

The

Student's Desk

ON LOCATION

Hello from Ararat, Vic,

I've only been here 3 days and have now just sat down to write. When you go around breaking laptops and cars, things mount up pretty quick. More about breaking things in a minute.

During my week in Adelaide, I managed to get 2 bike rides in along the River Torrens cycle path. The first ride was 34km return out to the hills and 3 days later, I rode 44km return to the city and beyond. I'm not to sure where the energy came from for either of them, let alone both. The Adelaide cycle network is quite reasonable, although there's a complete lack of signage, and I really didn't like it when the path kept disappearing.

I found the people of Adelaide to be quite friendly and prepared to listen. I seemed to strike conversations everywhere I went. Though, visiting Adelaide Presbyterian was quite a shock to my Sydney Evangelicalism. Some of the people were friendly enough, but if there was a high church of Presbyterianism, that'll be it! When I turned up, their youth group grew 100%. I was there only one there without any grey hair! I was quite distressed by it. Though Adelaide is the *City of Churches*, I was left wondering if it was a *City of the Gospel*. To have a church without any youth or family truly defies my vision of church. I wondered what the people's vision for the church was.

I was told by the now infamous supporter that I should have a look around the Fleurieu Peninsula. I thought, "well, if it involves driving, it can't *possibly* involve another bolder hop!" So I went and I'm glad I did. It was a fascinating piece of country. Lush green forests on the south side, and near desert on the north side. During my exploration, SA Parks managed to upset me again. I had hoped in a distorted way, National Parks would be regard as sacred. But no. Nothing seems to escape the scourge of commercialism. Using a self-registration system, they expect people to pay \$7 park entry fee and \$12 per car camp fee per night for up to 8 people. The sum of it is, they want to charge a pensioner \$19 to park his truck overnight and do his business in a hole the next morning! Oh please!!! I suppose for 8 people it's a good deal, but for 1, it really is quite ridiculous. Particularly compared to what I was paying at Mt. Gambier. It's a similar story at the Grampians with VicParks.

Earlier that day, I had found a council campground for \$5 a night at Rapid Bay. That sounded much better. It was also threatening to rain that day and was blowing quite a strong southerly. I thought given there were rainforests on the south side, and desert on the north, if it was going to rain, it'll rain on the south side. On top of that, the high ridge which characterises the peninsular would protect the north side from the strong southerly. So Rapid Bay was looking pretty good, and I camped there the night. I was hoping no one would come to collect the camp fees. But, at 8pm, I had someone at my door with an invoice book. Oh yes, I knew what they wanted.

The next day I visited Victor Harbour, and this seemed to mark the beginning of one disaster after another. I saw Granite Island which I had forgotten about, but once seen, I remembered it was a place to visit. I also recalled being told my parents visit to Granite Island. Mum souvenired a piece of Granite Island and Dad went crook saying, "don't you realise what would happen if everyone took a piece of Granite Island?" To this mum promptly responded something to the effect of, "yes, that's why I'm taking my piece now!" 30 odd years later, Granite Island is thankfully still there.

The causeway to the island is around 1km one way. I got the bike out to ride across. Alternatively, there's a horse drawn tram you can catch for \$7. At the beginning of the causeway, there's a sign prohibiting bikes. Well, I gave the sign all the respect it deserved and kept right on going – at walking pace. As it was I didn't get too far around the Island before the track became impassable on a bike. I should've got the tram. The only thing I managed to souvenir was a tyre puncture. I suppose it serves me right for disobeying the sign. So while I was being nice and polite sitting behind people as they walked the causeway, on the way back, it was a case of "excuse me, outta the way, flat tyre, coming through!" I was trying to get up enough speed for the tyre sealant to seal, or at least limp it back to the Hotel Royal so I wouldn't have to stop and change the tube. Disaster 2 followed shortly afterward. As I was strapping the bike down in the Hotel Royal, one of the tie down points let go, so I had no way of securing the bike in the back. But the real humdinger happened that night. I pulled out the laptop to do some work on it when I dropped it. It landed on the plug and broke the internal power supply connection. I was not happy!

However, all has turned out well. When I pulled into Mt. Gambier I got some advice from a computer place and I put in an insurance claim to get it fixed. The computer place has told my insurer it's not worth fixing, buy a new one. In the meantime they've fixed it enough to get it going again, but it wouldn't take much to break the connection again. So hopefully all will work out well there. I managed to buy a tool kit in Mt. Gambier with a small socket set for \$10, so I was able to bolt that tie down point in place and secure the bike. And the puncture eventually sealed itself. But then, the tube on the rear wheel expired the following week. This happened at Will's, so I got him to fix it. But frustrations didn't end there. I went to get a wheel alignment, balance and rotation as part of regular maintenance only to find I need a new inner rack end on the left side. Any contributions to the cost of repairs will be greatly appreciated. I've yet to find out how much this will cost, but I've been told it's a 2hr job. I'll chase this up when I get home.

The drive along Coorong National Park was interesting. Occasionally I'd come across a salt pan reminding me that I had not yet ventured too far from the desert.

Mt. Gambier was an intriguing place. Seeing the now water-filled volcanic craters displaying a bright blue colour, you would think someone threw a bucket of dye in the water. The sinkholes were mind-boggling. You'd walk down the street and there in the middle of town was a great hole! This was *The Caves Gardens*. Near by was Engelbrecht Cave. Normally, I'd expect such spectaculars to be an hour out from civilisation. This was smack in the middle of suburbia with the caves being right under houses and roads.

What really made me happy was the accommodation. I arrived in Mt. Gambier expecting to be bled dry for my "parking spot". Instead, it only paid \$6/night at Pine Country Caravan Park. It was only 4km out from town and wasn't bad either! The worst part was having a dirty great hill to ride over to get into town. At \$6, it was just as well. I spent 5 days in town getting my computer sorted. Still, I now know where to take my next holiday! Perhaps you can now understand why I've been screaming about national parks. That's without screaming about Melbourne!

On leaving Mt. Gambier I visited Lady Margaret Rose Cave which is definitely worth a visit – provided you can handle 87 steps down a narrow passage. The formations in the cave are beyond description, and photos don't do them justice.

I finally got to see the Grampians, or some of them. Half the park is still closed from the fires early this year. It really is an amazing area, and I'll have to go back some time. It was also a little on the nippy side. The extent of the cold could be seen the next day at the summit of Mt. William. Ice was still dropping off the towers at 2pm.

Again, I'd love to write more, but I'm out of time. I'm in Melbourne this weekend, and will be in Canberra during the middle of next week before returning home. I'll write again then.

JASON