

# **How to Plan a Cruise.**

I see lots of people on the discussion group talk about how they'd like to go on a cruise, but usually no-one steps up to the plate to actually "plan" one... This amazes me because it's really not that hard, but is very rewarding and a fun thing to do and participate in.

So I've put this tutorial together hoping it might inspire someone else to have a go at "planning" a cruise.

This is not the only way to do it, but it's how I do it... ;-)

## **Tez's Method:**

### **Tools Needed:**

- Google Maps
- Screen Capture Software (I use Paintshop Pro, but it can be done quite easily with the Microsoft Paint program.) - I'm not going to explain here how to capture a screen image. – I'll assume you know how to do that, or can work it out. – If not, go to the last page in this tutorial to find out..
- Word processor
- Printer

### **Preliminary Planning of the Cruise - Guidelines:**

- Pick a starting point not too far from home! – Somewhere with a carpark big enough for all your cruise-buddies to park safely. – Preferably somewhere where they can get a coffee or other drink to kick the day off... Most McDonalds restaurants meet all these needs, and are just about everywhere, so I tend to use them.
- Make sure your cruise route is entirely on bitumen! – no-one will want to take their cars over crappy roads (unless you're planning a 4x4 cruise!)
- Try to plan your route so it is a loop – go out on one road, come back by another – cruising from "A" to "B" and then from "B" back to "A" along the same road is OK if you've got no other choice, but try to use different roads to keep things interesting.
- Try to find somewhere about half way where you can stop for lunch. – A park, a pub, a beach, a council reserve or even another Macca's if you have to (!)... - Preferably somewhere with toilets!
- Don't make the cruise too long – you'll find that on the day, time just slips by and the cruise you expected to take 3 + ½ to 4 hours ends up taking 5 or 6 hours instead...
- Allow yourself three or four evenings at the computer to put it all together.
- Remember, it's *your* cruise, so you can plan to go pretty well anywhere you like – most joiners-in will be happy to tag along and just follow the lead car.
- Have fun planning it & have fun driving it! :-)

## The Process

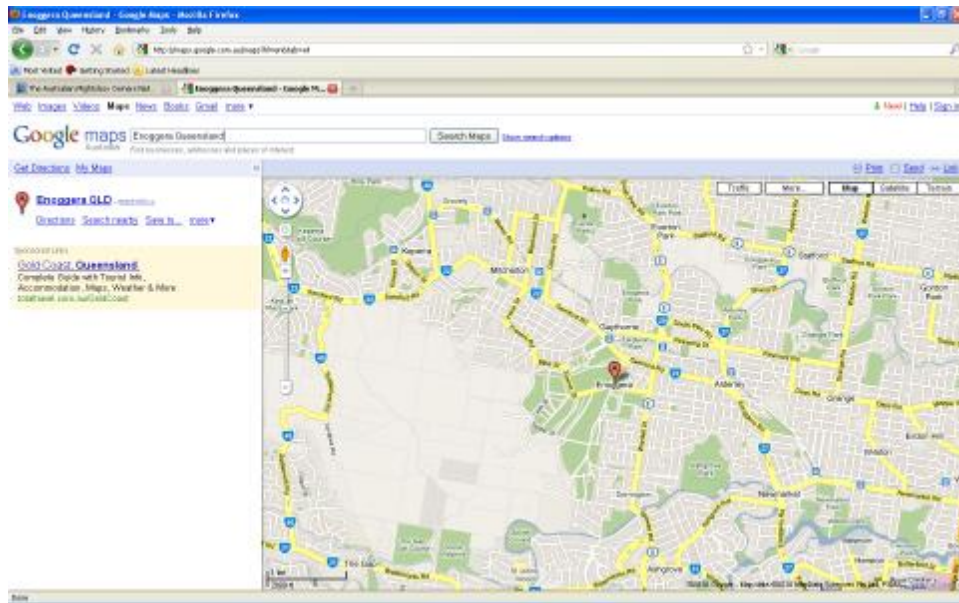
I live in Victoria, but for the purposes of this tutorial, I'll pretend I live in Brisbane...

### *Night 1 at the computer – Laying out the Cruise Route*

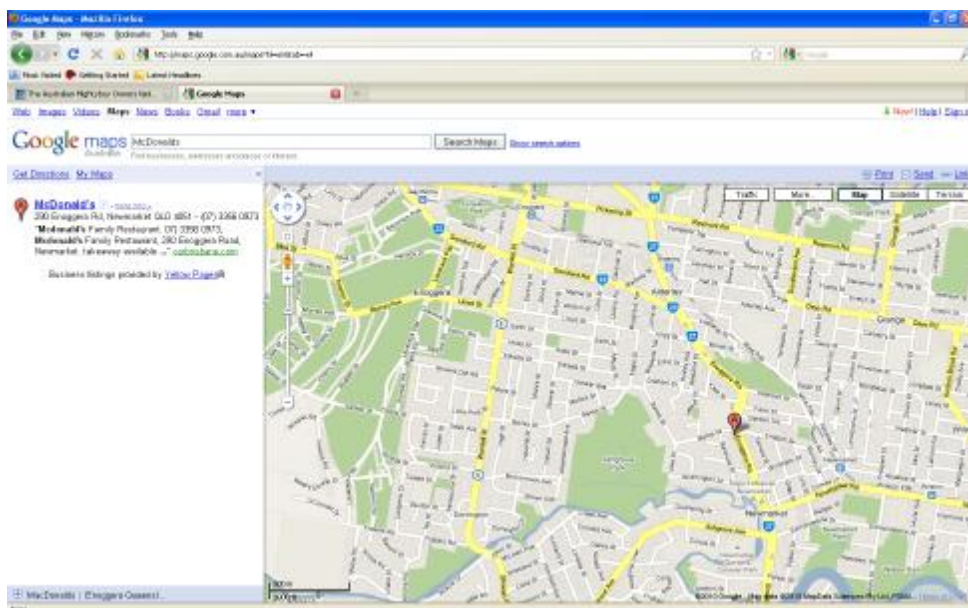
Hopefully, you'll have *some* idea of where you'd like to go! ;-)

Crank up Google maps - <http://maps.google.com.au/maps?hl=en&tab=wl> and pick a starting point not too far from home... I'll pick Enoggera.

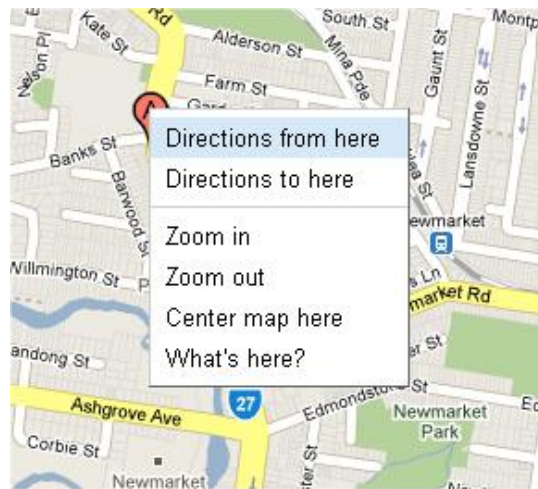
Type “Enoggera QLD” into Google maps and it will immediately jump to a fairly close-up view of Enoggera.:



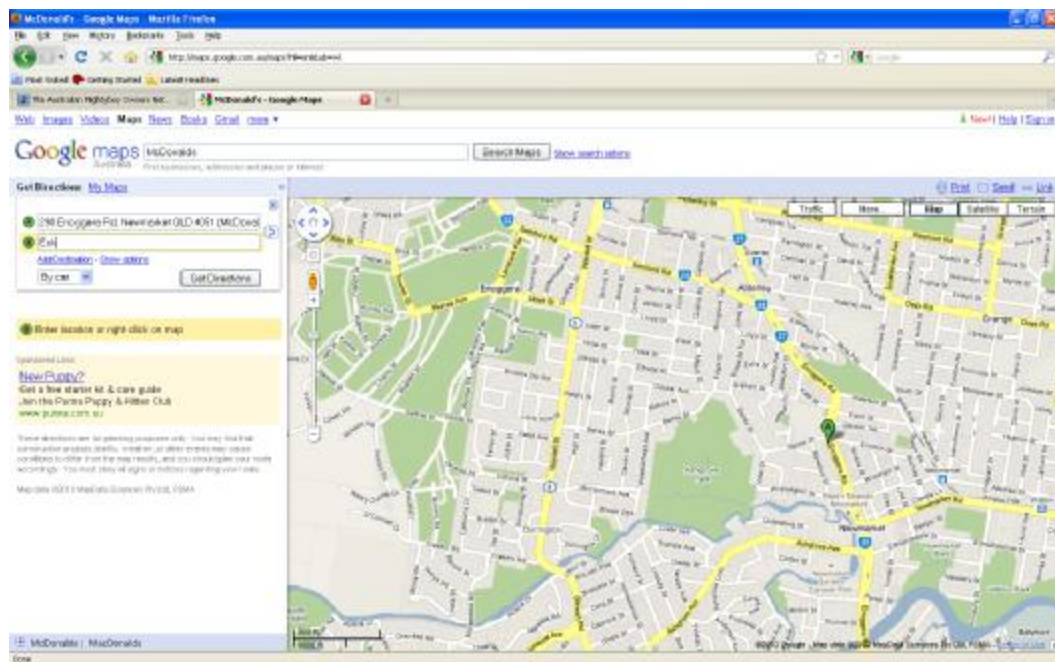
That's a start, but it isn't much good yet, - we've got to find a suitable start point for our cruise. Surprise, surprise, there's about a dozen McDonalds all within about 10 km's of Enoggera, so for the purpose of this tutorial, we'll start at the Enoggera McDonalds which is on Enoggera Road:



Here's where the fun begins... If you RIGHT-CLICK on the balloon, you'll get a context menu pop up:

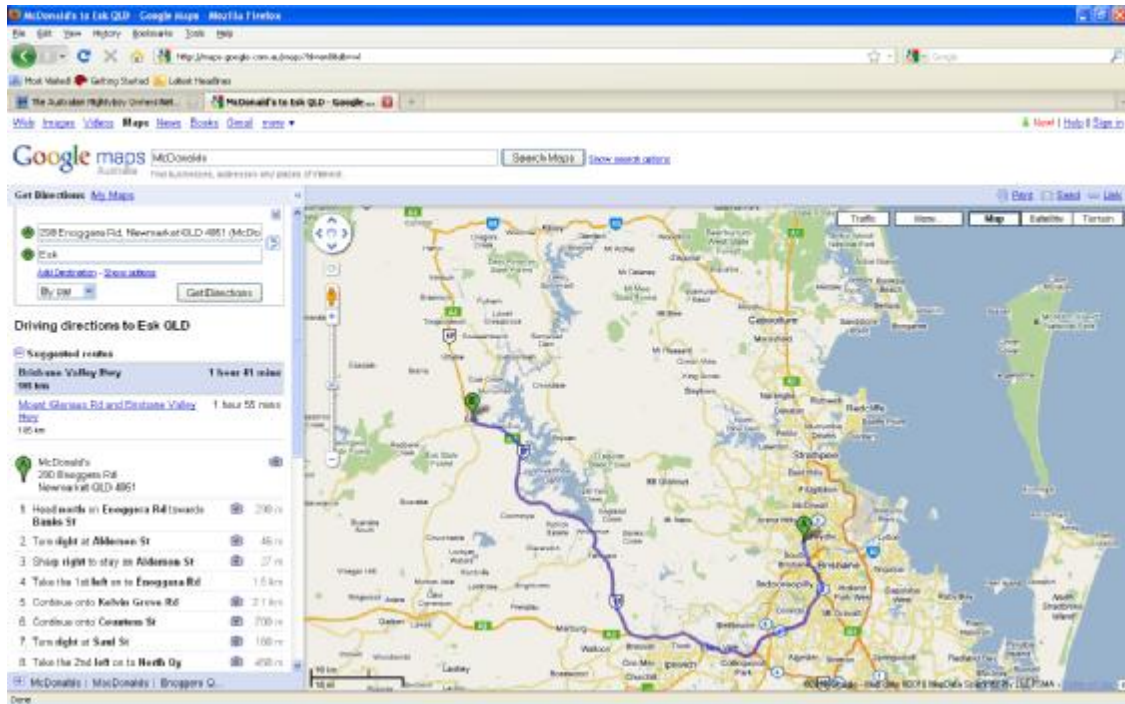


Now you can click on “Directions from here” and type in a destination...



Let's see how far away Esk is... Type in at the “B” balloon on the left hand side “Esk” and click on the “Get Directions” button just below. Google will calculate the fastest route to Esk from our starting point and highlight the route for us. (see next page)



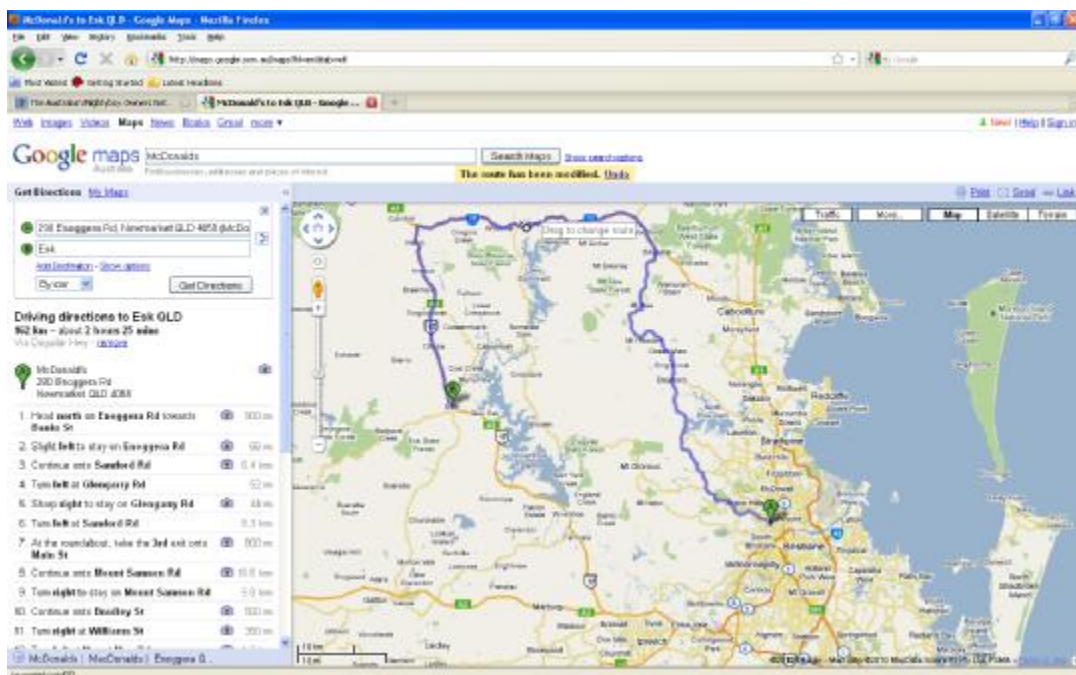


Google also calculates that this trip will take 1 hour and 41 minutes to complete. That's cool, but it's not much of a cruise... ..yet.

Now we get to mess with the route! :-)

Suppose we want to go to Esk, but via Kilcoy... I've learnt that Google will allow you to add up to about 40 waypoints in your route... So we can create a waypoint at Kilcoy by dragging the highlighted line to Kilcoy.

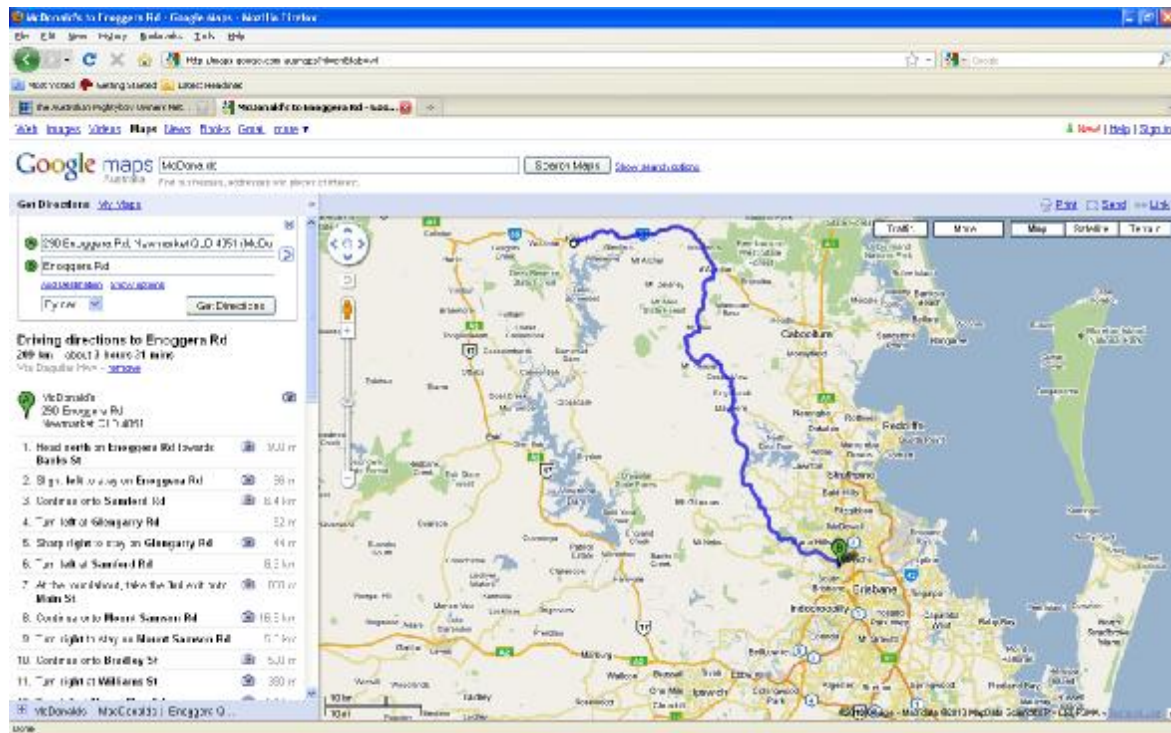
If you hover your mouse over the highlighted line anywhere, it should turn into a hand. If it does, then you can click to "pick up" the route and drag it somewhere else... like Kilcoy...



As soon as you “drop” the route, you’ll see a waypoint appear... that’ll be the white dot on the route line. Google will immediately recalculate the route based on your new criteria and re-display it.

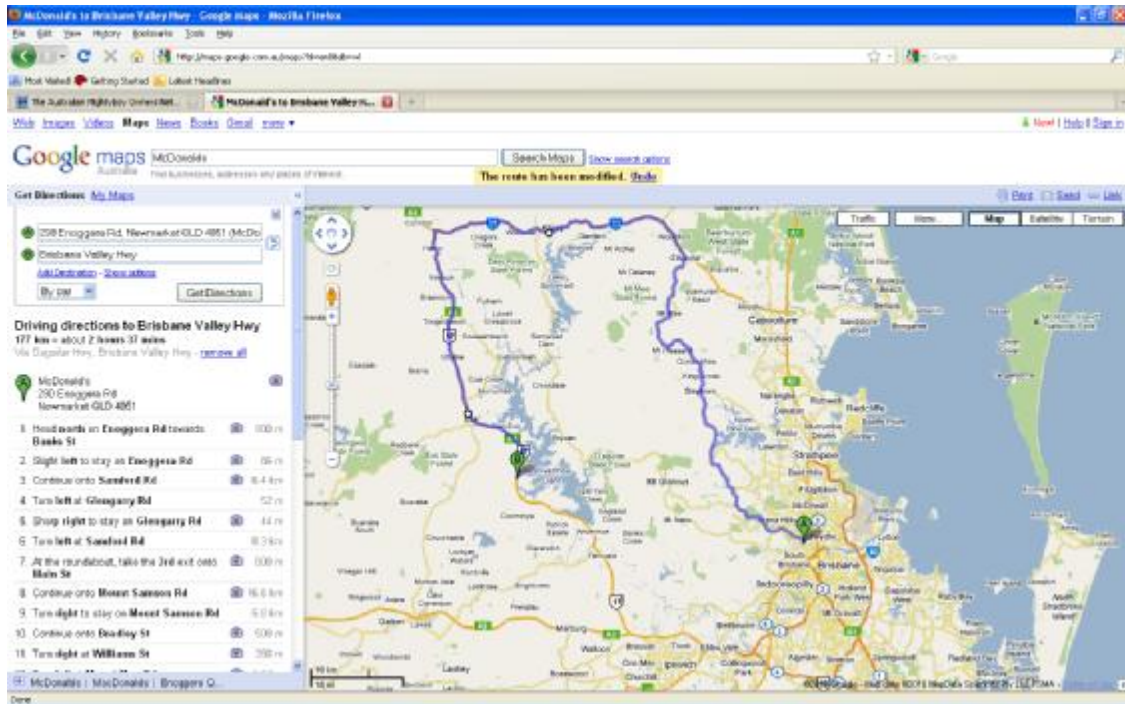
Now the trip is going to take us 2 hours 25 minutes... But we’re not home yet!... So we’d better sort that out. The easiest way to do that is to drag the end-point balloon back to the start balloon (or very close to it!)

Be wary though, Google maps doesn’t know what you’re trying to do, so it will re-calculate the fastest route from your last waypoint to the end-point, and if you drag it too far, Google might suggest an entirely different way to get there than what you planned!

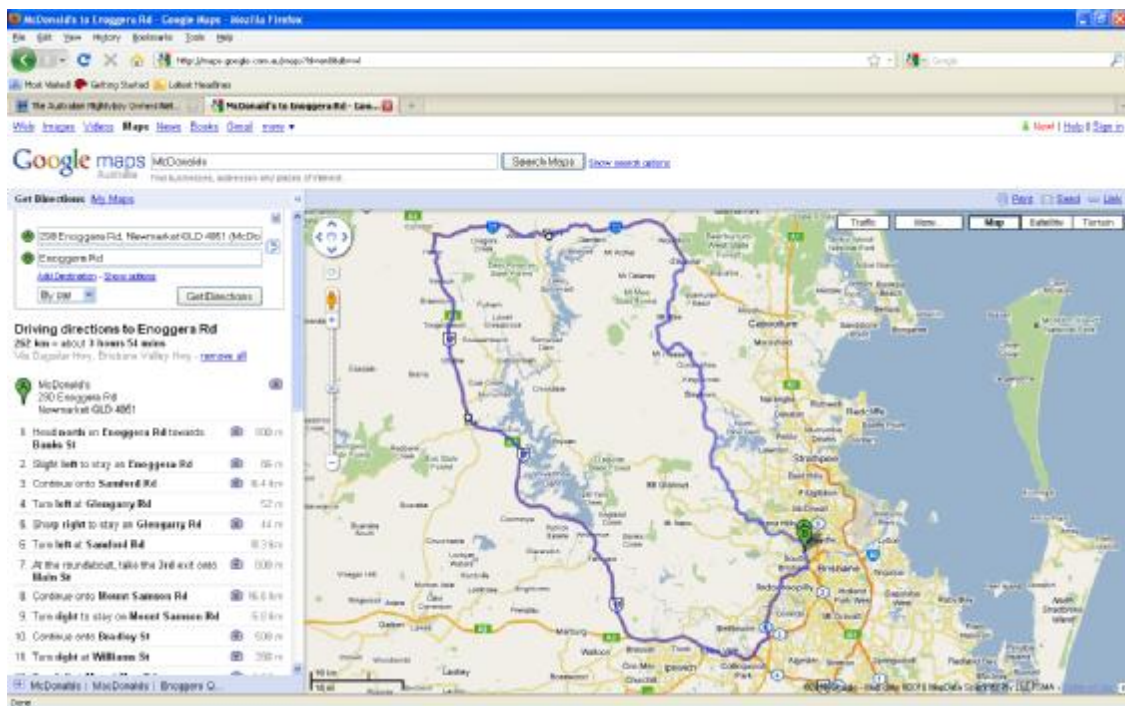


Right now, Google maps is (quite correctly) suggesting the fastest way from your waypoint at Kilcoy to your end-point you just moved over to the McDonalds in Enoggera is to go back the way you came... But we don’t want to do that, so go back to Esk, then move down the road a little bit and plonk another waypoint at Esk. (see over the page)





Now you can drag the end-point back to Enoggera and the route should recalculate how you'd like it to...

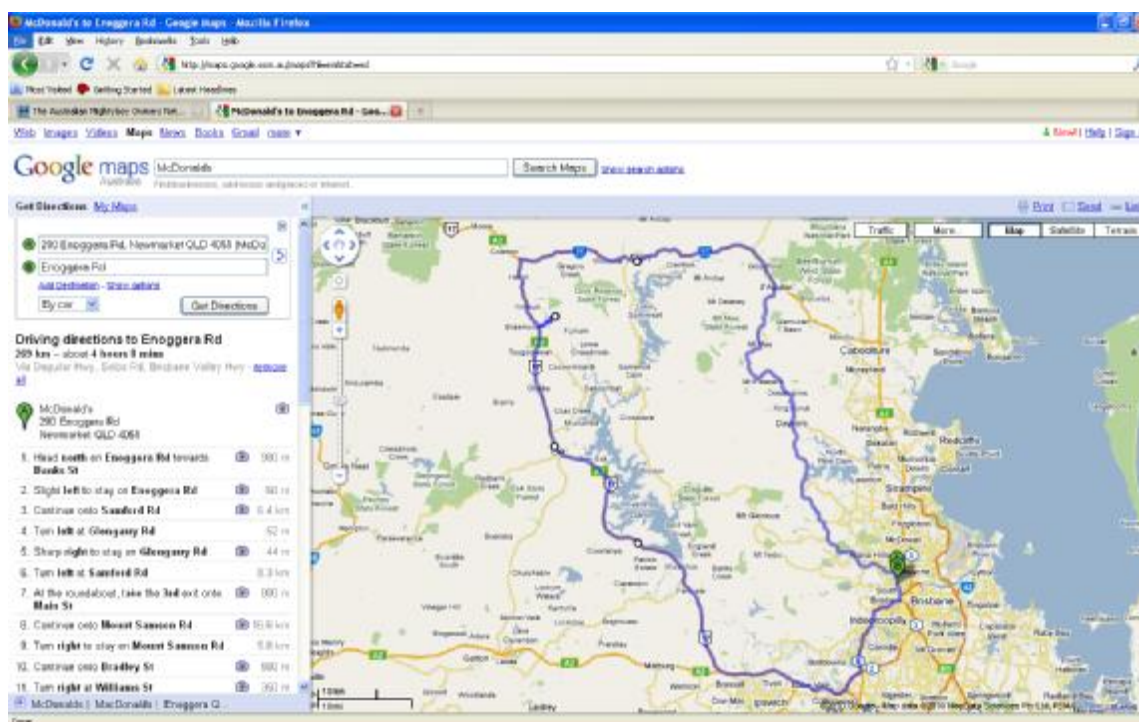


You can also see that Google has re-calculated the driving time for this trip to be 3 hours 54 minutes... sounds about the right length... Good. – That'll be about a two hour drive, stop for lunch half way somewhere, then another two hours to get home... Nice.

So now we need to find somewhere to stop for “lunch”. It may not really be “lunch” – but regardless of the time of day, you should plan to stop somewhere about every two hours so the drivers can get out and stretch their legs etc. and maybe go to the loo etc.. It's good driving form to stop about every two hours in any case, so build it in to your cruise.

For the purposes of this tutorial, I'm going to pretend there is a nice reserve on the Brisbane River where Scrub Creek Road crosses it just outside of Braemore and select that spot for "lunch". I've picked this spot because it is about half way around the cruise, and it's off the main road a bit, so fairly safe. If there was a reserve there, it might be a very nice spot to stop for "lunch". :-) Where the cruise stops is entirely up to the planner, but take into consideration that not everyone that comes may like your ideas for "lunch", so try to pick somewhere that caters for a wide variety (a country township with a hot-bread shop is a safe bet)... You'd be very lucky to find somewhere precisely half way – 15 or 20 minutes or so, either side of about half way should be fine – if you think the ideal spot is 15 minutes earlier than the half way point, stop there – it won't matter – there are no hard-and-fast rules to this... Just pick somewhere *about* half way. BBQ facilities (if available in a reserve) is always a good option. – If you're planning your cruise for the cooler months, maybe plan to stop at a pub for a counter-lunch, but ring them to make sure they actually do a counter lunch on the day you plan to come through town!

You could pull a waypoint over to your stopping place if you wanted to. – Whatever you decide to "do" for lunch, you need to let the other drivers know when you announce the cruise so they have a chance of coming prepared. – If they don't read your notes, well you can't help them then, can you? :-o



So now that we've mapped out a route, seen that it's not too far to drive in a day, and have some idea of where we're going to stop for a break, we could post this to the discussion group and announce it for some date in the future, right? – Well, yes... but we'd be smarter to do a few other things first. We've done a lot tonight though, so save your route and go to bed – it's probably late... :-)

To "save the route" I use a screen-capturing program to make a .jpg of the route (I use Paintshop Pro). And I save all the images I collect in a unique folder on my pen-drive, but anywhere on your PC's hard-disk will do just as well.

## Night 2 at the computer – Checking the Route from your PC

Google Maps is a fantastic tool for anyone planning a trip – not only can you frig about with routes and waypoints and immediately get times and distances, but Google has a brilliant feature – “Street View”.

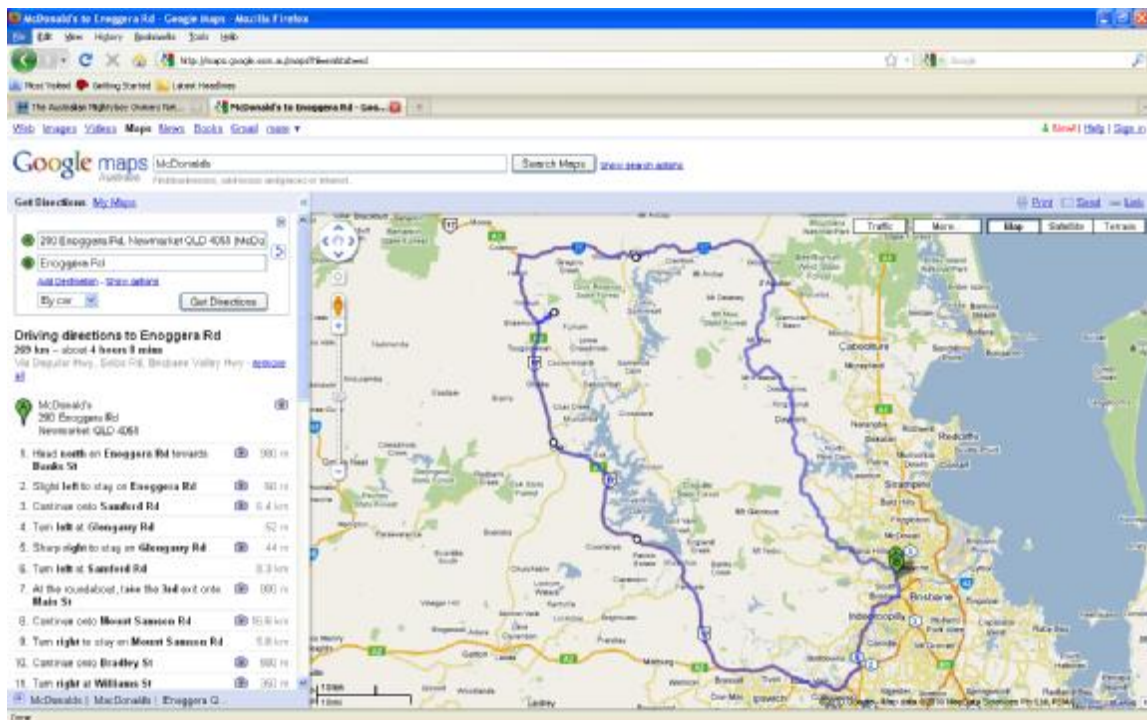
A good portion of all the roads in Australia have been driven and photographed by Google.

This is an absolute boon for anyone planning a cruise, because from the convenience of your PC & chair, you can do a “virtual drive through” of your route and check every road and every intersection in the route without moving an inch if you’d like to, to make sure the roads you have selected are suitable for the cruise.

That’s the activity for this evening. – Checking that the roads we’ve picked are suitable for the cruise.

So to start, we need to re-create the route in Google Maps again. This should be a snap this evening, because we know our start-point, our way points and the end-point is very close to the start point again!.

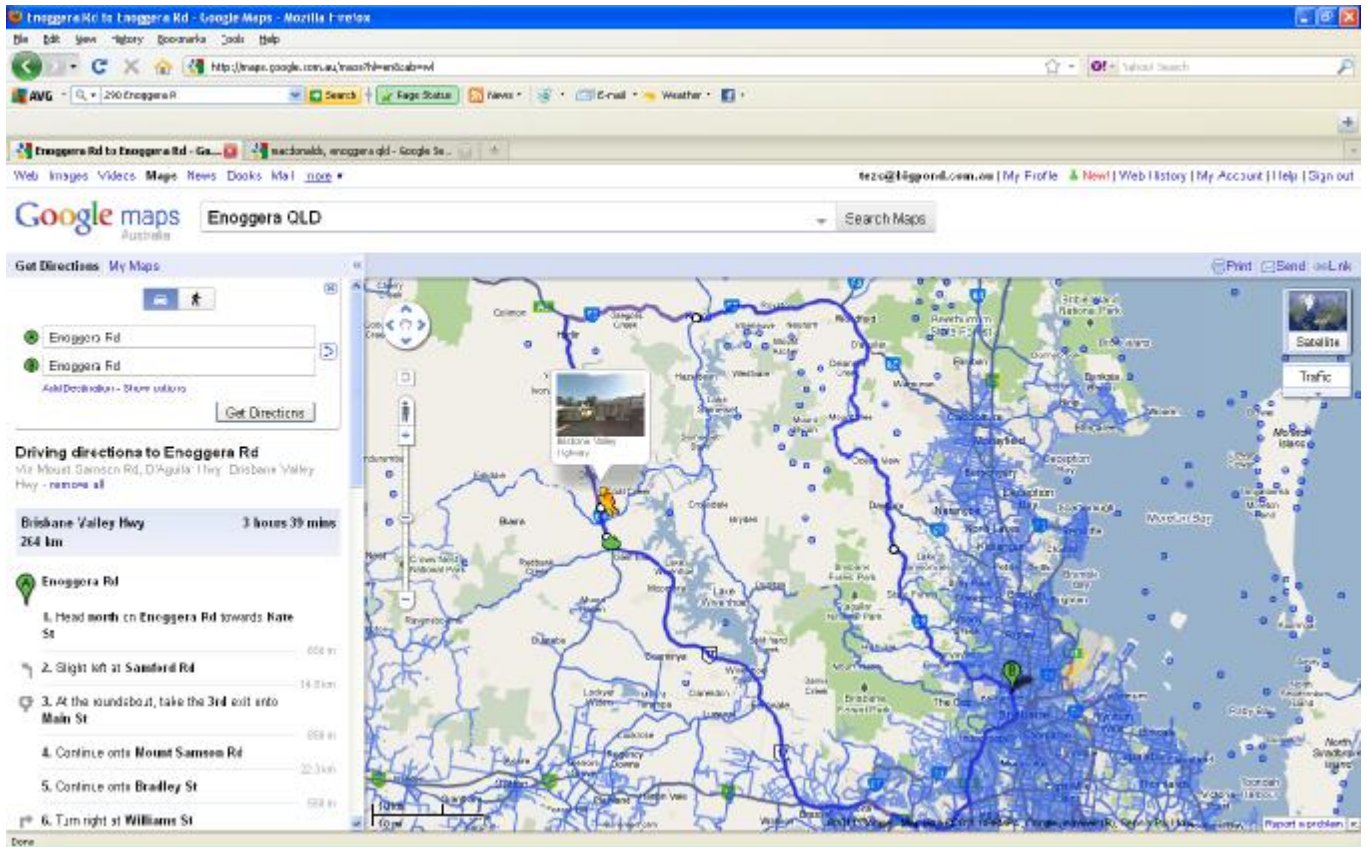
So we pop that stuff into Google and re-create the route:



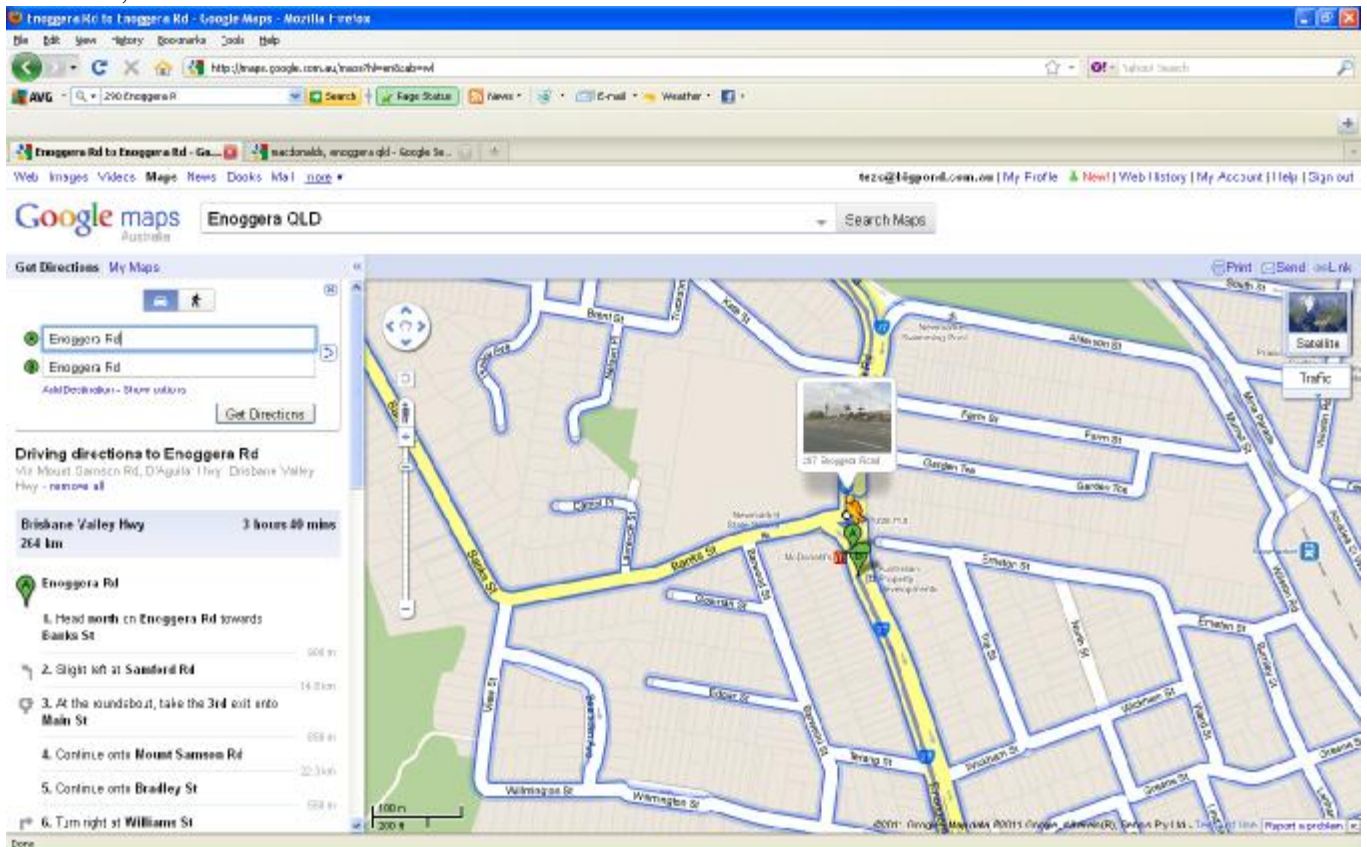
Now, selecting the “little orange man” near to the “Get Directions” Button, we can drag him onto the map.

Google will respond by turning all the “known” roads blue...

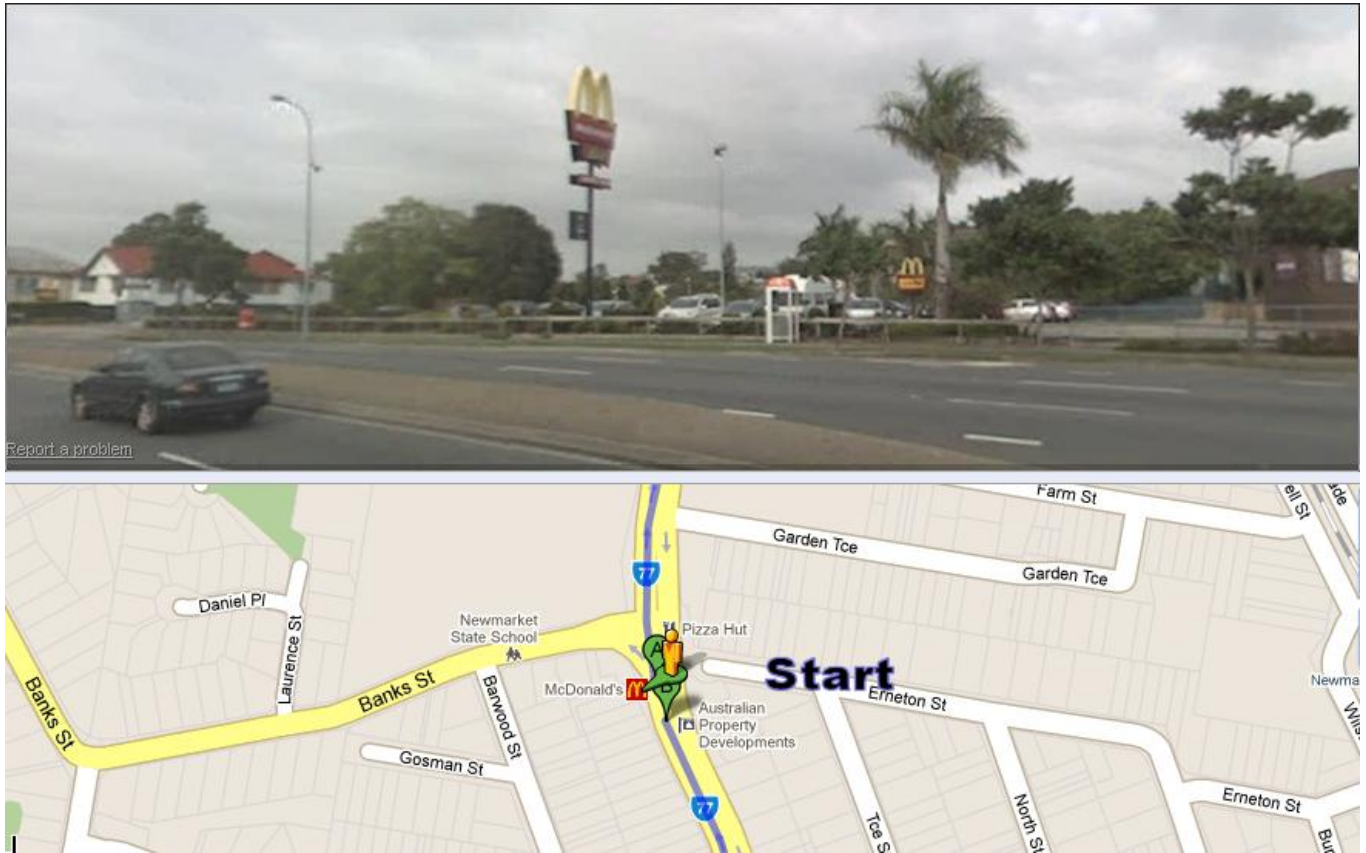




If you 'drop' the little orange man, he will land on a road and show you the view from that point!  
Closer in, it looks like this:



and when you drop the little man, the street view at that place (looking in the direction of the green arrow) will appear:



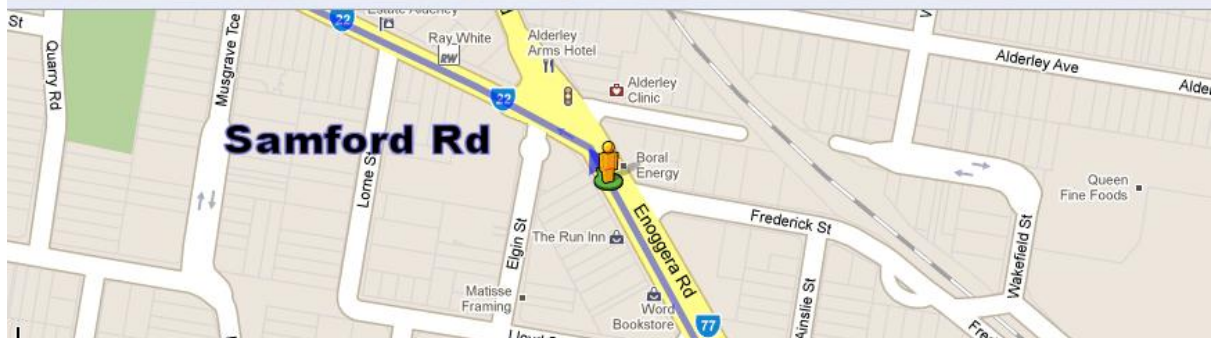
This feature is fantastic, because now we can take a 'snapshot' of every intersection or stopping point in the cruise, and paste them into a word document (you'll find you'll get two images to a page, with some room between...)

I use that room to enter the section distance to the next intersection... I've found it helps to know at a glance how far it is to the next intersection, and I simply do some quick maths in my head as I'm driving, to know when I'm close to the next turn using the odometer.

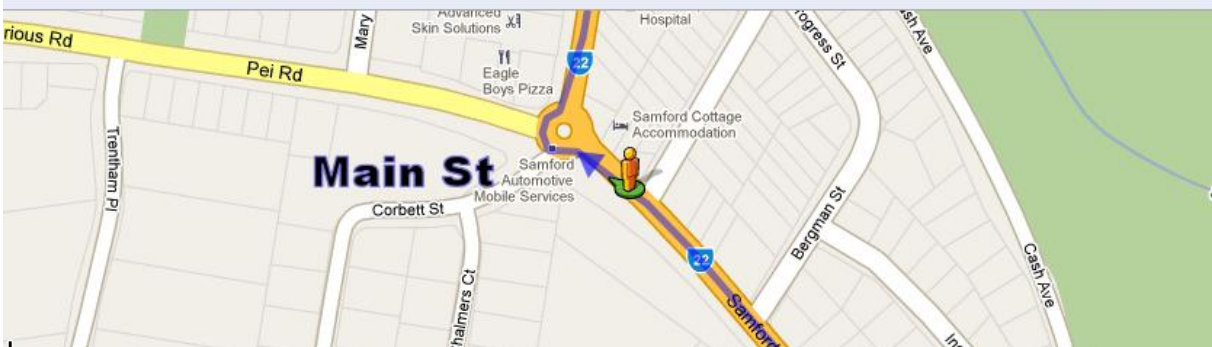
To calculate the distance between any point in the route and any other point using Google maps is quite easy, but does take a little time to do... That will be the task for tomorrow night, but for now, allow me to show you how I would lay out a page:

(see the next page!)





15.7 Km



10.5 Km

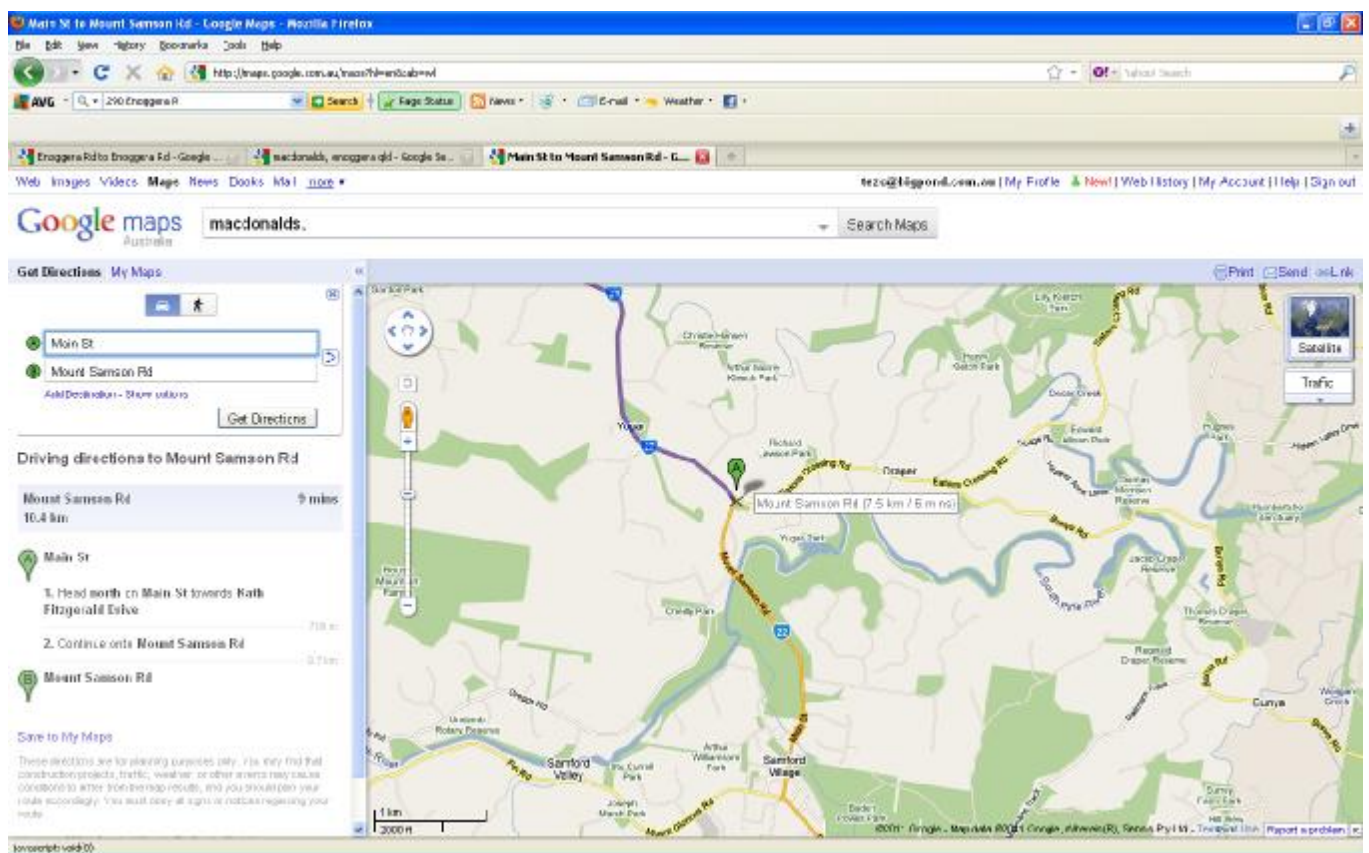


### Night 3 at the computer – Checking the Distances between Intersections

Tonight we will complete the task of determining the distances between intersections. This becomes important, because from one intersection to the next might be only 1.0 km or less, but the very next intersection might be 30 kilometres away! – The pictures are great for identifying the intersection, but knowing how far away the next one is, is very handy, and the pictures alone don't give you that, so we need to add that into the route map.

You'll also notice I've added big bold text showing the street name... That can be very handy to have available too!

So to get the distance from any corner to the next, simply pick up the "A" balloon and pop it at the point you want to measure from...



The cursor will turn into a hand holding the "A" balloon until you drop it...

Then locate the "B" balloon at the next turnoff, and Google maps will immediately recalculate the distance between the two for you.

**Advice:** DON'T get into a habit of measuring from every cross-road or roundabout to the next... **Simply measure the distance to the place you turn off this street.** – The reason I say that is otherwise, your route map will get overly complicated – (It may be bad enough already!) and if you set yourself that rule, then you know as you're doing the cruise that you simply "stay on this street" at intersections until you reach the distance you put in the map at which point you will turn off the street you're on now...

If you put the details of the example above into Google Maps, you will see there are several major intersections I ignored... because the cruise route remained on the street I was already on... I'm only interested in where the next turn is, and if it is to the left or the right...

So if you pick your way around the route you mapped out, you will eventually compile a library of every intersection on the cruise in order, and the distances between, with both a street view that should look just as the intersection would do as you approach it in your car (so you can recognize it!) and a map showing if you continue to the left or to the right.

**Advice:** When you screen-capture your street-view and map section from Google, try to set the view so that there is an obvious landmark – that will help you recognize the intersection... sometimes there is nothing very obvious, but invariably there is. I have saved the image to include a distinctive tree, or shop front or similar, so that I will know as I approach it that I'm at the right intersection. The more information you can save in the image the easier you will make things for yourself when you're actually doing the cruise.

**Advice:** One short-coming I've discovered in Google maps is that at many intersections, the view is from the wrong side of the street! – This is because as the camera cars traveled around documenting the roads, they didn't ever bother to go back up the street the other way to get the opposite view... So some intersections will look as you'd expect them to – from the left-hand lane... Others will actually be a backwards shot from the camera car in the opposite lane. This is a bummer, but there's nothing we can do about it, and for the service we're given free of charge by Google, I ain't about to complain!

If you compare the two images on my example page, you'll see what I mean – the top view is from the “correct” side of the street, whilst the bottom view is from the wrong side of the road!

### **So what now?**

So you've spent a few nights at the computer, and reckon you've put together a killer cruise. You've planned out the route, allowing for a lunch stop and a loo break or two. You've picked a good place to start the cruise, and an appropriate place to end it. You've got a large image of the overall route, and a detail view of every intersection along the way with a bit of a map at that place to show whether you turn left or right... You've put all the stuff into a word-document so you could print it out as a book if you wanted and carry it in the car with you. (That's exactly what I do!!)

Well, I reckon you've done well. Real well... but there's one more thing you should probably do before you post it up on your car forum...

Go out and drive the route.

You don't have to, but I pre-drive all my cruises, and I've come unstuck on occasions. Better to do that on your own or with your partner, having a nice casual day out, than in the middle of a cruise and having 3, 5, 10 or more cars and drivers all following you around, lost. – That's stress you don't need! – Remember, this was supposed to be FUN! – and you elected to put this thing together, so you oughta make sure it works! It will also give you a much better feel for the cruise when the day comes to lead everybody else along the way.

So you do the drive, and find a glitch... Fix it! – That's what the drive was there for... So you do the drive and find it works like the charm you always knew it was...? FANTASTIC!

Pick a date, and post it up to the forum.

Don't be disheartened if you only get a few starters – think of all the fun *you* had putting it together, and then driving it.

As your cruises get better known, you will find more people will come, and it just gets better and better.

And it's a great feeling providing something with no strings attached, that gives several other people a great day out.

That's why I keep doing them

Cheers

*Tez.*

P.S. To capture a screen image is easy – there are many ways to do it, but you need nothing more than your keyboard.

At the simplest level, to capture the image on the screen, simply hold down one of the shift keys, and press the “PRINT SCREEN” button (usually up near F12).

This will put a copy of whatever was on the screen on the “clipboard”

You can then go to an image processing program (Microsoft Paint will do this) and “Paste” the image into the program.

Then you can simply crop the image down to the bit you need...

Then “Copy” that, and “Paste” it into your word document.

Oh, and don't forget... Have FUN!

28 March 2011