

Esk to Toogoolawah - We're Not Quite Audaxians Yet



Friday 11 May 2018: the drought finally broke, the planets aligned and the previous week's predictive signs and portents proved correct. Mrs B, myself, and our bicycles, met joyously at Esk - our selected start point for a ride northwards along the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail.

Kick off was at 8.30 am; the morning fine with a decent breeze, perhaps a bit too decent. Mrs B was being portentous by way of wearing her Merino long-sleeved baselayer. The temperature wavered around a cool 16 degrees - an improvement on the 11 degrees atop Mount Glorious on the way over.

We rolled out with the cheerful enthusiasm that only a hiatus in a usually regular cycling routine can produce. The sun was shining and the day grew warmer. Butterflies darted in remarkable numbers amongst the grass and cows looked at us as we pedalled past. Mrs B had to stop to remove the Merino. The cows continued to look.

As the ride progressed we agreed that the overall gradients were some of the friendliest we had encountered in our Rail Trail Riding careers. This countered my unfortunate forgetfulness of my Camelback that contained a back up spare tube, CO2 canisters, mini pump, an apple, a protein snack ball and my new camera for memorialising travels. Fortunately there were no punctures nor pinch flats, there was no en route desire for munchies, and the iPhone sufficed.

However, after the first few kilometres out of Esk, the optimistic assessment turned to cheerful criticism of the surface - smooth gravel and clipped tussocky grass gave way to rocky ballast. Its chunky, pointy presence gave a certain *je ne sais quois*, mostly felt around the butt and less strongly around the front suspension. An occasional smooth stretch of single track gave some relief. Some mud was encountered at culverts and shallow streams at creek crossings.





The natives proved friendly, farmers in tractors doing crop circle activities waved and we were interrogated by a Border Collie who sniffed and leapt and stayed briefly enough to be admired and patted. I was uncertain whether Mrs B showed him the Merino. Then in a single bound, he dived into the high dry grass that bordered a paddock.

It was 18 kilometres up the trail to Toogoolawah and our unfit, out of shape and unpractised pace averaged not a lot over 12 km/hr. On downhill grades velocity was more impressive, even exhilarating. Some girls pay

a lot of money for a similar jouncing and weight-controlling experience of lipotherapy. Technical skills came into play as we dodged and weaved amongst the liberal spoor of bovines and possibly equines. The assaultive aroma of cow and cultivated earth mingled with exhaust fumes when the trail ran close to the Brisbane Valley Highway.

Eventually, beyond the kilometres of grass and trees, an impressive cycle/pedestrian bridge came into view and beyond, the township of Toogoolawah.

As we rode on in to town, the Rail Museum ladies were occupied planting plastic chairs about the old rail station and paused to greet us, wanting to know if we comprised the vanguard of "the big event tonight". No, we weren't, but clarification yielded that a record-breaking endurance event via bicycle was occurring on the BVRT.

Our thoughts turned to refreshment - to be had at the Coach House Cafe where the obligatory coffee and cake was purchased. We have rarely argued over who gets to pay. I have provided faultless navigation while Mrs B provides food and beverages. Toogoolawah Street life produced yet more friendly natives. A passing council worker emptying garbage bins glanced at us and safely advised that the calories of the our morning tea would quickly be burned.

Of note was the Coach House Cafe's commitment to a Cyclist Friendly vibe: a red floor pump.

The return journey was fraught with strong head and cross winds. This time, more downhill than up, though despite the insistence of the wind trying to retard our progress, our average speed remained respectable for two middle-aged ladies squandering our VO2 Max on whinging about the butt-punishing progress. This was eased with frequent stops and philosophical



conversation.



We searched for wildlife: no koalas or kangaroos, though magpies - many in pairs - matched the plethora of magpie warning signs. There was some rustling in the hedgerows; usually something small and startled, rarely something scaled and slithering. We saw our

canine friend on our return but he remained with his tractor-mounted master half a kilometre away. We waved regardless.

We had to consider some unavoidable interruptions: gates - we counted at least seven but all were well-serviced and after the third encounter of this obstacle kind, we had our routine down pat as to who would ride ahead and unlatch and who would prop the bicycles and shut the gates - all without enmeshing handlebars or producing temporary chain tattoos on our calves. The gates were found north of Ottawa. South of this long-lost town, concrete grids allowed unimpeded access and just a tad more butt-pummelling of a different frequency.

My homeward drive travelled at times parallel to the new work on the Toogoolawah to Moore section of the BVRT. I managed several envious glances at the smooth, wide and compacted surface and at the new bridge north of Harlin. Could there have possibly be a phenomenon of Surface Acquisition Syndrome to match the intensity of Gear Acquisition Syndrome? Completion of Toogoolawah to Moore is scheduled for the end of June, the outcome of \$3.4 million funding by the Queensland State Government and the Australian Federal Government, and also on the part of robust activism by BVRT supporters.



Later, after a cup of tea, a shower, and Dencorub, logging onto Facebook yielded the news of Rebecca Stone's record-breaking ride from Wulkuraka to Yarraman and return: 18 hours and 11 minutes, a handsome shaving of some four hours on the last epic attempt.

I corresponded with Mrs B. She responded and we agreed that we could claim that on the same day that we were the two oldest, slowest female riders who had ridden the least distance on the BVRT. No accolades were required for our 36 km ride.

Postscript: information via the BVRT Users Association Inc advised of an update of the completion of the Toogoolawah to Moore section. Opening of this section will now be some two to three weeks later than 30 June. An auditing process for contract compliance will postpone the original date. The BVRT Users Association Inc indicate that ***it will be worth the wait.***