

VICTORIAN - HIGH COUNTRY

TRIP REPORT 2004

Day 1 (13/11/04)

Due to other desires we were delayed and departed Taillem Bend at 1020, there were 7 vehicles and 13 people heading for Mt Gambier. The tour group included Mal Swalling & Lee Caldwell, Ken & Anne Trebilcock, Evelyn & Ron Pitt, Leith Holder, Barry & Kay Speck, Dennis & Ros Connor & Robyn & Garry Worrall.

On arrival it was tents up before the rain set in and followed by a very comfortable evening in a well appointed camp kitchen.

Day 2

Up and away by 0900, heading for Peterborough (Vic) stopping for lunch at Pt Fairy. We continued on to Peterborough via several coastal stop overs including Bay of Islands, Bay of Martyr's and Worm Bay. It was then we discovered the origin of the Bay of Islands. It appears that Techno, as a toddler, dug a hole with his plastic spade which over the years has expanded. We are all a little worried about where else he may have dug holes.

The appropriateness of wind farms along the Victorian coast became apparent when we were putting up our tents.

Day 3

Able lead by our tour guide for the day Leith, we headed out to view the scenic spots along the Great Ocean Road from Peterborough to The Twelve (10) Apostles.

Some of the spectacular spots visited were The Grotto, London Bridge, Pt Campbell (for lunch), Island Arch, Loch Ard Gorge, The Blow Hole, Thunder Cave and ending at the Twelve Apostles. Returning to Peterborough we found we had been joined by Dennis and Carole Vincent.

Day 4

Departed Peterborough early along the Great Ocean Road and headed for the Otway Point Lighthouse. Getting a small glimpse of the scenery we were to experience more later. The light house complex was very interesting with several annexes including a telegraph station, weather station, WW2 radar bunkers and keepers cottages. Most of our group climbed to the top of the lighthouse and were rewarded with spectacular coastal views and the Great Southern Ocean.

We headed for the Otway Fly, a series of elevated suspension walkways, which took us above and over the rain forest reaching a height of 47m. Species included huge Mountain Ash, Beech Myrtle and enormous soft tree ferns. Too beautiful to describe we took many photos to remember the experience.

Travelling to Anglesea via Apollo Bay along the most beautiful section of the Great Ocean Road was slow, but most rewarding. We were joined there by Ken and Helen Robinson.

Day 5

Heading for Eildon via Melbourne was always going to be tricky but we were very ably led in two groups by Ken R and Mal without getting lost once!! Well done guys and well done followers it was a great effort. The two groups joined again for lunch at Yea and then proceeded to Eildon arriving at about 1430. Paul and Linda Stein joined us at Eildon.

Day 6

The morning was spent as free time giving the group a chance to wash, read, relax or do what ever they needed to do. At 1300 we departed on a drive through the Eildon National Park led by Ken and Helen. We drove to Mt Piniger Lookout with views of Lake Eildon and were enlightened as to the enormity of it complete with many houseboats. Then we proceeded to an altitude of over 900m to Rocky Point once again with spectacular views down to Lake Eildon. The decent down was of some excitement being extremely steep and some what rough and rocky. This caused some concern in the lead vehicle to the extent that Helen swore!!

Once at the bottom we appeared a little bit (just a little bit) lost. But Barry saved the day with his superior skills with the GPS and ably led us back to camp. All agreed it was a worthwhile & rewarding afternoon of driving.

When we returned to camp we were joined by Richard (Blackjack) and Wendy (Black Jackette) Wheeler and Tony Porter. Birthday celebrations were held this evening for both Helen and Wendy. Happy 39th Girls!

One of the pleasures of Eildon were the native birds in abundance including Sulphur Crested, Wattle Birds & Rosella's that ate from our hands...magic.

Day 7

A 0930 departure saw us heading for our next night stop at Mansfield. Stopping at the Snob's Creek Waterfall proved to be a rewarding experience. From there we travelled through Eildon National Park with wonderful views over the valleys to the extremes of Lake Eildon. Arriving at Jamieson we stopped for a lunch break in this pretty but small town. We then travelled the 40km to Mansfield which is our base for the next 3 days. Here we were joined by Colin and Sue.

Day 8

At what was now becoming the standard departure time of 0930 led by Ken and Helen we headed out of Mansfield for a day trip into the Howqua Hills. Stopping at Sheep Yard Flat, several of the group went on a 4km bush walk for about 1.25hrs to view Fry's Hut, while others went fishing (or at least tried to) and the remainder just relaxed and enjoyed the views. After lunch we proceeded onto a 4wd track, Three Chain Track in the Mansfield National Park. This track proved to be very challenging and took us up to 950m altitude. On the return loop of the circular track the lead vehicle became bogged which required some road building with any dead wood we could find to fill the bog. Proving to be a longer track than we had anticipated it turned in to a full but, fun & rewarding day.

Day 9

Based at Mansfield the group had a relaxed day with a variety of activities being undertaken, including a visit to Kelly's Tree & Cemetery, a food & wine festival at Whitfield and a trip to the summit of Mt Buller and others fished (we still haven't been fed any fish).

Day 10

A 0930 start saw us heading for the Alpine National Park via Mt Stirling. This trip was awesome the scenery breathtaking and the tracks a challenge.

First point of interest was King Hut on the banks of the King River which by then we had crossed 3 times. We then proceeded to our lunch stop at Lake Cobbler and Dandongadale Falls. Back on the track was proving to be something of a challenge especially a section aptly named "The Staircase". The track became much better after that point & we reached our over night camp at a very lovely spot called Upper Howqua Camp on the banks of the Howqua River.

This was a very full day and took in gorgeous views, challenging tracks and included about seven water crossings.

Day 11

A brave group of 4 vehicles set out at 0800 for Craigs Hut, which proved to be another interesting and challenging 4x4 track. The end result giving 360 degrees panoramic views of as far as the eye could see across the mountains. Craigs Hut which was used for the filming of the Man From Snowy River movies was truly well located.

On the return trip we visited Bindaree Falls which you can stand under the water flow at the bottom.

Return to base camp and everyone was ready to negotiate the days travel to the Wonnangatta Valley. Travel was slow over mainly 4x4 tracks consisting of rock ledges creek and river crossings and posed a challenge for most drivers. We travelled via Bindaree Hut, Pikes Flat, Bluff Hut and Lovick's Hut where we stopped for lunch after being advised by the ranger that the track we intended to take was closed. This meant at least an extra two hours travel to our destination.

Soldiering on as any good VOR travellers (most trained by our intrepid Grumpy) would, we were now aware this was going to be a very long day. By this time tempers were becoming a little frayed and our main aim was being in camp before dark, the lead vehicle arriving at the Wonnangatta Station camping ground at about 1850hrs. It was a lovely spot in the valley surrounded by the Wonnangatta River, Conglomerate Creek, mountains and studded with huge tall gum trees, a real treat.

After 2 very full and long days the leaders gave the group the option to stay here two nights instead of the scheduled one and it was a 100% decision to do that.

It has become apparent that it is very hard to calculate a time for distance and ETA in this area due to the unknown track conditions and the speed at which individuals are confident in travelling.

A very rewarding day full of fabulous views and lots of 4x4 driving to test us all.

Day 12

Most of us woke up later than normal and spent the day recovering from yesterday. A bathroom was erected for anyone wanting a shower or sponge bath, but nobody told Leith who chose to bathe and wash clothes in Conglomerate Creek. Around the campfire that evening frustrations were vented regarding the previous day and we retired to our tents for an early night.

Day 13

A nine a.m. start saw the group move out toward Dargo. Our first challenge was to cross the Wonnangatta, but as the river was not very deep, the challenge was not great. However the next three water crossings of Humfray River proved to be more fun. Soon after that we climbed Wombat Spur, a long steep climb that tested some of our newer drivers as well as the more experienced.

Soon after reaching the top we descended a fairly steep spur that took us to Eaglevale. There we crossed the Wonnangatta again which was deeper and wider than before, and proceeded to Smith's Hut. This has been restored to original condition and furnished accordingly and was well worth the trip.

Returning to Eaglevale, we stopped by the river for lunch and then continued along the valley to Dargo. The scenes were breathtaking as the road followed the river but about 100 metres above for much of the trip.

Day 14

Today was a lay day in which washing was done some cars washed, some sight seeing. The evening was spent in the Dargo Hotel for dinner attended by all. Dinner was proceeded by the launching of the Heckarewe anthem sung by the very talented!!!! VOR Choir.

Day 15

We headed for Omeo via "Dogs Grave" a very impressive monument to a man's best friend which touched the hearts of the dog lovers among us. About 15km into the trip the Nissan Patrol with us encountered some mechanical difficulties. This caused the convoy to split. The main group continued on and one vehicle returning with the Nissan owner to Dargo while another stayed with the broken down Nissan.

The second convoy arrived about 1 hour later to inform us that once the Nissan was repaired it then received a staked tyre which was subsequently changed. Not a good day for the Nissan.

Day 16

A 1030 departure saw us heading for Mt Hotham a fairly steep ascent with breathtaking views over the mountains some of which were still capped with snow. Passing through Mt Hotham Resort we came across a patch of snow close to the road and a compulsory stop saw most of our group playing in the snow and hurling snow balls at each other. Our imaginative leader then produced a small tarpaulin which was used by several as a toboggan which created some fun and hilarity. One of our "ladies" coming off very unceremoniously with legs in the air.

Onward then, to the very pretty little town of Harrietville, where we stopped in a lovely park along the river, for lunch. Lunch over we headed up Mt Hotham again to return to Omeo via Victoria Falls. On the way back Ros suggested we stop and take some snow back to Ann, Ken, Barry, Kay, Dennis & Carol because they didn't go with us. A large amount of snow was collected in esky's etc. On return to camp a snowman about 60cm high was built complete with beanie & scarf. The group who didn't take the trip were delighted and there was enough snow left over for snow ball fights.

A very enjoyable scenic & fun filled day was had by all, although many are getting very weary.

Day 17

A rest day for most with shopping washing etc happening. Some took a short drive into the Berambra area whilst another group went into the gold mining area panning for gold. At the end of the day we were all rested and stocked up for the next few days.

Day 18

We headed for Dartmouth, via Mitta Mitta, stopping briefly at "the Blue Duck" hotel, and a fruit fly check point where most of us decided to have a large fruity morning tea.

Further up the road we came upon a vehicle that had rolled over and needed a hand to change a tyre. We checked out the car and the driver, and sent him on his way back to Omeo.

Lunch time was spent on the banks of the Mitta Mitta River at Mitta Mitta. As we were expecting to spend the next four days away from supplies we all topped up our fuel tanks there, and drove onto Dartmouth. We were welcomed at the caravan park like lost brothers, as the park has three Vietnam Veteran permanent lodgers. The proprietor sent a slab of beer across for us all to enjoy at happy hour and beyond, and insisted that our flag fly on the parks flag pole.

Most of us had the opportunity to inspect the Dartmouth Dam and its hydro power house, the bane of SA politics in the early 70's.

Day 20

An early start of 0830 hrs was required to ensure the tracks and water crossing planned for the day were completed in good time. As we left Dartmouth it began to rain and by the time we were about 7 kms down the track to Taylor's Crossing the rain had become heavy and was affecting the track. That and a five foot diameter fallen tree across the track made it impossible to continue.

Turning around on a narrow slippery track proved how important Grumpies training had been. The 7 kms back to the bitumen was becoming increasingly slippery and caused us all to crawl along, sometimes sideways leaving plenty of space between vehicles. The rain had increased which was affecting the track even more for the last vehicles out.

Drama over, without injury to vehicles or drivers, we met back at Dartmouth. It was then that all the passengers needed to pop a few sedatives swallowed with a schooner or two of brandy.

Having relaxed some made the decision to return to Adelaide as we had to reroute the rest of the trip off of the 4WD tracks we had intended to take. They included Paul and Linda, Denis and Carole and Colin. The remainder decided to press on to Khancoban, and spend the night in cabins and review the trip from there.

On arrival the rain had ceased, but we all decided to stay in luxury anyway, except for Gary and Robyn who left us to continue on to Jindabyne by themselves. We were then down to eight cars and 15 people.

That night at happy hour we decided our new route which took into account all of the original planned destinations accessible by bitumen. The debrief for the day was considered, but also a lot of fun. We all agreed that it had been a great day.

Day 21

Onward and upward we drove to Jindabyne via Cabramurra which is the highest town in Australia (not Nimbin as suggested by Ron).

We stopped for lunch on the banks of Lake Eucumbene then drove on to Jindabyne where some restocked, refuelled etc. We then proceeded into the Kosciusko Alpine Retreat in Kosciusko National Park where we were spending the next three nights. This was a top location with nice grassed sights and towering gum trees.

The evening entertainment was the possums which ventured down to the ground. One mother with baby on board even allowed Leith to hand feed it although biting him for his efforts.

Day 22

Mixed activities including six of our more fit and eager members i.e. Ken R, Helen, Richard, Ron, Evelyn and Mal driving to Charlottes Pass and taking the 18 km round trip walk to the top of Mt Kosciusko. They started out at 0845 and phoned us from the top at 1130. Returning to camp 1730 having taken the long track back at total of 22 km round trip. They were all tired & leg weary but very pleased with themselves on having achieved their goal.

Others drove to various localities in the area including Cooma & Thredbo to take a chair lift ride to the base of Mt Kosciusko & sip cappuccinos in the café at the lookout.

Day 23

Barry spent last night fighting with the possums that apparently were invading his space and being very vocal about it. Another free day where each did their own thing. Dennis & Ros departed to return home from here.

Day 24

Leaving at 0900 we now headed for our next over night stop at Tom Groggin travelling along the Alpine Way via Thredbo where we stopped for two hours so those who wanted could take the chairlift up to Eaglesnest for a coffee.

There was a River Murray crossing at Tom Groggin just begging for us to give it a go. So we did, but as it wasn't the way we were going anyway we all did a u turn and did it all again (what fun).

We then decided to proceed to the next bush camp locality for our over night stay at Geehi, a lovely spot on the banks of the Swampy Plain River.

This being the last night we would all be together Helen provided party whistles which must have had the local duck population worried, sparklers and toasted marshmallows. Much merriment was had by all and of course a rendition of the previously newly launched "Heckarewe Anthem" was sung with gusto.

Day 25

An 0830 departure saw us heading for Tallangatta for lunch after which Ken and Anne, Richard and Wendy departed to head home in other directions. Barry and Kay left us at Benalla heading for Melbourne to pick up their dog from the dog sitter.

There were only four cars left by now (hope it wasn't something we said) stopping over night at Shepparton with rain, thunder and lightening. Not at all the type of weather we had become accustomed to. The caravan managers must have felt sorry for us because they kindly allowed us to use one of the cabins to sit in to chat and cook our evening meal.

Day 26 (7/12/04)

A 0800 departure heading for an over night stay at Nhill but because we were making very good time it was decided we would make a dash for home. We stopped for lunch at Nhill and then again at Taillem Bend where it all started, to say our farewells to those who were left, Ken & Helen, Ron & Evelyn, Leith, Mal & Lee.

Conclusion

There were thousands of photos taken which will be great to help jog memories but they cant replace the reality of what we experienced over the past 26 days. Mind blowing scenery along with challenging 4x4 tracks and the company of great friends all contributed to this being an amazing trip we will all remember and talk about for a long time.

Lee Caldwell