

# Busting the Bididi

On a rainy Sunday morning at the end of April, Declan von Dietze set off on the Munda Bididi Trail in Albany with his sights set on reaching Mundaring on Thursday. If he pulled it off, this journey of more than 1,000 kilometres over challenging terrain to 'Bust the Bididi' would set a world record, and push him to his physical and mental limits.

**by Lauren Cabrera**

**W**estern Australia's world-famous Munda Biddi Trail is an off-road cycling trail that runs 1,000 kilometres from Mundaring to Albany. Trekking through a range of ecosystems and through many towns, it can be enjoyed in stages, or as part of an end-to-end journey. But, for a determined 22-year-old Declan von Dietze, the trail presented an opportunity to push himself mentally and physically and complete the trail solo and unsupported in four days. He also hoped to raise awareness of the trail and stop at every hut and town along the way.

To give this mission context, the first ever end-to-end trip took a group of experienced riders three weeks to complete. The riders spent time in every 'trail town' along the way, carried plenty of food and supplies, and got a solid eight to 10 hours of sleep each night. Declan's challenge involved sleeping only a few hours a night, and keeping his bike as light as possible and buying almost all his food and drinks from the towns along the trail. He embarked on this gruelling endeavour carrying only a lightweight sleeping bag, a spare pair of socks, a thin jacket, basic bike repair equipment, a few band-aids and some snacks. He was confident that, aside from any major mechanical or physical issues, he could do the distance in four days. *Here is his journey ...*



### DAY 1 Albany to Walpole

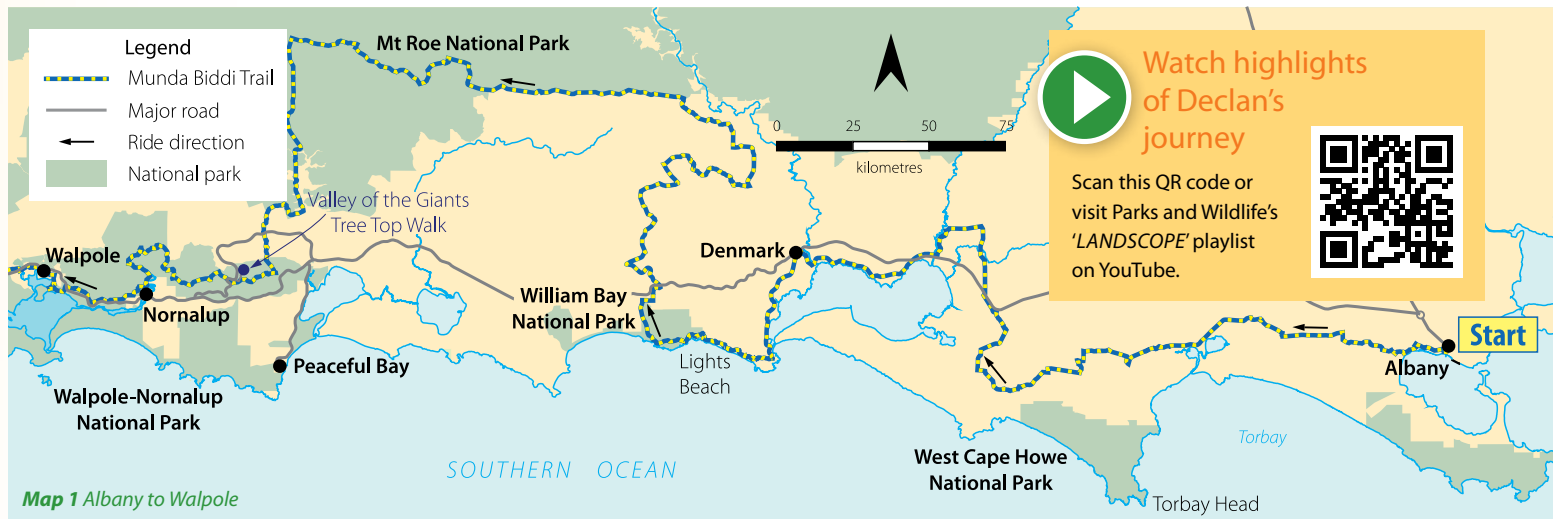
230km  
13 hours riding  
5 hours sleep  
"A few body niggles, but nothing major."

After months of training and planning, and with adrenalin coursing through his veins, Declan steadied himself to accept words of encouragement from Albany Mayor Dennis Wellington; receive a reminder to keep safe from Munda Biddi Trail Foundation Chair Peter Versluis; and enjoy one last hug from his mum, Kay and dad, Erich. Local Menang Elder Carol Pettersen gave a moving Welcome to Country, which gave him permission to pass through the ancient land as her people have done for tens of thousands of years. She also presented him with a message stick, an item carried by traditional people passing through country, which was decorated with emu feathers – a totem of the Menang people – to carry on his journey. After a final countdown, and cheers from the gathered crowd, Declan rode off into the rain to embark on his epic journey.

The first few hours were the fastest, and saw Declan ride along sealed roads through Albany. He then travelled past old railway reserves and Torbay Head in West Cape Howe National Park – the most southern point in Western Australia, which is almost completely covered in heathland and forest.

Declan credited the rain with being his biggest challenge on the first morning –





## “Bikepacking is only going to grow in popularity and the Munda Biddi Trail provides the perfect setting.”

though it helped compact the sandy parts of the trail, it also made trail conditions unpredictable.

Declan arrived in the busy southern coastal town of Denmark for lunch, where he was joined by his parents who said their goodbyes. Then he headed off to one of the most beautiful sections of the trail. Just two days prior, a new section of the trail opened from Denmark heading south – a 10-kilometre stretch along the coast near Lights Beach. Declan was the first to ride it and stopped a couple of times along the way to photograph the beautiful landscape.

The rain cleared up as the day went on and Declan carried on towards Walpole, passing through the beautiful and remote section of tingle and karri forests of the Walpole Wilderness. The section from Denmark to Walpole normally takes people two days to complete, due to the heavy sand, but Declan, aided by the rain, did it in half a day.

He continued riding into the early hours of the morning, past the turn-off to the world famous Tree Top Walk in the Valley of the Giants, until he was 10 kilometres out of Walpole where he stopped on the side of the trail for a few hours' sleep.



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**Main** Riding along the Denmark River.  
 Photo – Lauren Cabrera/DBCA

**Top** Declan was presented with a message stick, a totem of the Menang people, by Menang Elder Carol Pettersen.  
 Photo – Sally Bostwick/DBCA

**Inset above** Point Hillier Vista, Denmark.  
 Photo – Lauren Cabrera/DBCA

### **Bikepacking**

Bike enthusiasts will tell you that bikepacking as a sport has significantly increased in popularity during the past 10 years in WA and much more around the world. DBCA officer and recent Munda Biddi 'end-to-ender' Rod Annear said the last 10 or 15 years had seen a huge growth in bikepacking around the world.

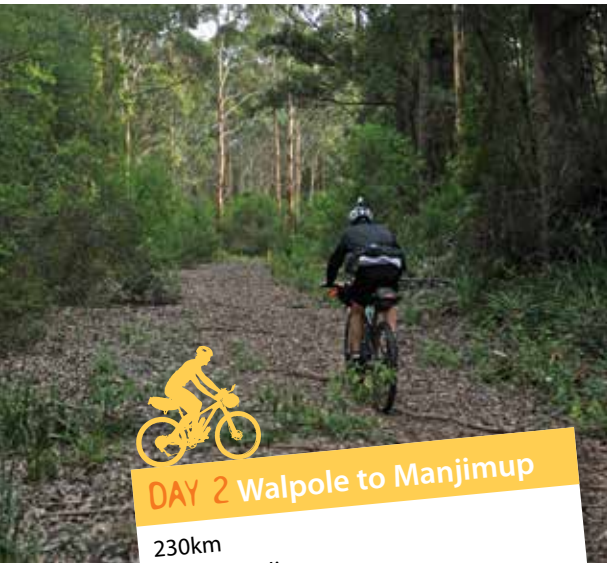
“It’s a sport and a recreation that is attracting new and young people to national parks,” Rod said.

“They might not go out there looking for the solitude and quiet of the bush, but that’s often what brings them back. Bushwalking has and always will be popular, but mountain biking brings a whole new generation of people to parks.

“Bikepacking is only going to grow in popularity and the Munda Biddi Trail provides the perfect setting.”

Bikepacking is a relatively new phenomenon. The older style of bike touring involves large pannier saddle bags that are fixed to the sides and front of the bike. Bikepacking is about taking the minimum impact, lightweight bushwalking sensibilities and putting them in a biking context.

As part of an effort to promote WA as a mountain biking destination, a State master plan for mountain biking was recently released. The *Perth and Peel Mountain Bike Master Plan* outlines plans to expand the current network of trails from 125 kilometres across nine sites to 575 kilometres across 24 sites in the Perth hills, Wungong, Dwellingup, Swan Valley, Jarrahdale and Yanchep. The plan, and more information, can be found at [www.westcycle.org.au](http://www.westcycle.org.au).



## DAY 2 Walpole to Manjimup

230km  
14 hours riding  
3 hours sleep  
"Starting to feel soreness in knees.  
Few issues with charging battery packs."

Declan arrived in Walpole two hours ahead of schedule, having ridden 20 per cent of the trail. The plan for the day was to get to Northcliffe for a late lunch (130km away), then Pemberton for dinner.

After breakfast, he set off north past Swarbrick Art Loop up long, steep climbs towards the popular Yirra Kartta camp site. Yirra Kartta means 'high mountains' in the local Menang Aboriginal language, and the hut is next to an impressive granite dome.

Declan passed the Boorara tree in the mid-afternoon, before heading on to Northcliffe near Warren, to Shannon National Park. Surrounded by karri, marri and jarrah forest, he pushed on in the dark to Pemberton on a part of the trail that is mostly along old railway formations that



are considered good riding. He enjoyed the fast downhill parts out of the Warren River Valley approaching the famous Gloucester Tree.

After dinner at the Pemberton pub, Declan rode towards Manjimup before stopping to rest on the floor of a school in Quinninup. He continued 40 to 50 kilometres to Manjimup before breakfast.



## DAY 3 Manjimup to Collie

295km  
20 hours of riding  
2 hours sleep  
"Sore knees, strain through tendons.  
Some adjustments on the bike needed,  
few things starting to wiggle their way  
loose."

With an acceptance that his pace would start to slow, Declan ventured through the beautiful karri forest between Manjimup and Nannup. This terrain includes sections of 'switchbacks' – downhill zig zags with hard-packed soil and tight (potentially dangerous) corners.

Unfortunately, he misread a sign post and took a wrong turn, which added about seven kilometres to his journey up

a challenging climb – a tough reminder that the trail required mental focus as well as physical brawn.

"With mountain biking you have to pay attention to the trail and navigate as well, so it's as much of a mental challenge as it is a physical one," Declan said.

The switchbacks led Declan to the historic One Tree Bridge where, in 1904, a giant karri tree was laid across the Donnelly River with a deck on top – a testament to the ingenuity of local pioneers. It was replaced in 1971, but a section of the log remains as a memorial on the banks of the river nearby.

Donnelly River is roughly the halfway mark on the Munda Biddi Trail and often the place where, according to Donnelly River Village Manager Andrew Sullivan, riders come through and say, "well, I've come this far, I can do the rest of it".

End-to-end riders often stay overnight in the village, have a day of rest and then set off to complete the second half. Declan stayed for less than an hour, during which time he enjoyed a giant freddo frog, some milo and a chat with Andrew surrounded by friendly resident emus and kangaroos. The next section to Nannup along a gentle downward slope on a stunning karri-lined gravel road, provided welcome respite for his weary legs and he soaked in the pleasant ride through quiet, cool jarrah and karri forest.

After crossing the iconic 115-metre Blackwood River Rail Bridge out of Nannup

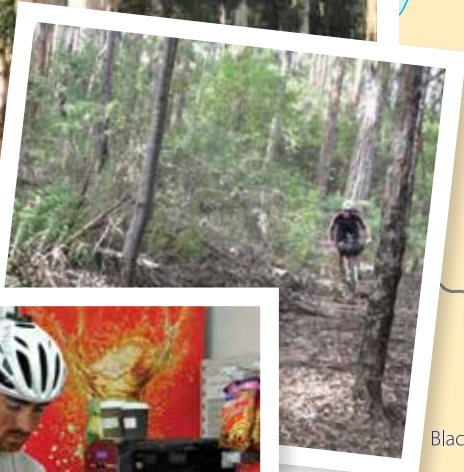
**Above** Approaching the Swarbrick Art Loop.  
*Photo – Shem Bisluk/DBCA*

**Above right** Declan was dwarfed by the incredible towering karri trees.  
*Photo – Lauren Cabrera/DBCA*

*Opposite page*

**Inset left** Stopping to refuel in Northcliffe.  
*Photo – Sally Bostwick/DBCA*

**Inset right** Enjoying the switchbacks near Karta Burnu camp site.  
*Photo – Mark Whittle*

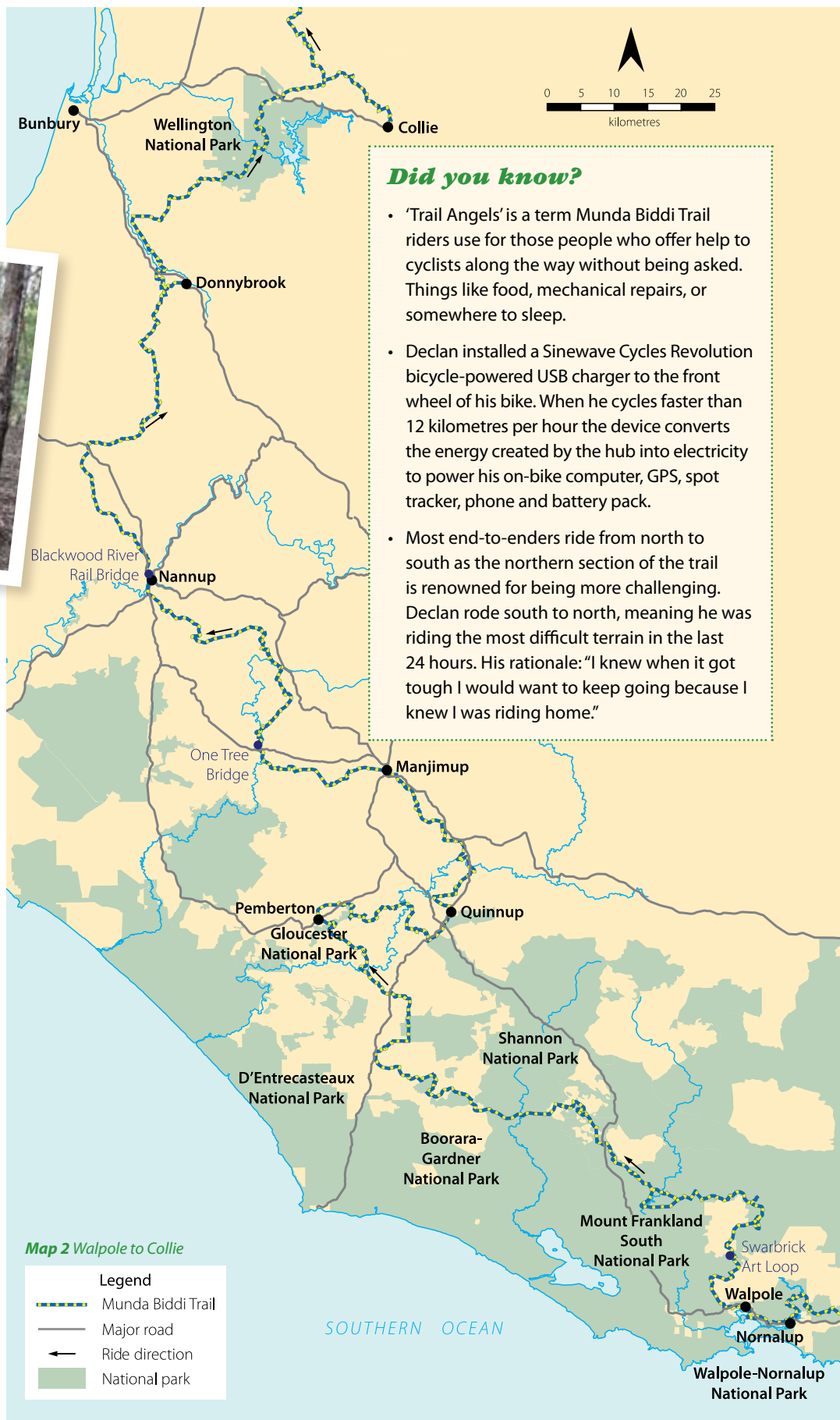


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he followed the Sidings Rail Trail through jarrah and banksia woodlands, and pine plantations before reaching the forest settlement of Jarrahwood. He pushed further north to Donnybrook for a late dinner.

Following a series of forest tracks in the dark of the night, Declan descended into the scenic Ferguson Valley in Wellington National Park and rode through more switchbacks – some uphill, some downhill – and past huge granite boulders.

He got to Honeymoon Pool at about midnight feeling good, but after a lot of climbing and walking decided to push on until he was about 30 kilometres out of Collie.





## DAY 4 Collie to Jarrahdale

220km  
18 hours riding time  
90 minutes sleep  
"Knee soreness, blisters, saddle soreness."

Following a trail spur, Declan journeyed into Collie and filled his panniers with as many bacon and egg muffins as he could to get him through the day.

President of the Collie Mountain Bike Club and owner of Crank'n Cycles Erik Mellegers said the real mental challenges kicked in from Collie.

"By this stage riders have got blisters, saddle soreness and all the things that will draw their mind away from what they're trying to achieve."

"Collie is working towards becoming a mountain biking destination, and is building trail networks and interest," Erik said.

"The Munda Biddi is made for bikepacking."

Although Declan was still two hours ahead of schedule, he faced lots of climbing



to Dwellingup and then deep pea gravel near Jarrahdale.

"The hardest part is always making sure that you're with it," Declan said. "Focusing on every sign post and not missing anything."

Declan pushed on through the rolling hills of Zephyr Road, enjoying the crisp smell of the blackbutt forest and the Brunswick River, on to Yarri camp site near the Harvey River, which is named after the Aboriginal word for blackbutt tree.



### Supporting local communities supporting riders

The Munda Biddi Trail passes through 16 towns from Mundaring to Albany, which provides significant investment in local goods and services.

Donnelly River Village Manager Andrew Sullivan said the walkers and cyclists that came through Donnelly River were a unique type of customer.

"We really value them and think of ourselves as caretakers for them," he said. "We take our responsibility for them really seriously. We've adapted our shop to not only provide food, but basic bike repair products and other things they might need along the way."

The trail also provides opportunities for volunteers to make a meaningful contribution, while spending time in some of the most beautiful parts of the State.

Munda Biddi Trail maintenance volunteer Bron Suchecki said he volunteered on the trail because it was an asset for WA and a big drawcard for visitors and locals.

"I'm out riding the trail anyway so I may as well clip some trees and do a little bit of work. It's not an imposition at all, and I feel like I'm giving back to the community," he said.

"It's mainly just moving branches that have fallen over the trail, trimming back overhanging branches, and occasionally you get a big tree that needs chainsawing.

"Volunteers' sections cover around 10 kilometres each. I take a bit of pride in my section, as you don't want to be known as the guy who's got lots of trees fallen down in his section."

*The Munda Biddi Trail has 96 active volunteers for the 108 maintenance sections. Each section is between seven and 20 kilometres and some volunteers are responsible for more than one section.*



Lake Brockman Tourist Park was a welcome pit stop after some tough hills near Logue Brook Dam and as the sun was setting he rode through the popular Nanga Mill in Lane Poole Reserve and then on to Dwellingup.

After dinner at the pub and some minor bike repairs, he set off in the dark to ride the 47 kilometres to Dandalup Hut – one of the toughest sections of the trail. With 800 kilometres under his belt, Declan pushed through ankle-deep pea gravel, dragging his bike uphill for a gruelling 20 kilometres.

He finally made it to Dandalup Hut at 2am where he rested for 90 minutes before setting off again to Jarrahdale.



### DAY 5 Jarrahdale to Mundaring

140km

10 hours riding

"Left knee swollen, sharp pains.

Scratches and minor injuries from falling over a lot in pea gravel."

As Declan embarked on his final day Peter Versluis said the hardest part would be coming into Perth because he would be tired, the hills were bigger and the pea gravel was like riding on ball bearings with sand underneath them.

"Your tyres sink into the gravel and you slide all over the place. If you're tired, it's even harder still," he said.

At 6.45am, after already completing two hours of riding, Declan stopped to be interviewed by Peter Bell – one of his footy heroes – on ABC breakfast radio. After he finished the interview he hung up

*Opposite page*

**Above left** Fellow riders show support for Declan.

*Photo – Sharon Morris*

**Inset below** Declan receives a warm welcome from Andrew Sullivan.

*Photo – Donnelly River Village*

**Above** Crossing the finish line in Mundaring.

*Photo – Emma de Burgh/DBCA*

**Right** Munda Biddi Trail marker.

*Photo – Peter Nicholas/DBCA*

the phone, took a few deep breaths and let the tears of exhaustion roll down his cheeks. If he was to continue, he would have to dig deep.

"I had to remind myself that sitting on the ground wasn't getting me anywhere, I might as well have a go and keep moving forward," Declan said.

The Jarrahdale General Store was his final chance to gather supplies. Breakfast was nutella sandwiches – perfect fuel for the huge uphill ride into the Canning River Catchment. The effort through more pea gravel and up a steep gradient was rewarded by the magnificent jarrah forests encountered on the way.

The downhill ride into The Dell was welcome relief and Declan was met by a group of 'last leg riders' who joined him to ride the last 15 kilometres to the finish line.

## THE BIG FINISH

A crowd had gathered at the northern terminus at Sculpture Park in Mundaring. Mountain biking groups, DBCA staff, Deputy Shire President of Mundaring Patrick Bertola, Peter Versluis and curious passersby anxiously awaited his arrival.

## A numbers game

- 1,115 kilometres travelled
- 4 wrong turns
- 75 hours total riding time
- 15,505 metres of climbing
- 11.5 hours sleep
- 6 crashes
- 18 litres of water
- 1.4 kilograms of chocolate
- 8 litres of soft drink
- 21 coffees
- 2 pairs of socks
- 1 pair of bib shorts
- 1 jersey
- 1 jacket
- 1 bivvi bag
- 2 battery packs
- 1 pair gloves
- 4 numb fingers
- and... 4 well earned beers

Conversations among those gathered turned to what it meant for the Munda Biddi to have an elite endurance racer set a world record on the trail and the news that other elite athletes were now considering the trail as their next challenge.

Then, four days, six hours and 39 minutes after he left Albany, Declan journeyed down the home stretch at a cracking pace; around the oval and through the archway.

Declan's phenomenal ride set a world record and a tough benchmark for others to follow. Word about Declan's record spread online around Australia and internationally, bringing the Munda Biddi Trail to the attention of the world's cyclists. Who knows when the next person will try to 'Bust the Biddi', but, in the meantime, Declan can revel in his well-earned bragging rights.

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