

FROM OCEAN TO OCEAN

ACROSS A CONTINENT ON A BICYCLE

AN ACCOUNT OF A SOLITARY RIDE FROM ADELAIDE TO
PORT DARWIN

JEROME J. MURIF

This edition has been produced using the original edition annotated and corrected by Jerome Murif, kept at the State Library of South Australia.

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Foreword

I was cycling on the Oodnadatta Track, between the small pub of Williams Creek and the ghost town of Edwards Creek. Battling against winds, slowed down to a miserable speed of 4 km/h, panting, grunting. I was dragging 20 litres of water, and kilograms upon kilograms of food. The sand, the sun, the heat, the flies, and that merciless headwind: it wasn't an easy ride. It was hell.

But I thought about Jerome Murif. I just had read his account of how he had first crossed Australia, South to North, in just 74 days. I was in my 45th day, and only a third of the way. Knowing that he could cross the continent in so little time, 120 years ago, when sealed roads were a distant dream, and when even dirt roads were seen as a rarity. Well, it didn't make me feel better at all.

It was 2015. I had a good bike, I had a GPS, a phone, a solar panel, dehydrated food, the dirt road was easy to follow, and usually of good quality. There were “shops” every 200 kilometres, even though they usually only stocked a couple of overpriced items, sometimes of doubtful use, like this fuel stop only having lasagne sheets. Sadly I didn't think of packing an oven on my bike. But the point is, compared to the ordeals Murif had to face, my trip was a luxurious holiday.

Murif left Adelaide on March 1897 without much fanfare, as no bicycle manufacturer accepted to sponsor him, and he found no one willing to accompany him on that trip. He took 74 days to reach Palmerston (now called Darwin), over a terrain that is considered as more difficult than the Nullarbor, because of the long sand sections, where he had to walk and push his bike for miles and miles. Only six months earlier, in 1896, Arthur Richardson crossed the vast empty flat plain of the Nullarbor from Coolgardie to Adelaide. This was probably that ride that inspired Murif to attempt his overland crossing from South to North, something that had never been done on a bicycle before.

At this time the railway went north from Adelaide as far as Oodnadatta. After that you had to follow vaguely defined horse tracks and the Telegraph line (built in 1872) to Alice Springs, then all the way up north to Port Darwin. There were no towns, and Murif had to rely on the hospitality of telegraph masters and station workers for food, water and shelter when he didn't have to camp out.

The itinerary he was following was far from being random. The railway and telegraph line were closely following a string of artesian springs and waterholes known by the Aborigines who then guided the first white men through the continent.

Murif wasn't trying to establish a record: he took his time and even toured in the MacDonnell Ranges around Alice Springs for a week. This led a number of other cyclists to try and break his "record" just a few weeks after he finished his trip. But the first party failed, and the second party did beat the record only by a few days, after one member getting ill and having to cut the telegraph wire to get help.

Little is known about Murif after his ride was completed. He seemed to have vanished in the anonymous life that he was leading before the trip. According to Jim Fitzpatrick¹ the last trace of him was in a 1898 letter where he complained that "between editing and publishing, such an awful botch was made of the work that I have declined to have anything to do with the printed book".

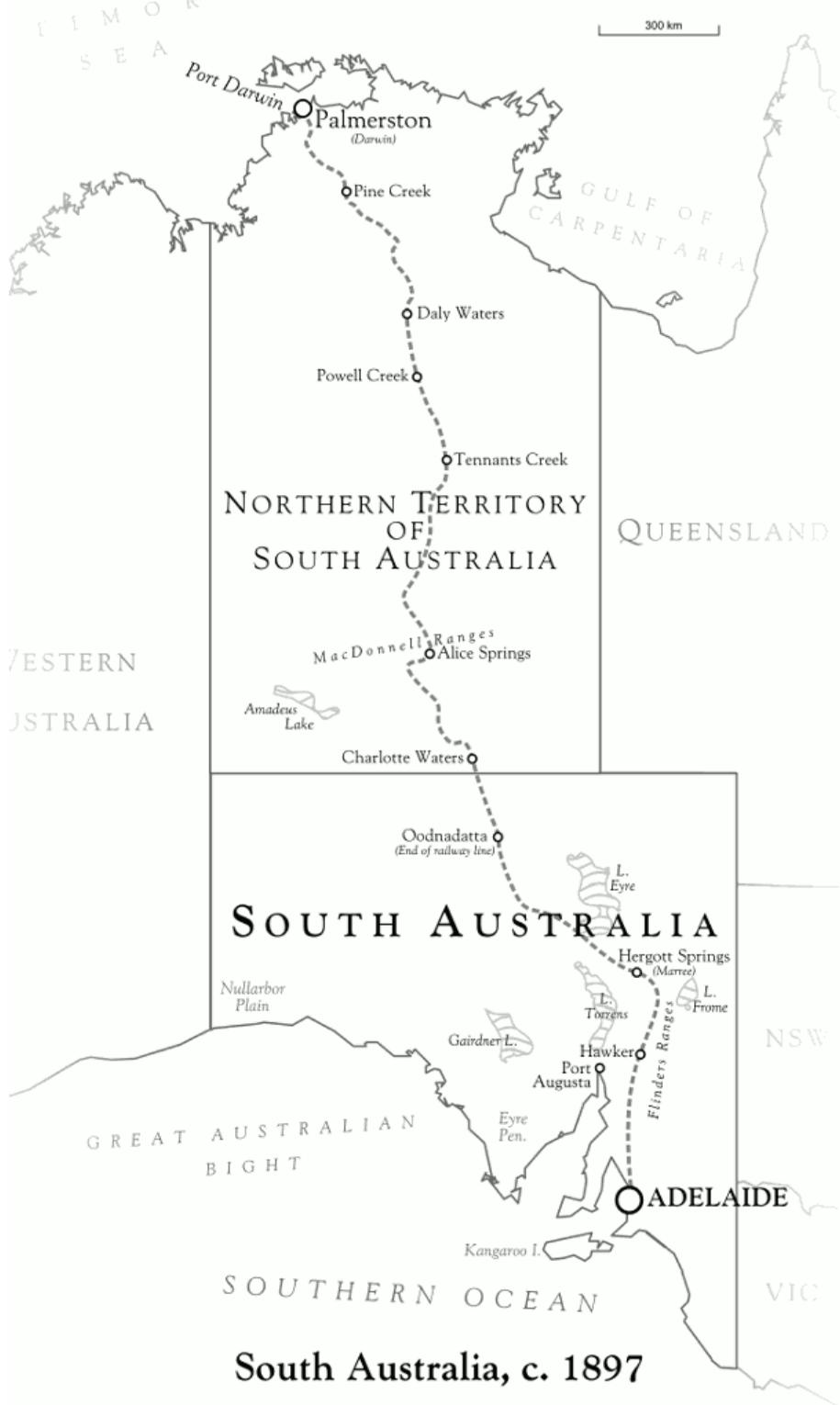
As for me, I made it as far as Alice Springs before I decided to go ride my bike on easier tracks, taking the train back to Adelaide. As I was looking out the window on the vast landscapes unrolling, I was also looking back on the past months in the outback. The trip was hard, but it was also magnificent and nothing like I expected. The beauty of the place is stunning and this experience will stay as one of the best memories of my life. As I was witnessing mulga and

1. The Bicycle and the Bush, 1980

spinifex appear and disappear from sight I thought of the lengthy descriptions Murif used in his account.

It is now clear to me that he liked this trip and its scenery very dearly, and that he was less of a record-setter but more of a traveler, an exploring tourist eager to discover new and exciting places. Just like me, and a long list of people who are crossing Australia on a push-bike every year, something only made possible thanks to the description of the tracks, places and obstacles lying ahead. Just like what Murif did in this book. And for that I am very grateful to have followed his wheel tracks in the sand.

Sylvain Eliade, editor — hære



South Australia, c. 1897

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Note: this book has been annotated with SI (metric) units for reader convenience.

A vague longing to do *something* first flattered, then irritated, then oppressed me. In vain I tried to argumentatively brush it aside, to pooh-pooh it, to laugh it out of countenance. My arsenal of trite well-worn sayings (so commonly the accompaniment of a weak argument) was ransacked for ammunition to once and for all lay out this absurd restlessness. For instance, I resolutely endeavored to persuade myself that of course the maxim was true that "There is nothing new under the sun." I argued that that was as absolutely convincing in my case as a Maxim is in some others. Then I went to sleep, dreamily reflecting that *that* was settled, anyway. In the morning, I was witness that one saying, at any rate, was true : I had convinced myself against my will, and was in reality still longing for that formless *something*.

So I made a bargain with myself to strive to give my longing a local habitation and a name—to set about discovering something to be done that no man had yet even dared.

In my quest of a world to conquer, I bought a book of "Human Records" (which is not to be confounded with "A Human Document") so I might know what spheres had been already vanquished.

There inscribed were the names of the heroes who had sucked the most eggs, eaten the most dumplings, drunk the most liquor, chopped the biggest tree, drawn the most teeth, vaulted the most horses.

I passed these dizzy heights with a sigh. They were far above me. Besides, *cui bono* ?

And then, my mind revolving many things, speeding from one to the other, passing as the bicycle-scorcher passes the mile posts on the road-side—

Of course ! Why, what else could it be ?

To cross Australia on a bicycle, piercing the very heart of a continent, facing dangers, some known and more unknown—it was the very thing.

Now, looking back upon the task accomplished, I confess, with becoming humility, that it was not from a splendid devotion to Science ; it was neither to observe an eclipse of the sun or the moon nor to scour unknown country for the elusive diprotodon; not even in the interests of British Commerce (as represented by Jones's factory or Brown's warehouse), but simply to gratify this craving to do *something* before considerate people dropped me out of sight and out of mind—it was simply for this that I resolved there and then to pedal from Ocean to Ocean on a bicycle.

And when, a month after my task was completed, the Jubilee honours were announced I did not search the list in the expectation of finding myself down for even a peerage.

The *something* had at any rate taken shape at last ; in the first blush of delight the accomplishment seemed a trifling matter of detail. To do, and to be the first to attempt the doing of it, was my object. If that object was to be attained easily, all well. If, on the other hand, there were many dangers and they were safely overcome, then better still.

All I now lay claim to having done was the little all I had the desire to do : to travel a bicycle over every inch of the ground between Glenelg, on a gulf of the Southern Ocean, and Port Darwin, on the Arafura sea, a portion of the Indian Ocean—and to be the first to do it. In no sense of the word has my . machine been conveyed for me ; neither has any conveyance other than the bicycle with which I set out borne me at any time over any part of the journey.

Nevertheless in the fulfilment of my purpose I availed myself of whatever other aids offered. Thus I took full advantage of the hotels *en route*; and when, later on, the region of hotels being passed—and

these benevolent institutions are pitched marvellously far out—I did not ride off into the scrub whenever I suspected that people were ahead of me on the track. Not even the thought that those persons might invite me to a meal daunted me. The proffer of a blanket at night had no terrors for me. And if in the morning my new-made friends could give me some fresh directions, checking my own and serving as a safeguard, I thought none the worse of them.

But we are not on the track yet. Not even in the dressing-room.

* * * *

As the first few to whom I in part confided my intention pooh-pooed the notion, I consulted further with no one ; and as I was not in a position to pick up much information concerning the country to be traversed without disclosing plans which were never mentioned but to be laughed at or declared impracticable, I decided to go quietly at the first opportunity, and to be my own “guide, philosopher, and friend.”

Still, I was not angry with those who chided me, In common, I fancy, with the majority of Australians, I knew but little of the northern part of the continent ; and I honestly believed that the journey was one which it would be difficult to complete. They said impossible, I said difficult—that was all the difference.

Men who knew the country led me in fancy into the centre of the continent, broke my machine upon any one of the thousand unexpected dangers of the open, trackless desert—and asked me to consider my helplessness.

Yes ; the journey was formidable. It had no attractions for me if it was otherwise. I thanked my friends, began earnestly to regard the excursion in a serious light, and held my tongue.

I smile benevolently now as I look back upon myself of those days. The thing is done, it then remained to be done.

* * * *

Before this time, I had thought of securing a companion to share the venture ; and I wasted a good deal of time and money seeking such a one.

The number of people who had the expedition in mind surprised me—I met them constantly.

“Ah, yes, great idea ! D'ye know I've been thinking about tackling it for some time ?”

“Well, co'on.”

Then there was an awkward pause.

Generally I had to see them about it in the morning. In the morning—“Sorry, old fellow, awfully sorry, but can't manage to get away just now. Great idea, though, isn't it ?”

One whom I came to know intimately (we were, and continue, excellent friends) was at first all eagerness to join. But he too gradually cooled off and reluctantly and half abashed, but finally, backed out.

And in his case, why ?

Not because of the expense, nor through reading or hearing of treacherous blacks, of venomous snakes, of alligators and other interesting things we had so eagerly looked forward to throwing stones at. Not because of the certain hardships and probable perils to be encountered ; the likelihood of being stricken with fever ; the danger of getting bushed, and experiencing the terrors of thirst as well as the horrors of hunger (for we knew we could carry precious little of either water or food).

No ; just this, half apologetically said, and then only with an effort that did him credit—"The general impression seems to be that the thing, you know isn't to be done. When they hear of our starting out to try it, what will the fellows say ?"

And what talks we had had about our adventures in prospective ! A rousing change, too, was admittedly just the very thing he stood in need of. He could well afford both the time and the money. An "adventure" he was the one to thoroughly enjoy. But—the smile of the fellows left behind, their laugh and jest in case of failure ; it was more than a sensitive man could bear to think of. And so he stayed at home.

Two could travel in safety where one might perish. If one machine broke down, the other at least might bear food and water to the derelict rider. But if the derelict rider were alone, stricken ill, fallen a victim to accident far from any settlement—

Not a pleasant track—let us seek another.

There was the continent. No bicycle had crossed it. That was my *something*, resolved upon long ago. And if it had to be done alone—it might be misfortune. Who knows—it might also be the other thing !

* * * *

It was, then, to be a solitary ride. But that the *bona fides* of it could not very well be disputed, I had printed a many-paged book, ruled vertically. The headings to the spaces were :—"Distance," "Date," "Time," "Presence vouched for at," "By," "Address," "Departure," with a blank page opposite for "Mems *re* road."

Being well aware that many people would certainly be averse to hurriedly entering their names in the book of an entire stranger—a stranger, too, who must resolutely decline to state his business, his object, or his destination—I determined to call on and

make known my intention to two or three "leading men," foreseeing that, could I but obtain their signatures to begin with, others would be only too pleased, or at least would not refuse, to add theirs to the list.

Luckily the first of the notabilities I waited on took kindly to the idea, and at once very courteously obliged me. To him my thanks are once more repeated; and neither of the other two gentlemen next seen demurred.

Yet even this task was not accomplished without the customary kindly-intentioned warnings. Thus one of the three said :—"Do you know you face Death in seriously attempting to do this journey?" What answer could be more common-place than mine—"One has to die *some* time, sir?"

"Death"!—the word, spoken generally with much unction, and I were grown familiar.

Had the gentleman said—"Pooh! It's easy. You ought to do it without hurting yourself, in so many weeks time,"—had he said that, I should have been sadly disheartened.

* * * *

When in Adelaide previously I had sounded a cycle-agent as to the reward he would be prepared to offer a man for undertaking the trip.

Like the others he ridiculed the notion—termed it preposterous, spoke of crocodiles, and of the rider having to carry a spare set of tyres, bags of flour, tanks of water, perhaps an extra machine. Nevertheless he proposed that the hare-brained unknown one be got to purchase a bicycle (on the sale of which I, of course, would be allowed a small commission), "and should he get through," remarked the agent, with a wink, "I would not mind returning him the purchase money."

“But, stay,” he added, as an afterthought, climbing down yet lower, “it's bound to be a failure, and failure does nobody any good, you know ; so I'd rather not have my name or one of my machines mixed up with the thing at all.”

As this might be the prevailing feeling among cycle-agents (and I have good reasons now for believing that it was) I determined on acting independently of them also. Than this resolution nothing in connection with the undertaking has since given me greater satisfaction ; nor was anything more comforting during the ride than the feeling of complete independence which flowed from it.

* * * *

I knew a little about bicycles, and did not pick one at random in the first, second, or any other agency I entered. Besides being on the look-out for a good mount, I was also seeking a firm which I could, if occasion arose, recommend others to deal with.

At last my choice was made. I paid the money, said nothing of my plans, and no embarrassing questions were asked.

Being now resolved to take upon my own shoulders all the consequences of failure—if I should fail—I erased the maker's name and substituted my own favorite word “Diamond” in its place.

If I broke down—well, a moral might be pointed on the evil results of riding an unknown make of bicycle. If there came success—well, again, I should have no objection to making my acknowledgement to civil people.

* * * *

The machine I chose and purchased came nearly up to my ideal for this present purpose. Let us look at it.

A roadster ; two 28 in. wheels ; weight, 29lbs ; gear, 62½ ; handy interlocking arrangement ; dust-proof caps over pedal bear-

ings ; bearings not of complicated construction ; tangent spokes ; the sprocket and back gear-wheels well set on their shafts.

I could not find fault with any part of the machine. Its general appearance pleased me.

The new saddle came off, and an old and comfortable one, with an appropriate tool bag, took its place. This tool bag was circular, and my drinking vessel (a "pannikin," not to put too fine a point upon it) fitted closely over its end. An old, tried, and trusty inflator was added to this part of the equipment.

Then I ordered a more than ordinarily thick tandem tyre to be fitted on the hind wheel in place of the one of the regular roadster pattern, and an endless rubber strip to be solutioned on over the tread of the front wheel.

As for the rest I did not look for gear case or cyclometer. If the country to be traversed came up to expectations in point of roughness, the former would be torn away—an objection which applied also to the cyclometer, as the only reliable make I knew of when in use protruded from the outside of one of the front forks. Neither was missed ; and I was glad I did not burden myself with them.

The brake was allowed to remain, and a bell was added. Both of these I intended to throw away when the beaten roads were left behind.

The equipment was completed with a spare air tube, chain-link and rivets, copper wire, file, spanners and plyers, solution and patching rubber, a long length of strong cord, tooth brush, compass, and small bottle of matches.

A pair of luggage-carriers were fitted to the handle bars ; on these was strapped a roll of light waterproof sheeting, 6½ feet by 4 feet, containing a change of linen, pair of socks, handkerchief, soap, towel, a small mirror—my extravagance !—a comb, and three small waterproof bags in which to stow papers, etc., in the event of

heavy rain falling. A leather satchel slung over one shoulder, and so fastened that it could not slip down, proved a handy receptacle for odds and ends. A rug and other things of which I may have occasion to make mention later on were forwarded to Hergott.

I had intended carrying front and back wheel duplicate shafts, but did not.

A tin to hold one quart of water was strapped against the stays, between the top of the rear wheel and the saddle.

A day was spent in riding through the hills near Adelaide with the object of testing the new machine, and that I might adjust its chain and bearings to my liking, learning the while what I could of its peculiarities, if it had any disagreeable ones—in fact, to break it in.

* * * *

On the evening of my fourth day in Adelaide, my very few arrangements being nearly complete, I rode down to Glenelg, obtained the local post-master's promise of a signature, and spent the night at the Pier Hotel. Next morning the P.M. walked down with me and stood on the pier—smiling, I observed— while I cycled down the firm sandy beach into the ocean ; then, having turned about, found myself dramatically waving my hat to the water.

That was the baptism of Diamond in the Southern Ocean.

The obliging officer entered a short statement in my voucher book to the effect that he had been witness to the incomprehensible ceremony (The statement served as a preface, and so was written on the first blank page inside the cover.) And now northwards through a continent.

* * * *

Still having a little private business to transact in Adelaide, I remained there for another night and well into the following forenoon. Then the bicycle, loaded now for the expedition, was lifted downstairs ; I shook hands with the landlady (who “couldn't make me out nohow,” I dare say, good soul), told her I might not be back for tea and not to keep it waiting, and quietly pedalled away on my glistening Diamond, without a single person being by to see me off or wish me luck.

But there was the glorious sense of having resolutely acted an independent part. A glad feeling of being alive, untrammelled, free. And so we gaily sped along. It was a very dance on wheels. We are on the track at last !

* * * *

Kapunda, 50 miles¹ from Adelaide, gives us shelter for the night. To Gawler is half the distance. The road is good only to four miles² from Adelaide, thence bumpy macadam, with clay stretches, to within five miles³ of Gawler. To the right, the Barrossa Ranges ; flat country showing to the left. Agriculture everywhere.

Beyond Gawler, I was advised to take the middle one of three roads, known as the Freeling; but after trying it, cut off to the right and got on to the Greenock road. Here was splendid running—down grades, too. Metalled with ironstone—some grand patches. So good that I passed the words “Post Office” at She-oak Log without dismounting to ask someone to sign for me.

About and after She-oak Log was undulating country, with the ranges showing now and again to the right. At a little place named Daveyston, I halted to pick up a signature and a long drink. A resident put down the one, I the other.

1. 80 km

2. 6 km

3. 8 km

Arrived at Greenock. Visited madam the gracious post-mistress, and obtained her signature. Prized, because it is the first in a lady's hand in the book. Then on to Kapunda. Undulating country, with good riding all the way. Arrived about 6 o'clock—hungry.

* * * *

This afternoon I met a cyclist seated in a spring dray, steadying his machine with one hand and himself with the other. They were noisily approaching at a jig-jog. We stopped.

“Good-day !”

“Good-day !”

“Accident ?” I asked.

“No—only this is less like graft. And where are you bound for ?”

“Head of the line if all goes well !”

“Oodnadatta ?” “Um.”

“Mean it—on business ?” “Oh no, merely out for a ride,” But my new mount had betrayed me to this wheeling Sherlock Holmes.

“Ah, you'll get over that sort of thing by-an'-bye. Just after I'd learned to stick on, I was like you—

*The stiffest breeze was never too stiff,
Nor the highest hill too high.*

Ha, ha ! Not bad, is it ? But as I was saying, I got over it. The bloom is off the rye'-din. Ha, ha !”

“Oh, come now,” I expostulated meekly. “Never mind, no 'fence, you know. Bye-bye.” Then to the driver—“S'pose we see if we can't knock a sprint out of the old quad., eh ? Ha, ha !”

And he laughed along the Greenock road.

* * * *

From Kapunda next morning. The road excellent, built up of ironstone, broken small. Gentle inclines, and longish down-grades. Undulating country, fertile and farmed. Before one quite reaches Waterloo, a cemetery is seen away to the left, remindful of a battle field.

The track continues hilly and ironstony to Black Springs; soon after that, at Stony Hut, a rivulet of brackish water crosses the road. Then one gets amongst the highest rises yet encountered. Through these, known as the Black Hills, winds the road, keeping fairly level for eight or nine mile¹, and so into the Burra. Rather a pleasant ride those last few miles, gums and peppermint or box trees picturesquely dotting the landscape, until at the Burra the ruins of once famous copper-mining works displease the eye.

From the Burra to Mount Bryan an excellent level metalled road keeps close beside the railway line; but a couple of miles beyond Hallett, the cyclist will come on unmade roads, so that he will have only fair riding to Yarcowie and Terowie.

Tyre troubles cause a delay between Yarcowie and Terowie. Ahead are cross-roads innumerable, and it being already sundown I reluctantly decide to stay at Terowie the night. 145 miles² from Adelaide.

* * * *

A drought lay heavily upon the land, giving the township in the eyes of the skurrying passer-by an atmosphere of even greater somnolence than usual. A church, a store (often also the post-office), a blacksmith's shop, a hotel, a school-house, with half-a-

1. 13 or 14 km

2. 233 km

dozen suburban tenements, constitute a township. It is affirmed that there are inhabitants, that on Sundays they go to church punctiliously, and that on one other given day in the week the farmers come in from round about with their butter and their eggs to the store, and then the township is "busy." Of the other five days there is no record.

An early start was made from Terowie on an absurdly round-about road to Petersburg—unmade, too, but level, yet only mid-dling for travelling on Head winds, besides.

Breakfasted, and steered for Orroroo; this township appearing to be right in the path of anyone making northwards. Much crossing and re-crossing of the railway. At half-way, Blackrock is passed. A hard, smooth road, running through the fertile Blackrock plains, now withered and parched; high ranges showing afar off on either hand—and so to Orroroo. Thence it is only a few miles to Walloway, where another rivulet is come upon. To Eurelia the road is not good, but it improves as one journeys towards Carrieton.

* * * *

In a blinding dust-storm blowing against us, a spring cart passed, whose driver invited Diamond and me on board. This was the first offer of the kind we had received, and it was thankfully declined.

My voucher-book was being signed readily. Only twice so far had it been presented without result. One poor human agricultural implement looked cunningly at me. A book canvasser had "had" him once, he said, and added "I ain't a fool."

Disaster is a merciless mocker; it deceives its victims into believing that it has sharpened their wits, whereas in general it has sadly dulled them. Here was a case in point.

In the other case a pot boy, the only “inhabitant” on hand, was so impertinently inquisitive that I did without his help. Perhaps another case.

* * * *

The evening at Carrieton was more or less profitably occupied in listening to a tap-room discussion of social, political and domestic economy as represented by seed-wheat. No matter into what by-ways the debate drifted, it came back inevitably to seed-wheat. There was infinite pathos in the tales of helplessness of these drought-harried men.

* * * *

There are abundant proofs as we steer out of Carrieton towards Cradock that we are already on the outskirts of the kingdom of the bicycle. The horses—bony apparitions mostly—have for the machine none of that contempt which tells of its familiarity to the city horse. So the bell is handy. Not so much to warn the equestrian as to soothe the bicyclist's conscience. You ring your bell and by that simple act throw on to other shoulders the full responsibility for all the frightened horse may do.

* * * *

To Cradock from Carrieton next forenoon. Thirty miles¹. Strong head winds. Near Yangarrie, cross a gum-lined creek of shallow running water. Travelling stock and mail route all the way.

And on this stage a slight mishap, and an incident. Before creeping into a dam for a drink, I hung my satchel upon the fence. Having drunk, a horse took my notice : it stood listlessly against the fence, on the outside, in a paddock entirely destitute of feed—a

1. 48 km

sun-baked waste. But for the support of the fence it must have fallen.

I remembered having somewhere seen such another animal described as a barrel-hooped skeleton, held together by raw-hide.

In vain I tried to shift it. It quite frivolously whisked its tail—its only token of animation. No persuasions, no beguilements could move it. I was interested—in the cause of science, and of sport. I had inflated my tyres a little, and now desired to ascertain whether a strong blast from the air-pump would throw it *hors de combat*. Visions rose before me. I should, if I could but succeed, tell a breathless people, ever intent upon the amiable pursuit of killing one another and other more harmless things, that when in the desert I had slaughtered every one of a mob of horses with the help of a new and deadly air-gun.

To discover something so deadly—here was a Companionship of the Bath at the least !

Thus murderously inclined, I approached with the weapon. The animal raised its head, cast upon me a look of mingled sorrow and reproach, lazily lifted its upper lip on seeing the threatening inflator, and—tried to eat it !

Of such stuff are the dreams of the bush. Thus moralising I rode off without my satchel. Had to race back four miles¹. And there still leaning against the fence, apparently unmoved in so much as a limb, stood the animal, a pitiful monument to the appalling severity of the drought of '96-7.

* * * *

After you leave Cradock the ranges appear to be closing in in front. But they are escaped somehow ; and Hawker, 17 miles² from

1. 6 km
2. 27 km

the last township, is reached. Of Hawker I have two memories : one of a barber; the other of a “specially prepared” (*i.e.* warmed-up) dinner. Neither, I suspect, of absorbing public interest.

In the evening, a strong head-wind having calmed down, rode to Hookina (9 miles¹); thence, being disappointed there in the matter of “accommodation,” to a place known as “The White Well,” seven miles² ahead.

Was it to be the first camp out ? Darkness had fallen, and lone travellers who can give no rational account of themselves must ever labor under dark suspicion also. But, at a roadside cottage, the rare bicycle served me as a talisman, and secured me a supper, bed, and breakfast. For the day, 64 miles³.

* * * *

The road to Hookina goes through the ranges, and for four miles⁴ there are rough and very stony hills to traverse. I took to the railway-line and rode alongside the rails ; but the “metal” was destructively sharp-cornered, and the riding unsafe, because of the steep embankments and the frequency of culverts There was also a tyre-tearing levelling-peg protruding at every chain or so between the lines.

From Hookina the track winds through soft but fair riding and level ground, with the high Arkaby ranges keeping well away to the east. Mount Alice shows up most prominently.

* * * *

On examining Diamond by lamp-light—I made a practice of looking it over every night—I was unpleasantly surprised to observe

1. 14 km
2. 11 km
3. 103 km
4. 6 km

innumerable burrs sticking in both tyres. The back one, being of more than ordinary thickness, had successfully resisted their endeavors to get through into the air tube, and the strip on the front tyre, being new, had also dissuaded the attacking thorns from intruding too far.

These burrs, common to many of the agricultural districts of South Australia, and especially prolific where the ground is sandy, are known as “three cornered jacks.” No matter how they lie upon the ground, one hard and sharp spear points upwards. They are very plentiful in their season from Hookina up so far as Parachilna.

* * * *

The breeze next morning, though light, was favorable. But the day was Sunday. I debated with myself, in bed, which would be the greater sin—to not avail oneself of an inviting breeze, or to continue cycle-touring on the Sabbath. Being unable to answer the question quite satisfactorily, I compromised, and made a late start.

To Parachilna (40 odd miles¹): Bad, bumpy road, stony and soft, or hard and guttery. Dined here.

To Beltana (24 miles²): Alongside the railway line—on which trains travel occasionally, and even then for the most part only to Hergott. Some stretches of good track, but most of it heavy travelling. Much walking. Some very stony miles traversed over; country broken into low hills.

By way of change, there was fresh-looking high saltbush in the vicinity of Blackfellow's Creek—and also numbers of diamond sparrows. Blackfellow's Creek, a wider stream than had been expected.

* * * *

1. 64 km

2. 39 km

I met the first aborigines when close to Beltana. There were four of them, all females, fully dressed. They were walking towards me; and by way of entertaining them I rang my bell and cavalierly doffed my cap. For my entertainment doubtless they smiled, as only one of their kind can, and made grimaces. So we parted the best of friends. "It may not always be so," I thought; "the painful necessity may arise presently to shoot some of your male distant relations."

Bush country is here fairly entered upon; the wheat-producing areas ending about Hawker. The rainfall is too certainly uncertain further north. To the south it certainly is uncertain also.

The everlasting hills yet last, to east and west.

The night at Beltana; 64 miles¹ for the day; 354 miles² from Adelaide. In good fettle and with a healthy appetite.

The rough track had been very trying to my Diamond. But all was well. Sunday cycling, too; yet no accidents ! Resolved to cycle on the Sabbath in future.

* * * *

1. 103 km

2. 570 km



Beltana railway station, 1885

From Beltana Monday morning. Hilly to Puttapa Pass. The latter the most picturesque spot yet passed. Through a jutting rocky point, a railway cutting runs at the base of a steep and rugged hill, and at the cutting's end a lofty iron bridge of many spans runs out across a wide and very stony creek, through whose bed for a mile or so the track winds sinuously; then climbs the northern bank, and so on to country far from good for cycling over.

Saw the first mob of kangaroos—a small one.

Much creek-crossing; also much walking—tiring and very slow. Still, I was in such good condition that I frequently caught myself going at a “Chinaman's trot” where I could not do any riding.

In flat country now. The track (over marshy alkaline-strewn ground) faces towards several low flat-topped hillocks, and passes close to some remarkable metalliferous-seeming ironstone mounds.

Then to Leigh's Creek, at about 25 miles¹. Here are a railway siding and a coal mine, Adelaide owned, but the prospects are not bright.

In front of a cottage somewhere about here I caught sight of—my first snake. A small one, brown, about 3 feet long. A frocked child was standing in the doorway keeping tight hold of a cotton-reel. To the unrolled length of cotton was attached a crooked pin, baited with a piece of bread. This precocious infant was fishing—when I chanced to come along and frighten away his eel.

On my thoughtlessly telling the mother (who, it transpired, had been having forty winks in a back room) she exclaimed, "Drat the boy!" Informed me that "the kid was always getting 'imself into some mischief—could never let things be," boxed the innocent little fisherman's ears, and took from him his tackle. "I wondered what he was awanting the bread for," she remarked by and bye; and when the child; who had gone to a corner to have his cry out, walked over to bury his face in her lap—"Lord bless his dirty little angel face," she said, as, spitting on one corner of her apron, she wiped the little angel face clean.

* * * *

From Leigh's Creek to Lyndhurst is very heavy road—now soft, now very stony, so travelling is hard work. Thus it was right through to Farina, 60 miles² from Beltana, where Diamond and I pulled up about 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

An enthusiastic and almost intemperately hospitable wheelman, the only one in the place, made me welcome; advised me of an excellent stretch of road up to Hergott, 30 miles³ on; closed and locked his store door to mark the occasion of a stranger-cyclist's arrival, and accompanied me for two or three miles⁴ along the track.

1. 40 km

2. 97 km

3. 48 km

Presently some railway-workmen's cottages are reached, and here kind people provided an evening meal. And as I started somebody remarked—"Look out for a bit of a rut when you get about 4 miles¹ on."

One rut in four miles ! Yet, *mirabile dictu*, the road to Hergott came right up to expectations.

* * * *

Railway workmen up here console themselves for their miserable portion by giving their residences high-sounding titles.

Somewhere up from Hawker, a row of tents occupy the site of an old camp. A square tent standing at the top corner of the row is dubbed "No. 1, Transcontinental Terrace." A round one further along, "Euchre-ville." Here as everywhere is also a "Belle Vue House;" and likewise "The Shamrock"— *in memoriam* doubtless.

One with the name large-written over the entrance in painfully sprawling capitals is "Marine View Cottage !" A strapping workman was at the door.

"Which way lies the marine scenery, mister ?" "Eh ?" he questioned in return, not comprehending for a moment.

I pointed to the sign and repeated the question. "Where's the marine scenery, is it !"

"If you please."

"Oh, everywhere within a radius," sweeping his arm across the refuse-littered waste. "Marines for yez, but"—with infinite sadness—"all dead."

* * * *

4. 3 to 5 km

1. 6 km



Camels at Hergott Springs, 1886

At Hergott, 441 miles¹ from Adelaide. Bleak and uninviting. Treeless, save for some Government date palms; healthy looking plants, fringing an artesian bore. The hotel people kindness personified. “Spelled” the greater part of next day and overhauled the machine; cleaned the chain, and located one or two puncturettes.

Found awaiting me here some wearables, a rug and other likely-to-be-useful articles ; but hearing of depots still ahead, I re-addressed the parcel, minus the wearables, back to whence it came. Although the nights were likely to be cold, the days are very warm; and the bulk of the rug made it “impossible” in bad country. At night time, for a while at any rate, when camping out I would try how sleeping between two or half-a-dozen fires suits me.

* * * *

Oil was to be had at the telegraph stations. (Neatsfoot—I fancy for this hot climate an oil of about the right consistency; sperm oil, such as is used for sewing-machines, being to my mind too thin al-

1. 710 km

together, while castor is, on the other hand, of course too thick.) As I had so far used hardly a single feeder-full, I merely replenished my oil-feeder and left the "reserve tin" behind. I had oiled each morning regularly, perhaps using another drop or two on the main bearings during the day, and had dropped a little on the chain after roughly cleaning it occasionally. Some machines call for frequent re-oiling; others do well with very little. Diamond luckily was among the latter.

The consensus of opinion at Hergott was adverse to the success of my project—for my intentions could no longer be completely hidden. So, rather than endure possibly irritating remarks on the subject, I moved on in the afternoon.

Several people southwards had told me of a cyclist who was coming presently with the object of attempting to ride right through. (It had got into the newspapers somehow—how I do not to this day know.) I was so lightly loaded that few, if any, of them suspected that I was the individual, "misguided," "rash" and many other things. Wherefore to me they laughed more derisively about the coming visitor than they might otherwise have done.

At one place, after obliging with his signature, a postmaster opened his heart to me. (That "somewhere about the terminus of the railway" was my destination I had permitted him to infer.) I ought to wait, he said, till the expectantly-looked-for other fellow turned up. "He is bound to come along this way," remarked the P.M., "and—unless you'd rather not, of course—it would be company for both of you."

This officer added, cheering me on my way, that he knew the country northwards well, and he ridiculed, the idea of a bicycle being ridden through it.

Ah ! well, we shall see whether one cannot be pushed through in that case, I thought; and so moved on.

* * * *

The road from Hergott was far from pleasant and there raged that disheartening drawback to cycling, a head wind. All flat country; soft, sandy loam, covered with loose stones of varying sizes known as “gibbers.” We shall know them better presently.

Travelled only 21 miles¹, and camped at Canterbury water-hole. Here was a Callanna sheep-station boundary rider's tent—a temporary shelter until the water evaporated; and I was made welcome to tea, salt mutton and—my first damper.

Before arriving at this waterhole I had to walk through a very soft, marshy salt-lake; sometimes having to shoulder the bicycle, and frequently sinking almost knee-deep into the mire. The subsequent sleep beside that camp fire was a re-creation to remember.

At a deserted hut a dozen or so miles from Hergott I met a “hard case” of the bush who had been camped there for three days, and intended remaining there for four or five more. He was “spelling,” he told me. I suggested that it was a strange place to recuperate.

“Well, 's this way,” he said, in an access of confidence. “I heard ole so-an'-so had sold 'is mine to a swindicate and was goin' to stand a blow-out at the pub at Hergit. I might's well be in thet, I ses; but I found I was a week ahead of it, and now I'm just waitin' here for that ————— drunk. My oath, it *wus* hard when I larnt I was to be a ————— week out en them drinks; my throat's peelin'. You don't happen I to have —————”

I cut in that I didn't happen to have —————

“Then d'ye happen to have a squib ?”—(squib = revolver).

I looked at my friend. He observed the glance.

1. 34 km

“Now, now, nuthin' like that about me,” he said. “Fact is ”—in another burst of confidence—“I'm perishin' fer a bit of meat. There ain't no harm in *that*, I hope.”

We chatted (confidentially still) about this strange life of his.

“And how do you get meat ?” I asked in my simplicity.

“Why, y' know,” he answered with a wink, “if we see a sheep we can't stand quiet and let it bite us, now, can we ? It wouldn't be human natur'.” And he chuckled at his joke.

* * * *

A late start was made the following morning. An entry presently made in my note book has it thus : “Plugging away, barely moving, against a viciously strong wind, over bleak, soft, treeless, and nearly flat country, strewn with loose stones, and with a sand-hill now and again by way of change, or the marshy bed of a salt lagoon to wade through”—an experience to be forgotten as soon as possible.

Again : “There is no avoiding the badnesses. The railway line is near at hand. Tried riding alongside the rails—useless, too soft. Between the rails—too rough.”

As the wind beat wildly into my face I heard it warningly cry “Go back ! Go back !” and in the lulls it droned and muttered chidingly—I knew not why— “Obstinate, foolish fellow.” Whereupon, as I wasn't taking any warnings, I stooped, and in a short-lived sprint exerted all the strength I had to bore a hole through the blast.

This sort of thing lasted to Bopuchie, where are some workmen's huts. Here I was treated to bread and butter and tea by a couple of kindly-dispositioned expatriated women, whose husbands were working further up the line. I was also generously presented with a good clean handkerchief, as I had been heard to deeply mourn the recent loss of my own : the wind had whisked it out of

my pocket. The same night Diamond and I reached Lake Eyre cottages, where were the husbands and others, a “flying-gang” of navvies on the (some-day-to-be) Transcontinental line. Only 54 miles¹ from Hergott. Heartbreaking work. Yet fed ravenously.

After leaving Bopuchie, caught myself doing a cautious “Look out-for the Train,” glancing warily up and down the line. Then I recollected that a train came along only once in three weeks, and was reassured.

* * * *

Did you ever, travelling alone, make unexpected acquaintance with a bush grave? The lonely land has been clothed as usual in “weird melancholy.” You are weary, and, perhaps, a little dispirited. And then, just behind a mulga tree, you come upon a mound—and it is the length of a man. If you are very weary you will sit upon it, and take off your hat, and think; perhaps in a minute or two shudder a little. Whereupon you will rub your eyes to try and satisfy yourself that you have been foolishly dreaming. But you will not sit again; you will move on, faster than you have been doing.

Between Hergott and Oodnadatta there are several rows of mounds. They are the vouchers for part of the cost of the at present useless railway line. For typhoid and dysentery played sad havoc in the navvies' camps.

* * * *

Leaving Lake Eyre cottages the track passes very close to the southernmost end of the lake itself: within, say, half a mile. The bed is 25 feet² below sea level, and occupies an area of over 5000 square miles³. I would certainly have ridden across and cycled on it

1. 87 km

2. 8 metres

3. 13,000 km²

had I not been told by the cottagers that the glaring, eye-paining, glistening sheet of salt, stretching away to the horizon north and east, was merely a frosted-over bog—all around near its barren, low, and stony banks, at any rate. But when the creeks have ceased to flow it soon becomes dry, firm under foot, and smooth—solid and ice-like in many respects. What a skating-rink 'twould make !

* * * *

Stony table lands, wide expanses of level country, support Lake Eyre on either side. Sand, stones, mirage, and sun—these are the “dominant notes” here.

I had been told some stories of the cattle of the region : how, for instance, an odd one had been known to chase a railway tricyclist along the line for miles. Hunting after swagmen, so it was said, was a pastime in which at every opportunity they freely indulged. I was now to have personal experiences.

When a traveller comes within near sight of a quietly grazing mob, the scattered units mass together ; then nine times out of ten the amazed animals race towards him in order to get out of his way. About this proportion of times they decided to cross in front of my bicycle; and the more I endeavored to prevent them doing so, by quickening pace, the more wildly they rushed to succeed.

The ringing of the bell had a more startling and discomfiting effect on them than the firing of a revolver shot.

Not far from Stuart's Creek I came upon a bull lying dead, with his horns deeply imbedded in a mound which his shoulders also nearly touched, his head being underneath between his front legs. I had been on the look-out for this interesting spectacle, of which an explanation had already been tendered.

A “sundowner” was tramping along one afternoon when the bull sighted him and gave chase. The country was level almost as

a billiard table, with the single exception of this couple-of-feet-high mound. Towards this the pair hurried. The chase was exciting. The bull gained rapidly, and was within a few yards of the swagman by the time he reached the mound. Then were some moments of supreme anxiety, till with an extra effort the man stumbled over just as, head down, the bull came charging along, on elevating thoughts intent. But not being in the habit of calculating upon the occurrence of hills, the bull collided with the mound, and broke his neck! Each district has its own pet class of perjury. In the richer of agricultural districts they lie about the size of pumpkins; in the poorer ditto, about snakes; in the sheep country, about rabbits; here the best liars devote themselves to wild cattle. They all do pretty well.

Occupied an hour as I rode along working out the musical note educed by a tyre flicking aside loose stones. Found it to be a high D. ("Pung" in cycling notation.)

When the stone is not flicked aside, but the machine passes over it, a low D is emitted—by the rider.

* * * *

Road middling to the Blanche Cup and cluster of mound springs. These remarkable features lie about two miles off the main track, to the left. I cycled over—not cutting across at right angles, but gradually edging away from the track on sighting them.

There are eight or ten of the cone-shaped, flat-topped rises, all within a radius of half a mile. Roughly, I should say their average vertical height is twenty feet. The summits of most of them are merely small swamps decorated with rushes and bogged cattle in various stages of decomposition. Little dribblets of water trickle down the sides.

Two of them are well worth journeying far to see.

The Blanche itself is an elevated circular pond of good drinkable water. On one side a lip has been worn through the impounding rock, and by this passage the cup gently overflows. The water so escaping streams down the sloping side, and forms into a shallow swampy creek.

The other is locally known as the Boiling Spring. Flowing much stronger than the Blanche, it boils or bubbles at the centre, not from heat, but because of the force with which the water is driven to the surface. The temperature of the water is about 100° Fahrenheit¹. A circle of sedimentary sand, three feet in diameter, is kept in constant motion around the bubbling centre, and around this again spreads a wide circle of perfectly clear water. Rushes fringe the water's edge, and the whole is surrounded by a rim of whitish rock three feet wide. About once in every half hour the quickly settling sand so accumulates at the centre as to choke back the ascending stream. Then to the observer a big thing in bubbles heaves in sight a low rumble is heard; a periodical clearance has been effected, and the boiling spring boils bubblingly as before.

The surrounding country is bleak and desolate-dreary in the extreme. The average annual rainfall is about 7in.² per annum.

* * * *

If one is not on the look-out, these mounds, in general appearance so much alike, are apt to tantalise one. For my own part, moralising upon nature's marvellous scheme of compensation, I found myself adrift. Yet, pshaw ! Bushed so soon—and a rail track within three miles at most ? It was monstrous. Refused to consult my compass; and paid for my folly by some few hours of hard labor.

A boggy little lake of salt water, its supply kept constant by one of the mound springs, first intruded itself; and on rounding its

1. 38°C

2. 177 mm

northern end I was amongst sandy undulations past which I could not see. Then a wide but not gum-lined creek, the nearest bank low, and one point occupied by half-a-dozen blacks' wurlies, like so many boats on end. The further bank was high and steep; and climbing over this I marked a course, which I judged would be due east, towards some bush-like objects in the distance. But these objects proved to be a small mob of wild-mannered cattle, which soon, racing towards me, pranced gaily around with uplifted tails. It is not fair to ask a man to persist in a due east course in such circumstances.

I grew fretful; looked at the time, the sun, and the shadows, but could only make a guess at the east. The guess, however, happened to be correct, and by evening I was in Coward, a township which consists chiefly of a public-house and—an anomaly indeed!—an interesting bore.

The bore at the Coward is situated in the heart of the little township, between the railway fences. The water wells up to the height of a dozen or more feet above the surface, and, wide-spreading over the end of a six-inch¹ conducting pipe, feeds a tiny sparkling rivulet. This stream runs for several chains, and finally gives back the water to the desert ground.

* * * *

1. 15 cm



Coward Springs bore, 1898

All these artesian waters are drinkable, but more or less brackish. There, as at most of the other bores, blind fish come up out of the artesian reservoirs—fish beyond a doubt, two or three inches long¹, but exhibiting not even rudimentary eyes.

This total absence of eyes is a curious fact in natural history; in the great dark caves of America the crayfish have eyes, though they are sightless. So also elsewhere. But “eyes would be no use to them in the blackness down under,” the local cicerone says. Yet wherefore? Should they not rather be provided with unusually good eyes?

(Happy thought: when all else fails I will come hither and inaugurate the great Centralian Sardine industry.)

1. 5 to 8 cm

To the Blanche Springs and the Coward (a trifle over 500 miles¹) should be an interesting holiday cycle-journey for Adelaideans. They could time themselves to rail it back.

* * * *

Procured a fly-veil here. Should have had one before this; my eyes are already sore from the persistent attentions of swarming, irritating flies. Dinner; and then still northwards.

The Coward track, speaking generally, proved bad. Sand, loose stones; very rough, and ill defined. Terribly trying on the bicycle; but Diamond is staunch. We are fast friends already; and in the oppressive silence I find myself familiarly addressing the steel-ribbed skeleton with words of comfort and encouragement.

By the time I arrived at some cottages (The Bedford or Strangeways Springs) it wanted only a couple of hours or so to sundown. Beyond loomed up sandhills, continuing, according to local accounts, in “an unbroken chain for fully five miles.” As William Creek was my proposed destination for the day—or, rather, night—I went on, after having enjoyed the proverbial hospitality of another “travelling gang” of navvies.

When the railway cuttings were being put through these rolling hills, it was prophesied that in a very short time the loose sand would blow in again, and that its removal would be a constant source of expense. But by fencing off three chains or so on either side, cattle and horses were prevented from cutting up the surface; herbage grew, and the sand now shifts but little.

* * * *

Here snakes breed unmolested. I saw several as I dragged myself and Diamond along. On coming to a particularly steep hill, I

1. 800 km