

Victorian High Country – Corryong to Omeo March 6-7-8

Graham & Sue Abotomey	Toyota LC SW
David & Doreen Clarke	Toyota LC Tray
Murray & Judy McEachern	Ford F250
Barry Richardson and Dennis	Mitsubishi Pajero
Bruce Gooday	Toyota LC SW

This trip took us south through the Victorian High Country from Corryong to Omeo. We left Wangaratta at 8.00am on the Saturday, picked up Barry and his mate Dennis in Wodonga, and refuelled and refreshed at Corryong before heading south through the Pinnibar Pendergast State Forest for our scheduled lunch stop at Wheelers Creek Hut.

During the week prior to our departure I kept checking the weather forecast for the weekend because I knew that several sections of our proposed route would be very tricky if wet. DSE staff at Corryong were helpful with advice on track conditions and confirmed the tracks which should be avoided in the wet. When it rained on the Friday prior to our departure I did a ring-around of the crew and all confirmed that they would give it a go. So when we stopped for morning tea in Corryong I did a quick tyre comparison.



Murray and Judy's F250 had tyres to match the vehicle – a mile wide with lots of chunky rubber. Dave and Doreen's Toyota sat up on the ever-reliable go-anywhere, narrow, high profile, farm ute standards, and Barry had converted the Pajero from its usual shopping trolley appearance to a Dakar Rally look-alike. Barry has a spare set of wheels and tyres which he uses on special occasions. They are very wide and rather aggressive. In contrast, the two Land Cruisers – in keeping with their status – were running on Dunlop Grand Slicks.

Our first track (Scrubby Creek Track) led us to the Ski Hut (Lind Lodge) and a nearby abandoned winch. The weather was fine and the track was a pleasure to drive. About ten days earlier Barry and I did a recce along the track and came up behind old man emu and five fairly large chicks. The section of track we were on was cut into the side of a hill with a cliff face on one side and a steep drop on the other. So there we sat for a good twenty minutes following these emus at considerable speed until the track widened and we were able to scare them off into the bush.

Encouraged by the fine weather, and the good condition of the Scrubby Creek track, I decided to take the Six Mile Ridge Track even though DSE had identified it as difficult in the wet. It wasn't raining, we were running on time, and I couldn't remember any really tricky sections from our recce. All went well until the final steep descent from the ridge. The clay surface was still wet and the Grand Slicks gave up. The Cruiser unceremoniously slid off the track into the scrub. I radioed a warning for

the rest of the convoy to wait at the top while I found a way to extricate myself, and Barry's helpful response was "I hope someone down there has got a camera".

Although it took some time, with good advice and guidance from Murray and Dennis, recovery from the scrub was fairly easy. The rest of the convoy then tip-toed safely down the track – with the exception of the other Cruiser whose slicks also led it off the track into the scrub. But that may have been because navigator Sue had abandoned ship at the top of the hill and had proceeded to roll down under her own steam.

We were late for lunch at Wheelers Creek Hut and shared the area with a group of trail bike riders and their support vehicles.

After lunch we took the Mt Gibbo Track to Mt Pinnibar (1773m) and enjoyed spectacular views along the way. One advantage of the previous Friday's rain was the absence of smoke and dust which would have spoiled the views.



The track down from Mt Pinnibar to Tom Groggin had its moments on a wet clay section which had been bulldozed flat and smooth. But we had learned much from our earlier troubles and navigated our way slowly and safely to the bottom.

Camp for the night was on the east side of the Murray River at Dogman's Hut. After dinner we sat around the camp fire and watched the stars disappear behind the clouds. It had been a long and eventful day but the weather had been kind to us. At midnight it rained. Rain continued on and off through the night and, although it was fine for breakfast on Sunday, we packed up very wet tents and swags.

After crossing the Murray for a quick look at the main Tom Groggin camp site on the west side of the river we decided to proceed along the Davies Plain track as planned, hoping to keep ahead of the thunder storms we expected to come down from the north. The intermittent showers kept away for our lunch stop at Davies Plain Hut where Murray, Judy and Sue were let loose with their cameras. Tripods, macro lenses, and a host of other photographic paraphernalia were aimed at fungus and ferns and moss beds as the shutterbugs unleashed their artistic flair. The rest of us ate lunch.



I had expected to see some brumbies in the Davies Plain area but the only signs of wild horses were the many large piles of dung on the track (left by stallions I am told).



With the storm clouds getting darker and closer, Murray and Judy decided that if they wanted to be sure of making their Tuesday morning flight they had better head for home, which they did via Buckwong Track. "There goes our winch" was the lament heard on the radio. The rest of us headed in the opposite direction along McCarthy's and Limestone Creek tracks to the Limestone Creek camping area. We arrived at 4.00pm and had set up camp before the storm finally caught up with us. The heavens opened at five o'clock, by which time Graham's twenty foot tarp had been strung up as a community shelter. Thunder, lightning, and torrential rain continued on and off for a couple of hours. Ninety mls of rain fell in the area that night. The storm provided a unique atmosphere to pre-dinner drinks and the main course that night. But spirits remained high as we remained dry.

The rain continued and during the night Barry and Dennis (who shared a tent) had a new experience. No, not that. Their tent leaked like a sieve. Not just at the seams but through the walls. At midnight they could be heard seeking higher ground inside the tent, and at 4.00am they gave up and retreated to the shelter of Graham's tarp, made a cup of coffee, and woke up the rest of the camp. Dennis was the master of one-line-puns, for example when I commented that all of the sheep in a paddock near Omeo were wearing coats, as quick as a flask Dennis responded with "if they don't wear coats they get baared".



The Sun shone on Monday morning as we packed up for home. Dave and Doreen had christened a new tent that night and were surprised that it had leaked at the seams. We reassured them that the rain was just what was needed to seal the seams without admitting that we had all taken on our fair share of water during the night.

The trip home on Monday via Benambra, Omeo, and Mt Hotham included a visit to McMillan's lookout near Omeo and lunch in the 'Nordic Shelter' at Wire Plain near the top of Hotham.

For me, the trip was a very enjoyable experience with its mix of great scenery, exciting driving, extreme weather conditions, and very good company.

Bruce Gooday