

Recollections from a Long Run to Beechworth

(Excerpts from a diary kept religiously over Easter)

by Leigh Johnson

Tuesday, April 19

A leisurely breakfast with Julie and Bill Scully, Georgie Bennett & Rowland Palmer and Brian Gannon from WA in a great little café just next to the Skullys' at Hazelwood Park. And who should turn up but our Club Captain Mark Denton on his way to the river? Explained what a river was to the WA folk as they haven't seen water for some time.

Rowland was standing outside the café; a bloke handed him a couple of original Riley advertisements from the Advertiser in the 1950s saying "I'll be dead before you, so you should have these."

Lunch in Coonalpyn then led everyone to the wrong motel in Bordertown. Can't blame the GPS this time.

Wednesday, April 20

Morning tea at Dimboola. A senior citizen on a gopher approached us to admire the Rileys and told us that a Riley was the first car in which he'd done 100 mph. Standing in the main street again. A bloke stopped and offered Brian Gannon a collection of old Riley magazines and then..... offered to send them to him in Western Australia. These Western Australians must attract kindness.

The museum at Murtoa. Julie's Great-grandfather, Pastor Peters founded Concordia College here. The college was later transferred to Adelaide. History I'd never heard about.

A reporter/photographer from the Wimmera Times captured the group in the main street of Murtoa.

Feeling like a storm chaser. Black, Black clouds increasing and the temperature's dropping as we head towards Bendigo. Heavy, heavy rain. Found leaks we never knew existed. Reg hasn't run this cool for ages.

The Bendigo Cathedral Motel owner told us that his first car as an 18 year old was a Riley 2½. Pity he didn't understand aspect ratio and setting up televisions properly so people don't look small and fat. Why do they look at me like I'm from Mars when I tell them?

Thursday, April 21

Lunch at Glen Rowan or Glen Rowen depending on your point of view. Deep into Ned Kelly country.

First sight of beautiful Beechworth in its Autumn colours. Our accommodation, Latrobe at Beechworth, is a stunning environment. What will happen to it now that it's on the market?

The Welcome Dinner. Old friends, older faces, new faces, some young faces.

Friday, April 22

A run around the valley to Mount Beauty and Bright. Scully RME on the side of the road. Can't believe it could be running on two cylinders. Experts agree. Followed Bill back to Yackandandah. Left him in discussion with the RAA with offer of a ride home if needed.

Arrived in Mount Beauty as everyone was leaving. Up and over the hill and then on to Bright. Extraordinary amount of traffic heading towards Bright. Unbelievable number of bicycle riders. Julie and Bill OK.....on a truck.

Quiz night after dinner with Ken Hodge as quizmaster. Enjoyed myself too much. Sent to the naughty corner temporarily. Almost won. Only a few hundred points behind.

Saturday, April 23

Drove to Bandiana and joined the lineup of vehicles. Great photo opportunity. Army supplied forklift for photographers. Much, much better use of my taxes than fighting a war- against-what in Afghanistan.

Just outside Bandiana. Tree-lined boulevard in autumn colours. Helen said we could have been in France. Don't have to travel there now. Seen it here. Stunning.

Beechworth Easter Fair in the afternoon. Big event. Grabbed a bottle of home-made sauce of course.

Headed to the RACV garage to find the RME already bereft of bonnets. Accepted the job of apprentice to Rowland and Chris Gilbert. By 6pm the head gasket had been replaced and all put back together in spite of my assistance. Those Western Australians sure are generous with their time and expertise. Bill's buying the drinks for the night.

After dinner entertainment was the Beechworth Re-enactment Group. Something different. It prompted Lyn Wyatt to suggest that we should always have one day in dress up at a national gathering. Hear, hear! Dick Barton's ready for a reprise.

Sunday, April 24

The Conrod Trophy in a sunny spot on a crisp morning. Washing being pegged to the clothesline from the back of a Nine. Open-topped cars had the advantage.

More time to poke around in busy Beechworth. Sausage roll from the famous Beechworth Bakery. Picnic lunch in the grounds of Latrobe with the crows, currawongs and parrots. Just like home.

4.30 pm early drinks with the Vics to get a head start on the night.

Presentation dinner. Complex calculations to find the winners. We was robbed!

A big thank you to all of the organisers. Next year it's Toowoomba.

Monday, April 25

6am. Rileys rumbling. Is that someone off to the Dawn Service or those Western Australians getting an early start on their six-day journey home?

Early breakfast, goodbyes and away we go. Four-lane freeway to start.

Mistake in Maldon. Maldon Easter parade in progress. Roads closed and some shops as well. Should have stopped in Castlemaine instead. Couldn't even find a bargain. Did find a Riley though. Not one that had been with us at Beechworth but one from Castlemaine that had come over for the street parade and run out of petrol. SES very obliging with their fuel.

Overnight in Maryborough. Magnificent late 19th Century railway station still in operation and some antiques to ponder. Plague of mice and spiders following their huge rains. Spider web wafting from every stick of vegetation on the roadside. Amazing sight.

Tuesday, April 26

Followed the GPS to Minyip but unfortunately it took us 10 km out of town. Just as well we had a map too! Mental note on a piece of paper. Must speak to those Tom-Tom people about listing only one street for Minyip and that being 10 km away from the town.

Maryborough to Bordertown-an easy drive but back on the highway after Dimboola.

Wednesday, April 27

Leisurely drive home. Reg coughed once near Mount Barker but an otherwise uneventful drive over 1600 km. Guess we were lucky.

The ash tree in the drive has gone from green to its autumn colours while we've been away and the leaves are just starting to drop. Just like Beechworth. Great to be home in my own bed.



Looks like 1911 but it's really 2011 LJ Photo



Black clouds near Bendigo. Photo by Georgie Bennett