

## Long Way around Australia



Back in May 2010 when our three friends from Denmark and my partner Robyn and myself came back from our 9000 km ride up through the middle and down the East coast of Australia, my old friend Jorgen started talking about going one step further and include WA in our next adventure.

Two years later, in late February 2012 Jorgen arrived in Australia for our Long Way around ride. This time only Jorgen and I were going. With only limited time available for me due to work commitments we early agreed there would be too many long riding days and not enough days without riding for the girls. We had to promise them another easier trip at a later stage, and we could keep in touch via Skype. Modern technology is great and Jorgen could on most days show his partner Connie in Denmark the surroundings we were in.

I have known Jorgen for more than 30 years. We both did our time in the Danish military and afterwards in the Army reserve where we spent more than 10 years in the same group. Ever since our teenage years we have both been riding and working with bikes. Jorgen made a living out of his passion and became a motorbike mechanic, and later spent 10 years as a BMW mechanic and 5 Years as Sales Manager for BMW motorcycles in Denmark. On the 4th July 2000 he took the new model F650GS for a test ride, and had it not been for some driver in a tin box that did not look before making a right-hand turn, Jorgen would probably still be in the job today, but unfortunately he broke his back in three places. Jorgen was 45 years old, and motorbikes were a major part of his life. The Doctors told him that he would never ride a bike again. But I guess they did not know how big his passion for bike riding was, and how determined and resilient he was, because only 14 weeks after the accident he took his first ride around the block on his much loved BMW K1. Years later he told me that the pain to get out of his special bed installed in his home and the time it took him to get dressed and move the bike out of the garage is something he will never forget. Yes, it was crazy and the ride only lasted a few minutes, but he just had to know if he could do it and if there was something to look forward to. It would take another year and many hours of physical training and rehabilitation before he could do longer rides.

These days he is fine, along with modern medicine and a special waist belt to keep things in place he can do full days of riding. So far he has clocked up 380.000 km on his K1 in Europe, and now it has been converted into a K1 LT, a mix with a K1100 LT to give a better riding position for both him and his pillion passenger.

We have kept in touch ever since I migrated to Australia in 1995, and did our first ride together here back in 2008 covering 6000 km in and around the southern states.

Our plan, this trip, was to leave from the Gold Coast on the 5. March and go down the Newell highway, but due to the rain and flooding in the area at the time, we postponed our departure by 24 hours and left home on the 6. March, Jorgen riding a 1995 model BMW K1100LT and myself on a 2006 model BMW R1200GS. When we reached Inglewood it started raining and it rained steadily until we reached Goondiwindi, amazingly that was the only rain we experienced in the next 29 days on our journey. In Coonabarabran we met up with some fellow bike riders that we had met when we passed through on our trips in both 2008 and 2010 and we spend another 1 ½ hour in great company. We originally planned to ride via Parkes and Forbes and turn left at West Wyalong towards Mildura, but due to flooding, the roads were still closed so we had to turn left at Gilgandra and go via Warren and Cobar to Broken Hill and then via Wentworth to Mildura. We had great weather riding through the wine district in this part of Victoria and South Australia. From Wallaroo in SA we took the new Catamaran ferry across the Spencer Gulf to Lucky Bay and from there to Tumby Bay for the night.

From there on we continued up the coast via Cummins, Elliston and Streaky Bay to Ceduna. Perfect weather and great scenery along the Southern Ocean. Almost everywhere we stopped for a coffee break we would get talking to other travellers or locals, many of them spotting our Danish flag on the rear of our bikes. So often our stop would take quite a bit longer than expected, but it is great to meet and talk to so many different people when on the road, and riding a bike seems to make it a lot easier to get talking. One of the many reasons why Jorgen is so fascinated with Australia is the immediate openness and friendliness of most Australians, whereas many Scandinavians can seem a bit reserved until they get to know you.

From Ceduna we were now getting ready to cross the Nullarbor, neither of us had done it before but we had both read up about it and talked to people who had done it before and we were excited about what lay ahead. We divided the Nullarbor crossing into two sections. Our first overnight stop was at the Eucla Roadhouse, just across the border into WA. Along the 182 km stretch from the Nullarbor Motel to the SA / WA border we had two rest stops/detours where we could ride all the way out to the ocean to view some amazing scenery, the wonderful panorama of the bright white cliff edge dropping into the deep blue ocean with a cloudless horizon. At the border quarantine inspection station we had a talk to the two female Officers who efficiently checked our luggage and located two little sachets of honey that I had kept from our breakfast that morning. It looked like a prison sentence for both of us as I was not aware that honey was on the quarantine list, but they were very friendly about it and wished us welcome to WA and a safe journey. The next day's ride from Eucla to Norseman was a distance of 717 km. The weather was perfect again, we had been warned about the often windy conditions but we had none of that. A cool 17 degrees C. in the morning, rising to 39 degrees C. in the early afternoon. We were surprised how green it was along most of the way, all the wet weather experienced in big parts of Australia in the last years had made a difference. Also, the amount of goats along the road took us by surprise. This being the first time that we crossed the Nullarbor, we both agreed that it had been a great experience and not at all as boring as expected. I believe the great weather all along also made a big difference. The temperature gauge on Jorgen's bike showed 42 degrees C for the last part of the trip and, although we tried to keep up a regular fluid intake, we needed a few sports drinks and a long stay in the motel pool at Norseman to recover when we arrived there late afternoon.

Our journey through the south of WA was one of the highlights of our trip. From Esperance via Albany to Denmark and up to Margaret River there are some great roads and beautiful landscapes. The Red Tingle trees, Eucalypts which are exclusive to south west WA are many in the area around Denmark and Walpole. They can grow to 75m tall with a girth of 24m. The Valley of the Giants Tree top Walk is well worth a visit to get a bird's view 40m up. Denmark is a charming rural town on the banks of the Denmark River and features a rugged coastline with unique boulder rocks. We had planned to stay in Perth for two nights, but ended up staying three nights due to the Cyclone warnings up north. That gave us a bit more time to have a look around, and we also had to get some new tyres for both bikes. We phoned around and found the tyres that we needed at the Bike Tyre City. We got our new tyres on Saturday morning, and Dave Rawson and his experienced team were very friendly and they have a huge selection of tyres, according to their website, the biggest in WA. Dave has done a lot of riding himself around the world, and also organises a trip to the Malaysian Motorcycle GP every year.

While in Perth we also took time to visit the Swann Valley and the Henley Park Winery, owned by a Danish family, Lisbet & Claus and their two children. We had a great time there tasting some of their fine wine, so good that I purchased 12 bottles of their excellent red wine to be posted home to the Gold Coast. A few bottles have already been enjoyed, a fine drop indeed.

We were again very lucky with the weather conditions as we travelled north. The Cyclone had passed and it was sunny and warm. From Perth we travelled along Hwy 60 and later Hwy 1, along the Indian Ocean and experienced some great scenery again, often with white sand dunes on both sides of the road. North of Geraldton at Northampton we turned off towards the coastal town of Kalbarri. Ride number 194 of the 200 Top Rides in the Australian Motorcycle Atlas that we used extensively on our trip. Driving towards Kalbarri from south on a beautiful sunny day we had the sheer cliff drop on our left side and coming over a hill top is this little coastal town in an inlet with a white sandy beach and crystal clear water, magic. As much as we enjoyed Kalbarri and our coffee at the cafe with oceans views, the main reason why we chose to go here is that I had heard about an independent state within Australia in this area. We stopped at the Tourist information and asked the young man behind the counter about it. He told us they did not officially display any information as it was an independent state within Australia. But he did have a small leaflet under the counter that he gave us. Great, it had a road map showing it was only 64 km from Kalbarri. So off we went to find the Principality of Hutt River. The place was easy to find, about 30 km of good dirt road that even the K1100LT handled easy. What an interesting place and story. We were shown around by H.R.H. Prince Leonard himself. An extremely well spoken and knowledgeable man, he knew a lot about Denmark and Scandinavia and we had a nice and lengthy conversation about how the Principality of Hutt River came about as well as a lot of other national and international issues. They have thousands of, mostly foreign, Tourist every year. Many Cruise ships visiting Western Australia have tours to the Principality of Hutt River. The Principality of Hutt River is situated 595 km north of Perth and is about 75 square km in area. Hutt River is an Independent Sovereign State having seceded from Australia on the 21. April 1970. It is of interest to note that Western Australia was actually never proclaimed by Captain Stirling as British Territory as was required of him under his Letter Patent. He only proclaimed a Settlement (the Swann Settlement) in Western Australia. The Territory of The Principality of Hutt River was never, ever, British Proclaimed Territory. A lot more information can be obtained from their website [www.principality-hutt-river.com](http://www.principality-hutt-river.com)

After spending two nights in Carnarvon it was our plan to make Karratha our next stop, but we found it impossible to find any accommodation at a reasonable price there mid week. We had two offers, one for a budget cabin in a Caravan park at \$360 per night, or a hotel room in a resort in Wickham north of Karratha at \$630 per night. After talking to our Hotel manager in Carnarvon, she suggested we contacted the Pannawonica Tavern, run by the Rio Tinto Mining Company, 150 km south east of Karratha, as they often had cabins available. And so we did, and got a nice clean cabin with ensuite including dinner and breakfast in the Mess Hall for \$270. We found that to be one of the big experiences of our trip to see how it all works in a mining town. The dinner and breakfast buffet were just amazing, anything you could think to eat was available.

Pannawonica was an experience, so was our next stop, Pardoo Roadhouse 130 km north of Port Hedland although another type of experience. The smallest cabin we have ever stayed in, the air conditioning unit was not working the shower cabin next door was so dirty I believe it had never been cleaned. At \$120 for the night it was way over priced. In the restaurant a deep fried piece of chicken and chips was \$20 and a beer was \$8.25 Generally we found that any area in Western Australia where there is mining industry prices are high for almost everything.

Before our overnight stay at the Pardoo Roadhouse we had quick stops in Karratha and Port Hedland. Lots of mining related companies, road trains, railway lines and white utes with yellow numbers. Very industrial towns, not very inviting we thought. In Port Hedland we met a young German guy from Hannover who had been working and travelling his way around Australia mostly on dirt roads for a year and so far had done 13000 km on his BMW F800GS. His bike was all decked out for off road riding with a long range fuel tank and heavy duty panniers and crash bars. Most nights he would sleep in his little tent somewhere in the outback. He had the bike shipped out here from Germany, and his plan was to ride back via Indonesia, Thailand, China and parts of Russia. All respect to this young man. Our longest ride on our journey was from the Pardoo Roadhouse to Fitzroy Crossing with a visit to Broome, all up 870 km. A hot day again between 36 and 39 degrees C. Broome is a nice place and we spent a couple of hours there. But being from the Gold Coast, for us it was nothing spectacular. For the people living in and around Karratha and Port Hedland I can see that it would be a nice place for a holiday. The ride to Broome from Port Hedland was in parts almost like riding the Nullarbor again, lots of nothing. From Broome and along the Great Northern Highway to Fitzroy Crossing the ride was a bit more interesting we just had to be very alert all the time due to the cattle that were on and around the road for long stretches. Our accommodation at the Fitzroy River Lodge that night was great. All hotel rooms were on poles and very modern. We were also able to park our bikes underneath on solid concrete ground. There was a lot of rain during the night but clear skies in the morning.

From Fitzroy Crossing we went on to Kununurra, with a stop in Halls Creek for a great coffee and homemade cake at the only cafe there. A hot and humid ride that day but with lots of things to look at. Just keep the eyes open for the cattle.

Our ride from Kununurra to Katherine along the Victoria highway is a great ride with nice scenery and some twisty

roads through the Gregory National Park. Fuel is expensive though and far between, we almost got caught out when a Service station shown on the map was closed for renovation. Jorgen's K1100LT was 3 km short of making it to the next Service station, but luckily the R1200GS made it and I could rescue him with a Gatorade bottle filled with petrol. (This road is ride no. 196 in the Australian Motorcycle Atlas)

The next day we went out to the Katherine Gorge Visitors Centre. They have a very informative display of how the Gorges were created, and about the Aboriginal people that lived in the area, and who these days are heavily involved in the running of the Katherine Gorge National Park. Our intentions were to have a good look around and walk some of the many tracks in the area to get a close up look at some of the 13 Gorges. But due to the length of the walks, and the temperature hovering around the 39-40 degrees C it was just too hot for us, so we decided to take the easy way and went on a helicopter tour instead that took us over 8 of the Gorges, and also landed on the side of one of the Gorges so we could jump out and have a good look around. You get a real feeling for the size of the area when you are up in the air, it is huge. The Helicopter tour company was not very busy this time of year, so they gave us plenty of time to explore the area where we landed and all up the tour lasted for more than an hour. The pilot told us that they were the only tour company that had permission to land on the side of a Gorge because they were owned by a large Aboriginal company. After our helicopter tour we went into Katherine and stocked up on water and Gatorade for our 320 km ride to Darwin in very hot and humid conditions.

We stayed in Darwin for three nights so we could have a good look around and have a bit of rest and recovery. We located a great place to stay, the Alatai Apartments. With a fully equipped 2 bedroom apartment with a big flat screen TV, washing machine, dryer, nice furniture and no less than three large air conditioning units. There was also a large pool with a waterfall and secure undercover parking for our bikes, and all this for \$108 per night. A couple of days earlier we paid \$120 for a small dirty cabin. Just goes to show accommodation often is a lot cheaper in the larger cities.

Although it was very hot and humid, we enjoyed our stay in Darwin. We walked a fair bit around the city and the harbour which is new and modern with stylish high rise apartments and trendy restaurants. We visited Crocosaurus Cove, a crocodile zoo with a lot of large crocs and other reptiles. We had the opportunity to get put into a steel cage and visit a huge croc under water in The Cage of Death, but we gave that a miss this time.

It seems they still have a few problems with the Aboriginal community up there. In the morning we saw a few indigenous people sleeping on the park benches with a lot of beer cans strewn around. We also saw police on horseback patrolling the parks and checking the bags and belongings of groups of Indigenous people gathered on the lawns. As with a lot of other places on our trip we met young people from all over the world working in restaurants, bars and souvenir shops. We had a bit of a laugh when we did a bit of souvenir shopping. We had been walking for a while and it was very hot and humid, so when we entered the souvenir shop Jorgen said in German something like „it is so hot that my balls are sticking to my ass“ not knowing that the young girl in the shop was German, Jorgen only found out when he asked her about the sizing on some T-shirts and she replied in German, we all had a laugh. Like many other young people she was working her way around Australia.

Later that night after our dinner at Outback Jack's Steakhouse we took a push bike taxi back to our hotel, and again it was a young German girl doing the pedalling. She was from Berlin, from the suburb of Spandau not very far from the BMW motor-cycle factory. We had a great time in Darwin, and it is well worth a visit, although I probably would go a bit later in the year than March because of the heat.

It was very hot again the morning when we left Darwin for our way down south and home. We only had a two minutes ride to the petrol station, but when we got there my T-shirt was already soaked and with sweat dripping from my head onto the tank. Jorgen was the same and we knew this was going to be a very hot day. We made a detour via the Kakadu National park on our way to Katherine. We tried on several occasions to take one of the dirt roads leading out to the gorges or look outs but it was too early in the season and most of them were closed, even for 4WD's. Anyway it was a nice, but very hot ride. We agreed that this day was the hottest day so far, and we needed an hour in the A/C of our hotel in Katherine and lots of water as soon as we arrived before we slowly could get ourselves together to get the rest of our gear in. Another hour later and after a couple of beers in the bar we were back on top.

Our drive from Katherine to Tennant Creek was long and boring. We have had enough of long straight roads for a while now. There was a couple of highlights though. The Renner Springs Road House had super friendly service and free coffee for the two "sweeties" on motorbikes. The Daly Waters Pub is well worth a visit. A very unique place and the biggest tastiest Barra burger I have ever had. We met a young Danish couple on their way to Melbourne in an old Camper van. They told us they had seen us earlier that day when we passed them, and they noticed the Danish flag and stickers. That night we stayed at the Safari Lodge Motel in Tennant Creek, the same Hotel we stayed at on our 2010 tour. We even got the same room. A long hot ride again. (690 km)

For the next couple of days it was a bit like, we just want to get home now, and we did close to 700 km every day. In between Mount Isa and Longreach we had a stop at the Walkabout Creek Hotel for a drink and to have a look at the memorabilia from the Crocodile Dundee movies. We met another Danish couple there on their way around Australia in a 4WD. They too had noticed the Danish flag and stickers earlier on that day.

In Longreach Jorgen visited the Qantas Museum, I had been there last year in August with Ian so I had a Coffee and read my book. The ride from Longreach to Roma gave us the worst road conditions we had experienced so far. The huge amount of rain and flooding they have had out there had really done some damage. There were lots of stops at road works and the 697 km ride took longer than expected and we only arrived at our Roma Hotel after 7.00 PM. At least three or four times we had close encounters with Kangaroos that scared the living daylights out of me.

The road conditions the next day only got better after Toowoomba but we arrived safely home before dark after 29 days and 14549 km. We were very tired, but what a great trip we had.

As for the bikes we experienced no technical problems at all. A blown headlight bulb on both was all the repairs required. These Germans make things that last.

If anyone would have asked me if I wanted to do a trip like this again in the first week after coming home I would have said no, but now after I have been back home for 7 weeks and all impressions from the trip, and the good time with my old friend Jorgen has sunk in, YES I would do it again, I would pack my bags in a flash and go again. What a great country we live in.

Erik

