

HIGH COUNTRY TRIP – 2009

Mon, Tues, Wed, 16-18 November 2009

Terry & Meg Dillon Nissan Navara
Bruce Gooday Toyota LC

Early in the club year, when Stan was canvassing options for club trips, I said that I wouldn't mind doing some short mid-week trips into the nearby High Country for a picnic with a view. This was the general idea. Then I stumbled across the ExplorOz website and a made-to-measure trip described as 'a great trek through the Victorian High Country where you'll experience some of our most spectacular mountain areas. See high country huts, spectacular views and participate in challenging four-wheel driving.'

Terry & Meg Dillon

I can report that we did indeed travel through some spectacular mountain areas, visited high country huts, experienced breathtaking views, and engaged low range 4x4 many times. The driving wasn't challenging so much as interesting. Many tracks follow ridge lines with steep drops on both sides. The driver holds on to the steering wheel and the passengers hold on to their breakfast as the tracks wind up and down through the mountains. We were fortunate in that driving conditions were ideal. All tracks were firm and dry and on some there had been extensive fallen-tree clearing in preparation for their opening earlier in the month.

We travelled through some areas which had been burnt in the 2003 bush fires. Regrowth has been slow with most starting at ground level rather than from the trunks and limbs of standing timber. This provided for great views of wave after wave of giant mountains covered in bleached, standing, dead timber. It reminded me of the white stubble on the face of an old man who hasn't shaved for a week. It also provided good views of the tracks we had travelled and of the tracks ahead. From time to time I found myself asking 'did we really come down that track?' and 'we're not going up there are we?'

Our pace was leisurely, with many photo opportunity stops so many in fact that Terry filled up the card in his camera. Terry and I photographed the scenery while Meg snapped the wildflowers and sign-posts.

The route:

Day 1: Mansfield to Howitt Plains via Sheeppark Flat, Brocks Rd, Refrigerator Gap Track, Bluff Link Rd, King Billy Track.

Negotiating Fallen Tree

Day 2: Howitt Plains to Talbotville via Zeka Spur Track, Wonnangatta, Wombat Range Track, Cynthia Range Track.

Day 3: Talbotville to Harrietville via Grant, Dargo High Plains Rd, Blue Rag Trig.

The highlights:

A feature of the trip was the almost complete absence of traffic. After we left Sheeppark Flat, where we were advised by a Parks Victoria crew that the weather would be perfect, we encountered a convoy of four vehicles with trailers making their way up the Zeka Spur Track (day 2) and a lone traveller on the Blue Rag Range Track (day 3). That was it. No other traffic for the best part of three days.

View from Blue Rag Trig

On day 1 we had morning tea and lunch by the Howqua River ñ a very picturesque fast flowing mountain stream. The Refrigerator Gap Track was an unintended but very scenic detour (trip leaders don.t miss turns) and the views from the ridge lines we travelled gave us a taste for what lay ahead on day 2. We didn.t quite make our intended camp site (Wonnangatta) and instead camped up on the Howitt Plain. It was a great camp site (complete with toilet) but we froze at night. Terry and Meg had packed summer sleeping bags and didn.t get much sleep.

On day 2, after lunch at Wonnangatta, we travelled along the Wombat Range Track. What a drive ñ and what magnificent views. We stopped off at Little Baldy to stretch our legs and take in the scenery. There is a memorial plaque on Little Baldy which simply says ñIn memory of Ray Pye 1930 ñ 70 who loved this country. The ñthis country. referred to is a magnificent 360 degree vista. Then it was on to Talbotville for camp on night 2.

Ray Pye Memorial

After a leisurely start on day 3 we had a brief look around the Grant township sight then headed for Harrietville via the Dargo High Plains Road. Day 3 highlight was the drive up to the Blue Rag Range trig site and the views along the way and from the top.

This trip was my first real venture into the high country. There will be many more.

Bruce Gooday