



Burke Developmental Road – Normanton To Mareeba, QLD

A Long Way Between Drinks – And Fuel

If you're looking to travel between the Gulf and the Cairns area, Burke Developmental Road (BDR) is an excellent choice. It really is the road less travelled, probably because it's dirt – and the alternative route (Gulf Developmental Road) is tarred. Where's the fun in that!!



AT THE EASTERN (MAREEBA) END OF THE BDR. CHECK YOUR FUEL BEFORE YOU LEAVE NORMANTON OR YOU MIGHT NEVER SEE THIS SIGN AT THE OTHER END!

Leaving Normanton, pretty soon you're on the dirt. BDR was constructed to service the Channel Country beef industry, enabling road train access to the huge cattle stations dotted along the route. So the road is wide and mostly flat and generally in good condition.



DON'T SEE THIS VERY OFTEN. WE MISSED THE C-520 SIGN BEFORE IT. SO, NEXT TOWN CHILLAGOE.

Cattle, Cattle Everywhere And Not A Steak To Eat...

This is cattle country. Brahman cattle (and their variants) thrive in these conditions – thousands of acres of black soil plains with grass about a metre high in amongst the savannah woodland. These cattle are bred for export all around the world. Consequently, we saw large mobs of cattle all along the BDR. They seem to like standing on the road for some reason. Maybe they were doing a traffic survey...

So you'll need to keep an eye out for cattle on the road. Slow down to a crawl and let them move out of the way. This can take some time, but that's okay – what's the hurry?



WATCH OUT FOR THE CATTLE ON THE BDR.



THIS YOUNG STEER LOOKED LIKE HE'D JUST CRAWLED OUT OF BED! TYPICAL TEENAGER...

Miles From Nowhere

You won't encounter much – if any – traffic and station homesteads are few and far between. In fact the only station near the road is Dunbar Station. It's right up near the Mitchell River (see map below) and has its own airstrip. In these parts, a light plane would pretty well be an essential item. Dunbar Station's a long way from any town.

The house itself is a classic Queenslander, perfectly suited to the climate. Apparently there's a notorious crossing of the Mitchell River not far to the North. You can take this as a "shortcut" to Cape York, but it's not for the inexperienced.

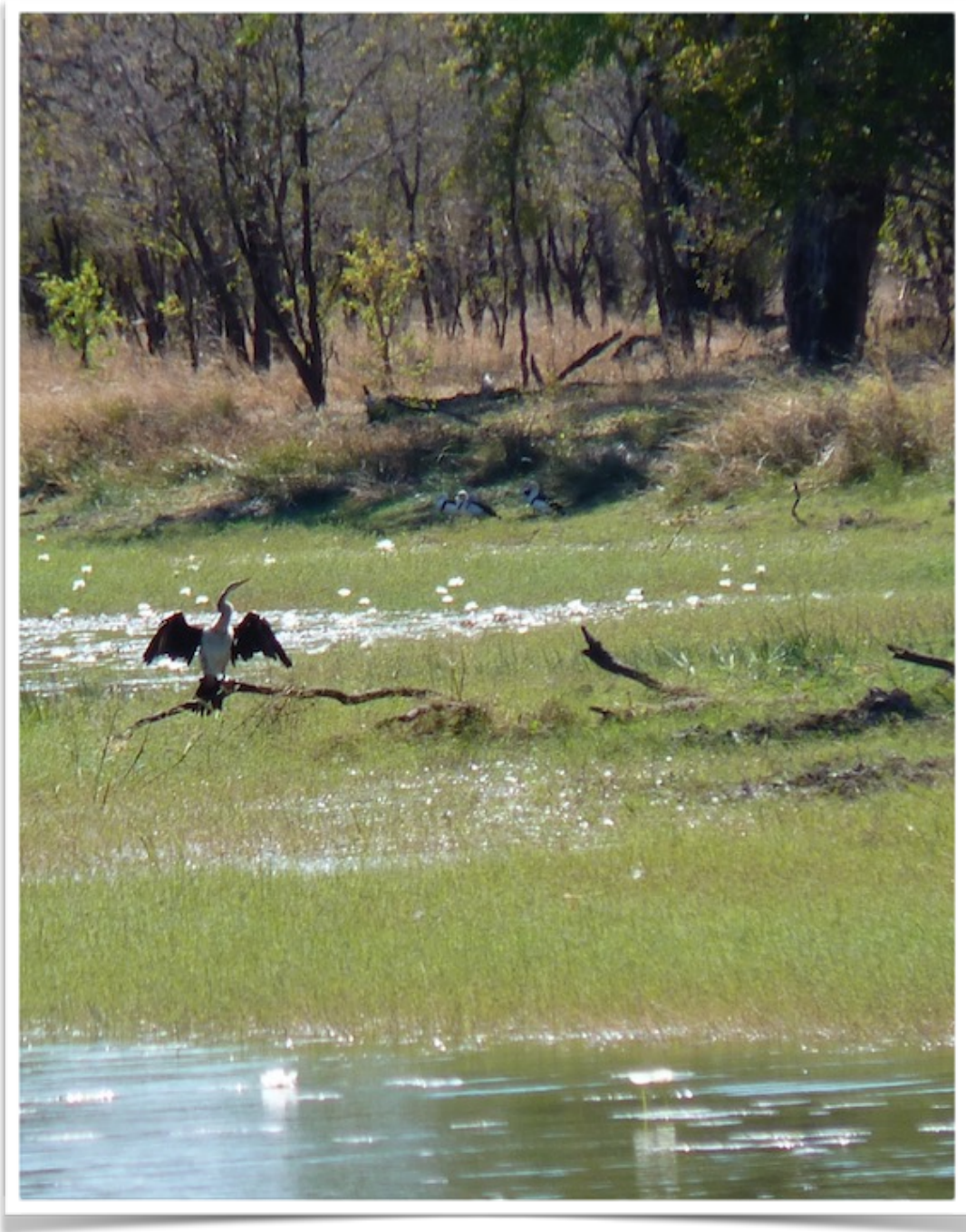


DUNBAR STATION – A CLASSIC QUEENSLANDER.

You'll be travelling in a vague Easterly direction once you pass Dunbar Station. Away in the distance to your left (North) is the Mitchell River. You won't really see the river, but you'll encounter the occasional billabong – offshoots of the river proper.



OUR LUNCH STOP – PERFECT!



THE BILLABONG WAS TEEMING WITH BIRD LIFE AND BEAUTIFUL WHITE WATER LILIES.



A WATCHFUL HAWK.



A FERAL PIG ACROSS THE WATER. PIGS DO ENORMOUS DAMAGE TO WATERHOLES LIKE THIS ONE. THEY TEAR UP THE GROUND AND CAUSE EROSION.

Bush Camping on Walsh River

At Walsh River crossing, we turned right off the BDR and found a bush campsite. Surprisingly a couple of other travellers were camped there as well. So we stayed well away to respect everyone's privacy.

What a brilliant spot! So peaceful and quiet. One vehicle crossed the river the whole time we were there – a road train on its way to who knows where.



"GEE, I'VE DONE THIS ONCE OR TWICE BEFORE..."



OUR CAMPSITE AT WALSH RIVER CROSSING.



PEACE AND QUIET, THAT'S WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT.



WALSH RIVER CROSSING.

In the morning we awoke to the strange call of blue winged kookaburras. Certainly beats being woken by an alarm clock!



BLUE WINGED KOOKABURRAS (ACTUAL PHOTO WAS TAKEN AT BRAMWELL STATION, CAPE YORK).

Chillagoe – Back To Civilisation

Pushing further East on the Burke Developmental Road, we eventually started to see mountains on the horizon. The Great Dividing Range was looming in the distance! Strange black rock outcrops and some “real” hills signalled Chillagoe was close.



HEADING EAST IN THE EARLY MORNING SUN.



GREAT DIVIDING RANGE IN THE DISTANCE.



UNUSUAL ROCK OUTCROPS CLOSE TO CHILLAGOE.

Chillagoe was established in the late 1800s as a mining village. The town's residents obviously take pride in its appearance. Chillagoe is probably best known for Chillagoe Caves – limestone caves nearby.



CHILLAGOE PUB.



A RATHER SOLID BANK VAULT, CHILLAGOE.

This area is certainly on our list of places to explore further.

Mareeba – Greenery And Travellers

We had planned to stop in Mareeba for a few days. However, the place was full of travellers and tourists. All the caravan parks were full. Our only alternative was the local show ground, which didn't appeal.



SUGAR CANE CROPS ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF MAREEBA. THE TROPICAL GREENERY WAS A BIT OF A SHOCK AFTER SPENDING SO MUCH TIME IN SAVANNAH COUNTRY.



A QUICK BREAK IN A PARK IN MAREEBA, THEN ONWARDS TOWARDS COOKTOWN.

So we decided to push on towards Cooktown, expecting to find a rest area. But it wasn't to be. All the rest areas were full – in fact they looked more like caravan parks than rest areas...



BELIEVE IT OR NOT THIS ISN'T A CARAVAN PARK – IT'S A REST AREA! BETWEEN MAREEBA AND COOKTOWN.

In Conclusion

The Burke Developmental Road is one of the great drives in Australia. It surprised us. We knew nothing about it and decided to travel this way on a whim. Sometimes it pays to follow your nose!



BDR SURFACE WAS MAINLY A WIDE GRADED GRAVEL ROAD WITH SOME PATCHES OF BULL DUST, THE OBLIGATORY CORRUGATIONS AND SOME ROCKY PATCHES IN THE HILLS NEAR CHILLAGOE.

