Dramatic gorges, lava tubes and brilliant gemstones are the highlights of the Lava Tubes, Gems and Gorges Trail which loops from the Savannah Way through the Etheridge Shire. Experience the Australian outback and its wildlife on an adventure taking in the McBride Volcanic Province where eruptions millions of years ago formed a spectacular landscape and left behind a rich mineral heritage.
Highlights for a week-long journey

Drive times are approximate and can vary depending on the condition of dirt roads.

Undara

275km (4 hours) from Cairns

Undara is an Aboriginal word for a long way, and the lava flow that created the Undara Lava Tubes, at over 180km, is the longest in the world. Ancient roof collapses have created deep impressions in the tubes allowing rainforest plants and animals to thrive in unique ecosystems. Savannah Guides conduct tours of the tubes and take you on a sunset tour to experience the wildlife. Unwind Experience on the edge of the Undara Volcanic National Park has unique accommodation, camping and home-style meals. Visit www.undara.com.au or call 1800 990 992 for more information.

Mount Surprise

55km (30 minutes) from Undara

Mount Surprise is a centre for gem fossicking with topaz, quartz and gemstone among the semi-precious gemstones which can be found at nearby O’Brien’s Creek Gemfields. Obtain advice, equipment and a hearty meal from Mount Surprise Gems where you can also get the feel for fossicking by sifting through a bucket of wash. Use their fossicking site to explore the gemfields. Visit www.etheridge.qld.gov.au/terrrestrial or www.cobboldgorge.com.au for more information and advice. Phone (07) 4062 1190 or visit www.mountsurprisegems.com.au.

Georgetown

92km (1 hour) from Mount Surprise

The administrative hub for Etheridge Shire, Georgetown owes its existence to the gold found there in 1870. Gold fossicking is still popular and you can purchase a fossicking licence from the Visitor Information Centre and fossicking area. An experienced professional fossicker can capture the tiny bats for dinner. Visit the TerrEstrial Visitor Information Centre, Georgetown has two caravanning parks and a hotel. Latah Motel has air conditioned rooms, a laundry and fully licenced restaurant and bar open 7 days. Phone (07) 4062 1190 or visit www.georgetownaccommodation.com.

Cobbold Gorge

70km (1 hour) from Forsyath, 37km (45 mins) from Cobbold Gorge

Fossicking for semi-precious gemstones, gold and the world’s most colourful thunder eggs are a highlight of the Gem and Gorges Trail. O’Brien’s Creek Gemfields near Mount Surprise is known for topaz, quartz and garnet, while Flat Creek Station is a favourite with those wanting to prospect for gold. The Ayte Creek gem fields are aptly named for the colourful thunder eggs found there. A fossicking licence is required. Ask at the Visitor Information Centres or Mount Surprise Gems.

Flat Creek Station

45km (1 hour) from Georgetown

Flat Creek Station is a family run beef cattle grazing property of 30,000 acres where tourists come to prospect for gold. Bedwathing is also popular with an array of native birds including the rare Gouldian finch. A shady campground, hot showers and flushing toilets make it a popular place for campers. Call (07) 4062 3504 for more information.

Forsyath

45km (1 hour) from Georgetown

The former gold mining town of Forsyath is the terminus for the Savannahlander Train with half-day rail rides available. Relics from the rich gold days including a rail engine can be seen in Forsyath Park where there are public toilets. The Gemfields Hotel and Ferniggin’s rest offer hotel, accommodation, mini-market and postal agency. Phone (07) 4062 5374.

Agate Creek

72km (1 hour) from Forsyath

A fossicking site with thunder eggs, agate and just 20km away is the Cumberland Chimney, the remains of an old gold crushing plant. The Cumberland Chimney gives a vivid picture of the hardships faced by pioneers and Cattle aughter Park in Forsyath where you can see an old rail engine. The Ted Elliott Mineral Collection at Ferniggin in Georgetown has more than 4500 specimens and is visited only by the Geological Museum in Canberra.

Gympie Outback Retreat

56km (1 hour) for off-road vehicles and trailers only from Agate Creek. Conventional vehicles 160km (2.5 hours) from The Lynd Junction

The luxurious Gympie Outback Retreat is a rustic retreat for couples wanting to get away in comfort. Gold fossicking, visiting the old gold mining township of Gympie, seeing Aboriginal rock art, wildlife spotting, swimming, fishing and kayaking are among the activities offered. Gympie Goldfields offers camping and great fossicking. Go to www.gympieoutbackretreat.com or phone (07) 4062 5329 for more information.

Einasleigh

72km (1 hour) from Forsyath

The former copper mining town of Einasleigh sits beside the scenic rolling hills of the Catetpa Range. The Savannahlander train stops right outside the pub so passengers can enjoy a beer in the outback and see the amazing collection of miniature antique furniture. It is a short walk to Copperfield Range where the river has cut a line through the landscape. Einasleigh Roadhouse is where you can find Australia’s smallest bar. The outback roadhouse is a hub for local cattle stations and a major truck stop. It has rooms, camp sites and home-cooked meals seven days a week. Phone (07) 4062 5291.

The Lynd Junction

76km (1.5 hours) from Einasleigh

The junction of the Kennedy Developmental Road and the Gregory Developmental Road is the southern access point to the Gems and Gorges Trail. The Oob_LS Roadhouse is where you will find Australia’s smallest bar. The outback roadhouse is a hub for local cattle stations and a major truck stop. It has rooms, camp sites and home-cooked meals seven days a week. Phone (07) 4062 5291.

Events

May – Gympie Outback Retreat
June – The Lynd Junction
July – Gympie Outback Retreat
August – Gympie Outback Retreat
September – Gympie Outback Retreat
October – Gympie Outback Retreat
November – Gympie Outback Retreat
December – Gympie Outback Retreat

Getting there and exploring further afield

- Drive from Cairns via the scenic Atherton Tablelands to Undara Experience
- Drive from Townsville and Charters Towers to The Lynd Junction
- Drive the unsealed Ootan Road from east of Mount Surprise to Almaden, Chillagoe and on to Mareeba
- From Georgetown continue west along the Savannah Way to the terminus for the Savannahlander Train in Baroona St.
- Catch the Savannahlander Outback Railway from Cairns – see www.savannahlander.com.au

Road conditions

Sealed roads are marked on the map. Unsealed Roads are generally well graded.

Contact Etheridge Shire Council on (07) 4079 9090 or www.etheridge.qld.gov.au for more information.

Birdwatching

The Gulf Savannah is a world-class attraction for birdwatchers thanks to a diversity of habitats and seasonal weather patterns. The best time to see birds is late in the dry season (September to December) when many migratory birds arrive and animals congregate around the remaining rivers and waterholes, although there are plenty to be seen all year round. Cumberland Chimney, 20km from Georgetown, is a popular location to see a variety of birds. Ask for bird lists at each of your stops to learn more about the species you may see.

Wildlife

Kangaroos, wallabies, emus, geckos, skinks, frogs and butterflies are among the Australian wildlife commonly seen in the Gulf Savannah. While driving, watch for magnificent wedge-tailed eagles which swoop from the sky looking for prey. At Undara Experience you can watch at the entry to the lava tubes on disk to see thousands of tiny micro-bats emerge to chase insects and witness pythons and Brown Tree Skinks slaming from the trees trying to capture the tiny bats for dinner.

Heritage

The history of the fascinating region revolves around mining and cattle stations. The restored buildings of Georgetown date back to the early 1900s and just 20km away is the Cumberland Chimney, the remains of an old gold crushing plant. The Cumberland Chimney gives a vivid picture of the hardships faced by pionniers and Cattle aughter Park in Forsyath where you can see an old rail engine. The Ted Elliott Mineral Collection at Ferniggin in Georgetown has more than 4500 specimens and is visited only by the Geological Museum in Canberra.

Visit the TerrEstrial Visitor Information Centre, Georgetown, for all regional updates, advice and information.