

Katherine Times

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Cycle turns into fact finding trip

WHEN these two self-confessed "no spring chickens" began planning a ride around Australia on nothing but two pushbikes, the scepticism they met only spurred them on further.

"Denise's parents said 'remember, you aren't spring chickens anymore', and a friend responded saying we were 'sprung chickens', because we had left our (grown up) kids behind and were 'springing' from responsibilities at work," rider Mark Arundel laughed.

The pair from Canberra had been running their successful small service provider business Multi Locus Interactive for 12 years, and decided to take a year off and "revive our interest" in riding.

Their route, which they began in late March, will see them visit every capital city travelling anti-clockwise, camping or staying in cabins along the way.

They arrived in Katherine on July 31 and plan to leave around August 12. The couple has been compiling interviews with people they meet along the way, which they hope to make into a book when they wrap up their trip around January next year.

Mark attended the Defence Indigenous Development Program at the Charles Darwin University Rural Campus on Friday, August 7 through his business connections with Norfolk, and interviewed one of the participants and his family. "Instead of writing a book on how to ride around Australia, we want to write about the people we met," Mark said.



Sprung Chickens Mark and Denise Arundel are taking at least 10 months to ride from hometown Canberra around the country. The only mishap they have had so far with their bikes, which are fitted with cameras and carry 40-50kg, was a cracked wheel in Bowen, Queensland.

Perhaps just as diverse as the people is the country. "Around Mt Surprise (far north Queensland), the country opened up and changed so much from the coast, and there were less towns," Denise said.

"You kind of feel like you own the place," Mark added, pointing out that the ride is more mental than physical.

"The mental bit is when you hit those straight, long roads with no corners and nothing on the side of the road to look at.

"In Mt Isa, an Italian guy approached us saying that he felt so far away being 10,000km from Townsville, in a car, and here we are on pushbikes."

Over the trip, the couple has increased the average number of kilo-

metres they travel per day from 50 to 120. "Travelling up the east coast first, with tame distances between towns, has gradually increased our fitness," Mark said.

In planning the trip, the pair was not deterred by the current economic crisis. "It was probably a good time to get away, we might not have had much work this year," Denise said.

The couple has visited the Great Barrier Reef and the Undara Lava Tubes, with "the most recent (highlight) being Bitter Springs at Mataranka; it was like swimming through an aquarium," they said.

The next stop for these sprung chickens will be Kununurra, then on to Broome. Visit their website www.sprungchickenride.com.