

# The Floods

*of 2010/2011*







Helicopter pilot Cameron Parker took these two photos in the Midgee district, south of Rockhampton. Cameron's aerial mustering service was called in to move livestock to higher ground.





After a prolonged drought, the 2010/11 wet season has brought rain like we thought we'd never see again. For a time it was a welcome change and for the first time in a decade there was widespread rainfall. For anyone on the land, it is hard to knock the rain – especially when you've spent years on bended knee begging for it. Yet every so often as the skies open up and the rain comes without mercy, we watch rivers and creeks fill and we prepare again for one of nature's most devastating onslaughts – the flood.

**THE SEASON** of widespread flooding started in western Queensland in early 2010. From St George to Charleville people were displaced, and animals and crops lost. Just as the victims of the March floods were getting back on their feet, weather watchers from around the country began to warn us that this wouldn't be the last of the extreme weather; we were in the strongest La Nina pattern since 1973 and with it would come more rain and more flooding in 2010 and 2011.

With Spring came more heavy rain events and more flooding across the country. As devastating as those flood events were, they would prove to be nothing compared with what was to come. A flood so devastating and so widespread that it defied our imaginations, broke the records and brought the nation together.

In December 2010, Queensland experienced its wettest month on record. From the northern-most parts of the state to its border regions, rain gauges overflowed and catchments filled. As rivers rose across the state, mass evacuations began in townships like Condamine, Chinchilla and Theodore. People on rural properties were cut off and those travelling were stranded, in some cases unable to get home for weeks. As the floodwater subsided, cleanup operations began. For some, this would not be the last time they would have to clean the mud and debris from their properties.

Initially, central Queensland was ground zero and images of Rockhampton and surrounds bombarded the media.

Fortunately for the residents of 'Rocky', they had some warning that the water was coming and the community was able to prepare as best it could. Other Queensland towns like Bundaberg and Murrumbidgee experienced their worst floods in decades.

In January the amount and severity of the rainfall was unexpected. No-one could have imagined the devastation in Toowoomba (the Garden City sits 691 meters above sea level) when on the 10th January over 160mm fell and a flash flood roared through the streets, catching everyone by surprise. Apart from the shocking damage caused to infrastructure and belongings, it was the loss of life that astonished the country and the world.

In the Lockyer Valley, the sudden onslaught of heavy rain resulted in a vast quantity of water which ran down the Great Dividing Range with such ferocity that it quickly filled the Lockyer Creek to its greatest height since 1893. Whole communities in the Lockyer Valley were decimated. Withcott looked like a war zone following the wall of water that coursed through the tiny community at the bottom of the range.

The worst was still to come – the communities of Grantham and Murphy's Creek experienced what was dubbed an inland tsunami when an enormous mass of water hit without warning. So ferocious was the watery demon that it swept away everything in its path, including whole houses.

Wivenhoe dam, built as part of a flood mitigation program for Brisbane, filled to

an astounding 190%. Yet even Wivenhoe at capacity couldn't hold enough water to save Brisbane from major flooding which swept through the city.

Just a week later, the heavy rains reached the southern states and towns in New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania were ravaged by the raging flood waters.

In the areas where the flood water came with little warning, many horses were lost and in some cases whole horse studs went under water with stables full of horses drowning or being swept away. Dramatic footage of horses being saved from floodwater was posted on the internet, pulling at the heartstrings of many.

The RSPCA was called to some locations where it was reported that horses were trapped in paddocks with rising flood waters. While many people moved their horses to friends' places and out of danger, there were also horse evacuation centres set up at places like Ipswich and Gatton. The RSPCA organised feed to be donated from major feed manufacturers and suppliers. Bandages and drugs were also donated to treat horses injured during the floods.

Many community groups and private citizens came together specifically to help injured and lost horses and to help those who had lost so much care for and feed their precious equine friends.

Here are just a few insights into the events experienced by some of our readers in the 2010/2011 floods.





## Brian and Lynne Hay - Taroom QLD

Brian and Lynne bought their property 'Gunnado', 75km from Taroom, just 18 months ago. They had grown up in the area and had lived next door on the family property. Brian and Lynne never thought their new home was in danger of being flooded. The house on Gunnado is near the bank of the Robertson Creek but had never had a flood go through it before and the Hay family had never seen flood water like this in the area before.

What made this flood so different was a massive storm upstream. The local creeks were already full and then in one night there was between 9 and 11 inches (225-275mm) of rain at the watershed for the catchment between Taroom and Rolleston. Brian and Lynne expected the creeks to rise, but they could never have imagined how fast the water would come.

On the morning of the flood, Brian and Lynne had been out working and came to the house for a cup of tea around 8.30am. As they sipped their morning brew and looked over the creek the couple quickly realised it was rising incredibly quickly. As a precaution they decided to unchain the dogs and let the chooks out. In the short time it took to let those animals loose the water had risen to their knees and they decided to quickly put their motor bikes in the house. Lynne said they never expected water would go in the house and thought it was the safest place to be.

As she watched the water rise Lynne quickly realised the house wasn't safe at all. "I thought – this is no good and if we don't get on the roof now we'll get caught." Lynne made a quick phone call to her children to let them know they needed to get help.

Then she grabbed her handbag, mobile phone and camera and headed for the roof via the tank stand. As a final thought before leaving the house, Brian grabbed a loaf of bread.

It was 9.00am and the Hays would have a long wait before they were rescued. With no water, Lynne decided not to eat their loaf of bread – "I thought that will just make me thirsty."

Brian and Lynne's children quickly made some calls to organise a rescue and were directed to the SES. With no mobile service Brian and Lynne waited nervously on the roof, hoping their rescuers would arrive quickly.

"We sat watching our things float by".

I prayed that the house wouldn't come off the stumps."

Hours later and still listening intently for a far off noise that might be a rescue helicopter, Lynne decided to move to the other side of the roof and on a whim turned her mobile phone on. She was surprised to find a spot that gave enough reception to send text messages. "Not all the texts got through and we didn't really know what was happening." At one point Lynne received a text message to say the SES was sending a helicopter, but hours later she realised something was amiss. Brian and Lynne still don't know what happened with the SES, but fortunately for them their family contacted MI Helicopters of Roma and a pilot kindly took to the air to rescue the stranded couple.



*Top far left - Jess Crozier on the daily ride across the creek to check on the feedlot cattle*

*Top left - Brian Hay on the roof at Gunnado, it would be a long wait for rescue.*

*Top right - Ferrying motorbikes and supplies across the swollen creek.*

*Above - Jess Crozier walks carefully over this fallen tree to get to neighboring Gunnado to help with the cleanup.*

*Above right - When the water receded the Hay's possessions were scattered for many kilometers, this is one of their dining chairs which was swept from the house.*





After 8 hours on their roof, Brian and Lynne were relieved to see the helicopter arrive at 5.00pm, but were dismayed when the pilot turned and left as fast as he had arrived. The pilot had quickly realised there were too many tree branches around the roof for him to get close enough to rescue the pair. As Lynne watched the helicopter leave with the pilot unable to communicate his intentions, she wondered if she and Brian would be rescued at all. "When he left again, we didn't know what would happen. He (the pilot) went to the neighbours though and got a chainsaw, came back and lowered it down to Brian." Brian was able to cut enough branches down and the helicopter got close enough for the weary couple to climb aboard.

This was not a rescue helicopter service and there was no rope or harness to lower to the couple. The pilot manoeuvred the aircraft to about the height of Brian and Lynne's shoulders and they scrambled in. Lynne is still not sure how she made it aboard. "I hate heights but we seemed to get in there somehow."

## JASON AND RACHEL LEITCH – Central Queensland

Jason and Rachel Leitch own 'Mannalee' near Springsure in central Queensland, and also have 1350 acres at Rockhampton on the Fitzroy River where they run their yearlings and broodmares.

Jason is thankful that in central Queensland they had quite a bit of warning and were able to prepare for the floods. "Our block at Rocky went under water and stayed under for about 10 days. We had warning though and got all the horses moved." Jason said he hasn't been able to get to the Rockhampton block since it went under to assess the damage, but is expecting to find fences down and a lot of cleaning up to do. Having been under water for an extended time, the previously grassed paddocks will most likely be just mud and debris.



Brian and Lynne were taken to their daughter's place in Taroom where they stayed for 2 days. Lynne said that as soon as the water went down their neighbours, the Croziers, made it across the swollen creek by walking carefully across a fallen tree. The Crozier family began cleaning up what they could. "They wouldn't let us come home until they got the mud off the floors at least."

Six feet of water went through the house. Furnishings were washed away or destroyed and carpeting was ruined. Lynne was pleased to salvage whatever they could. "The motorbikes that were in the house ended up underneath the dining table so it sat up higher and wasn't damaged." Those motorbikes were cleaned up and surprisingly are operational again.

Apart from the water going through their house, they had vehicles picked up and moved. A fuel tanker full of diesel was swept up and was found later 2 kilometers downstream.

"Locals say it could take twelve months for the pasture to rejuvenate."

At Mannalee, Jason and Rachel's infrastructure is up high and escaped damage but, as with so many, they have lost fences and have a lot of repairs and cleaning up to do.

Jason and Rachel made it home from moving horses from the Rockhampton block just in time before the waters rose cutting off Mannalee. They had a very quiet Christmas and were isolated for 3 weeks, needing a food drop by helicopter.

Jason and Rachel are preparing to head for the Landmark sale in Tamworth at the beginning of February and hope the road

Thankfully no water got into the tank and they are still using the diesel, although they have to travel a little further to get to it.

The dogs gradually returned home, except for one pregnant bitch that Lynne fears might be gone for good. The horses and cattle were spared and had enough space to get to high ground.

The road to Gunnado no longer exists and the only way in is to travel to a property 20 kilometres away and then take 4 wheel motorbikes the rest of the way. A tractor is then used to ferry motorbikes and other supplies across the creek.

Brian and Lynne's biggest concern at the moment is getting supplies in and getting the rubbish out with no road access. Lynne is currently cleaning frantically and says it will take weeks to get the mud out of the house. She just spent a whole day cleaning the mud from the wood and electric stoves and has to meticulously clean every wall and every nook and cranny of their home. Lynne sounds optimistic but admits she has had her ups and downs. "I had a bit of a meltdown this morning and thought – 'how the hell will we ever get through all the mess.' But a lot of people are going through this now, not just us."

Brian and Lynne are now waiting to hear back from their insurance company. They are also looking into the logistics of moving their house further from the creek.

*Top left - Having travelled to the creek by motorbike, then ferrying the bike across the creek with a tractor, Lynne is ready to travel the rest of the way to Gunnado. This is the only access in and out of the property now.*

*Top right - The cattle yards after the flood*

to Rockhampton will be open so they can at least take the long coastal route to get to the Tamworth where they are selling horses, including the 5 year old imported stallion Smarty's High Card.



*Jason and Rachel Leitch at the 2010 NCHA Futurity*

## REG AND NOLA NOLAN – Grantham area, Lockyer Valley

Reg Nolan counts himself very lucky. He and his wife Nola have a property just 3km from the tiny community of Grantham that was ripped apart by flash flooding.

Fortunately for Reg and Nola, their property sits quite high in comparison to Grantham and while they were cut off and lost power, the only other major loss was some fences and one cow. Nola works at a retirement home in Laidley and was trapped by the surrounding floodwaters and unable to get home for 4 days.

Reg said it rained virtually nonstop from Monday to Thursday. “It just kept raining, and I gave up measuring it. On Tuesday 7 inches of rain fell at the head of Laidley Creek – we just had a lot of rain.”

Reg said it’s hard to know how many stock might have been lost around the area; at the moment the focus is on cleaning up and finding missing people from Grantham itself.

## MARTIN AND LEANNE MORAN – Elmore, Victoria

Martin and Leanne Moran’s property ‘Lombardy’ is situated between the North Central Victorian towns of Elmore and Rochester and fronts onto the Campaspe River.

The river flats at Lombardy are an ideal location for their cereal and hay cropping enterprise. About 250 acres produce oaten hay for export to Japan, while the Morans also grow 150 acres of wheat and 100 acres of canola on an annual basis. Martin and Leanne also run a small feedlot and most of their horses (the Moran family also operate the Tri Star Quarter Horse Stud) are based on the property as well.

This region was hit hard on January 15th and 16th 2011, with water encroaching on several towns in the area. Rochester experienced its worse flood on record. Leanne said that the severity of the flood came as a shock to most locals. “Many elderly residents in the area have never seen floods of this magnitude and the township of Rochester was very unprepared. By Saturday afternoon a number of people had to be evacuated from their homes by the army and others. Around 80% of the township of Rochester was inundated with water, despite the efforts overnight to sandbag and pump water. It shut down the business centre of town for most of the week and some businesses may not recover from the damage.”

Martin described the unseasonal rainfall as ‘enormous’ and said they have had about 15 inches (375 mm) since November. Leanne portrayed the reality of the flood - a tale of loss, recovery and determination that is similar to many others across a vast part of the country. “We watched the water rise throughout Friday and Saturday and managed to move around 20 horses from one of the low-lying paddocks. This area is still covered by water and we are yet to see the damage done to fencing and infrastructure; it may be months before the water is finally gone and we can move in to clean up”.

“The floods have ruined our wheat crop which was ready to be harvested and half of our oaten hay which was already cut was covered in water or floated away.”

Leanne feels fortunate that their houses and sheds are on high ground and didn’t go under, but said they feel sad for others in the area that didn’t fare so well.

Martin and Leanne are no strangers to the impact of weather extremes – their main residence in Whittlesea was devastated by the 2009 Black Saturday Victorian Bushfires.

Following the bushfires the Morans relocated their horses to Lombardy, and are fortunate that this time they were able to prevent any harm coming to their beloved equine friends.



*Above - Martin and Leanne lost most of their crops including a wheat crop ready for harvest.*

*Left - The houses and sheds were out of danger but much of the property went under.*





## ROBERT AND LORI MACKAY – Boggabilla, NSW

Robert and Lori Mackay are situated on the MacIntyre River. Their property 'Budleigh' is 10 kilometres from Boggabilla in northern New South Wales, just over the border from Goondiwindi in southern Queensland.

Robert and Lori are used to floods and their property is on the banks of the river. This is flood country and at least once a decade they see a large flood go through the area. This however was one for the record books.

The Goondiwindi region was in an unusual situation, with little local rain contributing to the floodwaters. The residents of the area sat in virtually dry conditions waiting for an unknown force to reach them. There had been a smaller flood in October, but leading up to the January 2011 flood there had been just 30 millimetres of rain in local gauges and the creeks weren't flowing. Upstream was another story however and places like Stanthorpe and Texas received massive falls in a short period of time. Water from the MacIntyre River at Inverell met the flood water in the Dumaresq River, causing what some reported to be a 9 foot wall of water surging towards Goondiwindi. The local councils went into action and Boggabilla and Toomelah were evacuated. In Goondiwindi the prediction was that the flood water could reach a record height and potentially be higher than the 11 meter levee bank that was erected to protect the town after previous floods.

Robert and Lori knew they would be hit hard and had two days to prepare for the water to arrive. It took every bit of those two days to move machinery and livestock. As they prepared for the river to peak, Lori stayed up watching the water rise ever closer to their house and was finally able to go to bed at 3.30am, relieved that the house was spared with the water reaching the steps.



*Top - An aerial view of the Budleigh house, yards & arena's (photo supplied by Lori MacKay).  
Left - Robert MacKay and son Greg rebuilding the arena fence.  
Centre - Looking into the round pen  
Above - A flood damaged fence along the MacIntyre River at Budleigh*



The floodwater went through the sheds and stables and did major damage to their arenas. As a professional cutting horse trainer, those arenas are vital to Robert. The main pen lost virtually all of its sand and one whole side of the arena was demolished. The round yard fared better with more sand remaining, but still required major repairs.

Robert and Lori also grow Lucerne for hay on 'Budleigh', and while they saved their round bales by moving them to higher ground before the water hit, the bottom layer of hay in the shed went under water.

More concerning to Robert was the Lucerne paddocks, some of which were under water for 2 days.

"Luckily for us the Lucerne was quite high and the tops were out of the water so we are watching to see how it fares now that the water is gone," Robert explained.

## **JAMES AND LIZ SPEED – Central Qld**

Liz and James Speed felt the impact of the raging flood waters in central Queensland. The Speed's property 'Goodliffe' is between Springsure and Tambo on the Carnarvon Range. The property itself is at the top of the catchment and didn't suffer the full brunt of the flooding, however James and Liz also have a second home and business in Emerald where the floodwaters inundated 80% of the town.

Fortunately, James and Liz had some warning and were able to make what preparations they could to try and minimise the damage the floodwater might cause. Liz said that they knew a major flood was coming, "I went to go home (to Goodliffe from Emerald) on Christmas Eve and there was a lot of water in all the creeks on the way. On Christmas day it rained and it just didn't stop. One night we had 9 inches of rain. We knew then it wasn't going to be good."

James and Liz didn't lose any cattle or horses but were isolated for 2 weeks and needed a food drop to get them by until roads opened up. Liz was chomping at the bit to get back to Emerald to check on their house and her business, Emerald Photos.

"We had moved a lot of our furniture from the house and had put all the equipment we could up high in the shop in case it flooded." Liz sat stranded at Goodliffe and listened for any news about the extent of the flood in Emerald. As soon as it was possible James and Liz hit the road to Emerald, but it was very slow going with bitumen ripped off and huge potholes slowing them down. The first part of the journey from Goodliffe to Springsure which usually takes one and a half hours was a four hour trip.

When the couple made it to Emerald they found the water had been 1 meter through their house, but more devastating for Liz her shop had gone under and much of her photographic equipment was ruined. "The shop needs to be re-built. It will take about 4 months so I have to find a temporary shop for that time and I have to lease equipment to replace what I lost so we can re-open."

Liz said that at first the damage got her down but now she has a positive attitude and is ready to get on with things. "I have to replace everything anyway and it's made me want to start again and get bigger and better – I can get new equipment and the technology is better so it's a good opportunity to grow the business."

As for their horses, Robert and Lori were able to move them all out of danger. "We had 20 horses tied up around the tennis court for a day and a night." When the flood water receded, the only suitable place to put the horses was in one of the Lucerne paddocks and while Robert says the horses are understandably enjoying the green feed he is keen to get them out.

As if all this wasn't bad enough, Robert's mother Judy passed away while the flood was on and the family began preparations for her funeral while also planning the cleanup operation on 'Budleigh'.

Judy MacKay was a legend in the Dressage community. She was a former A level judge and FEI competitor. She competed overseas on Australian-bred horses that she trained herself at a time when the sport of Dressage was virtually unknown to most Australians.

Judy trained many riders in Australia and overseas and was one of the country's most highly respected trainers and competitors.

Robert and Lori's son Greg helped with the clean up. Their nephew Brett also came from Tamworth and a friend of his came all the way from Sydney to help. Robert said the crew were aiming to work hard for 48 hours and get most of the arena and fences repaired.



*The horses enjoy their temporary home in the lucerne paddock while their pens are repaired.*

## **PROBLEMS THAT CAN ARISE AFTER A FLOOD**

**During a flood if horses aren't moved out the path of the floodwater they can experience a whole range of horrific injuries and health problems.**

**INJURIES** – usually after major flooding vet's will care for horses with a range of injuries. The worst are in horses that are trying to escape floodwaters or those left standing in water and hit by debris. If you haven't had time to move your horses before a flood, be sure to check them as soon as you can when you are out of danger.

**HOOVES AND LAMENESS** - Often following wet and muddy conditions there will be cases of hoof abscesses and seedy toe. Watch for any signs of lameness and contact your vet if you notice anything unusual. Both of these conditions are extremely painful for horses and should be dealt with promptly. Standing in wet and muddy conditions can also cause greasy heel which can be tricky to combat if not treated quickly.

**RAIN SCALD** – After any prolonged rain events rain scald is a threat. This uncomfortable condition results in hair loss and the formation of scabs on the horse's skin and when irritated can become infected.

## **PREPARING YOUR HORSE FOR A FLOOD**

Move horses to high ground or if possible away from the flood-prone area entirely. If you get caught and have little time to prepare, do whatever you can to allow your horses to escape the water. Remove their rugs and if you have to, open up your fences. Keep information on your horses' markings and brands in case you need to track them down after the flood. Remember, it is far better to search for a live horse than a dead one.



## CHRIS AND LINDSAY ROSE – Gundagai NSW

The mighty Murrumbidgee River has been both a blessing and a curse to the town of Gundagai throughout its history. While the River is the source of agricultural prosperity, it has over many years brought floods to the area. In 1952 the residents of Gundagai were hit in the night by a massive wall of water which decimated the town and carried entire houses away. This is still on record as the worst flood disaster in Australia's recorded history. Following the 1952 flood the town was literally picked up and moved to higher ground.

For Chris and Lindsay Rose their property and lives weren't in jeopardy from the approaching flood waters, but their wedding plans were thrown into chaos. The couple were due to marry right about the time the floodwaters were peaking in Gundagai.

Not only were Chris and Lindsay helping friends move horses and cattle to high ground, they were making contingency plans to ensure their nuptials would go ahead. The few days before a wedding are stressful enough in normal circumstances; for Lindsay her nerves would be tested as she systematically ruled out venues in the days leading up to the wedding. "We planned to have the wedding on the River, but decided for safety to move to a higher location – destination number 3 was the Park and we settled on that as the venue at 3.30 on Friday afternoon. It was stressful but we decided not to let it get to us, and to just get on with it."

The wedding on Saturday went off smoothly despite the difficulties. In homage to Lindsay's love of horses (she is a keen rodeo competitor), the couple arrived on a horse-drawn cart, albeit with a route change as the trip over the bridge was no longer a viable option.

Fortunately most of the guests were locals and the couple didn't have to deal with transporting people across flooding roads. Many of the guests had to wade to their motel rooms with the car park going under and the water getting perilously close to their rooms.

The town of Gundagai experienced significant damage with the lowest areas going under water. The Racecourse and Rodeo Grounds took a beating and repairs are estimated at around \$100,000.

The great 1950's project to move the town to higher ground paid off for the 2011 residents of Gundagai, with most houses out of reach of the floodwaters.

Lindsay was relieved that Gundagai wasn't isolated by the floodwater and that she and Chris were still able to make it to their honeymoon. "We were glad to get away – it had all been so hectic and stressful, we needed the week to relax."

Chris and Lindsay have photos that will ensure their unique wedding day is remembered. The happy couple are pictured overlooking the floodwaters in what is normally a park, but on this day resembled a Lake.



*Chris and Lindsay with their wedding party. The couple had to change venue's twice due to the flood waters and were finally married in the park overlooking the rising floodwaters. (photos by Bill Bell).*

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