

Sometimes things don't go according to plan. It happens. Be that at the hand of Mother Nature, the weather or mechanical gremlins, there are some things that just remain out of your control.

The extended forecast was unspectacularly average on this particular weekend that we decided to head out, but it wasn't horrendous by any means. Having said that, a rainforest doesn't get its name for a lack of rain I suppose.

Deciding to make the most of an ordinary March weekend, our convoy of 3 vehicles headed off, loaded up with gear and supplies. We rallied after work on Friday for a leisurely evening run through D'Aguilar National Park (Mount Mee section) before crossing into Bellthorpe National Park and then onto Conondale National Park.

*There were a few mishaps along our trip, but it's amazing what you can stumble upon on your adventure.*

## D'Aguilar by night

As we travelled along Mt Brisbane Rd from Dayboro, it was obvious to us that the recent wet weather had impacted the area. There was dirt and debris washed onto the road, so a keen and careful eye was required when driving. We arrived at the entry to the Mount Mee section and stopped briefly to air down our tyres.

The trails through D'Aguilar National Park are well maintained touring style tracks with a couple of steeper ascents and descents. 25 PSI is probably all you need for your tyres to maintain the correct level of grip as well as comfort for your occupants.

Driving the dirt at night has never really been my thing, but it offers a unique perspective especially when driving along a familiar trail. Wildlife is generally more prevalent at night in the park, so it's far easier to spot a few animals here or there in the stark contrast that the headlights provide.

*Airing down for the evening run, through D'Aguilar national park.*

## Arriving at the Archer campground

With water over the culverts and light rain falling, the tracks were free of dust, which made them more grippy than slippery. We estimated it would take us around 2 hours to clear Mount Mee before rolling into the Archer camping area around 9 pm. The Archer camping area is beside Neurum Creek and has 9 numbered sites plus modern facilities available.

Having a simple camp set-up can make late night arrivals less far less troublesome, especially after a long drive. Short term accommodation such a swag, can be set up with minimal effort and fuss which was perfect for this trip.

It really is a great time to be a shopper, as the market currently offers so many shelters to choose from whether it be a touring tent, swag or a hybrid of them both.

*The lush surrounds of Archer Camping Area.*

## Beautiful Bellthorpe

Being able to roll out of bed at an inoffensive time surrounded by nature's highlights is one of the biggest advantages of departing on a Friday afternoon.

Starting off your day with the weekend adventure already underway, really cannot be understated! We began the morning with a cup of coffee and light breakfast and then we were on our way to Bellthorpe National Park, a short 35km away.

Whilst it was overcast, any rain looked like it might hold. The cooler daytime temperatures were a nice change off the back of a typically humid South East Queensland summer.



*Beautiful Bellthorpe National Park.*

When we entered Bellthorpe National Park, the track climbs immediately which provided fantastic views out both windows of the neighbouring hilltops. Almost on queue, upon arriving at a beautiful pocket of rainforest, the skies opened up and a light misty rain began to fall. As trip-destroying as rain can be, there is something inherently amazing about driving through a rainforest during this type of weather.

The previously stagnating creeks begin to flow with crystal clear water, and the plant life seemed greener and livelier. Though with the rain, finding a safe passage become that little bit more difficult. Did someone say, "adventure!"



*There is just something special about clear running water.*

## What goes up must come down

Our descent was short and sweet to the creek below, and what a truly amazing sight it was. We could've been stopped along the Bloomfield track somewhere within the Daintree, but we weren't.

We were around 2hrs from Brisbane and surrounded by dense sub-tropical rainforest. Silent admiration was the best we could collectively muster at that view.



*If nothing else, a bit of rain will have the creeks flowing.*

Logically, after descending into the creek bed, we had to climb back out if it - and it wasn't pretty! Around 18 degrees of incline isn't a lot in the dry but add about an hour of light rain to clay-based soil and it becomes something entirely different. A single unsuccessful effort was all it took to acknowledge our responsibility to the environment we were in.

There's nothing to gain from tearing up tracks in sensitive areas of our country and only serves to paint this past time in a bad light. I paid good money for my winch and associated recovery gear, so intend to get my money's worth using it!



*Don't be afraid to use the winch if it means preserving the tracks.*

The track out of the creek bed was a 2 stage climb of about 40 metres in length. With about 25m of useable rope on each winch drum, an intermediate anchor point was rigged about halfway up with a final anchor point located at the crest.

With the hard work done, it was a simple but time-consuming process to get each vehicle safely to the top. Many see a winch as unnecessary or an over-the-top item of recovery gear. I see it as a 'get out of jail free' card when the weather does catch you out.

## Next stop, Conondale National Park

After completing our loop of Bellthorpe National Park (albeit a few hours slower than planned) we continued north to the more popular Conondale National Park. With increasingly regular showers passing through the area, we made our way via the blacktop along Maleny-Kenilworth Road.

No less picturesque, the surrounding area of farming land to the west of Maleny is a fantastic little drive. The countryside was almost a fluorescent shade of green due to the recent rains. It is hard to not consider a “tree change” when confronted with scenery like this.



*Picturesque dairy country.*

Taking the short run down Booloomba Creek Road gave us an opportunity to participate in two of the more photographed South East Queensland creek crossings. It also allowed us to strategically “half” tick off the Conondale National Park from our list.

## Arriving at the Charlie Mooreland Camp area

We arrived in the late afternoon at the Charlie Mooreland camp area which allowed just enough sunlight to make camp, re-spool winches and rustle up a campfire before another untimely shower. Tucked on the banks of Little Yabba Creek, Charlie Mooreland is the quintessential National Park campground.

It has large grassy areas, modern amenities, shade and a creek that flows most times of the year. At \$6.15 per adult / per night, it’s an absolute bargain by anyone’s standards.



*Charlie Mooreland camping area.*

Unfortunately, further overnight showers put paid to our plans to tackle some of the Conondale National Park tracks the next day. So after rolling up the swags, it was time for us all to head home.



*Conondale creek crossing.*

## Nice to Know

**Where:** D’Aguilar National Park, Bellthorpe National Park & Conondale National Park

**Nearest Supplies:** Despite how it might feel, you are never very far away from civilisation. Fuel and groceries can be purchased easily at the local townships in the area.

**Trip Standard:** It’s blacktop all the way to D’Aguilar National Park where the road becomes a graded forestry trail. Upon exiting D’Aguilar, it’s a short run on the bitumen to Bellthorpe National Park. It can be tricky in here during the rain, but when dry it’s reasonably straightforward. The terrain within Conondale National Park varies with the weather but is also generally straightforward.

**Camping:** Standard Queensland National Park rates of \$6.15 per adult / per night.

**Facilities:** There are toilets at the main campsites. Firewood collection is prohibited in Queensland National Parks, so it’s BYO only.

**Essentials:** You’ll need to bring food, drinking water, and basic recovery gear.



## Summary of the adventure

Not everything goes according to plan when it comes to Mother Nature. But, life is what you make of it in these situations. When the weather conditions are not ideal, it can provide a completely new outlook on a place you've been to before.

So, the lesson of this adventure is, don't let the threat of a shower keep you indoors when there are experiences to be had!

**Have you ever attempted an ambitious 4WD trip like this?**