

## **Pinnacle of Success!**

A 200km Audax ride in Mackay



Jason and I started our 200km ride with rain threatening. It was a late on Saturday afternoon and we were facing a night of storms and muddy roads but we had many more surprises in store. This was Jason's first Audax ride. He's training for the 2019 Indian-Pacific race.

As we pedaled through town I felt my pocket and realised that the bananas I had planned to eat were still on the kitchen bench. No point going back now, there's bound to be food somewhere.

After half an hour of traffic and rain we were on country roads surrounded by lush fields, palm forests, wetlands. Dark grey rain clouds formed the boundary of our existence yet the sun shone brilliantly. It was such a pleasure being immersed in the world all by ourselves but there was trepidation that it wouldn't last.

There's a section of the Habana-Yakapari road that is unsealed. Most of the roadies in Mackay don't venture further than the "end of the bitumen". I always wonder why because it has a great surface and is a lovely trail to follow. The eucalypt forest up on one side, riverine rainforest and a great view of Mount Mandarana. However, today was not the usual. Jason had ridden the road

24 hours earlier and the recently graded surface was muddy slop. But what a difference a day makes, when we passed by the surface was smooth and dry and as easy to ride as any bitumen.

So we survived the first challenge. Our second reward was to follow. Mt Blackwood and Mt Jukes are two parts of a volcanic landscape that existed just 32 million years ago. These giant magma remnants dominate the country but on our ride the summits were shrouded by clouds (the photo is of Jason heading towards Mt Jukes). We climbed across the eroded rim of Mt Jukes then descended into the valley as we pedalled towards Kuttabul. This is my favourite road in Mackay. It's windy (but not windy ⇨), has a few climbs and lots to see and keep your mind occupied as the kilometres tick by.

Disaster struck at Kuttabul when Jason discovered that the cleat that had been giving him trouble for the previous 50km had fallen off his shoe. I suggested that he tape his foot to the pedal and keep going but that wasn't an option Jason wanted to experiment with on his first Audax ride, at night in foul weather. His preferred option was to abandon and get a lift home. So I faced the last 150km alone.

Darkness arrived on the Marian-Hampden Road and I picked up the pace considerably. Too much really. I realised that with no training to speak of, I'd be very tired in the second half if I kept it up. I slowed to around 25km/h through to Marian.



It's pretty strange going into a pub full of diners at night wearing lycra. I was alone but did it anyway. My thought process was "maybe if I don't draw attention to myself they won't notice." Anyway, there was no choice. The Railway Hotel was the only place I'd be able to find food for the next 130km so I needed to eat. A steak sandwich, chips and beer provide all the essential nutrients needed it seems.

The rain stayed away. On the Marian-Eton road there were signs that it had been in the vicinity quite recently and in abundance. Frogs chorused so loudly that if there were two of us cycling we wouldn't have been able to hear each other speak. Insects of all flavours filled the air. An unexpected secondary source of protein had come my way.

At Eton I thought about another beer but I wimped out on walking into another public bar in lycra on a Saturday night. Onward I rode, wondering what I would do if one of the many causeways that lay ahead would be flooded. My plan was to definitely not cross any flooded creek. Most of the lives lost in floods in Queensland are people who try to drive through floodwater. I thought I could double back and use the highway and then make up the kilometres elsewhere. Fortunately nothing like that happened.

My other big concern was roaming dogs. I can shout pretty loudly and am sure I can ride quite fast if I need to but dealing with an angry dog was not something I wanted to contend with alone on a lonely country road at night in the middle of nowhere. By assuming stealth mode I let sleeping dogs lie.

I rode through the well known localities of Septimus and Mia Mia on the way to the township of Pinnacle. There are a couple of smooth sections of dirt on the road but no mud. The full moon found some space amongst the clouds to light my way and illuminate the landscape. The countryside out there would be beautiful to ride through late in the afternoon or early in the morning. I had the idea of organising another ride out there when it's not too hot. Watch out for the Septimus September Century next year.

I reached Pinnacle just on closing time and a few drivers made tentative efforts to travel surreptitiously down the deserted highway. I survived that 5km which was probably the most dangerous part of the journey. Now I had to limit my water. I had consumed one bottle over the previous 45km and had another 35 to go but the humidity was taking a toll.

The Owens Creek Loop Road and Langdon Lumburra are two others that every cyclist in Mackay should venture along at some time. Maybe even at night. By that time I was starting to become a little drowsy but the curlews that set up camp on the road and bandicoots that darted across it gave me little adrenalin rushes that reminded me to keep my head up and eyes wide open.

From there it was on to Mirani to replenish my bidons and back home along the northern bank of the Pioneer River. I think by the end I was in another world. I don't have much recollection of the last hour as I became a bit more sleepy. The muscles and brain knew the route well so I just plugged along as best as my fatigued legs would take me. I arrived home at 2:21am. Slept until 11 and gradually recovered as the day wore on.

There are plenty more less crazy Audax rides in Mackay this year. The next is the Hangover Hundred on New Year's Day. See you there.

**Statistics:**

Punctures: zero  
Cleat detachments: 1  
Beers: 1  
Steak Sandwiches: 1  
Curlews on road: 12  
Curlews run over: 0

**Successes:**

No mud  
Not being eaten by a dog

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Peter McCallum  
3 Dec 2017