

Otway's Trip Report: Saturday 22nd February – Sunday 1st March 2020.

Trip Leader: Steve

Trip Report: Mel

The original trip to the Victorian High Country had to be changed due to the bushfires, and was changed to the Otway ranges in Victoria.

Plans were made, trips detailed – camping was to be at Stevensons Falls a free bush camp in the middle of the Otways. Plans were made day trips organised, track closures checked, campsite at Stevenson's falls earmarked as our base. That lasted till halfway to our first stop when I received a phone call from Geoff from the Geelong 4WD Club. I told Geoff we were on our way to Stevenson's Fall – to which he replied "I wouldn't stay there if I were you, that's where all the young blokes go for the weekend, and there is very little room and not designed for Camper Trailers". Geoff advised that Dandos is a much better campground and he also advised of some other tracks that have been closed. As tracks in the Otways are controlled by National Parks, Forestry, Private plantations and State parks, access was never going to be simple.

So plans would need to be changed before we even got there!!

Day 1: Saturday 22nd Feb. Steve, Mel, Chris & Judy met at Judy's at 7.15am and headed to Wannon Falls for our first night. The drive took us through Bordertown, Frances, Edenhope and down to Camperdown where we met up with Ian & Vanessa who had left on Friday and stayed at Naracoorte for the night. Wannon Falls was a lovely overnight campground with easy walks to the falls and long drop toilets. The campground was 1.3km's off the Glenelg Highway but was a lovely quiet spot for the night.

Day 2: Sunday 23rd Feb. Heading to Otways. First stop was another waterfall on the other side of the Glenelg Highway. We nearly missed it but Vanessa spotted the sign so a quick U turn and off to Nigretta Falls. Lovely waterfall that could be viewed from two observation decks at the top of the falls or for the brave amongst us (Vanessa & Judy) a significant set of stairs down to the bottom of the falls. Lots of lovely photos and we were back on our way. Next stop was Hamilton for fuel and then we made our way to Colac visitor centre to get any up to date information before heading to the campground. The visitor information centre advised that even if we still wanted to go to Stevensons Falls it was closed for the week. Once we had information, supplies and fuel we headed to Dandos Campground. Dandos is a beautiful campground with lots of space and a small river running around the edge of the grounds. We easily found a good spot for the three tents and one camper with a designated fire pit and lots of grass and shade. Scones for dessert – were great. Chris tried his luck at fishing in the river but to no avail.

Day 3: Monday 24th Feb. Each night and morning we had a quick trip meeting to establish what area we would be looking at for the day. Even though I had a detailed itinerary it was always meant to be 'fluid'. The first area we agreed on was north of Apollo Bay taking in as much of the scenery as possible and hopefully some good tracks. From camp we headed down towards Apollo Bay stopping at Beauchamp Falls – the walk there would take too long so we headed to Hopetoun Falls and Triplet

Falls. Again some beautiful scenery and lots of steps. From there we went into Apollo Bay where a Bakery was found and Chris tried out the jam doughnuts. The information centre advised we could have showers at the Apollo Bay caravan park for a \$6 fee. Once we had showered we then headed to Shelley Beach picnic area and then wound our way back to camp via Lavers Hill. Campfire and scones were again the order of the night.

Day 4: Tuesday 25th Feb: Today we headed toward Anglesea and the North East section of the Otways via a few tracks. Couple of good tracks for the day and as we had been in the area for a few days we considered ourselves as locals so when the sign said No Through Road, Local Traffic only, we knew that meant us. The track showed on the map as being a through track and it was – I think they wanted to keep this gem of a track to themselves. We headed down the track and came across a rather large fallen tree across the track but we all managed to get around the obstacle. From there we went to Erskine Falls then into and out of Lorne. Another great track was Gentle Annie Track which took us down to Moggs Creek, where we did a few laps looking for the picnic ground. Luckily Vanessa has eagle eyes and spotted the right road. We did give the Stop/Go man a laugh as we went past him then had to do a U-turn and come back past him again. From there we headed back to camp via Denham's track with our Tour Guide Judy in the lead. Judy pointed out every type of flora to be seen and made sure we knew about every obstacle both large and small on the track. We wound our way back to camp for another campfire and scones.

Day 5: Wednesday 26th Feb. Cape Otway lighthouse was on the Agenda for today. Another trip into Apollo Bay for showers then onto the lighthouse for a good look around. Each day we tried to go a different way both there and back and today was no exception. We found an interesting track to go back on which saw one of the Toyota's 'parked'. The track had fairly deep ruts with some nice mud to ensure the Prado just wouldn't quite make it through. Quick recovery and we carried on down a track that had seen very little traffic for some time. A few steep descents with a nice covering of leaf matter made for some slippery conditions. Of course, what goes down has to come back up and the up hill was just as fun. We then came along a forestry track where we spotted an echidna on the side of the road. Back to camp for a roaring fire and a new treat was cooked by Vanessa – pigs in blankets. We decided to have the club supplied nibbles so the pigs in blankets was the perfect accompaniment.

Day 6: Thursday 27th Feb. We explored the North West area of the Otways – again looking for as many tracks as we could find. We wound our way through some lovely forests and came across one area where we had lunch that had seen a bushfire come through at some stage. Lots of native plants that are now regenerating. One track we had mapped out proved to be our down fall. Ian & Vanessa led the way and we turned right into Delaney's track and we soon had the other Toyota 'parked'. The 'puddle' didn't look too deep but the Toyota was soon up to half it's wheels in mud. Some discussion between Chris & Steve and a bit of digging to free the tow bar then a chain and the Toyota was soon back on track. After some discussion we decided to turn around as we had no idea what the rest of the track had in store and it was getting later in the afternoon. We then headed to the left of the track as that was a shorter distance but again the track was not well used and very narrow. We only had a couple of kms to the main road but suddenly there was a huge tree in our way. There was no getting around, over or under so we took some photos and turned back the way we had come. Back at camp for another campfire and scones.

Day 7: Friday 28th Feb. Today was the day to go to Lake Elizabeth which has a one and a half hour walk around the lake. We headed into Forrest and first went to the Reservoir which had a nice picnic area and a walk across the dam and for some a walk down and around the spillway.

From there we headed back to Forrest for a coffee and cake then headed to Lake Elizabeth. Being 4W Drivers we decided to go the bush way and walk down from the opposite side to where the 'normal people' go. We did find the gate but it looked to be a long way from the water and it was a walking trail only. So we carried on down the track and went to the visitor car park and headed off for the walk. The first section of the walk was along a fairly level track and then it started to go up hill and uphill and uphill for what seemed miles. After getting to the top it was then a downhill walk to the lake – thankfully the downhill was much shorter but it still meant climbing back up to get back. The walk took about 1 hour - 40 minutes to get to the lake and 20 minutes back as the long uphill became a much easier long downhill. Chris again had his trusty fishing rod packed but there was no opportunity to fish today.

We then headed over to see if we could get a look at Stevenson's Falls but the road was closed. We headed back to camp via new tracks through the forestry area.

Friday night saw much more people arriving at the Campground and one group in particular thought it would be great for us to hear them sing for a few hours. At least they stopped after a while but another group thought we might like to hear their 'duff duff' music till 2.30am. We are hoping that these were the groups that normally go to Stevenson Falls to camp but had to come to Dandos as Stevenson's was closed.

Day 8: Saturday 29th Feb. All packed and ready for the trip back. We decided to go through to Naracoorte and stay at the Caravan Park for the night. Some of us opted to have a bit of luxury so Steve & I booked a cabin and Ian & Vanessa stayed in a motel. Chris and Judy both put their tents up in the Caravan Park but at least were able to have a hot shower and use the camp kitchen to cook Sunday breakfast. We all had dinner at the Naracoorte Hotel and ended the trip there.

It was a great trip with good company, laughs, recoveries, great scones and a lovely area for club trips. There was a lot we still didn't get to see and we all are hoping to go back again.