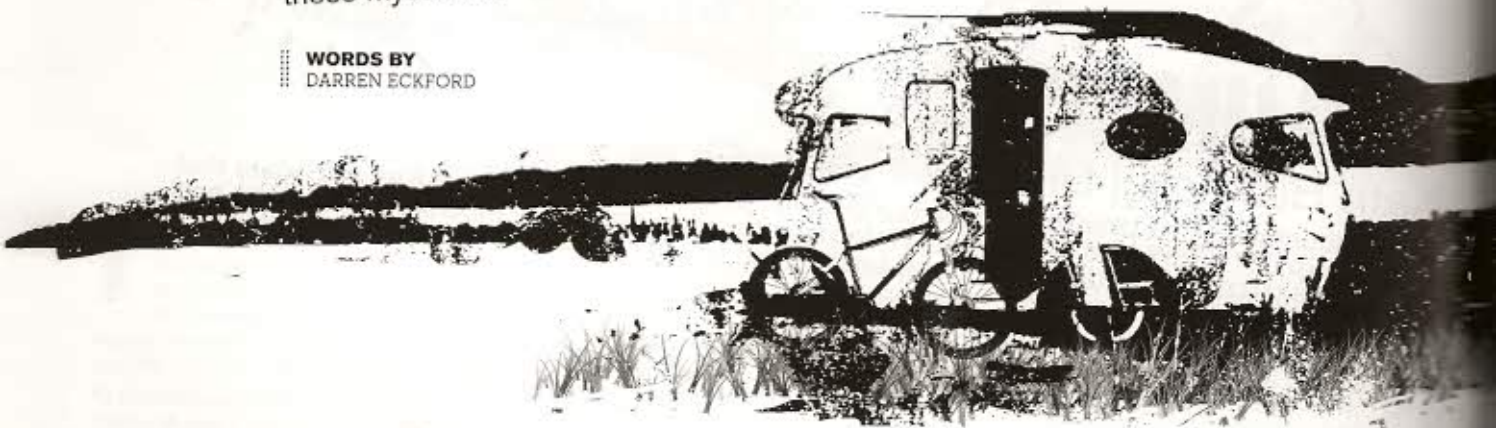


# MY "BLUEWATER" EPIC

The rainforests of North Queensland are some of the oldest and boast some of the most unforgiving terrain in Australia. They are largely uncharted and hold many secrets. The aim of our epic was to try and solve one of these mysteries.

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For years, the old timers have spoken of "the legend of the caravan" in hushed tones, hidden deep in the middle of the Bluewater rainforest, north of Townsville, North Queensland. The legend goes, that somewhere along an old logging route, which is now almost completely reclaimed by the rainforest, there is an old cabin and caravan, just waiting to be discovered.

We decided that we wanted to find out once and for all if the legend was true, or if it was an urban myth passed down from generation to generation.

One of the guys in our riding group, Longo, is an avid explorer and had done some research for our ride. Our plan was to set out from a logging hut at the start of the Bluewater track, where we often ride. In the past we have ridden to Keelbottom Creek, about 14km from the hut, before turning around. This ride, although short, is still challenging, due to the nature of the trail. The trail is like a roller-coaster, with many pinches but just as many awesome downhills on wide singletrack.

The information we had was that the cabin and caravan was located on this same track beyond Keelbottom Creek. We had been told that it would be about 30km from our start point at the hut to the cabin, but only time would tell if this was true. Our plan was to set off at 8am and had allowed about 8hrs for the return trip. This seemed heaps of time to do 60km.

Bluewater rainforest is notorious for being muddy and its bog holes have swallowed many

a rider. The weather leading up to our ride had been perfect, but the day before our scheduled epic, I noticed dark clouds in the mountains to the north, "it'll be sweet", I said, trying to sound confident.

Our group consisted of 12 riders, all experienced mountain bikers with a couple of roadie cross overs. Everyone was pumped, and full of anticipation of the adventure that lay ahead. Little did we know what was in store for us!

We set off from the hut at 8am and I couldn't help but notice that the track looked damper than usual. "It'll be sweet", I said, a little less confidently.

The ride to Keelbottom Creek was great fun as usual, but already there were some massive bog holes that we had to negotiate.

My mate Bill had driven 4 hours from Cairns the day before to be part of the ride on my prompting. Last year Bill completed the BMC 100 and Birtworks to claim the coveted Dual Centurion jersey, so he had some cred. Since then however, he hadn't been doing much riding and I had a feeling the paddock he had been grazing in had run out of grass.

At the bottom of a fast downhill lay a huge boghole, and Bill was riding just ahead of me. He decided to try and skirt along the left edge of the bog and all of a sudden, his bike disappeared completely from view. He had ridden into a deep moto rut and went over the bars for a huge mud bath. Not realising I had seen it all, he quickly recovered to climb out and shout "The left line is good!!". With mates like that, who needs enemies?

We arrived at Keelbottom Creek muddy, but on schedule and with only one flat being the damage. We had a quick feed and set off, unsure of what lay ahead. If all went to plan, we would run into the cabin and caravan in about another 15km. There were nervous smiles all round.

Conditions deteriorated quickly after crossing Keelbottom Creek. The rainforest started to close in and the track became very muddy. More worryingly, especially for me, the climbs that had previously been followed by awesome downhills, were now only being followed by bigger climbs!

By now I had taken my usual position as sweep, due to my lack of hill climbing prowess, rather than duty of care for my fellow riders. Bill had decided to keep me company, or so he said, and together we began pushing up what proved to be the hill from hell. Being in rainforest, you could only see a small section of the trail in front of you and it just kept going up and up. By this stage the mud had turned to thick clay and it was beginning to get difficult to stop yourself sliding down the hill. Every corner brought the hope that it would surely be the top, only to have it cruelly dashed when we rounded it to reveal more climbing. The only thing that kept me motivated to keep moving forward was the thought of bombing down on the way back.

Eventually, after some of the best combined swearing I have ever heard, we finally made it to the top, where the others were waiting. Someone commented that the hill on our B-

hour course in Townsville, called "Misery Hill" had been misnamed as clearly this was the real "Misery Hill". I think Bill and I made up some much more appropriate names for it while we dragging ourselves up, but none that could be printed.

To my horror, I saw that we had only travelled 5kms past Keelbottom Creek. I was feeling pretty busted, and Bill looked worse than me.

Mercifully, there were some nice downhill to help get the positive vibes going, and soon enough we having a ball again. We started down a long downhill and were flying, when all of a sudden I noticed some movements in the bush on our left not far ahead. Suddenly I realised that the riders had detoured, and begrudgingly we jumped on the brakes and ruined our buzz. It turned out the reason they had detoured was we had come to a creek and the bridge on the trail was long gone, leaving a 4m straight drop onto the rocks below!

Gradually the group strung out again as the climbs came back with a vengeance. It seemed at this stage Bill and I were doing more walking than riding. It was about this time Bill said, "It is going to want to be a F\*#\$%ing awesome caravan!!"

By now, I had my head down, watching the kilometres tick by, counting them down and hoping like hell our information was right. By my reckoning we had about 2kms to go. All of a sudden I heard voices, and looked to my

right. Nestled in a tiny clearing just above the trail, was an old cabin and even older caravan! I never thought a shitty old caravan would look so good! We had made it. The legend was true and it was bang on 30km from our start point.

The difficulty of the trail was evident by the 4 hours it had taken to get this far. It seems back in the days when they logged the area, the road was well maintained and the caravan was brought in. As soon as the logging stopped, the rainforest claimed it as its own as a little souvenir.

While having some well deserved lunch, everybody was busy trying to clean their drive trains. There was not one bike that wasn't having some problems with shifting, but thankfully that was the extent of our mechanicals. It seemed that somewhere along the way, everyone had swapped to the same tyres, 3" mud slicks.

The mood was one of triumph, having achieved what we set out to do. I was secretly just happy that the trail was mostly downhill back to Keelbottom Creek!

What a difference the direction of a trail can make. What had been a murderous slog on the way out, was now a hoot as we headed back. Mud covered hills are so much more fun going down than up. Bill had come back to life and was too busy getting air and tail-whipping off washed-out sections of trail to notice how smashed he was. The hill that had taken forever to climb was gone in a few

moments, with the bikes fishtailing all the way down.

One of the cross over roadies, who had been less than complimentary towards some of the slower riders in the group (as is normally their way) snapped his hanger about 10kms into the return trip. It turns out roadies are that awesome that they don't need to carry spares or even know how to fix them. Some of the guys who he had been bagging, were the guys who bailed him out, and set him up single speed, middle ring no less! Needless to say, he was pretty quiet all the way back.

Finally, we made it back to the cars at about 4.30pm. My ride time was 6hrs 45min, and with stops consumed all of our the time we had allowed for this epic. There were 12 very muddy, exhausted mountain bikers, but there is something to be said about being completely smashed, knowing that you have had just had the best time doing it.

It turns out we were most likely the first mountain bikers to see the cabin and caravan. Another group got very close the year before, but turned back, unaware how close they were to the prize.

Although not the longest ride I have ever done, it was definitely an epic in every sense of the word. I think that is what is great about our sport - a normal person can see and achieve things many people will not and can do so all in the company of great people and having a fantastic time.