

STORY DAN SLATER
PHOTOS PAUL LANE

90 MILE STRAIGHT
AUSTRALIA'S LONGEST STRAIGHT
146.6 km

AUSTRALIA'S LONGEST STRAIGHT, EAST OF BALLADONIA ON THE NULLARBOR PLAIN.



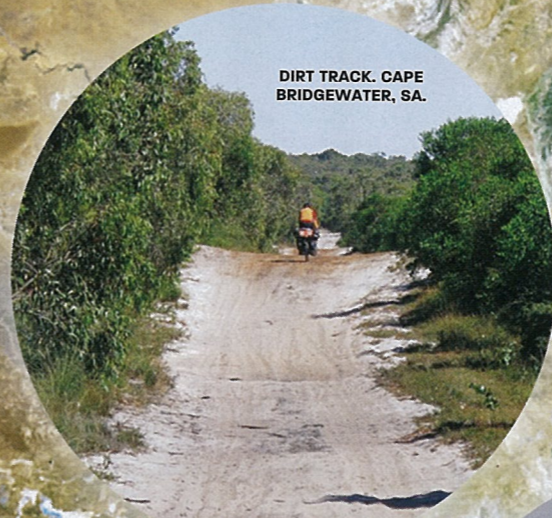
Going Trans Continental

Paul Lane lived the life for four months on a 7385km solo ride from Sydney to Perth



DAY 106

FINISH LINE: PERTH 7385KM



DIRT TRACK. CAPE BRIDGEWATER, SA.



RAILROAD CROSSING. NEAR BALAKLAVA, SA.



START LINE: SYDNEY 0KM

DAY 01

Have you ever felt like going on a long, long ride? Did you ever want to just clip in and pedal, get away from it all, head into the wind all day, all week, all month? Paul Lane did. In November 2011 he stepped out of his front door and went for a ride. Four months and 7500km later he dismounted in Perth, stopped only by the Indian Ocean. Luckily, by then his thirst for the open road had been satisfied.

The thing is, no one need be jealous of Paul's adventure. Logistically, cycle touring is simple. All you need is a decent bicycle, some funds and perhaps an understanding partner or boss. Oh, and the will to succeed - that's definitely important. Paul rode stoically through torrential rain, severe wind, lightning storms, soaring temperatures, desert, mountains, wine lands, and the stark emptiness of the Nullarbor Plain. Companionship was rare -

mostly just his Surly Troll, the road and the odd mining-town lingerie waitress.

Paul is a pragmatic, thoughtful character. With his shaven head, vigorous goatee beard and sleeve tattoo, he looks more like he'd prefer a bike with a 1200cc engine and twin shotgun holsters to a humble pushie. Not so. He is calm and measured, a man who will finish what he starts, and his pre-trip planning was impeccable, meaning the ride was as straightforward as aiming west and casting off.

HOW LONG DID YOU SPEND IN PREPARATION?

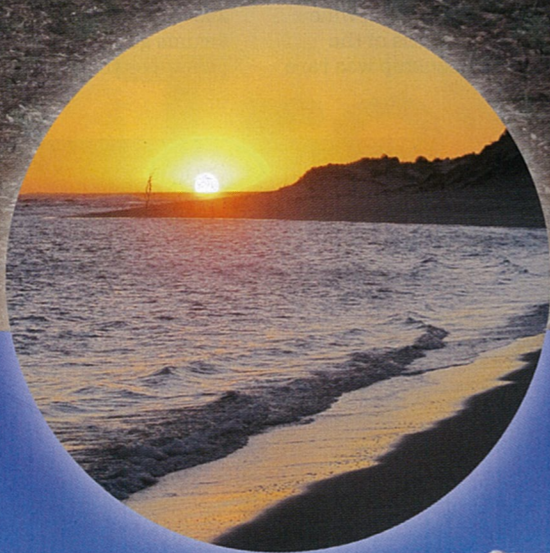
From deciding I was going to go, until being ready, was probably about six months. Most of that was involved with the bike rather than logistics of the trip. I spent a lot of time in various cycling touring forums getting ideas about the different bike types that you can use, the spares

you might need, things that commonly go wrong, etc. The premier forum I used was a worldwide touring site, www.crazyguyonabike.com - very useful.

I also took my regular commuting bike down to Tasmania for two weeks just as a 'Can I do this?' 'Will I enjoy it?' 'Am I going to be fit enough?' That was nice. I learned there's no point worrying too much about weight - you've got the gears to get you up most hills so you don't have to worry as much as if you were hiking.

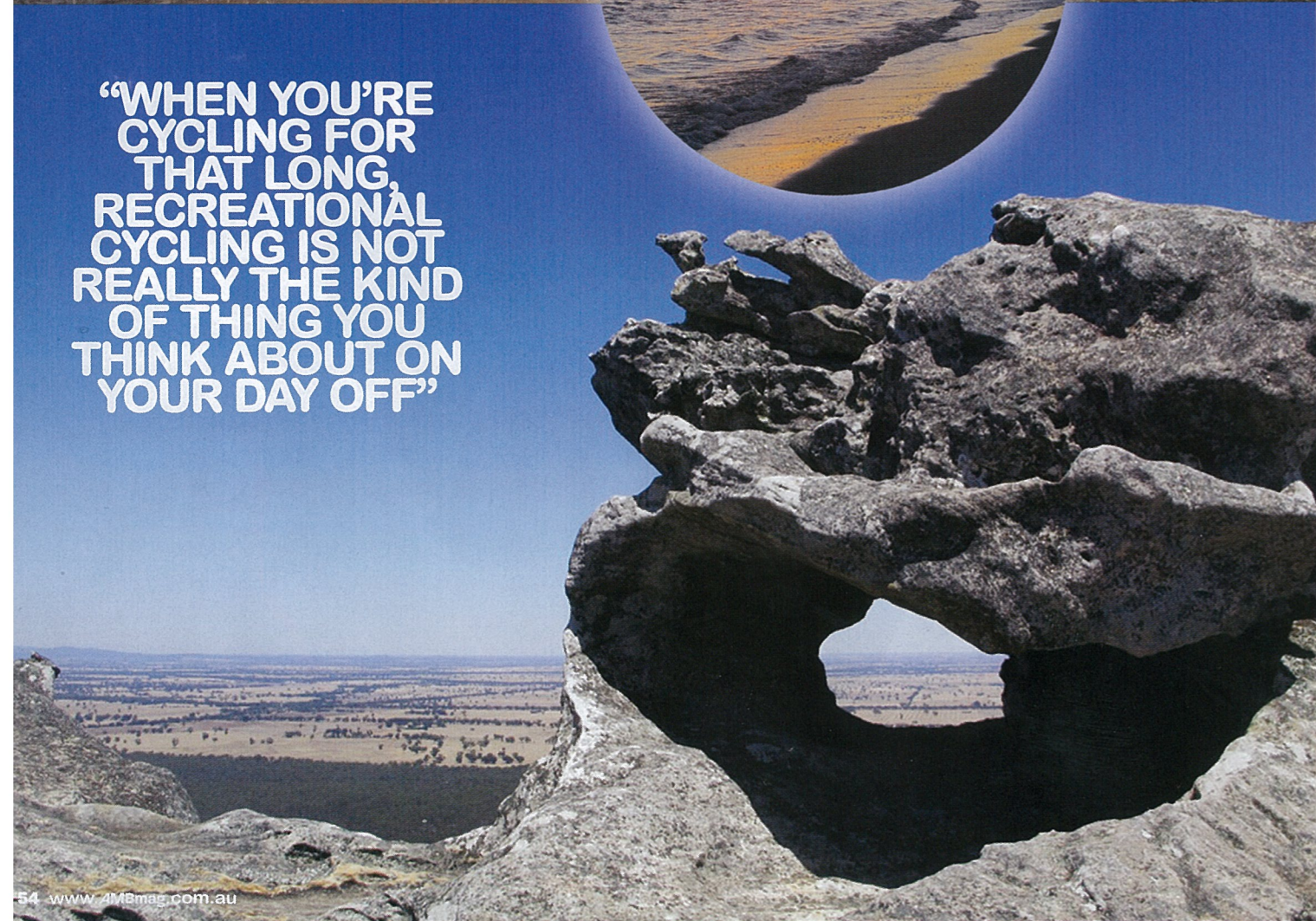
WERE YOU RIDING FIT WHEN YOU STARTED?

No, I wasn't, but you just take it slowly and build up your fitness. You do a lot less kilometres when you first start out and you get tired a lot quicker, and it takes you longer to recover so you're more sore in the mornings. You definitely notice that for probably the first two weeks.



BUSH CAMPING – A SIMPLE LIFE, SA

“WHEN YOU’RE CYCLING FOR THAT LONG, RECREATIONAL CYCLING IS NOT REALLY THE KIND OF THING YOU THINK ABOUT ON YOUR DAY OFF”



ICONIC ROCK STACKS ON THE GREAT OCEAN ROAD, VIC.



CROSSING THE NSW/VIC BORDER ON THE BARRY WAY. ONE STATE DOWN AND GOING STRONG



WHAT NAVIGATION TOOLS DID YOU USE?

I already had a hiking GPS, a Garmin eTrex Vista HCX, and there is an open source mapping group called Open Street Maps where you can download maps of pretty much anywhere in the world, including bicycle-specific overlays which will route you off the busy roads and down quiet roads and cycle tracks. And I had a SPOT messenger, which is similar to an EPIRB, except that it lets you send customised messages, so each night I could send a Facebook status update saying where I was camping, and all my friends could click on a link to Google Earth.

HOW MUCH OF THE RIDE WAS OFF ROAD?

Probably 85 per cent would have been on tarmac but the rest would have been combinations of gravel roads, mud, dirt tracks, some beaches. A lot of reclaimed railway tracks are being turned into dedicated cycle lanes down in Victoria, and they’re building up quite a network of them, which is good.

DID YOU STOP TO DO A BIT OF RECREATIONAL MOUNTAIN BIKING?

No. When you’re cycling for that long, recreational cycling is not really the kind of thing you think about on your day

off. Probably the most extreme cycling would have been coming out of Jindabyne along the Barry Way. That was pretty muddy and there were some hairy gravel roads there, some pretty steep descents. Downhill mountain biking on a fully loaded touring bike is an interesting experience that you probably don’t want to try.

DID YOU PLAN YOUR NUTRITION SCIENTIFICALLY OR TASTE-WISE?

Neither. I was carrying all my food for four or five days at a time, so the main consideration was that it have a lot of calories and be lightweight. It was spaghetti most nights with porridge or muesli for breakfast and whatever snacks I could rustle up along the way, like crackers or cheese triangles. As a vegetarian, the roadhouses and pubs that I stopped in didn’t have a lot of options.

WHAT ABOUT SPORTS DRINKS?

I only drank water. Sports drinks are a lot of bulk for not much return. Those big tubs of Gatorade make about eight litres, which is a day and half’s water so you really can’t carry that stuff.

WAS THE TRAFFIC A PROBLEM?

There was a lot of talk in the forums about how bad the road trains were going to be, but I actually found them to be some of the better drivers. They tried to give me as much space as they could by going right over the other side of the road. Some of the worst traffic was along the Great Ocean Road, where there were a lot of tourists towing caravans, driving campervans, and not necessarily used to driving with cyclists around. There were some pretty close moments there, the odd wobble as people were closer than I’d wanted them to be. A little bit closer and they’d probably have clipped the bike, but I wasn’t ridden off the road at any point, no.

HOW WAS THE WEATHER?

The first 10 days when I left Sydney it rained every day. I got soaked to the skin every day and would be sitting in my tent, shivering wet. I had trouble drying my clothes out so it was wet clothes in the morning, too. Then as I approached Jindabyne up into the mountains it definitely got colder. Along the Great Ocean Road there was a lot of rain as well and it was windy. At the opposite end of the scale, down in SA, there were some 35 to 38°C days. It’s difficult to stay hydrated in that kind of heat, especially going across the Nullarbor where there’s no water and it’s supposed to be about 40°C plus

at that time of year. Luckily, it wasn't actually as hot as it normally is. Probably the maximum water I carried was there because I was staying overnight between road houses. I think I started one day with about 15 litres of water. Fortunately, it's relatively flat.

DESCRIBE CROSSING THE NULLARBOR.

It's boring. It really is. It's amazing for a bit, y'know, the emptiness of it, but after five or six days it gets boring and you just want it to be over. It took 10 days to get from Ceduna to Norseman.

DID YOU SEE THE STORM TROOPER OR THE NULLARBOR NYMPH?

There was a storm trooper, yes, but I didn't actually see him. I missed him somewhere on the Nullarbor, I don't know how. Apparently he walked from Perth to Sydney in a storm trooper outfit pushing a shopping trolley full of food and water. I didn't see the nymph either, but I did see the posters for *The Nullarbor Nymph*, a locally made film about the incident.

HOW DID YOU KEEP MOTIVATED?

I didn't really have that much of a problem with it, to be honest, except when the weather was really bad and had been for a number of days. I didn't ever think it was a mistake and I should stop, but I did think that if it stayed like this forever it

would just be too hard. When you've been cycling in the rain for eight hours you do start to question yourself, but never to the point where I thought about turning around or giving in. It was a case of: This is it, this is what I'm doing, I'm cycling to Perth. And you cycle to Perth. I'd given myself an upper limit of about six months.

WERE YOU LONELY?

I think I was, yeah, but I was fine with it. You do speak to people occasionally - shopkeepers, at roadhouses, people you meet at rest areas and campgrounds. Most evenings I'd probably have a chat with someone, so it wasn't more than a couple of days that I'd go without seeing someone. I met a Swiss guy on the Great Ocean Road and we rode together to Adelaide in about three weeks, which was good. It was nice to have someone to talk to. Apart from that I was pretty much on my own the rest of the time. I saw some cyclists coming the other way a few times but there weren't as many as I'd heard about in previous years.

HOW DID YOU FEEL BEING BACK AMONG PEOPLE AT THE END OF IT? WERE YOU A BIT OVERWHELMED?

Yeah, definitely, decompression was a struggle. Partially because you're living in a certain routine for so long, you're camping out in the bush every night and you're seeing all that scenery and that's



RIDING IN FRONT OF THE SAND DUNES NEAR FOWLERS BAY, SA

“THE NULLARBOR IS BORING. IT REALLY IS. IT'S AMAZING FOR A BIT, Y'KNOW, THE EMPTINESS OF IT, BUT AFTER FIVE OR SIX DAYS...”



THIS FAT SPIDER SPENT THE NIGHT USING PAUL'S GLOVES AS A SLEEPING BAG, BUCHAN STATE FOREST, VIC





THE REWARD FOR HOURS OF SAND CYCLING, CAPE LE GRAND NP, WA

“NO REAL ADVENTURES, SO TO SPEAK, APART FROM THE OBVIOUS, Y’KNOW, CYCLING TO PERTH”

amazing and you’ve got all the space and the time to yourself, and all of that goes out the window in one big bang. I’m probably still feeling it a bit even now, four months later.

DID YOU EVER WISH YOU WERE JUST BACK ON THE ROAD, CYCLING?

Not so much cycling, no. Definitely glad to be off the bike by the time I’d finished, but there were times when I just wanted to be back in the bush, camping.

WILDLIFE – DID YOU HAVE ANY CLOSE ENCOUNTERS?

Lots of dead stuff. Lots and lots of dead stuff that smelled really bad. I nearly ran over a number of snakes, that’s pretty scary. I nearly ran over a family of three wild emus that ran out in front of me on a steep descent. Camels, wombats, possums; I didn’t see any koalas. Spiders nesting in my gloves overnight. Lots of kangaroos. Oh, and lots and lots of flies.

WHAT WERE YOUR HIGHLIGHTS AND LOWLIGHTS?

I really enjoyed the Margaret River area, possibly because it was getting toward the end of the trip and the weather was nice, but also because there’s some great food and wineries and breweries, and it’s a really nice part of the country. No real lowlights apart from the bad weather. No brushes with death; no scary stories; no real adventures, so to speak, apart from the obvious, y’know, cycling to Perth.

ARE YOU PLANNING ANY OTHER LONG-DISTANCE TOURS?

I haven’t planned any future trips yet but there are lots of famous cycling tours that appeal. I’d really like to ride around Japan, or New Zealand, although it is quite hilly there.

ANY OTHER COMMENTS?

The guys at my local bike shop, Cheeky Transport in Newtown, were really supportive with getting the right bike for the journey. They gave me a lot of time there, a lot of information that was really good, and they recommended several things that I wouldn’t have known about myself. I think if I’d got the bike wrong it would’ve been a lot harder. **AMB**

“I THINK I CAN MAKE OUT PERTH FROM HERE”. NEAR KIMBA, SA.




FINISH LINE PERTH, WA 7385KM

DAY 106



DAY 82

HOPETOUN, WA 6018KM

NIGHTTIME COMPANION, CAMPGROUND IN JAN JUC (TORQUAY), VIC

