

Start of the Scenic  
Rim Trail, Great  
Walks of Australia.

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GREAT  
LUXURY WALKS  
SCENIC RIM  
TRAIL, QLD

# RANGE ROVING

Queensland’s Scenic Rim Trail traverses multiple ranges, a 24-million-year-old shield volcano and Gondwana Rainforest World Heritage Area.

WORDS AND PHOTOS\_ BRIAR JENSEN





**Above:** Mount Cordeaux lookout.

**Right:** Skroo's folly, the ladder.



**MOUNT** Mistake or my mistake? The refrain becomes an annoying earworm as departure looms. At 60km the four-day Spicers Scenic Rim Trail is one of Great Walks of Australia's longest trips and one of the few rated moderate to hard, with a 700m ascent of the Mount Mistake Range on the first day.

I'm concerned about climbing in Queensland's humidity. Then I bruise the ball of my right foot. I ramp up squats in lieu of training walks and oscillate between planning and postponing. But this is my first luxury, pack-free walk, so I don't stiff-soled boots, a stiff upper lip, and hope for the best.

Spicers Scenic Rim Trail starts in Thornton, about 110km southwest of Brisbane. It tracks south across the lands of the Yuggera Ugarapul people, over the Great Dividing Range and

through Gondwanan Rainforest to culminate at Cunninghams Gap.

The trail is the dream of Jude Turner and her husband Graham, aka 'Skroo', co-founder of Flight Centre, who both hail from the Scenic Rim. They established the Spicers brand, which owns retreats at either end of the Main Range. A keen hiker, Jude felt Queensland needed a 'great walk' like those she'd done in New Zealand and knew the Scenic Rim offered the ideal location.

Answering the Queensland Government's call for eco-tourism ventures in 2011, they invested \$10m over ten years creating a trail that traverses their private nature reserves, state forests and Main Range National Park. It opened in 2020 with public camping sites for self-guided walkers, but I'm taking the luxury guided option.

I meet fellow walkers in our group of eight at Spicers Hidden Vale. Some of us have bookended the walk with accommodation here. Guides Harley and Grady hand out packed lunches before the 40-minute transfer to the trail head in Thornton View Nature Reserve.

## Journey of discovery

"Pack a can-do attitude," quips Grady about today's 11km walk as we squint at a steel ladder we're aiming for high on a ridge. The single-file track switchbacks up the mountain like a sinuous serpent, rocky and exposed. Wildfires in 2019 and recent spot fires have scorched the earth and stripped the hillside of shade.





**Left:** View from Mistake Range into Laidley Valley.

**Below:** Giant spear lily.

**Bottom:** Elephant foot fungi.



## “WE CROSS ONTO THE MAIN RANGE FORMED 24 MILLION YEARS AGO,”

Thankfully the temperature remains in the 20s, and there are plenty of rest stops to admire the view.

The two-tier vertical ladder, dubbed ‘Skroo’s folly’, is a bit of adventurous fun up a 30m rock face. It avoids the habitat of brush tailed rock wallabies, but we spot a couple high on a ledge staring back at us with inquisitive sooty faces.

Harnessed on we climb the ladder one at a time. My gait feels like a stick insect, reaching ahead with my hands first then pushing up with my legs, bum out so as not to skin knees on the abrasive treads. Face-to-face with the cliff I feel like a pseudo rock climber and it’s thrilling.

The track continues zig-zagging to the ridgetop where we lunch looking east over the Laidley Valley and Little Liverpool Range to Brisbane’s skyscrapers. It’s an opportunity to get my bearings, as I haven’t been able to source a map of our exact route. Harley says this is intentional, explaining the walk is about more than A to B. “It’s a journey of discovery in so many ways,” he says, “A journey of self, reconnecting with nature.”

He and Grady facilitate this with insightful commentary on local flora and fauna, Indigenous and colonial history. They riff off each other, dispensing humorous motivational euphemisms along with freshly brewed coffee

and cake for morning tea and energy boosting sweets in the afternoon.

We’re on the Mistake Range, so named as explorer Allan Cunningham mistakenly thought it was part of the Great Dividing Range. The open eucalypt forest is studded with grass trees sprouting candle-like cream flower spikes. Due to the low rainfall here they only grow about 1cm a year, making these specimens hundreds of years old. Grady reels off the multiple Indigenous uses for the plant from spears to resin.

The staccato chatter of Lewin’s honeyeaters follows us to our accommodation at Mount Mistake Station, which ups the luxe factor in this luxury hike. We’re met with refreshing towels, glasses of bubbles and cold beers. The aroma of fresh scones fills the farmhouse and after freshening up we help ourselves at the bar and gather around the firepit for tomorrow’s briefing. Dinner is a convivial feast of fresh local produce, and beds are sumptuously soft.

### Forest embrace

Although longer at 17km, much of today’s walk is on an old forestry trail, easy underfoot but a steady uphill slog to crest the Mistake Range. In the 1800s the area was prized for its timber and logging continued until the 1980s.

We cross onto the Main Range formed 24 million years ago as the area drifted over a volcanic hot spot, creating a shield volcano. The eroded eastern escarpment, dropping sharply to the valley below, is populated by giant spear lilies, a succulent with 3m sword-like leaves from which a single flower spike curves under the weight of flame-red blooms. They can take up to 13 years to flower and the cliffs are ablaze with them.

Main Range National Park sits at the northern tip of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area and it’s noticeably cooler as we enter the subtropical rainforest. We hear whip birds, honeyeaters, golden whistlers and scrub wrens. Enormous staghorn ferns crown tree trunks and dainty orchids trail a veil of white flowers. Striated turkey tail mushrooms proliferate as does the giant stinging tree that we are careful to give a wide berth.

Eventually we leave the logging trail for a grade five track that winds down into the valley. At a creek we see the tadpoles of the endangered Fleay’s barred frog and avoid stepping on the native spinach they use to lay their eggs. Climbing up we’re back in dry sclerophyll forest on the Great Dividing Range. At a lookout over Blackfellows Valley we hear the story of Indigenous warrior Multuggerah







Canapes and dinner at Spicers Hidden Peaks. Great Walks of Australia.

who united neighbouring tribes to repel white settlers in the Battle of One Tree Hill.

Commercial cabins in national parks can be controversial, so the Turners were determined to show they can be done discreetly with minimal visual and environmental impact. The two identical eco-camps, Amphitheatre tonight and Timber Getters tomorrow, were built of sustainable materials off-site and positioned on former forestry clearings.

The cosy main pavilion includes a conversation nook around a fireplace, an open kitchen and long dining table. A metal boardwalk leads to sleeping pods, where our bags await. My favourite feature is the cantilevered glass wall to the deck, which I leave open to let the forest in.

## NEED TO KNOW

Spicers offers 2, 3, 4 and 6-day guided walks of the Scenic Rim, staying in first-class accommodation and enjoying excellent meals and wines. For more info visit [scenicrimtrail.com](https://scenicrimtrail.com) and other info on walking in the area visit [parks.des.qld.gov.au](https://parks.des.qld.gov.au)



## Listening to nature

Furthering our connection with nature we start our 16km day with dadirri (da-did-ee) an Aboriginal concept Harley introduced yesterday. Hailing from the Daly River region it relates to deep listening and awareness, like Japanese Shinrin-yoku or forest bathing. Walking quietly by ourselves I spot a rare regent bower bird, hear wompoo pigeons, catch sun glinting off a cobweb and inhale the

fecund aroma of decaying wood, the essence of forest regeneration.

We see Mount Castle in the distance. Known as Butcha to the Ugarapul people it's the resting place of their warrior hero. Old Sylvesters Lookout is a veritable rock garden of spear lilies and yellow heliotropic paper daisies. From here we can see the scale of the escarpment as it curves around the Fassifern Valley.

Back in the forest it's up and down through piccabeen palms, tree ferns, hoop pines, flooded gums and buttressed carabeen trees. We learn about luminous fungi, strangler figs and pollinating fig wasps. Pear-shaped nests of yellow throated scrub wrens dangle like decorations from tree branches and hoof fungus protrude from trunks. Attuned now, we spot tiny red velvet mites and a yellow-faced whipsnake, recognise the alarm call of satin bower birds and identify their bowers. Not all wildlife is welcome though, like hitchhiking ticks, expertly removed by our guides.

I love the variety of today's terrain, and when the going gets tough Grady distracts us with stories strung out like rewards for reaching each milestone.

## Uplifting panoramas

It's hard to imagine today's 16km route could be better yesterday, especially when it starts with another uphill logging track. But I'm mistaken. The Scenic Rim keeps on surprising. There are huge bunya pines that once drew Aboriginal clans together to celebrate the harvest of their nutritional nuts. We meet a granddaddy red carabeen that survived logging and fires, photographing ourselves dwarfed by its wall-sized buttresses. A pair of satin bower birds cavort beside the track and we watch several Albert's lyrebirds, one shaking its tail feathers.

The pinnacle is Bare Rock, not just because it's the walk's highest point at 1168m. Taking in the 360° views of this crumpled caldera shows how far we've travelled physically, but we've also broadened our understanding of the environment. I've learnt to see, listen, and feel the land more deeply. Harley's right, it has been a journey of discovery.

Mount Cordeau lookout presents a final floral flourish with a vertical garden of xanthorrhoea and spear lilies before we descend to our transport at Cunninghams Gap. At Spicers Hidden Peaks the pampering climaxes with fragrant foot baths accompanying our celebratory drinks around the fire pit, over which the chef smokes rib eye as the sun sets distant peaks aglow. My only mistake might be getting accustomed to this level of luxury hiking. 🌀

*Great Walks was a guest of Great Walks of Australia & Spicers Scenic Rim Trail*