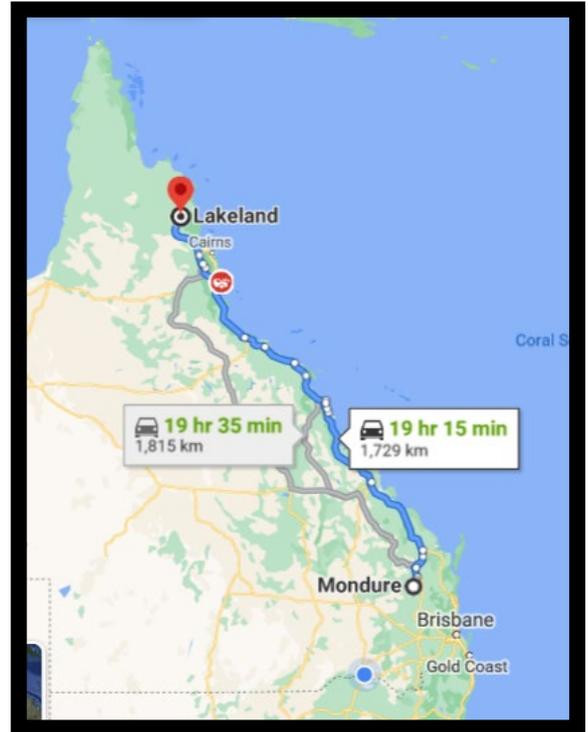


Lakeland Downs (Part 1) (David & Kathy Jensen)



In 1987 we travelled from Mondure to Lakeland Downs to begin farming peanuts on the red volcanic soil around Lakeland.



We had two trucks and a four-wheel-drive with a trailer and started out on our big trip which was 1800 km long. The truck with the semi trailer carried one tractor and a scarifier pulled to pieces, dual wheels for the tractor and duals for the second tractor on the other truck. The truck was accustomed to only going a few miles, carting peanuts 3 miles into Kingaroy and out again, so the truck had not travelled too many miles in the last two years.

The tyres on the trailer and the truck looked good. They had a lot of tread on them and they looked to be in good order, but by the time we got to Rockhampton we had blown six tyres. We had three spares but we had to buy new tyres to get us to Lakeland.

Every second time we needed a new tyre, we had to ring Kathy and ask her to put money in the account. We continued running into rain and it poured and poured. My brother Ross had taken his truck, and he had the heaviest tractor with its duals. The semi trailer tractor wasn't as heavy, but because of the scarifier and the planters which were pulled apart, the trailer was very heavy, way over its weight.



There were three very steep hills on our big trip, the first one being out of Home Hill. The truck with the trailer had a very difficult time getting up the hill. My brother Graham was driving the truck and he said he was down to low and you could have a cup of tea in between the piston going up and down. I was driving the four-wheel-drive with a trailer and we had our young apprentice Adrian who had helped us while going to Uni.

One night we slept in the trucks and the mosquitoes drive us bananas. Adrian was sleeping in the four-wheel-drive and had a gearstick in between his legs but the mossies found him just the same. We called in and saw relations in Townsville and then continued to Cairns.

From Cairns we went up to Kuranda and that was the second steepest hill. The trucks really had to work very hard to get up there, it was a steep sharp climb. We got to the Atherton tableland and then we came to Mareeba and we are on the last leg.

In those years there was not a lot of bitumen past Mareeba. There was a lot of gravel up the ranges and we had one last range to climb. The trucks were getting used to the climbs, so we struck out with a lot of confidence. At one stage I was driving with my brother Graham, and Adrian was driving the four-wheel-drive. He was behind the other two trucks and he stopped to clean his teeth and have a drink, so he pulled his bag off the Ute but he forgot to put it back on the Ute and left it on the A-frame of the trailer. When he passed the truck again I asked him on the CB, "Where is your bag?" He stopped in a hurry and realised he had left his bag on the front of the trailer. He turned around straightaway to look for it but someone had found it.

Adrian only had the clothes he was wearing so that put a kibosh on things. Gravel road crossed one river, the St George, three times and during the wet season you tried never to get stuck between the crossings. We went up the last steep mountain range (past Mt Carbine) very slowly and finally we came into Lakeland late one afternoon.

Our farm at Lakeland was on the road to the Cape about 8 miles out of town so it was called the "8 mile". The house at the 8 mile had four bedrooms all facing the west in a line.

The house was built for Barracks, with the four bedrooms in a row, and then a bathroom and laundry, with a big room for the kitchen and the lounge.



Every room faced to the west so it was terribly hot in the afternoon.

Later, Kathy went to a plant nursery in Atherton and bought a lot of Cape York native plants to hide and shield the house from the West.

There was one small tank which got its water from the Windmill a couple of miles away. We rigged up a new Irrigation system to water the plants and trees whenever the wind blew the Windmill.

The wind would start blowing mid-afternoon and the birds would know that the water from the drippers would soon be available so they would sit on the drippers just waiting for the water to start running.





There were 30,000 acres of red volcanic soil at Lakeland Downs. The climate was such that the peanuts matured in 12 weeks but at Kingaroy they required 22 weeks.

The peanuts just shot out of the ground and as you turned around the peanuts would grow an inch. When farming peanuts all the rocks should be off the ground. But the volcanic rocks were everywhere and as you dig them up and they become caught in the pullers and threshers.

Because the peanuts were such good quality, the processors would pay for the freight from Lakeland Downs to Kingaroy. They would have road trains and they would travel the inland route so that they could avoid all the traffic on the coast. Once when inland route was flooded road trains went down the coast but only travelled at night and hid in timber during the day.



One year we had a beautiful crop of corn over 400 acres. It was so level that you could put a ruler along the top of it. One of the carriers from Mareeba loaded his road train up to carry 100 ton of the corn to Mareeba, always at night.

