

These seven suggestions are extracts from *On the Road Again**, the Bear's alphabetical Australian bike holiday book. But don't worry, this story is worth a look even if you have the book; it features some updates and all-new photography. All together the book features details of 52 destinations – one a week for a year.

New South Wales

Dorrigo

FALLING WATER

There's been a terrific argument about the name of this small hinterland town, with some locals insisting it derives from a Spanish commander during the Peninsular Campaigns called Don Dorrego, a friend of a bloke who settled in the area. Others back an Aboriginal origin.



'It's difficult to check that due to the museum's unusual policy of not opening to the public.'

Someone actually searched the records of the Spanish equivalent of the Canberra War Memorial and found no trace of the Don, so the Aboriginal derivation it probably is. Phew. Unless, of course, the bloke who named the place couldn't spell his Spanish mate's name.

The town itself is a pleasant little place with about 1000 inhabitants and the climate is pleasant thanks to the town's elevation from the coastal plain.

Getting there: Dorrego is on the Waterfall Way and that's recommendation enough all by itself. Running basically from Armidale to the Pacific Highway at Raleigh, this is a stunningly beautiful (though not necessarily stunningly good) bit of road through some truly outstanding natural scenery. Well, it would be natural scenery, wouldn't it? I mean, nobody would go on about unnatural scenery, would they, or artificial scenery. No, on second thought – there's actually a lot of artificial scenery about. Like gardens and such. Hmm. Don't mind me – just ride the Waterfall Way.

There are several other ways of getting to Dorrego and most of them are pretty good, too, although they tend to have short stretches of gravel. The road up from Coffs Harbour via Coramba is a personal favourite. A back road from Grafton

through Nymboida is well worth riding, though the surface is changeable. There are also various gravel tracks and some of them are good value, too.

Best road/s: I've given that one away already – it's the Waterfall Way.

Other attraction/s: The Steam and Railway Museum west of town claims to have the largest collection of rolling stock in the southern hemisphere, but it's difficult to check that due to the museum's unusual policy of not opening to the public. You can take a look from the road if you're interested.

Waterfalls abound (as you might already have divined from the name of the road) and there are places such as the Rainforest Centre in Dorrego that will give you a detailed look at the magnificent forests that once covered the land.

Down in Bellingen there are craft shops and such as well and (I am assured by a local who prefers to remain anonymous) even drinkable coffee. One of the cafés has a bike on show, we believe.

Our pick: The Dorrego RSL Club in Hickory Street comes highly recommended, but then the bloke who's recommended it is the manager. Still, Peg, we trust you. Likewise, the Dorrego Heritage Hotel Motel, (02) 6657 2016 gets a good wrap.

Tourist information: (02) 6657 2486

Northern Territory

Hermannsburg

THE DESERT AWAITS

The town itself is interesting, with an historic precinct that lets you see what the original mission was like; but what I really like out here is Palm Valley. You can get petrol and some supplies in town.

Getting there is not hard. Just head west from Alice Springs on Larapinta Drive, number 6, make sure you take the left fork at Iwupataka and 125km later you're in Hermannsburg. There are very few distractions along the way, apart from the turnoffs to Simpsons Gap (no relation to the donkey), Standley Chasm (no relation to the knife) and Wallace Rockhole (no relation to the Line, as far as we know). None of us have been to the last-named, though we mostly enjoyed the others. A couple of kilometres before you reach Hermannsburg you'll see the Albert Namatjira Memorial. The great painter lived here for many years.

Best road/s: Hmm. The Mereenie Loop Road is interesting, though it's often suggested that you need a 4WD; most bikes should make it without any problem. In our humble opinion, anyway – if the weather's been bad that might not be true. Check at Kata-Anga Tea Rooms in Hermannsburg (and try the apple strudel)

'The Finke River is one of the oldest rivers on the planet; show some respect.'

or, more sensibly – so you don't ride all the way out here to find you have to turn around and go back – ask at the tourist office in Alice Springs. It's near enough to 200km to the next civilisation, at Kings Canyon Resort, from Hermannsburg. You will need a Mereenie Loop Pass because you're crossing Aboriginal land; check with the tourist centre in Alice Springs.

The pick of the roads is the track into Palm Valley. No permit is required, but it takes a fair bit of care; there is deep sand in places. Here it's always suggested that you need 4WD but we've been in by bike, so maybe you can get in, too. Pace yourself and be careful out there – it's best not to go alone.

If you only like tar, you'll have to go back the way you came. There is no other tarred road out of town, not for any distance, unless they actually have the Mereenie Loop finished (which seems unlikely).

Other attraction/s: I've mentioned a few above, but there are plenty of others such as Glen Helen resort, Ormiston Gorge, Tnorala (Gosse Bluff) and so on.



Our pick: Camp out at Palm Valley in Finke Gorge National Park. Be one with the ages. It's magic; the Amphitheatre is awesome at any time of day. Take all your supplies in, including water, and bring 'em out again. The Finke River is one of the oldest rivers on the planet; show some respect.

Tourist information: Alice Springs, in Gregory Terrace (08) 8952 5800 or www.catia.asn.au/catia; Hermannsburg, at the Kata-Anga Tea Rooms, (08) 8956 7402

Queensland

Cairns

BOOM AND BIKE TOWN

One of my mates, an American from San Francisco, once described Cairns as "Miami without the Cubans, the food or the architecture"; but of course he meant that as a compliment. Except, maybe, for the food.

Cairns is very much a tropical city, with all the heat and flies and general air of languor that implies, but it is also a vastly efficient money-making machine that takes tourists and, in the course of a couple of weeks, turns them into heaps of cash. The combination is invigorating.

Being very much a tourist town – the locals reckon the airport will soon have more international traffic than Sydney, which sounds a bit unlikely – Cairns is also a tolerant place. Don't count on too much tolerance from the Highway Patrol though, especially on the stretch of road between the city and Palm Cove.

Getting there: It's a long haul up the coast or inland through Charters Towers, but those are pretty much the only ways you can get to Cairns by road. We'd probably recommend the inland route; it's a bit more interesting. It's worth keeping in mind that Cairns is as far from Brisbane as Brisbane is from Melbourne. All together now: "Big fella my country!"

The temptation is to rush this trip but I'd suggest you not even try to tackle it if you don't have plenty of time. You can always fly up and rent a bike in Cairns; call the tourist office for rental bikes, or get in touch with Wayne Leonard at Wayne