



South West Australian Tour 2026

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South West or Bust!

Arrival in Perth

3 January saw us, with weighty bags in tow, leaving the old grey skies of "Old Blighty" for the sunny shores of Western Australia. However, after a two-hour delay at Gatwick due to fog in Dubai, where we had a very tight turnaround of just 45 minutes, we were finally on our way to Perth.

On arrival, my brother Neal messaged to tell us where he would pick us up and to look out for the "white van with a rocket launcher" – probably not the best description to be shouting around outside an international airport!

Our first stop was the Parkerville Tavern to wet our parched whistles before heading back to Neal's place in the Perth Hills.

Planning the Adventure

The decision on where and how to tour Australia came from a discussion in early 2025. Our original idea was to ride from Perth to Darwin and then down to Ayers Rock, but Neal quickly vetoed that plan, suggesting we would probably kill ourselves riding in 50°C heat.

We then toyed with crossing the Nullarbor and touring Tasmania, but that didn't seem practical either. Eventually, we settled on the idea of exploring the south-west corner of Australia, travelling from Perth to Esperance and back.

Getting the Bikes Ready

The following day found us out in Neal's shed – although Australian sheds are more like metal barns. We were joined by our fourth tour member, Dan, who would be our mechanic throughout the trip. In preparation for the tour, Neal and Dan had been busy readying the bikes. Neal is an off-road adventure rider with the Perth Adventure Riders Club and, with five bikes to his name, was more than happy for us to use some of them.

Neal would ride his KTM 690, Dan a Husqvarna TE610, Peter an R1200GS, and I would be riding a heavily lowered Suzuki DR650.

I climbed onto the DR650 in the shed but couldn't get both feet down. Neal and Dan lowered it a little further so that I could at least get my toes on the ground.

"Let's take them out and see how they go on the road."

First Rides

Dressed in our newly acquired mesh jackets, we headed out onto the wide, pothole-free roads – or "bitumen", as the Australians call them. We rode some wonderful twisty roads past Mundaring Weir and on to Kalamunda,



The Four on Tour

stopping at the Dome Café for lunch and the welcome relief of air conditioning from the 32°C heat. Neal asked if everything felt alright with the bike. "Absolutely," I replied, grinning from ear to ear.

After stopping to admire the weir, Dan led us onto a gravel road to see how we would cope. There were no problems at all. Back at Neal's place, he and Dan immediately turned their attention to the DR's side stand, which had started bending. Using some steel rod, they fabricated a replacement and, after a few adjustments, it did the job perfectly. That evening, we visited the Mount Helena Tavern for dinner. As we sat outside, bandicoots scurried beneath the decking in search of food.

Learning the Terrain

The following morning, Dan and Neal were already back at work improving the side stand. This time they modified the original stand, cutting it down to suit the lowered bike. After testing it, I was happy to report that it worked perfectly. We rode out towards Toodyay, stopping first in the hills overlooking Midland. The scenery was stunning, with a river and railway winding their way through the landscape below.

From there we mixed bitumen roads with gravel tracks before reaching Walyunga Scenic Lookout. The main road to Toodyay seemed endless as we cruised along at 110–120 km/h. After parking up, we sat outside the Coca-Cola Café for lunch. While we were eating, a lady driving past clipped a signpost and ripped the trim from her wheel arch clean off. A rather bizarre sight!



We returned via much the same route, but on one sandy section things became more interesting. The bike suddenly began to snake from side to side, becoming increasingly unstable. I remember thinking: "If I don't stop this, it's not going to end well." Instinctively, I eased off the throttle slightly – apparently the wrong thing to do – but somehow the bike straightened up and carried on. When we stopped, Dan, who had witnessed the whole episode from behind, admitted he had been expecting to pick me up off the ground and was amazed I had stayed upright.

Testing Ourselves on the Gravel

Four days into our holiday, we were back on the bikes. This was to be a proper gravel-road day, taking us towards Jarrahdale. From the bitumen roads we moved onto yesterday's gravel tracks before tackling Ashenden Road and Kinsella Road, which Neal described as some of the worst roads we were likely to encounter. "If you can manage these, you'll be fine on the tour." As it turned out, the roads weren't nearly as intimidating as expected and were actually quite enjoyable to ride. At one point we were slowed by some road workers who felt we were travelling a little too quickly. I reduced my speed from around 75–80 km/h to 60 km/h, although it soon crept back up again.

Near the end of the road, Peter stopped some distance behind us and promptly dropped the BMW when the front wheel dug into some sandy gravel. As we dismounted to help him, Neal's bike toppled over too. Dan and I helped Neal lift his bike while laughing at the situation before heading over to rescue Peter's machine. With all four bikes finally upright again, we continued on the bitumen roads into Jarrahdale and parked outside the café for a well-earned refreshment.

Fallen Trees and Sandy Tracks

While we enjoyed our break, Neal and Dan worked out a return route. Soon afterwards we were back on the bikes and heading along Randall Road, where I had to dodge a rather leisurely salamander crossing the track. A little further on, two kangaroos bounded across the road between Peter and me, providing a reminder that Australian wildlife can appear from nowhere at any moment. Later, yet another salamander scurried across in front of my

wheel. The excitement wasn't over. As we rounded a bend, we came across a huge fallen tree blocking the road completely.

Our first thought was to try and squeeze the BMW underneath it through a gully, but the screen prevented that. Instead, we manoeuvred the bike out and Neal rode it up the bank and around the obstruction. Dan and Neal then repeated the process with the remaining bikes. Back on the move, we followed a series of gravel roads before reaching Metro Road, which was full of dips, troughs and washouts. After a brief stop to drink from our CamelBaks, we continued onto Yarra Road and then Smit Road. The entrance was particularly sandy, causing both Peter and me to experience some serious squirrelling, but we managed to keep everything under control.

Further along we encountered another fallen tree. This one had a gap of around two feet beside it. Peter managed to get through first, although the engine casing caught the tree and bounced him into a gully. Fortunately, he remained upright, albeit firmly stuck in the sand. He shouted a warning, but I couldn't slow down quickly enough. I made it through the gap, but the front wheel immediately dug into a sandbank and tipped me off sideways. Thankfully, it was a very soft landing and neither I nor the bike suffered any damage. Neal later laughed and said I had performed the whole manoeuvre in slow motion and with complete control.

Dan, who was waiting further along the track, wondered what on earth had happened to us. After a series of animated hand gestures and much laughter, we set off once more. Several rough tracks later, the road finally turned to tarmac. I have never been so pleased to see a smooth, flat road.

Later that evening, Neal admitted he had been genuinely proud of us. He wasn't entirely convinced that two UK road riders would cope with the terrain as well as we had.

Final Preparations

The next day was dedicated to packing and last-minute preparations. The air filters were changed, panniers fitted and final checks completed. Both the KTM and the DR650 featured cylindrical storage tubes mounted to the bikes, ideal for carrying tools and essential spares. Everything was now ready. Tomorrow, the real adventure would begin.

9 January – The Tour Begins

After loading everything onto the bikes, Dan arrived and rearranged the impressive tower of luggage stacked behind him. With the bikes fully packed, we set off, stopping first for fuel. Now heavily laden, we tackled the gravel roads of Ashenden and Kinsella once more, riding at a more sensible pace and with slightly reduced tyre pressures.



Wellington Dam

Our first stop was Jarrahdale Café, where we enjoyed a coffee while Neal and Dan reinflated the tyres for the long stretches of bitumen ahead. From there we rode through Dwellingup and on to Waroona, where we stopped at a pie shop for lunch.

Rejoining the South Western Highway, we continued towards Harvey before making a detour to Wellington Dam. The enormous structure was covered in spectacular murals painted directly onto the dam wall, creating a remarkable piece of public art. Back on the bikes, we continued south and soon came across one of Australia's more unusual roadside attractions — Gnomesville. Thousands upon thousands of garden gnomes have been deposited there over the years, creating a bizarre but strangely fascinating sight.

From there we followed the Busselton–Bunbury Highway into Busselton and checked into our accommodation. The evening was spent enjoying a barbecue in the garden and reflecting on a fantastic first day on tour before turning in for the night.

Busselton and Margaret River

The following morning we rode down to Busselton Jetty and boarded the little train that runs the length of the structure to the underwater observatory.

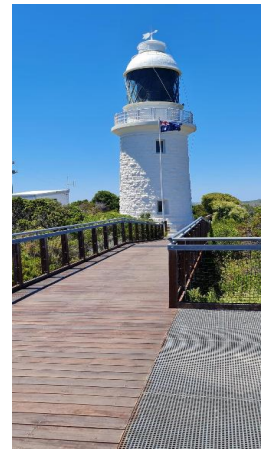
Stretching 1.841 kilometres into Geographe Bay, Busselton Jetty is the longest timber-piled jetty in the Southern Hemisphere. At the end sits the observatory, a cylindrical concrete chamber 9.5 metres in diameter and eight metres below the surface.

Descending the staircase, we found ourselves beneath sea level, looking through large viewing windows at the seabed below. Colourful fish drifted past while beautiful anemones swayed gently in the current. The observatory forms part of Australia's largest artificial reef, home to tropical and sub-tropical corals, sponges, fish and countless other marine creatures.

Returning to the bikes, we set off in search of the coast road. Somehow, however, we ended up on a sandy track that led to a car park overlooking the stunning Forest Beach. It wasn't a bad mistake to make.

Heading South

The next morning we packed up and continued south along the coast road through Dunsborough and Yallingup before reaching Margaret River, where we would be staying in cabin accommodation. On the way we stopped at Cape Naturaliste Lighthouse. Perched on the edge of the coastline, it offered spectacular views across the ocean. The museum told fascinating stories of shipwrecks from the days before the lighthouse was built, when sailors relied solely on navigation skills and luck to avoid the treacherous coastline. Even today, remnants of shipwrecks can still be found beneath the waters of the bay. That evening we enjoyed a leisurely ten-minute walk into town to visit The River, sitting outside as daylight gradually faded and discussing the adventures still to come.



Caves, Lagoons and Ice Cream

The following morning began with breakfast at a café overlooking a beautiful white sandy beach. From there we rode to Mammoth Cave, where elevated walkways guided visitors past impressive stalactites and stalagmites. There was even the skeleton of an ancient animal preserved within the cave system. Afterwards, it was time for an ice cream in the shade before heading to a nearby lagoon for a swim.

Although the water was colder than expected, it quickly became comfortable once we were fully immersed. Refreshed, we climbed back onto the bikes and, naturally, found another café for drinks and cake. A bit of a theme was developing by this stage, but keeping hydrated in the Australian heat was important! That evening we walked into Margaret River and visited the Settlers Tavern for dinner. While enjoying our meal, we struck up a conversation with a group at the next table who had spent the entire day visiting local wineries and sampling their produce. Judging by their enthusiasm, they had enjoyed themselves immensely.

Augusta and Boranup Lookout

The next morning we headed towards Augusta. Light rain accompanied us for part of the journey, forcing us to keep wiping our visors, although fortunately it didn't last long. At one point we turned off onto a gravel and sandy track leading towards Boranup Lookout. Unfortunately, Neal's phone completely lost satellite reception, leaving us effectively navigating blind. Fortunately, we encountered a couple travelling in a car who were also attempting to reach the lookout. Since they expected the road to emerge at the viewpoint, we decided to follow them. Peter struggled a little on the sandy sections aboard the BMW and briefly left the track, although he managed to keep the bike upright.

As I approached the summit, I stood up on the pegs to ride through a rut. The rear wheel immediately began squirrelling in the sand, but I managed to ride it out and stay in control.

At the lookout we parked the bikes and wandered amongst the trees, taking in the magnificent views. On the way back down, Neal and Dan disappeared. Peter and I eventually emerged onto a bitumen road and discovered that they had turned off onto another track leading to a rocky bay. While waiting for them to catch up, I spotted Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse in the distance and headed in that direction.

Once reunited, we continued into Augusta and stopped at a bakery for lunch. Back at the cabin, we enjoyed a cuppa while discussing supplies for our next destination. The Tingle Cabins, where we were heading next, had no nearby shops, so a shopping expedition was required. Neal, Peter and I rode into Margaret River to visit Woolworths and stock up on food for the next three days. With our panniers packed full of supplies, we returned to the cabin ready for the next stage of the tour.

A Change of Plans

After breakfast the following morning, we packed the bikes and set off around 9.30am. Initially, we followed a gravel road before turning onto another track called Crouch Road. This was a narrow route with vegetation encroaching from both sides. Peter found it challenging and was progressing cautiously. At one point we crossed a rocky washout where a large slab of stone formed a natural obstacle. Beyond it lay a deep patch of sand. Unfortunately, this proved my undoing.

The front wheel suddenly dug in and disappeared into the vegetation at the side of the track. Moments later I was lying on the ground beside the bike. Neal and Dan quickly came to help. Thankfully, neither I nor the bike had suffered any damage, but Neal was concerned enough to ride my DR650 back through the sandy section himself.

With no idea how much worse the track might become, we decided not to continue and instead returned to the main road. Joining the Vasse Highway, we stopped in Nannup for coffee and cake before tackling the next 100 kilometres to Walpole. The South Western Highway seemed to stretch endlessly into the distance. Long, straight sections rolled over gentle hills through vast areas of bushland. I had never seen roads quite so relentlessly straight.

As we approached Walpole, however, the scenery began to change. The roads became more winding, the forests denser and the landscape increasingly picturesque. After a brief stop in the small town of Walpole, we continued to the Tingle Cabins. A gravel driveway led us to our accommodation, where we parked the bikes on the grass outside and unpacked our gear. Later, we sat on the veranda chatting while kangaroos grazed nearby.

As evening approached, we carried our food to the communal barbecue area and began cooking dinner. The campsite owner wandered over and spent some time chatting with us, suggesting several local gravel roads worth exploring. After dinner, Neal and I stood outside gazing up at the night sky. The stars were extraordinarily bright and, as darkness deepened, the Milky Way slowly revealed itself overhead. It was one of those moments that reminds you just how vast the world really is.



Our Tingle Cabin and the Grazing Kangaroos



Walpole and the Valley of the Giants

The next couple of days were spent exploring the Walpole area and attempting to locate one of the local farmer's gravel tracks that had been recommended to us. Following one gravel road, we turned onto an even narrower track. The vegetation quickly closed in around us, brushing against our arms and shoulders as we passed. The surface was littered with leaves, sticks and fallen branches, some of which we had to ride over. As the track continued to deteriorate, we eventually decided discretion was the better part of valour and turned around. Later, we discovered it was actually a maintenance track rather than a public route, which explained its condition.

From there we headed towards Denmark and the magnificent Tingle Forest to visit the Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk. The elevated steel walkway stretches for over 600 metres and reaches heights of around 40 metres above the forest floor. Walking amongst the upper canopy of these ancient trees was an incredible experience, offering a completely different perspective of the forest. Afterwards, we explored the trails below, wandering amongst the giant tingle trees. Some of these remarkable trees have buttress roots with circumferences of up to 16 metres. Standing beneath giants such as Grandma Tingle and King Tingle, craning your neck to see their tops, made you feel very small indeed.

Circular Pools and Mandalay Beach

Another day saw us riding along the South Coast Highway to the Circular Pools near Nornalup. The pools are named for the circular motion created by the water currents, and after exploring the area and taking photographs, we headed back through Walpole towards Mount Frankland. Lunch was taken at The Frankland River Tavern, where we gratefully escaped the 30°C-plus heat and enjoyed the luxury of air conditioning. Afterwards, we set off once more in search of Mandalay Road, which would lead us to Mandalay Beach.

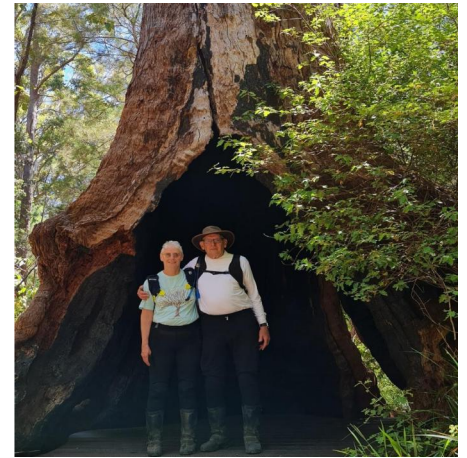
The gravel road was heavily corrugated, constantly trying to shake both rider and machine apart. By the time we reached the car park, we were more than ready for a break. Leaving our jackets safely stored in the panniers, we followed the path down to the beach. The view was breathtaking. A vast expanse of pristine white sand stretched away in both directions, completely deserted apart from the four of us. Naturally, someone suggested a swim. However, a prominently displayed sign advised against entering the water due to the powerful surf crashing onto the shoreline.

One look at the waves was enough to convince us the sign knew what it was talking about. Instead, we admired the scenery, took photographs and enjoyed the rare experience of having such a spectacular beach almost entirely to ourselves.

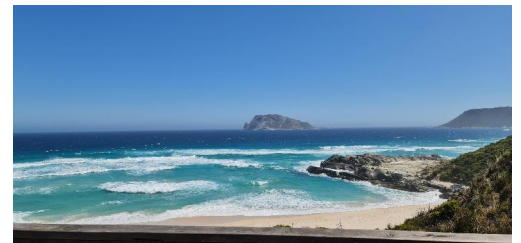
Albany and the Whaling Station

Our next destination was Albany. Along the way we visited Torndirrup National Park, following Gap Road to two of the area's most famous attractions: The Gap and Natural Bridge. Carved by centuries of relentless ocean power, both features were spectacular. The Gap provides views directly down a sheer 25-metre drop to the Southern Ocean below. Watching the waves crash violently against the rocks was mesmerising. Nearby, Natural Bridge spans a narrow channel of water, creating a dramatic archway sculpted entirely by nature.

From there we continued to the Blowholes. The tide wasn't high enough to create the spectacular water spouts for which they are famous, but the roaring sound of the ocean surging through the underground chambers was



Tingle Tree & Mandalay Beach



impressive enough. Several visitors standing too close to the opening jumped back in surprise when the sound suddenly intensified. After spending time admiring the coastline, we continued into Albany itself.



Albany Whaling Ship

One of the highlights was a visit to the old Whaling Station, which only ceased operations in 1978. Exploring the former whaling ship was fascinating, although the narrow passageways made it difficult to imagine crews spending long periods aboard. We also visited Albany's Old Gaol, where we learned about the area's convict history.

"if someone was caught stealing from another person or a horse, they would get life but if you stole a pig, you only got 7 years!"

When the men had finished their sentence, they would be sent to a farm as a labourer.

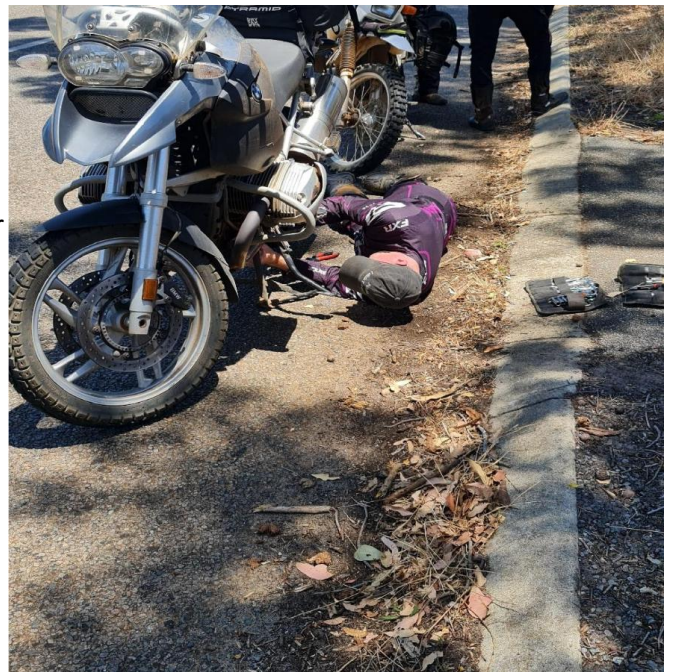
Some women convicts were there too, their task was: to help the men reform their characters and do the washing, ironing and cooking for all the inmates.

A lady and her husband lived in the prison with their 8 children; she was the matron of the sick wing. She became pregnant with twins but died giving birth and the twins died, she was only 40. Her eldest daughter of 16 then became the matron. The lady apparently haunts one of the cells numbers 25."

This visit quickly descended into silliness. There was a collection of period costumes available for visitors to try on. At one point Neal appeared behind me wearing a wig and hat, while Dan sat motionless beside a mannequin dressed as a convict, blending in so convincingly that he looked like part of the display. Not wanting to miss out, I donned a convict outfit complete with hat, while Neal and Dan took photographs for future blackmail purposes. We also spent time chatting with one of the volunteers, who happened to be a former "£10 Pom". His stories were every bit as interesting as the exhibits.

Bremer Bay and a Loose Gear Lever

The following morning we packed the bikes and set off for Bremer Bay. We hadn't travelled far when Peter announced that his gear selector appeared to be missing. We stopped immediately while Neal and Dan continued on, unaware of our predicament despite our enthusiastic use of the horns. A retaining nut had worked loose, leaving the gear lever dangling. As we examined the problem, a local motorcyclist approached to see if he could help. Upon hearing what had happened, he climbed into his ute and drove to the nearest motorcycle dealer to source a replacement nut and a suitable spanner. True to his word, he returned a short while later with exactly what we needed. Peter quickly repaired the gear lever and, not long afterwards, Neal returned having finally realised that two members of the group had disappeared. It was another reminder of just how helpful people can be when travelling.



Roadside repairs on the BMW

Battling the Elements

We eventually regrouped and continued east. The roads seemed endless. Long, dead-straight stretches crossed open countryside while fierce crosswinds blew in from the coast. At times we found ourselves riding at an angle simply to continue in a straight line. The biggest challenge came whenever one of Australia's enormous road trains passed in the opposite direction. The bow wave would hit first, followed by a moment of calm, before the vacuum behind the vehicle attempted to drag us towards it. Dan had the worst of it. Being tall, riding a tall bike and carrying what appeared to be a small tower block of luggage, he presented a considerable target for the wind.

Eventually we pulled onto a dirt track for a short rest. Unfortunately, another problem soon emerged. Neal switched to reserve fuel and discovered he had approximately 70 kilometres remaining before the next petrol station. The problem was that his reserve tank would only take him around 60 kilometres. Ten kilometres short. We pressed on regardless.

Eventually the inevitable happened and Neal coasted to a halt beside the road. Initially, the plan was to siphon fuel from my DR650. However, Dan pointed out that we might struggle to reconnect the fuel pipe afterwards without heating it first. Instead, Neal retrieved a fuel bladder from his luggage. Peter emptied his top box, Neal borrowed the BMW and rode the remaining 12 kilometres to the nearest fuel station.

While we waited, another passing motorist stopped to check that we were alright. Once again, the friendliness of people in remote Australia was remarkable. Eventually Neal returned carrying both a full fuel bladder and a full BMW tank. After transferring fuel into the KTM, we prepared to leave. Only my bike refused to start. For several anxious moments we wondered whether something serious was wrong. Then Peter remembered that Neal had turned the fuel tap off while preparing to siphon petrol earlier. One flick of the switch and the DR burst into life. At precisely the same moment Neal was riding back towards us to point out exactly the same thing.

Bremer Bay and the Mystery of the Light Key

After eventually reaching Bremer Bay, we checked into our accommodation and began discussing the possibility of a swim. Dan and Peter elected to stay behind, but Neal and I decided to investigate the local beach. I changed into shorts and a T-shirt, loaded a few essentials into the panniers and rode down to the beach. Riding in shorts felt very strange after years of always wearing full motorcycle gear, but when in Australia...

At the sandy car park, I swapped my boots for sandals while a small audience watched with mild curiosity. Motorcyclists changing clothes beside their bikes clearly provided some entertainment. The beach itself was beautiful. There were already a few people swimming in the sheltered lagoon, and after standing ankle-deep in the water debating whether it was warm enough, we eventually committed and waded in. The water was refreshingly cool rather than cold, and before long we were happily swimming and chatting.

At one point Neal lost his sunglasses and had to dive underwater to retrieve them. Fortunately, the keys he had forgotten were also in his pocket remained there too. As we floated about, Neal pointed towards what appeared to be a fin protruding from the water. "Shark?" he suggested. I studied it for a moment. "It's not moving, and it's too close to shore. Probably a tree root." Thankfully, it was. After a while the cooling water began to have the opposite effect, and we headed back to shore. Neal hadn't brought any spare clothes and was visibly shivering by the time we reached the bikes. I, however, had come prepared and quickly changed before we rode back to the campsite. Neal spent the entire journey home dripping wet.

Dinner and the Light Key

That evening we ate in the campsite clubhouse. The place was absolutely packed with locals and tourists alike, suggesting it was probably one of the few places to eat for miles around. Unfortunately, after everyone else had been served, Neal and Dan were still waiting for their meals.

Eventually I flagged down a waitress. She disappeared to investigate and returned looking embarrassed. Apparently, she had been attempting to deliver the meals to Table 14 for quite some time. We were not Table 14. After a profuse apology, she promised them both a complimentary pint. The meals eventually arrived, although by then they were only just warm enough to qualify as hot food. Still, nobody complained. True to her word, the waitress later provided the free drinks. Eventually Dan headed back to the cabin, announcing that he had the key and would leave the door slightly open for Neal. A few minutes later, Neal reached into his pocket with a mischievous grin. "I've got the light key!" We both burst out laughing. Moments later Dan reappeared. "Has Neal got the light key?" The laughter only got louder.

A Pickup Truck to the Rescue

During the night I was woken by a loud banging noise. It turned out to be Peter hammering on the interconnecting door because the occupants of the neighbouring room had decided that 4.00am was the perfect time to start watching television.

The following morning we packed our belongings and loaded the bikes. Everything was going smoothly until I managed to mount my bike from the wrong side. The bike promptly leaned towards me and fell directly onto the BMW. Before I knew it, I was lying underneath it. I crawled free without injury, but neither Peter nor I could lift it. If Peter abandoned his own bike to help, there was every chance that would fall over as well. Fortunately, a passing motorist in a pickup truck stopped to help. Within seconds the bike was upright and moved clear. As he walked away he commented that he thought Peter was being remarkably unsympathetic until he realised Peter was trapped by his own motorcycle. I thanked him and we continued on our way.

Emus and Endless Crosswinds

After refuelling, we set off towards Esperance. Neal had wisely filled the fuel bladder again, just in case. Our first stop was Jerramungup for coffee before continuing eastwards into the seemingly endless Australian landscape. The crosswinds were relentless. At Ravensthorpe, around 207 kilometres from Bremer Bay, we stopped again for fuel and refreshments. Dan departed before the rest of us as his comfortable cruising speed was closer to 90 km/h, whereas we tended to sit between 100 and 110 km/h. Not long afterwards, half a dozen emus suddenly charged across the road directly in front of Neal. He braked hard. I immediately slowed too, expecting more to appear from the bush. Seeing wild emus at full speed was an incredible sight and not something you witness every day. Later we found Dan resting in a lay-by and stopped briefly before tackling the final 165 kilometres to Esperance. By this point the winds had become exhausting. Every side road seemed to generate a fresh gust, attempting to shove us off the road and into the gravel verge. When we finally arrived in Esperance, we were physically drained and delighted to get off the bikes.

The Curious Accommodation

Our accommodation looked nothing like the photographs online. We actually questioned whether we were at the right place. Neal checked us in and handed out the keys. The surprises continued. Dan and Neal occupied the room next door, but when we entered our accommodation we discovered that both rooms shared a communal kitchen, bathroom and toilet area. The shower door had also been repaired using a piece of bent wire. It worked perfectly, but wasn't exactly luxury accommodation. Then we discovered Dan and Neal had the room with the double bed while Peter and I had the room with two singles. A key exchange quickly followed. After unloading the bikes, Neal made everyone a cup of tea while I lay on the bed nursing aching hands and shoulders from the long day battling the wind.

Exploring Esperance

The following morning we were up early. The forecast suggested temperatures between 24°C and 34°C, so we wanted to make the most of the cooler hours. After breakfast, we rode along the Great Ocean Drive, stopping at Rotary Lookout to enjoy panoramic views across Esperance Bay. From there we visited a succession of stunning beaches: West Beach, Twilight Beach, Nine Mile Beach and Eleven Mile Beach.



'Jumpers' Rock Twilight Bay

Each seemed more beautiful than the last. Twilight Beach was particularly memorable, with crystal-clear water, huge granite rocks and shallow swimming areas.

Eventually the road turned inland and our beach-hopping adventure came to an end. We headed back into Esperance in search of a café. By now the temperature was approaching 34°C. My first drink disappeared almost instantly. It barely touched the sides. After a long and leisurely break, the group split up.

Peter and Dan returned to the accommodation while Neal and I headed back to Twilight Beach for a swim. After changing beside the bikes, we wandered down to the beach and into the sea. The water was cold initially, but once acclimatised it was wonderful. We floated around chatting and watching people leap from a huge rock into the ocean. From the water it looked perfectly safe. From above, it looked absolutely terrifying. Eventually we drifted towards the rock, prompting a swim back to shore. We spent some time drying off in the sunshine before changing and heading back to the bikes.

The Not-So-Pink Lake

Our next destination was Pink Lake. Or rather, Not-So-Pink Lake. An elderly local explained that he hadn't seen it pink since he was a boy. Years of salt extraction, combined with freshwater inflows, had altered the lake's chemistry and removed the conditions that created the famous pink colour. Efforts were underway to restore it, but it would likely take many years before it returned to its former glory. As Neal and I stood there chatting and looking across the lake, I found myself thinking that it simply didn't get much better than this. Travelling across Australia with my brother, exploring places we'd never seen before, was something truly special.

Lucky Bay, Stonehenge and New Friends

The following morning, Peter noticed that the end cap of the DR650's exhaust was working loose. Out came the tools once again. Dan and Neal quickly discovered that several screws had vibrated loose, leaving only two holding the exhaust together. A temporary repair was made and we set off along the Great Ocean Drive in the opposite direction, heading towards Lucky Bay.

Before reaching the coast, we stopped at one of Esperance's more unusual attractions – its very own Stonehenge. The story behind it is fascinating. A local granite company had originally been commissioned to create a replica of Stonehenge for a development near Margaret River. When the project was cancelled during an economic downturn, a local businessman purchased the completed stones and erected them near Esperance. Unlike the original Stonehenge, this version represents what its creator believed the monument looked like when it was first built. Two triangular openings were incorporated into the design, allowing the sun to be viewed through them during the summer and winter solstices.



After wandering amongst the huge stones and taking photographs, we rewarded ourselves with ice creams before continuing to Lucky Bay. The beach was absolutely stunning. The sand was brilliantly white, almost dazzling in the sunlight, and squeaked beneath our feet as we walked. We sat beneath a shaded shelter enjoying refreshments before strolling along the shoreline. Afterwards we explored a gravel track leading to another secluded bay before retracing our route. While examining a cave near the top of a huge granite outcrop, a familiar motorcycle appeared. It was Ollie, the rider we had met previously in Esperance. His fully loaded Royal Enfield Interceptor looked every bit the travelling machine. We chatted briefly before he headed off to explore the rock while we continued our journey.

Lucky Bay Brewery and the Skimpy Bar

On the way back into Esperance, we stopped at Lucky Bay Brewing. The brewery had been recommended by the gentleman we had met at Pink Lake and proved to be an excellent suggestion. There was live music, plenty of outdoor seating, food and a wonderfully relaxed atmosphere. One beer soon became dinner, and before long we realised daylight was beginning to fade. We rode back to our accommodation and unloaded the bikes before heading out once more to visit what the locals referred to as the "skimpy bar". For those unfamiliar with the concept, it is exactly what it sounds like – a bar where the serving staff wear very little clothing. Only in Australia!

North Towards Wave Rock

The following morning brought yet another exhaust issue. The DR's exhaust cap was now hanging on by a single screw. When Dan removed it, he discovered the internal baffle had disappeared down the exhaust pipe. His solution was simple. Start the bike. Open the throttle. Stand back. The baffle promptly shot out of the exhaust like a projectile. A few new screws later, everything was reassembled and the baffle safely stored in one of the panniers. With that problem solved, we fuelled up and began the long ride north towards Hyden and Wave Rock.

The journey was hot, long and tiring. Every hundred kilometres or so we stopped for drinks and a short rest. At Munglinup we refuelled and continued onwards. As we rode, an enormous cloud formation appeared on the horizon. At first we thought it was weather. It wasn't. It was a massive bushfire. The smoke plume was enormous and could be seen for miles. Later, as we approached a junction, we discovered the road ahead had been closed because of the fire. Fortunately, our route remained open.

After another fuel stop at Lake King Tavern, we pushed on through temperatures of around 34°C. The heat was relentless. Hot air rose from the road surface, the bikes radiated heat from their engines and the sun beat down relentlessly from above. At times it felt as though my legs were cooking inside my riding trousers. Eventually we rolled into Hyden and checked into our motel. After a quick shower, we climbed back onto the bikes and headed straight for Wave Rock.

Wave Rock

Wave Rock was every bit as impressive as its reputation suggested. The enormous granite formation genuinely resembles a giant ocean wave frozen in time. Its colourful streaks and curved shape make it one of Australia's most distinctive natural landmarks. We walked along its entire length before climbing to the top. From above, the views stretched for miles across the surrounding countryside. The indigenous people traditionally used the summit as a lookout point, enabling them to observe travellers and determine routes across the landscape. It was also used as a gathering place for ceremonies and celebrations. After spending time exploring and taking photographs, we returned to town and enjoyed dinner outside beneath the evening sky.



The Broken Side Stand

The following morning began with unexpected drama. As we prepared to leave, Dan was tightening luggage straps when the side stand on his Husqvarna suddenly snapped clean off. Without warning, the bike toppled over. Fortunately, Dan managed to step clear. Unfortunately, the fall bent the gear lever against the engine casing. After a quick repair, the bike was made rideable again, but there was one major problem. It no longer had a side stand. For the remainder of the journey Dan would be unable to get off the bike without assistance. Whenever we stopped, someone had to support the motorcycle while he dismounted. It became one of the running jokes of the trip.

The Final Ride Home

After fuelling up, Dan set off ahead of us. Since he no longer wanted to stop unnecessarily, he simply kept riding. For over 100 kilometres we almost caught him, only for him to disappear into the distance again. At Corrigin we stopped for refreshments while Dan continued onwards without even pausing for a cigarette. Eventually we reached York, where we parked near an ice cream shop and enjoyed drinks, cake and a lengthy rest. It felt strange knowing that the tour itself was almost over. After one final break, we climbed aboard the bikes and completed the last leg back to the Perth Hills. Dan had already arrived and propped his motorcycle against the shed wall. And with that...

The End of the Tour

This marked the official end of our South West Australian Tour.

But it wasn't quite the end of the holiday. Over the following week we explored more local roads around the Perth Hills, enjoyed visits to cafés such as Café Mojo in Mundaring, watched the Australia Day fireworks in Perth and even helped Neal wrestle with a tyre change on his KTM. Forty-eight hours before our flight home, we decided on one final ride. We headed to Fremantle before continuing to the beaches around Rockingham in temperatures of around 36°C. We stopped frequently for drinks, ice creams and any excuse to escape the heat. None of us could have imagined how the day would end.

The Accident

As we travelled along Roe Highway, traffic became increasingly heavy and filtering was required for several kilometres. We had been travelling steadily at around 70 km/h when the traffic ahead suddenly slowed dramatically. Neal reacted instantly, steering onto the edge of the central reservation to avoid the vehicle in front. I was already positioned towards the left side of the lane and slipped safely between two lines of traffic before making my way over to join him. Then I heard a loud bang. As we stopped, Neal admitted his heart sank. He had heard a scream and feared that I had collided with a vehicle. The relief on his face when I appeared moments later was obvious.

We walked back to find Peter standing beside the BMW, which was lying badly damaged in the road. Several motorists had already stopped to help. Although Peter was on his feet, it was immediately clear he was shaken. When I asked if he was alright, he simply wasn't sure. Moments later he sat down, then slowly slid onto the ground. Within minutes the scene was filled with police, ambulance and fire crews. Peter was taken into an ambulance for assessment while officers gathered statements from those involved.

At one point a man carrying a clipboard approached us, claiming that new legislation required us to sign paperwork allowing his recovery truck to remove the motorcycle. Not being the owner, I declined and called Neal over. When

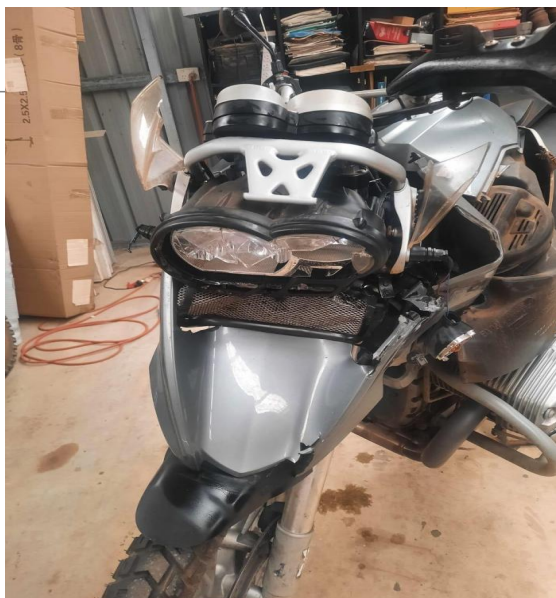
Neal suggested confirming this information with the police, the man's confidence appeared to evaporate rather quickly. The recovery operators soon disappeared.

Meanwhile, firefighters righted the BMW, allowing fuel to drain safely before moving it clear of the carriageway. I spent some time collecting pieces of broken motorcycle from the road, cleaning oil and fuel from my hands using sand from the verge. Eventually Peter was transported to the Royal Perth Hospital. The driver of the car involved was also required to attend hospital for routine testing.

As the emergency services began to leave, Neal and I shared a brief moment of amusement at the sight of a man in high-visibility clothing standing on the central reservation and apparently supervising a broom. Even after everything that had happened, it made us laugh. We returned to Neal's house, collected a trailer and Dan, then drove back to recover what remained of the BMW as darkness fell.

Aftermath

Peter suffered six broken ribs and a tear in his lung, together with an impressive collection of bruises. Thankfully, he is making a good recovery, although the healing process is expected to take some time. During the additional weeks that followed, while Peter recuperated, I continued riding the DR650 around the Perth Hills and even flew to Adelaide to spend a few days with our sister. Eventually, on 15 February, we boarded our flight home to the UK.



*Front and
left side
of BMW
R1200GS*



A Holiday of a Lifetime

What had begun as a simple idea discussed over a conversation in early 2025 became an unforgettable adventure. There were gravel roads, sandy tracks, fallen trees, wildlife, breakdowns, laughter, spectacular scenery and more than a few unexpected challenges.

Most importantly, there was the opportunity to spend time riding with family and friends in one of the most beautiful and remote parts of the world.

The memories will last forever.

Nicole & Peter Le Monnier