

Simpson Desert Bike Challenge Newsletter

June 2007

Race dates for 2007: 2nd – 6th October

Hi everyone,

Ten weeks remain until close of entries for this year's race. Almost half the fifty positions are currently spoken for. Three –time competitor Andrew Koop from Alice Springs has dived in but a strange silence remains from fellow Alice inhabitant and three-time race winner Jack Oldfield – will he or wont he in 2007....?

This month's newsletter traces the race from it's beginnings in the late '80s – those pioneering days pre- suspension, when you had to be tough to survive

1987: The first known Desert race, which was reduced to six stages after attempting to tackle the infamously sandy French Line. Entrants included a bunch of 10-14 year olds riding Malvern Stars in a relay.

1988: The first 'official' Simpson Desert Cycle Classic which, due to heavy rain, didn't go near the actual Desert. The race ran from near Kulgera around Mt Connor & Uluru (Ayers Rock) to end at Kata Tjuta (the Olgas).

1989: The first year that the event took a similar route to that currently followed. The first international competitors arrived from Canada.

1990: Little is known of this race. None of the competitors had taken part before, nor have since. Perhaps this pretty much says it all?

1991: The Police & RAAF got in to the act this year. Photos show riders wearing dodgy 'stack' helmets and the elite using roadie pedal & cleat systems (no SPDs back then).

1992: Remembered as the year cyclist Stephan Vanderhee ran out of spare tubes & decided to ride 30km on the wheel rim without any tyre at all. He finished with minutes to spare & spent the evening working on his rim with steel wool & a file, fronting up the next morning with a new tube, refurbished rim & the original tyre still intact.

1993: Won by Ian Thompson of NSW. This race was shortened to just three days with 21 competitors completing 100% of the distance.

1994: At the pre-race briefing the Ranger advised riders to avoid looking like a wild donkey or camel, as a helicopter cull of feral animals would be taking place around them during the race. A violent dust storm broke up the pack as they fought their way into Birdsville for the finish. Dennis Litvenski made a solo getaway to win the stage.

1995: Bob & Jayne Simpson finish 100% riding a tandem. Pat Meldrum kept going for 40km after his handlebars broke, riding by hanging on to half a bar and the head stem to complete the stage.



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1996: Mostly favourable conditions finally allow 22 competitors to claim victory over the Desert, including the first two women to complete 100%.

1997: From one extreme to another Possibly the worst conditions ever greet riders, with only two managing to complete the distance. The 46 competitors included slightly shell-shocked entrants from Japan, Canada, Switzerland & the UK.

1998: One of the hottest years, with temperatures in the mid forties. Fortunately recent rain had filled dams, providing an unusual opportunity for riders to have a refreshing 'swim' during several race stages. A team from a Queensland University performs 'research' on volunteers, deducing that riders are often dehydrated, overcooked and quite possibly completely insane.

1999: A notoriously sandy course had defeated all but two of the competitors by lunchtime on Day 2. Overnight rain had riders floundering in a quagmire of sticky black mud on Day Four, much to the delight of the journalists from 'Inside Sport' magazine.

2000: A dramatic evacuation was required when rider Andrew Rubins sustained a dislocated shoulder, fractured neck of femur and fractured humerus after crashing on the first day. Jack Oldfield from Alice Springs wins for the third consecutive year.

2001: A great year for those who came to the Desert for the umpteenth time seeking to lay their personal demons to rest. 21 riders completed

100% in relatively benign conditions with the exception of the bum-shredding surface of the Inside Track.

2002: Andy 'Grim' Griffiths is promoted from Sweep to Race Director. Lots of repeat riders but most were disappointed with just three completing the 100%.

2003: Now under the auspices of Trent Taylor from Synergy Sport the event gets a good rain soaking, resulting in a shortened Day Two. Little soft sand & cool conditions make it possible for all but two competitors to complete the course.

2004: Even more rain resulted in a shortened course which featured more mud than sand. A strong turnout had hoped to see former Sweep Andy 'Grim' Griffiths suffer the unspeakable humiliation of being swept himself. Unfortunately he snuck through to complete his 2nd 100% finish. Jaap Viergever wins by nearly 3 & ½ hours.

2005: Jaap is back & again finding the improved conditions just too easy. Officials begin starting him an hour behind the field, just so he has someone to chase for a while.

2006: A small field is blessed with generally mild conditions except for rip-snorting headwinds. Smooth & fast conditions on the Inside Track are a pleasant surprise for all.



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Race Preparation: Packing

The big question for support crews: how to fit a cyclist, bike, assorted cycling equipment, support crew members, bedding, tent, clothing, food, water (lots) recovery gear, spare fuel, table, chairs, stove, lighting, shade tarp, and who only knows what else into a standard 4WD?

Don't forget that you need to be able to pack this all up in the dark at around 4:30am & load and unload twice a day. Probably on your own as your rider is going to be sod all help once he or she starts cycling

Firstly – a roofrack is pretty much essential. This is useful for securing a tarp for shade at the lunch break, as well as storing lightweight, bulky items such as personal items and bedding. It's a good place for a second spare tyre too. Empty water containers can also be tossed up on the roofrack as the trip progresses. Rubbish can also be stored there until we reach the disposal point in Birdsville.

Inside the vehicle keep the weight low and forward as much as possible. Water is ideally transported in 20 -25 litre containers of heavy duty plastic. Replace the taps with the flat bungs so the taps don't get damaged. Sheets of heavy cardboard in between containers can help prevent damage in transit.

Bikes are easiest to transport if boxed and stored inside the vehicle. The flattened bike box can later be used as a platform on which to park your bike, protecting the tyres from thorns.

Store cycling gear: helmet, shoes, hydration pack, sunnies, gloves, knicks & tops, pump, spares and

tools, in a storage bin or soft bag up on the roofrack until race start.

Minimise the amount of personal gear you lug along – keeping it simple keeps it easier. One warm outfit is useful for cold mornings. Include gloves and beanie. Otherwise a couple of sets of shorts/t shirt and a pair of protective shoes (lots of thorns around) are adequate.

You will need chairs for each member of your group – those that collapse into a compact tube are easiest to pack; and also a sturdy table.

Fluorescent lights which run off a vehicle cigarette lighter are useful and can be hung off the roofrack. Store these in an easily accessible place in the front cabin of the vehicle. Sunset is around 6pm so the evening meal is often cooked after dark.

There are inexpensive, basic camp stoves with a single burner which run off small disposable gas canisters available. The flat, fold out model is compact and easy to use. Or there are countless more elaborate options.

Accommodation is a matter of personal preference. Those using swags are much envied as they roll up bed, mattress, pillow and bedding in a blink of an eye and toss the bundle up on the roofrack. Although they are less envied should it start to rain.

If you decide to bring tents – avoid the large, multi-room family model that takes six people half an hour to put up in calm conditions. The Desert is renowned for howling winds so go for something one or two people can manage easily.



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Heavy duty plastic bins are useful for stowing food, cooking gear and odds and ends that you need to get to easily. You will also need a variety of straps and tie downs to secure the load. As food supplies diminish the empty bins can be used to store bagged rubbish (up on the roof).

Food-wise: try to keep glass and packaging to a minimum. Decant items into resealable snaplock bags where possible.

Vehicle recovery equipment should include a minimum of shovel and snatch strap. A number of vehicles in the convoy will be carrying heavy duty compressors (for reinflating tyres) and winches, so these are not essential for all vehicles. A second spare tyre is recommended, however the majority of punctures seem to occur on the way in to Purni Bore. Keeping your speed down and slightly dropping your tyre pressures once off the bitumen and on to the stony tracks leading in to the Desert will help prevent these.

General Update:

Updated promotional packs are now available as a download from the website. These provide background on the event to assist when approaching potential sponsors, or for fundraising activities.

See you out there ...

Gaye (Flipper)

