

Kiwi Invasion

Fair Dinkum Bike Tours, Cairns, Australia

5 Day Legends Ride, June 2008

The 5 Day Legends Tour is the name that Dave Williams, boss of Fair Dinkum Bike Tours, gives to this tour, which takes in, what we believe, are the best parts of lower Cape York Peninsula.

We are definitely not Legends and probably will never be, (in the riding fraternity anyway) but this is the tour that we decided to embark on. Having convinced 8 other like-minded kiwi riders from the Horowhenua Motorcycle Club in New Zealand to join Alan and myself, we set off to Cairns, for what turned out to be an awesome scenic and sometimes challenging tour.

Alan and I met Dave while on a Cape York tour in 1996. We then moved to Cairns for a couple of years, we have ridden some of the tracks that Dave uses in his Legends Tour but Dave showed us a couple more. We wanted to show some of our friends the experience that you can get from riding in this part of your vast country.

The bikes that Dave is running this year are 2008 DRZ400E that have been set up to his specifications with his specific modifications that make these a very capable tour bike, on some sections we rode with 5 litres of fuel in a backpack each. This was a far preferable method for easier control and handling than having to ride with long-range tanks on the bikes all the time.

Day 1 was a meet, greet, get organized and start the tour. Up the Kuranda range from Cairns onto some grouse single track trails through rain forest. This started to sort out the riding speed and capabilities of all riders. It also was the start of what I will call the "short-leg syndrome", which is myself falling off at most stopping opportunities, as I only stand 5.0 ft but don't let that fool you, even with the lowering linkages Dave had fitted onto my bike I was certainly a great source of amusement for our tour.

After lunch at a great drinking hole, we hit some more trails, this time the scenery had changed to more open Savannah land that was not being maintained for regular 4WD users, a track that we hadn't ridden before.

After a few hours of this, we came across our camp for the night. What an awesome setup! Dave and his crew have got the new backup truck kitted out to hold everything and handle any situation that may arise. Nathan is a very capable cook and 4WD backup driver along with Brad who was our sweep and sometimes lead rider. Coming across camp at the end of a days riding with everything set up, nothing to do except put up your tent, inflate your mattress, sit back and enjoy a couple of well deserved beers. Sitting around the campfire, chatting, drinking and telling tall stories, that's what makes a great end to a day.

Day 2 saw us having quite a long day riding across more open Savannah land through the Palmer River Gold fields to Maytown then onto camp at Laura. Riding through this area you had to have your wits about you, as there were quite a few pitfalls and washouts to be aware of. Not far off the track you could see a lot of the old mining equipment from previous old diggers including big stamp mills, that have just been left standing abandoned.

Camp that night was in the camp grounds at the Laura pub. So after another great meal, we all headed off to the pub for a few ales and some more yarns. Dave advised that we were having an easier day the next day, so "there is no need to get up early". Well as it turned out, there was no need to go to bed early either as the Fair Dinkum crew delighted in entertaining the very giggly barmaids into the small hours, then the native bird life decided to get an early start. This is definitely something that us kiwis are not use to – crow and kookaburra alarm clocks!

For Day 3 we visited some of the local sites around Laura then went croc spotting. This was a very enjoyable experience. Our group got to see at least a couple of crocs in their native surroundings. We all seemed to enjoy the simplicity of the riding and the scenery without being bored at all. Most of the riding on this day was, wide corrugated 4WD tracks that had been recently graded but were already starting to cut up. Lunch was at a shady billabong with our 4WD backup vehicle – awesome.

Onto camp at Kalpowar Crossing. After setting up camp it was time for some exploring. We all headed down to the nearby Normanby River to hear from other campers that a 12 ft freshwater croc had been caught there and relocated that morning. A 6 ft snake that was slightly pissed off was hanging around trying to have the toilet block to itself, until that too was removed, later a goanna decided that it wanted to dine at our camp as well. The next morning it was the serenading of the Dingoes that accompanied pre-dawn, we were experiencing what Australia is all about but still no sleep in.....

Consequently we were all up early with eager anticipation of what Day 4 had in store for us. We knew that this was going to be a long hard day that was going to be riding approximately 400 kms. A backpack with our 5 litres of fuel with a packed lunch, we set off heading towards the infamous Starcke track. From our experience, this track is full of deep sand and bull dust. The landscape through here remains basically unchanged with a 4WD track that has been rutted out and is just deep white sand and bulldust. There were varying techniques and riding styles that sometimes worked and sometimes didn't. I myself didn't cope too well with this as every time I put my foot down, I seemed to come off, I was not a happy camper by this stage, trying to lift the bike back up again, In the end, on Dave's advice, I tried riding in the centre of the 4WD tracks or off to the side. This worked a treat as I was faster, not as hot and tired, only you had to concentrate as the termite mounds don't take kindly to being run over and before you know it, you're soil sampling again.

Onwards through very tall grass and lots of the staple gum trees. We had heard that the south end had been graded, well it had but what a very poor job, It did open the area up, so was faster.

This turned into some very clean dirt roads that led to Cooktown, up to the lookout for the compulsory group photo's then to Black Rock Mountain and onto camp at the Lions Den Hotel (the oldest pub in Queensland). A great night was had by all here, as it was the last night of tour, everybody seemed to let their hair down (so to speak).

We arose the next morning without any bush critters as our alarm clocks but found there were a few in the group had sore heads. This would come right when you got off-road and started concentrating on the next obstacles to avoid.

Heading into the infamous CREB track was a definite must on this tour. although there had been some rain, the track was in a rideable state, I had already psyched myself out with the slippery downhills and fell off a few times. We finally crossed the Daintree river at the bottom of the Creb track to devour lunch in Mossman. After lunch we headed up the Rex Range onto some more single trails, these were awesome and really topped off a great tour then back down the scenic Kuranda range to Dave's base in Cairns.

All in all, we would like to thank Dave, Nathan and Brad for an awesome tour and would recommend anyone thinking about doing a ride in Tropical North Queensland to give Fair Dinkum Bike Tours a call.

Story by Kiwi rider and mother Tracey Manning AKA "Stumpy".