

Doing Something Different

If you are on the look out for your next scenic adventure, *Gail Rehbein* has road tested the perfect bike ride festival for you to get peddling on.

Last November, I did something that I've never done before. Not that doing something different is unusual for me. I did my first yoga headstand at 50! But my yoga headstand lasted less than a minute. This new adventure would take nine days. A rolling bike festival, known as the RACV Great Victorian Bike Ride. I cycled for nine days through amazing landscape from the Grampians to the Great Ocean Road.

For three months, it had been just a concept, an idea, an aspiration. Now, my GreatVic is real. I've ridden the miles, seen the sights, felt the strain and the jubilation; and here is my experience of this bicycle ride through the landscape of south eastern Australia.

On rides like the GreatVic everybody has a different experience. While I ride slowly through the landscape, others speed across the asphalt. Some leave camp early. Others leave late. Some stop for photos, while others keep rolling. For some riders, the distances are a breeze. For other it's hard work. I love climbing hills, but there are cyclists who approach the hills with great apprehension. Some revel in talking as they pedal. Others settle in for a quiet ride.

Every day is different. The first day was filled with travelling and settling into the Grampians

campsite: registering, selecting a tent, unpacking our bikes, preparing our camp, collecting our GreatVic jerseys and learning how things happen for meals, showers and phone charging.

Day Two, the riding began and the magnificent Grampians National Park greeted us with a cool 4 degrees, a few long hills, plenty of gorgeous gum trees and views of dramatic escarpments. By day's end, we were walking around the new campsite in shorts and singlets under a blue-sky evening. After months of anticipation, I felt happy that my GreatVic had begun.

The heat of the previous afternoon didn't last. During the pre-dawn hours, chills ran through me as I lay in my sleeping bag. I couldn't get warm and started to think I might be getting sick. Daybreak showed the tents were blanketed with frost. No wonder I was cold. A cup of hot tea and a bowl of porridge warmed me up and I pedalled out for another day of simply riding.

The third day delivered mostly downhill riding and long straight roads lined with paddocks of sheep, wheat and dams full from recent rains. We faced a light headwind, blue skies and plenty of rest stops where we could refill our water bottles. As the temperatures warmed, staying hydrated was

important. For reasons that I still don't understand, day three was my most challenging day for the entire event. Was it the dry heat? Was it the scarcity of trees in the landscape? Was I simply adjusting to something completely new?

Day Four brought our longest day of riding and my personal highlight. We enjoyed fabulous weather and spectacular scenery. Rural paddocks sprinkled with dairy cows or thoroughbred horses. Roads lined with clusters of wattle or families of gums. We ended the day with salt air in our lungs as we hit the Great Ocean Road.

The Great Ocean Road rolls up and down with hills mirroring great ocean swells. The infamous Lavers Hill is a demanding 20km climb but my touring bike carried me up with confidence. Limestone stacks surrounded by ocean. Amazing stands of gum trees, tree ferns and tiny roadside daisies, as we pedalled through the Otway National Park towards Apollo Bay for a well-deserved rest day.

As with most supported cycling holidays, the RACV Great Victorian Bike Ride has options to suit different riders. I rode the 9-day tour but there are also 5-day and 3-day options. At Apollo Bay, we said goodbye to the 5-day riders and hello to the 3-day riders.





The GreatVic offers a variety of camping options. You can bring a tent and set it up yourself. Or you can have a tent supplied, assembled and dismantled for you. That's what we chose and it was a good choice for the ease it brought. Each morning, we'd pack our bags, hand them to the friendly guy on our allocated luggage truck and then our bags would be waiting at the next festival site. Our tent for the night would also be waiting, and already set up.

Along with this community of tents, each festival site had a large marquee – known as Café de Canvas – for dining, drinking and dancing. Every night there was entertainment – a band in the marquee, a movie on a huge outdoor screen and drinks at the Spokes Bar. A quiet night, early to bed, was also a realistic option.

From Apollo Bay our final three days included pedalling around cliffs, across watery inlets, past gum trees where koalas slept and hugging the ocean in all its colours. The view from my handlebars was magnificent! A bubbling excitement carried us along as the close of the nine days neared. Crossing the finish line after completing 559 kms was an emotional moment that morphed into a lingering euphoria. It seeps out as I remember the places we pedalled, the people we met, the challenges we shared and I felt a deep sense of satisfaction with my GreatVic.



Photo credit: Bicycle Network

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ABOUT /

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Gail is a bicycle-riding writer who has a knack for guiding people through change. This article is an extract from her forthcoming book about her bicycle project. To discover more about Gail and cycling through change, head to:



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