

Victoria High Country (14th – 29th March 2015)

It has been eight years since our club has had a high country trip and nine years since some of this group has been up there together with also Marie Carter (RIP). There was a meeting and meal a few weeks prior to this year's trip. Most wanted to take their off road camper and a few participants had to drop out, Roy and Bronwyn were still unsure because of a sickness in the family. (Thanks to Sandra and Wayne for their hospitality)

Saturday 14th of March, Daryl and Joan, Norma and Bronte, and Wayne with Sandra, met up with Martin and me at the Gawler visitors centre to try on some new magnetic signs and take them for a ride. We headed east on Trial Hill Road and Pine Hut roads to morning tea before the ferry at Swan Reach. Continuing east on the Old Loxton Road to Meribah, we crossed the Murray Sunset National Park to Hattah along the Pheenys track, lunching at one of the camping areas along the way.

Reaching the Hattah national park headquarter we thought we may stay at the lakes, but the signage said campsites had to be booked and paid (\$35) in advance over the internet, so we went on looking further on for a campsite up to the Murray river along the river side track.

The next day a few more kms needed covering so it was all bitumen to Jamison for a couple of nights in the caravan park. A lovely area but invaded by European wasps, and the trees dripping excrement from aphids or acorns so extra care was needed to find a decent camp selection. Later on that night Roy caught up with us with news that Bronwyn will be joining us later by train and bus.

Monday was a full day on the high country tracks. Firstly, we drove to the top of Mount Terrible, where there is a fire lookout tower being fitted out with solar panels. There was a bit of smoke in the area and after talking to the tower attendant we found out that the back roads to the next campsite, and following on tracks were closed due to a controlled burn. Continuing on along the Mount Terrible track, there were options to go over the ridges or take the alternative bulldozed tracks around. One of the ridges only taken by Roy and Wayne turned out to be rather tricky and ended with an unsavoury name. Following on we reached the Moonlight Spur track which goes down to the Woods Point Rd. After lunch the track built for the power lines called the Flour Bag Track, took us back toward Jamison, completing the Journey on Slappers track.

Tuesday a revised route took us along the bitumen to Mansfield, which then gave us a chance to stock up on extra goodies. Bronte's CB was playing up so he bought a new one and also got new auxiliary batteries. I went to the DSE office to find out which tracks were open and closed. A new camp site was chosen on the Howqua River near Bindaree Road, so after dropping the campers off, the 4WDS were taken up to Craigs Hut via the Monument track and the obligatory photos of the hut taken and the man from Snowy river poem read. I had memories of bringing our horses up there 11 or 12 years ago before the hut was burnt down in the fires and rebuilt.

When around the campfire that night there were dozens of Timbertop students filing into an adjacent camp in the dark. We thought we would not get to the loo in the morning, but they packed up camp and hiked out again before dawn, by the light of their head light torches. I think it was that afternoon Bronte's car was engulfed with smoke which turned out to be the cables to his solar panel shorting out and had to be hurriedly disconnected from the batteries. Small drama to keep people on their toes.



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Wednesday was heading up some 4WD tracks towing the campers, the only way through to Dargo without going hundreds of kms around on the bitumen. On the way up to Bluff Hut one of Roy's tyres was a victim of the rocks up there. Stopped at Bluff Hut and Lovicks Hut and continued on up to King Billy. The track got a bit uneven, so with some wheels off the ground Daryl's Jackaroo had to have a little extra help to tow the van up the steepest section. By the time we made it to Howitt High Plains it was a bit late in the day to make it to Dargo, and there was a nice camping spot (with toilets) at the Howitt Rd carpark. Fire wood was collected and tents and campers erected in time for happy hour.

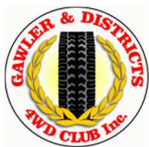
Thursday morning Norma said they needed to consult the medical profession, so after morning tea at Arbuckle Junction Norma and Bronte headed south and we headed east, to try and find our way through to the Dargo hotel and meet up with Norma and Bronte later. Maps and GPS had different names and I took the wrong road first up, but finally managed to find Castle Hill track, McDonalds Gap track and our way to Dargo road.

We met a woman at the hotel with horses, waiting for her daughter whose car had to be recovered from Wanangatta Valley as their backup driver abandoned it. The wheel was making a dreadful racket which, turned out to be only a stick jammed in the wheel. We met her again with the daughter later in the Omeo caravan park.

After a shower and meal at the pub and a good sleep behind the pub, we headed to the Grant historic area and dropped the gear off in the Talbotville camping area. Then we headed off on the 4WD tracks across to Billy Goat bluff track which was in good nick. Had a walk to the Pinnacles Fire lookout, on a clear day you can see to the sea, lunch and back down Billy Goat bluff track. This time we headed to Eaglevale to cross the Wanangatta river and back to Talbotville to set up camp before happy hour.

Saturday was the highlight of the trip the "Iconic" Blue Range track. This track has tough 4W driving and long ridge top runs, with the best views in the high country including Mount Hotham.

To get there we took the run up the South Basalt Knob track which has a steep rocky climb up to the helipad and is probably the toughest climb that is navigable by an unmodified 4WD (Not a tuff truck). Reaching the Blue Rag we soon arrived at the trig point look out. Because this is such a good track we saw plenty of other groups of vehicles. Some of them only go as far as the trig point as further on it has some steep and rocky sections (not for the faint hearted). We on the other hand travelled all the way to the Wangangarra river at the end. Lunch was had at the camping area before heading back this time passing the entry we came in on and travelled all the way to the Dargo High Plains road. On the way down one hill a young driver's car kissed the rear of Bronte's car passing a bit close. On the way down the High Plains Road we stopped and picked up a ute load of fire wood for the following 2 nights. Some went back to Dargo for fuel and supplies, others headed back to camp for well-earned drink and nibbles. Camp oven pizza was on my menu so coals were needed. Others had BBQ over coals.



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Sunday was our day of rest, and time Roy picked up Bronwyn from her bus and train trip. So after breakfast Roy headed off to return in the afternoon with our last trip member. I had a hankering to go along the Crooked River track (24 creek crossing from memory) and then up the Bulltown Spur track (saw this on maps for years and finally had time to travel it) No one else was interested in coming but one more off the bucket list.

Monday morning, we headed off to Omeo for a couple of nights calling in at Dogs Grave on the way. Trying a short cut, the track got a bit steep for the campers so a bit of reversing and backtracking was required. After a meal at the pub and sleep we set off to see the Washington Winch in the fog. The winch was imported to WA from the US then later to Victoria to drag logs out of the valley to the logging road. It was powered by a steam engine. We then went on to visit Moscow Hut, so named as it was finished on the day of the fall of Moscow. It is a well finished house rather than a hut.

Wednesday we did a lot of kms deciding not to do the Davies Plains track but travelling all the way down the Limestone Road to the Barry Way going through Suggin Buggin, Jindabyne and Thredbow to Tom Groggin camping ground. While everyone was setting up camp I checked out the Murray River crossing which was OK, so on Thursday we were able to cross over back into Victoria to head up Mt Pinnaba.

About 3km from the summit I got a call on the CB there were some problems on a tricky section, so I returned. As there was low cloud it seemed pointless really to bust ourselves getting everyone up but Bronte wanted to go on. So he went up on his own. Bronte rejoined us about an hour later and we returned to camp for lunch and packing up to go on and find a campsite nearer to Corryong. A nice fire by the Murray river (about 15 feet wide).

In the morning Corryong was explored. After the visitor's centre, the Man from Snowy River Museum was on the agenda, but first a trip to the bakery (museum wasn't open yet) and after the museum a trip to the cemetery to look at Jack Riley's grave. Jack was visited by Banjo Patterson at Tom Groggin, and common belief is that the Man from Snowy River poem was inspired by Jack an expert horseman. After Corryong we blacktopped it to Echucha but because of the start of school holidays, we had to ring around to find space in a caravan park.

The second to last day was a cruise to Lake Albacucha in Wyperfeld National park. Well it's called a lake but alas no water even though there is a concrete boat ramp. Flat ground, trees and firewood so a good last night was had around the campfire after I think one of our two communal stews.

Now to the last day. We were going to have to lock the hubs in again and let the tyres down as well. Heading towards the Murrayville track, we made our way to the sandy Chinaman's Well track. Running through private property we got to a gate at the start of the Big Desert. Stopping at the gate I alerted the following cars that the track was getting soft and we will have to let tyres down and move the little gear stick. Must have been a bit late as reports came back from towing vehicles that they were bogged.



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After adjustments everyone got going again. Onward to the well. Apparently the Chinese walked across from the SA coast to the Victorian goldfields to avoid the Victorian landing tax. The sand started getting softer with low dunes. Easy stuff with a vehicle alone but not towing a trailer, so out came the snatch strap.

After multiple recoveries time flew by so we didn't make the Marayville track and had lunch well into the afternoon. Pumping up tyres and unlocking hubs we were ready for the run home. When we got to Tailern bend we stopped and said some goodbyes as Wayne, Sandra, Roy and Bronwyn were going to have some dinner while the rest of us headed for Gawler, before splitting up and saying farewell over the radio. An end to an excellent trip in beautiful countryside.

Thank you Daryl and Joan for the post trip BBQ get together and sharing of photos.

Thanks for the company of all participants.

[Martin Kisbee]