 187km run to the border. You get some good views of the Great Australian Bight along here as well as the cliffs. It is also a good whale watching time of the year with a few places you can pull the road to check them out. I've seen heaps of whales before so I continue on.

Most of the traffic out here is of two varieties – road trains and cars towing caravans. Most of the vans and cars that are on the road wave at you, a traditional outback nicety. It is best to wave to everyone. You never know if you'll need someone's help one day.

After about an hour and a bit, I arrive at the border. I go straight to the camp area across the road from the roadhouse and find a flat spot without ants to pitch my tent. It's pretty much desert with bushes. The ground is soft. No hammers required. Then it's across the road again for a drink and to see who's around.

There's around 70-80 bikes with most parked outside the small rooms you can book. I talk to a few of the guys I know including one from my old bike club, the QL Club. I saw him here last year as well. Night time falls. Dinner is eaten. I catch a glimpse of the pudding being photographed by a few people and then it's time to collect my badge from last year. You pay for your badge this year and then collect it next year. It's the only way you can get them.

I'm starting to think about the ride home tomorrow. It will be at least a 1,200km day. Feeling tired, I retire.

Day 4. I have a restless night as it's very cold again. Wake at dawn and crawl out to see ice on the bike. I pull down the tent and pack up just as the sun rises. I ride over the road to fill up the bike, have breakfast, say bye to those I know that are up, and then hit the road at 8.15am EST. The air is still without a cloud in the sky. The same as every other year I've been at the border.

I make very good time today. Traffic is light and when the wind starts to blow, I have a tail wind. Much better than the last few days of head winds. I fill up at Nullarbor, Ceduna, Kimba and Clare. I definitely didn't want to go through Adelaide again, so turn off the main highway towards Horrocks Pass and Wilmington.

Horrocks Pass is the closest thing to twisties I get on this ride and it is quite a good run on a smooth surface. Most of the corners are marked at 75km/h with a couple of 55's thrown in, so it's quite fast. After four days of straight roads though, it takes you all of the Pass to find your rhythm.

I arrive in Clare at dusk and, feeling good, decide to push on. The later it gets, the more I think I can ride all the way home, so I do. 1,932 kms in 19 hours, 40 minutes arriving home at 3.55am. It would have been quicker but I had to wait 40 minutes for my pizza in Clare! At least it was a good pizza. There was some rain as I passed through Mt Pleasant and Murray Bridge area but not too bad. It was very cold but my gear held up well and I never felt cold enough (or tired enough) to need to stop.

This is a summary of the last day:

Border Village to Nullarbor – 187 km	15 minute break including fuel.
Nullarbor to Ceduna – 297 km	30 min break for lunch including fuel.
Ceduna to Kimba – 313 km	15 minute break including fuel.
Kimba to Clare – 352 km	1 hour 10 minute break including fuel and tea.
Clare to Tailem Bend – 208 km	15 minute break including fuel
Tailem Bend to Horsham – 331 km	15 minute break including fuel.
Horsham to Bacchus Marsh – 244 km	

So the Border run is over for another year. 4,000 km over the four days. No tickets this year which makes it three ticket free years out of five. In fact, this year I only saw two police cars out on the road the whole trip, both in SA. Some years I've seen more than ten.

Although it's a long ride, I find it a great challenge to manage your bike, fuel stops and fatigue. The Nullarbor is an interesting place and great for giving the bike a good blast and to clear your mind. Anyone up for it next year?

Mark Copeland