



Chapter 6. Burke Shire

Mayoral Statement

Burke Shire has much to offer the innovative, perceptive investor. Developments, with a strong socially and environmentally responsible focus, are welcomed and encouraged by Council. We look forward to the opportunity to work collaboratively with the commercial and private sector to bring about such development, be it big or small.

With live cattle export through to potential agricultural diversification prospects, for example in aquaculture and irrigation, the Shire is strategically placed to access the markets of Asia and beyond through the Port of Karumba. Provision of alternative energy technologies by innovative developers utilising an abundance of water and sun, could create numerous opportunities within the region. Already home to mining activities Burke Shire sits on the cusp of mining expansion - several opportunities are being explored and early indications are positive.

Potential tourism scenarios abound - from the majestic Lawn Hill Gorge, through to the rugged landscape in the NW of the Shire, the vast "Plains of Promise", the sprawling Gulf rivers and the unique Morning Glory cloud formations that grace our skies in early Spring to the myriad of opportunities for keen anglers and nature lovers there is much to attract tourists looking for something special. The Shire abounds in strong natural and cultural values being home to fossil fields, unique flora and fauna, rich indigenous history as well as the legacy of numerous visits by intrepid explorers seeking opportunities to meet the needs of the expanding colony. There is much for the astute investor to capitalize on to attract both general and niche tourism markets.

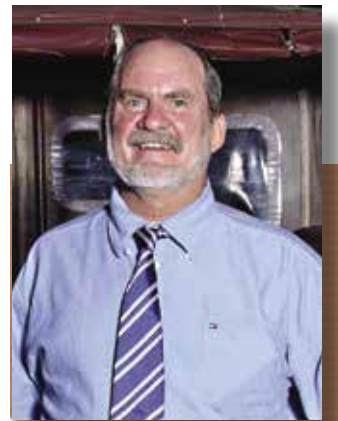
Service industries for mining, pastoral, tourism and small business are seen as an emerging growth area for the Shire and the wider region. Council is currently seeking to determine industrial and residential land parcels that could be made available and is working with various stakeholders to maximize availability and ensure unencumbered land security. The completion of sealing of the road from Gregory to Burketown, along with road infrastructure improvements towards the NT border, has created greater security regarding accessibility and as a result reduced downtime due to Wet season closures.

Burke Shire Council envisions a robust and vigorous future for the Gulf and as such continues to plan and invest heavily in infrastructure to meet immediate and projected needs. Plans to develop a new Community Hub incorporating Shire offices, meeting rooms, innovative displays and an entertainment precinct are well underway with project managers having been recently appointed. Road infrastructure improvements continue to be assertively lobbied for as well as for improvements to power, communication and technology to ensure the region is well placed to meet the needs of the 21st Century.

Whilst small in numbers the Shire is big in heart - an attribute that continues to serve us well as we move to embrace the future. The townships of Burketown and Gregory offer an existence removed from the usual stresses of urban living - peaceful, relaxed and best undertaken at an unhurried pace. Fishing, canoeing, riverside reveries, bushwalking, bird watching are all part of the family-oriented Burke Shire lifestyle.

On behalf of Burke Shire I invite you to come and see for yourself what the Gulf has to offer. You will be delighted by what you discover.

Councillor Ernie Camp
Mayor, Burke Shire Council



Overview

Burke Shire can boast many great assets, including great fishing, an abundance of sunshine and friendly people. With a population of around 550, the Shire covers an area of 41,802 square kilometres with two main communities of Burketown and Gregory. The balance of the Shire is primarily made up of pastoral properties.

Today the character of the Shire is still predominantly rural with emphasis on the flourishing tourism industry which is a drawcard in itself. A never ending change of colours dominate the countryside as you follow the Savannah Way, across the Leichhardt Falls and up to the Northern Territory border.

The significant aboriginal history and the many great explorers who traversed the country along with the ruffians, adventurers and visionaries all helped make the Shire what it is today. We are proud of the Shire's history, and it's current-day landscape. It is obvious to both long term residents and recent visitors that this part of the world has something special to offer.

The Shire is rightly proud of several natural and constructed assets. Visitors and locals alike enjoy the natural beauty of Beames Brooke and the Albert, Leichhardt, Nicholson and Gregory Rivers, including the impressive Leichhardt Falls. Adel's Grove and Lawn Hill Gorge are true jewels in the Shire crown. The rugged country surrounding Hells Gate today boasts one of the oldest landscapes on the planet. Stunning rock formations tell their own tales of the land's evolution, and natural art galleries from the early indigenous tribes can be found in the caves.

History

Matthew Flinders arrived in the Gulf waters on November 3rd 1802 in the "Investigator". For the next two and a half months he examined and chartered the Gulf Coast. Whilst in the Gulf, Flinders blazed a tree on Sweers Island. It was to be another forty years before further exploration occurred.

Captain J Lort Stokes in the "Beagle" spent the period between the 29th June and 4th August 1841 retracing Flinders' route in more detail. Between July 30th and August 6th Stokes discovered the Albert River and ascended it for a distance of 50 river miles from the mouth in a long boat. He was much impressed with the level grassy plains dotted with trees which stretched endlessly to the South. Stokes called it "The Plains of Promise". Stokes also visited Sweers Island and on finding the tree blazed by Flinders, he blazed the reverse side.

Dr Ludwig Leichhardt's expedition in 1848 was the next in the area. The exploration party, to avoid salt water, made a great sweep inland crossing the Flinders and a river that Leichhardt thought was the Albert. This was later named the Leichhardt in his honour by August Gregory. The explorers were now 12 miles south of the later site of Burketown. They reached the real Albert River on 18th August, 1845 and later came to a "fine running brook" Leichhardt called Beames Brook after Walter Beames Esquire of Sydney.

In 1856 August Gregory on his exploratory overland trip from Victoria River to Brisbane stopped on the Albert to meet with the "Sandfly" which was to resupply the party. Too impatient to wait, Gregory pushed on after burying letters at the foot of a marked tree. The schooner arrived in November.

After the disappearance of Burke and Wills, search parties were organised by Victoria and South Australia. Queensland was not to be outdone. The Queensland Government sent Frederick Walker with a relief expedition overland. He and his party rode out of Rockhampton in September 1861 and headed west.

William Landsborough and his party aboard the "Firefly", escorted by the "Victoria" set out for the Albert River on August 24, 1861 to set up a rendezvous and depot to meet with Walker. In October, 1861 they found trees marked by August Gregory and Lieutenant Chimmo of the survey ship "Sandfly" in 1856. They marked a line of trees to guide Walker's overland expedition to the depot on the Albert on the 7th December 1861.

Walker caught the fever and left Burketown heading south. He died at Floraville Station where his grave still exists today. The "Firefly" being the first known ship to enter the Albert River sank in a small inlet near the Boiling Down Works. Before leaving Burketown, Landsborough had Captain Norman of "HMS Victoria" bury provisions near a tree they blacked in case Burke and Wills returned. John McKinlay also,

The reason I live here is because of the climate, the good fishing and I like talking to all the visitors who come through here. There are always interesting people ... plus it's great country. Lots more tourists coming through nowadays than what there ever were – so there must be something good going for the place

Frank Thomas, Visitor Centre Coordinator



Burke Shire Area Map

searching for Burke and Wills, left Adelaide on the 16th August 1861 for the Gulf. In May 1862, he followed the Leichhardt River down to salt water and camped five miles from the sea. Commander Norman and the "Victoria" had left the Albert months before.

Over the next three years the stations of Gregory Downs, Floraville and Beamesbrook to name a few, were taken up in the Gulf. It was obvious that a town and port was needed in the Gulf. Towns and Company chartered a small vessel the "Jacmel Packet" and on 12 June 1865 it arrived off the mouth of the Albert River. The goods were eventually landed on the present site of Burketown.

By September 1865 the population was about forty, and by October a store of sorts and a pub were under construction. The balance of buildings were humpies. Rations and grog were plentiful but already one evil was noted; prices for goods were so high that some intended settlers could not stay. The town grew; however, currency, notes and coins were so short in early Burketown that the business people issued their own currency, dubbed "shinplaster" or "calabashes". These were in the form of IOU's hand printed on tissue paper so that they had as short a life as possible.

In February, 1866 Lieutenant Wentworth D'Arcy UHR with eight troopers and accompanied by William Landsborough, the first Police Magistrate, rode into Burketown. Here everyone carried a pistol and a successful shop keeper could ride well, shoot well and be an able pugilist. Also that month the vessel the "Margaret and Mary" dropped anchor in the Albert. She had come from Java and brought an illness with her. Between 25 and 50 people died in the epidemic. Some of the survivors fled to Sweers Island led by Landsborough. The island was occupied for some 18 months during which time two people are known to have died and were buried on the island.

Yet the pioneer spirit was indomitable and the first official horse race meeting was held 25 July 1866, with prize money equivalent to \$200, quite a figure in those days. The fever epidemic abated but returned again in later 1866. A small boiling down works was operating, providing a limited market for Gulf cattlemen. The schooner "Restless" loaded casks of tallow from Ellkins Bros boiling down works.

The first land sale was held on 14 August 1867 when 75 allotments were sold. About this time a barque, the "Captain Cook" arrived with machinery for another boiling down works being erected by J G MacDonald. A paddle steamer, the "Pioneer" ran between Burketown and Sweers Island. Burketown continued to grow and service the vast cattle stations and ply the sea trade with vessels such as the 120 ton "Hannah Broomfield" owned by Aplin Bros.

The Shire of Burke was proclaimed on Saturday 31 January 1885. In March 1887, Burketown consisted of 138 people, four hotels, a general store, eight small neat weatherboard cottages and a three trooper police station. At 11:00 am on 5 March 1887 a cyclone accompanied by an unexpected tidal surge struck Burketown. Eleven hours later 98% of the town was gone and seven people had died. Sergeant John Ferguson, of Scottish Highland descent saved many lives through his heroic efforts. Two hotels were completely destroyed and five houses carried away. Of the humpies no trace existed and stock losses were enormous.

Key Facts

Shire Population:	Burke Shire estimated population from the 2011 Census was 514. Of the approximate 202 residents of Burketown 41.5% were identified as indigenous persons, 52.02% were males and 47.8% were females. The combined population of Gregory Township and stations is approximately 312. Out of this population 21.4% were indigenous persons, 66.1% are males and 33.9% are females.
Towns:	Burketown - 202 population Gregory - 50 population
Land Area:	40 126 sq. km
Council Employees:	45 staff
Federal Electorate:	Bob Katter MP
State Electorate:	Rob Katter MP
Length of Roads:	State Roads - Sealed 190 kms Unsealed 30 kms Local Roads - Sealed 204 kms Unsealed 509 kms

Once you visit or become part of a Gulf Savannah community the pleasures and personal benefits are many fold; the life style is at a comfortable pace that allows you to enjoy the regions features like flora (the landscapes of the Gulf Savannah plains are to behold) and fauna (there are scores of the prettiest bird species and animal life that is long gone from the highly populated areas of the country). Boating and fishing is just the most rewarding activity in this region particularly during the dry season and combining with the winter season in the Gulf Savannah Region it is just the most perfect environment for this type of relaxation.

My family and I would encourage everyone to come and have a life changing experience and indulge in the affordable features that can be shared in the abundance in the Gulf Savannah Region.

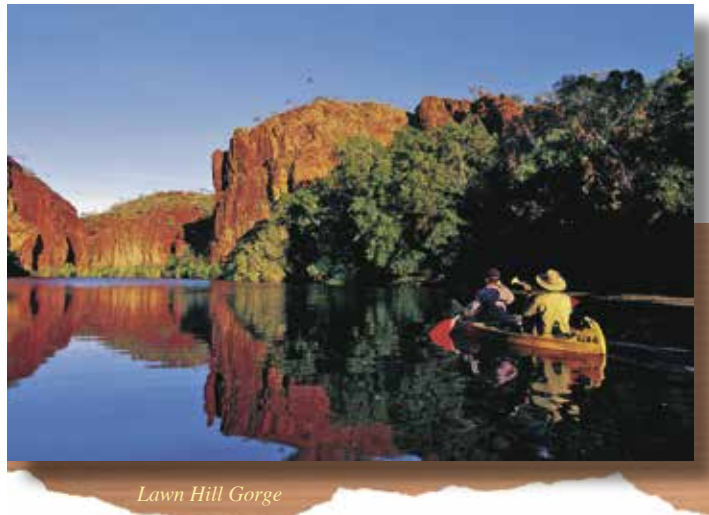
John Page

Building Approvals

While a lack of available freehold residential land continues to influence new building approval figures, Council is in the process of addressing this with the relevant bodies through negotiation.

What building activity does exist is based around domestic dwellings, domestic sheds, extensions to current dwellings and the like. In 2013-14 four new houses have been constructed in Burketown and two in Gregory.

The Burketown Hotel has been rebuilt following the fire in March 2012 and provides a modern facility for the community. The Burketown Bakery and Butchery has commenced operation as a new business.



Lawn Hill Gorge

Land Sales

Land sales in Burketown and Gregory have continued to grow in value. A recent residential sale for a housing block in what is seen as a premier location was made at just over the \$50,000 mark.

Special Projects

Transport and Main Roads will have completed the sealing of Main Road 78A from Gregory to Burketown by the end of October, 2013 which will not only provide a fully sealed access to Burketown but the final sealed connection to Doomadgee. This will assist in the development of good community relations between Burke and Doomadgee Shires.

Council has sealed the remaining 7kms of Truganini Road and will have approximately 10kms of Doomadgee West Road sealed by end of November. Council is progressing with the Burke Shire Community Hub which will incorporate a new Hall, Council Meeting Room, Disaster Coordination Centre and kitchen facilities.

Contact

Please contact Council's Chief Executive Officer with regards all investment and development enquiries. Email: ceo@burke.qld.gov.au or call 07 4745 5100.

Services and Facilities

Health Services

Burketown has clinic facilities and an on-call 24 hours medical service with a resident Director of Nursing. The Royal Flying Doctor services the region with regular clinics held in Burketown and Gregory. Fly-in, fly-out specialists attend the clinic on a six week cycle, with a range of services from dietitian to mental health provided.

Education Services

Burketown has a primary school, prep to year seven, and a C and K kindergarten for children aged three years and over. The school is set in a picturesque environment with substantial grassed areas, play areas and teaching resources. Gregory has a well maintained, single class primary school for children aged prep to year seven.

Sport and Recreation Facilities

Both townships offer children's play areas, parks and multi-sport use tennis courts. Burketown also boasts a six pool aquatic facility, rodeo grounds and library. Gregory has a race track used for a variety of horse sports activities. There is also an active seniors group who meet three times a week for social activities. For the more adventurous there are numerous fishing opportunities, camping and bushwalking. There are a number of active clubs in the Shire including the fishing club and the Country Women's Association.

Retail and Financial Services

I came here for the job and was only going to stay for two years. I've been here eight years now and can't see myself leaving for quite a while. I enjoy the weather, the work, and the people here are just wonderful. It's nice and quiet and peaceful and friendly.

Diane Phillips, Director of Nursing

Burketown offers a post office, service station, two small general stores, take-away food outlets, hotel (ATM), caravan park and cabin style accommodation. Eftpos facilities are available at all retail outlets and banking services are provided by the post office. There is Next G mobile phone coverage and broadband internet services. The town has an off-grid electricity generation facility. Gregory has a hotel with accommodation, meals and fuel supplies.

Religious Services

Burketown has the services of a lay preacher with church and Sunday School a regular occurrence.

Tourism Facilities

The Shire offers a myriad of tourist facilities including Adeles Grove, World Heritage Site Riversleigh Fossils, Boodjamulla National Park and barramundi fishing.



The Morning Glory

Climate

Many people think Northern Australia is uniformly hot and humid, but this is not always the case. Burke Shire residents enjoy warm days, cool winter nights and dry winters. Maximum temperatures are higher than on Queensland's east coast, but not as high as areas such as Mt Isa, which is hotter throughout the summer months.

The Shire enjoys cool winter nights, with mean minimum temperatures in July significantly cooler than in Cairns. Humidity is also much lower than in Cairns, especially in winter. As with most of Northern Australia, rains begin to fall in November/ December, mainly through afternoon and evening storms, before the monsoon brings the bulk of the regions rain from January through to April. Average rainfall, however, is much less than on the east coast in Cairns and rain periods tend to be shorter in duration.

Our Shire also experiences one of the world's most interesting climatic phenomena - the Morning Glory. The Morning Glory is a rolling cloud which stretches up to 1000 km long and is usually 900 metres deep. Rolling onto land in the morning, it looks and behaves much like an ocean wave, and Burketown attracts many enthusiasts who come to glide or view this incredible phenomenon.

(I like Burketown) being a small town away from the busy lifestyle. The smallness of the town and the cleanliness and the people around it. It sort of has that little community feeling. There are business opportunities for everyone, the Burke Shire Council and other small businesses in town always need workers.

Rosita Wade, Business Owner

The things we enjoy about living in Burketown are the friendly people in town, the community. The fishing of course is pretty high on the list (and) the landscape and wildlife around the town as well, and the areas outside of town. Just nice landscapes, places to get away. You have to be prepared to live in a remote community. You just can't go up to Maccas every day for a burger or something (but) if you're happy with living in an isolated area we have good facilities for the school and things like that. It's a good community for kids.

Jasmin Davis, Business Owner

