

RIDING THE BOUNDS:

The AEBM Committee and friends get out for a ride at the 16th Annual 'Riding of the Bounds' in Berwick, 18th April 2004 - Barefoot & Bitless!



by AEBM Member Lisa Yelland

Every year for the last 16 years there has been a ceremonial Riding the Bounds of Berwick, Victoria. This ceremony has become one of the highlights of my year.

Many years ago in England on the borders of Scotland there sat the smallish Shire of Berwick on Tweed. The Shire boundaries were regularly ridden to prevent infiltration from those pesky neighbours, the Scots.

Every year in Berwick Victoria, as a tribute to our sister city Berwick on Tweed, we also "ride the bounds". Last year Lezley Golding (AEBM Secretary) and I attended the Riding of the Bounds on our horses Mr Darcy and Ned Kelly. Both were barefoot and Mr Darcy was bitless.



This year five extra AEBM members rode the bounds with us: Julie Leitl (Treasurer) and My Kariboo, Gail Bateman (President) and Bobby, Steve Golding (Member) and Booma, Ysabelle Dean (Publicist) and Lady Hawke, Lindsey Hobson (12 year old AEBM member) and Kara. All of the horses were of course Iron Free - Barefoot and Bitless. Most of us took the precaution of putting Old Macs on our horses' fore-feet as they do not usually do much distance work and we weren't sure how they'd find the terrain. All up there were over 300 horses present at this great event. This year's ride was a tad quicker than last but all our horses performed well - if a little enthusiastically.

The ride proceeds from Akoonah Park in Berwick, up Emerald-Beaconsfield road. Left at the Pub and then through the private property of one of the organisers. The final three km or so of the ride is up the main street of Berwick on the Princes Highway and back to Akoonah Park about 15 km in all.

I started my day by arriving at Stevley Park where Lezley and Steve live along with five of the horses going on the ride. Ysabelle and Lindsey were already grooming and feeding their horses. Steve, Lezley and I went and caught our mounts and brought them up to the yards to get ready to leave. The loading of the horses onto the floats went well (apart from LadyHawke throwing a brief hissy fit) and we proceeded to Akoonah Park in convoy - okay, rubber ducky!

Julie and Gail were riding down to Akoonah Park to meet us there. We managed to find a place where we could park the floats together and close to the toilets for our convenience - what a pity they were kept locked all day.

Well, here we all were, safe and sound, with plenty of time to register and pick up our maps, bumper stickers and numbers. Just as well, Lindsey and I had to stand in line for 20 minutes to get everyone's numbers.

Steve's mum Betsy was there taking photos as we mounted and moved off in a group to the oval where the Mayor of Berwick made a speech and bid us all "make sure the bounds are secure." With Mr Darcy and Ned feeling very forward Lezley and I decided to circle around the oval and stay to the back of the ride. This was all good in theory but Ned moved off at a brisk walk and I soon left the AEBM group behind.

As we moved onto the farm property things picked up pace with a couple of quite large hills, which of course many people felt the need to gallop up. Not my first choice, but Ned made his own choices and we had a ball getting to the mid-point stop. Lindsey and Kara upset a few riders by starting before their turn, ducking and weaving in amongst the horses and setting them all off like pop-guns. Despite Kara's keenness and bitlessness, Lindsey had no control or surefootedness issues at all, unlike a lot of riders with heavily metallated horses.

The main street of Berwick is on a reasonably steep hill and as we rode you could hear the shod horses slipping and sliding as they tried to get a toehold on the bitumen. Our barefoot horses had no such problems in fact after a couple of riders went past at a canter I had my hands full trying to explain to Ned that galloping up the main street was not the best option. Lezley, Ysabelle and Lindsey had no such reservations and, with yells of "We'll never get a chance to do this again!" took off up the median strip at a brisk pace, waving to startled shoppers along the way.

We all arrived back at Akoonah Park tired but happy that we had been able to enjoy such a great day. There were several trophies awarded for things like the most Australian Rider, and the Mayor of Casey made another speech and asked if the boundaries were secure. Funny, we were having such a good time we forgot all about watching out for those pesky Celts in kilts.

We went back to the floats and worked on removing gear and rubbing the horses down while eating sausages provided by the organizers. Then it was time to pack up, load the horses and head home. I think every horse from Stevley Park got back in the paddock and had a big roll.

As a day out for someone like me who works full time and has two young children it was wonderful to be just me on my horse with a crowd of like-minded people from the AEBM.

There were a couple of things that made me sad though. One of the horses on the ride was so under-weight that I don't think it should have been allowed to participate.

And so many horses (the vast majority shod or even the handful of barefooted ones besides ours) had visible problems with their feet. If only their owners could understand the importance of removing the shoes and trimming correctly. But many of the riders were noticing the Old Macs - and the Mayor's carriage horse was even wearing a pair! and the fact that the AEBM people were riding with no bits. "There's another one of those horses without a bit" was a comment I heard a lot. Ysabelle had handed me a pile of cards with info on both barefooting and riding bitless so as I rode I chatted and handed them out. It was great to see other people recognizing that we were doing something different and that it was working.

Thanks to all the AEBM members who came and made our presence felt at this ride where there are such a diverse group of riders participating in one event. Maybe next year the AEBM will be an even bigger presence. Maybe we'll even win a trophy!

Footnote: Sure enough, the 2005 Bounds ride did see a trophy presented the AEBM team