

23 May 2020

Eastern Cycling Club

Newsletter

Duty Roster

The duty roster is in abeyance while racing is suspended in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Editor: Nick Tapp
editor@easterncycling.com

As well as Adam's committee update below, this latest issue of the newsletter (while racing is suspended under COVID-19 restrictions) contains a report from Rob Suter at the Peaks Challenge – which took place just before all such events were shut down – and an account from John Williams of a recent race at the Loop. John's dreaming, of course; it never happened. But it will happen again. Meanwhile, try to stay motivated, stay healthy and stay safe!

Message from the President

Greetings members,

Your committee held its monthly meeting via Zoom on Wednesday last week. There are two major agenda items we'd like to share with you.

1 Resumption of racing update

The easing of restrictions as of last Wednesday (aka Stage 2) limits groups outside to no more than 10 people and includes a requirement of 1.5 metres social distancing, which prohibits us from considering racing. The race committee is planning for the possibility of a return to racing when the next stage is announced. When racing resumes, it will likely be at venues where we don't require road or council permits, namely Casey Fields, Metec and Kew Boulevard. This is also seen as a good way of easing us back into 'racing mode' rather than some of the more strenuous road venues we would usually be riding on at this time of year, such as Gruyere and Yarra Glen.

Ultimately, we won't re-commence racing until we get the appropriate approval from our governing body, AVCC/VCV.

2 ECC going cashless

The committee has decided we should investigate the pros and cons of the club going cashless in its operations. One outcome from COVID-19 is that many retailers and cafes no longer take cash. We will be sending out a survey to all members shortly via TeamApp so you can have your say and also give us any ideas on how we could pay entry fees, distribute prize money and so on if we decide to go cashless. Our decision-making will be heavily guided by your feedback, so please take some time out to give a quality response and any suggestions you may have to this important survey.

Regards,
Adam



Peaks Challenge Falls Creek, 8 March 2020

As Pat Ruys discussed in the last newsletter, and as has been well publicised, the consequences of the response to COVID-19 have troubled many people, me included. As of now (2 May), with a possible easing of restrictions next week, it hasn't seemed too difficult; I've settled into 'virtual work' (code for WFH), still have a job, and can still do 'simple exercise, close to home' (aka ride my bike about the beautiful Yarra Valley). We didn't run out of dunny paper (although we were down to our last roll), the sky hasn't fallen, and Stage 3 lockdown for us Victorians has been nowhere near as onerous as that imposed in Europe and other parts of the world. And it seems to have worked ...?

I was still going down the street daily for a coffee, and to poke my nose in the supermarket – really, I should say, for some other normal human interaction. We could buy the materials to build horse shelters. We were both doing 'virtual work' and had enough on our 7 acres to otherwise occupy ourselves. And the dog, like all dogs in Australia, were getting a decent daily workout! We just miss the wider social interactions in our lives.

But as we headed into it in the middle of March, it was unsettling. What shape was it going to take? Would we be able to prepare enough to occupy ourselves in total lockdown on our 7-acre block? And would I still be able to ride my bike? The latter was a concern, for a number of reasons: it is wonderful for my physical and mental wellbeing, and I just can't do home trainers. For me they are as boring as watching grass grow in the middle of a drought. Sitting on one of them gives me as much pleasure as a web meeting – and believe me, I am well versed in the latter subject after being Skyped and Zoomed and (soon to be) MS Teamed to death in the name of 'remaining connected'!

Also, I'd just completed the Peaks Challenge, and with that base of miles was looking forward to an autumn of fitness before our (now cancelled) trip to France and the TdF in July. Racing is a great training motivator for me. There's also the camaraderie of racing alongside the rest of the club, done in good spirit as we all quietly rejoice being fortunate enough to still be able to raise the heart rate in a competitive arena. Stuck at home on a home trainer – well, enough said already!

Victoria's alpine community was lucky to hold the Peaks Challenge this year – possibly the only mass tourism event for the first six months of 2020. As our Editor knows, the Alpine Classic was cancelled because of the bushfires in January, and the Peaks Challenge was just as precariously placed: the road from Trapyard Gap at the back of Falls only opened in the week before the event in March. Ten days later, Stage 1 restrictions came in, limiting gatherings to less than 500 people. There were 1300 cyclists at the start at 6.30 am, along with many support personnel and helpers. Alpine communities may yet enjoy the fruits of a good snow season – from those of us still with money to spend.



The event briefing on Saturday evening. Gatherings of this size were banned less than 10 days later.





Ian R. Smith also competed in – and completed – the Peaks Challenge. I came across him four times during this retelling: twice, training in the weeks beforehand, and twice at the event. I'm sure it was him that I crossed paths with at McMahons Creek; and I saw him when he was tackling his epic triple-Donna the Sunday before. When I caught up to him on my one-Donna, from home, ride, he was looking pretty wasted on his third ascent!

My hopes of a good time (somehow miraculously faster than my diesel training times suggested) were scuppered when I woke with a head cold on the Friday morning. Do I stay or do I go? I contacted the people I would be staying with (all medicos) to enquire if they wanted to risk my presence: fortunately, they said come along, the more the merrier (aka *Ruby Princess*, although none of the four got sick!) I drove up there on a warm, sunny Saturday, sharing with my youngest son my opinions of what the world should do about COVID-19 – several proven wrong by subsequent events!

The other glitch in the plans was the deteriorating weather forecast. I've done enough Donnas in the snow to know what I need to wear – it is still a glorious novelty for me, a boy who grew up in the dry of SA's interior, to ride amid snow! I'd replaced two vital pieces of cold-weather clothing that were worn out; but I had never worn either of the new items, purchased at the TDU in January, in anger before, and both were of far lighter construction than the ones they replaced (a gilet and Santini Eroica 50% wool jersey, purchased in Milan the day Tom won the Giro). In the end, they worked superbly, as the photos of my ruddy complexion in the mist at the tops of mountains confirm!

So, to the day. After a sleepless night, to the start line in the mist and darkness, and off down the mountain we go. First rise about 6 km down Falls, and my legs wouldn't work – they hurt like hell – and I couldn't breathe. One of those self-doubt moments we cyclists often experience: do we stop, or do we go on? I talked myself into the latter, and would assess things at the top of Tawonga Gap. Tawonga Gap was completed in a reasonable time and without too much discomfort, so onward I marched. Hurtled down to Germantown – those corners 7, 9 and 11 aren't so bad if you use all the road – and hopped on a group into Harrierville. Among them were guys wearing black knicks with Italian colours on one hem and Ozzie on the other. I'd come across them doing the People's Challenge Tour at the TDU in January – the colours were in preparation for their group trip to follow the Giro in May. We did discuss whether the Giro would even be on: I'm guessing they didn't go!

Soldier on up Hotham, into the mist and cloud and cold above about 1300 metres, mist so thick that my GPS stopped working for a few ks over the top. Then to the 'Strade Bianche' section of unsealed road – really, it should have been called 'Strade Rosse', because that's what we and our bikes looked like after traversing it! We'd been warned about it, and the top 2 cm were red mud, but, finding it solid underneath, I went onto the wheel tracks on the right side of the road and sped through it – making the most of the downhills, because I don't go up very fast!

Dinner Plain stop was a challenge, but fortunately they'd opened the First Aid room with some heat; and shortly after I entered the overcrowded room, someone vacated two seats, so I could eat my tasteless chicken wrap and ponder changing clothes and reapplying cream to my groin. I did neither, but wished I'd done the latter as soon as I remounted, as the chafed areas quickly became apparent! It was there I met Ian R., arriving as I headed back to my bike. I pointed him to the food tent, the valet tent and, most importantly, the First Aid room. His was a sorry tale: three flats already!





Back on the bike and it was a challenge working the mud-caked front derailleur, but a bigger challenge was controlling the shaking elbows to get around corners at 60 km/h. Finally, out of the cloud, and heading towards Omeo, tackling the bastard of a hill that pops up at Cobungra, while observing the greening recovery of the fire-damaged farmland and bush. I was seesawing among the 12-hour leaders, who climbed just a little too fast for me (but I wished I was well ahead of them). They just got away from Omeo before me, and I watched them slowly draw away up the Bogong High Plains Road – a pleasant 4% open climb through farmland.

Heading into Anglers Rest, I resisted the temptation to hop onto some guys passing me – WTF Corner and the back of Falls were still to come. At Anglers I took Mark's advice (he being the organiser of the apartment that we stayed in): no point filling your bidons up, because there's nowhere to drink after WTF. Well, almost: I made sure my belly was full of water and food on the road to WTF, with a little left in my bidons. From the hill's profile I'd spied two brief downhill bits – grab a drink while riding on the first and stop at the second, about an hour up, to get a gel in along with some water. Back into the fog, mist and cold, grind through the never-ending 13+% segment, and suddenly it was over, swooping into Trapyard Gap – all those times grinding away up Wellington Road had paid off. Then the last leg into Falls Creek, but first over the interminable undulating climb to the top, through the unchanging scenery, unseen through the fog, once we'd cleared the burnt forested areas. Finally, past the timing point, to be able to stop to grab a last banana; then charge (somewhat) in the big ring, praying that I'd see any corners in time given the 100 m visibility and the unmarked road being the same grey colour as the verge. The finish at last, a feeling of accomplishment and personal pride; a pat on the back from one of the 12-hour leaders – that's what I'd managed: 235 km and over 4000 m vertical in 12 hours!

I saw Ian R. the following morning as he was swapping his finisher's jersey for one that fitted: no more flats, 30 minutes or so slower than me, and another off his bucket list. Well done, Ian: three flats would cost me a full hour, plus sore thighs from trying to push on on only 80 psi.

Congratulations to the guys I shared the apartment with. David Chesney got an under-10



A sense of (weary) satisfaction at finishing





hours jersey, and James was stiff – he was one minute too slow for the same after damaging his rear derailleur in a fall, then breaking his chain.

And to Mark, who soldiered on, completing his ninth 3P in ten and a half. This one was said to be one of the hardest, with the cold and rain: 1500 entrants, 1300 starters, 1100 finishers (under 13 hours). Especial thanks to Mark's wife, Chris, who filled us in the evenings with sumptuous food, as well as doing Germantown and back on the closed roads on Sunday, which equates to about 60 km of climbing.

PS Many ECC members are of a vintage either to know of, or even appreciate, the Rolling Stones. (To think that they released their first single when I was only five or so!) Their contribution to understanding the COVID-19 world, the newly released single 'Living in a ghost town', captures the absurdity of the changes thrust upon us. The video footage of streets in major cities across the world totally devoid of people is sooo striking. If you haven't caught it, visit <https://youtu.be/LNNPNweSbp8>. Rock on, everyone!

Robert Suter

News etc.

The Phantom Loop

By John Williams

Wednesday 22 April, 9.45 am. It seems like three years since we last raced, but old habits die hard, and I find myself pedalling along the Boulie, just as I would on any other Wednesday in the days before COVID, PPE, social distancing and 'flattening the curve'. As I approach the turnoff for the Loop, I turn right instinctively, and even as I realise I'm doing it, a sense of nostalgia urges me to take a couple of circuits, just for old times' sake.

There are no cars parked at the bottom of the hill, no banners across the barriers announcing 'Cycle Race in Progress', and as I pedal up the hill there are no other bikes circling around, no voices bantering about last night's breakaway at Metec, no desk or ref taking entries. Is it like this for Jesaulenko when he returns to an empty MCG on a quiet Thursday morning 50 years after his great mark in front of 100,000 screaming fans, I wonder? Probably, yeah, I conclude.

The trees on the left-hand side of the course look dry and stunted. I've been watering these trees every week for over 15 years, and they've missed me. I dismount and offer them a tentative splash. No yells of 'Watch out for the snakes' or 'This is where the big knobs hang out'. It's at times like these you realise that the old jokes truly are the best!

Remounting, I head off on a warm-up lap and resolve to ride my own race. Division 1b, 40 minutes. Keep it hard, especially up the hill, try to hit the start/finish line at 30 km/h each lap. Throughout the warm-up lap I recite in my mind the ref's briefing: no passing a higher grade, don't cut down when overtaking, don't pedal through the bottom corner, stay left and in single file after the race. Got it.

Up the hill to the start/finish line I pick the pace up to easy race pace. Heading towards the top bend I sense a bike behind, and then the buzz of a freewheel as Greg Foster from Northern draws alongside with a 'How ya going, Johnny Boy?' We establish that he





hasn't been on the bike much, not fully fit etc., but he felt he might come down and give it a shake. Then he flies into the bottom corner and races away up the hill. Just like Greg. Never too early to attack for some of these Northern guys.

Greg is away and my chase is not bringing him back. I look over my shoulder and there are two old bulls who ain't gonna chase down an early break but will be around when the prize money is being divvied up. Chris Ellenby and Mark Edwards are sitting neatly in my draft. No help from that quarter so I continue the chase down the slope, and Big Dougie Page roars past like a train with Dean Niclasen on his wheel. Now there's 200 kg of manpower to get a draft from, but they are going too fast downhill for me, and others file past: Webby, Grant Farr, Russ Wheelhouse (haven't seen him for a while). The two old bulls abandon me for a better draft. Even Nick Tapp is faster than me down the hill, but with a little desperation I just manage to slide into his meagre slipstream.

With the combined horses of Doug and Dean we pull Greg back, but it takes a few laps. As we slip past him I can't work out whether it's a grin or a grimace on Gregg's face. He slips in behind me, I'm head down chewing the bar tape, focused on the arse in front.

We crest the hill yet again and I notice that not only has Keith turned up, but he is sitting at the ref's desk. After 20 years of refereeing this venue every week, it must be three years now since he retired. How wonderful to see him in control once again.

Back to the bitumen, somebody is doing severe damage up front. I see Dean, Grant and Ray Russo taking turns and they are doing no harm to our average speed, but keep it up and I might be back in for more heart surgery – maybe get some fresh legs while I'm at it. Still, I'm going better than

Greg. We're just passing him again – he's paying big-time for the fast start.

There is relief on the horizon, as we close in on Div 1a. Mark Sedden, Troy Jordan, Phil Cav, Stephen Lane, Fraser Short et al. are going as hard as they can, bless them, but they are not going to hold us off today. Since we are not allowed to overtake, we get a short spell as we slow up behind them. Then Keith does the unthinkable. As we cross the finish line, yet again topping 34 km/h, he yells that we are permitted to overtake the higher grade. No, no, no! I was just recovering, and off we go again, starting with an Ellenby Attack.

Three laps of madness, and we have him back in our sights. Just as we reel him in, Edwards hits us with a counterattack. That must mean there are four laps to go, and we all know that Mark can only go for three. Dean and Ray do a heap of work to chase him down.

They are preparing for the finish, Keith has moved to the left side with a bell, Simon is holding up the Numero 3, indicating the bell is for Division 3. Ray yells, 'Does that mean three laps to go?' Simon treats him to a look of disdain. In fairness to Ray, he is suffering from oxygen debt, and not much is getting to the brain. Then again, what's his excuse the rest of the time?

Mark drops out and is last seen remonstrating with anyone who'll listen (and those that won't) about the timeliness of bell ringing (like a lap or two earlier would've been nice). Ellenby anticipates the bell with another attack. Grant, Dean and Ray are quick to chase and a whole bunch of us jump into the vacuum they have created. Chris is first around the corner, followed by Dean, then Grant, but all of them look pretty stuffed. I slide around the corner in company with Ross Clark, Dave Rooke, and I know Webby and Tappy are in tow. I give it everything and



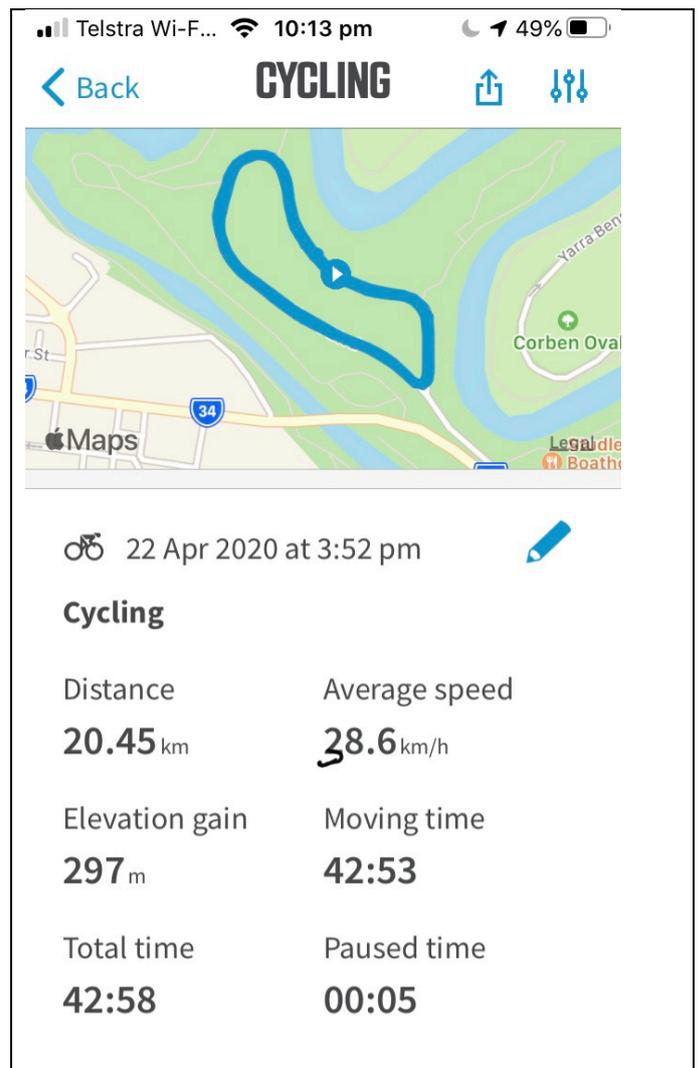


accelerate away. Passing Chris, Grant and Dean, all floundering, I see the finish line approaching. Webby and Nick are breathing down my neck, but somehow I find another leg and reach the line with a tyre's width to spare. Both arms in the air in a celebration that Peter Sagan would be proud of, I roll around, staying left, and savouring my first Division 1b podium in over a year. The GPS is showing an average speed of 38.6 km/h, not bad after a layoff.

At the finish line again, Keith greets me with a disqualification: 'You must have both hands on the handlebars throughout the finish.'

I look around, everyone has left. I'll catch up with them at the coffee shop. They are not there, either. It's like the event never happened. Even my GPS is now lying to me, but I'm able to adjust that.

Of course the entire story is a figment of an overactive and underemployed imagination, and yet nearly all of it has happened over the years. Here's to a quick end to restrictions so we can start proper racing again, and hopefully cease those nauseating grandchildren/grandparent videos that seem to conclude every news bulletin. 'Love you Poppy, miss you Nanna.' That really is not entertainment!



News etc.

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Max Kornhofer





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