

Sand in our shoes!

Late August saw four cars heading over to Wyperfeld National Park for the start of some sand driving that would take us across a number of classic Victorian sand tracks in the Mallee scrub with a quick dash over the border into SA. Timing was just right. Recent rain had put a firm base into the sand and the Mallee scrub was looking its best for years with acres of waving green native grasses, wildflowers coming out, birds abounding and roos and emus out and about.



Figure 1 - Casuarina Camp

Our track routes meant we did almost all driving on sand. Starting at Casuarina campground (Wyperfeld NP) the “early birds” Chris, David and Peter had a day of exploring the many interesting small tracks north & west of the camp ground while waiting for Rob, Dean, Terry and Meg to arrive the next day. Easy driving took us south through the park and to Lake Albacutya, a dry lake where we camped for two nights at the secluded OTIT camp NE of lakeside. (Anyone know what OTIT stands

for? Google is no help) Chris and David departed to attend to family business after winning the sartorial award for their splendid dressing gowns!

The remaining five drove the Jordon Valley track disturbing big mobs of roo, waist deep in the lush grass, then across the lake bed, round a few squiggles and onto the Milmed track across the Wyperfeld wilderness area. Milmed gets the award for the best track of the trip. Gorgeous sunshine and interesting relics of settlement along the track

- ❖ Hermes Garden: old settler Hermes Strauss settled and farmed on a spring in a natural clearing of Mallee);
- ❖ Big Dune Lookout: Peter got the award for walking the steepest climb of the trip – cars were gated out).
- ❖ Lots of good camping spots including Arnold Springs, Round Swamp and Pigeon Springs.



Figure 2 - Lookout Dune

Our tyres were deflated and we handled the deep sand patches with ease, except for The Big Sandhill that loomed up about 20 minutes after Milmed Rock (The Small Rock). Terry failed two shots, then relented and dropped his tyres 2 psi further and shot up and over. That night we camped at Big Billy Bore off the Murrayville Rd, where a dingo howled at dawn, probably complaining about the 4am rain showers. No time to explore the many small tracks round our campsite. Will come back for that!



Figure 3 - Cactus Bore

Another great day of driving took us through the Big Desert State and National Parks along the Cactus Bore, Coburn Pines, and the Firebreak Tracks before crossing into SA to drive the Border Track through Ngarkat NP and into Pertendi Camp. Massive metre deep depressions were gouged into parts of the Border Track and Dean needed a few tries to get over one of the sand hills while driving Rod’s Navara. The Border

Track was a roller-coaster that scrambled all the eggs in Rob's tuckerbag (omelettes that night!) and broke all the light plastic containers round Meg's packed frozen casseroles (will double-bag them in freezer bags next time). Ngarkat NP vegetation was more sparse and heath-like than the Vic deserts with wild goats and very few native animals to be seen. We drove the Centre Track to camp at Pine Soak and looked at Scorpion Springs, Nanam's Well and the Fish Ponds as well as doing the orchid walk trail (too early- only greenhoods out). Some driving on the bitumen then took us back into Vic and after spending time at the beautifully restored historic Mallee Kow Plains homestead near Cowangie



Figure 4 - Kow Plains Homestead (Cowangie)

we headed into Pink Lakes (bleak and windy) where we had lunch in Murray-Sunset NP. Afterwards, the Mt Crozier Track took us into kinder country, deep in the park sheltered by the now familiar Mallee trees. Next morning Rod and Dean departed at 5.30am to backtrack to Pertendi camp to search for Rod's lost and favourite walking stick. Peter, Terry and Meg were left to continue to Rocket Lake via Mopoke hut along very easy sand/clay tracks. After lunch Terry accidentally led us out on the sandy narrow Millewa/Mopoke track - the historic cattle route between the Millewa station and mopoke hut. It's basically a motor bike track now, so expect lots of scratches, twists, turns and dips. (It's fun!)

Afterwards we camped at Lindsay Island – Murray Sunset NP on the Murray after cruising the Carwarp Rd and seeing the Spanish mission style stone church at Werrimull and the very interesting historic village at Meringur. Both recommended. Lindsay Island has very easy tracks in typical Murray river country – clay, red gums & stretches of former open grazing. Lots of red, as well as grey roos here.

Our final night was at Hattah-Kulkyne NP where the good winter rains have transformed it into a green Mallee landscape and Mr Brumby's *water for environmental purposes* has filled lakes Yelwell and Hattah from environmental flows released into Chalka Ck. (Thanks Mr. Brumby). Lots of birds, including our sighting of the fairly rare Regent parrot late in the afternoon.

A great trip with lots of good tracks and good company. Awards? Yep! Terry & Rob share the Alzheimer's Award- Rob for leaving his walking stick behind at Pertendi and Terry for leaving his camera in Rob's car when Rob headed home. Dean and Terry now qualify as 'Dune Meisters' for successfully mastering the finer points of sand driving; Peter gets thanked for sharing his knowledge about native plants and Rob and Dean



Figure 5 - Sand Driving

also for all the great campfires they organized. Meg gets fined for accidentally leaving her sunglasses on late into the night and shouting to everyone to look at *the amazing green colour of the full moon*.

Oh yes... Terry gets a gear jammer point for his second battery breaking loose even before we got onto the bumpy bits; special thanks to Rob & Pete for assistance with speedy repairs.

Happy tracking folks...Meg Dillon.