

“Alltrails”

Rail trail six pack



**Wednesday 6th February
Sunday 10th February 2019**

In early February Susan and I, David, joined a cycle tour of the rail trails of Gippsland organised and fully supported by Alltrails Bicycle Tours.

Alltrails planned a route and itinerary covering 6 rail trails in 5 days. They provided road transport between rides, support vehicle along the route, accommodation , dinners and breakfasts.

This is our story of that ride.

Day one.

7am Susan and I joined the tour group bus at Pakenham for the 4 hour drive to Orbost (Thank you Fred for the lift to the Pakenham service centre). At Orbost we unloaded and set up the bikes/trikes, ate our packed lunch and set off. The Forest Park setting was very attractive with a few animal sculptures and a most impressive mosaic pathway.



Starting out from Forest Park to the beginning of the trail was rather confusing with our party lost, or at least geographically confused, for a while. More geographical confusion occurred when finding the Nowa Nowa general store and again at the end of the Gippsland Discovery (or Mississippi Trail) when a few of us turned right instead of left into Scriveners road. Arrows invisible or missed?

An error for which we were punished with a steep pull up to join the main road at the Timbertech Centre. From there after Gwyn had first tested the route by riding off in the wrong direction, he, Derek and I took to the main road for a fast and very rewarding ride into Lakes Entrance arriving there around 7pm. Somewhat later than the 5pm target time. Those who did not take this route missed the fabulous view across the entrance from the top of the Kalimna hill.

The East Gippsland rail trail proved very attractive and mostly easy riding on a packed gravel surface that was occasionally very stony with the rare patch of dry sand that proved a traction challenge for our trikes. Plenty of shade along the way, a variety of mostly treed vistas and spectacular trestle bridges made for attractive riding. On one short steep sandy pitch I managed to get bogged while Susan selected a better line and pedalled successfully through;- so much for the coach and student relationship.





The trestle bridges not being safe to traverse we had steep approaches and climb-outs to negotiate, with stunning views at the bridge bases. One could only marvel at the engineering effort to design and construct those bridges with the tall pylons all being single tree trunks. Riding along through the Mountain Ash trees one did not appreciate just how high they are until finding one that had fallen. Impressive too, to get one's head around the concept that all those trees along rail

trails are re-growth; the whole point in building those rail lines was to cut and cart the timber. Views along the way included tall crops of maize in irrigated fields and stunted maize in the fields without water. Some of the fields abutting the trail/bush had high fences presumably to keep the kangaroos out of the crop. Glimpses of a few abandoned timber mills and some currently operating ones with their characteristic sawdust incinerators added variety.



The first leg on day one took us 40km to Nowa Nowa from where we were bussed to the start of the Gippsland Lakes Discovery Trail into Lakes Entrance. Those rendered a bit apprehensive by the published profile and notes for the last 17kms stayed on the bus. The Discovery trail follows the Mississippi creek along the route of a tramway built to carry stone from a granite quarry. A ride quite steep in places with many twists and turns. The occasional tree down across the path made for an enjoyable and in parts challenging ride. Unfortunately one of participants had a fall on this section and had to abandon any further riding.



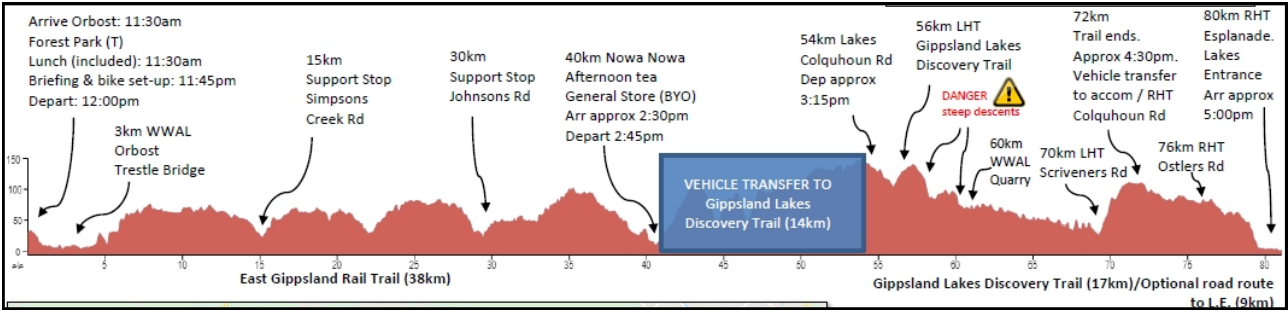
All in all a long and tiring day with many highlights to enjoy and remember. Susan and I sighted one Lyrebird who disappeared into the undergrowth before I got the camera out.

I had better image luck with an almost 2 metre Lace Monitor who when I approached leisurely ambled up a tree where he was superbly camouflaged.



By dinner time Susan had completed 50kms and myself 70 of a planned 65km ride. The extra being the rewarding ride from the Forest Tech centre down the highway with Gwyn and Dereck. Superb view over the entrance from the top of the Kaslimna hill.

EAST GIPPSLAND Rail Trail



View from top of hill at Kalimna

**Day two,
Nowa Nowa to Bairnsdale on the East Gippsland Rail trail.**





After a breakfast at “Bloody Good Coffee Cafe” serenaded by a cheerful guitar-playing busker of senior years it was back on the bus for a return to the Nowa Nowa store.

Faced with thunder showers at Nowa some, including Susan, elected to stay on the bus and join the tour further along. Susan re-joined at the Bullant Brewery at Bruthen. The rain soon abated and we enjoyed good riding conditions with more trestle bridges a few tunnels, a steep pitch or two with an overall down hill trend. Overcast or tree shaded conditions made for a comfortable 60km riding day.

I did have a panic moment or two at the start of the day when I could not attach the battery for my pedal assistant. At first it seemed that the battery cradle had been distorted by all the rattling and jarring along the way. Fortunately a careful cleaning out of some impacted dust allowed the battery to fit OK.





Along the way more open country than before, bare grazing fields showing the effects of drought, and some properties obviously seriously de-stocked. Off in the distance some hop kilns evidence of an earlier history. Gate ways and traffic calming structures provided the occasional serious challenge for the trikes.

At one site where the ground dropped away quite close to the gateway I managed to tip my trike over into the blackberry brambles. An uncomfortable and humbling experience. Crossing the Nicholson river bridge indicated that Bairnsdale with bath, beer and bed was soon to be reached.





Old Bumberrah Railway Station

- A Native Grassy Woodland And Grassland Reserve

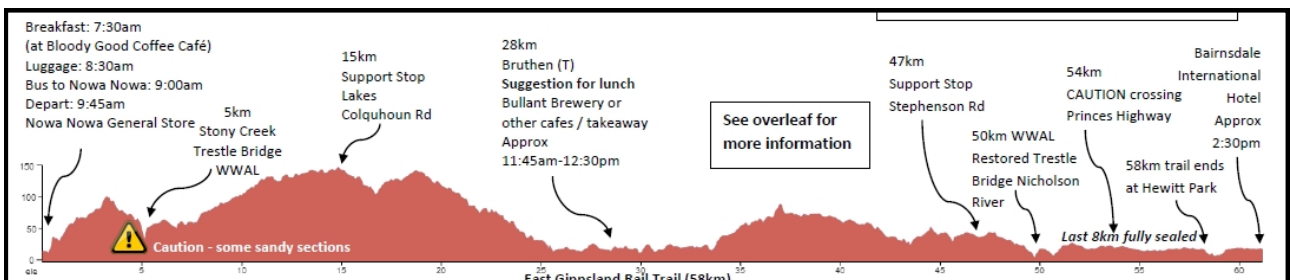
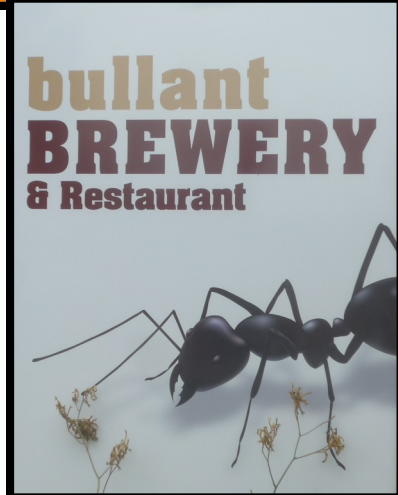
HISTORY OF RAILING

The surrounding area is the site of the old Bumberrah railway station. With the establishment of the Bairnsdale to Orbost railway line from 1912 to 1916, a station and siding was set up in this location. It was used and managed by the railway authorities until it closed in 1977, the last train ran down its tracks in 1987. With the site regularly burnt and isolated from grazing stock a native grassland was preserved. Its diversity of flora is still remaining today. There are over fifty varieties of native plant species identified in this reserve, some to look out for have been portrayed here.



The hop kilns at nearby Mossiface are strong reminders of a once important industry that flourished in the Mitchell and Tambo Valleys. John Calvert's kilns were built in late 1881. The bricks were made on the property and the timber milled on the spot.

The Mossiface site consists of three buildings of historical interest - a large rectangular wooden building consisting of a cooling / storage / packing shed and two kilns. The drying apparatus (consisting of brick furnaces, wooden scaffolding of the drying funnels, bricks which line the funnels, and drying racks) of both kilns are in good condition apart from the slowly disintegrating shingle roofs. A large nineteenth century iron screw press for bailing hops is located in its original position in the shed.





Arrival Bairnsdale



Day Three Stratford to Traralgon along the Gippsland Plains Rail Trail.



There was some confusion finding the start of the trail resulting in a U-turn or two before we settled into the right direction. The early weather signs were not good but soon provided excellent cool overcast riding conditions. For much of the early part of the journey we rode through quality dairy farming country with blue views of the Great Dividing Range to our right.

Just past the Powerscort station site is the Avon Ridge winery with an easy entrance from the rail trail, then on to Maffra. The winery will have to be something for another day perhaps!. Maffra is today mostly a service town for the dairy industry. At earlier times timber, hops and sugar beet industries have all in their turn kept this rural town bustling. From Maffra we peddled on to Tinamba a tiny dairy farming town whose gastro pub has a well deserved reputation around Gippsland and further afield for its fine gourmet fare. No time for us to sample their dinner and drinks this day however.

Next stop Apex Park Heyfield for morning tea. Almost immediately after leaving the park we hit a short and very steep section of track. By far the steepest on our whole journey. While I managed to peddle my way to the top, Susan was not so fortunate. On the steepest section a rider in front of her stopped to dismount forcing her to stop also. Trikes

have their advantages; starting on a steep slope is not one of them, the machines are heavy and the pedal assist that we have require two revolutions of the crank before providing any aid. With a bit help from myself and others the trike was pushed the rest of the way up the incline. At the top the path seemed to fork into two directions with no clear indication of which way we needed to go, a problem soon sorted by sending a scout out ahead while a cluster of us waited, still catching our breath, for a correct direction indication.

And so onto Cowwarr, Toongabbie and Glengarry through beautiful green pasture land wherever irrigation water was available and dry bare fields elsewhere. The Gippsland plains is not an area where one would normally expect to see such barrenness. Glengarry sports the only remaining rail station building still extant along the line and facing the famous Glengarry pie shop.

A pie and cuppa there was much appreciated. From Glengarry an easy ride to the end of the trail and then along Traralgon's main street to our overnight accommodation with plenty of time for a relaxing clean up before a very social dinner at the bowls club.









Bluetongue dreaming









Day four
Bus to Boolarra
Ride to Mirboo North 13km
Bus to Leongatha
Ride to Foster 50km



We took the bus to Boolara to join the Grand Ridge trail to Mirboo North, then the bus again to Leongatha to join Great Southern Rail trail to Foster. Susan and I had ridden the Grand Ridge trail ride a few weeks prior as our introduction to rail trail rides. Fifteen kms of easy riding through tall timber with a steady gentle grade all the way. Mirboo Nth being around 200m above Boolara. The road between these towns twists and turns through hairpin bends with much repeated climbing and descending. The rail track however is almost straight and level with a even incline all the way; a great tribute to the old railway engineers with their dumpy levels , horses and many navvys with shovels.

Arriving at Mirboo North on Saturday we were met by a team hanging bunting and otherwise setting up for their grand festival of all things Italian on the Sunday. We learned later that some of our family drove to Mirboo to enjoy the Italian Fest. On to Leongatha by bus to start the Great Southern Rail trail just in time for the weather to break. It looking seriously wet some, including Susan, elected

to stay on the bus. In pouring wind-driven rain the rest of us set off on the first 10 or so kilometres of wide smooth track with a slight down hill slope. A fast very wet ride that I enjoyed but not one that allowed much leisurely scenic viewing.

Through rich dairy farming country with a change in the track side vegetation from the tall trees on the North side of the Strezeleckis to a more diverse cool temperate rain forest remnants. Lower, broader canopies with a brighter green foliage compared to that of the bluish Mountain Ash woodlands, and every now and again a cluster of tree ferns. Several times we crossed the winding Tarwin river on recently constructed bridges and on to Meeniyen.

I rode up and down the streets of Meeniyen before deciding that I presented a far too wet and muddy image to reasonably expect admission to anyone's coffee shop. That being the case I went back onto the track and headed for Fish Creek.

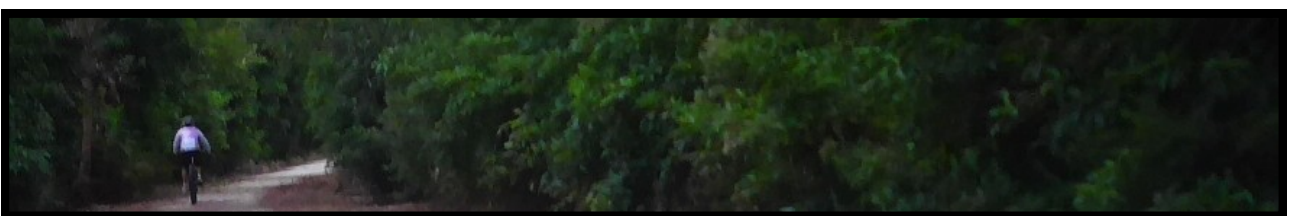
At Fish Creek, being still far too wet for inside, myself and Derek had a pie and pot of tea at the pavement tables.



I was so muddy that I got the waiter/barista to open up my wallet and retrieve the necessary to pay for our snack.

Then it was full bore on to Foster for a hose down for man and machine before enjoying a most welcome warm shower, after which I sat around almost naked in our room until Susan arrived in the bus with clean and dry clothes. Did I say I loved every moment of the 60+kms?.





Day five.
The last 24km of the Great Southern Trail, followed by bus to Wonthaggi for our final 23kms along the Bass Coast Rail trail to Woolamai.





A spectacular track along the coast presented a completely different vista to our earlier rides. A good track surface with a few short steep ups and downs with views to the coast. It was not a pleasant surprise to discover the Bourne creek trestle bridge closed for repairs and necessitating a challenging and hazardous manoeuvring of the trikes down a series of steep stairs. Not much fun!

Thankfully a combination of strangers and fellow riders assisted in carrying the trikes down to road level.

Beyond the stairs we moved onto a very narrow section of the Bass Coast highway before rejoining the trail to Anderson. A few found that section on the road more than a little threatening.

At the Anderson roundabout Susan elected to re-join the bus and our US participant Carol, left our group to continue her adventuresome solo ride.

Another gently downhill 6kms on wide smooth gravel led us to the end of the track at the Woolamai racecourse and the end of our six pack cycling adventure.

Would we do it again?

Yes please!!. The overall experience was a most enjoyable few days shared with a cohort of people whose company we really enjoyed. It was my third tour with Alltrails and Susan's first attempt at a cycle touring adventure. Prior to the start of this trip Susan's longest ride was 30kms and that with an extended coffee break in the middle. She did extremely well and is keen to do more.

This was my third ride adventure with Alltrails and I cannot speak highly enough of Richard and Jo's un-fussed professionalism and their enthusiasm for the ride.

www.davidsusan.com/Theride.pdf
tells my version of the 2018 Alltrails Copenhagen—Paris ride.

Why ride a trike?

The pros;-

Comfort. Susan with almost nil bike touring experience rode for 6 hours with no pain.

Trikes are fast on the flat and seriously fast on the downhill.

Trikes are very stable and will not fall over if you go too slow, or are waiting at the lights.

Nor do they wobble all over the place when slow.

They are fun.

With their wide track and low centre of gravity trikes are very stable at speed.

Trike riders arrive at an accident feet first not head first.

On steep climbs where bicycles wobble and struggle a trike-rider selects a very low gear and just keeps spinning. I've never struck an incline that I could not climb on my trike.

However if the surface is either dry sand or very greasy one can get into a situation whereby the back wheel just spins and fails to propel the trike forward.

Did I mention fun?

Real cons;-

Trikes are heavy,

When you are not riding them trikes are heavy, awkward devices that are not easy to store or to transport.

On gentle to moderate climbs a trike's extra weight renders them slow and hard climbers.

Perceived cons.

Hard to see in traffic. Because of their novelty factor drivers notice trikes whereas bikes are so common that they can become psychologically invisible. As well as my trike I ride a bicycle, in my experience traffic gives me much more room when I am on the trike.

You cannot stand on the pedals to climb. This is true but the conclusion is not. When standing on the pedal one can only exert a force equal to ones weight. On the trike I can push my shoulders into the seat back and exert much more force with my legs than my weight.

