

Victorian High-Country Trip: 8th Feb – 15th Feb 2023

Trip Leader: Paul & Dee

Participants: Sandy & Marc, Mike & Jan, Steve & Mel, Gary & Jodie-Anne, Rob & Ann-Marie, Kevin & Megan, Ashley & Kids (Hayley, Brooklyn & Tahlia), Brett, Janet, Judy & Maggsy.

Day 1 – Wednesday 8th Feb: The trip started at 6.30am from the Club Rooms with 5 vehicles in convoy and the next stop to join up with the rest of the participants was OTR Taillem Bend. We were joined there by 5 more vehicles and picked up the last vehicle in the convoy at Keith. Eleven vehicles in convoy is as one member explained is like “herding hawks”. We stopped at Nhill for lunch and made our way to Rupanyup for our first stopover. The campground there is run by the Lions Club and they had cordoned off sites for our arrival. The campsites were only \$10 per night and \$1 for 5mins of hot water for the shower.

Day 2 – Thursday 9th Feb: Saw us heading off to Sheeppark Flat leaving Rupanyup at 8.30am. According to Google maps the trip was a 5hr & 5min drive. We finally arrived at the campsite at 4.45pm. Obee was about to send out a search and rescue team to find us. Obee & Dee had arrived at Sheeppark Flat on Wednesday and had scoped out the best spot for us to camp. There was plenty of room for all of us at the campground and we all staked out our claim.

It was decided at our pre-trip meeting that 12 vehicles was too large a group for touring the High-Country tracks and we were split into 2 groups of 6. Group A led by Obee consisted of Obee & Dee, Mike & Jan, Marc & Sandy, Brett, Gary & Jodie-Anne, and Janet. Group B led by Steve consisted of Steve & Mel, Maggsy, Ashley & Kids, Rob & Ann-Marie, Kevin & Megan and Judy.

Group A- Day 3 – Friday 10th Feb: Group A led by Obee left at 9.30am and entered Alpine National Park along Brocks Road which was a winding road with plenty of hairpins and very beautiful scenery along the way. We had been advised that Brocks Road was closed from Bluff Road so instead of doing the full loop the group turned down Bluff Track. There were a large number of ghostly gum trees from previous bushfires but the regrowth was great to see. The group stopped at Bluff Hut for a look around and a comfort stop (in the bushes) but didn't realise there was actually a longdrop there until they were leaving. The group carried along the rocky track until they arrived at Lovicks Hut where they met up with a Trail Ride company leaving hay for the 15 horses due to arrive as part of a 4-day trail ride. At this point the convoy turned back and followed the track back to Bluff Hut for lunch. They passed the riders who were on their way to Lovicks Hut on the track and arrived back at camp at 2.45pm. A pleasant day had by all.

Group B – Day 3 – Friday 10th Feb: Group B departed at 9.30am led by Steve heading for Mitchells Track via Fry's Hut. The weather was fine after slight rain the night before. Heading away from camp we stopped at Fry's Hut and then headed up Howqua Hills Track toward Mitchells Track. We had a river crossing at Tobacco Flat where we also met up with the riders and horses that were staying near us at Sheeppark Flat. At the Slate mine we turned left onto Mitchells Track as the map showed Mitchells track down to Wren's Flat but only showed the track going a short way to the right. We stopped at Wren's Flat for lunch by the river and then made our way back the same way to camp bypassing Fry's Hut on the return journey. The tracks were generally in good condition with some muddy patches, steep climbs and descents and two river crossings. Beautiful views all the way of the mountains and trees. Back at camp at 2.30pm and some members had a refreshing cool dip in the river, those less hardy had a warm shower (Ball Family!). Looking at the more detailed map later we should have gone down Mitchells Track to the right as it did go much further than shown.

Day 4 – Saturday 11th Feb: Free day with lunch booked at Merrijig. Everyone left camp at their own time and headed to Mansfield for shopping, sightseeing or some for a shower at the swimming pool.

Mansfield was quite busy as the Targa Rally was on at Mt Buller and there was a car show on in the main street.

We all met for lunch at the Hunt Club in Merrijig at 12.30pm and everyone enjoyed their meals. After lunch we all followed Steve & Mel to a spot, they had found at Lake Eildon. It was only a short trip to Goughs Bay where we all had a stroll and took some photos. We then headed back to camp where we had Club supplied nibbles and some True/False quiz questions and then a game of head/tails.

Day 5 – Sunday 12th Feb: Group A led by Marc. The trip started with Marc taking off just as Sandy was trying to have a drink which she ended up wearing! Marc & Sandy led the trip and Mike & Jan were Tail End Charlie. The trip headed to Tobacco Flat, bypassing Fry's Hut on the outward journey. Jodie-Anne took photos of all the vehicles crossing the creek. Steiners Road was in good condition and we stopped at Running Creek Reserve for morning tea and were amazed to see caravans camped there, they must have come in on a different track.

From there we went through a residential area and ended up on the bitumen at Lake Eildon. Great views of the Lake. The map had the wrong name on the road we were supposed to take so the first 4 cars missed the turn and at that time Marc had radio issues so couldn't hear us saying to come back. Dee was driving and chased him down with lights flashing and horn honking. We all regrouped and turned up Stony Creek Track which was an impressive and difficult track along the mountain ridge. Great views on both sides. We then went left onto Mitchells Track which was in good condition with some steep sections and some slippery and bumpy sections. We stopped for lunch on the side of the track. We continued on to Stieners Road and then onto Fry's Hut. It was a fun day with beautiful scenery and some challenging tracks. It was Dee's first time driving the Mux and she did a great job. We drove 78,5kms returning to camp tired but contented at 3.20pm

Day 5 – Sunday 12th Feb: Group B led by Steve. Trip was Sheeppyard Flat to Picture Point via Bluff Hut. We set off at 9.15am along Brocks Road towards Bluff Track. The road is narrow and windy and the dry conditions caused a lot of dust making for poor visibility.

At 1083 metres above sea level we turned onto Bluff Track. From this point the track became quite rocky and much slower. A few steep descents and care needed to navigate over a few larger rocks. Overall, not a difficult track. Steadily climbing we reached Bluff Hut. A wood and metal hut that needed to be rebuilt in 2008 after the 2006 bushfires. Quick toilet stop at Bluff Hut – thanks to Group A for telling us where they were hidden. Maggsy had some transmission oil issues but after a stop and changing to Low Range this was sorted. Ashley had an exciting toilet stop when he discovered he was sharing his spot with a mulga snake. Neither Ashley or the snake were harmed during this brief encounter. We stopped for lunch at Lovicks Hut. This hut was a lot larger than some of the others with a stone floor instead of the usual wood flooring. Lots of flies that seem to be following us around. Judy took a bit of a tumble but she dusted herself off and carried on with the trip. We continued along the track to Picture Point approx. 1600 metres above sea level. The views were spectacular with uninterrupted views of the lush green vally below and the mountains in the distance. We then began our return journey along the same tracks taken earlier with a slight detour down Refrigerator Gap to look at a waterfall. We found the waterfall half way down the track but sadly no water. Good easy track and worth taking all the way down in future trips. Lots of

purple and yellow flowers along the track and we passed several cows grazing on the side of the road close to our camp. Arrived back at camp at 3.10pm

Day 6 – Monday 13th February: Group A & B did the same track with 30 minute gap. Easy track back to main Mt Buller road. Through toll gates (toll only payable during ski season), then left to Mt Stirling road where we travelled to the Telephone Box junction. From there we took the right turn on Circuit road travelling through Howqua Gap then onto Bindaree Road to Bindaree Falls. A short walk to the falls which were flowing and the platform had us standing under the falls. Ferns and tree ferns abounded and it was much cooler under the falls. Back onto Circuit Road then up Monument Track to Craigs Hut. Craigs Hut was originally used for the Man from Snowy River film and has since been rebuilt twice after bushfires. There was a large open area with picnic tables and shade and toilet facilities (still long drops). We continued along Monument Track till it joined back to Circuit Road and back to camp. Some carried onto Mansfield for more shopping. The tracks were quite steep and rocky in places but very manageable. The views of the mountains were spectacular and the flora ranged from huge gums to lush ferns. We encountered numerous other vehicles and the group of horse riders, walkers and a cyclist. Brooklyn was navigator for Maggsy and was very happy Maggsy swerved to avoid a snake. Brett was convoy leader for Group A and Rob & Ann-Marie for Group B. Another great day had by all.

Day 7 – Tuesday 14th February: Valentines Day - I didn't see any red roses or chocolates just more dust and long drops! Another day where both Groups were doing the same tracks but somehow, we didn't end up in the same places! Group B left first at 8.30am with Ash leading and headed up Doughty's Road, which was a good uphill steep track but no problems encountered. We turned left onto Mt Buller Road, then within a few metres turned right onto Carters Road. We stopped at the Carters Road campsite for a comfort stop and then headed to Tomahawk Hut. We were surprised to see Group A already at the hut but worked out they either time travelled, left before the 30minute lapse or went passed us whilst we were at the comfort stop! Group B continued back in the lead and headed for Weston Track. The maps again were a bit off and some tracks were closed so we explored and did a loop back onto King Basin Road and down across the creek to Pineapple Flat campground. Lovely spot for lunch and we came across a couple of men fly fishing in the river. We left Pineapple Flat and headed up Blacks Landing Road back to Circuit Road. We turned left and did the longer part of the road. Back at Mt Buller Rd some decided to drive up to Mt Buller and others went back to camp.

Group A had Mike as convoy leader and used their secret time travel track to arrive at Tomahawks Hut ahead of Group B. Leaving the hut, the objective was Weston Road and Mine Creek track. As per Group B the maps weren't helpful. Group A negotiated Weston Track easily over the steep rocky track and continued in what they thought was the right direction however due to the inconsistencies with the maps they were soon questioning their whereabouts. They decided to continue on to find a prominent landmark and eventually found Razorback Hut (Group B never found that hut). The hut had a toilet block, hand sanitiser and shade which was a blessing for some who were getting quite desperate and also provided a good spot for lunch. After lunch they headed for Mt Buller via Cornhill Road but that road is closed until March (which they had seen the day before but hadn't remembered!). The group then took the bitumen road to Mt Buller for well earned refreshments and some photos of the great scenery up there. The day was pleasant with nothing too challenging as far as 4WD driving but worth the trip. It seems that Group A had a few comms issues with Mikes falling apart, Obee's falling out of reach and Marc's switching channels, but like true explorers they didn't let these issues get the better of them.

Day 8 – Wednesday 15th February: Pack up and go time. Marc & Sandy headed off to Sale, Obee & Dee to Dimboola, Kevin & Megan to Bright, Maggsy, Mike & Jan headed to Melbourne and Rob & Ann-Marie to Canberra to see their family. The rest of us headed home, Ash and the kids left us at Rushworth as they were driving straight through and the rest of us headed back to Rupanyup for the night. Day 9 – Thursday 16th February saw us leaving Rupanyup and heading for Minyip, Dimboola then onto Bordertown and home. The road between Dimboola & Minyip cuts off the drop down to Horsham or going up to Warracknabeal saving around 30kms off the trip. Minyip is where the Flying Doctors TV series was made and is about its only claim to fame.

This trip report was compiled from the individual reports given to me from Group A & Group B's designated trip report writer for each day. Thank you all for handing in/sending your reports through.

I am sure all participants had a great trip and we thank Obee & Dee for organising. Can't wait for the next one.