

A Very Special Project in Cloncurry, QLD

In August 2019 the Bay Building Services Queensland Team were approached by RACQ, to volunteer for a program traveling to far North Western Queensland to undertake work on properties that were severely impacted by floods in February earlier this year.

All focus was on Townsville and the flood damage to properties there. Whilst in the rural areas to the west, there was a catastrophe of massive proportions that did not receive the national media recognition that it would otherwise have.

The majority of Eastern Australian rural communities have been under unprecedented drought conditions for quite some time, with the North Western area of QLD in their seventh year of devastating drought conditions. The Cloncurry district, where the team headed, had endured 42 days straight of temperatures over 40 degrees before the rainfall arrived in February 2019. The Graziers were initially thrilled by the prospect of substantial rainfall, however the celebration of the rainfall was soon replaced with despair as 700 mm of rain was recorded in 7 days and the heatwave replaced with temperatures below 10 degrees with driving winds.

There was an expanse of floodwater covering an area the size of Victoria, (over 200,000 km²). Stock losses from this event were reported in the media to be 500,000 cattle however the Graziers we spoke to believe the more accurate losses were close to 1,000,000 cattle.

The media did report on this event and I have included a link to an expansive story on the event. (*Please note:* The story contains some confronting images)

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/13/we-have-death-and-devastation-at-every-turn-the-flood-massacre-of-queensland-cattle>

The RACQ Foundation in a joint effort with Connecting Communities Australia "mustered up" a group of volunteers to travel to Cloncurry and work on a number of properties that were affected by this event. On behalf of Bay Building Services, our QLD State Manager, Steve Fordham and Supervisor/Estimator, Stuart Kidd, formed part of a group of 30 volunteers, including Carpenters and Mechanics from the RACQ Insurance Service Provider Panel, who responded to the call for assistance.



We were tasked with working on three properties situated 80km north of Cloncurry. Stuart invested lots of time outside of his normal work hours to work through the project scheduling and communicating with the property owners to assist them compiling the material orders that would be required.

The Volunteers flew 1800km from Brisbane to Mount Isa and we then drove 120km east to the township of Cloncurry aka "The Curry", all because it is hot as.

The Bay Building Services (BBS) Team were joined by another volunteer who was a "jack of all trades".

Our work detail for the week was:

- Fabricate and erect a steel frame carport 6m x 14m
- Install 170m² of Kliplock laminate flooring in a homestead
- Install 30m² of Kliplock laminate flooring in a cottage

We arrived at our first property mid-afternoon on the Monday, where our 1st project "carport fabrication and erection" was set to kick off. The dimensions of the structure were changed by the Property Owner to a 4 m x 14 m footprint. By sundown the site had string lines erected and we were ready for the post holes to be dug.

On the Tuesday we learnt that the delivery of the materials we required was delayed so our schedule for the week had already changed.

We finished the preparation of the footings and then headed off "cross country" on a short cut that should have seen us arrive in 45 minutes, cutting our travel time in half. Two hours, 2 wrong turns and a dry river bed crossing navigated with the prowess of a "Paris to Dakar" rally veteran later, we arrived at our next property. Task/work program was to prepare flooring in a Workers Cottage.

This property is a second generation Brahman Cattle Stud. The flood event has resulted in a loss of 2600 head of cattle to this property. The financial loss was in excess of \$10,000,000, but more devastating for the family concerned was the 40 year breeding bloodline that was lost. The bull in the photo below, as an example, is an \$80,000 asset.



The Workers Cottage was originally constructed by the family, some 40 years ago. The carpet that we had to uplift certainly looked like it was 40 years old... The hardwood floor had been laid using a hand operated brace and drill bit, the workmanship was sound indeed.

Preparation on the cottage floor completed, it was off to property #3 where we had to do similar preparation in the homestead. No carpet here, vinyl flooring in place, and time constraint pressures, the decision was reached to leave the vinyl in situ. All that was required to be done was to move a considerable quantity of furniture as well as patch and "build up" areas where the floor was uneven of the vinyl worn through.

The flooring arrived late Tuesday afternoon, without FC sheet underlay which we required for half of the house floor area. Whilst awaiting the delivery of the FC underlay we started laying floor over the area that had a Masonite underlay under the vinyl. By lunchtime Wednesday the BBS Team had 50% of the floor laid and we found ourselves "on the road again" back to property #2 to quickly install the 30 m² of flooring before sundown.

We were assisted by an employee on the property who worked as a Jillaroo. Whilst working away laying the floor, we were being educated on the scientific processes Stud Cattle breeding follows. Something that is far more involved than a lot of the wider Australian population would appreciate, but this something to cover at a later date.

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We were making record breaking progress on the floor installation and were on track to have the job completed within 3 hours. With 2 planks left to lay our "Assistant" was undertaking quality control on the joins between the laid planks. (*When the planks are laid it is often a requirement that a little force with a hammer and a piece of scrap plank may be required to set the join in place*) Upon finding a join in the middle of the room not sitting flush a "little force" was applied with a LUMP HAMMER. To the dismay of all, the planks were fractured and the only way to replace them was to lift and relay 60% of the flooring (insert sad face).



With the job completed and a little time spent with the family who owned this property, we found ourselves again travelling "cross country" at night, avoiding red kangaroos and red cattle back to property #3.

Thursday morning and we had found our "second wind". We blitzed the remaining floor installation in the homestead by lunchtime. We again we were assisted by another Jillaroo who worked on this property. An absolute pleasure to work with and just "nailed the job", without incident... well that's how I am telling the story anyway.

We were relieved to hear the material for the carport had arrived in town. The plan was the property owner would collect the material early Friday morning. Things were looking to fall our way, with just a day and a half left we felt we could knock over this last project.

With all the plans bedded down, we had a chance to stay the night and enjoy the hospitality of our hosts, the family, who own the property #2. Before we realised it, we found ourselves dragging our aching bones off the bed after "pumpkin hour".

Friday, up before the sun had risen, we were off to the final project and buoyant with what lay ahead was in our control.

Arriving on the "job site" we quickly learned we were again going to be "kicking against wind". The family had decided the footprint of the carport wasn't big enough.



We had to build one twice as wide i.e., 8m span. We found ourselves "jump starting" the Massey Ferguson /tractor and operating the post hole digger attachment, all under the "eagle eyes" of the elderly Graziers nervous we may damage the "old girl" in the process.

By midmorning all eyes were gazing toward the road leading to the front gate of the property with the same questions being posed. Where was our material delivery? The "SOS" call came through an hour or so later, a sizeable portion of the material load had fallen from the Truck when the ties had broken. Posts and purlins where fine. Battens and guttering had been damaged beyond salvage.

The steel material for posts and purlins were quite "over engineered with the view being everything in the country must be built to last"

The material delivered:

- 90 mm x 90 mm
(8 mm gauge)
- SHS 8 m lengths that would be cut into 4 m posts
- 100mm x 50mm
(8 gauge) purling 8 m lengths

Hand mixing concrete for the 6 x 600mm deep x 300 mm diameter post holes and trying weather conditions the posts were all in by sundown Friday.



The purlins had to be lifted into place by forklift (yes the Graziers have all the tools). The purlins where welded in place, whilst a team chased spot fires below.

We left the property exhausted but thrilled to have achieved so much during the week, with so many obstacles placed in front of us.

The work of all the Volunteers was acknowledged in a formal dinner held in Cloncurry Saturday evening. Dignitaries attending the event included Mayor, Greg Campbell , RACQ Group CEO Ian Gillespie, RACQ Bank CEO, Michelle Bagnall and RACQ Foundation CEO Fay Barker along with all the Graziers who had benefited by the hard work undertaken by the team.

In the speech to the collective guests and dignitaries, Ian Gillespie called out the few building firms who had participated with special mention.

Our Project Manager/ Supervisor, Stuart Kidd, displayed admirable leadership on the project, despite the challenges he consistency found thrown at him. Proud of what we had achieved was an understatement and although weary from the week away we returned home and back to normal life Monday.

Such is the satisfaction from what we were able to "give" of our time and expertise this may well be an annual event for the QLD Team, either representing BBS or in our own time.

A worthwhile project to be involved in and again thanks to the Business for backing our involvement.

- Stephen Fordham, State Manager QLD