

## **The Cheap 3 Peaks Challenge (2<sup>nd</sup> July 2016) – Paul Witzerman**

I'm always a little edgy when I sign up for one of Andrew Bragg's rides. His ride descriptions and his course maps don't always prepare you for the actual day on the bike. In the days prior to Saturday the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July's ride, The Cheap 3 Peaks Challenge, Andrew emailed me and stated the following: "You are best not to look at the profiles, can be a bit off putting." That should have been the cue that got me to pull the pin on the ride and just do 20 odd Mt Coot-tha repeats in the dark, instead. But I persisted and rode the route, hoping that Brian Hornby's role in the map preparation would soften the blows a little. I must say, as well, that I was a bit chuffed to be doing a '3 peaks' ride for over \$300.00 less than one of the official 3 peaks rides I've seen advertised. \$300.00 can buy a lot of pies.

It was a sharp 5 degrees at the start of the ride, outside Andrew's home in Arana Hills. Peter was there for the 200 km version and I, Alex and Andrew (the big galah) were taking on the 300. We set off and Andrew and Alex promptly dropped Peter and I on the first few rollers as we headed out towards Bunya Road. Peter and I were happy to let the other two go and to probably wreck each other over the course of the day. Further, I knew I didn't want to get involved in the frantic idiocy that always accompanies any attempt to match Andrew's rhythm and pace on the climbs (ie: attacking every climb in the big chain ring with a cadence of about 12 ½). In my mind, I was wishing Alex luck as I saw his tail-light disappear up the road alongside Andrew's. They are both very strong riders and I figured that they each deserved to share that strength with each other, all day.

Five minutes into the ride, I was colder than I could remember having been since the last time I had so under-dressed for a ride in winter. The temperature got down to 3 degrees and felt like it didn't get over 10 all day, even though it probably did. Up and over Clear Mountain we went. Morale was momentarily high. Wonderful views up there in the early morning. Then it was out to Dayboro via a detour off the main road to gain a few more metres of vertical. From Dayboro, Peter and I rode for a while with one of Australia's most competitive 24 hr MTB racers, out for a long training ride on his duel suspension MTB, complete with fat knobby tyres. It was easy to see why he wins those big races. We introduced him to the delights of the Ocean View Road climb as an alternative way to the top of Mt Mee and he loved it. Another beautiful place in the early morning light. An uneventful ride out to the first control at Woodford ensued. Ordinary was the coffee at the bakery, but the potato pie more than made up for it.

Neurum Road took us out to the Somerset Dam control, before we trundled through the valley to the bottom of the Mt Glorious Climb. I saw lots of friendly cows that Andrew, no doubt, would have enjoyed talking to as he enthusiastically smashed on and up the road. I managed to find a bit of a rhythm out there, only to have it violently snatched from me while Peter dropped me on the pitiless struggle up the back of Glorious, with its false summits and close passes from the motorcycles. That was the last I saw of Peter, as I pushed on past the closed café at the Mt Glorious control to face a dark descent off Mt Nebo into The Gap. Almost 4000 metres were on the Garmin by then, at the 180 km mark, or thereabouts. I couldn't think about all the climbing ahead without thinking about how easy it would have been to simply roll down into The Gap to my home there. But I couldn't let one of The Big Galah's rides beat me. The thought of him potentially struggling and paying for his ROing sins kept me moving.

The descent off Mt Nebo was almost surreal, as I rode along in a bubble of light on a virtually empty road, using something like ‘the force’ to anticipate the corners ahead and to play the brakes gently with thickly gloved but still numb hands.

Once off the mountain, it was time to skirt around the base of Mt Coot-tha on Gap Creek Road before the climb up the front of Mt Coot-tha. I felt a little odd passing all the folks out for a Saturday night drive on the hill. They probably thought I was a little odd as well (rightly so, perhaps).

The hardest part of this ride for me was riding up Settlement Road from The Gap, within 50 metres of my wife and three sons on Saturday night (pizza night at home), at dinner time, with much more suffering to come. And it was six degrees. I have never been so close to bailing on a ride. I remained audacious and pushed on, not wanting to give the RO (what’s his name? I forget it now) the pleasure of knowing that his ride defeated me. I pushed on and intrepidly groaned my way up and over Lochinvar Road (another ridiculous hill – just for the sake of it) and then set a local record for the most amount of potholes ridden through by a cyclist at night while on their way down to the base of Camp Mountain. Fearlessly I struggled through Samford and out to the foot of the northern climb up Clear Mountain. Peter and I had zoomed down the same climb so many hours before, after having chatted our way up from the other side. It had been a long day and I really felt like a piece of pizza. I dropped one of my emergency industrial grade caffeine gels (because I didn’t have any pizza. It was pizza night at my home. Did I mention that?) and threw myself stylelessly at the short and sharp pinches of the second Clear Mountain climb of the day. Caffeine and an almost overwhelming absence of pizza coursed through my body as I lunged over the summit and steeled myself for what I knew was going to be a freezing descent. Not to be disappointed, I shivered uncontrollably down the other side and struggled to keep the bike on the road as my shivering was translated, via the handlebars flailing rapidly from left to right, into a wild dance down the road that must have looked from behind like some drunk old bloke trying to ride a bike home from a long session at the Clear Mountain Resort bar. I must remember to turn the rear light off next time, so I don’t alarm anyone approaching from behind.

I hate Bunya Road and the streets that lead to it on the short way there from the base of Clear Mountain. Stupid rollers and power climbs which suck from the legs the last semblances of anything that’s left in them. By that point in the ride, my whole body ached and my mind was settling into a post-caffeine OD flat: More than 7000 metres of climbing and descending; The cold; The loneliness; The absence of pizza; The potholes. At 11.30 p.m., I clumsily and mindlessly lurched up the last couple of climbs through suburban streets that got me back to Andrew’s home – the end of the ride, and there was Alex, having arrived with Andrew about 10 minutes prior. He was cursing poetically and articulately as he stuffed his bicycle into his car, and I reckon he might have been as close to drooling as I was. He reported to me that all day, Andrew was saying to him such things as ‘Oh, there’s just a few more rollers to go’ and ‘just a bit of up and down.’ The only thing that made me feel even a little better at that point was Alex’s news that Andrew had suffered a puncture. The karma police had done their job! Five minutes later, Andrew sent me a text message and told me he had hoped I’d bailed on the ride, rather than still being out there. With him expressing such little faith in my capacity to complete such a ridiculous ride, and after I had actually completed it, I suddenly didn’t crave pizza any more.