



From Longreach

At Hamilton Waterhole on the Min Min Byway
heading toward Boulia



This propeller on the rear of the van helps fuel economy HEAPS - gotta watch for low bridges though

To Mount Isa



I became very glad I had decided to drive to Mount Isa via Boulia rather than up the Landsborough Hwy because it gave me the joy of travelling through some of the most interesting country I have experienced since getting into what they call Outback Queensland.

I found Longreach disappointing and was glad to move on. I felt it very focussed on the 'tourist' and the attractions or tours are quite expensive – well, they are to an old skinflint retiree like me.

So after taking some of the usual tourist photos of the town, I discovered there was a very good camp spot on the Thomson River about 5km north of the town and I headed off to spend a few days on what is known locally as Longreach Waterhole.

Despite the camp being incredibly crowded, I was quite taken with the area and spent three days there, walking the river, watching the emu, eagles and roos while enjoying being away from crowded Longreach.

I am very happy I lashed out and installed solar panels on the roof of the van.

I am getting used to the 'comfort' of being able to maintain well charged batteries and still use the lights etc of a night.



A B 'Banjo' Patterson

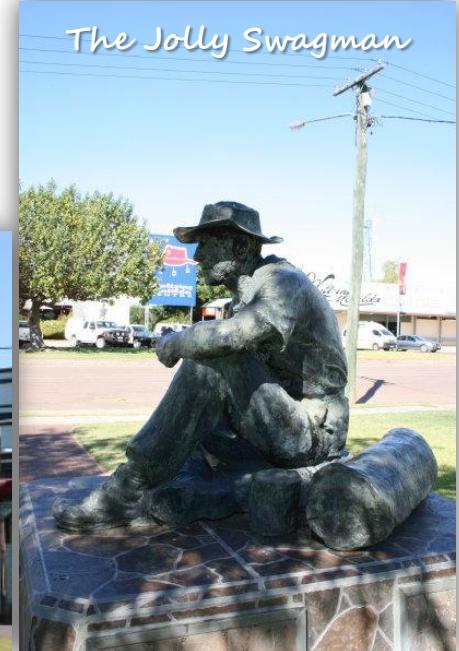


Winton is considered the home of Waltzing Matilda which was penned by Banjo Paterson at nearby Dagworth Station in 1895. It is said the first public performance of the song was at the North Gregory Hotel.

North Gregory Hotel



The Jolly Swagman



I went for a drive out to the Age of Dinosaurs which is a working research facility located on top of a giant mesa called The Jump Up, about 25km east of Winton. Unfortunately, I arrived too late for a tour but I did get some photos from the top of the mesa.



Bladensburg National Park is 17km south-west of Winton and was once one of the original stations in the Winton district grazing thousands of sheep and about 1,000 cattle. Many of the original buildings still stand. The area is mainly undulating Mitchell grass downs with fertile, black clay-soil plains – interesting but endless.



Original Bladensburg Homestead

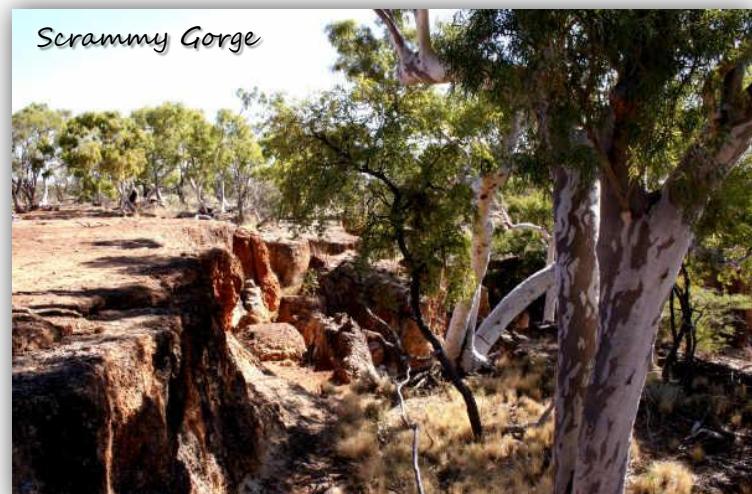


Original Butchering Hut

There were no formed walking tracks, so I did the scenic drive to Scrammy Gorge, about 25km through grasslands and dry channels and finally climbing the Jump-Up to different vegetation of stunted, dry, black trunked gidgee trees appearing to barely survive in the harsh red, rocky soil.



Scrammy Gorge



Scrammy Gorge

Leaving Winton, I headed toward Bourke along the Kennedy Development road, known also as the Min Min Byway. I intended to visit some of the historic places on my way through and was going to camp along the way – taking about four days to do 360km.

My first stop was at Middleton which is now just a pub. However, in days gone by it was one of nine changing stations on the Cobb & Co route, and is the only one still remaining. The publican tells the story of how there were times when they used camels to pull the coach from Winton to Bourke.



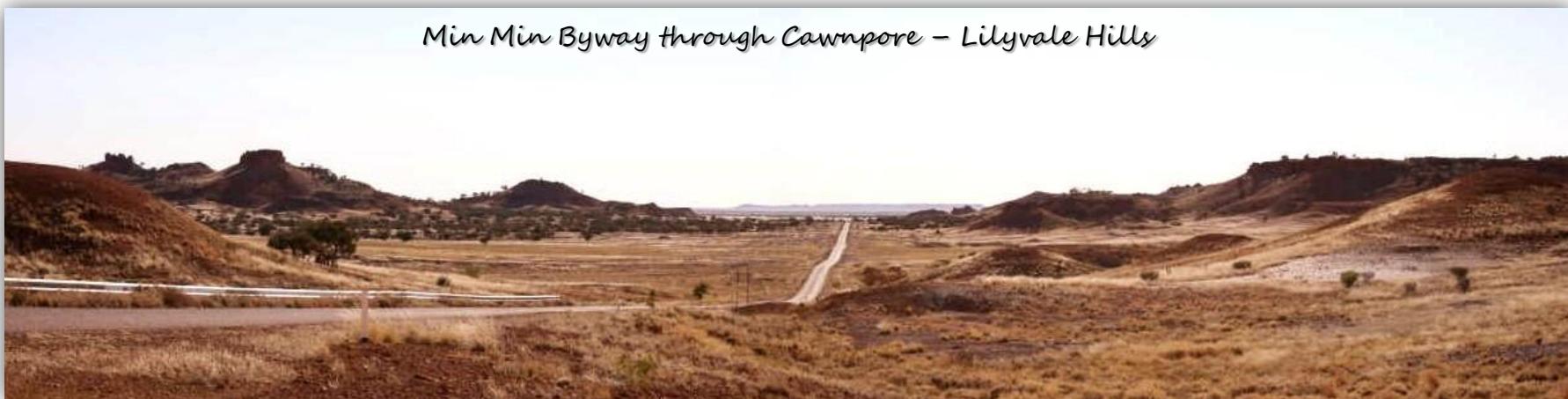
The pub provides a free camping stop they call the Hilton Hotel – so I gladly availed myself of their hospitality.



The view from my camp spot at the Hilton Hotel

Leaving Middleton I headed further along the Min Min Byway. About 50km west of Middleton are the Lilyvale Hills (known locally as Cawnpore). I had been told of this place by other travellers and was looking forward to seeing it for myself. I was not disappointed.

Min Min Byway through Cawnpore – Lilyvale Hills



After the flat plains all the way from Middleton, I couldn't get the grin off my face as I drove through the area which covered about 8km or so of the Min Min Byway. I stopped so often to take photos and each time I just could not fully capture the beauty of the area.

The area is so vast and so varied I was in awe and so glad I came this way. I eventually stopped at a wide area on a crest and spent hours walking around taking photos.

I would have loved to camp here for a few days, but camping is not allowed. I moved down the road a few kilometres and tucked myself into the bush.

I have tried to select only the better photos to show, and even then I have had difficulty selecting which to include.





I hope these give some idea of the area.

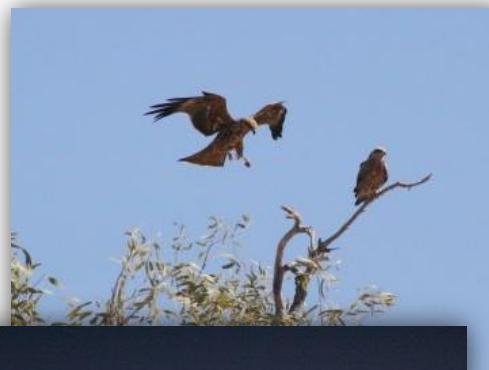


Forcing myself to move on from the beauty of the Lilyvale Hills, I pushed on through more endless and intriguing Mitchell grass plains with only the roos, emu and wandering cattle to keep my interest (and attention).

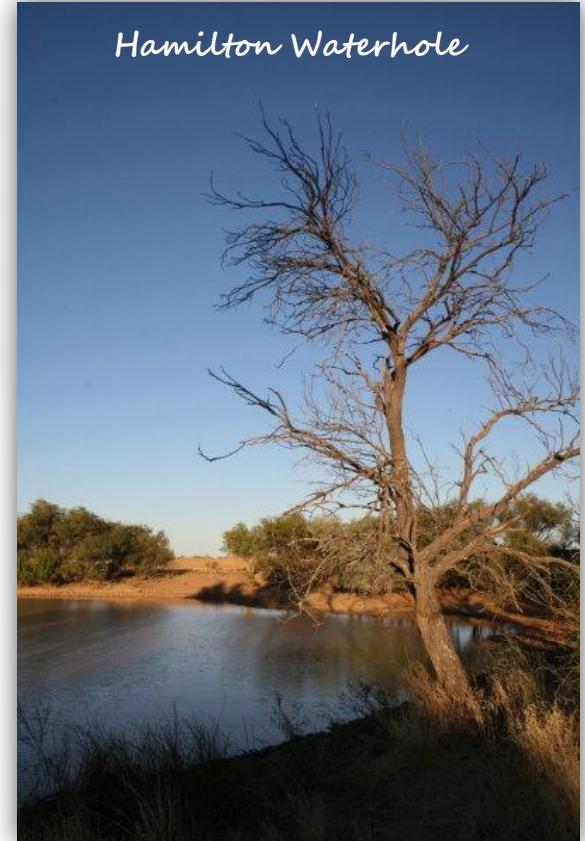
Hamilton River (and the nearby waterhole) was the site of what was the Hamilton Hotel – one of the other nine Cobb & Co changing stations of years gone by. I had passed the site of the Min Min Hotel which now is only a plaque on a rock. At least the Hamilton Hotel's fireplace and some of the fences and garden are still there – although very much in ruin.

The tranquillity of this spot was wonderful and I spent three lovely nights sitting alone in the vastness of the plains. The night sky was totally filled with stars and with no moon or distracting city lights, I spent some time each evening contemplating my existence – ah ... so relaxing.

Kites at the Waterhole



Hamilton Waterhole



Sunset at Hamilton River

Leaving Hamilton Waterhole behind, I headed to Boulia. I had intended to spend a couple of days at the Boulia Caravan Park to catch up on my 'domestic chores' but travellers passing through my camp at Hamilton Waterhole all had the same story - "there is a bush rat plague in Boulia. They gnaw the plastic off extension leads, coaxial leads and get up under the bonnets of cars and gnaw insulation off the wiring." I was not impressed.

Arriving at Boulia I checked at the Info Centre and they confirmed there was "an increase in the bush rats" although it was not confined to Boulia but affected most of the 'desert region' from Boulia south to Birdsville. I decided to just spend the day at Boulia and then press on to Dajarra further up the road and stay there for a few days.

The name Boulia is derived from the waterhole (on the Burke River) named by the Pitta Pitta tribe (Boolya) - I always wonder why they had to 'Anglicise' native place names. The Burke River was named by Burke (of Burke and Wills fame) when he camped here in late 1860.

Travellers had also told me that if I was in Boulia I should not miss the Min Min Encounter show. I thought that, given the almost unanimous chorus of how good the 'encounter show' was, I really should go and see it. The advertising blurb states - "The Min Min Encounter is a unique theatrical experience incorporating animatronics, fibre optics and loads of other high tech wizardry". It was well done, and was similar to a show I had seen about Ned Kelly at Glenrowan last year.

For those who do not know of the Min Min lights, they are lights that appear at night out in the desert. The first documented 'encounter' was in 1912 by a stockman who was 'chased' by the lights. There have been many such sightings since - although sightings seem to be getting few and far between these days. Opinion is divided - supernatural? UFO? Natural phenomena? Local Pitta Pitta people claim it is the spirits of their ancestors.

Boulia also boasts the Stonehouse Museum, housed in the stone house built by storekeeper James Jones who, in 1888, contracted stonemasons from Armidale in NSW to build the house.

The house remained in the Jones family until the late 1970s when it was acquired by the Boulia Shire Council and developed into the museum. It was quite interesting to wander through the house and its grounds.



Leaving the bush rats of Boulia behind, I headed to Dajarra late in the afternoon to make camp. The scenery initially was more of the endless, Mitchell grass plains stretching all the way to the horizon in every direction. I began to see some hills in the distance and eventually came across country that was similar to Lilyvale Hills but not as extensive or impressive.

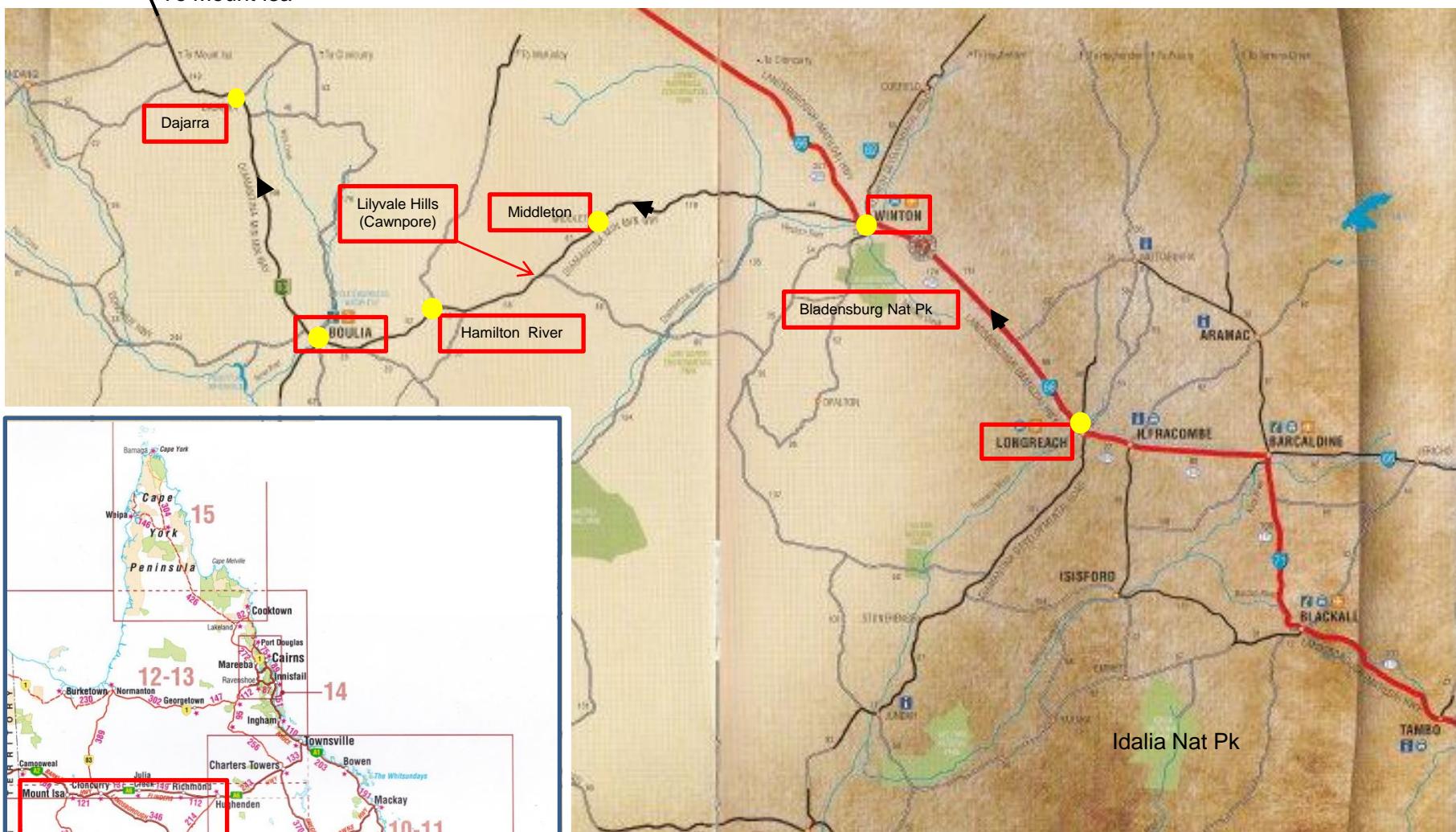


Arriving fairly late in the day at Dajarra I set up camp and went off to hunt down the local Aboriginal Centre so I could pay my fee. I was met by an elder with a smile so big it almost split his face. I chatted with this character which ultimately turned into hours about his people and the area.

The town, population around 120, has a rich Aboriginal heritage and is home to Aboriginal tribes from around the Diamantina River, the Gulf of Carpentaria and the Northern Territory. An Aboriginal language is taught at the school, along with how to make boomerangs, what wood to use and what timber is best for didgeridoos. They know where to find bush foods and the 'bush lollies' on the gidyea trees after rain, and other traditional foods.

Dajarra is now a sleepy outback post but once was the biggest cattle trucking centre in the world until the advent of the multi-trailer road-trains made the town part of a bygone era. In its heyday the area trucked more cattle than Texas in the USA. Cattle drovers would bring cattle from as far away as Western Australia to put them on the train at Dajarra for the saleyards in the east.

The locals were an unassuming and approachable lot and I enjoyed the couple of days I spent here – much more than bush rats in Boulia.



The above map shows my journey. The countryside after Dajarra was more endless plains until I entered the southern ranges about 20km from Mt Isa. The road wound through and around hills and outcrops that were astounding. Unfortunately, due to the narrow road and no areas to pull the van over meant I could not find a place to stop and take some photos so I just pressed on to Mt Isa.



So I will be in Mount Isa for about a week to get my medical check-up and tests and to clean all the dust that has accumulated from back roads and dusty camp spots out of the van and the Landy.

It is also a good time to restock my pantry in a big city with some sensibly priced food.

So until next time.....
Stay well.