

Exploring Pindari Dam

Northern Tableland, NSW



top: distant view of the dam spillway

lower: dam view, and a one kilometre walk to the spillway



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The population in southern Queensland and northern NSW is centred on the coast (Sunshine Coast, Gold Coast, Brisbane, Tweed Heads) and for them, Pindari Dam is not only a long way away inland, it is also probably off the map. Not only is it over five hours drive from Brisbane to Pindari Dam, but it is off any major highway system. The most direct way there is to follow the New England Highway south from Warwick, down through Stanthorpe, Wallangara, and Tenterfield to Deepwater, then go west through Emmaville.

This way involves over 50 kilometres of unsealed dirt road, from Emmaville to Wells Crossing Road, and across to the Ashford Bukulla Road before getting back on sealed bitumen. It is possible to stay on sealed roads all the way to Pindari Dam, either going west from Warwick towards Goondiwindi, then south through Texas and Bonshaw, or west from Tenterfield on the Bruxner Highway almost to Bonshaw, then south to Ashford.

I had been on the northern edge of this country some summer months previously, when I drove on dirt roads to Nundubbermere Falls, in the northern edge of Sundown National Park, west of Stanthorpe. That journey had been only ten kilometres on dirt on Nundubbermere Road, and four more down Falls Road to the waterfall on the Queensland Severn River. This time, in dry late Autumn weather, I drove another thirty four kilometres past Falls Road, around the borders of Sundown National Park to Mingoola, near where the Queensland Severn makes its southern exit from Sundown National Park. The road from Stanthorpe to Texas would have taken me there for the same distance on sealed roads, but that road keeps to the valleys, and I wanted the high road, to see the quilt of golden hills that reach from far horizon to horizon.

Eventually I crossed the Queensland Severn River, and the Mole River. As the road to Bonshaw kept pace with the Severn, I could see the massive floodwaters from the summer of 2010 – 11 had broken all the river bank trees. Five kilometres short of Ashford, I turned towards Emmaville, and twelve kilometres east turned south onto a dirt road again, down to Wells Crossing. It is only ten kilometres to the NSW Severn River (totally different to the Queensland river) and Wells Crossing. Pindari Dam is a short seventeen kilometres distant to the east on the sealed Ashford Bukulla Road that runs by the southern side of the Wells Crossing bridge.

After the wide open landscape for hundreds of kilometres, the camping spaces at Pindari Dam seemed too small, crowded too close to neighbours. The camping area at Wells Crossing was only a short distance way, and seemed preferable.

below left: upstream view Wells Crossing bridge
note the informal camp ground on the right bank



below right: downstream view Wells Crossing bridge





above: Pindari Dam foreshore

below: rocky buttress





left: dam wall



left: below the dam wall



left: ramp view

Local information about the dam was that the wind could make conditions decidedly testing. Waves to over one metre would make the lake unsuitable for canoes, and a head wind would make a journey trying. On the day I was there, the dam surface was mirror like. A couple of powered boats carved across the still water. The water felt icy in the noonday sun. The same rainfall that made floodwaters carve through river bank trees on the Queensland Severn River, had filled the dam, and a boater assured me that the bluff I paused under was a two hundred metres walk from the waters edge six months previously. Now I could touch the cliffs above, without getting from the boat.

The Severn River Nature Reserve covers the southern side of the river for about ten kilometres up from where the river flows into the dam, and also covers the upstream dam foreshore on the southern side. Elsewhere, the northern foreshore of the dam is privately owned. On the dam, a walk west on top of the wall to view the spillway is over a kilometre long. Before the heavy rains last year, the distance for a paddle up the dam to meet the incoming Severn River was about 10 kilometres, (Apple Tree Waterhole) but it is now more like 12.5 km (Eight Mile Falls).

While the canoe paddle from below the dam to Wells Crossing was locally recommended, (14.5km) access was closed below the dam. It may be possible to put in at a road crossing 7.5 km upstream from Wells Crossing. It definitely is possible to paddle downstream from the Wells Crossing bridge, either a short 5.5 km paddle on grade one water to the Beaumont Road crossing on the Severn (3.2km out of Ashford on the Ashford Bukulla Road), or a longer 14km paddle to the Inverell Bonshaw Road.

The area you are traveling into is sheep country. There has been no large population growth here on the back of a mineral resources boom, or tourism sponsored growth. So the country has largely stayed the way it was some half a century ago, and more. The attraction of paddling a canoe on Pindari Dam is matched by the majestic beauty of the western landscape. Brown, gold, and beige coloured countryside, with a scattering of open forest, under wide blue skies.

below left: picnic area, Pindari Dam campground



below right: Pindari Dam campground view
green verge is floating weed





As the canoeist travels further up the dam, away from the dam wall, towards the meeting place of the Severn River and the dam waters, some rocky bluffs overlooking the water are encountered.





Pindari lake views

