

Kidman Trail 2015

Before I get into the nitty-gritty of this report I want to congratulate Trevor and Pam for organising a wonderful couple of weeks riding the Kidman Trail. Trevor came up with the idea some time ago and then turned that idea into a really well organised holiday for us. Thank you, Trevor. There were some difficult times during the first week due to an event which nobody could either predict or control and our heart-felt thoughts are with Pam and her family. We all loved and admired Nigel who was a mentor for many of us.

The group met at the Willunga Lions Club Park on Sunday, September 20 and rode the short distance into the Willunga Trail Head along the trail and returned to enjoy a sausage sizzle supplied by the Lions Club members. Riley reminded Pam that he is, indeed, a mule when he absolutely refused to cross the little bridge near the trail head. However, he did consent to cross the creek, so that was good. It was necessary to camp away from the Trail head because the local council doesn't allow camping overnight at the old railway station, so Trevor did well to arrange for alternative accommodation.

On Monday morning we set off for Jack's Paddock and our wonderful crew drove all the vehicles up to Kuitpo and this was the pattern set for the rest of our journey. The people in the crew were: Trevor and my husband, Bob, Jeanette Hazeldine (the official photographer), Hank Schermer, Peter Russell, John Sommer, Sonia Sommer and Noel Phillips. Wayne Simms, Julie O'Connor, Jeanette Bromilow and Brendan Pool assisted on some days when they were available. These marvellous people not only set up our camps, brought out our lunches as well as providing a ferry service for the vehicles but also controlled the traffic at all the major road crossings, and I can't thank them enough.

Ruth and Marie were our chefs at Jack's Paddock on Monday evening. On Tuesday we rode to Echunga, with lunches from the Meadows Bakery brought out by Julie. Yum! The trail leaves the forest for a while and follows some interesting back roads before crossing Rocky Gully forest and the section along Proctor Road. The Trail head at Echunga is quite small but all the vehicles fitted and we adjourned to the Hagen Arms for dinner where there was a fire. This was necessary because fires aren't allowed at the Trail Head. The same rule applies to the camp at Macclesfield so the local pub again provided our meal.

Although the ride across to Maccy was only 19 or so kilometres and is very picturesque it was freezing! The southerly really hit us along Hack Range road where there are fantastic views in all directions over the valleys to Mt Lofty to the north and out to the lakes in the south. The free afternoon allowed everyone to re-group before adjourning to the pub for dinner. Riders who planned to go the whole distance to Kapunda were: Tracy Hampton on Murphy, Jenni Gamble on Nigel, Sean Bryant on Fred, Justin Brookes on Buster and me on bint Shamirah (aka Amba). Pam had planned to ride the entire distance on Riley but withdrew after riding to Jack's Paddock. Judy Jepson rode to Mt Pleasant (she drove home each evening and returned in time to ride the next day, so she could monitor the animals at home) on two alternating horses and Denise Young had Wayne as back-up driver for the few days she rode. She also alternated between horses. Tania Johnstone joined us at Nairne and rode to Mt Pleasant and Andrew Cowling joined us at Cowell Road and continued to Kapunda.

On Thursday morning we set off for the journey to Nairne. This is probably one of the most interesting day's ride of the whole trail as the track leads through lots of interesting stock routes and lane ways to Wistow before winding down a rocky hillside to cross the Mt Barker Creek near a lovely gorge. There is a steep climb out and then the trail follows some hard roads, goes under the

freeway, past the Kanmantoo Mine, over the railway line and eventually over the Princes Highway to the Nairne Trail Head. The Nairne branch of Lions prepared a comprehensive meal for us on Thursday evening. Their meeting rooms are to be found in the old Nairne railway station, which I found interesting. Bob and I spent the night in our own bed, which was very nice and I was able to wash a load of clothes which we were able to collect when we returned home on Sunday.

The longest day's ride is the leg to Rockleigh – 37kms – but it didn't take as long as people thought because the track is relatively easy. Soon after leaving the trail head, the trail passes the old Dawsley Bridge, built in the 1900's over the Dawsley Creek. The beautiful stonework is still there but the timbers which supported the road have now collapsed. The horses had a drink from the creek which crosses under the Bondleigh road after we had lunched at the start of the climb up Steep Hill Road. Millie's, in Nairne, supplied our lunches and the Crew provided our very yummy dinner at Rockleigh. On Saturday, extra riders arrived to accompany us to Mt Pleasant – Sandra Russell, Samantha Cunningham, with Brenton as driver, Sarina and Andrew Dellow, Shirley and Chris Carr, Lea Foale and Neil Jameison. Orders were taken for lunches and Glenda and Bryan picked them up and paid for them from Millies in Nairne. Thank you to Glenda and Bryan for your support. The ride from Rockleigh to Mt Pleasant is most pleasant. The track follows a nice sandy farm road before turning into an easement along the creek. It is so nice to ride over broad acres. Another road for a short distance and another turn through a gate into Hoad's Fire Track and we ate our lunch near Glenda's previous home across the track from the creek. We met Trevor on Veroushka a short distance from Mt Pleasant and assembled for our triumphant parade through the town with Trevor leading, holding the club banner, two life members (Pam and Christabel) and Sandra following (Pam carried photos of Nigel) and the rest coming along behind in neat order. It was quite an emotional event, really.

On Saturday evening, most walked down to one of the pubs for a meal while Bob and I drove home, leaving Amba in Sam's capable hands. We returned next morning refreshed and ready to tackle the next few days, but first there was the Anniversary Lunch. The local CWA ladies (and some fellas) prepared a wonderful meal which we enjoyed after a lengthy catch-up with a glass in hand. The reunion was wonderful and it was marvellous to see so many old faces. Some arrived looking bewildered but it didn't take long to match them up with others from the same era. As can be imagined, it was noisy! The first speaker during our meal was Tania Johnstone who had spent some ten years working for the Kidman Company. She told us some stories of Sir Sidney's life and some history of the company since his death in 1935. It was most interesting. Then there were a few speeches of reminiscence – Bob Virgo, Maureen Stevens, Penny and Natalie Fleet. Lovely! Joan Payford gave an emotional little talk about Nigel and we toasted his memory.

During that evening some of us joined the local Men's Shed for dinner, mind you, we didn't eat much. It was a good opportunity to thank these guys for the work they have done in restoration of the school building at the Rockleigh Trail Head and it seems that they will be called upon again to restore the old school building at Ram's Head, but that has yet to be finalised.

The "end-to-enders" saddled up on Monday morning and set off for the Trail Head on Cowell Road. It was a lovely ride through mostly familiar country in the forest before being directed through a gate into a lane and public road which crossed the Springton/Williamstown road and took us to the Mt Crawford Dressage grounds where the Kidman Trail head is located. Jane Schermer was our cook – with trifle to follow main course. We are spoilt! And she followed up with more goodies at Ram's Head the next night.

Andrew joined us for the last few days on Tuesday morning. Boy! It was cold! Frosty with iced over water buckets but it was a fine day and the views from High Eden Road were superb – north over towards the Barossa and Mt McKenzie and back over our shoulders across the Mt Crawford peaks. There was an interesting vineyard with rows of trees interspersed making it less of a mono-culture which appealed to Justin and me. I have to make mention of our lunches because Trevor purchased, on our behalf, the most wonderful pasties from the Mt Pleasant Bakery. This occurred on both Monday and Tuesday and then it was too far to return for more and he used the baker in Angaston and in Kapunda on our final day's ride. Is it any wonder we didn't lose any weight!

There was to be a little ceremony at Ram's Head to dedicate a plaque which stated that the water service was installed with funds from the Adelaide Trail Horse Rider's Club and the Brookman family and as Pam wasn't present Trevor asked if I would speak on the Club's behalf. Soon after we had settled horses in this very restricted area a couple of the local women accompanied by the Deputy Mayor of the Lower Murray council, Mardi Jennings, arrived. The women were very interested in the local history and showed us the sign which illustrates the importance of the school at Ram's Head. It is all so old, by Australian standards. The rock it was mounted on was from a local quarry and our intrepid photographer was taken there to collect samples. It was a very beautiful stone of a lovely green colour. This site is one of many featured in a tourist trail of historical sites in the district. Bob and I promised ourselves that we would return and follow the trail. After all the celebrations were complete we hoed into more of Jane's excellent fare.

The ride to Stockwell is most interesting and follows an imaginative track through stock routes hidden in private farms, although the first section follows the back roads and travels past two beautifully kept old Lutheran Churches dating back to the early settlers. We lunched at the Gnadenberg Church on the corner of Parrot Hill Road and checked out the well maintained and currently used cemetery. Jeanette had us lined up in front of the church for our photograph. She made a point of taking a group photo every morning before we departed from each camp and managed to capture other shots along the way when there was an interesting back-drop. The other church is at Gruenberg.

Our camp at Stockwell was on private property because our group of vehicles was too large to fit in the grounds of the Stockwell pub. Thanks to Greg and Marlene for their very welcoming hospitality. We didn't disappoint the publican and walked down the hill to dinner. The pub was busy because one of the darts finals was being held – Lyndoch vs Stockwell. Bob and I had not long sat down when his grandson, Gavin, came along to say hello. We were surprised! He was there to play darts and his sister and her family arrived, too, so that was a bonus, indeed.

Denise arrived on Thursday morning for the final day's ride to Kapunda and so we departed an hour or so later than the other days. We rode through Stockwell, followed an easement along the Sturt Highway which led to a tunnel under the main road, then rode back to the track and to Roehr Road. It was very devious and removed the danger of trying to cross the highway. The rest of the trip to Kapunda is on stock routes and back roads and although we missed a turning, we were able to use the map to return to the Trail without back-tracking. A marker post had been knocked out and replaced with the arrow facing the wrong way. After lunch we came to some grassy tracks so were able to trot on. Soon we crossed the River Light and were on the outskirts of Kapunda. Trevor drove behind us and Pam led the way along one of the tourist trips (number 17) which took us past the mine and miners' cottages and the very beautiful Convent with two stories of wonderful iron lacey verandas and balconies. Eventually we arrived at the main street and the North Kapunda Hotel where the traffic was stopped while we lined up in front of the pub for a historic photograph. Pam led us through the streets to the trotting track and suddenly our ride was over!

But our holiday was not. Arrangements were made for us to use the showers at the caravan park so we cleaned up and changed in readiness for our final dinner, which was held at the before-mentioned North Kapunda Hotel, together with representatives of the local Tourist Information Centre. The meal was fantastic. Speeches of thanks and congratulations were made and we all adjourned to the front bar for a photo of the "end-to-enders" in front of the Kidman mural which depicts the famous horse sales.

It didn't take long to pack on Friday morning and by 8am we were on our way home, via a stop in Nuriootpa to see Bob's daughter who had been ill with influenza. Later in the week she called to tell us about the photo in the local paper of the riders in front of the pub! She promised to send us a copy of the paper, but it hadn't arrived at the time of writing this.

Thank you to Trevor, Pam and all the crew for an excellent couple of week's holiday and what a fitting way to celebrate forty years of trail riding. Thank you to all my fellow riders, those who rode the entire distance and those who came for shorter periods. Thank you to my husband, Bob, for his support and good humour during the trip.

Congratulations to Julie Fiedler and Pam Brookman of HorseSA for the foresight to design, plan and implement a truly wonderful trail.