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Batemans Bay— a sight for tired legs!

Canberra 2 Coast

With no course marking, no prize money, no entry fee and 400km to cover in two days, the ‘C2C’ was always going to be a selective event, as **Craig Armour** reveals..

Would you like a jelly donut?” Not an offer you’d normally expect at the start of an endurance mountain bike race. Then again, you wouldn’t normally expect to roll in a few minutes late and have everyone wait for you either. Somehow, for the 13 riders gathered on the footpath, two days worth of gear strapped to bikes and bodies, I’m not sure rushing off the start line for that elusive edge was high on the agenda.

We were all about to embark on the inaugural ‘Canberra to Coast 200’, a two day 400km race and cruise from Dickson in Canberra to the marina at Batemans Bay and back again. There were no prizes on offer, no support cars or feed stations and most importantly, no entry fees. That hadn’t stopped some of Australia’s fastest endurance mountain bikers lining up for our own little grand depart.

Originally the vision of Canberra local Ed McDonald, it wouldn’t take long for the race to gain momentum. A Facebook page, a route and several e-mails later had as many as 20 riders considering lining up for the event. Discussions quickly turned to everything from DIY map boards to gear choice and eating strategies, as calendars were shuffled and dates locked in. Hammer Nutrition rider Jason Dreggs

even managed to organise one of the best swag bags any event could offer, choc-full of Hammer gels, bars and powders. Talk is cheap though, and it would be left to the 13 brave souls standing in the crisp but relatively warm Canberra winter’s morning to answer the challenge.

ALL DOWNHILL FROM HERE...

There was still nearly an hour to go before sunrise as we headed out through Canberra’s network of paths and trails before diving into the deservedly famed Majura Pines. Loaded bikes and the pre-dawn darkness added a new dimension to flowing rooty singletrack but provided an excellent start to a route that would soon have us heading out past Queenbeyan. In the interest of safety, the start of the race was neutralised, keeping us together on the roads while we escaped suburbia but it wouldn’t take long for the bunch to splinter once we turned off the tarmac. By this stage we’d covered 50km, already a long ride by some standards. It was here though, with 150km to go that the race would start in earnest...

With no arrows or marshals, navigation along the quiet country roads was left entirely up to each rider. For some this meant GPS traces but for others, the cue sheets that Ed had prepared and a speedo were enough, calling in a different set of skills than simply following an arrow on a screen. Juggling the numbers in your head kept the mind ticking over the whole day as you counted down the kilometres and simultaneously calculated the distance to the next turn. While Ed’s cues were excellent, it only took a missing sign post, confusing set of turns or slight error in the distances to leave you scratching your head. Still, pulling into Araluen with 100km on the dial and an incredible forest lined descent down the escarpment, I hadn’t managed to get too geographically embarrassed.



While there were many water options along the route, Araluen pub was a good excuse for a break and a refill. The hotelier was ready for a good banter by the time I arrived with three riders having been through already. Seemingly ‘not far in front...’, there was motivation for a quick turnaround to continue the chase, but not before raiding the fridge of chocolate bars, Powerade and all important water. I guess this would amount to a feed station and with the next reliable supplies some 80km away, an important resupply point.

Leaving Araluen, winding through Deua River Valley, we were once again reminded that it’s all together too easy to take the incredible scenery in Australia for granted. Lush ferns and forest lined, the smooth undulating dirt road occasionally opened out to reaches of the Deua River; up a little due to recent rains. While the weather had been looking threatening all day, it had yet to amount to anything. With the sun just starting to break through and the sounds of the river our only company along the

quiet roads, it was easy to get lost in our own little world. After 140km that would all change...

STING IN THE TAIL

Everyone had found their own pace by now, some pairing up or forming small groups along the route and others choosing to go alone. Out the front though, the combination of smooth dirt roads and a slight tail wind had the leaders pushing well over 20kph. It was a rude shock then to be greeted by Knowles Road. Sign

posted only as RM23.2, Knowles Road would take us up towards Wandera Trig; an elevation gain of over 450m in less than 4.5km. If gradients of up to 30% weren’t humbling enough, I was later to find that Australian 24 Hour Single Speed Champion Brett Bellchambers rode it all but one 30 metre stretch with just one gear! At least the effort wasn’t without reward, and the top would provide us with our first glimpses of the Pacific Ocean.

After nearly an hour of climbing, the descent into Mogo State Forest was a

Words with Ed

What was your motivation to put the C2C200 together?

Basically, I was trying to emulate the Kiwi Brevet (<http://kiwibrevet.blogspot.com>) in Australia on a small scale. I wanted to see a race that included navigation, choices about gear, food and water, and encourage the 'self-supported adventure' aspect of riding. Having ridden the route a couple of times, I thought it presented a variety of challenges and warranted a race.

What were your main challenges?

There is a duty-of-care issue. Making sure everyone could and would look after themselves, whilst still making the event more popular than a death march! The other challenge was knowing the route—conditions, roads and landscapes change over time, so you're never 100% sure that the cue sheet is correct.

How hard was it to get the route organised?

It was the fun part! I rode the route solo in January to see how it all came together. I usually took some time to try and optimise the route by looking at maps, satellite, contours and so on. Above all else, it needed to be fun.

Were you expecting so much interest?

No, not really as the concept's pretty new here. I had anticipated 10 riders at the most. After all, 400km in two days was always going to be very selective. We certainly wanted to ensure that only strong and experienced riders committed to it.

Would you like to see the C2C200 grow?

As long as it remains self-supported and small, yes. Similar events like the Tour Divide and Colorado Trail Race are becoming increasingly popular. Running it as a proper event, like the popular 100km races, would be a logistical nightmare given the number of public roads. It will always be self-supported, application-only, no prizes type racing—probably closer to the Audax model than what mountain bikers are used to.

Would you do it again?

Yes, definitely! The variety of the route – from monster climbs to some of Australia's best singletrack, from semi-alpine ranges to lush forest gullies – makes it a unique and fantastic route.

Do you have plans for any other events in the future?

I've been planning a Brindabella 300km for a while that connects Canberra and Tumut. It's genuinely alpine with lots of long climbs, but fast and enjoyable roads and a little singletrack within the two towns. Eventually, the goal is to emulate the Kiwi Brevet itself, and set up a 1,000km plus self-supported route that captures some of the best mountain biking in New South Wales.



Heading off for a pre-dawn start in the burbs of Canberra.


definite eye opener; the fast firetrail plummet eventually turning into the flowing network of singletrack that litters the forest. Once again, loaded bikes added a new dimension to the bermed corners and small rock gardens, but exiting Snake Track with fresh smiles was certainly a just reward after over 100 miles of riding. Tasty treats beckoned though, and with a short roll out of the forest we were surrounded by the pies and cakes of our last refuel stop—the Mogo Bakery.

The climbs out of Mogo have brought a tear to many a rider in the past, with 180km in the legs they would really hurt! They can also make you realise that the Danish pastry wolfed down only moments earlier was possibly not a good idea. Once again we would find ourselves in Mogo Forest singletrack as we darted along the ridge line. The end was close though and exiting back out onto one last dirt road would bring us to a locked gate and the edge of suburbia.

Just 10km would remain from here to the declared finish at the Batemans Bay marina. For David and I, who had been riding together since Mogo, there was a new sense of determination; it was time to get the job done. Swapping turns and sharing navigation duties for the road in made the time pass quickly as the excitement of finishing grew. There wouldn't be the hordes of spectators or

announcements over the PA like other events, in fact I would have been happy seeing the guys in front still there waiting, but rolling in to the finish with the last of the daylight was enough to leave at least two guys grinning with accomplishment. Too bad there was no one there to see the strutting!

Jason McAvoy, Garry James and Jeff Rooney would finish the 200km in a stellar time of nine hours 15 minutes. That's an average speed of 21.6kph—not bad for over nine hours in the saddle! Most others took a more relaxed pace and would roll into our accommodation in the dark an hour or two later. It didn't really matter when or where you finished though; there were no prizes, no glory, and no egos to check, but sitting around the table with pizza and beer in hand, there were certainly plenty of stories to share...

And there was still the 200km ride home yet! 

Interested in this ride? Go to www.facebook.com and search for "The C2C Race" and you should find it. You will also find the route at:

www.bikely.com/maps/bike-path/Canberra-to-Coast-200-10th-11th-July-2010

Photography by Ty Domin



Arulean Pub— a chance to refuel and rest.