**Woodend-Castlemaine 3-Day MTB Trek**

**Day 1 Notes**

***Total Ride Distance 56km (but about 30km of that is on roads / fire trail)***

**Wombat Track**

Enter from Boldiston Rd. Start riding counter-clockwise. Do first half of Stage 1 loop, then cross onto Stage 2 loop. Turn off Wombat Track onto Burnt Mill Rd to join Distillery Loop.

**Distillery / Rooters DH**

A diversion off the Wombat Track will send you deep into the Wombat State forest. Through over grown fire trails, old motorbike tracks, and sampling the joys of "Distillery Track" and "Rooter's Downhill". Distillery Track is a gradual descent through tight single track with a few surprise obstacles to negotiate. Rooter's Downhill is a flowing, fun and fast single track with log role overs, jumps, berms and bridges. A short climb gets you to the top of another fun flowing downhill section that finishes with the famous "100 planker bridge", a perfect photo opportunity place so make sure you are smiling for the cameras.

**Byers Back Track**

Byers Back Track is one of my favourite rides. It runs for approximately 12 kms eastwards from Blackwood out to O'Brien's Crossing. The trip can be undertaken as a one way trip with a car shuttle but it is quite easy to do the return trip so a return trip is recommended.

It is quite hard to categorise this ride in terms of difficulty. The route largely follows old water races which were cut into the mountainside to transfer water from dams or the river to downstream alluvial gold workings where panning for gold would be undertaken. As water originally flowed in them, the old water courses are basically level and follow the contours of the hillside meaning that the ride is relatively easy from a gradient point of view. Despite being relatively flat, the ride does present technical challenges along the way such as rocks, fallen trees, washouts, stairs, steep drop offs and loose surfaces and due to this the ride is only for experienced riders..

The first section starts on bitumen for a couple of kilometres, gravel for a couple of kilometres and then single track to O'Briens Crossing. The first section passes through the cottages on the outskirts of town before starting to follow the river gorge. The vegetation is largely gum trees for most of the way but as the track gets more elevated in the steeper sections of the gorge, the forest varies and provides excellent views out over the gorge.

A number of mines and gold diggings are passed on the way along the trail. The first mine is on the right in the first section of gravel road and another is just after the start of the Byers Back Track. Both are in 'good' condition but should not be entered. It's worth the short steep walk down to Tunnel Point at Gribbles track. The tunnel was built by miners to divert the river. When you get to bottom of track, you will see the entrance. It's currently covered by a shitload of trees from a recent flood but if you go up and over the entrance you'll see the outlet which is more impressive in any case. Be careful near the top as there is a big drop near the outlet - nothing dangerous if you're not stuffing around.

During the gold rush days where there were horseshoe bends in rivers, the miners used to tunnel through the mountain in the centre of the horseshoe to divert the river so they could drain the river in between so they could undertake alluvial mining. I have seen quite a few of these through Victoria but this is the best example that I have seen.

**Safety Notes (Byers Back Track)**

It should also be noted that obstacles can present themselves quite quickly - in particular steps which tend to be hidden from view on steeper drops. I have included some photos of typical obstacles on the route so that you can be aware of them prior to the ride.

It is suggested that riders maintain a degree of separation when in single file, as quick stops are sometimes required by the lead rider. I have ridden the trail in dry and wet conditions and the experience is quite different.

As the path is largely an old water race, you tend to get a lot of ponding on the trail during wet weather and, combined with the large amount of leaf litter, the track becomes quite slippery as do any wooden stair surfaces, rocks, etc.

Obviously care should be undertaken as appropriate. In the section approaching the O'Brien's Crossing area, there are very steep drop offs (say up to 30 metres) from the trail and due care should be undertaken on these stretches. The trail is largely reasonably wide but there are a number of sections that narrow considerably. If you're not confident, walk these sections as it is a long way out if injured.

Mines should not be entered. If venturing off path on foot, caution should be exercised in case there are shafts or loose materials though these are relatively limited in the area compared to the Blackwood - Simmons Reef area.

My last word of warning is snakes - I went through in mid May 2008 on a nice day and spotted a snake on the trail. I normally would not have expected them this late in the season.

If you do get into trouble in the gorge and you are in the eastern area of the trail, Gribble Track and Ambler Lane provide short but steep exits from the gorge out onto O'Brien's Road. In the western section of the trail, Kangaroo Track is a possible option to get out but is a reasonably lengthy walk out. These tracks are marked where they cross Byers Back Track with the various distance options out of the Gorge.

**DAY 2 NOTES**

**Total Ride Distance Blackwood – Hepburn Springs**

***Opt A (via Wombat Ck Rd and Three Lost Children Walk) : 39km***

***Opt B (via Sailors Falls and Goldfields Track Wallaby Section) : 38km***

Follow the GDT out of town. The first bit is single track for about 8k's. Follow this route - Simmons Reef Road, Skinners Road, look for trail head post on right of road. When you get to first signposted trail intersection, go straight ahead (not right). You can then just follow the track around shown in red below. You'll finally get to a big mine shaft and cross a big log. Go left to get to Garden of St Erth. Cross the car car park and head into the pine grove, pick up the trail on the left just before you get to the road (Lerderderg Heritage Walk / GDT). This will take you a fair way on some good single track. I went through this area with a chainsaw last week so the trail is nice and clear for you! This will take you to the end of the red line below on single track.

I'd probably road it from there up to Nolan Creek Picnic area for a break (old sawmill site). From there on I'd either follow the GDT or just make it up as you go along. There are some nice trails in there. The GDT passes the remains of a Blatic refugee camp and a couple of mine sites I believe. If you cannot locate route, tell me and I'll dig out a map - they're currently discontinued selling the map but I've got a copy somewhere. I have ridden the Goldfields Trail into Daylesford - mainly fire roads but worth riding to see Sailors Falls and the lake.

Below is the entry to the tunnel with all of the flood stuff in it - you can see the river going in in the photo. Climb up and over the saddle in the photo and you'll get to see it without trees! This is a good spot for a break as the river on the other side is in a nice location. Gribbles Track is behind us when looking at the photo. It's very steep so just leave the bikes in the bush near Byers Back Track - it's only 100-200 metres down to the tunnel area - you'll have trouble enough walking the trail though I have walked up it with a bike as there's a trail coming down the opposite spur but that's another story...

There's a mine adit on the Byers Back track back towards Blackwood which is pretty nifty (can't miss it). I wouldn't go into most of the mines as most are in shitty slaty rock which always worries me. If you do want to go into one, there is one in good rock as you come down into Blackwood. When you get to the end of Byers Back Track and back on the gravel road, you'll go round a big hairpin bend. Keep an eye out for the mine entry on the left. I haven't been in that entrance and it was locked for some time but there is another entry down the side trail as shownn in pic below about 100 metres and up on the left. The guy that showed it to me actually camps in it when he goes up there! His logic is it can be 0 degree outside but year round its about 10-15 in there. He took me in a reasonable way but he said you can actually spend about 3/4 of an hour wandering around in there and there are eating areas for the miners as it has a number of runs under the mountain. Obviously you'll need a torch and 5 mins was enough for me but it was interesting just to see what the mines were like...





**Day 3: Ride the Dry Diggings Track**

**Total distance:**61km

**Total time:**5 - 6 hours \*

***Opt A: 32km riding.*** *Get a lift in the ute to the intersection of Porcupine Ridge Rd and Dry Diggings Trail*

***Opt B: 41km riding.*** *Starts off with a climb from Hepburn Springs to Porcupine Ridge.*

1. **Daylesford to Chocolate Mill (8km) *SKIP THIS IF WE GET A LIFT***   
   Again it’s easy to be fooled by the long descent from Daylesford to Hepburn Springs, these first few kilometers belie the truth that is to come. The steep climbing through the northern end of the Hepburn Regional Park will make you feel as though Daylesford is trying to draw you back, but once past the Chocolate Mill and the letterboxes at Sawpit Gully Rd you will be set free into the sweet singletrack of the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park.
2. **Chocolate Mill to Vaughan Springs (21km)**  
   Now on the northern side of the Dividing Range you’ll find drier, rockier terrain and stands of box eucalypts jostling for position in unforgiving soils. Soon you’ll cross Porcupine Ridge Rd and start what is widely acknowledged as the best mountain biking section along the entire length of the Goldfields Track. A gradual descent, the track winds through fascinating old mine sites, long vanished villages and awesome geological features before dropping into the beautiful Vaughan Springs picnic area.
3. **Vaughan Springs to Castlemaine (19km)**  
   From this point there is a brief section of tarmac before the track reenters the forest and winds toward Fryerstown. Dense bushland is occasionally broken by moonscape like clearings revealing vast expanses of reef rock, look closely and you may spot a remnant streak of gold passing under your tyres. More flowy singletrack takes you past the Spring Gully mine site and following a steep pinch up the Monk you arrive at the Poverty Gully water race - this engineering marvel still carries water to paying customers 140 years after its construction. Nowadays it doubles as a shared walking and cycling trail providing an unforgettable finish to a great day’s riding.