

HUGHENDEN LOOKOUT



THE LONG WAY BACK

Amber Driver Alice Springs Branch

The long road back to boarding can look quite different for each family, and at the start of the 2026 school year our family decided to take 'the longest short-cut' from Alice Springs to Adelaide.

Usually, this journey consists of a 400km trip from "Elkedra Station" to Alice Springs (that includes 300km of dirt) then we take the Stuart Highway south 1500km from Alice Springs to Adelaide as this is the most direct route and one we are very familiar with.

It was decided that if 'the stars aligned' and everything went to plan; this consists of a lengthy list of potential issues every Cattle Station/farmer faces and these potential issues have a tendency to present themselves the moment plans for a family holiday are whispered, we would return to boarding school via a visit to the grandparents... highlighting the small detail about location; QLD & NSW...

The challenge consisted of:

- Ensuring we could get John's brother and partner to navigate flood waters they were facing on our QLD block between Hughenden and Winton to the NT block with their new month old baby - this factor was changing nearly on a daily basis. We are very fortunate being able to call on family to support us stepping away from the station together. So often, someone

has to stay behind and keep the home fires burning, thus a family holiday is exceptional and not taken for granted.

- Keeping up the supply of water at stock watering points - The NT block was not affected by the QLD flood event - and we had started carting water to parts of the station for the stock.
- Allowing enough time to take our "longest short-cut" considering road closures and diversions.

As each piece fell into place, we set off on our first leg: Elkedra to Mt Isa, 1000km.

Thanks to Sonny, Dave, Penny & Karoline for getting to Elkedra while we were away.

We reached Hughenden the next day and were very fortunate that sections of that road had opened for that day (due to major flooding)

A couple of nights at Hughenden, spending time with 'Grandma' fishing and exploring the area.

Our next move was selecting any road that wasn't closed due to flooding - so we headed east past Prairie to Torrens Creek and then took the road down through Aramac, Barcaldine, Blackall, beeping the horn and getting a picture of the turn off to our ICPA Federal President Lou Martins turn off near Tambo, Augethella and arrived

in Morven in time to grab a feed at the pub and watch a 20/20 cricket match.

Flood waters were no longer ruling our navigation and we wound our way through Mitchell, St George, Mungindi and Moree where we caught up with some familiar faces for a late lunch then we continued to Narrabri to meet with the next set of Grandparents who got quite the surprise when we arrived unannounced!

One of the best parts of tackling and taking a last-minute, unorganised, driving holiday is the flexibility - as long as we arrived in Adelaide in time to do an obligatory shop up of all the bits and bobs for the term, a 'name-tag' blitz, dry clean the blazer and buy new school shoes - we were basically footloose and fancy free on the open road.

The next stop was Tamworth where we spent some time cheering on one of the Territories toughest little cowboys who qualified in the top 15 across Australia to ride in the U11 Mini-Bull ABCRA Australian Finals. At the end of the event Tate walked away 5th outright in U11 Mini Bulls. Although we were only there for a night, we managed to see two days of rodeo action in Tamworth and catch up with many familiar faces from all over the NT, NSW & QLD.

After we left Tamworth our map app had a taste for our tendency to take the road less travelled - so we started a game of left turn - right turn as we weaved our way through

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We acknowledge the Yindjibarndi people as the Traditional Custodians of this land. Their stories, knowledge and connection to Country continue to shape the landscape and community we share today.

Hughenden Lookout is named for its expansive views north towards the township of Hughenden. Once regarded as "capital of the inland," Hughenden is now the administrative centre of the Flanders Shire.

Clearly visible on the outskirts of the town is the railway line, completed

in 1884. The line was built by the Queensland Government and was the first of two to be built in the area. The line was built by the Queensland Government and was the first of two to be built in the area. The line was built by the Queensland Government and was the first of two to be built in the area.

"Descending from the tableland we saw before us a lovely valley of undulating downs, dotted here and there with groups and hills of graceful Myrtle trees whose shadows were

stream over the green herbage by the rising sun. Rich pastures of rolling plains covered with Flanders and Mitchell grasses." 3 Generations of Drivers Before us.

He selected the site of Hughenden Station in February 1884, the first settlement in the Flanders Range in north-west Queensland. It was called Hughenden in honour of Hughenden Manor in Buckinghamshire, England. When Hughenden Manor was sold to two-time British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881), 1st Earl of Beaconsfield in 1877 the name of Hughenden was adopted for the future settlement.

3 Generations of Drivers Before us.



Waving goodbye to the Morphetts at Callanna



Territory represent at Tamworth Rodeo



Ruben and Tate

NSW: Tamworth, Currabubula, Werris Creek, Caroon, Premer, Coolah, Mendooran, Parkes, Forbes before calling it a day in West Wyalong.

As we prepared for our last leg; West Wyalong to Adelaide, I happily set up my position in the back seat and left father and son up front to make the most of each other's company. We had breaky in Hay, crossed the NSW/VIC border at Euston (our Map app was back to its left / right antics from the day before) through Ouyen, Pinnaroo (now in SA) and once we hit Murray Bridge we had a straight run down the M1 to Adelaide where we had booked in at Glenelg in time for Australia Day celebrations.

5 States, 5000km and ready for the challenges of entering Yr 9 as a boarding student.

Once the start of term drop off was completed and we said our goodbyes, John and I made our way back to Alice Springs on a not so long short cut - through Clare and Jamestown where we stayed a few nights on the edge of Lake Eyre at Callanna Station with Tom & Lucy and their two boys (Huxley was on the cover of the last pedals magazine) and another night with Matt & Chantelle and their girls at Anna Creek.

We had been so fortunate to spend time with so many friends and family along our mad dash across the country and we couldn't help feeling pangs of guilt for not being able to see everyone. In all fairness, we'd probably need to take a year off to ensure we could spend time catching up with everyone. Never say never - we might see you on the next go round.

Sending our two boys off to boarding school is hands down the hardest part of our education & parenting journey to date. Like so many geographically isolated families, we have no other option. And with that limited access to education comes extreme sacrifice that all members of the family are forced to accept, adapt and reconcile. The countdown to the school holidays are a regular distraction that I embrace. Over and out for now.



Ruben and Marnie