

GREGORY RIVER 2018

By David Hammond

I was after some white water practice before having a crack at the Avon in 2018 so I conned my father into joining me on a road trip to the Gregory River Race in QLD in May 2018.

Well I thought we were absolutely mad. The town of Gregory is 2,500km from Sydney. A 30hour drive to do a 40km race.

They tell you there are no crocodiles in the Gregory but we are in the far North QLD and the coast is not that far away and there is a good chance of swimming, so its pretty hard not to think about them.

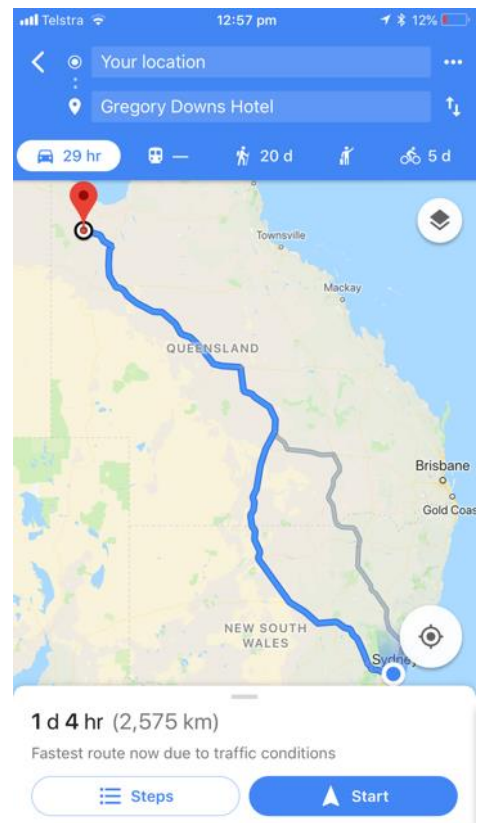
Not wanting to take too many days off work it was go go from Start to Finish.

Event	Distance	Total
Thursday	Sydney to Nindigully, Tallon QLD	900km /11hours
Friday	Nindigully to Cloncurry	1300km /15hours
Saturday	Cloncurry to Gregory	300km / 4 hours
Sunday AM	Race Day	43km
Sunday AM	Gregory to Winton	700km / 8 hours
Monday	Winton to Mulgoa Creek Hotel, Byrock	1250km / 14hours
Tuesday	Mulgoa Creek to Sydney	700km / 9 hours

We hit a kangaroo 10km from Nindigully at midnight on the first night. We got to Gregory thinking we could eat at the pub, but the pub was only serving meals for guests, we set up camp in a local park not knowing the paddlers were all camping just up the road, the picnic races had been on that day and it seemed like the band played all night and then we nearly missed the start. Allow an hour to get to the start they said but I read that on the way home.



Great hosts, special people



2500km for a 43km race



The locals

What a crazy race. 100m from the start is the first rapid. If you were not first off the blocks, you were stuck in the traffic jam as everyone tried to navigate the first obstacle.

The race is very unique, a mixture of long billabongs linked by small narrow channels full of rapids. You would be paddling down a deep water hole one minute and then the river would turn left or right into a channel, the river speed would increase and you would be ducking under tree branches, avoiding rocks and bashing your way through Pandanus Palms.

Ohh the Pandanus, it grows everywhere, on the banks, in the river, on the trees. You just bash into it, hoping to pop out the other side. Ohh the Pandanus, if you don't move your paddle sideways quick you will end up with a paddle in your head as you crash into the Pandanus, helmets are compulsory but a mouth guard would be a handy accessory too.

About 7km from the start is Kamarga Falls a bit like the Steps at Barrington. A bit further down is Wipeout Bend. Sort your leaning skills out quick or you'll be swimming. If you like the sound of your rudder crashing over a rocky floor with that shuddering sound and your gel coat being stripped from your hull you are then flying down a rocky chute called galloping jacks.

From checkpoint 4 to the finish you have the Pandanus, Ohh the Pandanus. Not too dissimilar to the tea trees of the Avon.

Not to forget the campers floating in the river on car tyres, cooling off and drinking beer as you paddle past. The race is held on a long weekend in QLD, campers everywhere. The Gregory is a popular getaway for Mt Isans.

I can't believe, I have started thinking of doing this race again. It was such a hard slog getting to the start line and back again, that I never thought I would think of going back, but there is something special about this race. You don't realise it until you are on the water, but it is set in some of the most picturesque scenery you will ever see.



The Start Knobbies Waterhole



Stunning beauty



Wipeout Bend



2020 GREGORY RIVER CANOE RACE POSTPONED DUE TO COVID-19.

Hopefully domestic travel will be allowed soon and the revised date of Sunday 4th October 2020 will be perfect for us all. This is also a long weekend in NSW and coincides with the October School Holidays. After months of isolation we will all need a road trip and there's no better road trip, than a paddling road trip.

A group of familiar faces would make this race even better.

Who's IN?

If you want more and keen to get your adrenaline pumping, check this out:

<https://youtu.be/NI8J5mH3VJQ>

Some Great Country Pub Stays:

Nindigully Hotel, Tallon. QLD

<https://nindigullypub.com/>

Burke & Wills Roadhouse, Four Ways. QLD

Gregory Downs Hotel. Gregory, QLD

North Gregory Hotel, Winton. QLD

<http://www.northgregoryhotel.com>

Mulga Creek Hotel, Byrock. NSW



Ohh "The Pandanus"



The Finish "The Bridge"



The Dinosaur Trail, Winton.
QLD



5 star accommodation