



## New Year's Day at Mt Pinnibar

Catherine Panich and Robert Dunlop

Trip Leader: Chris and Julie Nicolls	Nissan Patrol GQ
Christoph Rauch and his mother	Holden Colorado
Glynis Whitfield	Suzuki Grand Vitara
Glynn and Rosemary Shepherd & friend	Mitsubishi Challenger
Jake Vanderstok	Toyota Hilux
Kevin and Barbara Rowe	Nissan Patrol
Peter Fenwick and Catherine Panich	Jeep Grand Cherokee
Robert and Jane Dunlop	Toyota 200 series

We all arrived at Williamsdale surprisingly bright eyed and bushy tailed for the first day of the year. After New Year greetings and hugs with old friends we travelled straight through to Jindabyne for morning tea by the lake with shared left over Christmas goodies. Robert and Jane were already there having spent New Year's Eve with other club members at Frying Pan on Lake Eucumbene.

The drive past Thredbo and down the pass to Tom Groggin was uneventful. The mountain tops still look like old men's whiskers which made us think again about the 2003 bushfires. We remembered and shared stories of the work done by club members after the fires. At Tom Groggin we aired down and made use of the toilets, knowing we wouldn't see them again for a few hours. The Murray River crossing was easy, only hub deep then it was pretty well straight into low range again as we encountered our first steep incline. The day was hot anywhere between 25 and 28 degrees. Who knows which car was telling the truth? There was plenty of dust so everyone drove with windows up and air conditioning on. By the time we reached the top two cars came close to boiling. It's very hard to make yourself turn off the air conditioning and turn the heater to full bore on a hot day with dust billowing in through open windows; better than a cooked engine though.

We enjoyed a late lunch at the top, chatting and gazing out at the incredible 360 degree views. The ants climbed frantically over everything. In the middle of a call of nature I looked down at my bare left foot and found it covered with ants and there wasn't a thing I could do about it. Luckily they were exploring, not biting.

Standing under the trig we heard thunder and in the direction of our travel saw a curtain of rain, time to go. A third of the way down the rain caught us with, at first, big 50 cent spots on the dusty windscreen but very soon the windscreen was sparkling clean and the track was slippery, in some places very slippery. This was our first trip off road in the Jeep and we were still learning its tricks. Peter drove up so of course I drove down. At every steep descent I overrode automatic using the paddles on the steering wheel. The next trick was to make it stay in my selected gear. The car wanted to go downhill like the panther it is but I needed to tame it. Every time it went up a gear I changed it back down and by tapping the brakes a couple of times it learnt that I meant business and stayed in 2nd. Then I hardly had to use the brakes. I had to repeat this performance at each steep descent. The engine braking was awesome and we hadn't even engaged hill descent. We soon had a carpet of hail underfoot and we actually lost traction for 2 seconds on a left hand curve so I engaged the MUD terrain button. I'm pretty sure this is the curve that caught Robert out 5 minutes later. See his report below. We had brand new muddies at 24 psi but probably should have taken out more air. The vehicles in front of us were mostly down but I sent a prayer to the 3 vehicles behind us. At the turn at the bottom of the mountain we had to wait for 28 minutes for Robert to appear as we were to take over as tail end Charlie. I kept remembering driver trainer's admonitions; "you wait for as long as it takes, it's your fault if the car behind gets lost!!"

We gave up thoughts of a swim in the Murray, just crossed and aired up in light rain near this morning's toilets. Here I saw the nicest scene of domestic harmony I have ever witnessed. As Kevin plugged the compressor into the tyre valve Barb slid a stool under his butt and then sheltered him from the rain with her umbrella. They held

the tableau while the tyre inflated. Our domestic harmony was shattered as I abandoned Peter to try to take a photo but I missed it by 30 seconds.

We arrived in Jindabyne too early for dinner so decided to eat in Cooma instead. Glynis had to bid us farewell as she had booked a caravan and Jane and Robert left us at Berridale so we were 12 for dinner. The Alpine Hotel in the middle of town was practically the only thing open and they did a roaring trade. We had a lovely meal with lively conversation. At Williamsdale Peter and I noticed that it was exactly 12 hours to the minute since we left there in the morning. It had been a wonderful day with all the weathers that you can expect a mountain to throw at you, and of course good, good company. Chris planned the trip in his usual meticulous manner also checking with authorities for road closures as there had been a fire a few days previously. We did 484k and our average fuel consumption for the day was 10.1L per 100K. Thanks everyone for a great start to 2016.

### **The Descent of Mt Pinnibar on a Wet and Slippery Track**

The track up Mount Pinnibar had recently been bulldozed. The surface was as close to perfect as it could possibly be. Ruts were nowhere to be found and spoon drains were as smooth and well formed as is possible. The surface did show signs of recent vehicles and due to the relative dry conditions was reasonably dusty and our drive to the top was uneventful with all eight vehicles successfully reaching the 1772 metre summit. To say that it was busy at the top is somewhat of an understatement as our party of eight joined another eight vehicles.

Lunch was attended to, however it was noticed that rather ominous storm clouds were threatening so it was decided that we should immediately make our way back to Tom Groggin. As we descended the rain and occasional hail became heavier and of course the dust on the track turned to a slippery tyre worked mud. As we were tail end Charlie we had the misfortune to experience the slush created by the other seven vehicles.

We received a call from Peter F over the radio that there was a slippery patch ahead. Once we reached this not only did we find it slippery but exceedingly so. We went into a slide veering to the right of the track finally being stopped after a few metres by the rough grading created by the recent bulldozing on the edge of the road. Rather than trying to progress I managed to reverse into a position where I felt there was less of a chance of commencing a spontaneous slide. I pointed the front wheels towards the side of the track and found a very large rock which I used to chock the front wheel as well. Of course getting out of the car to do this was always a danger so I insisted Jane manned the driver's seat whilst I dealt with the situation outside.

After some communication with Peter F and Chris N I let them know that I felt that the best way to cope with the situation was to lower tyre pressures from the current 26 psi to 20 psi. After completing this task now it was time to negotiate this steep and very slippery section. I had walked it and found that challenging enough; I now had to drive it. I noticed that the central and edge regions of the track remained unaffected by vehicles so this appeared to provide the best possible means of negotiating this most difficult section. I locked the auto transmission in low range first gear. I thought the best approach was to move off very smoothly with absolute minimal braking. Fortunately the engine braking of the 200 Series Toyota in low range first is quite amazing considering you are essentially connected to the wheels by a fluid coupling. We managed to successfully negotiate this treacherous section and although there were the occasional challenging spots the remainder of the journey to Tom Groggin was relatively straightforward.