

11hrs and 50 Minutes after leaving our cars for a very early morning ride at Lake Wanum, we returned to the cars on the back of a Ute minus the Bikes

The last hour had been walking through thick bush, stumbling over coconuts, getting our gear stuck on the vines and vicious plants, until we stumbled onto the 4WD track 3km from our cars. We then find our rescue vehicle bogged in mud. Our elation at being found (when we were unsure which direction we were even going) was tempered by the thought of a 3km walk through a muddy track.

We'd had no water for a long time, were all physically exhausted and in without a doubt the worst condition ever after a ride, and we'd left our bikes an hours walk away.

Luckily our rescuer Rahui, found a guy with a tractor which pulled the Land cruiser out, and we were off. The ride was bumpy as hell and every part of our body hurt already but we knew our cars and a cold SP beer were minutes away.

The first energy drink didn't hit the sides, and we rehydrated enough to finally smile and remove the mud encrusted gear. We were covered in mud from head to toe, as during our walk we had to cross four creeks that had mud lined sides (turns out was the same creek).

For a short fat guy getting out of a 4foot tall mud covered riverbank it was comedy for all. The water was incredibly refreshing, but with constant calls of watch out for the crocodile, the panic got the better of me several times. Later on we found out we only needed to cross it once

The SP Lager cans were heaven and the injury toll was revealed. Blistered feet, cramped arms & legs, arms scratched, muscles aching, every part of the body sore, sunburn like you would not believe. Walking for days afterwards was agony, along with the constant itching from wearing sweaty gear for 12hrs.

This is not a fairy tale, more a tale of riding with a couple of fairies.

It all started when we discussed how easy it would be to circumnavigate the lake - it's a fucking highway declared Chris the night before on our 12th beer. Considering we had done 1km of the 12km journey in 4hrs two weeks before, he received a few strange looks but we made plans for a 6.30 departure from Lae the next day.

The 6.30 departure became 7.00 as we discussed the trip for some time that night.

5 Riders set off from the cars on bikes at 8am. Myself, Chris, Brad, Framey and Rahui - 2 Ktm 300cc 2 strokes and 3 big bore 4 strokes. Brad, Chris and I had been down maybe 10% of the way before, and somehow forgot about the off camber grass hills, 2 metre tall kunai grass and were telling the boys how much fun the hill climbs were.

Brad on his KTM set the tone for a hard day by slipping off the side of a track (Once one bikes been through it's a track.) on a dodgy slope and bike and rider landed a long way down.

The combination of the slope, wet kunai and the sun almost finished Brad off before he started. Lucky he was riding a KTM not some pretty boy bike (i.e just pick your fave mardi gras colour of blue, yellow, red or green), and showed true courage to fight his way back to us.

We had prepared seriously that morning. We carried 5 litres of water per rider plus we all drunk bucket loads beforehand. Someone forgot to tell the sun gods as Lae experienced one of its hottest days in years. The next couple of ridges were conquered with ease, till we came to a long downhill. Rahui went down first and in the process lost his 10 kina sunglasses, resulting in us all spending half an hour looking for them, as he claimed they were his most valuable possession.

It was at this time Framey's KTM450 Exc became temperamental, and did not want to start. Soon the battery was flat, and the continued kicking in the blazing hot sun soon destroyed him. He got it going eventually and we were off, finding more unexplored ridges and sensational views.

Close to the furthest point we had been the last time we rode here, Rahui and Framey said they had enough (this was around 9.30am) - as there was the highlights of a Parade in Sydney they desperately wanted to watch on TV, so we waved goodbye to our fairy friends....

Open grassy hilltops, hill climbs to challenges the best rider, burnt off ridges and stunning scenery greeted Brad, Chris and I over the next few hours.

We made our way down a 2 metre wide ridge to a small inhabited area and had our first view of the lake from close-up. The brackish smelly water we expected and what everyone had assumed was not present. Instead, crystal clear water made for a refreshing place to cool ourselves down, with a view to rival the best resort. Our conversation was about one thing only - Crocs, and were they present (we later found out YES).

Over the next hour the ridges got steeper, they were rock filled and rutted and several attempts were required on some of the more challenging climbs. On some ridges you were faced with a line with no margin for error. Any mistake and you would face the possibility of watching your bike fall 100metres down the side of the slope...with you following it down to your demise. 100% commitment was absolutely needed on these hills

Our second lakeside water stop was brought on by the incessant sun; I had lost my hat and was over heating badly, from the result of several unsuccessful attempts at a hill which would have been difficult in the Roof of Africa or Romaniacs Extreme enduros.

I barely have the skills and coordination to cut an apple in half without cutting myself - , let alone ride up scary as hell hills with full commitment

Not helping was my KTM was missing and dying on me at the worst possible moments and with no elec starter and short legs, it got harder each time. Brad helped get my bike up (the first of several times). The relentless heat forced us to seek shelter and we found a palm tree near the edge of the lake which provided cover for an hour with us up to the waist in water. We applied water to our necks and heads non-stop as our body temps were so high you could have fried an egg on my bald head.

Riding in PNG in the tropical heat with 10kg of gear on, lifting the bike up a dozen times, with not a breath of wind, carrying a few extra kgs of protection in the stomach area is not ideal. Throw in the remnants of a pile of SP Lager, and people ask how can it be fun?

Bloody oath it's fun the next day.

We discussed what would happen if we could not make the second half of the journey - there was no possibility of returning the way we came, our water was almost gone and we were reluctant to drink the lake water. I tried it purely out of desperation, and no side effects were noted.

The boys began humming the Deliverance banjo tune and talking about my 'purty mouth' and it became funnier when they started talking about which part of the human body was the tastiest to eat. Pre-empting their interest in eating me (being the fattest one) I stood up, unzipped and boldly told them that this was the fattest part of me and if they were hungry to suck on this. The redneck jokes cheered us up no end.

Brad recorded a message for his partner, Jade on his go pro advising that if she is watching this we have eaten the fat one, and almost made it. Chris piped up and said that if Framey was with us we would have gotten all the way around (get hold of the video coverage its piss funny)

One hill totally changed everything. This monster destroyed any fight left in us. Chris got up it, but no matter how heroic our attempts were, Brad and I couldn't make it. We made the fateful decision to ride around the side of the hill which had a slope worse than anything we had done. Brad got about 20 metres then ended up sliding down beside the bike to the bottom. He then spent what seemed like ages trying to get the bike off the bottom of the slope.

I got a similar distance, lost the bike and it fell on the wrong angle, the wheels facing upwards.

I turned it around, went 2 metres and it fell again, 2 more and so on and so on. I had progressed 20 metres forward and fallen down 10 times (did I mention it was so steep you couldn't stand up) and exhausted I lay in the grass as my skin was baking like a

lobster. Brad had ridden his bike out and conquered the next major hill, and I was left all alone.

The smell of burning flesh should have led Brad and Chris to me easily. Anyone who knows me knows I am seriously allergic to hot sun, and experience major problems when overheated. I knew that water was 30 metres below me so courtesy of my new bark busters I simply kicked the bike over on its side...and again and again and again and it got to the bottom of the hill.

How I was going to get it out was not on my mind at the time.. I had felt my heartbeat earlier and it was off the chart. I started thinking of heart attacks, I was seriously panicking.

Then my phone rings and its Cunno, (our non-riding, drinking partner) wanting to go for a beer. I politely explained that I was a bit busy and would ring him back. Oblivious to my situation our discussion about the All Blacks thrashing Australia at rugby (again) let me forget about my dilemma for a while.

Having a Digicel tower close by certainly helped us later in the day, as being able to communicate with Rahui kick started our rescue hours earlier than it would have. Half an hour later I heard voices, Chris and Brad were wading towards me from around the corner of the lake (I kid you not, wading in waist deep water towards where I was resting).

They found me in a disoriented state up to my neck in the cool water and I admitted that I had sent a text earlier to them, saying to go on and if they saw any locals in canoes to send back for me, plus some other rambling which they have agreed not to mention!.

Chris had ridden down a long slope, Brad had left his bike at the top and walked down.

But they came for me.

With Brad riding my bike and me walking we got out of that shitty valley. It took 45 minutes and 6 attempts from Chris & Brad to get up one hill but we got out - and I think walking with riding boots on was the worst part of the day - (walk up a hill with riding boots full of water with 1 metre high grass some time).

The bogging problem my bike experienced was gone courtesy of it tumbling down the slope. Throughout the next 20 minutes we covered close to a quarter of the entire distance around the lake, all the ridges led onto each other, we were racing around in hill climb paradise and had forgotten for a short while the perils we'd been in.

I'd received frequent texts in the afternoon from Rahui / Framey updating on their own perils. Not knowing the short way out, they went back the way we came, which was bloody hard in reverse. Framey's bike was still playing up and with a lack of any shade the boys were getting cooked badly. Rahui made it up the last major hill climb first, Framey almost got there but the bike died and tumbled and cart wheeled 2 times.

Where it lay was not an ideal place to go up or down so they were forced to drag it 10 metres up a hill - 10 metres would seem like a mile in those conditions.

The boys rested under makeshift Kunai shelters, with Rahui right at home, being a forestry boy, snuggled under his impressive shelter. Half an hour later Framey braced himself and kicked the hell out of the bike, and kicked and kicked and kicked. Then Rahui remembered the fuel was off... Unbeknown to Framey, Rahui had turned the fuel off earlier when dragging the bike to avoid fuel loss while on its side.

I don't know what words were exchanged but it would have been bloody funny to see the look on Framey's face, the kicking had killed him again so another 15 mins was spent resting. They made it out shortly after, but when they got to the vehicles disaster struck, the esky with water and beers was locked in my car.

Framey thought about smashing a window but Rahui talked him out of it. They settled for a hot coke from the nearby trade store. They got safely home but suffered badly from sunstroke and dehydration.

Our group of 3 merry men meanwhile had reached the tree line at the end of the hills at 6.00pm, and we knew we were about 1 km from the track. We estimated we were 4 km from our utes and that we had 15 minutes of daylight left.

And we absolutely knew we were up shit creek in a barbed wire canoe without a paddle.

In front of us was typical thick PNG bush. We looked to try and find some sign of life or trail that would mark the way to the 4wd road. I'd rung Rahui earlier and requested assistance as it was obvious then we had to walk out. We found some gardens which led away from the hills and this led us to the remnants of an old track. We got our bikes probably 100 metres along it and came to a creek - about 2 metres wide but a metre & half deep, half full of water, and walking in it we sunk to our knees in mud. We had nothing to cut any trees down to make a bridge so we left the bikes behind.

We thought we could hear a motorbike and myself and Brad were in favour of lighting a fire using fuel from the Hondas tank to attract attention. Chris was against the idea as we wanted to leave the fuel in the tank and then light it. We said goodbye to our bikes with Brad worried that they would be stolen.

I ventured that if they could steal them from where they were left they would be better riders than us. One long hour of walking through the bush, being worried about getting lost, terribly thirsty and fatigued and we hear a bike engine close by, its Rahui going to fetch the tractor to get his cruiser out of the mud.

Upon reaching the 4WD Track & seeing the ute we exchanged relieved looks with each other (actually the look Brad gave Chris was like the highly gay look Frodo gives Sam in the Lord of the Rings).

Too exhausted to talk we fell to the ground. Just to top our day off our rescue vehicle is stuck in a mud hole. All we can do is look on and wait. Our day was summed up by one of the Locals looking at us in shock when we commented on swimming in the Lake, advising us that there are always people eaten by the Crocs in the Lake!

BUT IT GETS FUNNIER

Two weeks after later we had a track cut in the bush and were able to reach the lake within 15 minutes of leaving the car. Chris, Dan Hargreaves and I spent an afternoon climbing some simply unbelievable hills. A week later Chris & I attempted to ride to the top of Mt Ngereneno, which overlooks the airport, using the Lake as access.

We got to within 50 metres of the summit but in a bizarre incident, Chris's Honda went over the edge of a hill, bounced, bounced again and bounced another half dozen times coming to rest 80 metres down... in more than one piece. Our expressions were ones of shock, we looked at each other in disbelief.

You couldn't tow it out, you couldn't double the rider out and with riding boots on you couldn't walk out. There were close to 15 very large ridges to go up and down, .and there was the incessant tropical heat. I left Chris in a gully with what water we had left and returned on my KTM to the car and went for help. I was unsure at the time as to what possible help I could organise.

NOW When someone now asks how fast can a Honda go, I show them the photos of the Honda being airlifted by a Chopper and say "pretty damn fast" – but that's a whole other story