

Trip Report

Murray Sunset National Park, September 7 – 11, 2016

On a sunny Wednesday we (new club members Meg and Ted Templer) met Chris Van Sleeuwen at the club room car park to make the 380 km trip to Murray Sunset National Park in Northwest Victoria. Pat and Frank Austin were making their own way up and would meet us in camp at Lake Crosbie adjacent the Pink Lakes area of the park.

An uneventful trip saw us at the lakeside campsite early afternoon with tent and camper quickly erected. Our new camper trailer and annex took a little extra time but no murder was threatened so all was satisfactory. A quick check of the area revealed several clean and spacious camping bays complete with fire rings, some already occupied with a variety of caravans, camper trailers, tents and mobile homes. A view of the pinkish, saline lake surrounded by lush green hills and clumps of saltbush made a peaceful and scenic place to stay.

Ted's Jeep Grand Cherokee was waiting its first off road experience so trip leader Chris suggested an afternoon scout of the nearby lake tracks. A short distance along the gravel entry road we stopped at a memorial display to the salt mining excavations of the late 1800's. The lakes salt harvesting was big business for the area, supporting local workers and Afghan labourers. In caustic and extreme conditions, the miners removed mountains of salt, crystalline mounds still on display near the information boards.

We left the main road, turning onto a series of tracks leading around the lakes. Hmmm when you think you've seen the same clumps of trees twice you probably have! And therefore missed a turnoff and drat! it must be nearly wine o'clock so back to camp we went to build a fire, open a red or two, get out the nibbles and chat long into the night.

After a windy night, Thursday dawned clear and sunny. As we were all up with the sun, team leader Chris suggested we get away early on a day's 4 wheel driving through the Northern section of the park, the Murray Sunset trail. Eight and a half hours later after 340 km's of varied driving over soft and abrupt sand dunes (boy! can Frank's Triton bounce), clay tracks, deep sand ruts/corrugations, gravel and the odd muddy hole, we had had an exhilarating (if not from the passengers slightly anxious point of view) day. Chris's words re tyre pressures, speed, unknown surfaces and the need to tackle difficult/extreme conditions if you don't really have to made a lot more sense. Happily the Jeep made it through with aplomb, leaving us more than satisfied with its capabilities. We also learned that a driver's reliance on laptop maps when negotiating lengthy runs of corrugations leads to intermittent unplugging and loss of correct directions. Sorry Chris, only a couple of boo boo's!

With rain and possible thunderstorms threatening, we made our way back to camp for tea, wine and fireside conversation. We found 30 year old jarrah fence posts make great coals and long handled shovels have other uses than digging out vehicles. Chris wowed us all by placing little mounds of coals under fireside seats, warm bums had by all! Later in the night the threatened rain arrived making the intended run through the southern part of the park on Friday unsafe, so a trip to Ouyen to partake in a coffee and the bakery's famous vanilla slice seemed a good alternative. Driving through a sea of green crops indicated the farmers in the area are looking to a bumper season.

The afternoon was spent talking all things 4 wheel driving and camping, Frank most adamant that everyone should experience the great outdoors and see all this country has to offer. He and Pat have certainly made an effort, it made us quite determined to go see for ourselves.

So, to sum up our first experience with SE4WD club, we learned about bum warmers, getting camper trailers up and down, that Jeeps(withstanding a reputation as Toorak tractors) can ably manage 4WD situations, laptops work better minus lots of bumps and good company is the best thing to take when you go camping.

Meg and Ted Templer