

Road trip to the Granite Belt in Southeast Queensland

Ken Gill

Every now and then a magazine or website article might catch your attention and those pages of interest either get torn out or saved and then tucked away for possible future use. This was the case for us with the NRMA magazine *Open Road* where we discovered a recommended road trip titled '*Rocky Road – touring the Granite Belt in Queensland*'.

We didn't know a lot about the Granite Belt, which runs along the border of New South Wales and southeast Queensland, but the article came out of the drawer when we learned that one of our daughters was graduating from the University of New England in Armidale in March 2015. Realising that **Stanthorpe** in the Granite Belt was only a further three-hour drive north of Armidale, our plan for a broader 12-day road trip started to take shape.

Departing our home in Northmead, our first destination was **Scone** on the New England Highway in the Hunter Region. Just three hours from Sydney, the Scone area is known as the horse capital of Australia and boasts the raising of the world's best racehorse, Winx at the Coolmore Stud in Jerry Plains. We had previously attended the Scone Cup racing carnival in 2010 and were still warmly attracted to the beautiful rural scenes that can be found in this district. Little wonder that the undefeated mare Black Caviar was retired to stud in the same region.

After a very relaxing overnight stay at the Stratheam Park Lodge in Scone, we could have then moved from the horse capital to the country music capital of Tamworth, which was a 90-minute drive away. Here, the Big Golden Guitar Tourist Centre would offer plenty of tips on the many wonderful things to do around the area. Instead, however, we took a detour to the historic gold mining village of **Nundle** which was also a 90-minute drive from Scone.

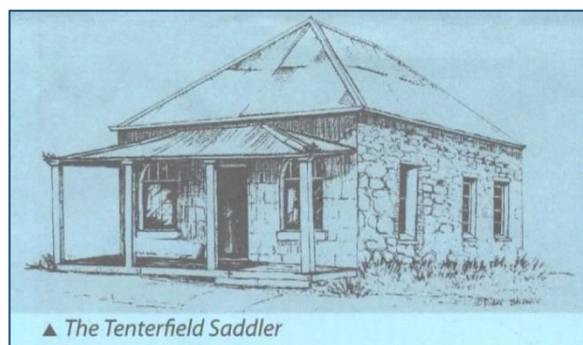
We visited the Nundle Woollen Mill in Oakenville Street where you can view some very old working machinery as well as browse their apparel, homewares, gifts, books and knitting accessories. A pleasant self-guided tourist walk around the village (map available from the Visitor Information Centre in Jenkins Street), followed by refreshments, then set us on our way to Armidale which was a further two-hour drive. This part of the trip actually bypassed Tamworth, which otherwise would have been a 50-minute drive from Nundle.

Our accommodation in **Armidale** was the reasonably priced Country Comfort which well suited the gathering of family members for our daughter's graduation. The University of New England campus was well worth a visit in itself, but Armidale otherwise has a number of major attractions including the New England Regional Art Museum, the Wollomombi Falls (30-minute drive) or a relaxing self-guided heritage walk. Armidale is about halfway between Sydney and Brisbane and only two hours (via Bellingen) to the coast, so there are many options that might encourage you to include this city in a road trip of your own design.

Our journey north to Stanthorpe was a three-hour drive from Armidale, but two hours in the car brought us to **Tenterfield** which was well worth the stop for a break and some local touring. A handy *Visitor Information Sheet* was available from Tenterfield Tourism (157



Our daughter and her family at her graduation



▲ *The Tenterfield Saddler*

Rouse Street) and this included a useful map for the one-hour self-guided *Walk Through Historic Tenterfield*. The National Trust listed Tenterfield Saddlery (1860) in High Street naturally had Peter Allen playing as we visited, and other Trust buildings included the Sir Henry Parkes Memorial School of Arts (1876), the State Bank (1891) and Court House (1870). In 1903, A.B. 'Banjo' Paterson was married in the local St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church (1884).



The Honeysuckle Cottages, Stanthorpe

It was then less than an hour's drive from Tenterfield, over the border, to our major destination of **Stanthorpe** in the Granite Belt. Our accommodation at the Honeysuckle Cottages was set in beautiful, thick, rocky bushland and was close to the centre of the town. Around 220km from Brisbane and at 1,000m in elevation, Stanthorpe is renowned for its apples and stone fruits and for producing some of Queensland's finest wines. With some 50 wineries and a variety of produce outlets and spectacular scenery, it was not going to be difficult to fill in three days here.

We began our touring at the **Queensland College of Wine Tourism** which as part of its training program has a unique student-run cellar and bistro. One of the teaching staff provided a personal tour of the college facilities and a few later tastings led to some selected take-away purchases.

Perhaps Queensland's best-known winery is **Ballandean**, run since the early 1930s by the Puglisi family. Ballandean is about 15 minutes south of Stanthorpe and we were greeted there by Leanne who guided us through some excellent tastings and then a scheduled small group tour of the winery. Lunch at their Barrelroom Restaurant was most enjoyable and my review would not be complete without stating that the Ballandean wines remain amongst my favourites of all time.



Ballandean Winery, Stanthorpe



Granite boulders in Girraween National Park

To better understand the area name of 'Granite Belt', south of Stanthorpe and not far from Ballandean is the spectacular **Girraween National Park** which features massive granite outcrops, balancing boulders and clear tumbling cascades. There are 17km of walking tracks within Girraween and we enjoyed the 1.4km return walk to the impressive Granite Arch, with The Pyramid also in view.

On the way back to Stanthorpe, we would recommend a stop at the **Bramble Patch** in Glen Alpin on Townsend Road. This part of the extensive food trail provides a variety of jellies, relishes, chutneys and local fruits and pancakes.

Back in the town itself, a very pleasant 5km return walk starts near the Information Centre on Leslie Parade and follows the **Quart Pot Creek**. This walk takes you through a number of parks alongside the creek and provides great views of the local area.

The **Amiens Road**, just out of Stanthorpe to the north, provides both an interesting tourist drive and also an interesting story. At the time of the First World War, more than 17,000 acres of land was set aside from Cottonvale to Amiens and distributed to 700 returned servicemen. The veterans named their farms, and the roads linking them, after battles in which they had fought. Armistice Way takes drivers along Amiens Road through Amiens, Messines, Bapaume, Passchendaele, Pozieres and Fleurbaix – all named after WW1 battlefields.

Within that area and in the Pozieres State Forest an enjoyable walk to the **Donnelly's Castle** lookout is rewarded with a good view of the area. At the intersection of Amiens Road and the New England Highway (10 Halloran Drive, Thulimbah) you will find **Suttons Farm** (Juice Factory) where you can pick your own apples and sample their apple cider, apple brandy, apple syrup, conserves and fruit pies. You are certain to find something to take back for later sips and nibbles. This outlet is just north of The Summit which is said to be the coldest place in Queensland (snow in winter) and has the highest railway (apple shipping terminus) in Australia. Returning to Stanthorpe, in Bradley Lane off the Amiens Road, is the **Robert Channon Winery** which is also well worth a visit.



Suttons Farm, Thulimbah

Our return journey to Sydney took a different path and was designed around family visits and we firstly travelled from Stanthorpe to **Ballina** to stay a couple of nights with one of my sisters. This leg of the trip took about three and a half hours. Our longest drive was then one of five hours from Ballina to **Harrington Waters** where we stayed with a brother-in-law for two nights. Our final drive home was then a four hour trip to Sydney.

Whilst the purpose and highlight of our road trip was our attendance at our daughter's graduation, the discovery of the delights of Stanthorpe and the Granite Belt will stand out as a wonderful travel experience.

Quoting the final few words of the Open Road article *"The air is invigorating and the life is good"*.

Contributor details

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Ken was Principal of Richmond High School (1992-2004) and Macarthur Girls High School (2005-2010). In retirement he enjoys the challenges of golf, the discoveries of travel and the wonders of watching grandchildren growing up.