



Not The Spoken Word

Bi-monthly newsletter of The Western Australian Historical Cycle Club Inc.

Riding the Goldfields of Western Australia

The mania for gold which ignited the explosion of population in Western Australia in the late nineteenth century must have been spectacular to live through. During my experience of the Northern Goldfields, I could sense the presence of the pioneers who gave up everything in the pursuit of a dream of riches beyond imagination.

Key to the experience was my trusty old road bicycle. Of course it is possible to drive to the abandoned towns and mine sites out there, but to get a real sense of the ghosts that linger doing it without the internal combustion engine brings you at least one step closer. For they were epic human struggles that took place there, struggles that are present in the unique landscape, the poignant remains dotted all over the bush.

I clocked up just over 1,200 kilometres in 12 days, during which I relived a time out of the past.

My tour of the Goldfield ghost towns nearly ended before it began. I planned to start, appropriately, in Midland, the town whose origin and history are bound up with the railway and the gold rushes. The Prospector train to Kalgoorlie was surely the way to embark on this time travel?

The uniformed lady railway official with the clip-board did not think so. Looking at my partly dismantled bike wrapped in plastic, she was adamant: "Bikes aren't allowed on the Prospector". The discussion circled around whether or not it was a 'fold-up bike' and even if bikes were permitted at all. The station master was consulted and finally the train driver, who saw no problem at all. I was on my way, for an extra \$20, but wondered if Irish gold rush pioneer Paddy Hannan was revisiting Kalgoorlie today, could he get on the Prospector with his kit?

Out of Kalgoorlie, battling into strong winds for 135km I made my first overnight camp in the 'ghost town' of Menzies, population of about sixty. After a good night's sleep I did some exploring on the red dirt roads around the town. Immediately the atmosphere of the gold-rush years presents in the architecture of the town hall, the pub, the railway station, a few houses and some long since closed shops.

At its height in the early 1900s more than a dozen mines were working and amazingly, Menzies was a throbbing town of 10,000 souls, with 13 hotels, three banks, its own breweries and cordial factory, a post office with a staff of 25, a school with 205 pupils, a public library, four churches and a railway station with four trains a day to and from Kalgoorlie. If you listen closely, you can still hear the faint echo of the honky-tonk piano from the saloon bars, the real Wild West, as opposed to the pale Hollywood recreation.

My own pioneering spirit was just about to be tested, even if I didn't know it. My first puncture wasn't going to be a big deal,

I thought, until I discovered that somewhere along the way my bicycle pump had begun to shake itself apart and was now totally useless. If there ever was one, there was certainly no bike shop here now. It was time for a quick excursion back into the 21st century—I hitched a ride. The Good Samaritan was Keith, a 76-year-old school bus driver for the 32 indigenous children of the district. He was a living history book—born in Menzies and lived there all his life. All the way to 'Kal', he brought back to life the dead settlements along the way, places with names like Comet Vale, Bardoc, Broad Arrow and Goongarrie.



Back in Menzies with my new pump, I was soon on the road to the old Menzies cemetery where the headstones whispered of the hardships and tragedies of long-dead miners and their families, buried so far from their birthplaces in Europe. Judging by the surnames, a great number were from Ireland. Predictably, many men died in mining accidents but, heartbreakingly, I learned that so many wives and children died from cholera and typhoid. Sad, as I had in my pack the 21st century answer to water-borne bugs, Acquatabs, the water purifying tablets made in Wexford, Ireland.

Back on the road out of Menzies, there was no let-up in the head wind as I battled towards Kookynie with a detour to the Niagara Dam. Niagara was meant to be the town where steam locomotives took on water but by the time the dam was built, they had found lots of groundwater. It was a big white elephant, but now it's a great spot for a picnic.

Up the road is Kookynie, a booming town in the gold-rush era, when it boasted a racecourse, shops and factories, a brewery, eleven hotels, including The Grand Hotel built in 1902 and still going. I heard that Kookynie even had a red light district run by local Japanese residents. It was also the first town in the Western Australian Goldfields to have a swimming baths. In 1907 the town had a population of well over 3,500, now shrunk to just seven people.

The abandoned mine shafts, deserted homes and shops are preserved as in a huge open-air museum, with touching reminders of lives which seem to have simply been switched off at a moment in time. I filled four bottles of bore water and I was back on the bumpy 60km gravel track to Leonora.

As the temperature rose into the 30s I needed all the water I could carry. The 'road' was a bit tricky with lots of soft sand interspersed with loose gravel and some seriously bumpy sections. After two hours I had only clocked 25km and had already got through two bottles of water.

My pioneering abilities were about to be tested again. When I checked the bike frame bottle cage, my reserve water was gone. The bottles had shaken free and were lost somewhere back down the track.

Fortunately there was just enough water in some of the gullies beside the track to fill my empty bottles, trying not to disturb the red muddy sediment. In went my trusty water tablets from far-away Wexford and so, on to Leonora.

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from page one ... Leonora lies 230km north of Kalgoorlie and has a semi-permanent population of 1,500 which includes a lot of transient gold prospectors living in the caravan park. One group of prospectors had come all the way from France, they were bitten by the gold bug and had come dreaming of a fortune still to be made in the goldfields. After a month driving around the bush in a clapped out van with a leaking radiator they had found \$35 worth of gold. Their investment totalled thousands of dollars and they were rapidly going broke, a living reminder that the past is still uniquely present out here.

Same as always, the gold fever still feeds on rumour. The story was circulating in Leonora when I cycled through that a secretive old Aussie digger at the park had found two eight ounce nuggets in recent weeks. He was indeed secretive because I couldn't find him and details were vague.

In its heyday Leonora and the nearby town of Gwalia were linked by an electric tram service. In the ghost town of Gwalia, you can almost touch the gold rush. The little settlement that grew up around the Sons of Gwalia Mine in the late 1890s thrived until the final whistle blew on 28 December 1963, closing the mine and putting 250 men out of work. Gwalia's 1,200-strong population melted away to just 40 in less than three weeks.

The eerily intact abandoned homes and business premises of Gwalia are a tangible link with a vanished era and way of life; the little cottages built of corrugated iron, timber and whitewashed hessian still hold faint echoes of a miner's wife cooking dinner on the cast iron range, while her husband toils underground to support his family and children.

It looks quaint and nostalgic now, like a snapshot out of the past, but the decline of mining in Gwalia was partly because people were no longer prepared to raise families in these same earth floored corrugated iron buildings.

In Mazza's Store, the shopper could buy everything from two pounds of flour to a length of fabric. Just up the road is Patroni's Guest House, for decades a home from home for single men working in the Sons of Gwalia Mine. The 'town' now has a population of about 15 people.

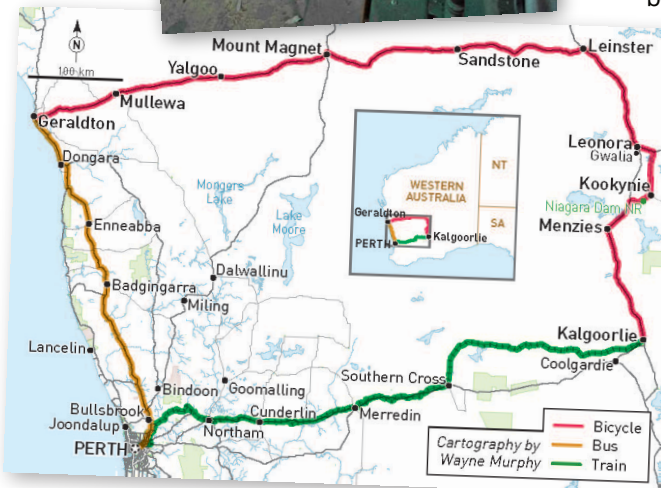
The following day I headed north to Leinster, a new town with no real history, custom built for workers at the nickel mine. At last the winds swung more favourably and I was happy to see the back of Leinster to begin pedalling the 160km to Sandstone.

I arrived quite late in Sandstone, but, thank goodness, the pub was still open. Two cans of beer never tasted better, that I can recall. The few locals sat at the bar with hardly a glance in my direction. They too seemed frozen in time, their glasses of beer seemingly suspended between counter and mouth. I can't imagine that sweat covered cyclists in the middle of the desert are commonplace here, but then again, this is the ghost zone where presumably anything is possible!

Now, it's hard to believe that Sandstone had a population of 6,000 in 1907 and was referred to as a 'city'. It's currently home to less than 100 people and lots of holes in the ground left by long-dead miners.

Only four more days on the road, with overnight stops at mining towns Mount Magnet, WA's longest continually operating gold mine, and Yalgoo, but neither of these are ghost towns. On to Mullewa, and I now seem to be also moving forward through time, passing into farming country and finally the bus from Geraldton back to the 21st century (and Perth). In all I covered just over 1,200 kilometres but who can say if I was away for days, decades or centuries?

Words and pictures by Bruce Hunt



Tail Light Project

Have a vintage tail lamp that no longer works? Can't bring yourself to fit a modern tail light to your old vintage bike? Here's a simple DIY project to upgrade that old vintage tail light into a modern, long lasting, flashing LED. The best thing is, many lamps can be converted without damaging or changing the external appearance. And it should only cost around \$20!

You will need the parts listed below, a soldering iron and a filling/insulating thick glue such as silicone or glue gun. The result will be a bright flashing tail light that only requires a 9 volt battery. No generator required. You have the option of fitting a small switch or you can simply open up the lamp to disconnect the battery.

Parts list (all available from Jaycar)

- 1 x 9V battery \$4.50
- 1 x 9V battery clip \$1.50
- 1 x White LED \$2
- 1 x Resistor 1000 Ohms +-5% Gold Red Black Brown \$0.80
- 2 x Resistor 10k Ohms +-1% Brown Black Black Red Brown \$0.70
- 1 x 4.7uF 63VDC Electrolytic RB Capacitor \$0.35
- 1 x NE555 Timer chip \$2.25
- 1 x Small Layout Prototyping BreadBoard - Jaycar CAT.NO: HP9570 \$5
- 1 x Optional Ultra Mini Rocker Switch CAT.NO:SK0975 or similar to suit. \$2.45
- Wire (red, black and white recommended) 100mm will be plenty.

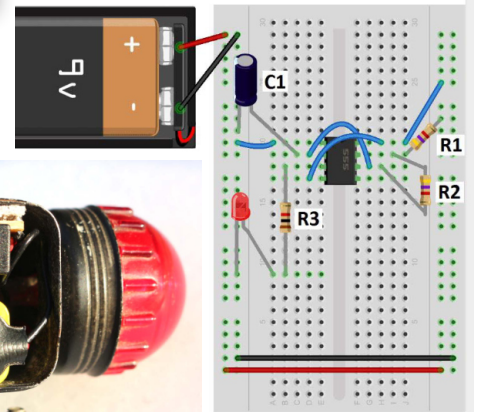
I used a circuit diagram (below) that I downloaded from fritzing.org. Spend a little bit of time test fitting the components so you can cut it down to the minimum size. If you choose to add a switch, simply insert between board and battery.

The LED I glued into the lens reflector, making sure to insulate the terminal and connections from any metal such as the reflector and case.

Add sufficient wire from the board to the LED to enable you to insert and remove the completed board.

I also glued some insulating leather to the circuitry to avoid contacting the case.

Frank West



February Auction

The club's next auction will conclude at our February meeting. The auction is live now on Bidding Owl (link below). This is what's known as a wheely good auction with 16 items for members to chose from, many of them wheels or rims.

biddingowl.com/Auction/index.cfm?auctionID=21151

Book Review

“Two Wheels to Adventure: Through Australia by Bicycle”, by Shirley Duncan

Published in 1957, 222 pages - available in the club library.

What is the book about? From the inside cover, “This is the light-hearted story of an 11,000-mile bicycle trip round Australia made by two girls and a dog, with minimum of equipment.” In a little more detail, author Shirley Duncan writes about her journey around Australia with her best friend, Wendy Law and a dog they picked up, aptly named Peter.

In 1946, the two women started their journey by cycling around Victoria to Adelaide and around Tasmania with another girlfriend, Margaret, all members of the Y.W.C.A. Walking Club. Margaret had ‘fallen in love’ after Tasmania and pulled out of the adventure. What was originally planned to be 6 months, they completed the semi-circumnavigation of Australia 3 years later by going across The Nullarbor Plain from Perth to Melbourne.

Duncan is not shy about discussing the fact they didn’t actually ride the bicycles the entire way. In the 1940’s most of the roads were dirt or worse, sand. They were never averse to accepting lifts on trucks, lorries, and the train. They rode single-speed Malvern Star bicycles with 80 pounds of gear “loaded unscientifically with suitcases strapped on the backs of the bicycle and string bags dangling from the handlebars.” Like their loads, they didn’t plan their trip like most I know who travel today. Or, should I say, how I like to plan. They were more free-spirited. They went where people told them to go. Additionally, Duncan’s mother was always worried about the girls, so she smartly told her mom she’d be home soon to appease her and state where the next stop was going to be. This also let her not commit to going places and allowed them freedom to roam.

With Malvern Star as a sponsor along with Peter’s Ice Cream, hence the dog’s name, the girls were celebrities wherever they went. Unbeknownst to them, their sponsors would call the towns ahead of their arrivals for radio interviews. With their unexpected ‘lifts,’ they would usually arrive early which would surprise the news press and radio people. It was fascinating how the girls quickly figured out how the system worked and would plan better. They were not the only celebrities cycling around Australia. Ernie Olds, the veteran cyclist, was also making a name for himself. The girls met up with Ernie for a few hours to which both were honoured to meet each other. He also disclosed that he too was accepting lifts.

Not able to live off ice cream alone, they would stop in locations for longer periods, upwards of several months. They would work random jobs like cleaning rooms at mountain resorts and harvesting fruits and veg. They also sold magazine subscriptions. Like any sales, the more they sold, the more they collected. But, many towns had limited people to buy the subscriptions so money was always low.

Why is this book relevant to Western Australia? The last 2 chapters talk about their adventures in WA. They took a boat from Adelaide to Perth and rode south to Albany then up to Carnarvon then back to Geraldton through to Kalgoorlie. The hardest part of their trip seemed to be crossing the Nullarbor Plain, I was happy they actually rode most the way. Unfortunately, they didn’t have too much to say about Western Australia compared to other parts. A few things they talked about was bicycle registering, which they paid a small fee to collect their individual number plates that attached the back of the bikes. It would be amazing if these plates were still around.

Overall, the book is very easy to read. Like the book’s description, Duncan’s writing is light-hearted. I learned a lot about Australia and the kindness of people throughout the country. Although Duncan admits she was relatively naive, there were a few moments of terror in the Northern Territory that may have stopped others. Their positive attitudes and openness to everyone was returned in abundance with most people opening their homes, feeding them or giving them lifts further than the driver’s original plans. It’s a book worth reading if you want a sense of adventure and learning a little about life in the 1940’s, which seemed a lot simpler..

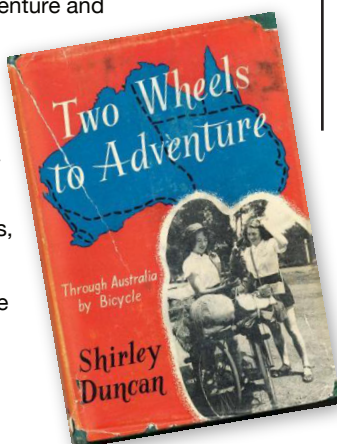
After finishing ‘Two Wheels to Adventure,’ two books I’m excited to acquire for the library and read are:

“With Bags and Swags: Around Australia in the Forties,” Suart Law, Wendy, 2018

“By Bread Alone: The Autobiography of Famous Veteran Cyclist Ernie Olds,” Olds, Ernie, 1950

To see the girls, I found this newsreel, <https://bit.ly/3EWp0zG> note the error, it mixes their names up: Shirley Law and Wendy Duncan.

Bill Raczkowski, Club Librarian



Stuck in the Shed with Richard Patenall

What are you currently working on?

I always have a number of projects on the go and my progress is typically quite slow due to limited play time. I currently have a late 80s 753 tubed Raleigh DynaTech, a 1984 Raleigh Team Professional, a mid 90s Rick Powell and a 70s Merlin - all are higher end race bikes.

How many rideable bikes do you have?

A good question. A quick count gives me four commuter bikes, one mountain bike, two modern road bikes and 19 vintage bikes. I didn’t dare look in the shed for more.

If push comes to shove, what is your favourite bike?

It has to be my 1965 Ian Reid. I grew up only a few kilometers from where it was built and have met the former racer builder and been in contact with the original owner who raced it for the Mid Devon Road Racing Club. It’s original and classy.

What was your first bike?

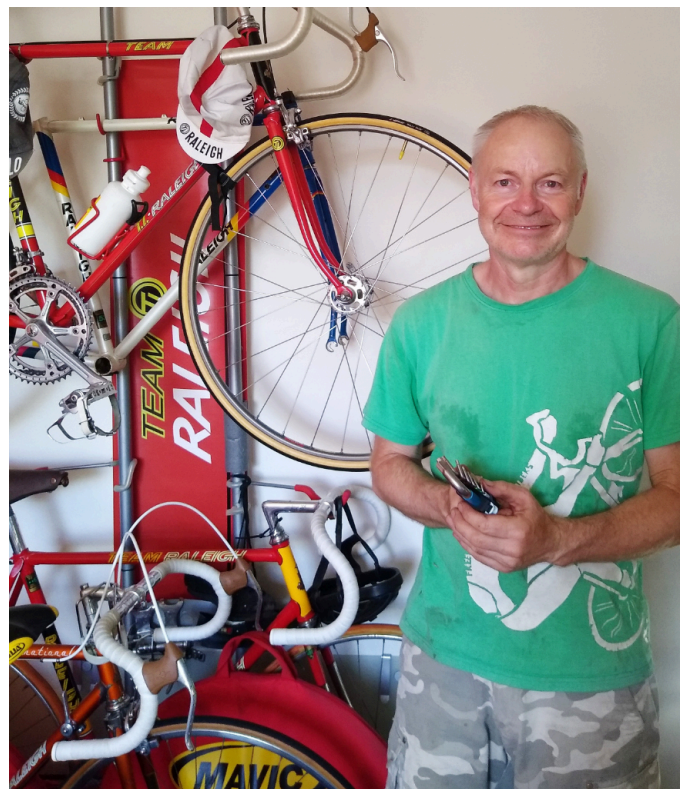
Although not my first bike, the one that really started my love affair with cycling was a polar white Puch Alpine 10-speed that I bought new for 30 pounds from delivering newspapers every morning, come rain or shine! Originally I was saving up to buy a Raleigh Chopper but after watching an episode of the British sitcom “Whatever Happened to The Likely Lads?” where they did a bike race I changed my mind and bought a “racer”. I just watched that episode again on YouTube 😊.

Pick a bike, any bike.. in your dreams what are you riding?

I don’t really have a particular dream bike. But if pushed I would be riding a steel bike that I had built myself.....or a Llewellyn custom bike with shiny lugs and lots of elegant subtle details.

Whistle while you work? Give us a tip on the sounds that fill your workspace.

I enjoy my music like my bikes - British and from the 70s-90s. Anything from soul to heavy metal.



Club Calendar

Mon 17th Jan 19:30 General Meeting

In-person at 41 Britannia Road, Leederville

Online Zoom Meeting ID: 896 2070 3705

(Check your email for the clickable link and meeting password close to the date).

Sun 23rd Jan 10:00 Yard Sale

Phil Harris is having a monster clear-out in anticipation of moving house.

Member only event

Mon 21st Feb 19:30 General Meeting &

Auction

In-person at 41 Britannia Road, Leederville

Online Zoom Meeting ID: 896 2070 3705

(Check your email for the clickable link and meeting password close to the date).

Mon 21st Mar 19:30 General Meeting

Speaker Alan Naber - The Social History of Cycling

In-person at 41 Britannia Road, Leederville

Online Zoom Meeting ID: 896 2070 3705

(Check your email for the clickable link and meeting password close to the date).

Mon 18th Apr 19:30 General Meeting

In-person at 41 Britannia Road, Leederville

Online Zoom Meeting ID: 896 2070 3705

(Check your email for the clickable link and meeting password close to the date).

Sun 1st May 09:00 Moondyne Festival

We're back in Toodyay for the Moondyne Festival. The display location is in front of the old fire station on Stirling St.

Lyotard Rims

At a not-so-recent meeting I mentioned Lyotard rims and got some perplexed responses along the lines of 'they only made pedals and similsr parts'. My attempts at researching them have been limited, as I gather was Lyotard's production of rims.

It seems they only produced them in times of high demand, although I imagine that the machines that produce rims would be very specialised, which would argue for more continuous operation.

Anyway, for what it's worth, to the right is a photo of my Mercier Mixte and another of the Lyotard name on its rear wheel. Sadly, the front wheel was non-original, the wrong size and in poor condition when I acquired the machine. Thanks to some generous help from Bob Sommerville I now have a correctly sized steel 700C rim of French origin in good condition, and I've abandoned my search for Lyotard replacement - unless a club member happens to have one tucked away, that is!

Will Riseborough.

Christmas Pageant

The club's presence really brings something unique to the Christmas Pageant each year. After watching innumerable pipe bands and dance troupes the appearance of the penny farthings and their coterie of 'safety' cycles is breathtaking.

The club had a great turnout for the 2021 Christmas Pageant and members put on a great show. Thanks to Ken and Mal Bell for organising the ride and to Rob Loughman and Rob Frith for the photos.

More photos can be found at [flic.kr/s/aHsmXfE1xA](https://www.flic.kr/s/aHsmXfE1xA)

