

## On Your Bike 2023 report – Rivers of the Darling tour

In 2023, the 35<sup>th</sup> annual On Your Bike – the Rivers of the Darling tour – was held from 7<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> October. This tour started near the Ashfield station heading north on the Tonkin Highway PSP to Muchea before heading east to the first overnight stay at Lower Chittering. The tour followed a circular route around the northern part of the Darling Ranges, riding along and crossing many rivers which have their source in the Darling Ranges. Participants finished riding at the Mandurah station, to either return home, or get the train back to Ashfield station.



After Lower Chittering, overnight stays included: Toodyay, York, Brookton, Wandering, Boddington and Dwellingup. Each day, many rivers were crossed, with the major rivers being the Brockman River (Lower Chittering), Avon River (Toodyay to Pingelly), Hotham River (Old Pumphrey's Bridge to Boddington), Murray River (Pinjarra) and Serpentine River (Mandurah).

The rest day was held in Brookton, where participants had the options of: taking a bus trip to Boyagin Rock (where all climbed the rock, plus seeing displays of the local wildflowers); learning about the history of the area by visiting the local museum; and/or having a go at barefoot bowling. On the first night in Brookton, many participants danced the night away to the music provided by the Narrogin-based band, *Drinks 'n' Tips*.

There was no rain during the tour, however it was probably the hottest tour to date. With the

first day reaching temperatures of around 35°C, getting on the Minibus from the water stop was very welcomed by several participants. The temperature became milder day by day until the last couple of days, when it began to rise again, however, fortunately not nearly as high as experienced on the first day.

During the tour, it was fantastic to hear of several participants that had connections to the regions being visited. Whether that be a long-ago convict past, having lived in the area, relatives that have lived there, and revisiting childhood family picnic locations. The 'lunch' stop at Old Pumphrey's Bridge was particularly enjoyed by many – not only to be able to pause and consider the tragic past of an early pioneering family that lived there, but to also experience the tranquility of the park that now exists there, alongside the Hotham River.

In 2023, entries for OYB were slow in being received. Due to this, discussions were held as to whether the tour should be cancelled, or promotional activities conducted. The decision was made to promote the tour. To this end, news articles were published in the 'Travel section' of *The West Australian* and in *The Post* newspapers. Flyers were printed and distributed to about 50 bike shops in the Perth metropolitan area (as well as some regional bike shops and other locations outside Perth).

Also, a survey was conducted of participants who attended OYB 2022 that had not sent in an Entry Form for OYB 2023. Approximately 50% of 2022 participants were spoken to in person or by phone, with the remainder being contacted by email (with about a 50% response from emails). The main reason for not attending in 2023 was due to overseas or interstate travel (15 people - this was due to 2023 being the first



full year that unrestricted travel was allowed since Covid-19). Other reasons included: Injuries (5), Medical conditions and/or appointments (3), Rain on OYB 2022 (3), Age (3), Family commitments (6), Work commitments (3), with three advising the towns visited.

The final number of participants on OYB 2023 was 74 people (down from around 110 participants on recent OYB tours). This resulted in the tour incurring a loss of \$4,871.90 (which included an expense of \$250.00 from OYB 2022, paid in March 2023). Several participants on the 2023 tour provided feedback that they liked having a smaller number of people on the tour. Other participants commented that: “they really felt like they have had a holiday”; and “the success of a tour should not be based solely on the financial results, the enjoyment participants gained from the experience should also be considered”.

I thank the members on the OYB Committee: Roy, Ann, Sue, Terry and John for their contributions in running the 2023 tour. Who, along with all the participants that volunteered, gave up some of their time during the tour to assist with a range of activities. Without the help of all these people, it would not be possible for the On Your Bike tours to run smoothly, providing good times and great memories for the participants.

And one final note... During the tour, a call out was made for persons interested in joining the OYB team in 2024 to assist with the Tour Leader role. Two expressions of interest were received - from Lois Grincer and John Maaskant. With both Lois and John being accepted to join the OYB team, at a subsequent OYB meeting, it was confirmed that only six people are required for running the tour, particularly, as those on the OYB committee get a “free berth” on OYB tours (i.e. they do not pay any Entry Fee). As a result, John Farrelly and I have stepped down from being on the OYB team. I give my best wishes to Roy and the new Co-Tour Leaders and the rest of the OYB committee for a successful OYB tour in 2024.

Christine  
Tour Leader  
On Your Bike 2023