

MEMORY LANE



HISTORIC: Starters in the Abermain Speedwell race in 1926. Abermain race drew a crowd of 800

Cessnock Cycling Club secretary Clyde Marshall has shared some photos and history of the sport in the area, as told to him by a former Newcastle clubmate, the late Don Spencer.

The Coalfields was one of the strongest areas in cycling in the 1920s, with clubs in Abermain, Cessnock, Branxton, Maitland and Kurri.

The Abermain club held a major race called the Abermain Speedwell Road Race, a 31-mile event carrying the first prize of 25 guineas.

Competitors rode from Abermain to near Maitland, returning past Abermain on the way to Cessnock, then back to the finish at Abermain. All the roads were gravel.

One of the photos shows a crowd of 800 cheering the riders home in September 1926, when victory went to W. Hall.

Cessnock Cycling Club will conduct its annual Abermain Handicap this Sunday, over 45 kilometres on the Hunter Economic Zone course.



VICTORY: W. Hall won the Abermain Speedwell race in 1926.

Don has found some mighty big trees

Greta resident Don Cruickshanks is one of the most prolific big tree finders in Australia, with 20 champions on the National Register of Big Trees.

Founded in 2009, the register records the biggest of every species of tree in Australia and now includes more than 700 trees.

Tree finders record the height, circumference and crown spread, and the resultant formula creates a points system of the whole tree for comparison with others.

Don's local champion trees include the stringybark white (eucalyptus globoidea) in the Watagan Forest, and the gum cabbage (eucalyptus amplifolia) on Congewai Road.

He has also recorded big trees in his hometown of Greta, as well as Dungog, Moonan Flat, Gresford, Johns River, Gloucester, Bulahdelah, Kulnura, Broke and Muswellbrook.

A retired cow cocky, Don, 78, says he enjoys getting out and about once a fortnight to look for trees, taking wife Del along for the ride as his photographer.

National Register of Big Trees coordinator Derek McIntosh said Don is a remarkable tree-finder.

"It is quite amazing how he finds the monsters," he said.

The register is an integrated list of Australian native trees, and naturalised exotic/alien trees. It is constantly changing as people nominate trees they have found.

See more, including how to become a champion nominator, at www.nationalregisterofbigtrees.com.au.



BIG FIND: Don Cruickshanks with the 'champion' gum cabbage on Congewai Road.