

The

Student's Desk

ON LOCATION

Hello from Broken Hill,

Wow, have I been on the road a week already? I spent 3 nights at Dubbo getting a mate to do some work on the Hotel Royal. I now have keyless entry (YES!!!), but my FM radio still ain't that much to talk about. My MP3 player does a better job of picking up signals – and that's without an aerial!

The drive out here has been quite an experience. Surreal is probably the best description. I don't know what I really expected, but rounding a bend, or coming over a crest came with shock as I saw the road stretching off into the far, far distance in a single straight line. Crossing the flood plains E of Broken Hill was eerie. Distant features would shimmer in the heat haze on the horizon, though it was only 20degc, with no end in sight of yet another long, long stretchy of road. Another thing adding to the surrealism is the tyranny of distance. 300km is just a morning's drive out here. I can't begin to imagine what it must have been like for the pioneers of the late 17th century.

Given the nature of the distances, I thought rest areas would make a good alternative for camping if I failed to meet my destination. So last night I spent the night at Baden Park, 100km E Wilcannia. Several other parties thought a rest area would make a good camping spot as well. It was a good idea. Apart from the very occasional truck thundering down the highway overnight, it was quiet. I'm sure it won't be my last "over night rest area" on this trip.

Surprisingly it's very green out here, though all the creeks are dry. It's not the barren wasteland I was expected. Perhaps this is more due to recent rain.

I'm at a little place called Silverton tonight, 29km NW of Broken Hill. I could've gone further today, but I had enough of driving. Besides, a great opportunity was on offer to get the bike out and explore this "semi-ghost town". I certainly enjoyed riding around and taking lots of photos. Surprisingly, Silverton was established before Broken Hill as a mining town. It was only when mining interests shifted that Broken Hill became the major centre. I was also interested to learn the first church established at Silverton was Presbyterian. Sadly there's no trace of the building left. It seems ironic that Broken Hill should be without a Presbyterian church today.

JASON