



## EASY OUTBACK ADVENTURES

Do you want to escape the concrete, traffic and crowds of the city for never-ending horizons and beautiful scenery, where the only traffic you'll come across is the local wildlife or a farmer droving cattle? Then Queensland's Outback is the perfect place for you!

A hundred years ago, when people spoke of travel to the Outback, it meant a long, arduous and often dangerous journey. Those who braved the thousands of kilometres to traverse its great distances were, and still are, regarded with awe. Their rewards, however, were tremendous – uninterrupted scenic vistas, true Outback hospitality, unique events, and inspirational characters.

Thanks to their trail-blazing spirit, Queensland's Outback is now more accessible than ever before. Travelling by air? You can fly with QantasLink, Rex Airways or SkyTrans. Travel with Queensland Rail or Greyhound Bus to really see the sights or opt for a self-drive itinerary. Looking to travel with friends? Book a tour with one of our many award-winning Outback tour operators. There is an option to suit all your and your family's needs.

If you've always wanted to visit Queensland's Outback, then now is the time to do it. So book your flights or your train ticket, pack up the car or book yourself a tour and 'Adventure Out There'.

### DAY ONE

Charleville is a historic little town – first gazetted in 1868. You may have seen it, as I did, on the news earlier this year underwater! It's not the first time and won't be the last, but, time and time again the community rallies and I'm happy to tell you the town and its residents have pulled through once more and the place is absolutely buzzing with activity.

We spent the day at the Charleville Cosmos Centre and Observatory. Believe me you'll walk away with more than just knowledge of the stars and planets! There's the Bilby Experience, no more Easter bunnies for me! And, you can find out all about local heritage trails and self-drive options not to mention book a Station Stay and tour.

### DAY TWO

A full day in Charleville was hardly enough but we must continue. Accessible by train (The Westlander), plane (Skytrans) and bus (Greyhound), I'm sure we can find our way back one day!

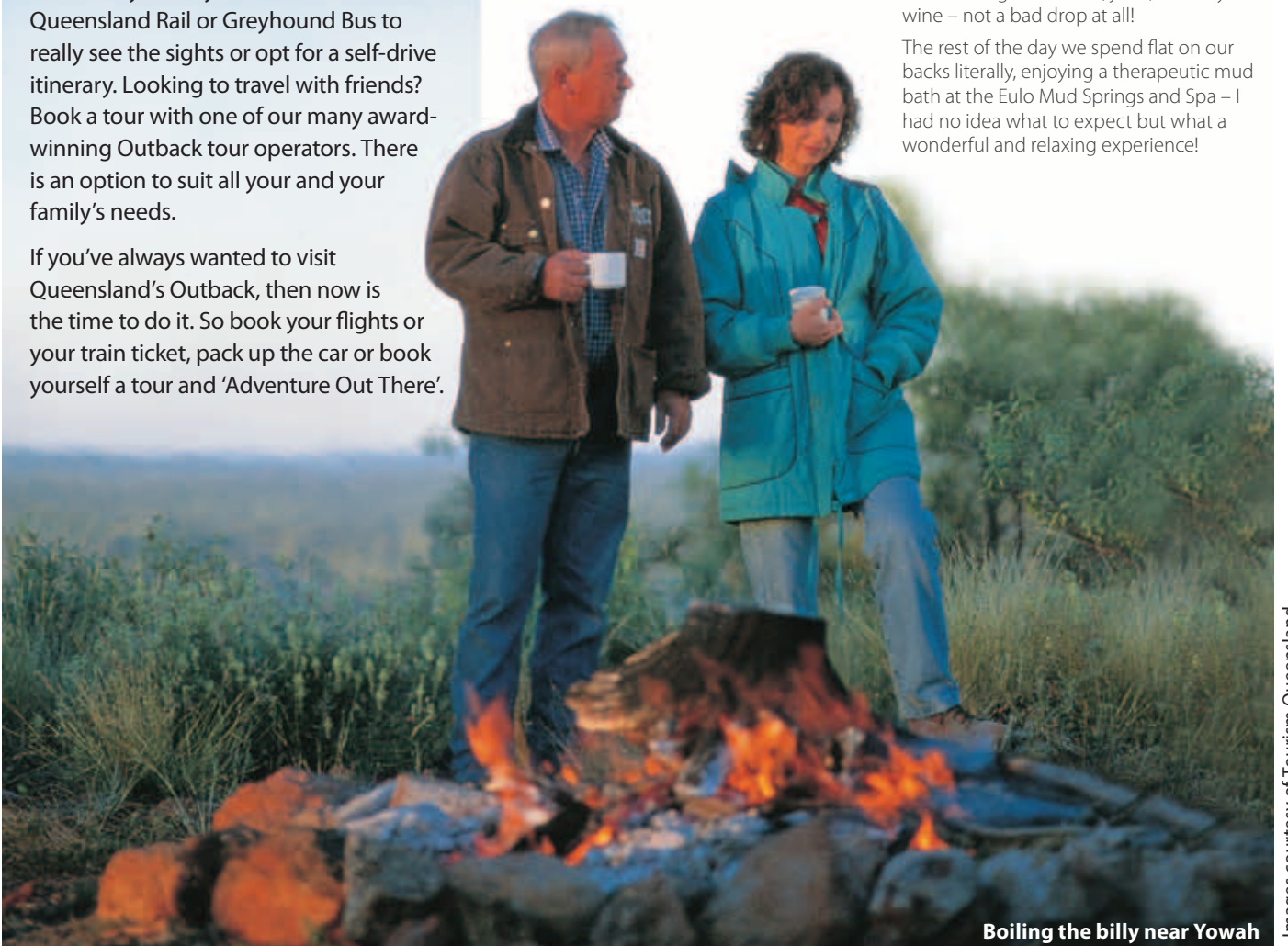
From Charleville we head south through the small railway town of Wyandra – definitely worth a stop and a wander. Call in at the Gladstone Hotel. There are some stories to be told of that place for sure.

South to Cunnamulla – named for the Aboriginal word for 'long stretch of water'. Cunnamulla sits neatly on the banks of the Warrego River. Feeling the need to stretch our legs we opt to take the Warrego River Walk, a self-guided walking tour tracking the river and crossing over black soil plains with interpretative signage identifying native plants, animals and other points of interest. We stop for lunch and spend the remainder of the afternoon exploring the Cunnamulla Fella Centre. Set aside at least half a day – you'll need it to view the Artesian Time Tunnel, Heritage Exhibition and Art Gallery.

### DAY THREE

Not so far between towns today we travel as far as Eulo – just 65 kilometres to the west. Today is about a little luxury! We visit the Palm Grove Date Farm and Winery where we are plied with samples of delicious fresh and dried figs and dates, jams, chutneys and wine – not a bad drop at all!

The rest of the day we spend flat on our backs literally, enjoying a therapeutic mud bath at the Eulo Mud Springs and Spa – I had no idea what to expect but what a wonderful and relaxing experience!



Boiling the billy near Yowah

## SOUTH WEST — Bilbies, Stars & Spas

*as rich below the ground as above, opals & gems and a rich heritage reminiscent of bygone days.*



### DAY FOUR

If you've time I would recommend continuing on to Thargomindah and Noccundra for a look – think Cameron's Corner and the Burke and Wills Dig Tree, but not me, not this trip.

We head north, popping into Yowah to brew a billy tea and explore its opal fields before continuing to Toompine, population two, 'The pub without a town'. Once a busy little settlement and regular stop for the Cobb & Co. coaches, all that remains is the Toompine Hotel. Try it for lunch. We did and can highly recommend it! After a yarn and a cooling beverage we continue to Quilpie, where we visit St Finbarr's Church with its opal altar, lectern and font and explore some local galleries. You can recognise the inspiration all around: the vibrant blues (sky), reds (earth), the green and the greys of the timber.

### DAY FIVE

This morning we continue to explore Quilpie, calling in to the local Visitor Information Centre, before heading out of town to Lake Houdraman – a popular spot for water sports and a gorgeous place for a picnic lunch. BYO your own chairs, as the ground can get rather hard after a while and don't forget to take away all your rubbish when you leave.

Following lunch we drive, for two hours, back to Charleville with just enough time to catch the Yabby Races. Now, I've heard of toad races, goat races, even lizard races but I'd never heard of yabby races – actually I'd not even heard of yabbies (think native crayfish) – but it was hugely entertaining. Tomorrow morning we've a plane to catch... heading east and back to reality.



The Cosmos Centre & Observatory, Charleville

## FAR WEST — Tales of the Bush

*famous for its dramatic landscapes, extra terrestrials and characters of old.*



### DAY ONE

A leisurely two hour flight from Brisbane can land you right, smack-bang in the heart of the Outback. Today, I'm travelling with friends and we are eager to hit the open road.

Longreach is a major centre and home of both the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame, and the QANTAS Founders Museum. I've booked a hire car with Budget (one of two hire companies in town) and having picked up some travel supplies at the bakery – I'm talking fresh jam-filled donuts and steaming cappuccinos – we turn

onto the Matilda Highway and head north-west towards Winton, a community thriving on its history.

A short side trip delivers us to the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum, where from a high vantage point you can look out across the endless flat bed of an ancient inland sea and as the heat haze shimmers in the distance you can see the rippling waves of ages past. At the museum our guide takes us on an interpretive tour, through the storage and preparation areas, past life-size replicas – all the while explaining in amazing detail the transition from

living dinosaur to fossil, lush inland sea to semi-arid desert.

Continuing to Winton, birthplace of "Waltzing Matilda" and home to Lark Quarry Dinosaur Trackways, the afternoon stretches ahead of us, and, while most of the group keep to the cool of the Waltzing Matilda Centre and the Outback Regional Gallery, some of us go on to test our musical talents on the world's first permanent Musical Fence. We also take a gander at Arno's Wall and wander through Winton's Diamantina Heritage Truck and Machinery Museum.

### DAY TWO

Leaving early, and heading west following the Kennedy Developmental Road over the Diamantina River and past the Swords and Carters Ranges, we enter a vastly different landscape from yesterday, quite rugged and the ranges surprising. A quick stop at one of Australia's most isolated pubs, The Middleton Hotel, and we're scrambling up and over the Cawnpore Lookout – trying to beat the midday sun – the view unsurpassed. Never in your life have you seen such blue skies!

## FAR WEST — Tales of the Bush

(continued)

Descending from Cawnpore we continue to Boulia, home of the famous Min Min Light! There are literally hundreds of stories of sightings, like the motorist whose car suddenly stopped as if out of fuel. While checking the fuel an eerie light passed across the road ahead before disappearing into the gloomy dusk, then all of a sudden... with no explanation, the vehicle started up again! Gives me goose bumps just thinking about it! You can find out more (as we did) at the Min Min Encounter Complex – a real Outback gem!

### DAY THREE

Another day and a change of direction – if you continue west, you can follow the Plenty Highway across to Alice Springs. We've turned south passing through Bedourie, past Lake Machattie and over the Cuttaburra Crossing. It is worth stopping to try your hand at birdwatching. No experts, we spotted broilgas, ibis and a host of other Outback birds. We later

discovered a Bird Watchers' Guide at the Wurrari Visitor Information Centre in Birdsville, also available in Bedourie. Be sure to grab yours on the way through.

As the day ends we find ourselves in the most famous pub in Australia, the Birdsville Hotel – long a haven for dusty travellers. Following a hearty meal and several cold beers the tall tales begin as a couple of regulars try to fool us with their stories of drop bears and bunyips.

### DAY FOUR

Today is spent exploring Birdsville itself: the Wurrari Centre, the Birdsville Working Museum, and the famed race track. It's hard to imagine a crowd of 6000 lining the track. Returning to town we lunch at the Birdsville Bakery. The curried camel pie was amazing! Slinking back into the cool interior of the pub for the afternoon, we bide our time until 4pm when, in convoy, we journey to Big Red,

the Simpson Desert's first and highest sand dune. The sunset is spectacular as we sit sipping champagne. What a wonderful way to spend the evening.

### DAY FIVE

Homeward bound! We are heading east today, this time on the Birdsville Developmental Road, past Moonda Lake and on to Betoota, mere remnant of an age past. Once a thriving business servicing drovers and pastoralists moving cattle from Queensland to South Australia and back again, the Betoota Hotel nowadays bounces back to life twice each year for the Betoota Gymkhana held in June and the Betoota Racing Carnival held in August, a precursor this year to the famed Birdsville Races. Tonight we stop at the Cooper Cabins in Windorah – make sure you take the time to visit the solar farm on the edge of town before the sun disappears. It's an impressive sight!

### DAY SIX

Windorah to Longreach is the final leg. With time to spare we make a scenic detour to Welford National Park, home to some of the most majestic river red gums and hundred year old coolibahs. The park follows the braided channels of the Barcoo River. Cutting back across to Jundah we lunch at the Jundah Hotel before continuing to Stonehenge. Nothing like its namesake in England, Stonehenge is nonetheless famous for its stones – gibber stones, great big fist-sized hunks of rock everywhere you look. Most famous of all is the Stonehenge Address Book, visible from the road (although we did have to drive by twice). The address book fields names, dates, postcodes and words of inspiration written out in stone by tourists and locals – said to have been started by an old postie bored with his wait for the mail truck. Don't forget to leave your mark! That done, we continue to Longreach ready to fly out next day and home!



Desert dunes, west of Birdsville



## CENTRAL WEST – Legends of the Outback

*Heart of the Outback and home to an impressive selection of museums and attractions.*

### DAY ONE

One day in Longreach is never enough; however, I've found it a great starting point for further adventures across the Outback.

Travelling with the kids this trip, my husband and I chose to start our adventure in Brisbane with the overnight train journey 'Spirit of the Outback'. Our two boys have room to stretch their legs and their imaginations and we've a chance to sit back, relax and enjoy as we crawl across the very heart of Queensland. In Longreach we've arranged a hire car with the local Avis dealer (Budget also operate here) so we can easily get from 'A' to 'B'. You can actually have your own vehicle brought out on the train – maybe next time!

First thing tomorrow we are going on a Cobb and Co. ride through the streets of town! Can't wait.

### DAY TWO

The Cobb and Co. ride was awesome and the boys loved it! Dad and sons all got to sit right up top and just quietly I think Dad was enjoying himself even more than the boys! Spending the rest of the morning 'up town' as the locals like to say, we

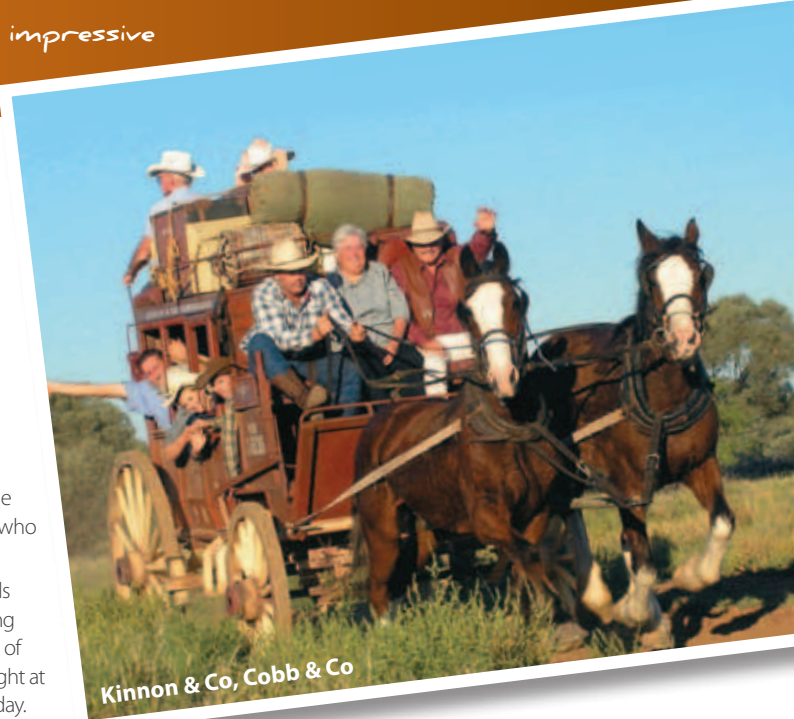
drove after lunch to Ilfracombe and, while it might not look like much, there are some wonderful attractions to be seen. The boys loved clambering over the 'Machinery Mile' and we were all amazed by the Langenbaker House. Over a hundred years old and totally unchanged, this cottage is a real eye-opener! Following an ice cream at the Ilfracombe General Store and Café, we continue to Barcaldine and spend the afternoon exploring the Australian Workers Heritage Centre, a tribute to the working men and women of Australia who made the Outback what it is today.

We dined at the Shaky Pub (as the locals call it) for a counter meal, before crossing over the road to have a look at the Tree of Knowledge Memorial, an impressive sight at night and a great end to a sensational day.

### DAY THREE

Today I had the boys (all of them) up nice and early for brunch at Roses n Things (Mum's choice!) before continuing to Blackall, home of the legendary Black Stump. We visited the Historical Woolscour on the edge of town and the memorial for Jackie Howe the shearer. In 1892 he became a legend of the Australian Outback when he broke the Australian daily and weekly shearing records. Howe sheared 321 sheep in seven hours and 40 minutes at Alice Downs Station, the fastest, highest tally ever recorded. A week earlier he'd set the weekly record, shearing 1,437 sheep in 44 hours and 30 minutes. Using hand shears, Howe's record stands to this day.

After a late lunch we enjoyed a dip at the Blackall Aquatic Centre & Artesian Spa before retiring to our lodgings for the evening. The hospitality at the Blackall Caravan Park was top notch and we enjoyed a wonderful campfire dinner.



Kinnon & Co, Cobb & Co



Barcoo River, near Blackall

## CENTRAL WEST – Legends of the Outback

(continued)

### DAY FOUR

I didn't know what to expect of Isisford but we were impressed! Only an hour and a half from Blackall and on a good road we were soon at the Outer Barcoo Interpretation Centre. With a theatrette, local arts and craft displays and wonderful displays depicting local flora, fauna and fossils it is a great stop for all the family. We were especially taken by the life-sized replica of *Isisfordia duncani*. Found by a local grazier, digging around in a creek bed, this incredible creature is the world's first modern crocodylian – the precursor to today's giant reptiles.

After lunch we dropped by the Barcoo River and threw in some hand reels, trying our luck on dinner. It was a gorgeous afternoon – quiet and peaceful, coolibahs gently reflected in the still water, birds fluttering here and there, a cooling breeze keeping the flies at bay.

At five we packed up camp and headed back to Longreach for the evening. The only fish we managed was fish and chips at the café in town but the boys had a great afternoon practising their casts.

### DAY FIVE

Catching QantasLink home to Brisbane in the early afternoon left us the morning to wander museums. We did the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame and Outback Heritage Centre, a museum which at its heart celebrates the life and stories of Australia's own stockmen and women, her explorers and drovers, the building of the pastoral industries: Australian beef and wool.

Luke Thomas's Outback Stockman's Show was great entertainment. You've never seen a dog like Raoul (of French extraction) and keep an eye out for Luke's goanna... he's a hard one to spot! The boys absolutely loved it!

We then crossed over the road to the airport, returning our hire car and checking in the luggage before lunching at the Qantas Founders Museum and a sneak peek – the Wing Walk will have to wait for another day. We plan on being back! We'll definitely be back!



Qantas Founders Museum, Longreach



## NORTH WEST – Ancient Discoveries

*a land of dinosaurs, rich in mineral resources and of communities passionate about their way of life.*

### DAY ONE

A hop, skip and a jump on Regional Express (REX) Airlines from Townsville takes you to Mount Isa, Capital of the Outback and home to the Xstrata Mount Isa Rotary Rodeo.

My first stop is the Outback at Isa Visitor Information Centre where I've booked on a Hard Times Mine Tour. As we descend into the tunnel I start to feel a little nervous. I can't imagine what it would be like working underground for hours straight... You can feel the temperature change; feel the ground beneath your feet shudder as they detonate at the actual drill face. The roar of drills and machinery would be deafening without the ear-protection... An amazing experience! And one I won't forget.

After the tour (and once I've found my feet) I wander around the Outback Park, cooling off in the shade by the lagoon, admiring the grevillia, eucalyptus and acacias, many of which are endemic to the area. Not quite done, I join a tour through the Riversleigh Fossil Centre guided by a resident palaeontologist. We work our way through the laboratory where they clean and prepare the fossils from Riversleigh, one of Australia's richest fossil deposits – huge

carnivorous kangaroos and emus, mega wombats and marsupial lions are just some of the ancient creatures found and on display!

### DAY TWO

This morning we drive out of town to Lake Moondarra. Friends of friends are taking me water-skiing. A first time for everything! I can tell you I ended up in the drink more often than not but wow, what an awesome morning! I had no idea of the strength you need for this and if I can find a club closer to home, I might just have picked up a new sport.

After lunch, my muscles feeling like jelly, we head east via the ruins of Mary Kathleen, an abandoned mining town, towards Cloncurry where I visit the John Flynn Place Museum. This is a memorial celebrating the life and accomplishments of the visionary John Flynn who pioneered today's Royal Flying Doctor Service. As the sun begins to set we head to Chinaman Creek Dam, just 3km out of town. We've an esky well stocked and gather to sit and watch the changing colours of Mt Leviathan. The birds shrill and settle for the evening and the waters lap in a lullaby after a long day.

### DAY THREE

We continue today to Julia Creek and then Richmond, on our way calling in at Proa Redclaw Farm. "Proa" is a sheep and cattle property to the south-east of Julia Creek. Owners Duncan and Judy Fysh diversified into redclaw as an answer to ongoing fluctuations in the sheep and cattle markets. It's quite an operation and when you look to the surrounding country the last thing you expect to find is a fully fledged aquaculture venture – you must book before you go.

At Richmond we visit the Kronosaurus Korner Museum and Visitor Information Centre where we are given a fossicker's guide and dirt-map, with instructions on where to find the best belemnites (similar to squid) and fish teeth. Half an hour later we are on our knees scrabbling in the dirt and the stone chips, looking for our very own fossil treasures – a great way to keep kids entertained. While we didn't find any fish teeth we did manage to find a couple of bits of ammonite shell. Great for souvenirs.

### DAY FOUR

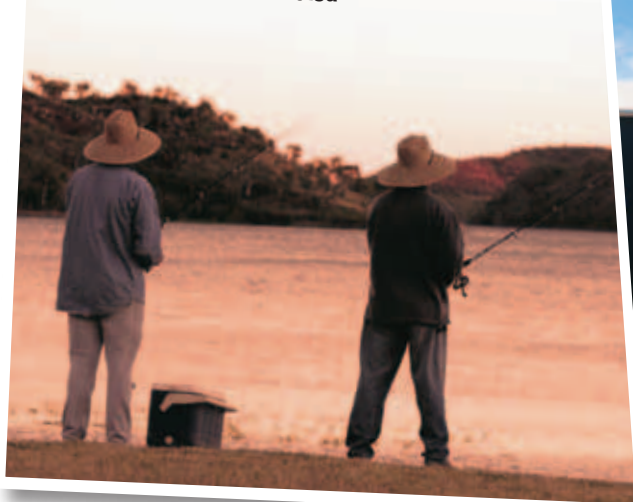
After a morning spent in Hughenden, visiting the Flinders Discovery Centre and getting

photos with Hughie the dinosaur, we venture north on the Kennedy Development Road to Porcupine Gorge National Park. A canyon of vibrant sandstone, the gorge has clear, cool rockholes and a flowing creek and the vegetation is atypical of the surrounding landscape – almost lush, a hidden oasis and wonderful camp spot. Make sure you've a gas stove though – no fires allowed.

### DAY FIVE

Today our journey eastwards continues. The plan is to be back in Townsville in time to watch the sun set over Magnetic Island! My Outback odyssey though will not be complete without a visit to Charters Towers – one of the most beautiful of Outback towns, full of graceful old buildings, many built during the booming gold years from 1872 to 1899. Don't miss the Post Office, former Municipal Library and the Australia Bank of Commerce Building. We visited the World Theatre Gallery and later climbed up the Towers Hill Lookout late in the afternoon before continuing along the Flinders Highway to Townsville.

Lake Moondarra, Mount Isa



Kronosaurus Korner, Richmond

