

My name is Wendy Law. I was born in Hamilton, Victoria, Australia in 1926. The youngest of six children, I was from adventurous stock. One of my three brothers became Dr. Phillip Law, an eminent scientist and explorer who led 28 expeditions to Antarctica.

I, like most Australians, loved to travel. Life was very different in Australia in the 1940s. When I left school, teenagers were expected to get a good steady job but I wanted to explore the world.

I did have a good job working for Radio 3KZ in Melbourne and was earning £3 a week but I longed for adventure. So in 1946, aged 19, I decided to resign. I rang my equally adventurous school friend, Shirley Duncan, aged 21 and said 'Are you ready?'

'Ready for what?' she replied.

'The war's over. I'm handing in my resignation. What about you?' An incredulous shriek shrilled through the earpiece.

Shirley and I had always talked about going to Europe after the war but were dissuaded from this as they were struggling with refugees, bombed cities and rationing. So we decided to explore Australia. We cycled our Malvern Star bicycles from Melbourne to Adelaide and back to Melbourne. Then we cycled around Tasmania. All this was to prepare ourselves for the big trip to Queensland.

We set off in early 1946, living frugally, earning our way, getting lifts over difficult terrain and enjoying wonderful hospitality from Australians everywhere. I don't think we ever had to pay for accommodation!

Things we regard as commonplace now, such as instant coffee, mobile phones, the internet and thermal clothing were, of course, unknown then. We had totally inappropriate clothing for

crossing the Australian Alps in the snow. No waterproofs or anoraks. Even our sleeping bags froze!

It took us a year to get to Queensland in the north-east of Australia. What we hadn't realised was that Australia is the equivalent in size of 24 European countries!

In Brisbane we bought a Queensland cattle dog and we named him Peter. He stayed with us for the rest of our trip. Sometimes he rode on one of our bikes, sitting on a basket in front of the handlebars but most of the time he ran alongside us. He ran so much that before long his paws became very sore. We asked a cobbler if he could make four leather shoes for Peter. He did this and, although I'm sure Peter wasn't too pleased at having them on his feet, they did allow his pads to heal. I think we also invented the world's first mobile washing-line! Stringing a cord between us, we hung our clothes on it and they dried quickly as we rode along side by side.

By now we had attracted the attention of the press and were dubbed the 'girl cyclists'. Crowds greeted us in every city and town we passed through, and our trip featured on Movietone News.

With sponsorship from the Malvern Star bicycle company but little other money, we earned our way by doing a variety of jobs, including working in a fruit-canning factory, helping on a cattle station and modelling in city stores. We sold sandwiches and ate lots of complimentary Peters ice cream. (Peters is a famous brand in Australia and they became another of our sponsors.) We were allowed to eat as much ice cream as we wanted, in return for giving them publicity. We lived on it! That is why we named the dog Peter!

Gradually our horizons expanded and we decided to cycle on to Darwin in the Northern Territory. Danger was a constant companion. Our bikes had neither brakes nor gears. We were also attacked twice, as we slept. The first attack took place near Mount Kosciuszko in New South Wales, but thankfully neither of us was hurt. The second attack was in Darwin. We were

sleeping in a church hall when Shirley awoke to find a man holding her by the throat and threatening to kill her. But the barking of our dog, Peter, brought the vicar to the rescue. Shirley was always miffed that her attacker was fined £10 for unlawful entry but only £5 for assaulting her! Taking police advice, we bought a small revolver but were more afraid of it than anything or anyone else.

Leaving Darwin, we pedalled south through Alice Springs to Adelaide in the south. There we caught a ship to Perth in Western Australia and then we cycled north up the coast as far as Carnarvon.

Heading for home, we crossed the daunting Nullarbor Plain. We were the first female cyclists ever to cross the Nullarbor!

We had battled our way through rainforests, snow-covered mountains and deserts, sleeping under the stars and relying on the kindness of strangers for shelter. Three years after setting off, we returned to a heroes' welcome at Melbourne Post Office, greeted by a large crowd. We had envisaged being on the road for six months but did not get back to Melbourne until April 1949.

I am astonished that my parents allowed me to go on this adventure. They must have been worried sick about me as I couldn't afford to ring them except on very special occasions. It was just too expensive.

I kept a diary of our journey and more than 60 years later, I expanded it into my book called *With Bags and Swags: Around Australia in the Forties* (2008, [www.dingomedia.co.uk](http://www.dingomedia.co.uk)).

Three years of cycling the length and breadth of Australia, covering some 11,000 miles, was undoubtedly one of the highlights of my life!

**Wendy Law**

**Phillip Law (son of Wendy)**