

High Country Weekender

11-13 December 2015

BRAVING THE GALE

A party of five vehicles headed off for Jindabyne on Friday afternoon consisting of our Fearless Trip Leader Greg Taylor and his wife Vickie in a 200 series Landcruiser, Kevin and Vicki Mckenna in the NT Pajero, Gavin Neilsen in his GU Patrol, Chris Nichols and Julie in the GQ Patrol, and finally Phil Hendersen and "Blow Up Julie" (more about this later) in his 100 series Landcruiser Sahara. Phil was taking his Sahara to test his car for the first time on the steep and challenging Alpine tracks. Greg had some concerns about if the weather would improve as the winds were strong. By the time we arrived in Jindy they were truly gale force. Our campsite was in the caravan park overlooking the lake. The wind was roaring through the valley across the lake with a chill factor that didn't resemble summer conditions. To reduce the discomfort level of our campsite, we parked the vehicles against the wind direction which formed a good windbreak.

We had dinner and a few drinks at the Brumby Bistro in Jindy before heading out into the cold back to camp and luckily the winds eased overnight.

CLEAR AND CRISP DRIVING CONDITIONS

We were greeted by a cool, clear sunny Saturday which was ideal for driving. After meeting Garry and Pauline Lymberry in their Ford Ranger Ute in town, we headed off via the scenic Alpine Way to Tom Groggin Crossing on the NSW/Victorian border. Driving adjacent to Crackenback Ridge, we noticed a few gullies that still had snow in them which was a surprise for some of us. Garry was testing his Ranger during this trip as he'd not been off road much since buying it and kitting it out. He wasn't disappointed.



Once we arrived at Tom Groggin Crossing and checked it out noting that the conditions were perfect with the water level low on the Murray River, we had a trouble free crossing.

There was some banter going about regarding “Blowup Julie” as Phil was going solo (Julie, his wife, was unfortunately, unable to come). He was accompanied by his trusty airbed, “Blowup Julie”, named by his fellow travellers. Blowup Julie kept him warm and comfortable during the nights of the trip which became a standing joke over the airwaves and during smokos. Enough said!

DAVIES PLAIN DRIVE TO NATIVE DOG FLAT, ALPINE NATIONAL PARK.

We had morning smoko at Buckwong Creek. It was unusual to have two Vickies on a trip and two Julies, apparently it was a first on a club trip. When Greg or Kevin called Vicki or mentioned Vickie on the radio, it was a little confusing for us.

While Gavin and I were reading the Davies Plain Track sign stating that the track is classified as Very Difficult in dry conditions, I began to feel excited as I took over the driving from Kevin. As we headed up into the beautiful and steep Victorian Alps, there is still evidence of the devastating bushfires of the past.

The scenic and green High Plains are magical with the backdrop of the mountain ranges. The landscape is inspiring and unique. There were lots of wildflowers of many different colours in the grasslands of the plains we passed by.

After our scenic drive we stopped at Davies Plains Hut to check out the site and the fantastic views and have a break.

I’ve since learnt that this hut was not burnt down in the 2003 fires.

The hut was originally built by the Gibson family for cattlemen's use in 1939, but the last cattle were grazed here in 1956. John Gibson took up the first lease in 1892. The hut was substantially rebuilt in about 1995.





While admiring the views at the Hut we noticed several Gang Gang Cockatoos which were a real treat to see.

We stopped for lunch at Charlies Creek Plain Campground at the southern end of Davies Plain Track which is north of the junction of McCarthy's Track. It's a picturesque site to rest. We travelled onto McCarthy's track that involved many steep ascents and descents with the condition of the tracks as being pretty good. The brakes and gearboxes had a good workout down the mountains, up the mountains, along the ridges and into beautiful grassy green gullies.

During our trip we spotted wild Brumbies in the bush. They left many telltale signs of huge piles of dung along the tracks which marked out their territory.

We drove past the Poplars Campground on the Limestone Creek Track and as we were making good time so we continued onto Native Dog Flat Campground where the Buchan River flows. There were no issues with any of the vehicles after the day's drive.

After setting up camp, some of the guys headed off to collect firewood for the campfire to beat the chill and cook dinner. We all shared happy hour treats and relaxed with a beer or liquid beverage of some kind. A herd of wild brumbies of all colours wandered past our camp at around dusk which was an awesome sight. Another good night was had by all with much banter before heading off for bed and Phil to his Blowup Julie who, he says, is much quieter than his wife Julie.

THE PILOT, THE COBBERAS AND MT MENAAK

We headed off early this morning to test our skills and enjoy the scenery on the Cobberas Trail, MacFarlane Flat Track and Ingeegoodbee Track. I still managed to have driving duties this morning as I was the quickest in the drivers's seat so Kev had to wait until morning smoko to take the wheel.. I was so glad that I did as it tested my driving skills and I had an absolute ball.

While driving on the Cobberas Trail we passed a well-known snow meadow called the Playgrounds which looks like a large horse paddock where brumbies graze and campers camp. The Cobberas landscape consists of open forests and grass or herb groundcovers.

We passed The Cobberas wilderness (Alpine National Park) on our left which joins the Pilot wilderness (Kosciuszko National Park). Our convoy was near the region of the headwaters of the Murray River but I'm not exactly sure where as there was some discussion about this topic between the experts.



There were a few trees over this track and we all negotiated the drive arounds with no problems.

We did encounter some challenging and technical driving on the Cobberas Trail where essential wheel placement was needed to get over a boulder formation on an ascent. The view of the Cobberas at the top was amazing. Further on we negotiated a series of rocky ledges on a very steep descent which we all made through without incident.



The track is rated difficult due to several long steep climbs to the Ingeegoodbee River crossing, but all tracks were in good condition and we had no issues. I realized that we need to further reduce the tyre pressures on the steep, loose and slippery descents which differ in surfaces to the Brindies. This is to gain more traction and to reduce my pulse rate. So the trick is to further deflate tyres = a lower pulse rate and a longer life!





We stopped for a photo opportunity at the junction of the Ingeegoodbee Track and the Snowy River Road at Mountain Hut Saddle and later lunched by the Snowy River before heading home via Barry Way.

At Jacobs River, Barry Way leaves the Snowy River carving its way through the Byadbo Wilderness and follows Jacobs River and Wild Bull Creek up out of the valley. The road climbs steeply with spectacular views to Wallace Craigie lookout where we aired up before heading to Jindabyne Bakery, saying our goodbyes and heading home.

Thanks to all of the wonderful people on the trip who contributed to a fun and memorable weekend with spectacular scenery, interesting stories, varied tracks and perfect weather! I can't wait to get back up the High Country in March on the next club trip. It was one of the best drives I've had in ages. A special thanks to Greg for being such a great Trip Leader and funny too, and to Vickie for making us all feel welcome☺.

Vicki Mckenna