

EIGHT TABLELAND TOWNS 2017

– GAYLE STICHER 9 APRIL 2017

It's been a big year for Audax riding in Far North Queensland, and we celebrated the anniversary of our first Audax ride in style. Sixty three riders registered for the second running of Eight Tableland Towns in a Day, with 12 rising to the challenge of the 200km version. The other 51 riders showed that they had fully embraced the FNQ spirit of Audax, and headed out for a day of coffee shops, photos, sight-seeing and fun on the 100km loop.



With a little more experience nowadays in my Ride Organiser role, the process felt slightly smoother and less daunting than last year. Riders arrived in Atherton in the pre-dawn light, found their Brevet cards, and filled their pockets with pre-ride lollies and bananas (which just happened to be the best in the world). Registrations were duly completed, lights were checked and re-checked, a ride briefing was delivered and (in an officialdom-pleasing exercise) the first wave of 20 riders set off roughly on time. They were followed by two waves of roughly 20 riders at roughly one or two minute intervals, showing due regard for all permit conditions, applicable regulations, by-laws and associated rules.



The course set off towards Mareeba, with the first 22km being a delightful downhill run helped along by a moderate tailwind. There were a few slight course changes from last year with the first coming at 22.5km for the 100km riders, who now turn right into Walkamin, rather than left towards Oakey Creek. Despite being firmly warned not to follow last year's course, or the 200km riders or a local, there were some geographical miscalculations, with at least one 100km rider putting in an extra few kilometres at this point. And yes, it was a local.



The 100km ride turned back towards Atherton, with most riders still looking cheerful as they approached Walkamin. They looked slightly less cheery as they turned into the full brunt of the headwind back to Tolga, particularly when most arrived at the first Control before the coffee shop had opened. A delegation of caffeine deprived riders at the front door brought about a rapid policy change regarding business opening hours. The rest skulked off to the Yungaburra Control before their withdrawal symptoms made riding impossible.



The delightfully named Milly Molly Mandy cafe hosted our second Control, with sweaty riders perched daintily among the frilly dresses and fluffy teddies. Few people seemed eager to leave, with most content to soak up the beautiful morning drinking coffee, eating cake, chatting and communing with the local wildlife. It was then off to find the secret stamp at the Yungaburra Avenue of Honour, followed by a quick loop around Lake Eacham before heading for home.

Peter decided to forego any further luxuries, and struck out for home in front of the pack. He arrived in 4hrs20mins, closely followed by Tate, Carmel and Andrew. Most of the group straggled in over the next hour or two, with reports of stops at the Cheese and Chocolate Factory, more coffee shops, Pearamon Pub (of course) and an unconfirmed report of pole dancing with the street sign on Marks Lane.



Gallery Five in Atherton was once again the centre of the FNQ Audax universe, with tables of hungry and happy cyclists celebrating a great day out.

Special mention to one tough pair of cyclists who finished the course on mountain bikes, and were still chirpy.



There were particularly large smiles from our last 100km riders home, with celebrations for their first century rides ever. They even had enough strength left to put in a bit of weight training in front of the cafe. Rumours of them ceremonially marking the occasion with a specially designed tattoo are yet to be confirmed.



After parting company with the 100km riders at the magic 22.5km mark, the 200km riders turned left and found their first secret stamp at Oakey Creek. As the bridge had inconveniently been closed for roadworks the week before, the course once again could not follow the circuit around Springmount Road. Riders instead backtracked to Chettle Road, where Kim had set up the first Control just opposite the prison. There was a quick refilling of water, lollies and bananas, and riders continued their mostly downhill and downwind cruise towards Mareeba.



The leading group (Alex, Fiona, Graham and Russell) completed the first 100km in around three hours before heading back up into the wind towards Atherton. The bunch split into three groups, with all arriving at back the Tolga Control at a reasonable hour for smoko having completed 115km. The 200km course then headed off to Yungaburra, where Kim was waiting among the Milly Molly Mandy teddies for our third Control at the 144km point. After a loop to the lakeside to find the secret stamp, it was off to Lake Eacham and home through Malanda.



Alex, Fiona, Graham and Russell arrived in Atherton after 8hr7mins with tales of how they out-sprinted salivating dogs to suddenly improve their average speed. Andrew, Chad and John came home in 9hrs32mins, claiming that their short break for pies had significantly added to their time. Snowy, Mary Ann and Michael rode in at 9hrs52mins, looking delighted with their efforts and fired up for more.



And so ended another great Audax ride in FNQ. Thanks to the 580 people who have registered for Audax rides during the first year of FNQ operations. It is great to hear the enthusiasm among riders who are setting their cycling goals and achieving something they can be proud of, while having a great time along the way.

Our next ride visits the high points of the Tablelands in the depths of winter. It will be a great opportunity for us tropical folk to invest in some of that classy winter cycling kit that our southern cousins live in for most of their year. Keep up the training, and we will see you for the next ride – Get High on the Tablelands – Sunday 16 July 2017.