

# Tough trek for survivor

IT WAS a journey that killed the first people who attempted it, but a British cyclist has retraced the epic route of Burke and Wills by riding from Melbourne to Karumba.

Hailing from the outskirts of London, Mr Laird completed the journey of more than 3000 kilometres in just 32 days.

Although it was something he had long wanted to do, Mr Laird said there were times when he could have thrown in the towel.

"There were some terribly difficult days. Cycling the distance wasn't the problem, but I like company, and it was very lonely. I have only been married for 12 months and I missed my wife a lot," he said.

"Riding unsupported through the outback took a lot of getting used to. Riding through outback New South Wales was terrible. I did wonder what I was doing at times and felt like stopping. But the reality is I was in the middle of nowhere and just had to keep going."

As well as battling loneliness, Mr Laird also had to be wary of Australia's unique wildlife.

"One night I had a two-foot-long brown snake in my tent. It was sitting quite comfortably on top of my sleeping bag. I wrapped my shirt around my hands and took the pegs out of the tent so I could lift it up and shake it onto the ground.

"I was more scared of the red-belly black snakes. I saw one that was six-foot long and as thick as your arm. They were real monsters."

The 41-year-old said one of the hardest parts of the journey was celebrating his birthday alone.

"There was nothing to do, I was on my



VICTORY: Mike Laird at the iconic Purple Pub in Normanton. - Picture: SUPPLIED

own. It would have been good if someone was there to say well done."

Although his journey tested his physical and mental limits, Mr Laird said his expedition was made a lot easier through modern-day technology.

"It was tough but I would never ever dream of comparing what I did to Burke and Wills' undertaking. I had a goretex jacket, a compass, a GPS locator, and I knew roughly where the edge of Australia was. I probably had more medical knowledge than their surgeon had and I had an understanding of what would kill me in the outback."

Mr Laird said he became interested in the ill-fated explorers after receiving a book about their expedition.

"I love great stories and the Burke and Wills story is a really fascinating one.

"I got a copy of the Dig Tree book as a present. It's one of these things I have always wanted to do and to I've always wanted to see more of the outback. Very few people take the time to go and stay on a station, or talk to the people in these remote areas."

"I have an absolute obsession with travel - the people, the cultures, the

food - everything."

Mr Laird said people who passed him on the road would stop to talk to him, which meant complete strangers on the road ahead were expecting him to pass through.

"The bush telegraph was in full swing. So people two or three days down the road from me knew I was coming. When I got to a place they would say 'Oh, you're Mike Laird, the Scottish cyclist.'"

Part of the reason he was so recognisable was because of his unique attire. Mr Laird wore a big bush hat and carried a 14-inch knife on his hip for his entire journey.

"People said I was the English version of Crocodile Dundee," he said.

Some of the people he met along the way were amazed by his feat, and others just thought he was crazy.

"If I met a stockman or a farmer or a bushie, they would acknowledge that I was facing a challenge, but surviving the outback is just a fact of life for them. But in some of the bigger towns like Longreach, Cloncurry or Karumba where people are mostly fisherman, people were amazed at what I'd done."

Mr Laird works as a risk management assessor for an insurance company - an ironic profession for an adventurer.

"I spoke to my insurance company and they revoked my insurance for this trip. It's something I didn't tell many people, but I did the whole thing without insurance."

From Karumba, Mr Laird hitched a ride with a road train to Cairns, where he was planning to meet his wife for a long-awaited reunion.

## IN BRIEF

### Lucas faces protestors

QUEENSLAND Acting Premier Paul Lucas faced a fierce barrage of protestors, angered by the State Government's assets sell-off, at yesterday's Labour Day march in Brisbane. Mr Lucas was drowned out by an irate crowd of tens-of-thousands of unionists gathered at the end of the annual march at the RNA Showgrounds, as he stood to deliver his maiden May Day speech. "Give us our jobs! We want our jobs!" protestors yelled.

### Petrol price on the rise

THE national price of petrol has risen after a major price war across Sydney finished and crude oil costs nudged higher. A litre of unleaded cost \$1.29 in the week ended May 2. With Sydney's bowser battle ending, the price there rose almost three cents. It left Canberra as the cheapest capital to fill the tank with prices there more than half a cent cheaper than Sydney's. Darwin remains the most expensive capital in which to buy petrol with a litre of unleaded costing \$1.32 in the Top End. Globally, crude prices were supported by expectations that the huge oil slick in the Gulf of Mexico could lead to delays in the delivery of crude oil in the United States.

### State games bid

QUEENSLAND will draw on the experiences of Winter Olympics host city Vancouver as it shapes its Commonwealth Games bid, Premier Anna Bligh said. Ms Bligh, in Vancouver on a trade mission, said the city would share details of its preparations with Queensland to aid the Gold Coast's bid to host the 2018 Commonwealth Games.

### Green investment risk

INVESTMENT in green energy will plunge if the Federal Government does not pass changes to its existing laws. AGL Energy chief executive, Michael Fraser predicts job losses and investment uncertainty if the government does not pass the its

renewable energy target (RET) amendments which requires 20 per cent of energy sources to come from renewable energy sources by 2020. "If the legislation isn't passed there will be flow on effects to other industries," he told a conference of 700 clean energy experts in Adelaide yesterday. "There is already considerable uncertainty around carbon pricing and I think failing to ensure a stable investment framework around the renewable industry, will see flow on impacts for investment in energy infrastructure. "There's no reason why this legislation shouldn't be passed in the next few weeks." Since the government announced the amendments in February, the price of Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs) has rebounded.

### Illegal weapons

THROWING stars, flick knives and Freddy Krueger-inspired bladed gloves are among the growing number of dangerous illegal weapons smuggled into the country each year, authorities have revealed. In the past year Australian customs detected more than 16,000 bladed weapons brought in through airports and overseas cargo terminals. The number represents an 11 per cent increase since 2007.

### Watson nearly home

TEENAGER Jessica Watson continues to battle huge swells but has rounded the final cape on her long voyage into the record books. Wild weather has been battering the 16-year-old on her final run to the finish line in Sydney. After a very rough few days being pitched around in angry, white seas off Tasmania, Jessica yesterday excitedly blogged: "The last cape!" She added: "Ella's Pink Lady and I have made it around the South East Cape of Tasmania and we're now headed north on the final leg to Sydney!" Jessica has passed the 22,000-nautical-mile mark on her bid to become the youngest person to sail solo, non-stop and unassisted around the world. Just 1000 odd nautical miles remain.

## Counting down to rodeo ball

ONLY 12 weeks until we crown our Rodeo Queen and Charity Queen for 2010; the Bell and Moir Toyota Rodeo Ball 2010 will be held on Saturday, July 24.

The 400 guests who attended the ball last year agreed it was an outstanding event, and this year's Rodeo Ball promises to live up to that standard. It is a night that focuses on our five entrants, and gives them the chance to shine. So mark your calendars for July 24. Tickets will go on sale in late June.

Speaking of our five entrants, last week our fifth entrant joined the quest. Although Danielle Bellamy may have entered the quest a bit later than the others, she has hit the ground running, fundraising for NQ Rescue Helicopter. Watch out for her huge trucking and ute show on May 22; the Isa Big Rigs Challenge will be held at Townies, with entertainment by Travis Sinclair.

May is always busy with Mother's Day, and this year Katie Humston is holding a Mother's Day luncheon on Saturday at 11 am, in the covered area at the Mount Isa Rugby Union grounds. The ticket price of \$30 includes a fashion show, hair show and a ball gowns auction. All proceeds will go toward Katie's chosen community organisation, the Mount Isa Rugby Union.

Emma Cillekens is holding a Mother's Day break-



Isa Rodeo Queen Quest Co-ordinators

fast at the Irish Club. Starting at 9.30 am, breakfast will cost \$25 and there are raffles and giveaways to enjoy, while raising funds for the Leukaemia Foundation, Mount Isa.

Next fortnight, we will give you more details on the Pyjama Party that Nancy Scott is organising for North West Breast Cancer Support Group; and on the Trash and Treasure Karen Ryan is lining up for the Queensland Country Women's Association, Mount Isa.

Now that we have the technical difficulties ironed out, you can get more details of the Mother's Day functions, and other upcoming events, by visiting our calendar online at <http://sites.google.com/site/isarodeoqueenquest/Calendar2010>

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