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ECOTOURISM

FROM BUSHWALKING HATER TO BUSHWALKING LOVER. HOW THE SPECTACULAR WONDERS OF THE GLADSTONE REGION CHANGED THE TIDE.

My first encounter with bushwalking was an interesting trip up Mt Larcom, a compulsory Year 8 adventure organised by my local Gladstone high school. I thought it would be a great trip; a whole day off school to socialise with friends as we took a leisurely stroll up and down the mountain. I considered the 1.2 kilometres or so journey up to the summit and back would be a piece of cake, I mean I walked further to school each day.

Little did I know that as I approached the base of the mountain full of confidence that it would be the start of a butt-numbing trek of endurance up this steep mountain. During my ascent I wondered why any sane mortal would even dream of attempting such a feat. I was hot, I was sticky and quite frankly I was over the whole experience. But as I reached the summit and downed a well-earned drink I began to understand what possessed people to negotiate the wonders of nature. It was the sense of triumph and pride that enveloped you when finally you reached your destination after you thought about giving up. It was the view, the smell of the trees and the feeling of serenity that instantly made you feel at peace. It was the overwhelming emotion that we Australians have the most beautiful landscape that's just waiting to be explored.



Did my Year 8 adventure start a love affair with bushwalking? Absolutely not! In fact, I had an aversion to bush tracks until recently, when I developed a need for a stress-reducing, revitalising and relatively cheap activity. My answer was right in front of me, the beautiful natural wonders of the Gladstone Region were just waiting to be explored via a good bush walk.

As I have discovered, the Gladstone Region has so much to offer the bushwalking enthusiast. Whether you're a first timer or an expert, the region is full of delightful spots.

Situated about 30 minutes drive from the Gladstone CBD, is Mt Larcom, Gladstone's most prominent landmark. The mountain is a challenging and interesting climb for older children and adults with a good level of fitness. It is an excellent vantage point from which to enjoy an uninterrupted 360-degree view of the Gladstone area. Rural lands and the harbour can be easily seen from the summit and on a clear day you will see reef islands to the east and Rockhampton to the north. As the mountain is of volcanic origin, the walk takes you through an array of environments, from light eucalypt forests to grass trees. The walk is best completed in the cooler months with an early start to capture the lustrous views. On ascent the trail is distinctly marked, however some care needs to be taken with spotting markers when descending. If you are adequately prepared and take your time, Mt Larcom is a bushwalkers' delight.



To the south of Gladstone, the Discovery Coast offers bushwalkers a collection of interesting and spectacular walks through the area's National Parks. Deepwater National Park, located 7.5 kilometres south of Agnes Water, presents a number of walking tracks suitable for novices and the experienced to enjoy the natural wonders of the Discovery Coast. The unspoilt coastline of Deepwater National Park is an impressive environment with freshwater wetlands, high sand dunes and open forest and is home to a variety of flora and fauna. It is an excellent area for bird watching and from January to April Marine Turtle hatchlings emerge from their nests. The practised bushwalker can be challenged with a very interesting walk from the beach, west to the creek system.

Eurimbula sanctuary with rainforest areas from the park's rises steeply to National Park park provides rainforest area



National Park, found just west of Agnes Water, is a picturesque coastal sandy beaches, Paperbark swamps, Eucalypt forest, Mangroves and just waiting to be explored by foot. Ganoonga Noonga Lookout, 3 kilometres entrance along the Bustard Beach track is 360 metre walking track which a lookout. Upon reaching the top magnificent panoramic views of the entire can be enjoyed and savoured. For the more experienced bush walker, the many opportunities for people to get back to nature. The walk through the is a treat in spring as the floor is covered with a lovely array of wildflowers.

West of Gladstone, in and around the Banana Shire, are a number of National Parks perfect for bush walking enthusiasts. The rugged lands, views, sub tropical rainforest patches and palm fringed waterfalls of Kroombit Tops National Park and Forest Reserve, situated 85 kilometres south west of Gladstone is ideal for experienced bushwalkers wanting to explore the many wonders of the area. This spectacular plateau provides stunning views of Curtis Island, Gladstone, Boyne Island and Tannum Sands and is a unique biological, cultural and geological haven with a plethora of fauna and flora species on offer. As the area is remote and undeveloped, only well equipped, seasoned bush walkers should venture through the park alone.

Isla Gorge National Park, 35 kilometres south of Theodore is a maze of gorges and sandstone cliffs with stunning scenery and panoramic views. The 7850 hectare park lies at southern tip of the Dawson Range at the eastern end of the Central Queensland Sandstone Belt. It is home to an array of birds and interesting rock engravings and stencils of the Aboriginal Dreamtime. No walking tracks exist at Isla Gorge National Park, so only experienced bushwalkers should attempt a sole voyage.

Beginner and intermediate bush walkers will fall in love with the enjoyable and visually stimulating walking tracks of Cania Gorge. The gorge which features prominent sandstone cliffs, caves, eucalypt forests and dry rainforest on sheltered slopes is teeming with natural wonders. The network of tracks at the southern end of the park leads to many places of interest. Some of these include Dripping Rock where cool water seeps from sandstone rock to create a haven for ferns and mosses and Dragon Cave where a naturally created image of a black dragon mystically presides over the entrance to the cave. At the end of a relaxing walk why not enjoy a spot of lunch at the southern section of the park where picnic facilities, water and toilets are available.

One of Queensland's most visited National Parks is also one of the easiest to walk. Carnarvon Gorge, hidden in the rugged ranges of Queensland's Central Highlands is located about 400 kilometres west of Gladstone.

This distinctive landmark is home to an incredible array of plant and animal species. The gorge is a birdwatchers sanctuary with more than 183 species of birds calling this landmark home while giant Angiopteris ferns dating back 300 million years dot various areas of the National Park. The Gorge also carries special significance in Aboriginal mythology. Stencil art, images and symbols of the Aboriginal Dreamtime can be found in areas like Cathedral Cave and Baloon Cave. Most walking trails are relatively flat and can be attempted by people with a moderate level of fitness.



If the thought of planning a bushwalking trip yourself is a bit daunting, why not join Gladstone District Bushwalkers Inc regular outings to some of the region's most spectacular natural wonders. Facilitated by knowledgeable Trip Leaders, Gladstone District Bushwalkers Inc offers a variety of day or night walks and campouts for the beginner, intermediate and expert bush walker.

If the bushwalking bug has bitten you, contact Gladstone Area Promotion and Development Limited for further information on (07) 4972 4000 or www.gladstoneregion.info.

