

Australia 2007

Gold Coast - Bundaberg - Longreach - Darr River Downs Station - Kooroorinya

Leg details

Date May 2 - May 10, 2007

Leg Gold Coast - Brisbane - Sunshine Coast - Maryborough - Bundaberg - Biloela - Moura - Rolleston - Springsure - Tambo - Blackall - Longreach - Darr River Downs Station - Kooroorinya

Leg map (click to enlarge in separate window)



On Wednesday, May 2, 2007, after lunch we leave Susi's brothers Bruno and Hans Peter's place in Merrimac and visit Susi's father in his nursing-home in Nerang. He is in good shape and happy. But with his health ... will we see him again?

We head north towards Brisbane and leave the highway in **Pimpama** to get some Swiss-style small-goods at Goetzinger. We are invited at Napier's place today and will bring the sausages for the BBQ. Napier is a friend of Peter and Margaret (OKA 196). Up to now we have known each other exclusively via email.



Napier and his wife Marilyn are both are professors in communications. Napier is also the author of the beautiful short story regarding "The Primus Lightweight Portable Toilet Seat" ... We have a great time and the evening is far too short. The night is a fresh one again with only 13°C.

On Thursday morning we show the OKA to Napier and Marilyn. Napier is working on his own camper back-section for a Toyota Dyna 4x4 he has imported from Japan. So many ideas are exchanged, pros and cons discussed.

Dear Napier and Marilyn.
It was fun at your place, thanks for having us.
And thanks for the cooking Napier!

Then we head off to **Keperra** / Ferny Grove (a suburb of Brisbane) to visit Michelle from the "Pass the Post" mail service (www.passthepost.com.au).



Michelle is our "mail lady".
Our mail is sent to Keperra.
Michelle opens it all, scans the important things and sends them to us as password protected PDF-files in emails. Every so often we give her an address where she then sends the originals to. We are client 219, she has just had client 300 enabled.

We continue towards **Mooloolaba** where we leave the **Bruce Highway** towards the coast. Since Susi was here some 20 years ago things have changed drastically. A lot of development has happened; there are high-rise buildings and houses everywhere. The access to the beach is still guaranteed but there is definitely no more camping allowed at the water front. What a shame.

So we leave the coast at **Noosa**, head over to **Tewantin** and camp in the State Forest. It is a bit of a swampy area and there are large mozzies there with a nasty sting.

We continue our way along **Wolvi** and the **Tagigan Ranges** into the **Toolara State Forest**. The county is very hilly and constantly changing from dense pockets of tropical jungle to Eucalypt forest to Pine forests. It is a very relaxing and beautiful drive.

We continue along **Tin Can Bay** to the **Tuan State Forest** and reach **Maryborough**. On the Bruce Highway again we pass through **Childers** and later on reach **Bundaberg**.

We know that some friends of ours, Dorothy and Jim Manzari, are in Bundaberg with their yacht. We have known Dorothy for a long time, we all used to work at Prime Computers. Actually Dorothy was a "witness" to the beginning of our relationship back in 1993 ... Dorothy and Jim have been touring the world for the last few years. We saw Dorothy the last time some 4 years ago.

We head down to the Port in Burnett Heads only to be told that Dorothy and Jim are anchored in the Midtown Marina. Well, we did not know that there was a marina in the middle of Bundaberg.

We find the yacht and Dorothy is very surprised to see us as she had not seen our mail announcing our visit. We head to the local RSL club for a cold beer and have lots to talk about. They have had some problems that are hard to understand ...

They came into Australia waters coming from Numea. In Numea they had gone to the Australian Consulate and picked up the details on customs and quarantine (over 30 pages ...). When reaching Bundaberg they were told by customs that the booklet they had received was outdated and even though they had a legal visa they had committed a criminal offence.

Besides being stamped as criminals they were fined with 4'000 AUD by the Australian Customs Service. They had immigrated into Australia as told by Australian Consulate in Numea and they didn't want to be placed on the terrorist watch list as this could cause problems with further immigrations.

So they decided to fight against this injustice. Well, 7 months and 50 000 AUD down the road they are still fighting for their rights. It is hard to understand how something like this is possible in this great and friendly country. For further details on this story please go to the links below.

<http://www.news-mail.com.au/storyprint.cfm?storyID=3720059>

<http://www.news-mail.com.au/storyprint.cfm?storyID=3720199>

<http://www.thecoastalpassage.com/manzaris.html>



We have a nice evening with some Swiss-style Leberkase and Knackwurst (Fleischkasee and Cervelats as we know them in Switzerland) we had brought from the Gold Coast and a bottle of Penfolds Shiraz Cabernet.

Dear Dorothy and Jim, we wish you lots of luck with your appeal.
May your name be cleared again.

On Saturday morning we wake up to a sunny but muggy day. We have 1'000 km to Longreach ahead of us so we hit the road as soon as we can.
In **South Kolan** we stop at the **Mystery Craters**, 35 craters formed in a massive slab of sandstone, silt and red ochre. Parts of this formation are believed to be over 25 million years old.



The interesting feature is that the red ochre is distributed through the coloured sandstone.
Red ochre is soluble with water ... why is it distributed like this in the sandstone?
Sandstone normally is created by sedimentation. There are no layers visible in this sandstone ...
Also some of the craters hold water, some don't. In the ones holding water the levels and quality of the water are different.



We continue travelling through sugar cane fields to **Gin Gin**. Because of the humidity the 30°C feel much warmer.
The area around Bundaberg is known for its sugar.
Also the Bundaberg Rum is quite famous.



The water for the sugar cane fields is distributed by a channel system.

We turn off towards **Monto**.
The country gets hilly. We seem to be in cattle country again.
Around **Boolboona / Wonbah** vineyards can also be found.

The dams are empty and the grass is not very high and all yellow.
Queensland missed out on its rainy season this year.
It gets dryer and dryer, the first cacti appear.

At **Mt. Perry** we have already climbed 360 m. The humidity is much lower than on the coast and the 28°C feel just right.
We cross the **Possum Range** and later on join the **Burnett Highway** heading north on it.
Most of the forest in this area has been cleared to make space for farms.
Here again there is not much water in the dams but there seems to be enough water around as irrigation systems are on.



After Monto the first Boab trees appear. We are a bit surprised because we thought that they only exist in the Kimberley's.
We cross the **Burnett Ranges** (highest point of the road 500 m) and enjoy the beautiful views over the mountain ridges.



The drive down from the **Auburn Range** to **Thangool** is just stunning.

We continue towards **Biloela**.
The temperature has risen to 33°C and the ice cream at the service station is just the right thing to have.

We change over to the **Dawson Highway** and head into the **Banana Ranges**.
We wonder where that name comes from as there is not a single Banana tree to be seen ...





In **Moura** we have a look at the coal mines.

It is a shame that there is no viewing platform like in Kalgoorlie.

We are surprised that the section where the really large trucks cross the road is not even fenced off, just a large warning sign sits at the side of the road

There are no trucks coming past. Either it is because it is Saturday or because it is already rather late in the afternoon.

Next time we come past we will park where that sign is and wait until one of those trucks comes past.

Moura also has a cotton industry.

Cotton buds and plants can be seen along the road.

We stop for the night in a state forest outside of Moura and enjoy a refreshing shower.

The night is warm, just right for a light blanket and we sleep like babies.

We are back in the climate we like so much.

On Sunday we wake up to another sunny day. The temperature soon is at 28 °C; humidity is at 75% but drops fast.



We continue our way west on the Dawson Highway, a 2-lane bitumen road.



On the map we see names like Bauhinia Downs, Stockyard Creek, Woolshed Gully, Cattle Creek, Sheep Station Creek ... there are no houses to be seen, just farmland, cattle, every so often a landing strip ... it is a wide and open country some small hills on the horizon .. it is so peaceful



After **Rollestone** we head into the **Staircase Range**. Palm trees appear ... and large spiders too ...

In **Springsure** we turn into the **Dawson Developmental Road** in direction of Tambo.

We sight the first Wedge Tail Eagle.

Even though there is a lot of road kill on the sides of the road so far we had not seen any birds of prey.



The area around the **Nandowrie Needle** is very beautiful with its yellow grass and the mountain range.

Here the bitumen ends and Ruedi lowers the tyre pressure accordingly to avoid the tyres being damaged by rocks.



The views of the **Great Dividing Range** in the afternoon sunlight are stunning.

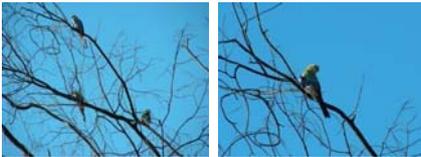


When we stop for the night we realise that the OKA stinks.

No wonder!

The outside is covered in cattle dung from the "left-overs" on the road.

As it concerns the outside of the OKA this "bull shit" job belongs to Ruedi.



We are visited by a flock of Blue-Checked Rosellas (*Platycercus elegans*).

The night is surprisingly cool with only 14°C.

But the morning sun takes care of that and soon the temperature is in the high twenties.



On Monday morning we continue along the Great Dividing Range and find a small mountain called **Sugar Loaf**.



Of course we have to climb it.



The rock is quite interesting, has many different colours and structures.



The views are impressive.



At Killarney Park we turn left towards **Tambo**.



In Tambo we turn into the **Landsborough Highway**, also known as "**Matilda**" Highway.

It is a rather boring stretch of road, more or less flat, so we leave it again in **Blackall** turning west towards **Isisford**. It feels strange to drive through all the floodways and see the depth indicators and all there is to be seen is a yellow, dry and sunburned country ...

Cam and Sharon Tindall, friends of [Lyn and Ron Quigley of Yatte Yattah](#), are expecting us today and we still have 300 km ahead of us. Thanks to the Sat-Phone we are able to let them know where we are and get directions on how to reach **Darr River Downs Station** 67 km north of **Longreach**.

We reach Longreach at sunset. The first thing that springs to our attention is the Qantas-Jumbo jet at the entry of the town. Qantas stands for **Queensland And Northern Territory Air Service**. They had their first office in Longreach. We will have to have a look at the Qantas-Museum and also the Stockman's Hall of Fame another time. We are in a rush now as we don't like driving at night.

The lights of the OKA are not adjusted well. The high-beam light is positioned to close, there we the normal light should point to. As we never drive at night we had not realised how bad it is. Something else to be placed on the to-do-list ...

Luckily there is still a bit of light left almost to **Morella** but driving under these conditions is not very nice. We leave the Matilda Hwy and drive the track to Darr River Downs Station . We can't see much and Ruedi hates it.

Then he hits the breaks just being able to avoid a collision with some brown cattle standing in the middle of the track. Finally we make it to the house and are greeted by Cam, Sharon and Ross, their eldest son. With a cuppa tea in the hand the world looks much better and we enjoy a nice evening.

On Tuesday morning Cam and Sharon leave for Longreach. Sharon is planning some gardening in their Longreach house, Cam will come back with a professional Jockey. So we have time to explore the grounds.



Darr River Downs Station was established in 1873 but was only bought by Cam's family in the fifties. All the original houses are still there.



The house on the right-hand side is the first house built on the station. It was already built from the local sandstone.



Then another stone house was built.



The currently used main house is also built from stone and has a huge veranda all around. There is Internet available via Satellite, telephone by directional antenna ... nothing is missing.

Cam and the jockey Terry arrive. Also the neighbour Stan and his wife arrive. The coming weekend there will be an amateur picnic race some 250 km up north. Cam will race his horses.

Cam says it's just for fun ... and of course to beat the neighbours, he adds with a wide grin.

The horses at the races all are ex-racehorses. They are on an "old age pension" on the stations. Race horses usually are fed with grain. At the picnic races only horses that are fed with hay and grass are allowed to start. It takes approx. 2 years until the horse's stomachs have adjusted to the new feed and the horses are fit enough to race again. The distances raced are also adjusted to the different feed and are only between 800 and 1 600 m.



We all go to the paddock. Ross gets the horses ready, Stan cleans their tails. Terry gallops each of the 6 race horses to free their lungs so they can breathe better during the races.



We inspect the Darr River dam nearby. The water is pumped to the house by a windmill. On days where there is no wind a petrol-driven pump is ready to be used.



Cam and a friend get ready to fly to another farm closer to the coast. Cam's father bought a plane some 49 years ago; it is still flying well but is a bit slow.



Like most of the larger stations Darr River Downs has its own landing strip. Later in the afternoon Paul, the youngest son, arrives. He is a professional Roo-Shooter. He shoots kangaroos and wild pigs and sells them. The pig meat is exported to Europe; the roo meat is used locally.

Paul had to study at the T.A.F.E. Institute. There are many rules and laws he needs to comply to. Also the shut animals must have a minimum size / weight ... Paul has contracts with some of the stations nearby to control the roo population. If one considers that ten roos eat as much grass as one head of cattle ...



Paul's LandCruiser has been specially equipped for his job: The windscreen can be lowered during his hunting sessions enabling direct shooting from the driver's seat. The gun is equipped with telescopic sight so the animals can get killed with the first shot.

The large searchlight on the roof can be operate from the driver's seat.
The tray of the Cruiser is equipped with steel-bars so the prey can be hung in rows.



Paul also manufactures his own ammunition. He is very meticulous.
The weight of the gun powder has to be precise as otherwise the ballistics will be different and the bullet might miss its prey.
After dinner Ross, Paul and Ruedi go roo-shooting.



Tomorrow morning Ross will take us along to check the watering system of the station.



On Wednesday morning we start our journey even before dawn. It is windy and the 18°C feel cool.
Paul and Ruedi drive in Paul's LandCruiser and keep a watch for wild pigs.

Poor Ross has to put up with Susi in the other LandCruiser and answer to all her questions ...



There is a network of dams and drinking trough distributed over the station.
They have to be checked every few days ensuring water flows into them.

Besides using rainwater dams to collect water Darr River Downs Station also has two bores.
In both cases they had to drill down deeper than 1 000 m to reach the fresh water as there is salt water layer in between.
The water at both bores is rather hot.



At one bore the pressure from the water is so high that it just flows out to the surface.



The other bore requires a windmill to suck the water up to the surface.
The water gets pumped into a dam.

The sad story is that last year Ross took the cattle dogs along on the water check.
When the dogs saw the water they ran and jumped into it for a swim not realising that it was over 80°C hot ...
A friend jumped after the dogs, got them out and got badly burned on his legs.
But he was to slow; the dogs had to be put down.

The water gets distributed throughout the station in poly-pipe by gravitation.
This system of pipes has been put in the last few years since Cam took over from his father.



The windmill moves a piston up and down to suck water and then presses it into the poly-pipe.
To ensure an even flow a pressure tank maintains the pressure in the pipes during the time when the pump sucks water.



Ross takes us to a dam that has a section built with rocks.
They are very neatly placed in one direction so the dam cannot get damaged should the water overflow.
The dam was built by Chinese workers in the 1920.

They had come into the country during the Gold rush.
When the rush finished, they were desperate for work, so the farmers had them build dams.



On the property the Prickly Acacia can be found, a pest imported from Africa.
It looks beautiful but the thorns are really long and will easily puncture a tyre, no worries ...
Camels and goats eat it. So they are brought into paddocks where the plant takes over to eradicate it.



An Australian Bustard (*Ardeotis australis*) crosses our way.
Ross learns something that morning ... he had always thought that the "Bustard" Street in Longreach had been misspelled and had a quite rude name



They have different kind of cattle on Darr River Downs Station, Brahmans and Short Horns.
The Brahmans are better resistant to the heat, the Short Horns will fatten faster



Later on we leave Darr River Downs Station and return to Longreach to stock up and have a look at the emails.

We camp just a bit outside Longreach on the road to Muttaborra.
The soil is so powdery that the shower water generates "high heels" underneath the thongs.
This fact worries Ruedi a bit as they have announced rains for the night.
Being stuck in such ground with rain would be bad news as the mud would fill the tires almost immediately and the OKA would be bogged.
But there the few clouds disperse so we decide to take the risk and stay where we are. But the OKA is made ready for a quick departure one never knows.



On Thursday morning Ruedi checks for Internet reception.
There is none in the truck, but when standing on the back bench in the cabin and using the roof as table it works.

After lunch we head off towards **Muttaborra** and Kooroorinya where the race will be held.
We find out why this area of Australia is called "Channel Country".
Driving on these back roads means over the grid ... through the dry floodway ... over the next grid and through the next dry floodway ... and so on



Sometime road signs can make you going "Hmmm?" or would you try to cross another vehicle on a single-track bridge?

The country is really flat. Every so often small hills can be spotted (Fort Hill, Tower Hill ...) otherwise nothing ... just dry yellow grass and some cattle and sheep grassing.
Well, let's hope for the rains that have been announced for the weekend ...



We reach the **Kooroorinya** race course later in the afternoon.