

PENSHURST RSL TRAVEL CLUB

HILLBILLY CIDER, BILPIN AND THE VILLAGE KITCHEN, KURRAJONG 23 MARCH 2023



There had been rain around during the week, so we were a little concerned about today, although most of the time would be spent indoors. The morning, at least, turned out to be fine. Malcolm, our driver all the way from Riverstone in heavy traffic, arrived much earlier than the rest of us, so grabbed himself a nice, strong coffee from Penshurst's main street. Despite a couple of last-minute and flustered arrivals, the 36 of us were able to leave on time at 8 am.

Needless to say, King Georges Road was its usual peak hour nightmare and it took us 35 minutes to reach the M4 around Sydney Olympic Park. Relief! Further on, we joined the M7, then a few smaller main roads until arriving in Richmond where Elizabeth had planned morning tea in Friendship Park across the road from the RAAF Base. There was 45 mins here, so plenty of time to check out the adjacent Hawkesbury Visitor Information Centre.

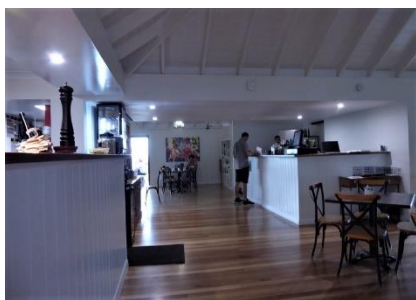


After meandering through a few Richmond streets, we passed a Polo Club (could've been either Windsor or Killarney Polo Club, situated next to each other on Richmond's outskirts) and actually saw a glimpse of a polo game (a first for us), before crossing the Hawkesbury River to join Bells Line of Road. Always a pretty drive and eventually we'd arrived at the Hillbilly Cider Shed in Bilpin. By this time, rain was threatening, but held off. Their staff and dogs (Sooty, Quiz and Smut) made us welcome and we were seated at long tables for the extensive cider tasting, both alcoholic and non-alcoholic. Of course, with both sweet and dry to choose from, we couldn't agree on a favourite, although their 'Sweet Julie' was delicious and has won several awards. It's the only cider in the world using the Julie apple and the alcohol content is lower than the others at 3.5%. We were able to purchase cider to take home, although Hillbilly will arrange home-delivery and it is stocked at some of Sydney's independent bottle shops.

A brief story from their website: *A move to an orchard in Bilpin in 2007 was Shane and Tessa McLaughlin's inspiration for creating this local favourite Blue Mountains cider. Shane's first batch of Hillbilly was fermented in the cellar he dug out by hand under the house. With 20 years wine and cider making under his belt, Shane adapted techniques from time spent in the cider regions around the world including Normandy, Hereford and Somerset. He blends Aussie classic apples as well as heritage cider apples. No sugar is added, they don't pasteurize and don't add artificial flavours. They're all about keeping it real – 100% crushed fruit fermented with minimal intervention and fermented in pressurised tanks to produce naturally sparkling ciders.*



Afterwards, many of us sat outside playing with the dogs until it was time to leave for Kurrajong. This is where the trip became even more interesting, as poor Malcolm took a couple of wrong turns and we were treated to a cook's tour of the area, along narrow roads that had almost certainly never seen a coach! Nobody minded, as the scenery was stunning and the homes were amazing. Eventually, we found Kurrajong Village and The Village Kitchen where we'd enjoy our pre-ordered lunch (with a choice of four mains). Fortunately, Elizabeth had brought along our order list, as some of us (incl. me) were our forgetful selves. A wine, beer or soft drink was included and the staff outdid themselves with their service. As well as us, there were others in the restaurant, so to serve our 36 meals almost simultaneously, beautifully cooked and piping hot, was a real feat. Not to mention, their wonderful garlic bread – the VERY best ever!! The meal was finished with made-to-order coffees/tea.



With a thunderstorm in full swing and a bit of local shopping done, it was 2.30 pm and time to leave. We were back on the motorway by 3.15 pm, just in time to get caught up in the school traffic! Lucky Seat prizes were won by Karen and Ron, and we arrived in Penshurst around 4.30 pm. It had been a very pleasant day!