

# Fords and Flying Machines

This is an extract from Jack McLaren's diary.

Fords and Flying machines: The diary of Jack McLaren focuses on the experiences of 14 year old Jack McLaren, who dreams of being a mechanic. Jack finds himself travelling along the Gulf Track from Longreach, Queensland to Katherine, Northern Territory in the first automobile ever to make this journey.

The text tries to capture a sense of place and time as we read about Jack's adventures.

31 August 1919 — The Burketown dance

5 What an exciting day yesterday was — too exciting for me to sit down and write until now. First there was Curly, the self-appointed town crier, ringing his bell and shouting through his ginger beard about all that was to take place, and that there are fresh oranges for sale at a tuppence an orange.

10 People began getting ready for the festivities first thing in the morning. Men took baths in galvanised bath tubs, set up close enough to the river to make filling them easy, but not close enough to be eaten by a stray croc. Others, braces down and shirts off, had their hair and moustaches trimmed by their mates or wives.

15 Boys groomed their goats and spit-and-polished their carts. Children ran wild everywhere, shrieking and screaming. They dragged their soapbox carts behind them, even though Burketown is as flat as an ironing table.

20 Here is a list of the activities that took place: At 2 pm a baby weight-guessing competition. At 2.30 pm a boys' wrestling competition. At 3 pm a goat cart derby. At 3.30 pm the tricycle and bicycle races. At 4 pm a girls-only skipping race. At 4.30 pm a regatta on the river. At 5 pm a boxing match in the middle of the main street. At 7 pm a dance.

25 The billygoat cart races were bonzer fun. I got to participate because a boy I wrestled and beat declared me to be his best mate. I am ashamed to say our little cart, pulled by one billygoat, was beaten by a cart carrying two women, pulled by three nanny-goats. But only because our left wheel fell off and we were tipped into the dust. George  
30 said I was lucky not to land face down in goat poo, as there was plenty of it around.

35 To get ready for the dance, I polished my shoes, for what it is worth in this dusty place. My shirt was unironed but clean, and my best trousers had been pressed under a board all day. I slicked down my hair so it would not curl and so it would look darker.

40 The dance was held in a ramshackle hall attached to the hotel. The entire town came, as well as a mob of gold and copper miners, some drovers, some prosperous-looking cattle agents, and the local graziers with their families, who are very lah-di-dah.

45 Everyone was wearing their best clothes. The men wore shirts (with detachable collars), ties, jackets and wide-brimmed hats that they took off as soon as they entered the hall. Most of the boys wore trousers or knickerbockers with lace-up boots.

50 The women's and girls' fashions were more sensible for the heat. They all wore bought-from-catalogue white cotton dresses with hip sashes, black stockings and buttoned-over "Nancy" shoes or lace-up boots.

Four young women refused to let me sit idly by tapping my toes. One by one they pulled me onto the dance floor. I danced every dance after that.



© The State of Queensland (QSA) 2012 Please read our copyright notice <[www.qsa.qld.edu.au/copyright.html](http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/copyright.html)>.

**Queensland Studies Authority** PO Box 307 Spring Hill Qld 4004

Phone: (07) 3864 0299 Fax: (07) 3221 2533 Email: [office@qsa.qld.edu.au](mailto:office@qsa.qld.edu.au) Website: [www.qsa.qld.edu.au](http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au)

**Texts** From *Fords and Flying Machines: The Diary of Jack McLaren* by Patricia Bernard, 2003. Reproduced by permission of Scholastic Press, an imprint of Scholastic Australia Pty Limited.

**Images** Vintage car: StateLibQld\_1\_68771\_Boy\_sitting\_on\_the\_bonnet\_of\_a\_car\_bogged\_in\_mud\_from\_the\_1925\_flood\_at\_Innisfail,\_Queensland.jpg, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.5 license; Biplane: Corel Pty Ltd, Sydney, Australia.  
All other images © QSA.