

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015

I have been looking forward to is trip for ages.

Since Annie n I accompanied Charles n Peter O' on a trip up Sun Mountain to overnight in the cave.... ohhh, back in 2010. Now he was doing it again.

It was Charles then that put that memorable trip together, it has stuck with me as one of my most enjoyable short-runs.

The moment the invitation to this trip came onto the forum, I was excited.

But 12 people..... hmm... , not so sure I was looking forward to 12 people in the cave or camping around it. 12 sounded like a crowd.

Nevertheless, I was not to miss this.

Then Charles fell off his trials bike and broke his right clavicle, nothing some stainless steel plates n screws could not put back together.

But it left us without a captain.

He volunteered myself for this task and coerced his lovely wife Julie to chauffeur him in their brand new Jimmy.

I dusted off my Basecamp app and plotted a route to Danielshoogte via Darling and Hopefield.

We are indeed fortunate to have Annie along as she snapped up over 300 really good memorable photos and it was a difficult choice on which to add to this report and which to leave out.

Even now I doubt I got it right.



After breakfast at the Swartland Wimpy, the briefing

commenced.: Andy, Kevin, Seb, Mark n Charles

It does not matter whether we are all seasoned veterans of the piste, we still hold a full pre-ride safety briefing.

Geoff Edwards had withdrawn due to a tummy bug.



Tony and Cecil drew in closer.: This was stuff they had heard

many times before but their attention was 100% there

Not like on an aircraft flight, these participants were earnest about the safety briefing... or just eager learn the route?

Each rider was going to ride in full battle order, no one put any gear in the back up vehicle!

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015



Ride leader- Daglo orange armband. Serves many purposes...



on inside that head now???

Tony Schlee - always great to have on a ride. what's going



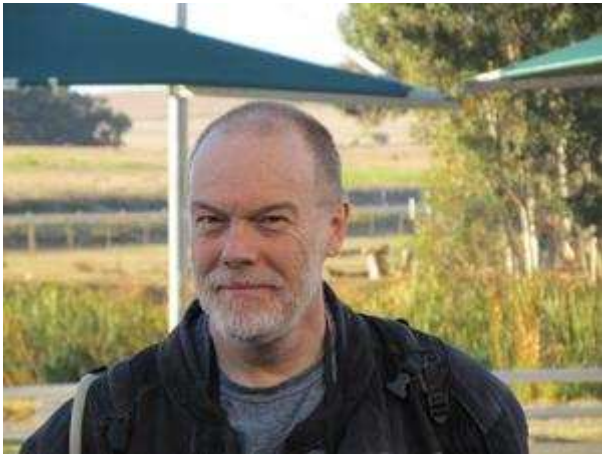
Sebastian and Mark, first time we have ridden together. Both very capable on bikes.



Charles n Julie would ride direct to the cave, Anne would ride shotgun and avoid the Sandveld sand roads...

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015



Kevin Charleston, glad to have excellent weather, good

company



Cecil Hill is always keen to go and ride.



Mark van der Mark, the HP2 was going to just love the sand..



Andy does the briefing, eye on the clock...

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015



Steve Jones, was going to ensure we were well entertained with his extremely bouncy personality!



Briefing over its time to mount up and ride North, 13km to the Kaslbaskraal turn off



Andy n Anne's 2010 R1200 GSA's - ostrich feathers on the helmets as always



An then we were on the railroad tracks heading to Darling: We had already set tyre pressures at the Swartland Engen and so we only stopped briefly to disengage ABS and traction control before getting going again.

We were down to 7 bikes- all were R1200's on this trip. a great combination!!!

Mark on his HP2 had to watch for fuel stops.

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015



And almost immediately we caught this 23 wagon train carrying stone chip ballast



As I passed the two locomotives the driver gave a friendly blast on his horn



I lost count of the times we crossed the tracks You have to cross the line at almost 90° to the rail or risk having your front wheel follow the rail and tip you over..



Steve crosses the rail lines



The other bikes dice the train to reach the crossing..

But discretion was the better part of valour and the train driver let out a sigh of relief as he saw the bikes stop

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015



The train takes the lead again



and the rest of the riders can now cross



Skills levels were high so we had a fast clip on all sort of

surface..



While riding through the discarded granite ballast I felt several stones thrown against the bash plate by the front wheel.: One bigger stone caught between rear wheel and brake calliper

The stone jammed, broke out two spokes and the brake calliper housing was dislodged and came adrift.

I stopped on the front brake as soon as I realised my rear brake was not working.

Within one minute, I had sized up the situation and used a bungee to hold the calliper parts together and tether it securely to the pillion peg strut.

And then I was off again.

Tony our sweeper had hardly had time to ask and see what was wrong.

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015



Another crossing.. I would have only front brakes for the rest of the trip.



No running water but some puddles on the piste.



Nothing to write home about.

In winter this road is made very exciting and popular by the many running water obstacles.



The same train was our companion all the way to Darling.



It was nice to ride with the train, made the ride special- we encountered three trains in all on this section

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015



and from time to time we had to wait..



....interesting....

There were a few washaways, some patches of loose sand,



But the road was in good condition



This fallen tree was not much of a challenge



the green or fairway

I wondered what they were all doing in the rough and not on

The golf course means you are close to Darling.

And here five locomotives sat across the track crossing and blocked us.

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015

We stopped for a regroup and relax and enjoyed the warm weather,
Pulled on our water supply and Steve had his smoke.
Eventually I went and asked the train driver to be considerate and move his rig.
Which he did in good grace.

But all five locos were running motors, not just one???? Lots of fuel to burn perhaps?



Brakanjan and his cousin found the bikes great sport

We hardly gave Darling the time of day, rode right through and back onto the rail access track on the other side of town.

Clearly bikes are no longer a novelty and no one spared us a second glance.

I was in touch with Annie by phone as we rode so we kept abreast of our progress.



Charles had discovered this fallen tree blocking the road

during his recce before the ride



The consensus before we started off was to follow his advice when we did get here and climb the embankment and just roll with it...

This is twee spoor country, we rode on lekker twee spoor -spacing well between bikes to avoid riding in dust.
We shared point, but Tony was always sweeper for the day.

Bless You Tony.

Time was our best friend, we had plenty and we stopped now n then, just to chat and catch up.

The stretch between Darling and Hopefield is alongside the railway line all the way into Hopefield.

It is renowned for treacherous sand and while its great fun, you are wary to drop your guard for even a moment.

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015



However, the roads were the least sandy I have ever seen them.



a few logging trucks came thundering towards us trailing huge plumes of thick dust.

This is more dangerous because you never know what to expect on the other side - just take a leap of faith and be prepared to pour on throttle to get out of trouble.

Now and then there were pools of Phesh-phesh, an experienced eye can recognise them and they are not terrifying if you see them.

This is the finest dust, like talcum powder, light coloured and pooled in a deep pothole.

If you throttle through it you are fine - even if the display of exploding fine dust is spectacular.

If you brake, you are dead. Front wheel digs in and you are lucky if you are not pitched at a tangent to the piste.



The countryside on this section is virtually featureless, flat and uninspiring.

I simply turn up my music volume, open the throttle and ride it.



.....and 23 kms later we cross to the left of track for the ride to the grain Silos and wind farm - 42 wind turbines in all: Steve pulls up smiling while Mark dutifully awaits the next bike to show we are turning.

Mark was loving this section, His HP2 was prancing like a show horse and wanting more... well there was more to come, and then some.

But first we rode the twee spoor to the silos, the low water bridge was a non event.

We stopped to discuss the wind turbines & for Mark to let his Genie out the bottle for a spin through some veld. Something I must work into pre-ride briefings.

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015

Farmers lock gates because of just this activity.

Then the last few kms into a very quiet and dilapidated looking Hopefield for the HP2 to take a slug n plug. I bought some brake fluid for the task ahead that evening.

Seb had been on the phone to his wife who was sick at home with a sick littlun.

So Sebastian took departure and went home to what he had to do.

It was great having him this far.

Down to six bikes, we ambled slowly through town crossing the R45 and over on towards the Berg river & into the sandveld proper.



..and here was the source of the logging trucks.

Great Bell movers and other heavy plant. churning the road to powder and turning across my path with arrogance. I had to brake the rear wheel by gearing down fast and then power out the resultant slide.



Shortly after, the mighty Berg River, slack and lazy, waiting for

winter rains.



In fact it looks sick, plundered and filling with hyacinth.

And here my Gopro battery died and I was not motivated to change to the spare.

However, now we were on "stuff".

Sandveld roads that force you to be vigilant and on guard.

I found 80 to 100 kph was the most comfortable speed to float on top of the sand, and luckily, with no bike ahead and a good GPS map screen, I had 40-20 vision and open road ahead.

I ride on Duals - 60-40 Maxxi MAPD's - my front pressure was 1.7 bar and rear was 1.9bar.

My suspension was on max high which auto sets the dampers to HARD.

I felt comfortable wearing the R1200GSA, even with no rear brakes, I was happy to cruise at ± 90 .

I could generally side step the pools of phesh-phesh by stomping on the right peg, then the left, the bike responding as if it had expected the move.

I think you are elevated into a different space when riding on the 'sweet spot' with good friends.

if I were to die then, just please leave the smile, let me be cremated with that same sublime smile, I am in Heaven already, so its just a quick greeting and I'm sure it will be the same.

I may even find some mates there.

But surely this stretch where training, time in the saddle, excellent rider gear, fantastic bike between your sloppy relaxed bent legs and good mates, has to be a high-point to the weekend.

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015

The engine purrs softly at 90kph and you smell hear & see all there is to see.

I turn my music much softer and savour the ride, always seeing Mark van der Mark's HP2 headlight on the other side of my dust plume.

As you pass vehicles coming/going in either direction, their occupants wave enthusiastically, broad smiles on their faces.

I wave back.

A crossing of the R399 and later at a T-junction added the only tinges of concern as I timed my decay from 100kph down to 20 without dropping the front wheel through the sand surface or arriving late because I had to twist the throttle to lift the front wheel out of that same sand.

Today was my day: Timing, man, moment & machine all contrived to make this a great dash to Aurora.

I am constantly amazed at how the 1200 Adventure gives me such days.

We hook up so well together, the bike even makes me look like a good rider. It is forgiving, built for these roads and carries the full load easily.

I stopped to re-group just before entering Aurora, netted in with Annie n Charles n Julie, sitrep updates & then Mark n I waited.

Steve emerged looking very happy, then Cecil, then Kevin, and after a brief wait Tony.

Meanwhile I had some target practice with my catty, and Cecil managed three shots before he broke the bungee, - twice.

Well Annie was wise to have taken the chicken run. We would have waited a lot longer. She gamely rides sand along with the best of them, but at her own pace.

We all agreed a stop at Helmut's pub was a good idea and I cannot say "for a quick beer" because nothing is quick at Helmut's.

If you want to really piss him off, offer to help. But we got our beers- cold still.

Just chill, bite your lip and roll with it.

Having agreed to stop infers we agreed to tolerate a 20 minute stop taking 90 minutes longer. But we chatted to two bikers, chatted amongst ourselves, toasted Sebastian, hoping his withdrawal had met the deserved appreciation and just waited.

we all ordered the Swiss sausage n chips in the vain hope things would be easier and hence quicker in the kitchen. Huh. Dream on buddy.

Helmut took up a hobby of restoring an old ox wagon, back in 2008.

He is now on his third wagon.

He makes the bolts himself in his home made forge.

He makes all the replacement parts himself, at his own pace. I have studied many many ox wagons all around South Africa, and Helmut's eye and commitment to authenticity is commendable.

Out in Aurora, where you measure time by the season, not with a clock, where a mobile phone is unnecessary baggage- as anyone you may need to talk to is within hailing distance, he is doing it the right way in the time honoured tradition of the old wamakers of Wellington.

Respect old man, RESPECT!!!

We had told Annie we would depart at 13H30 & RV at Daniel's house up on Danielshoogte, and we rode in, bang on the button.

The ride up the switchback road from Aurora to the top of the mountain is a climb from 30 to 980 metres all the way.

I lead the bikes in echelon, line astern and we arrived with less than 30 seconds between 1st and 6th bike.

Coffee, rusks, cookies and beer awaited us in the cool shade with Danie's warm hopsitality and huge fund of stories.

I lolled back in my chair where the conversation around me washing back n forth was soporific and soon I was in lala land recharging my batteries.

We only moved to keep chairs in the shadow of the huge oak trees, Tombe the big Ridgeback satisfied we were friend not foe.

And so we eventually shifted weight from the chairs to the bikes and followed Danie, back 4 km to the turn off to the cave.

The cave did not disappoint.

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015



The cavemen have arrived! Thank God 9 not 12.



We unpacked the bikes and then... just chilled.

We were very chill-axed.

Out came the camping gear, off came the riding gear.

I see almost everyone now rides with a pair of boxer shorts under the riding pants and slip slops in their rear pouch.

The transition from ATTGATT biker to chilled lounge took mere seconds

Danie brought the ice and cooler box. We set up the honesty bar and then we sat back to savour the first of many ice cold beers and B&C, Potato crisps & biltong did the rounds.

Danie shared many stories and as a BMW rider himself there was a lot in common.

Danie has crossed to the other side of 60 and watching him, I see I have so much to look forward to.

If I can be as active when I get there then look-out world!

As the engines ticked cool, the veld around us started to accept our benign presence and come back to life, rustling in the bushes, birds calling, nature was at peace with us, neither of us was in a rush.

Even the sunset dragged on and on, giving us ample time to get into picture perfect position.



We are not the first campers, others have camped here thousands of years ago

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015



I slowly got round to cleaning up and repairing the brake calliper unit.



I certainly was not short of advisors of every authority



Once all was clean and re-fitted, I bled the rear brake circuit and the bike was battle ready in no time.



Mark was not so sure this was a good idea...

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015



Tony had his share of chirps to add as well...



Kevin was sparing in his advice but was keen to see this all go together.



Steve and his good humour were indispensable.



Julie was settled in her chair and only a sunset would budge her now.

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015



Cecil was really not sure assembling the brake system was a good idea, he was sceptical.



Danie called time and started getting the fire ready.



Danie is a great host and his loyal Tombe was never far from his side.



Lekker rustig, Danie, Julie & Tombe.
No one was safe from Annie's camera lense, and few ere even aware of her SLR clicking away

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015



Eventually the sun set in the west, over the ocean and the nine ore carriers lying at anchor before us



The setting sun's warmth was replaced by fires, just as it has done for centuries in this very cave.

I sat back in my chair, warmed by brandy n coke, by the glow of the fire and the warm ambience of fellow riders enjoying the company of good food, drink and the Africa TV.

I was very spiritually aware of the privilege to share this cave that our forebears had used for the same purpose, so many thousands of years before,

The stars emerged one by one and out two green lasers pointed out constellations and satellites floating by.

It was really deeply moving to become conscious that other fathers had pointed out the stars as navigation tools long long ago.

What names did they have for the constellations?

What shapes did they see in the stars of the more prominent constellations?

What did they call Alderberan?

Or Castor and Pollux?

I may never know, one this is sure though, they also enjoyed the relative comfort and safety of this cave and they too gazed out at the same canopy of stars and had the same conversations.



The food was great, sandveld potatoes, 300gm steaks and plenty wors. We did them all justice!

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015



Night wore on, full bellies, we stared into the Africa TV and the conversation was even and enjoyable



I put my bike into its pyjamas for the night.



The embers glowed and we started finding our pits. Danie and

Tombe took leave , returning to his house.

If anyone snored, I am not aware. I slept peacefully and slept the sleep of the dead.

We all awoke, as usual, at cockcrow, around 06H00.

We went about our ablutions, and slowly packed camp and then mounted bikes and rode back to Danie to go on a farm ride.

All seven bikes, Annie was with us as we followed Danie to his favourite view spots.

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015



This photo is special.

Around 1838, my forefathers gazed out upon this or a similar panorama as they trekked North, and this view is daunting in the extreme. As far as the eye can see is range upon successive range of stark mountains. A way had to be found through them all!

This called them to dig deep, harden their resolve and tackle the trek, one day at a time.

But this view must have been daunting.

Sheer courage. Respect!



The ride on top of the mountain was really enjoyable



Steve, Kevin , Cecil weaving through the trees

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015



It got better n better, riding into the glade with cool shadows

cast by giant oaks.

Who planted these oaks over 180 years ago?

What was their story? How did they live?



Then a sand track up through the pine trees



Following Steve, Kevin and Mark....bundu riding..



Cecil & Tony covering our 'six'.



... then some open veld...

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015



... then a climb through sand and rocks....



Back on the service road, with two cuttings, we rode past the infamous she-bitch of Mountain Mist to Fijnbosch Farme - for breakfast on Charles n Julie's farm.



a Full on English breakfast under the shade of sprawling trees, much mirth, many stories.



We sat like kings while Charles n Julie fussed up a breakfast then washed all the dishes.

Then a short walk, and again, I took a mid morning nap in the shade.

Then we mounted bikes and headed for home.

Trip report : Danielshoogte overnight cave trip

March 2015



The views are spectacular from the top.



We re-grouped at the bottom and then said goodbyes as we split into three groups and headed home on different routes

So ended a splendid tour of the sandveld roads, the Danielshoogte up on Kaptein se Berg, and Fynbosch Farme.

Thank you all, especially Charles n Julie for a really memorable weekend.

Yes, now this report is finally finished.....