

Binna Burra Mountain Drive

An exhilarating driving experience

compiled by Tony Walsh

The Binna Burra Mountain Drive in the Gold Coast hinterland is a spectacular 29 km motoring (vehicle/motorbike) or mountain bike experience with breathtaking views of the waters of the Hinze Dam and distant high-rise buildings on the fringe of the Pacific Ocean.

Be challenged by its twists and curves as the ribbon of bitumen climbs to the cooler climate of the Beechmont Plateau where undulating meadows rich with succulent fodder grass nourish contented fat cattle and citrus trees strain to support their bumper harvest of grapefruit, lemons and oranges.

At the road's end, is the entrance to the Binna Burra Section of Lamington National Park and the middle section of the new Gold Coast Great Walk. It is a World Heritage protected area with more than 160 km of walking tracks that lead to towering waterfalls, hidden caves and mountain-ridge lookouts. The views will take a photographer's breath away at the sight of the beautiful environment that nature has bestowed on this special area of Queensland, often called the Green behind the Gold.

It has not always been so easy to access this mountain paradise. The traditional owners of the area, the Wanggeriburra people shared a common language called Yugambeh with others who formed a larger group of regional tribes of Aborigines. These included the Kombumerri, Mununjali, Mingunburri and the Birinburra the name given to the 'people of the cliffs', the site now protected by Binna Burra Mountain Lodge. For thousands of years the various tribes used paths and tracks through the tangled rainforest.

When the Europeans first came, it was not for the views, but with a distinct view of harvesting the beautiful rainforest timbers. In the 1860's and 70's, timbergetters struggled to fell and retrieve the much-prized and valuable red cedar from the cliffs and gullies of the region.

Road Notes

From the M1, take the exit to the township of Nerang. From Nerang take Route 90, Beaudesert Murwillumbah Tourist Route No. 8. This road joins Route 97. After 7 km, turn right into Beechmont Road and begin the climb. This road has now been dubbed the Binna Burra Mountain Drive.

Watch out for wildlife and enjoy great views for the next 11 km. The road twists and turns up the side of the mountain encountering sharp bends; some with advisory signs showing speed limits of 30 km in short sections. But these bends also give first glimpses of highrise buildings on the Gold Coast and also the wall and blue waters of the Hinze Dam.

The road weaves through tall timbers and the first hint of rainforest with hideaway houses clinging to the side of cliffs. At certain points, the forest opens up to offer panoramic views of the coastal plain and Hinze Dam. The road climbs steadily higher

– feel the cool air of the mountain escape as the road enters Lower Beechmont Village, 13 km from commencement of the drive.

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Turn right at North Road which leads to a grassy park with toilet and picnic facilities. It has a feeling of the mountains of Austria! Lower Beechmont is now a haven for Gold Coast residents wishing to escape the busy, congested lifestyle of the Gold Coast. The general store and café have a cute pioneering atmosphere.

The road then follows a ridge with views to the west. Pause on the corner of Tarlington Road and admire the creativity of the unusual letterbox made from weathered tree stump (14.4km).

The road passes into a slight depression and drivers are met with a sign reading – “Danger – military training area live firing on right of road DO NOT ENTER”. No need to duck for cover, this sign refers to an old army training ground and there have never been any reported bullet holes found in any vehicles travelling along this section of the road!

The road begins to climb again with tall timbers of gum and iron bark throwing dappled light over its bitumen surface.

At 18 km, Beechmont Village is reached and the road again opens up to offer extensive views of Numinbah Valley and distant coast. There is safe parking for photo opportunities on the corner of Jardine Road. For further photo opportunities, focus on the mass of bush letterboxes and old farm machinery on corner of Jardine Road. The old Bavarian Hut, now a private residence, is located opposite Jardine Road.

The road opens to a vista of green hills and a huge dam used as a watering hole for grazing fat cattle. This used to be the centre for dairy cattle milk production up until a few years ago. Further on, a sign marks the boundary between Gold Coast City Council and the Beaudesert Shire Council. On the right, extensive views are offered over the Coomera Valley.

At 21.4 km, the road passes the historic Beechmont Hall, opened in 1948. The timber hall was once the heart of community affairs for dairy farmers and their families. A short distance further on, a thicket of rich, remnant rainforest closes in on the road. The immediate area is now protected as a conservation park.

On the opposite side of the road are the ruins of an old dairy including an architectural masterpiece, a three-sided cream shed; possibly the only one ever made in the world

Soar like an eagle

Around the corner is the launching spot where humans dare to soar like eagles in their multi-coloured hang gliders high above the Numinbah Valley. This thrill seeker sport is based at Rosin’s Lookout (24 km) and is particularly popular on weekends and when the uplifting winds are blowing. There are picnic tables, gas bar-b-ques and clean toilet facilities. The well-maintained park overlooks the Numinbah Valley and is

the final resting place, supposedly between the now-towering hoop pines, of Henry Lilywhite who was crushed when tree felling in the area in the late 1890's.

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Explorers Cunningham and Logan passed within a mile of this spot searching for Captain Cook's Mt Warning, which, unfortunately for them, was many miles to the south.

The next 14 km of road consists of sharp bends and double lines making overtaking other vehicles an impossibility.

At 25 km, on the corner of McInnes Crt is the Old St John's Church which has now been fully refurbished as casual accommodation and provides an ideal photo opportunity for its early Queensland architectural design.

A further 100 m up the road is the old Beechmont State School, now used as a community centre and the venue for the Beechmont Village Fair held on the 3rd Sunday of the month. Turn left at the roundabout into Binna Burra Road.

At the commencement of Binna Burra Road, note the sign on the fibro house recording that it once served as the Beechmont Post Office until it closed in 1975 and became a private residence. On the left of the road are the distant sandstone escarpments of Ship's Stern Range, while on the right, a magnificent Moreton Bay fig tree stands proudly in the distance.

After admiring the views, take note of kangaroo warning signs. Rainforest once again envelops the road as it swings down towards the northern boundary of Lamington National Park.

A check of the distance gauge at 33.8 km will reveal a sign marking the northern boundary of Lamington National Park. It is worth stopping just before the directional sign on the left hand side of the road that reads: Lamington National Park Binna Burra Information Centre 500m. A nearby sign marks the start of the 12 km Lower Bellbird Circuit. It is only necessary to walk a few metres along this track before you are rewarded by hearing the dulcet, chiming chorus of a colony of Bell Birds.

The Information Centre is also near the departure point for two popular walks – The Caves Circuit (5 km) and Kweebani Cave (1.1 km).

The main walking tracks and the Binna Burra section of Lamington National Park are a further 1.8 km on at end of this scenic drive.

The road winds up around the edge of the mountain and closes to two, short, single lane sections before widening again until it reaches fork in road. To the right is the entrance to Binna Burra Mountain Lodge, one of Australia's oldest mountain lodges, while the left section of the road leads to a public carpark and Binna Burra Tea House and Campsite. For further details and reservations; www.binnaburrallodge.com.au

Photo captions: