

Kangaroo Island

Kangaroo Island is one of those places where the ride there and back can be almost as interesting as the destination. The trip was originally planned for September 2021 but the return of covid restrictions in Victoria and South Australia had it put back to April 2022, with only a few minor route changes. This time round we hoped to avoid the closed borders, QR code recorders and toilet paper hoarders.

Dennis (BMW R1200GS) and myself (Triumph Tiger Sport) met up with Archer and Philippa at Heatherbrae Pies Sutton Forest and spent some time admiring their new BMW R1250 RT. We stayed on the highway for the easy ride to David's farm outside Canberra, the unrelenting rain of early 2022 holding off for the start of the trip.



blown away by the amount of water in Lake George – or maybe by the wind farm

We caught up with Marija and Alice at Queanbeyan next morning, spending less time admiring the new Subaru Outback they would travel in. Sprinkles appeared after lunch at Jindabyne and gradually got heavier, as did the fog, necessitating a stop at Khancoban to don the rain gear.

This put a dampener on a normally fabulous ride along the Alpine Way, but at least we stayed reasonably dry for the rest of the way to Corryong. All accommodation had been booked in advance, but unaware “The Man from Snowy River” festival was on in town, we were fortunate to get a late sit-down take-away at the Sports Club.



taking shelter at Khancoban

Heavier rain was forecast for the next day but we had a good run to Tallangatta, and observed a much higher water level in the flooded Old Tallangatta catchment than when we passed through two years ago. We also visited the Bonegilla Migrant Centre where David's in-laws had been settled after arriving from Latvia in the 1950's. It is estimated one in twenty Australians have links to the Centre.



a more submerged Old Tallangatta

Apparently Hume Weir has grown up and become Hume Dam. This was lunch stop, then via Gundowring Road to Fall's Creek where rain gear was again introduced. It was wet, cold, very windy and very foggy across the mountains, finally arriving at Omeo after dark. No photos that afternoon. Also no 'roos, although I did see an echidna, a rabbit, a wild dog and an emu.



a fairly full Hume Dam

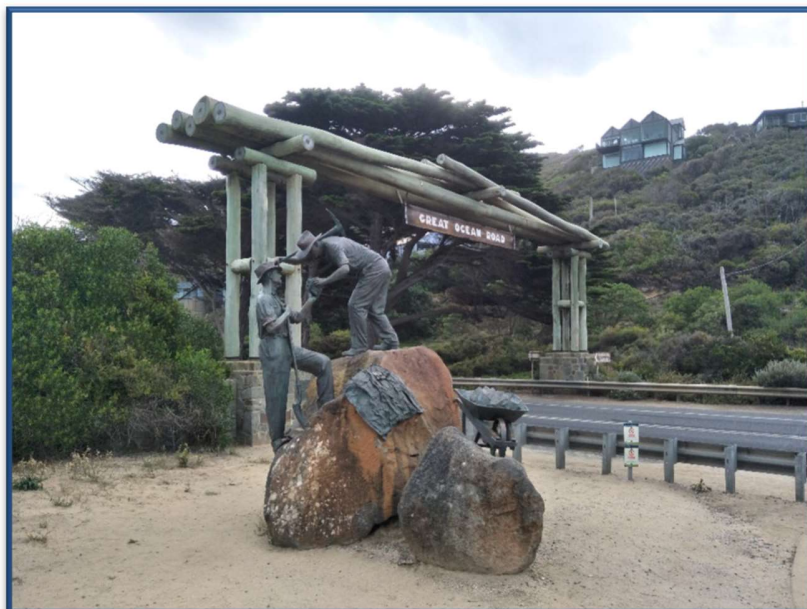


and a fairly wet and foggy Falls Creek

Overcast and cool again next morning but no rain, and we enjoyed a fantastic ride along the Great Alpine Road to Bruthen, especially the long winding sections after Swifts Creek and Ensay following the Tambo River. I'd like to do this ride again one day, and next time I'll remember to take a few photos. We had a coffee and checked out the remains of a Sabre jet which crashed near Bruthen in 1958, patiently accepted the less exciting roads to lunch at Sale, then carried on to our stop at Korumburra.

West Gate Freeway was the easiest way to get past Melbourne to reach the Great Ocean Road. We called into Bell's Beach, not knowing the Rip Curl Pro surfing competition was on. It wasn't really on due to poor surf, but we still weren't allowed access to see the beach. In Lorne we caught up with friends Noel and Lorna from the 2018 Tasmania trip, and again were lucky to get a table for dinner at the seafood restaurant on Lorne Pier. It was obvious in all stops on this ride that covid, school holidays and staff shortages were placing a massive demand on the hospitality sector.

Good weather for the Great Ocean Road with the usual great views and I still like to ride it despite the slow traffic. This time we stopped at Kennett River and found a sleepy koala in the (relative) wild. As expected tree bark, twigs and leaves littered the road through the Otways, stopping for lunch at Yatzies on Laver's Hill. The Twelve Apostles carpark was almost full and the sky was becoming overcast and not conducive to good views, so the only other stop along this section was London Bridge.



Memorial Arch on the Great Ocean Road



Great Ocean Road



sleepy koala at Kennett River



Twelve? Apostles

Port Fairy to Coonawarra was a good day's ride, passing via Portland to see the Cape Bridgewater Blowholes and Petrified Forest. The adjacent wind farm seemed to have taken the blow out of the Blowholes, and the Petrified Forest isn't really a petrified forest but hollow limestone tubes. It was still an interesting diversion, and I doubt the ACCC will pursue them for false advertising.



Cape Bridgewater Blowholes



Cape Bridgewater "Petrified Forest"

We also stopped in Heywood for lunch and photos of their Water Tower Art, in Dartmoor for their Wood Carvings, and in Mount Gambier for the Blue Lake, as you do.



Heywood Water Tower Art



Dartmoor Wood Carvings



Mount Gambier "Blue Lake"

Coonawarra was a rest day, with an afternoon winery tour to Parker Estate, Majella, Brand's Laira, Wynns Coonawarra and Zema. Our Coonawarra Motor Lodge accommodation was actually in Penola, Coonawarra having little more than a general store, but there were probably more than a dozen other "Coonawarra" wineries we didn't get to.



photo bombing the iconic Wynns Coonawarra label

The roads to Victor Harbor were rather mundane. We stopped at Padthaway for coffee and as for Coonawarra, this region synonymous with wine had little more than a general store. Keith had been identified as a fuel stop but inconsistencies between Google Maps, Fuel Map app, GPS and reality caused some confusion, exacerbated by one of those confounded credit card pay machines.

Coonalpyn was lunch stop, and a photo of their Silo Art. The roads and scenery were getting more interesting, with an unexpected ferry crossing at Wellington and a pleasant ride through the Langhorne Creek area. Dennis' cousin entertained us with a BBQ in Victor Harbor that evening.

David's Rocket was showing abnormal wear on the front tyre, resulting in numerous phone calls looking for a replacement. Most shops along the route needed one to two weeks to get one in from Melbourne, and the approaching Easter weekend compounded the delay. GC Motorcycles in Adelaide was the only shop with a tyre in stock, with David rearranging his schedule to suit.



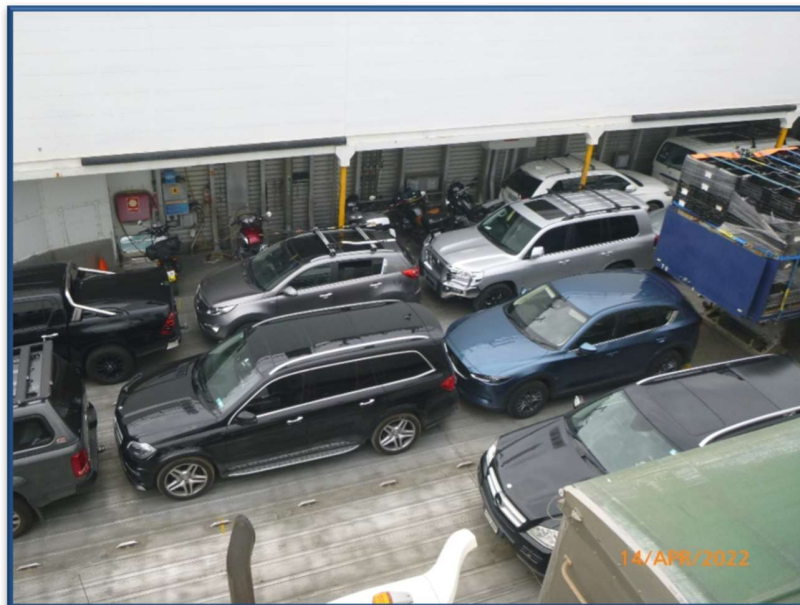
Coonalpyn Silo Art



unexpected ferry at Wellington

We made an earlier than usual start to catch the Kangaroo Island ferry next morning, arriving in Kingscote around mid-day for a three night stop, with David leaving his bike at Penneshaw and keeping the girls company in the car. There were many 'roo warning signs along the road from Penneshaw and a similar number of roadkill, but fortunately no live ones were sighted.

Our run of good luck with the weather came to an end after lunch, rain starting just as we checked into our motel. No riding that afternoon. We settled for dinner in a nearby pizza bar, and a selection of local The Islander and False Cape wines.



packed in on the "Spirit of Kangaroo Island" ferry

Good weather and a good ride to Flinders Chase National Park next morning. The rural countryside was mainly cleared paddocks and didn't show as much damage from the 2019-2020 bushfires as I'd expected, although evidence of the fires was more obvious as we neared the National Park at the other end of the island. Regeneration appeared to be well advanced, but apparently the wildlife was badly affected and will need more time to recover.

Admirals Arch and Remarkable Rocks are unique natural attractions reached by elevated boardwalks, with plenty of long-nosed fur seals basking in the welcome sun. The boardwalk and railing at Admirals Arch were obviously necessary for safe access as well as protecting the flora and fauna, but I was surprised we could walk on and around Remarkable Rocks unimpeded.

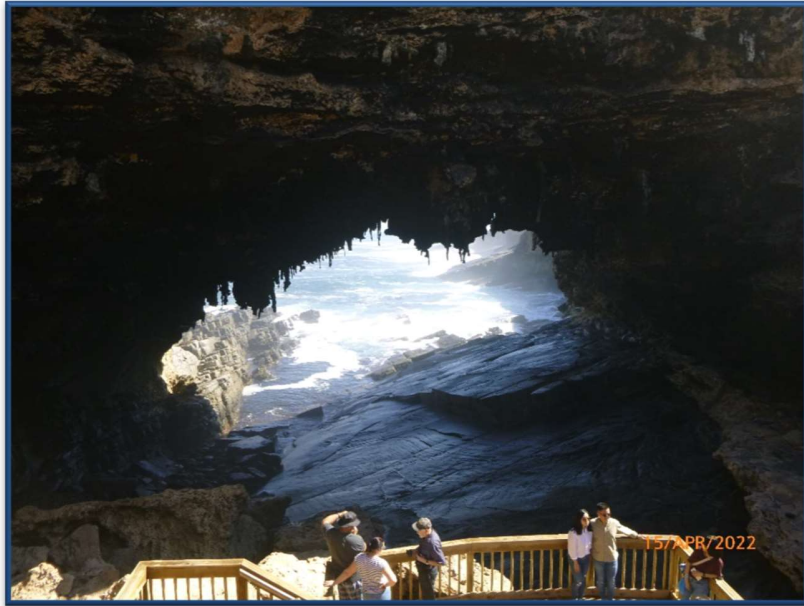
I'd led the ride that day and intended to ride the island anti-clockwise. Instead I missed the turn towards Parndana and took the South Coast Road. I didn't think anybody in the group noticed the difference and returned clockwise along the Playford Highway, stopping in Parndana for lunch and refuel. One day I'll get a GPS. Maybe. We struck a brief shower of rain for around 20km but the roads were dry after that.



Cape Du Couedic Lighthouse



angry surf near Admirals Arch



Admirals Arch



Remarkable Rocks



a very remarkable rock

Seal Bay was on the agenda next morning, riding the 60km to do a guided tour along another boardwalk and onto the beach amid the sea lion colony. I never imagined we'd be allowed to get that close to the endangered species. They typically spend up to three days hunting in the ocean, then return to land for a bit of R&R. Sea lions and fur seals are closely related, having small ears and the ability to use their rear flippers while walking on land, unlike "true" seals.



sea lions on R&R at Seal Bay

The return ride provided a Silo Art photo opportunity before a lazy afternoon, catching up on laundry, emails, another chain lube and some accommodation issues for the remainder of the trip. I'm not a fan of complicated pre-arrival check-in forms that take twice as long to complete as a face-to-face check-in.



the biggest kangaroo on Kangaroo Island

Ferry departure time was 10:30am next morning so an easy ride to Penneshaw, retrieve David's bike and refuel before boarding. We stopped at the HMAS Hobart Memorial on St Vincent's Gulf and felt some rain sprinkles. This may not have been an issue for divers on the scuttled destroyer, but our circumstances were different. A lunch stop at Myponga provided a dry environment to don the rain gear, and a cold, wet and uncomfortable ride to Hahndorf followed.

Dennis led the ride, and his GPS took us on a slow crawl through town and into the hinterland beyond. Somehow the GPS had identified an imaginary Hahndorf Motel suspiciously close to Hahndorf Motors. Thus ensued an even slower crawl back through town in the parade of Easter Sunday day-trippers from Adelaide, finding the real motel exactly where I expected it to be. Geoff 1, GPS 0.

A few drinks in the nearby Hahndorf Inn were in order, trying a chocolate/peanut butter/milkshake stout for something different. Next time I'll stick to Guinness. The day-trippers must have hung around for dinner, so an Indian curry usurped the traditional sauerkraut.



St Vincent Gulf coastline from HMAS Hobart Memorial

Rain pants next morning gave some protection from the wet roads, rain tops were added after a coffee stop at Angaston, and Murphy's Law then meant a relatively dry and comfortable ride to Quorn. We decided to lunch in Burra after a pleasant stop there on our trip to Coober Pedy this time last year. Only one café was open on this Easter Monday, the queue stretching out onto the road, and we settled in for a long wait rather than risk starvation in the unknown further on.



movies made in and around Quorn



Quorn Silo Light Show

Pichi Richi Railway was booked for next morning, taking a steam train ride through the hilly countryside in sunnier conditions after the last two days of overcast skies. Several train-spotters were parked along the route waving and taking photos, and several 'roos were also taking an interest in our excursion. The train stopped for refreshments at Woolshed Flats before returning to Quorn around 1:00pm.



Pichi Richi Railway

This left time for lunch then a reasonably short ride to Wilpena Pound in the afternoon, mainly long straight roads, flattish countryside and remains of several old and abandoned farm houses. We didn't see any 'roos while riding, but a stop at Arkaba Hill Lookout revealed two in the scrub keeping an eye on us. Possibly recent rain and greener pastures meant they didn't need to feed by the roadside.



can't help taking photos of steam trains, and good roads

Our arrival at Wilpena Pound culminated with a wicked combination of poor communication and boorish indifference trying to sort out National Park permits, room allocations and dinner arrangements.

All this was forgotten on a 30 minute scenic flight over the Flinders Ranges next morning, followed by a great ride to Blinman. The weather was perfect with clear blue skies, the road a great combination of bends, hills, sharp crests and deep floodways, with the occasional flood debris on the road to keep us alert. On the way we detoured to view "The Great Wall of China", an unusual line of rocks topped with ironstone, avoiding a mob of emus on the way in.

Lunch was home-made meat pie at the iconic North Blinman Hotel, the "*Pub in the Scrub*". Blinman was named after Robert "Peg-Leg" Blinman, a shepherd who discovered copper there in 1859. The mine closed in 1918 but mine tours have recently been introduced to boost tourism in the area. Tours were fully booked on the day we visited.

There have been several changes to the locality name with records of South Blinman and North Blinman as well as the current Blinman. There is no record of a South Blinman Hotel, but if one ever existed in this very small town during the mine's heyday, it could well have been next door to the current pub.



Flinders Ranges from the air



and it's not all mountains



the Great Wall of China



North Blinman Hotel

Back to the resort by mid-afternoon with time to relax, refuel, lube the chain, buy a souvenir, and reflect on a great day. Even the overly expensive beer and wine selection was acceptable at dinner that night.



a great ride

On the road early next morning, with more clear blue skies. This time we didn't stop at the Giant Red Gum Tree outside Orroroo, but we did stop at the Gumtree Café for coffee before riding on past the "Midnight Oil" house to Burra for lunch. We were relieved to find more venues open this time.

Google gave me false information on directions out of town, and Dennis' GPS compounded the error, then conspired with his oil warning light to force a longer than anticipated stop to top up. We caught up with the others at the old river port town of Morgan, the weather getting colder and more overcast, the flattish countryside mainly bare fields and scrub, and little sign of stock or wildlife. One more wrong turn at a roundabout that wasn't really a roundabout before I found our accommodation in Renmark.

A wander around the riverfront next morning found no cafes open so back to the hotel for breakfast. This was another pleasant day for riding with good weather and good road surfaces, although mainly long straights. Mildura was too early for lunch but worthy of a coffee stop before lunch at Robinvale.

The ride became more interesting as we stayed close to the meandering Murray River to Swan Hill, catching sight of the river on several occasions and constantly being reminded of its presence by signs to river locks, boat ramps and camping grounds. The landscape was relatively flat with many vineyards, olive trees and irrigation canals. We did a late afternoon walk past the Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement and along the river before finding a casual restaurant for dinner.



Paddle Steamer PS Gem at Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement

Even without interruptions, Swan Hill to Junee would have been the longest riding day of the trip, and a longer than expected stop at the Lake Boga Flying Boat Museum to see this little known chapter of WW2, including watching a documentary video, put us behind schedule from the outset. Deniliquin was the lunch stop but no time to visit the Deni Ute Muster Museum as we headed towards Jerilderie.



Catalina in Lake Boga Flying Boat Museum

We needed to refuel in Jerilderie but found the servo at the other end of town was closed. I consulted Google and found another back along the A39, so round I went with the others in tow, refueled, and continued on. I was now expecting to see road signs for either Lockhart or Wagga Wagga, but not to be.

It's certainly not the first time I've had that feeling, and consoled myself with the thought it's better to retrace 30 odd km rather than 100km. I hadn't been to Jerilderie before, and now I've been there twice in one day. Leadership duties were relinquished, Dennis' GPS made amends for past sins, and we finally arrived in Junee in the dark. Last supper was in the RSL club near our motel, Chinese fare only, but I think there were a few extra empty bottles left on the table that night.

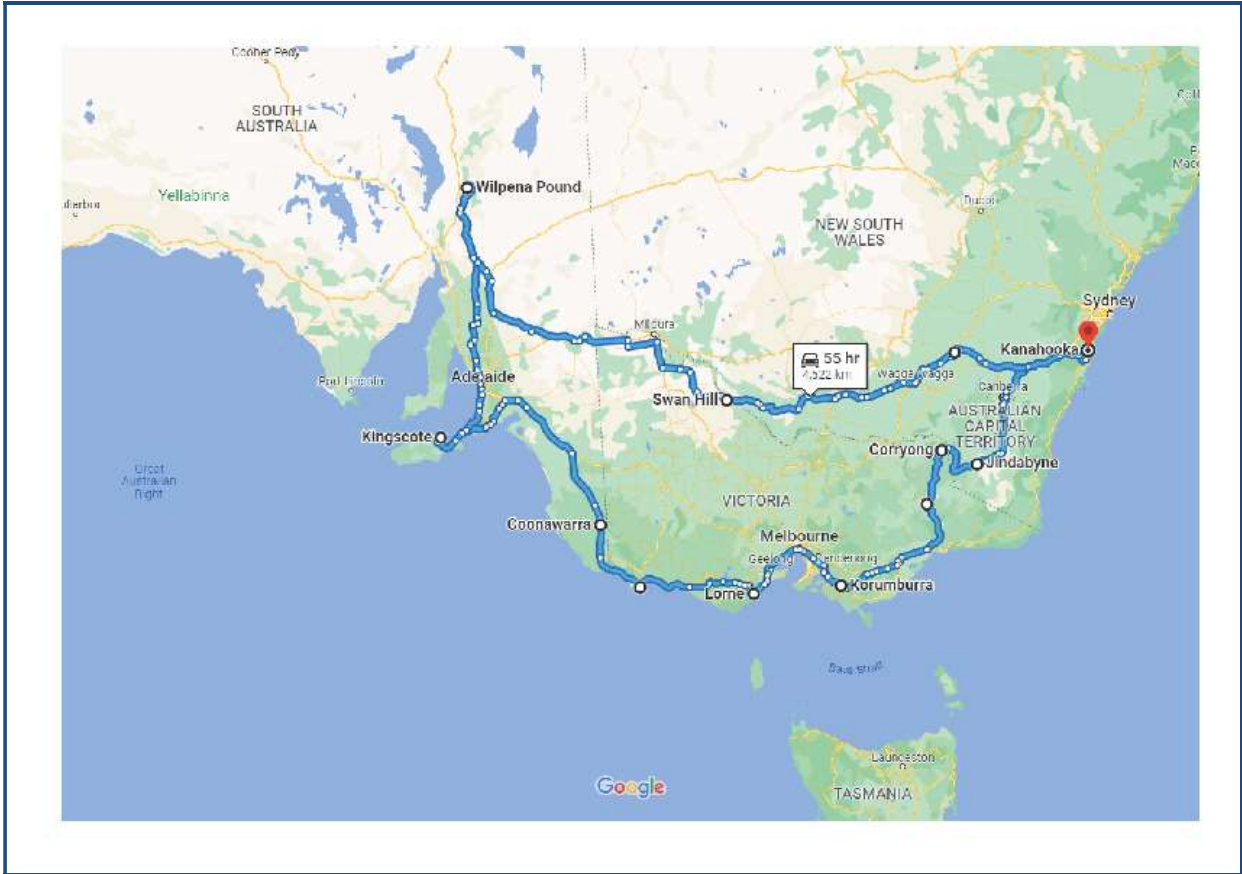


Bill the Bastard – part of the Harden-Murrumburrah Light Horse Memorial

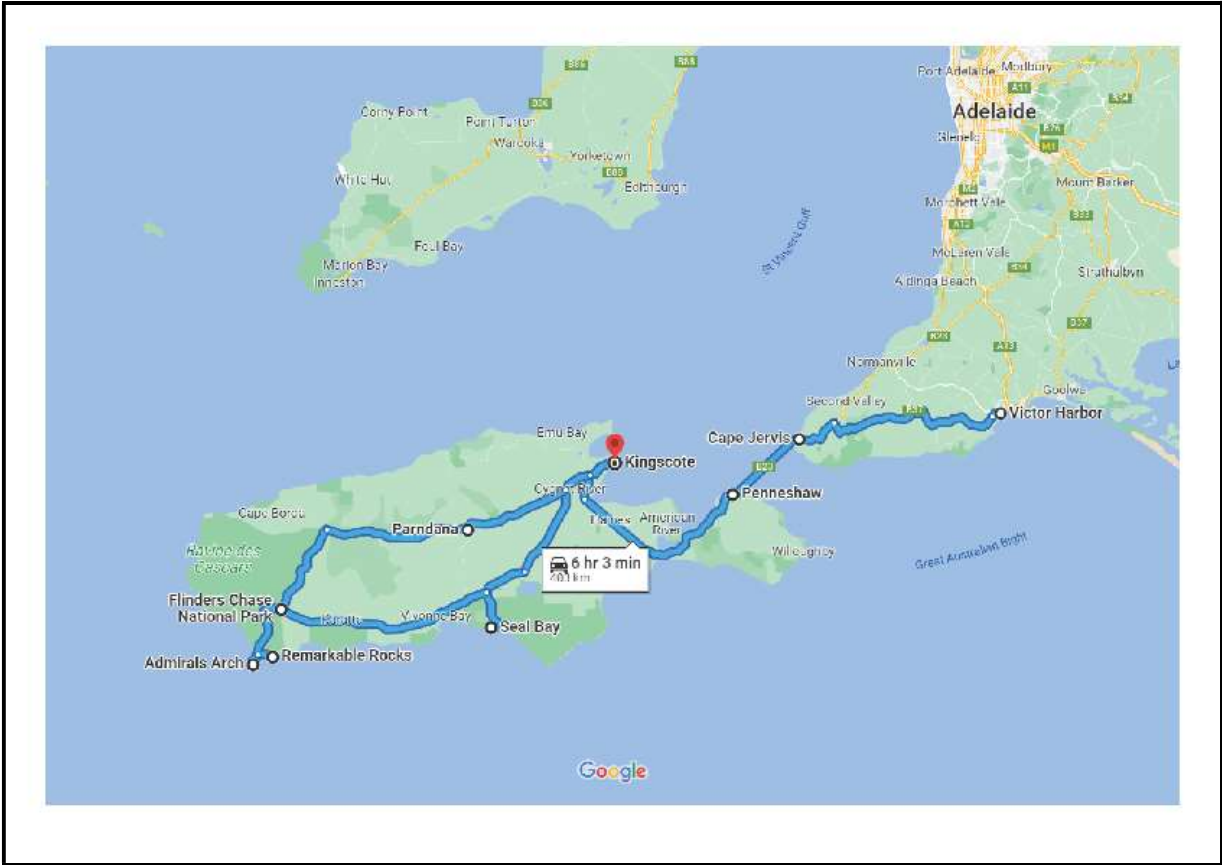
Leaving Junee the roads became more hilly and winding, although the road surface was fairly ordinary. Refusing to follow what appeared to be a detour around Cootamundra, I again got sidetracked trying to pass through the town centre. At least we managed to see some of this larger than I expected town.

We stopped in Harden for coffee and to refuel, and to admire the sculptures of the Australian Light Horse Memorial, including the horse known as "Bill the Bastard". We also said our good-byes to Archer and Philippa who were keen to get home. The rest of us stopped in Yass for jaffles at Tootsie Café and said our good-byes to David. I waved a symbolic farewell to the unsighted Dennis, Marija and Alice as I turned off at Canyonleigh interchange, ignored signs stating the Illawarra Highway was closed, and endured a wet and slow ride down Jamberoo Mountain to home.

Total mileage on my bike was 5420km, including the unintended additions. Another very enjoyable trip.



the route



Kangaroo Island

Geoff Roberts