



## Winton - Route of the River Gum

Featuring Bladensburg National Park

Discover the fascinating flora and fauna of the Bladensburg National Park and explore local heritage sites.



# Route of the River Gum

Allow three hours to discover the fascinating flora and fauna of the Bladensburg National Park and to explore local heritage sites.

The Route of the River Gum is a self drive tour starting on the Winton - Jundah Road and travelling a loop of approximately 52km. You should allow three hours – more if you would like to explore, swim or picnic. From the shade of Surprise Creek, beneath river red gums and coolibahs, you can view the vast plains of Mitchell and Flinders grass. Flat topped mesas, plateaus and residual sandstone ranges provide a scenic backdrop to Bladensburg National Park. Formerly a grazing property, Bladensburg was designated as a National Park in 1994. The park conserves 85,000 ha of Mitchell grass and channel country, a number of scenic waterholes and culturally significant sites. The park is



home to a wonderful diversity of birds as well as Red Kangaroos, Eastern Grey Kangaroos and Wallaroos. Set your trip odometer to zero at the town grid on the Winton – Jundah Rd.



Arid Landscape by Tourism Queensland

### Points of Interest and Key Attractions

#### 1. Western River – 1.5km

The braided intermittent creeks you are crossing are part of the Western River and are typical of channel country in Outback Queensland. The catchment for Winton and the Western River, forms part of the Great Artesian Basin and drains 1500km towards Lake Eyre North. The attractive grey-green leafed tree is Eucalyptus Microtheca or 'Coolibah' are plentiful in this region. It is one of these that the swaggie camped under in the song Waltzing Matilda. Other plants that inhabit these creeks are Black Wattle and Prickly Acacia. When the town was gazetted on the 5th of July, 1879, the Western River formed part of its boundary. During floods, the river becomes many times wider and floods the lower sections of town.

#### 2. Long Waterhole Turnoff– 1.9km (4.5km return trip)

Long Waterhole is man-made and was once used during the Outback Festival as the site for the famous biennial World Crayfish Derby. It is a popular camping and picnic spot and is great for bird watching and fishing. A bike track designed for motorbikes runs around the waterhole. The rodeo yards were built in 1978 by keen rodeo enthusiasts who ride the bulls, steers and horses for fun! World champion buck-jumping rider, Ray Hermann, often practised in these yards.



Outback Festival by Tourism Qld



Highway by Tourism Qld



Winton by Tourism Qld



### **3. Mistake Creek – 3.3km**

Mistake Creek is the scene of the murder of a young boy in the 1800s. By 1895 this area supported nine Chinese market gardens producing a complete range of fresh fruit and vegetables for the township.

The Cragg Family Bridge at Mistake Creek is named to honour this pioneering family who lived here until the 1950s. It is a good picnic and fishing area and Yellowbelly are often caught in the creek.

### **4. Western Picnic Race Club – 5.5km**

The first Picnic Race Club in the area was the Never Never Jockey Club. It is believed that this is the first time the term 'never never' was used in Outback Australia. A silver trophy, The Corinthian Cup, won in 1879 is displayed at the Waltzing Matilda Centre, and the race was again contested at the Waltzing Matilda Centenary celebrations in 1995. Picnic Races are amateur horse races and the horse must only be grass fed. The first race meeting was held on April 27 and 28, 1922.



Bladensburg

#### **6. 1894 Shearers' Strike Memorial – 9.7km**

Turn left to the memorial built by the Winton branch of the ALP and the Winton and District Historical Society in 1975. It was here that 500 shearers camped during the strike of 1891 and 1894, when Winton was under martial law. This was the beginning of the foundation of the Australian Labour Party.

#### **5. Bladensburg National Park turn off (6.7km) and Red Creek (9.0km)**

Turn left and follow signs to Bladensburg National Park. The road initially passes through the town common where stock graze at the owner's risk. Just after Red Creek, note the Gidyea trees, a species of Acacia. This very hard wood is used extensively for rural fence posts and is excellent fuel for camp fires.

The Aborigines used Gidyea to make boomerangs, a faulty boomerang still contained in a tree trunk may be seen in the Qantilda Museum. Apostle birds (also known as Lousy Jacks because of lice) frequent this creek area.



**7. Bladensburg National Park  
Headquarters turn off (11.6km) and park  
entry grid (12.4km)**

The left hand road leads to the National Park Information Centre and original homestead buildings. Keep to the right hand road to continue on the Route of the River Gum. Typical tree species in this area are Bloodwood, Bauhinia (with butterfly shaped leaves) and Mimosa (a prickly shrub weed). Bladensburg was first taken up in 1874 by Henry Cory, and registered on March 18, 1875 in the name of Euston Blomfield. In 1891, J.A. McCartney owned the property and ran 10, 000 head of cattle. The Park was purchased in 1993 by Queensland Parks and Wildlife and is yet to be fully developed.



Bladensburg Waterhole

**8. Claypans – 13.9km**

The claypans are flat areas along the creek. The surface is white, smooth and hard, and no vegetation grows except in the wet season. Because of the claypans, rain runs into waterholes as freely as if it were running off an iron roof. Half an inch of rain quickly fills nearby waterholes. In early days, drovers driving cattle across the dry country would follow the storms, knowing that water would be trapped in the claypans. You will see another claypan just across the grid to Engine Hole.



Rugged Landscape by Tourism Qld



### **9. Engine Hole – 17.2km**

Turn right to get to Engine Hole, a horse-shoe-shaped waterhole with white gums along the banks. Once the site of brick manufacturing, it is now a popular place for picnics and swimming.

### **10. Little Jump Up – 20km**

A 'jump up' is a local term to describe this steeply rising landscape. Stop at the top of the rise and look back along the way you have travelled; you will be amazed at how far you can see because of the flatness of the country. The Vindex Range is visible to the east. Wildlife in this area includes red and grey kangaroo, wallaroo, emu, plain turkey and wild pigs.

The peculiar spiky bush growing to about 60 – 70cm tall is spinifex. Spinifex has very little leaf so it sends up long vertical spikes covered with a waxy coating to prevent moisture loss. Spinifex fires are easily recognised because of the black smoke. The flowers are eaten by stock, and old bushman say that a bed of spinifex upside down and covered with a blanket is as good as an inner spring mattress. If you watch, you may see a Spinifex Pigeon fly out.



Outback Windmill by Tourism Queensland

### **11. Skull Hole turn off – 20.1km (4k return trip)**

Take the left hand track to Skull Hole. This was the site of a massacre of aborigines in retaliation for the murder of a teamster. Sergeant Moran, then in charge of the Winton Police Station, proceeded to track the murderers. When attacked, he dealt punitive measures to his assailants. This climaxed at Skull Hole, where the tribe was massacred by black troopers. Take note of the caprock.

During wet season, Skull Hole is filled by a waterfall. You can see a blowhole, wattle trees, caves, bats and unusually shaped rocks if you walk either side of Skull Hole. See the rock formation, and the eucalypt tree growth – the bulbous bases of the trunks is due to difficulty establishing root growth. This is a good place for a picnic and bird watching. To continue, return to Skull Hole turn off and turn left.

### **12. Bough Shed Intersection – 23.6km**

Turn right to visit a popular camping (fees apply), swimming and picnic spot on Surprise Creek which is an ideal place for lunch. Bush toilets are available but there is no drinking water.



Skull Hole at Bladensburg National Park



### 13. Top Crossing – 23.9km

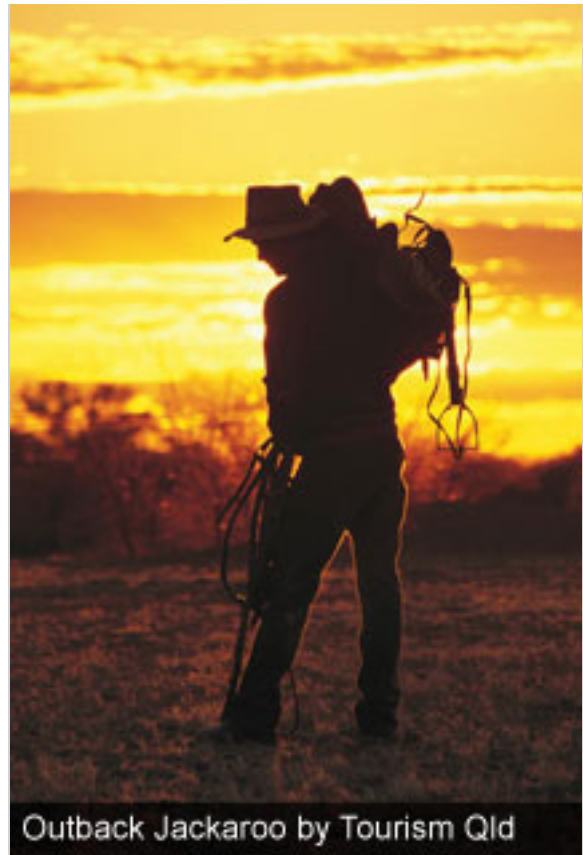
Drive over the solid rock bottom of Surprise Creek (a dry crossing except immediately following rain). If you want a refreshing swim stop at this rocky creek crossing. During the rain, water swirls through the area and fills the waterholes until the next wet. If you are here at sunrise or sunset you will see many birds and animals watering. 2km past top crossing you will see some Beefwood trees that are renowned for being resistant to termites.

### 14. Richard Cragg's Grave – 24.8km

Roughly 1km along this track on the left you will see a lonely grave. Many early pioneers were buried in the unforgiving Outback. Richard Cragg was a mail contractor who died on December 30, 1888. He was only 46 years old. The cause of his death is unknown, although it is believed he was accidentally poisoned. Cragg came from Manchester in England, with his wife and seven children, some of his descendants still live in the Winton area.

### 15. Opalton Road Junction – 25.4km

Turn a sharp right for Winton and continue until you get to the Winton Jundah Rd Junction (odometer at 37.1km). Turn right for Winton or left to Lark Quarry Dinosaur Trackways and Old Cork Station.



Outback Jackaroo by Tourism Qld



Rugged Landscape by Tourism Qld

### **Important Safety Information**

When driving take regular rest breaks. Keep left at all times. Avoid alcohol. Wear seatbelts. Drive at a safe legal speed. Take care on dirt roads. Watch for animals particularly at dusk. Avoid driving at sunrise and sunset. Bring at least 7 litres of water per person per day for drinking and cooking. Ensure your vehicle has spare fuel, a spare tyre, fan belt etc. In an emergency, or if your vehicle breaks down, stay with your vehicle. A vehicle is much easier to find than a person!

Content and information provided by Experience Winton.

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