

Inaugural Audax Tablelands Rides

By Warren Olsen



The inaugural Audax Tableland Rides were organised by Gayle Sticher and her merry band of volunteers. With about 80 registered riders, Gayle and her crew should be very pleased with the success of the event held on Sunday 17 April 2016. Top effort Gayle, crew and the sponsors, and three cheers from all the riders!

Riders were able to do a 100km or 200 km ride around various parts of the Tablelands. The rides were very well organised with GPS downloads for those tech savvy users and the hard copy maps and directions for those who want to stop every now and again, enjoy the view, and clarify what direction to go next. Needless to say, even the GPS guys looked at the directions once or twice for clarification of course and definitely not because they missed a turn off or two.

The start and finish point was near the tourist information centre in Atherton. The ride commenced about 6.30am. It was a requirement to have double front and rear lights and a reflective vest for the 200km riders. With Tony (CEO) bringing along reflective vests for several riders and arriving a little later than expected a small group of riders were getting a little anxious, but CEO arrived in the nick of time. With reflective vests in place, water on board, lights and vests checked off, energy bars and gels and bananas strapped in, the start was a calling. After a briefing from Gayle it was off towards Mareeba for the first leg of the 200km ride.



I had only ridden 180km prior to this event so the 200km ride was going to be a good challenge. In discussion with the guys prior to the event they commented it was going to be an easy steady pace, generally no rush to finish, enjoy ourselves and bring everyone home. For the first 20kms the pace was flat out with speeds in excess of 38km/hr (a slight downhill section they say). The next 60kms took us past the Springmount rubbish tip and Arriga sugar mill over a few hills, into Keribbee Park Rodeo Grounds for a quick release of body fluids other than sweat and then into Mareeba. Along this section I dropped my chain after hitting a large bump on a wooden bridge. Kevin (Chores) to the rescue to drag me back into the pack. Through this section the pace was again fast to frantic at times. Coach was heard to comment that "at this pace we will be home before smoko". Along the way the

riding group swelled as we collected several riders and small groups. Always good to see new faces and have a chat. At various control points you have to stop and get your card signed off to confirm you have been through the check point. Also there are unmanned control points where you have to stamp your own card. The stamp was usually hanging from a sign. At every checkpoint on the ride where volunteers were stationed the most positive rider I know, Sean (Thurdddyyy), ensured we all gave the volunteers a big '3 cheers' for their efforts. Well done Thurdddyyy, a great gesture and a good way to raise everyone's spirits.



The Offils cannot go past Mareeba without getting the well-known pie from the Mareeba Bakery. Alas the bakery was closed. With not so happy faces it was off to Brumby's for the beloved Mareeba pie. Sean (Thurdddyyy) decided to stick to his tried and tested diet of Subway. Others decided to head to Coffee Works for coffee and a snack. Brumby's looked after us well and also topped up our water bottles for the next leg. Some comments were heard later in the day that the pies were good value as some of the guys had eaten the pie 2 or 3 times throughout the day.

Off we go for the next leg, past the coffee works and up the road. Oops, out with the directions and yes we missed another turn. Well cyclists do like to chat and really don't follow Garmin directions that well. This leg to Walkamin generally via Chewko Road and Narcotic Creek Road was mostly uphill and the pace slowed. Davog and I decided to hang back, enjoy the view and take in the fresh country air or was it we just could not keep up with the pack on the hills, and were just trying to suck in the big ones to make it to the top? It was certainly a grunt in places and way past the time for Ron (Coach) to have a coffee so the pack pulled into the Mt Uncle Distillery for tea and coffee. This was an excellent choice with nice coffee and tea (for Thurdddyyy and me) served in pretty clear glass teapots. They supplied plenty of cold water also and the air-conditioning was a good relief. Plenty of laughs, stories and general chit chat certainly make for an enjoyable ride.



With the fluid intake ok it was on to Walkamin. There was some confusion as we turned into a street that we decided we did not need to turn into and then about 2kms down the road we took a wrong left. Glenn (Parker) pulled up beside me and said "You would not believe we have 12 grown up men in this group all with a GPS and we still don't know where we are going". He has a way of providing a good laugh. From Walkamin it was down the highway, through a few back roads, up a few more hills (which seemed like mountains) and on to the next control point at the Tolga Woodworks. Get the card signed, fill the water bottles, have an energy bar, gel and banana, and of course the 3 cheers for the volunteers and it was off to Kairi at a steady pace. From Kairi we headed to Gallo's Dairyland where we waited for Mike to catch up after getting a puncture just down the road. Cold drinks and sweets for some were the order of the day.

From Gallo's Dairyland it was past the Curtain Fig Tree, through Yungaburra, down to the Avenue of Honour where we stamped our card, back to Yungaburra and on to Lake Eacham Day Use Area to get our card signed at this Checkpoint. The shaded road into Lake Eacham was a welcome relief and the Lake Eacham Day Use Area provided some great views across the lake. A 5-minute stop, 3 cheers for the volunteers and we were on our way.

We had done about 160kms at this stage and Turdy asks me how I am going. I said I just have to get through the next 40kms. Mr Positive (Thurdddy) said you only have to get through the next 10kms and we can have a beer at the Pearamon Pub. It is marvellous how easy that 10kms is when you know there is a cold beer at the end. As we rounded the corner and headed up to the pub, the smiles returned to faces, and the lips were licked in anticipation of a nice cold ale. As we sat around the table it only took a few sips for more laughs and strategies contemplated on how we could finish the ride here, have a few more ales and get our bikes back to Atherton. Chores had a van we could put the bikes into and Thurdddy could slip back to Atherton in no time and pick it up. The Pearamon Pub certainly was a pleasant stop over with good company and a cold beer. The decision was made; we would only have one beer and finish the ride as a group.



From the Pub it was through Malanda where we collected another group of riders and then onto Atherton.

It was good to see Coach had ridden a very tactical ride by saving himself over the 204kms so he could sprint home the last km. Well done Coach on very good technical ride. Thurdddyyyy spent most of the ride out the front of the pack, breaking wind without complaint with Mike also supporting him out the front. Great work Thurdddyyy and Mike and the not so strong riders like me do very much appreciate it. What a fantastic day, the group stuck together, the pace was good, many laughs and cheers and a sense of accomplishment obtained. For me I have now achieved the double ton for a long distance ride, but I must thank the great company which helped me achieve this milestone.

The next Audax Tableland Ride is on Sunday 15 May 2016. I recommend you get some mates together and get along for the ride. It is well organised, the route is fantastic and of course you are doing what you enjoy – cycling.