

Biloela To Longreach QLD

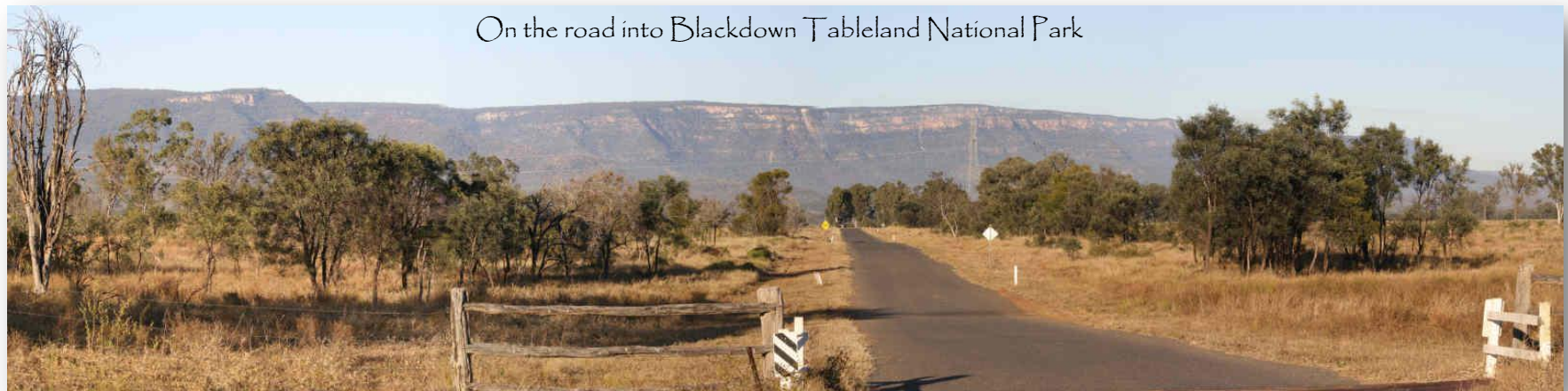


I finally found out where I was...

“I love a sunburnt country, a land of sweeping plains.....” These immortal words by Dorothea Mackellar have been foremost in my mind for the past month as I crest rises to be confronted with a distant horizon that, on these clear days, seems to never get any closer. Often there are rolling ranges, dark and inviting in the distance, breaking up the usual flat horizon.

The sky seems to dominate the space and I feel like I am travelling within an upturned blue, translucent bowl, occasionally flecked with white fluffy cotton. The landscape is constantly changing, almost imperceptibly, from flat featureless grassy plains, stunted bushes, thick mulga forests and rolling sandy or gravelly rises – alternating just to keep my mind focussed on the surroundings. Last year this country was the greenest it had been for many years and now it is covered with a lush, but very dry growth – desperately hoping no one accidentally carelessly sparks a fire. I have seen many roos, emu, eagles, feral pigs, goats and cats, but not a single lizard as yet.

I left behind the minor roads north of Biloela when I joined the Capricorn Highway and I was once again duelling with road-trains and the many caravans that criss-cross Queensland at this time of year. Thankfully it was not for long as I was heading to Dingo where I would stay and leave the van and venture into the Blackdown Tableland National Park.

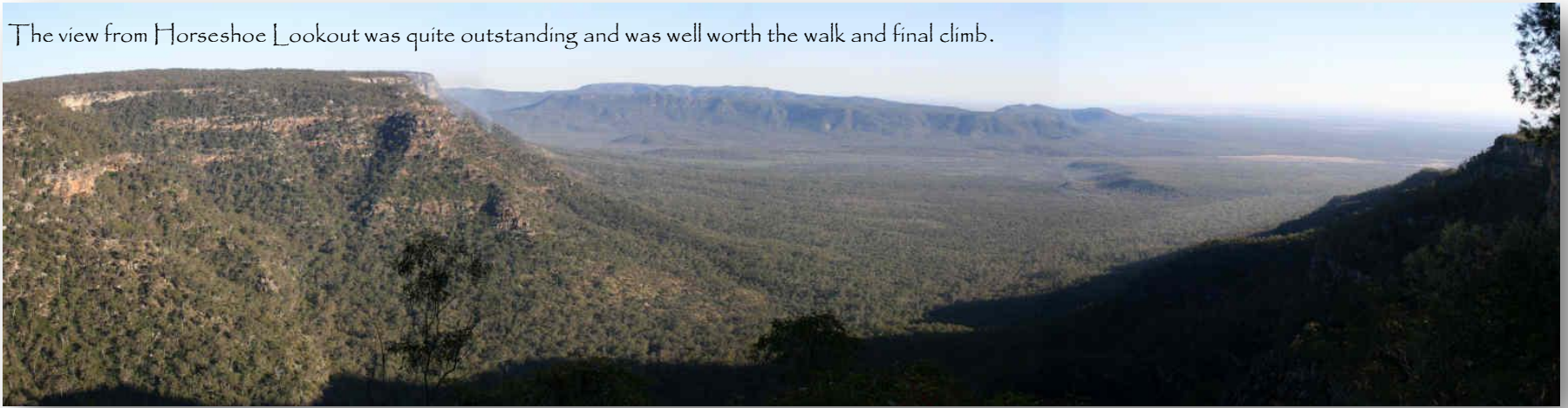


The Dawson, Expedition and Shotover ranges converge at the Blackdown Tableland creating a sandstone plateau rising above the surrounding flat plains. In 1869, William Yaldwin named the tableland after the family home in Sussex. His attempt to graze cattle here was unsuccessful as the phosphorous-deficient soil caused his cattle to develop chalky bones.

The National Park was gazetted in 1982 with management shared between the Dept of Environment and Resource Management and the Ghungalu people, to protect and present its natural and cultural values.

I found the walks extremely good – especially after being a little disappointed with the Cania Gorge National Park environment.

The view from Horseshoe Lookout was quite outstanding and was well worth the walk and final climb.



The walk down to Two Mile Creek was through lush bush that was still showing the impact of having had a very good summer. There was considerable water flowing along the creek and gently cascading over the edge into the valley below.





The walk to Officers Pocket Lookout (below) followed the South Mimosa Creek.





I pressed on after staying at Dingo to a lovely camp on the banks of the Bedford Weir about 25km north of Blackwater. This is coal mining country with many road-trains and freight trains transporting vast quantities along the highway and the adjacent rail line. The coal trains have around 90 freight cars and seem to be unending – especially when waiting at the level crossing.

Bedford Weir was a really tranquil – although popular – spot to spend a few days away from the hustle and bustle of the rest of the world. However, domestic necessities drove me back into travelling onward to Emerald to re-stock my pantry and catch up on the washing.



The Emerald Railway Station is a really stately building and took my fancy. It was built in 1900, restored in 1986 and is National Trust listed.

The world's biggest Van Gogh "Sunflower" painting – 25 metres high with 13.6tonne of steel in its construction – is in Morton Park. (I often wonder why some towns do some things.)



The town of Sapphire is within the Sapphire Gemfields, west of Emerald. I don't know what I really expected, but I was very disappointed with the gem field area.

The commercial hub of Sapphire is the Trading Post (right) and the main activity is searching for sapphire. The literature on the area suggested "unique bush architecture and many characters" – I am afraid I did not see much of either. The 'characters' of the town were not particularly friendly to 'blow-by' tourists and the buildings were just very old and run down shacks.

Rubyvale, whilst a bigger community (by a small margin), also yielded little that took my fancy.



The town of Sapphire is situated on the banks of Retreat Creek and there were quite a few hopeful fossickers seeking their fortune.

I had little luck striking up a conversation with these focussed individuals as they were quite intent on carefully sieving their gravel for the elusive sapphire.

I am not sure if the gravel in their buckets came from the creek, or from the fossicking fields some way out of town and then brought back to 'camp' for closer scrutiny.



On my way from Sapphire to Jericho, I passed through a delightful little village called Bogantungan. I stopped here for a while and I was taken by the view as I relaxed with my cuppa.

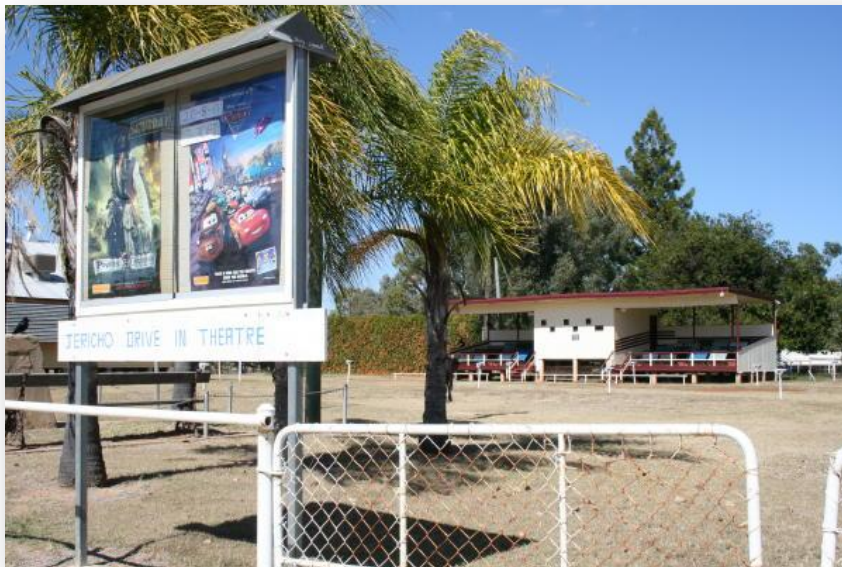
Jericho is on the banks of the Jordan Creek and was established in the 1850s. The community is very keen to have tourists stay in the town and they provide a great camp on the banks of the Jordan Creek about 1 km from the main street. They have a pub which had \$10 lunch and dinner and a General Store. The baker, butcher and fuel depot have closed down but the locals were all really friendly and were keen to chat and find out the background of their visitors. My camp below was on the banks of the Jordan Creek and was a very enjoyable place to spend a few days.



The only 'public building' is the Jericho Town Hall which has stood the test of time very well.

The town also hosts the smallest, operating drive-in theatre in the southern hemisphere. The theatre screens modern movies once a month and the locals come from all around.

The theatre holds about 25 vehicles and has seating for a further 20 at the rear under cover. The primary school now runs the venue and uses the revenue as fund raising.



I stopped in Barcaldine on my way through to Aramac and took a photo of what is now “The Tree of Knowledge” (right). An artificial structure featuring the trunk of the original tree, that was the meeting place purported to be the formation of the ALP, with a superstructure that is meant to represent the foliage of the tree – which was poisoned in 2006 by an unknown culprit.

I had decided to base myself at the town of Aramac, 70km north of Barcaldine, to visit Muttaborra and Lake Dunn nearby.

This saved me dragging the van up and down the road unnecessarily and gave me more mobility.



In 1963, a local grazier, Doug Langdon, uncovered the most complete fossilized dinosaur skeleton yet to be discovered in Australia. Being the first of its kind it was named the *Muttaburrasaurus langdoni*. They have created a life-sized replica, based on the skeleton, in the main street.

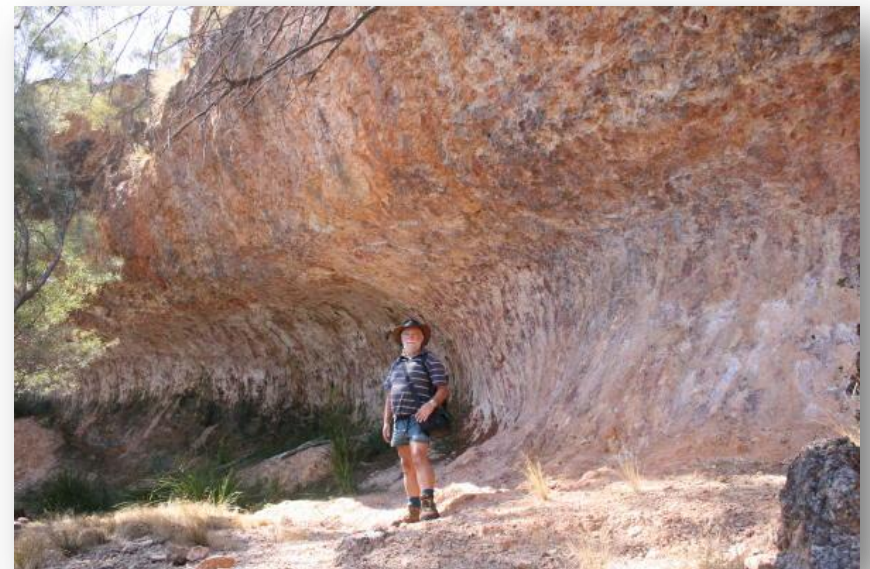
On my way back from Muttaborra, luckily only travelling at about 65kph, I struck (and killed) a very dopey emu that ran straight toward the Landy, giving me very limited time to brake to avoid it. Luckily, there was only minimal damage to the Landy – bent winch bracket, bent driving light support and a broken perspex driving light cover.

It is always a little unnerving meeting one of these road-trains on the narrow back-roads I am travelling most of the time. The only sensible thing to do is to keep a close watch on my mirrors and pull off the road and stop until they have passed.





After spending about a week in the Aramac area, I headed the Landy and the van down to Blackall, about 110km south of Barcaldine. My plan was to leave the van at the rear of the Barcoo Hotel while I headed off with the tent to experience the isolation of the Idalia National Park. The Park has extensive mulga woodlands and the leaves of the lancewood and mulga treetops act like mirrors reflecting the sun's heat. It makes the trees look startling in the midday sun. The area is also the headwaters of the Bulloo River. The photos below show the variety of the rock formations, with the Wave Rock looking quite interesting.





Above is the view from the rim of the Bullock Gorge. I was lucky to see quite a few of the yellow-footed wallabies that live on the rocks around the rim, but they were very timid and I was always just that little bit slow in getting a photo. Even sitting and waiting for about half an hour only rewarded me with a couple of peeping heads occasionally.

It was a wonderful place to sleep out in my little tent and I must admit I enjoyed it immensely. It really whetted my appetite.



Pressing on from Blackall, I spent a few days at another camp on the Barcoo River outside Isisford, about 120km south of Longreach. I was lucky to score a secluded area away from all the other travellers so it was almost like being all by myself.



The day after I arrived, a couple travelling in a converted bus with a Suzuki 4x4 on a trailer behind, pulled in.

Jim was a very friendly bloke who liked fishing, and when he decided to take down his canoe and head off to Oma Waterhole further down the Barcoo River he asked me if I would like to come along. I was so glad I did, as the day was perfect – still, warm, clear skies – but no fish were biting.





Longreach ~

The home of the QANTAS Founders Museum ~
with a Boeing 707 and 747 on display ~ waiting to
take the visitors through on tours.

And Also the home of the Stockman's Hall of
Fame.

I hope you have gained something
from reading through my jottings

Stay well until next time....

