

## **Rumbled by the Rathdowney Rumble 2016**

I pencilled in the Rathdowney Rumble at the start of the year, as it visited an area not familiar to me and feedback from participants in previous Rumbles was enthusiastic. The distance was challenging for my perceived state of fitness but the weather forecast for the weekend was favourable. Not only that, most of the entry fee was to be donated to a cancer research charity.

So, up at 4 am, then a drive to Rathdowney. Not much traffic; some roadworks; plenty of mist. Finding the registration point was easy. Roger, RO, had positioned red lights at the turn-off from the main road and the next turning, with an illuminated bicycle at the entrance to the car park.

I was amazed at the number of starters, mostly from non-Audax clubs, who relished a challenge for a worthy cause. There were some Audax members but I did not actually see them at the start. Everyone was well-wrapped up, as it was certainly cold but not so cold that your breath froze. Apparently last year it was even colder. Still, it was dry, with the prospect of a warmer morning.

The riders set off in groups and I was soon alone at the back. Roger's practice is to accompany the last rider/s to ensure no-one is left behind. We rode together to the start of the climb up the Range, where he accepted that I could reliably be left to my own devices and rode away. The climb is not too difficult and the views make it very enjoyable. Even better was the descent towards Woodenbong. The hills rose out of a sea of mist, rather like those photographs of the tall buildings of Brisbane that we see at this time of year. It was a sight not to be missed! The views of the mountains are the most memorable feature of the Rathdowney Rumble and I would encourage all Audaxers (is there such a word?) to register next year. The climbs and descents are a bonus.

Anyway, by the time I reached the first control, at Woodenbong, the support crew was ready to move on. Whilst enjoying the biscuits, cakes and savouries that they kindly provided for me, with coffee arranged by Roger, I contemplated my situation. The Rathdowney Rumble is a straight-out ride to Woodenbong, followed by a lumpy circular route back to Woodenbong, via a second control at Urbenville. It then retraces the route over the Range to Rathdowney, with a short loop at the foot of Mount Barney. It occurred to me that, if I were to complete the full circuit, in my present condition I would arrive at the Urbenville control well after the support crew should have left. My solution was to ride up the first climb of the circuit, then turn around back to Woodenbong and ride to the control at Urbenville. Whilst stopped at top of the climb, prior to retracing to Woodenbong, I was surprised to see a car stop further up the road then reverse to me. The driver actually asked if I needed assistance, a true indicator that I was in the country. A highlight of the Rumble was the traffic. There wasn't any!

It was now warm enough to remove two layers of clothing and swap gloves for mitts.

Between Urbenville and Woodenbong there was a short stretch of unsealed road but it was not a problem and is probably to be sealed by the local council. Generally, the road surfaces were reasonable, although caution was required on descents where uneven patches can be hidden by shadows. Obviously, I am unable to comment on those roads on “the dark side of the circuit”. This is Yowie country and there is a number of Yowie crossing points, with large footprints on the road. However, I did not meet a Yowie. I suppose they are shy! The roads on this New South Wales side of the Range were noticeably damper than those on the Queensland side, so care was advisable.

The climb back over the Range is not too difficult, with no steep stretches, and the descent is a cyclist’s dream. Having missed out a fair amount of the route, I decided to forgo the Mount Barney loop as the sun was low and bright enough to obscure a comfortable viewing, at least, that is my excuse. The support volunteers again enthusiastically provided food and drink on completion of the Rumble.

I hope to ride the complete course next time and I would exhort all to give it a go. My only criticism is the Cue Sheet. It is from Strava and I counted twenty-seven superfluous directions on the sheet. There was no indication where the controls were and none of those little direction arrows we used to get. I appreciate that many Audax members are highly computer literate, with advanced GPS technology on their handlebars, but I am not. It’s probably why I get lost!

David Booth