

The 2012 Mudgee weekend

Every year around the end of April a group of Audax riders trek to Mudgee, about three and a half hours drive northwest of Sydney, for a weekend of cycling pleasure. Numbers were a little down in 2012 – too many competing events – but the eighteen or so riders who made the trek were rewarded with glorious weather, quiet roads and fabulous cycling.

The early arrivals enjoyed a late afternoon 65 km ride on Friday to the Old Cooyal pub via the vineyards to the north of town, followed by a few fine wines and dinner at Roths Wine Bar.

Next day we had the choice of three events: a 115 km event, 155 km or a 200 km. All riders followed the same route for the first 80 km – up to Gulgong (the town on the ten dollar note) along the Henry Lawson Drive, out to Ulan on Ulan road (famous as the only underground and above ground coal mine in NSW) and back to Gulgong along a fast downhill run on Spring Creek Road.

On leaving Mudgee the 200 km riders and the 155 km riders with one or two 115 km riders jumped off the front and formed a peleton driven by two RAAM aspirants (Glenn Druery and Steven Berveling) and two young guns from Dulwich Hill (Jeremy Thomson and Adrian Emilsen). The group rolled along at a steady pace on the straight, gently undulating roads and arrived into Ulan just a few minutes after the checkpoint opening time. There was no time for a beer at the pub but plenty for a bacon and egg roll washed down with coffee in Gulgong further along.



After Gulgong the riders split; the 115 and 200 km riders headed west across the Castlereagh highway and back to Mudgee while the 155 km riders rolled east to Cooyal along country lanes that had just recently been sealed. The roads were exceptionally quiet, with no more than one or two cars passing us during this 30 km stretch. Even better, the early morning cloud cleared to a warm, sunny day. The sun was on our back as we rounded the last corner before Cooyal to be greeted by a flooded causeway, an unexpected remnant of the heavy rain that had fallen through the Central West several weeks before.

In the meantime the 200 km riders were transitioning from the undulating roads of the Cudgegong Valley to the steep hills that lay between them and their destination of Hargraves, on the road to Hill End.

While the climb into Hargraves is a brute of around

300 metres in 3 km with maximum grades of 15%, the ride back is a joy, with swooping descents and sweeping views down into the valley.

Our first 200 km rider rolled back into Mudgee in the very smart time of 8 hours and 15 minutes, just less than an hour after the lantern rouge for the 115 km, although the latter was a little laden down with the few bottles of wine she'd picked up along the way – this was Mudgee after all!

The 155 and 200 km rides finished with a 20 km loop to the south of Mudgee around the Lue, Rocky Waterhole and Burrundulla roads. The quiet roads, the views up the valley as the road skirts Mt Lowe and the splendid farmlands along this loop make it one of the most pleasant short rides in the country, and all the more noteworthy for being so close to town.

Later that evening the Mudgee Brewery hosted twenty hungry and thirsty cyclists and partners, all there to refuel and egg each other on for the 'big one', the climb to Hill End on Sunday and for those ambitious enough, the ride through to Bathurst – 2700 metres of climbing in 150 km. Hill End is at 75 km from Mudgee so the out and back was offered as an alternative 150 km.

Five riders showed up on Sunday morning: three for the out and back and two – Gary Keating and Adrian Emilsen – attempting the ride to Bathurst. Things got interesting when a large snake on the road nearly caused a collision in the peloton, and downright scary when Glenn Druery's crank snapped – testimony perhaps to the steeper grades? Luckily, Glenn stayed upright as did the others, but his day was over. He hitched a ride back to Mudgee with Gary leaving Adrian to press on alone, taking pictorial evidence of his epic trip at Hill End (a one-time booming gold town and now a national historic site and artists' retreat) and at the top of the descent into the Turon Valley.



Many thanks to all riders who turned up and made this such a great weekend, and a special thanks to our friends from the Dulwich Hill Bicycle Club, who have adopted this weekend as part of their calendar and turn up in great numbers. Congratulations to all those who completed their first Audax ride – we look forward to seeing you all again!