CHANNEL COUNTRY EXPLORER DRIVE

WINTON TO LONGREACH

Duration: 8 days / 1416 km

Discover the world's largest collection of Australian dinosaur fossils and learn the myth, truth and romance behind Australia's favourite song. Travel through majestic Jump Up, Channel Country and Mitchell Grass Downs witnessing the spectacular views from Cawnpore Lookout and visiting an old Cobb and Co stop along the way. Learn the mystery of the Min Min Light and visit one of the first homes built in Western Queensland.

Explore Diamantina, one of Australia's top 10 National Parks, home to many rare and threatened species, its rich landscape colours a photographer's delight. Toast the sunset atop majestic red sand hills at Windorah. Throw in a line at Coopers Creek or the Barcoo River and discover tranquil billabongs, desert drives and expansive clay pans at majestic Welford National Park. Follow a four wheel drive track to discover magnificent landscapes sculptured by nature over millions of years into the most amazing rock formations and sign a most unusual visitors book…with stones!!

Experiences:

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Winton

Day: 1

Start: **Winton** End: **Winton**

Winton, in big sky country, has a rich history as the birthplace of Waltzing Matilda and QANTAS, and links to the 1891 Great Shearers' Strike. The region has diverse natural history and spectacular landscapes: Mitchell Grass Downs interrupted by mesa formations, beautiful red earth and spinifex country, and never-ending undulating plains of the Cha el Country. Popular Winton attractions include the Australian Age of Dinosaurs and the Dinosaur Stampede at Lark Quarry Conservation Park which is approximately 110 kilometres south-west of Winton. Over 3,300 dinosaur tracks mark the site of the only known dinosaur stampede on the planet. Seven kilometres from Winton is the beautiful Bladensburg National Park with impressive flat-topped plateaus, sandstone ranges, grassland plains, river flats, river red gums and rocky scarp. The Park is open all year however wet weather may cause temporary closures and no access for conventional vehicles. Four wheel drive vehicles are best. Rex Air operates twice weekly flights to Winton from Townsville and there is a twice-weekly 'Spirit of the Outback' Rail/Coach service from Brisbane. Motels, caravan parks and free campsites are available. Stay co ected with free wi-fi in Winton's main street.

Winton to Boulia

Day: 2

Start: **Winton** End: **Boulia**

Drive west to Boulia - capital of the Cha el Country. The road winds its way through Jump Up, Cha el Country and Mitchell Grass Downs. En route visit the historic Middleton Hotel, one of Queensland's most isolated pubs. Cawnpore Lookout offers spectacular panoramic views of the Lilleyvale Hills. Visit the original Min Min Hotel site where one of the first recorded sightings of the Min Min Light occurred. Fire destroyed the hotel and only a bottle heap and the old cemetery remains there. In Boulia, visit the Min Min Encounter for a unique theatrical experience based around the famed Min Min Light phenomenon. Call into the well-preserved Stonehouse Museum which is also home to a Marine Reptile Fossil exhibit - evidence that Boulia was part of an Inland Sea 100 million years ago. See the last recognised Corroboree tree of the Pitta Pitta tribe - a distinctive Waddi tree. Drive approximately 25 kilometres out of town to the Old Police Barracks (1875-1884). The campsite at this natural waterhole had great spiritual significance to the local people. The Boulia Rodeo, Races and Campdraft is a major event at Easter, and the famous Boulia Camel Races are held every third weekend in July.

Boulia to Diamantina National Park

Day: 3

Start: **Boulia** End: **Diamantina National Park**

Drive south-east of Boulia to the Diamantina National Park. The Worldwide Fund for Nature has named it one of Australia's top 10 National Parks. This 507,000 hectare park is home to many rare and threatened species and the park's rich colours are a photographer's delight. Lake Constance and Hunters Gorge are important wetlands and support breeding populations of many resident and migratory birds. Canoe, bird-watch or take a scenic drive around the park to include the Warracoota Ruins and Janets Leap Lookout. Fishing in the waterholes is permitted and you can catch yellow-belly and Welsh's grunter in the Mundewerra Waterhole. Size and bag limits apply. In the past, Maiawali and Karuwali Aboriginal people moved through every part of this landscape. Their strong spiritual co ections remain today. A four wheel drive vehicle with high clearance is necessary as many outback roads are unsealed and wheel ruts can be deep. Take extra fuel, food and water. Open all year however wet weather may cause temporary closures. Visiting is recommended from April to September. Camping is permitted at Hunters Gorge and Gum Hole camping areas (permits are required). For information on permits visit the National Parks website.

Diamantina National Park to Windorah

Day: 4

Start: **Diamantina National Park** End: **Windorah**

Take the Diamantina Development Road to Windorah, the heart of the Cha el Country. Windorah, which is Aboriginal for 'Big Fish', is 35 kilometres south of where the Thomson and Barcoo Rivers join to form the multi-cha elled Cooper Creek. Follow the 12 kilometre Nature Drive through a diverse range of landscapes between Windorah and Cooper Creek. The waterholes offer great fishing and the smaller cha els are ideal for catching yabbies - the inspiration for the Windorah International Yabby Race held a ually in August. The magnificent red sand hills found ten kilometres west of Windorah are definitely worth visiting as the colours change continually throughout the day, especially at sunset. Visit the original slab hut in Windorah, circa 1906, which was relocated from its original site on the Whitula Creek banks and tells an interesting historical story of the town and its people. Windorah Solar Farm is the first solar farm trial by Ergon Energy with five mirrored dishes that generate enough power from the sun to supply Windorah with most of its energy requirements. 80 kilometres west of Windorah lies the JC Pub Ruins, once part of the township site of Canterbury. Windorah offers cabins, hotel, caravan and campsites.

Windorah to Welford National Park

Day: 5

Start: **Windorah** End: **Welford National Park**

From Windorah, head south-east towards Quilpie for 50 kilometres, then turn left onto the Jundah-Quilpie Road and head north-east towards Welford National Park. Drive along black soil roads on the Barcoo River flood plains before arriving at the Barcoo River crossing. Drive over the Barcoo River Crossing to the Retreat Station intersection before entering Welford National Park. Little Boomerang Waterhole is the starting point for several scenic drives (four wheel drive access only), the 12.3 kilometre River Drive and the 22 kilometre Desert Drive. Welford is a land of contrasts-wide coolabah lined waters and grey alluvial cha els of the Barcoo River slice a brown and green swathe through Mitchell grass plains and arid mulga woodlands. Golden-green spinifex and white-barked ghost gums grow atop a vivid backdrop of red sand dunes. Remnants of Aboriginal heritage and use, including water wells and stone arrangements, are found throughout the park. You can see a rare (rammed earth) homestead built on this former grazing property in 1882. Welford National Park is open all year; however wet weather may cause temporary closures, especially during the wet season from December to March (permits are required).

Welford National Park to Jundah

Day: 6

Start: **Welford National Park** End: **Jundah**

Departing Welford National Park, drive a short distance northwest to Jundah on the banks of the Thomson River - an ideal spot for some scenic fishing and river drives. Jundah is the closest town to Welford National Park and is an ideal base if you would prefer day visits. Explore the Barcoo Shire Museum offering a window into the early pioneering times of the district. Take the Settler's Nature Drive along the Thomson River featuring sign-posted descriptions of native plants. Unique 'Welcome Signs' to the town replicate the historic shop front still to be seen in the main street of Jundah. Each of the signs is linked together by a walking trail, and contains different information giving an insight into the early years of the township. Located 90km east of Jundah is the site of Magee's Shanty, believed to be the site of the shanty immortalised in Banjo Paterson's poem 'A Bush Christening.' Meet local characters and enjoy outback hospitality at the Jundah Hotel, open for lunch and di er and offering air-conditioned accommodation. Caravan Park and free bush campsites are available in Jundah. Stay co ected with free wi-fi at the Jundah Information Centre and Library.

Jundah to Stonehenge

Day: 7

Start: **Jundah** End: **Stonehenge**

Drive 32 kilometres north of Jundah on the Stonehenge road to The Native Well, a valuable source of water for Indigenous people in days gone by - marvel at how these wells were manually created. Situated halfway between Jundah and Stonehenge is Swanvale Lookout on the Johnstone Range. Stu ing views are to be had from two vantage points, particularly the westerly lookout at sunset - a fantastic spot to boil the billy. Take the eight kilometre John Egan Pioneer Drive (suitable for four wheel drive vehicles only) and discover magnificent landscapes sculptured by nature over millions of years into the most amazing rock formations. Follow the top loop road a short distance to the Stonehenge Visitor Information Centre for great coffee, friendly service, access to Telstra Mobile 3G and free wi-fi. Take a stroll to see the Government Tank on the old stock route where drovers watered the travelling stock. Caravan Park and free bush campsites available in Stonehenge.

Stonehenge to Longreach

Day: 8

Start: **Stonehenge** End: **Longreach**

As you leave Stonehenge on the top loop road, turn left on the Longreach-Jundah Road, where you'll pass XXXX Hill, a scenic vantage point with breathtaking 360 degree views of the Thomson River flood plains and surrounding Johnstone Ranges. About two kilometres from the Stonehenge turn-off en route to Longreach, you can sign the visitor's book - Stonehenge style. This involves writing your town name with stones - a quirky tradition started years ago by the then mailman. Take some time to read through the many town names that can be seen embossed in stone.rnrnContinue your drive to the heartland of Outback Queensland - Longreach. Soak up the history and heritage with visits to the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame, Qantas Founders Museum and Powerhouse Museum. Enjoy a cruise on the Thomson River complete with sunset nibbles, di er and entertainment. Tour though one of the largest classrooms in the world at the School of Distance Education or experience the thrill of a Cobb and Co. ride. rnrnLongreach offers a range of motel and camping accommodation. Daily flights from Brisbane are scheduled with QantasLink and twice weekly rail services on the Spirit of the Outback. Hire car facilities are available.