

By Gary Chigwidden

What do you do when you're riding a motor cycle at 60 kph along a dirt track through the South African wilderness and an obviously upset, very large, charging baboon with blazing eyes and wickedly bared teeth, has you in its sights?

Well, not a great deal says Possum Creek's John Bennett, except to keep riding.

And that's what he did.

Just when he thought the baboon was going to jump on him, it propped on all fours and skidded to a halt less than 15cm from the bike.

With his heart racing, John rode on and the baboon bounded off into the scrub.

All of which gells in nicely with his bike touring philosophy, 'If you are not living on the edge you are taking up too much space.'

John and a hard core circle of seven or eight mates have been 'living on the edge' taking part in annual marathon bike treks for nearly 20 years.

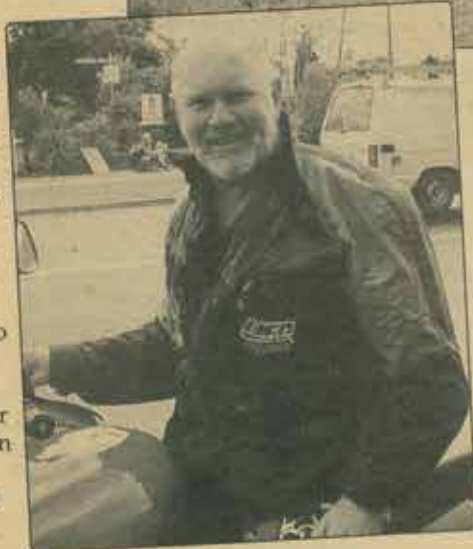
The first, all those years ago, was to Cape York. That was followed by other trips all over Australia and a total distance travelled of more than 100,000 km.

After that came a motorcycle tour of New Guinea which, despite warnings from many quarters, was trouble-free and an "amazing experience".

Four years ago John heard about Pancho Villa Moto Tours operating out of Texas in the United States.

He and seven of his mates decided to give it a go and went on what is known as the Sierra Madre expedition, which took them through Texas into Mexico.

John liked the experience and he also liked the founder of Pancho Villa Moto Tours, Skip Mascorro.



And as it turned out, Skip liked him. That's how he became the Pancho Villa representative in Australia.

And that's how he found himself last year in the sights of a rampaging baboon in South Africa last year.

It took John two years to plan and arrange the trip which took he and nine other riders through South Africa and the mountain kingdom of Lesotho.

Driving one of the back-up vehicles on the trip was his partner, Jennifer Regan, a criminal advocate who writes the Legally Speaking column for the Byron News.

South African born and raised, John, a resident of Australia for 38 years, and a director of a research company, had always dreamed about "riding the roof of

Dealing with a charging baboon all in a day's riding

Africa" through Lesotho and he was not disappointed.

The ride through Lesotho and South Africa, he said, took them through spectacular mountains, valleys, unspoiled beaches and deserts.

It gave he and his fellow riders a great feel for the local culture and people and a gourmet experience to boot.

John's now planning a Pancho Villa tour to Peru later this year and in February next year, he and his mates are off on a 12-day motorcycle tour of Mexico.

But as they say in the TV adverts... there's more.

In July next year, he and his mates will celebrate 20 years of touring with a two

■ John Bennett on tour in Lesotho (left) and at Byron Bay (below) last week

and a half week African tour which will take them through South Africa, Mozambique, Tanzania, Malawi and Zimbabwe covering 5000 km.

It's an adventure he is more than looking forward to. But he and his fellow riders won't be doing it that tough.

Like all the Pancho Villa tours, they do it in style. No sleeping or dining rough. It's all top-class accommodation and dining for them.

Which means it's not cheap.

The average trip costs about \$3500 for 12 days, plus normal air fares.

John said those attracted to the tours are normally people in their 40s or 50s, "with a few bucks" who have taken up motorcycle riding again after raising families.

"It's a fantastic experience," he said.

"What I like about it is you are so busy living on the edge that you don't have any time to worry about problems back at home.

"It's completely different to touring in a four-wheel drive vehicle where six blokes might be sitting next to each other for nine hours a day.

"We have eight or so guys on bikes who are on their own all day and you look forward to the end of the day and a cold beer and swapping stories.

"The adventure is the unexpected, not knowing what is around the next corner."

Like a mad-eyed baboon for example.

• If you want to know more about Pancho Villa tours, give John a call on 6687 1512.

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