

The Overlanders

Greg Ryan

Newspapers dubbed them 'The Overlanders,' cyclists challenging to be the first to complete a lap of the Australian continent.

Perth man Arthur Richardson was first to set out in June 1899, heading north from Perth carrying "not more than 25 pounds (11.4 kg) of luggage" and a pistol. Heavy rain slowed his progress in Western Australia, and later in the north the black-soil plains were unrideable for several days.

Richardson had keen competition from New Zealand cycling brothers Frank and Alex White, and wealthy adventurer Donald Mackay. They were attempting the ride in a counter-clockwise direction. The White brothers left Melbourne in July and were joined by Mackay in Brisbane.

Each of these men passed through Albury in their quest. The *Western Mail* (Perth) printed a telegram on July 14 from Frank White: "Alex and myself left Melbourne on Wednesday [July 5] ... had to carry our bikes three miles through the gluepot between Winton and Glenrowan ... left Chiltern on Saturday morning, and arrived at Albury at noon. We were received by Messrs Scanlan and Blacklock, of the local club.



Local cyclists outside Albury Cycle Agency, Townsend St
Fred Blacklock left, Jim Scanlan fourth from left.

They both wear shirts with a 'Swift' monogram, Swift cycles were imported,
Scanlan and Blacklock were the Albury agents in 1899.

“We left after dinner for Henty, paced by Mr Scanlan. We were met at Yerong Creek by the combined clubs of Henty.”

Jim Scanlan, a well-known Albury cyclist, rode with the brothers as far as Gerogery. He was proprietor of the Albury Cycle Agency and with Fred Blacklock, manufactured the ‘Relay’ cycle.

On December 29, 1899 the *Albury Banner* reported: “Mr Richardson, the overland cyclist, arrived in Albury on Friday, having ridden 8000 miles on his Humber machine. He describes the road en-route as unrideable in some places. Riding across the Kimberley country in West Australia was the loneliest portion of the journey, and no defined roads for 700 miles ... The driest part of the track was between Powell’s Creek and Bourketown, over 600 miles without an hotel and 108 miles of the journey without water, and nothing but cattle tracks to guide him ... With the exception of being much sunburnt, he is none the worse for his self-imposed task ... The longest ride in one day was 120 miles.”

Richardson was the first to complete the trek, arriving back in Perth on February 4, 1900 after travelling about 11,500 miles (18,500 km) on one bicycle.

The White brothers arrived in Melbourne on March 16, 1900. Mackay was fastest around Australia, arriving in Brisbane on March 27, 1900, three days better than Richardson’s ride.