

RATHDOWNEY RUMBLE

160 km - Sunday 31st July, 2016

Organiser – Roger Hawley

Report by Peter Whittle

My planning for this ride started a year ago, when Roger insisted I put the Rathdowney Rumble in my diary. Not only is it a great ride (I love the country around the NSW/QLD border), but it is his way to raise funds for the popular local cycling-based cancer charity, Smiddy. Roger being the dude he is, the Rumble went in my diary and I fended off any other offers or demands on my time – I had a very important commitment!

On one of my first Audax rides, I had to borrow a bidon from Roger, so I began planning and packing the day before, instead of at 4 am the day of (truth be told, all my Audax rides have had some planning flaw). I headed off for the 80 minute drive on a chilly, dark morning, and as I neared Rathdowney, I stopped for a shot of the foggy dawn.

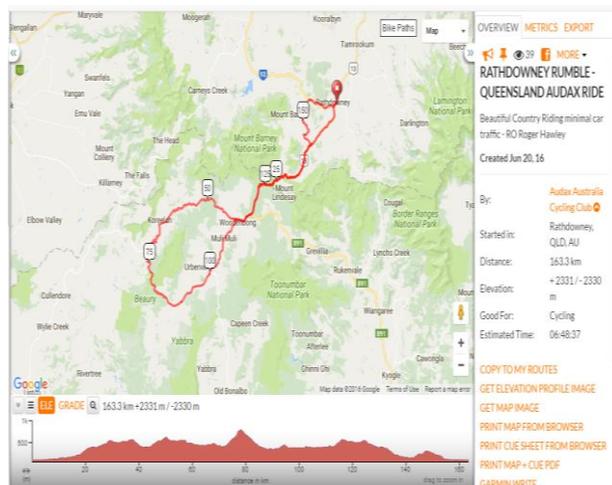
Arriving in Rathy, the riders weren't to be seen where I had expected them. Then I spotted a trail of blinkies, which Rog had thoughtfully placed, to guide riders to the back paddock where we were assembling. On arriving at the gate, there was Rog astride his bike, telling me to hurry up – the man looked under pressure. As I drove in, I saw why he was anxious – an unusually large turnout for an Audax ride. There were lots of people I didn't know – Roger had recruited 39 riders for his charity do – a fine effort. Many were 'Smiddy' folks, and the 'Graceville Grupetto' was out in force. There was a small bunch of fairly fit-looking young blokes, who were talking about a



hard hit-out. The support vehicle was adorned in Smiddy regalia and was laden with food and drink, as well as Roger and Kym's pit crew – two excellent girls who were very particular at the checkpoints in attending to our brevets, including the choice of sticker.

Everyone was keen to get moving, due to it being about 5C. A quick briefing from Rog, and we headed off, the main chatter being how long it would take for the fog to burn off and the weather to warm up – especially from those less well equipped. The Mount Lindesay Highway took us out of Rathy through the valley, and after a few kms, as the road tipped up for the climb, we

emerged from the fog, into a crystal clear day, with 21C forecast. Yes folks, winter is why we



live in Queensland.



The bunch started to sort itself out in the long climb up the Main Range. The Thoroughbred contingent went off the front fairly soon. The Grupetto rode steadily with a level of cohesion that I've never seen in my handful of Audax rides, even coordinating a nature break for one rider who would normally be left to their own devices. I had the good fortune to ride into the high rainforest with a young woman who nearly cried with joy at the sound of bellbirds, which she had only ever heard about. It was nice to witness her pleasure – and also to admire her lovely new eTap-equipped bike.

The first climb is typical of Queensland climbs – never a steady long climb, usually lots of downs along with the ups, with some steep pinches, some rainforest and spectacular views. In this case we were blessed with the sight of Mount Lindesay (no photo sorry – you'll have to go there yourself – I was trying for a decent Strava time up the climb), and as usual I nearly fell off my bike trying to work out how I could climb its sheer walls, to the scrubby top. I enjoyed the good road surface, knowing we would soon be in NSW, home of the pothole. At the top, we had a few kms of rollers, then a fast run down to the wonderfully named hamlet of Woodenbong (much classier than plastic milk bottles) at about 40 km. Roger and Kym provided a great smoko table and picked up the tab for a round of coffees at the cafe.

The fog had returned and jackets went back on for the second pitch, but soon enough the sun was back out. The road rapidly deteriorated into tar patchwork, with signs blaming some other government, but the ride towards Tooloom was a lot of fun – rolling through lovely grazing country. I was riding with two Audax regulars, Mark and Tony, and we stopped at a corner to strip off and eat, before ascending Mount Tooloom. This was a nice steady climb – around 7 km averaging say 6% - with a great view over the Downs from the top.



From there, it was a fine, fast, winding descent towards Urbenville. We had been warned about wet or trashy corners, but it was pretty good – the main hazard being overly large cars (a witty friend referred to them as byproducts of the arms industry, owned by soft-minded people who mistake them for cars) driven by people with poor proprioception (i.e. on the wrong side on blind corners). Roger had briefed us to look out for Tooloom Falls, a 5km gravel

diversion near Urbenville. I popped in there and it was indeed nice. And it later required me to wash my bike. Once again, a fine table served up by our hosts, and efficient brevet-marking by the pit crew, at the 100km mark at Urbenville. A few folks were looking like they had been looking forward more than most to the food and drink – and not everyone was used to longer rides and were suffering a little by now.

On the way out of this pleasant town, a lady munching a large bag of chips on her verandah warned me there was a hill coming up, then cackled hilariously. The warning turned out to be a bit overstated for us wizened riders, but it most certainly would have killed the chip lady – rollers up to Woodenbong and the range summit. We then had the usual fun hooning down the highway, but the climbing was not all done.



Roger's inevitable twist in the tail, which he always provides, was a diversion into Mount Barney View – a ridgetop road with spectacular views of Mount Barney (Russell Coight wrote that sentence). Kym was at the corner and warned us to keep our eye out for the right turn, and we decided after extensive debate to take the turn, apprehensive of what Roger had in store – but the views definitely made the climbing worth it. On coming back to the main road, we had 10km back to Rathy, which we TTed fast, knowing that Roger's lasagne awaited.

Rog, Kym, his pit girls, and the Smiddy crew, did a great job on this ride – getting 39 riders out for a magnificent experience and raising a good lump of money for a great charity. Not everyone rode the last diversion, but my bellbird friend rolled in last, with Roger for company, having completed the brevet and her first 100 mile ride. Thanks everyone!