

Birthday Bash-Eldorado Weekend Trip

On the weekend of Saturday 14th and Sunday 15th May, 2011, an enthusiastic bunch of Wangaratta 4X4Club warriors hit the bush tracks around Eldorado-Yackandandah area to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the formation of the Club.

The meeting point was the Eldorado Camping ground at 11.00am.

With huts chosen, camper trailers set up, tents pitched and the lone swag erected, (in an immaculate hutchie I might say!) David Jackson rallied the troops at 12.15 sharp and we hit the road.

Being the Birthday Bash, there were some family friends as well as some wives and partners along for the day's events. One family also brought along their virtually new Nissan Pathfinder 4X4 cab-ute which proved to be a highlight later in the day. (Courageous effort Terry, we do have photos.)

A short convoy on the black-top led us to the Eldorado dredge turn-off.

Our mix of 100 series Toyotas, Nissan GU's, Navara's and GQ's was being led by the ubiquitous and obviously fiercely independent David Jackson in the sole Land Rover Discovery III, electronics and computer aided air-riding marvel. What could go wrong?

Within the first kilometre, we were at the first of many challenges for the day, a short but steep angled hill descent and ascent.

Time to air-down then practice some wheel placement!

Ron Beurs was the nominated expert who guided some of us less experienced drivers over the edge and back again...lots of photos and video was taken...

Getting down was the easy bit...coming back up proved a bit more of a challenge. The three hundred millimetre (approx) step just near the top was slightly too much for some of the vehicles so the alternative track, back to the top, was used.

We all had a couple of goes at this obstacle then off, following D.J. through the creek, left through the water obstacle and then up the short but steep climb to the road above. No worries here for anyone.

A little further on there was the sand to play in on the right.

Down through some trees into a tight little crossing with trees all over the track....waiting, waiting, waiting....Disco had to lower itself in its suspension so it could get through the gap...(the roof-tent was too high). We waited...but there was a collective sigh of relief when the grey machine glided gracefully through the gap and rose on its air bags again. We were getting one really good education this day!

After we all got through this obstacle, it was time to have some fun in the muddy bog holes. And we did.

Exit the same pathway in...more education then we came to the next obstacle.

It was a steep bank, about the height of our vehicles but with quite a sharp lip at the top.

There were two approaches: Through water from the left or none from the right.

D.J. showed us the way from the right...two goes and he was up.

The GQ shorty was next and it went through the water...and got stuck on the lip...wrong gear on approach...(try 1st instead of 2nd Andrew!) The vehicle was backed down to have another go with the right gear selection this time. Not too fast but it climbed over the top this time. Pretty specie though...lots of steam and photo opportunities galore.

Next!

The others all went for the right side approach and created some awesome flying vehicles...well done Tom!

By this time, Andrew had discovered his electric thermo fans were not really working...some huddling around the stricken vehicle...multi-meters found and used...fuse changed but still dead fans.

It was time to use the heater as the radiator, and get on with the day. It was pretty cold and there were no really big climbs for this day so the heater would do its job and keep the GQ cool...it did.

We had a few tight sand turns and downhill drive-through braking manoeuvres then on to the quarry lake.

More of the same then out onto the road to Mason track for some gentle tracks in the bush...but first, we'll just go down this short track with some ruts in it. Just follow the Disco...

All was going really well until the wheels of the new Navara fell off the crown of the ruts...my, what an angle these vehicles can achieve!

Time for the winch and snatch practice whilst Terry and the girls just sat and watched from in the vehicle...for a little while...

No problem...vehicle removed...with the help of some friendly honking by the fire trucks passing after their day in the bush...we all got through unscathed.

Off into town for an ale/ refreshment...shower and get ready for the Birthday Bash dinner at the tavern.

Day Two:

After a beautiful, clear and positively freezing night, we woke to the sounds of Ron and Tom stoking the fire in below zero temperature, readying the hotplate for a cooked breakfast.

Because Ron is up early most days, this was a walk in the park for him. He was rudely happy preparing loads of bacon and eggs for those of us who felt inclined. Not everyone had his enthusiasm for the temp or the hour but....

A few cups of coffee... full tummies, some great stories and sunlight warming our backs was, just about the right way to start the day.

Ron's great cooking also tempted some members, who had stayed in air-conditioned units, to abandon their warmth and brave the cool (read...freezing) air. Well worth it in the end.

Well done Ron and Tom...excellent effort by you both.

It's a big thank you from all of us.

Soon, a few new faces and vehicles arrived to join in on the fun of the day.

There was a bit of a changing of the guard as some of the previous day's warriors had to head back home, happy with what they had achieved the previous day.

The GQ shorty needed time to rest and think about just how hot she would have been if she went out for the day with no cooling!

Andrew rode shotgun in the plush leather of the Discovery, with D.J.

At 10.30 David led us out for the day.

A couple of the guys had done this combination of tracks a few times but for us that hadn't done it before, it was great to be out in the bush, going through bush tracks and forest sections that abutted onto the edge of farming land.

The first part was quite easy with gentle undulations and a couple of nice rutted descents. We stopped and practiced some ascents and descents on these inclines...a good warm-up for the rest of the day.

Then it was on to the pine plantations around Yackandandah for some more serious climbing practice.

Fortunately there had not been any rain for a few days so the tracks were pretty dry but the depth of some of the ruts and height of the ridges had deepened since the last trip. What started out as fairly easy bush tracks, had a few surprises in store for us.

This was Glen and Robyn Norton's first trip with the club and also Alan Trott's first 4WDing in his 100 series, so it was great to see them attack each of the obstacles so enthusiastically and gain valuable experiences from their efforts.

After a couple medium climbs we stopped and had a few minutes to discuss and reflect on the progress of the day. There were lots of smiles and some happy drivers. Some photos taken then, "let's get on with it...", so we did.

In the lead vehicle now, there was mention of the next climb being a "bit harder, a bit longer and a bit more technical". Even some mumbling about..."lower tyre pressures" being very important and "momentum needing to be kept up for a successful climb" on the next section of the track!

I was excited...what were we in for?

I soon found out.

Over a small crest and down into the gully we went. In front of us was a three hundred meter climb over muddy, rutted and one major ridge, about eighty meters from the start, on the 30 degree incline. Ouch!

We stopped and walked the start of the climb...

It was pretty steep, with David and Glenn struggling to stand whilst ascending by foot.

It was slippery under foot and the combination of sandy loam, rocky rubble and ruts made it tricky to walk up, but they made their way up over the lip. Other vehicles were still arriving, lining up and the drivers surveying the climb.

D.J. was raring to go and was waiting for me to jump in after taking a few photos. I was ready for the adventure....but there now was a short pause whilst D.J. dialled in all the parameters for the Disco's computer to make sense of the task ahead...*(basically, getting a jumbo off the ground is a shorter and easier prospect...)* but there was blur of hand movements and we were ready.

With accelerator mashed to floor, engine chattering on the rev limiter and brakes straining to hold back the rocket...D.J. launched us up the steep incline at warp speed.

He stuck to the right hand side of the track and we launched over the ridge and headed over the far right edge of the track...we missed the trees but the vehicle now decided to slow to a stop...we were about to launch again into the bushes but D.J. pulled the wheel to the left. The vehicle now launched itself to the left back onto the track and on up the hill...phew!

We got to the top safely.

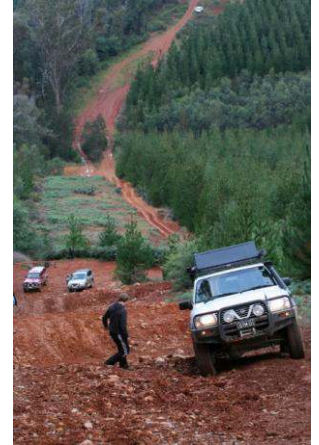
D.J. doesn't hold back...he commits and goes in hard!

An exciting ride indeed....we ran down the hill now as the rest of the team was ready to have their goes.

Zoe and I stood a very respectful distance off the track to video and photograph these proceedings.

Robyn was not that excited about the prospect of being launched into bushes in the Nissan so she braved the walk to the top of the hill...I think this was much harder than the ride but she was happy to walk...gutsy lady.

Glenn just chose a line and went for it...a bit of wheel slip but no real problems...he was really excited though when he got out at the top...check the picture.



Alan was a bit worried but got up easily on his second attempt. Robbo just went for it and smashed it, no worries. Last and definitely not least, Tom gave it his spectacular best...lots of sideways action and heaps of black sooty smoke saw him weave his magic on way to the top.

What a hill!

Everything was pretty calm after this...some trails in the forest, an abandoned mining shaft, some more forest driving on easy tracks and navigation practice for me out of the maze.

We went to what was the start of a really interesting track, but it had been blocked off by Parks Victoria so since it was about 3.00pm, Robyn suggested we take a short detour to Yackandandah for coffee and lunch.

A great idea...

Because some of the members were wearing club jumpers etc. we were suddenly very noticed when we were having our pies and coffee.

It was like "old-home week". People were introducing themselves and chatting.

We were on our 'bestest' and most 'friendliest' behaviour...a good time was had by all.

Now it was a short drive to the Underground Hut...some camping spots for future trips and also checking out how much damage the floods had done to the



streams.

The last bit of the trip was to go past Long Tom and Eternity...ten minutes from where we were.

We were back in the pine forest but now the road was quite open and flowing...(good rally country!), then we came to a large opening and turned right off the main drag....ouch, that's a climb!

Before us was Long Tom.

It was just about four now and we were lined up at the bottom. Tom walked up the first steep climb to see just how slippery it was.

It looked glistening and dewy and quite slippery but he assured us it was good.

As David was giving thought to whether we should give it a go...Pud (Glenn) just motored past and went for it!

We just watched thinking he may not get that far on his All Terrain Tires set at 22 psi...

We were wrong...over the first hump...more revs...straight up to the next sect with the tight right hand turn...is there nothing that this guy won't have a go at?....more revs, a left turn and he launches himself up the second section.

He's now roaring up over the catchment bank and heading towards some shaly stuff in the middle of the track...

Lots of wheel spin and sliding to the right, but now no forward motion...

He tries to get it going again but the wheels are spinning...he's going nowhere.

A few messages over the CB... "just sit there Pud, we'll come up to help you," says D.J.

We can clearly see the Nissan about a kilometre away, stuck on the hill...no problem.

We launch up the hill and do what Glenn had just done...when we got to him though, our only line was to the left at speed, to miss him...now this was great for the first thirty or forty meters but just past the stricken Nissan...the ground was muddy and soft and getting softer the further we went...until we didn't!

Now we were stuck...not exactly bogged...but with no forward momentum, we were not able to move either....ummmm!

Great! Now we had two stranded vehicles up a big hill...at 4.10 on a Sunday afternoon...

A call was made to the troops to come up...but not up this part of the hill!

Now, through all this, Robyn had decided to stay at the bottom and wait for Glenn to have his 'play' and come back to pick her up. So with the team coming up to help us, she was now alone down at the bottom....chivalrous lot our team!



We didn't even leave a hand held CB for her...and it was now getting quite cold and a bit darker...from the top of the hill, we could just make her out, walking back to the intersection of the main road.

Tom got up to us first...with Alan and D.R. there too. Zoe was soon videoing all this from the sidelines...

The first thing done was to get Glenn back to a small pile of stones that lay behind his right rear wheel...no problems. Now he could rest and turn off the engine.

We let his tires down more to fifteen pounds and did the same for D.J.

We started to dig D.J. out then remembered he had his Maxxi-traks on board!

We (Tom) cleared away the soil in front of the wheels and we put the Tracks in place. D.J. had to be on full right lock so as not to push over the soft ridge and bottom out...

He fired the beast and basically just drove straight out of the bog...he kept on going till he found a safe position to stop.

Now it was Glenn's time to Maxxi Trak out...

He fired, and revved the engine then dropped the clutch only to spit the Traks out like a skeet machine...this was not going to work!

After gathering the Traks, we got him to start in reverse and back slowly down to the safety bank.

When he got there, he chose a path forward and with the lower tire pressures and his extra experience, he launched straight up the hill and was gone.

We now made our way to the vehicles parked down the hill on the access road level.

Robyn had in the meantime had chats with arriving 4X4 groups who were thinking of climbing to help us...none had lockers so D.J. politely suggested they stay at the bottom...they left. Robyn was still alone.

Whilst we went down the hill, Zoe decided to walk up to meet D.J. and Glenn who were up at the top.

Everything seemed to be going really well now!

We've reached the vehicles and have put away the recovery gear then Tom decides to call D.J. to see if he has Zoe with him.



"No, we're coming down the hill on the long escape road...we didn't see Zoe...We'll be at the bottom in about five minutes".

Tom dives for the mobile just hoping Zoe's is on and there is some reception...

It's getting darker...Zoe is now very light clothes and light shoes...not really the best for hill descents or climbing for that matter.

A few tense moments whilst the phone rings...she answers then lots more tense moments as Tom explains there is no car at the top of the hill..."could you walk down please Zoe?"

It was very quiet for a few moments...

A little while later, we saw this lone figure, picking her way slowly through the bush on the side of the track.

Not happy Jan!

Meanwhile...the two miscreants appeared at the bottom of the hill and Glenn reacquainted himself with Robyn.

What happened at the intersection stayed at the intersection because after Zoe got down off the hill, we all made our way down the much safer but longer escape road.

When we got back to the intersection...the boys were airing up and there were smiles all around.

The adventure had finished. It was getting dark and a good day had been had by all.

We said our good-byes and headed out of the forest.

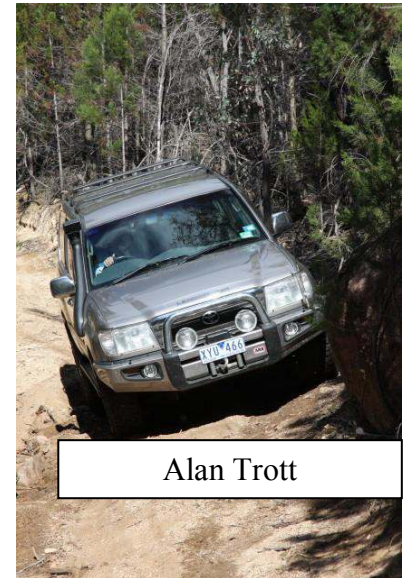
We stayed in convoy heading back towards Eldorado with individual vehicles peeling off to their destinations as we went...

It doesn't get much better than that for a weekend in the 4X4s.

Hope to be with you on the next trip!

Andrew

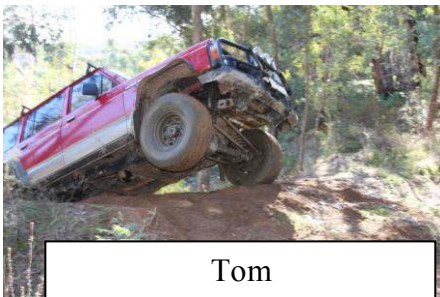
What do you think Robbo



Alan Trott



Glenn no worries



Tom

Photographs from Saturday and Sunday drives