

100 Miles

Contributed by scott
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Please put your tray tables up and return your seats to their full and upright position:

As the wheels of our 747 touched down at Sydney International Airport the full weight of our situation settled onto the tarmac with an audible thud ? my brother and I are about to begin a 10,000 mile lap around Australia. Back in the states it was easy to wax poetic about our traveling philosophies, but as you stand at the proverbial starting line of a 10-month marathon, all abstract reasoning fades into obscurity. It's hard not to feel small, weak and unprepared.

The first 100 miles of our trip have been interesting to say the least ? but I suppose most good trips are. After dodging the airport traffic and peddling a disturbingly effort laden 10-miles into the heart of Sydney, I was immediately taken aback by the countless Christmas advertisements. What made this particularly hard to absorb wasn't the fact that the Aussie's had beaten America to the Christmas buying rush (after all, they don't have Thanksgiving and Black Friday as a starting gun) but that they had so readily embarrassed the ?White Christmas? theme. You see, Australia is in the southern hemisphere, which means Christmas is in the heart of summer. Passing window displays and billboards glittered with fake snow when it's a toasty 85 degrees outside is hard for the mind to embrace. I can only imagine how confusing this must be to their children.

Nonetheless, we didn't have much time to linger in Sydney; after all, we had an adventure to get on with. So on Sunday morning, November 9th, we enjoyed a traditional Australian breakfast of poached eggs, beans, flaccid bacon (that's how they like it) toast, a beer, then headed south out of the city.

Weaving our way south it didn't take long for our first 100 miles to become marked by many ?one-hundreds?:

100 - Honking cars. We are still trying to translate the Australian car horn. As far as we can tell, a series of 5-10 short horn bust is a ?G-day and good luck?, while one or two long horn blast ? often accompanied by clever hand gestures? are often meant to encourage us to move closer to the shoulder of the road. This problem is compounded by the fact that we must constantly resist the overwhelming urge to veer into oncoming traffic. Australians drive on the left side of the road and our right-handed American brains are having a hard time grasping this fact.

100 - Bites from the common Australian fly. And by ?common? I mean that they are everywhere. Dozens of them hover overhead at any given moment just waiting for the most convenient moment to dive-bomb us like kamikaze pilots. Sunscreen and bug repellent only seem to marinate the skin. I have inadvertently added no less than half a dozen of said flies to my diet. Pat and I have been forced to purchase giant bug nets that cover the entire head. While practical, they tend to make us look like flamboyant modern-day train robbers (see pic).

100 ? Genuinely interested well-wishers. I cannot overstate how welcome the Australian people have made us feel. We

have had complete strangers offer us a bed and a meal, give us groceries, and one sympathetic National Park employee even allowed us camp illegally in the park after we overestimated how far we thought we could ride in a day.

As these 100 miles come to a close it's finally beginning to feel like we're firing on all cylinders. Our legs don't complain like they did at first, we've figured out to how to properly distribute the load on our bikes, and each mile seems to click by on the GPS faster than the last. And it's a good thing that our growing pains are coming to an end because the Australian spring will soon be replaced by summer's 100+ degree temperatures; as well as days on end of traveling without a town in sight ? I can't help but wonder if we are ready.

All that being said, at the end of the day these 100 miles really only translate into one concrete fact; and that is that we still have 9,900 miles more to go ? or in other words we've completed 1% of the trip.