

CREPE ESCAPE – 5 MARCH 2017 GAYLE STICHER

A short hop up the range from Cairns, the village of Kuranda sits nestled in the rainforest basking in the spiritual glow of the many artists, artisans and alternates that call it home. By day, the town comes alive with psychic energy, as crowds flock to soak up the cosmic vapours and contribute to the economy with their purchase of obligatory trinkets. In a perfect blend of planetary alignment, the town awakens as the first train arrives from Cairns bearing cashed up tourists ready to park with their dollars, and shuts down again as the whistle blows to signal the last departure from Kuranda Station.



So perfectly is the lifeblood of Kuranda predicted by the movements of the train that the good folk of the town stay tucked up in their futons meditating on their chakras and exuding harmonically balanced auras until the first tourist train is chugging up the line from the coast. Decades of wisdom gained from a careful study of the moon's movement in the third room of Venus clearly indicate that there is not a big market for kangaroo testicle coin purses or crocodile tooth hat-banded Akubras before Kuranda Scenic Railway delivers its first payload of the day.



So it was that the 83 riders registered for the Crepe Escape had Kuranda to themselves early on Sunday morning. The weather gods temporarily forgot their pact with Far North Queensland Audax, and treated everyone to a steady drizzle. Ride Organiser, Wil Bird, delivered the ride briefing, emphasising the word “undulating”, while minimising references

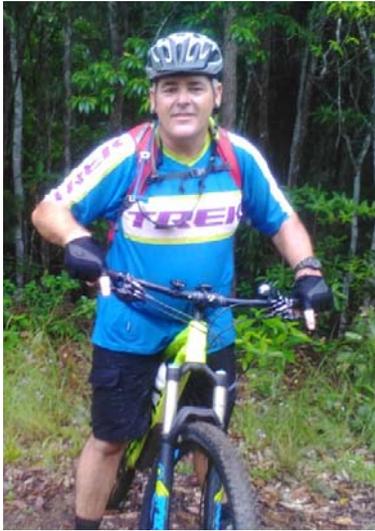
to “up”, “climbing” and “hill”, and tantalising riders with the lure of a well-stocked Control point at the top of the final “undulation”.



The ride started in waves of 15 riders at two minute intervals, with Wil remaining faithful to his promise to the constabulary not to interfere with local traffic. Or was it non-interference with local scrub turkeys, who seemed to be the only locals present. No doubt the human variety of locals were busy pursuing enlightenment elsewhere or had sworn off motorised transport for the day.



We headed through the backstreets of Kuranda, that I never knew existed, and found some undulations, that are now clearly etched in my memory. After a few kilometres of bitumen backstreets, we crossed the Kennedy Highway and headed further into the wilds of the Kuranda State Forest through Myola and Kowrowa, mostly cruising downhill towards the causeway across the Barron River. Seeing the non-flooded low causeway was a cause for celebration. Wil had warned that we would have to backtrack up the previously cruisy downhill bit if it was flooded.



Across the river, the road turned to dirt and liberally coated us with red mud and grit, but presented mostly easy riding with a manageable uphill slant. It was a good day for the navigationally challenged, with the bikes in front of us having left easily followed wheel tracks in the mud. The route turned off onto a forestry Access road, and the real business of the day's climbing began. I have learned that most hills look worse from a distance, and look easier the closer you approach them. These hills hadn't learned that lesson. They were every bit as steep and long from far away as they were from close up, and kept the legs pumping until the end. I stopped cursing the pain of endless climbing on our recent Tassie Trail trip, and had a short karmic experience of finding the ride up the hills relatively enjoyable.



After two kilometres of stiff climbing, we were well rewarded with the most lavishly catered Control point I have ever encountered. Sandy had laid out a table groaning with cake, jelly snakes, bananas, chippies, drinks, fruit and biscuits. Eager hands dipped into the chippies box, finding treats they hadn't seen since high school, or were never able to get to before the kids cleaned them up. Yummies disappeared into backpacks with plans of a post-ride feast, and we all lingered longer than necessary over too many pieces of cake. No doubt Wil was intent on soothing the ruffled feathers of the lowlanders, hoping to have them well fed and

contented before they returned to find him in Kuranda and extract vengeance for the undulations.



The ride took a steep pitch downhill on a moderately loose and rocky surface that had me clutching my brakes in a death-grip to the bottom and hoping my hydraulic fluid didn't choose that moment to desert me. The area opened into a patch of recently logged forestry, then passed through farmlands, before cruising mostly downhill through kilometres of rainforest. It was a truly beautiful cycling experience, riding on wide dirt roads through the



rainforest, and being sprayed by only small amounts of mud. Despite the Cassowary Crossing signs, the big birds didn't oblige me with their appearance, and I contented myself with a sighting of a Ulysses butterfly to fulfil my need for rainforest icons.

Black Mountain Road emerged onto the Kennedy Highway, and we rode across the Barron River on the very skinny walkway that doubles as a cycleway on the edge of the bridge. We crossed the highway and headed up the road, dreaming of finding Wil stationed in his beloved crepe shop. Wil was nowhere to be seen in the main street among the throng of tourists. Nor was there any clear indication of a crepe shop.



Acting on a tip-off, we headed into the markets in the most unusual Audax finish I have ever experienced. There was no chance of a sprint to the line, trying to save those extra seconds on your Brevet card. Instead, we pushed our bikes through the alleyways of stall holders, dodging past the dream catchers, sarongs, home-made soap, fair trade coffee, artistic knick-



knacks and unidentifiable arrangements of colour and form. The normally malodorous throng of cyclists finishing an Audax was no match for the pervasive wafts of incense, healing balms and various leafy substances, although the gritty collection of bikes piled outside the café was clearly not the brainchild of a local artist.



Audax riders were quick to tuck into the coffee and food on offer, with all memories of Wil's gastronomically amazing control apparently forgotten. There were smiles all around amongst the mud and grit and joss sticks. We'd had a great time. It had been a beautiful ride. Thanks again Wil.

(5 March 2017)