

# Victorian High Country - April 2014

Officially the start of the trip was NugNug and Mark and myself decided to leave Sydney early in the morning to avoid the long weekend holiday traffic.

We left our respective homes and around 5 AM and where to meet up at the Pheasant's nest service station. After a coffee we continued our drive on towards Victoria with a couple of short stops along the way.

We arrived at Myrtleford at around 3 pm and after filling our fuel tanks to the brim we made the short drive out to Nug Nug where we were greeted by Clinton and Valerie who arrived shortly before us and already secured a nice camping spot and the reasonably full camping area.

We started setting up our camps and one by one the rest of the group arrived and set up camp. When everyone except Marian and Michaela set up it started to rain a little bit but the Markova family was quick to set up in the rain (it seems to become a common pattern ;-). The rain subsided quickly and we got ready for the campfire where everyone got to know each other.

### Day 2 - Nug Nug to Lake Cobbler

We arrived a little after 4pm on Friday at Nug Nug Caravan Park. There was a quick "get to know you", around the camp fire and we bunkered down early for the evening as we were excited to start our first day on the road.

On this morning, there was a quick start with the jumper leads on the Toyota, and we were off! It wasn't quite the early start our trip leader had planned for us, so we thought it best not to ask within the first 10 minutes of taking off where were we stopping for morning tea?

The sun was out after a foggy start to the day and it was a lovely easy drive on all tracks. Our only request for the day was to have lunch with a view and we weren't disappointed. (It seemed around every corner there was going to be an opportunity).

After negotiating a small "blocked" path at Lake Cobbler, we found a lovely camping spot for the evening and settled down very quickly to preparing dinner and we were soon into the camp fire discussions with Stuart and Brian (Barry) formulating the "undie challenge" for the week ahead.

We heard the rumor that Clinton together with Brian (Barry) was about to disassemble his 60kg drop down Fridge slider to put it on the roof as it could not be closed anymore.

Stefan investigated and it turned out that Clinton did have the slider locked (he blamed his son for it) and after unlocking and re-assembling the slider all was good

Tracks covered on the day:

Buffallo River Rd  
Abbeyards Road  
Worseldine Track  
Cobbler LakeTrack

Written by Stu and Wendy

SUNDAY – 20<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2014 – LAKE COBBLER – HOWITTS HUT - Bryan and Susan

Notes – Cobbler Lake Track, Speculation Road (staircase is graded), King Hut, Link Road (narrow passing of Hilux), Bluff Track (traffic jam), Lovicks Hut, King Billy Track, Howitts Road, Howitts Hut.

Easter Sunday morning we were all up at 7:30 to start packing to leave for Howitts Hut.

It was a very misty morning with low cloud over the lake.

Spectacular sights when the sun started appearing over the mountain. Before leaving we all stopped for a photo shoot at Lake Cobbler Hut.

From Lake Cobbler we travelled along Cobbler Lake Track up the "Staircase" which was very rocky and steep, we made our way back onto Speculation Road to King Hut.

We stopped at Upper King Hut at mid morning for morning tea and to have a look around the camp site, then carried on along Bindaree Road to Bluff Hut where we stopped for lunch. Bluff Hut was very, very cold.

At about 2:15 we left Bluff Hut we carried on towards Lovicks Hut. On route we came across a party of 12 vehicles from different clubs which had stopped on a very narrow track below the Lovicks lookout. Photo opportunities at the lookout were just amazing as the view was breath taking which made the half hour traffic jam so much more worthwhile.

From Lovicks Hut lookout we carried on King Billy Track which was again very steep and challenging, eventually coming out on Howitts Plains which was magnificent. After driving through bush, tall trees and on rocky tracks it was just so serene on the plains.

We eventually arrived at Howitts Hut at 5:15 which was bitterly cold, but thanks to the quick work of the chaps in the group, had a fire going very smartly which was welcome. After dinner we were entertained around the roaring fire by Bryan with his iPod and speakers.

Clinton, Valerie and the kids decided not to pitch tents as it was just too cold so they slept in the car as little Welton was not well. They had decided not to carry on with the trip and would be leaving us the following day.

Day 4 of our trip started with quiet shiver as we slept on minus 6 degree at 1590m above the sea level. We camped at Howitts Hut where the view was absolutely amazing. Clinton and Family decided to go home after a night sleeping in the car and a sick boy.

We left at 9:30am and travelled down to Caledonia River Track.

The track had everything - rocks, lots of river crossing, but most were pretty low, steep hills, mud. There was one particular puddle that Markov's decided to take a swim and got stuck in it. They tried out every possible self-recovery Max Tracks...didn't worked, Pulley...didn't work, Max Tracks +Pulley...didn't work. After half an hour playing in the mud came help from Mark's D4. It took him 2 min to pull the Nissan Patrol out.

Driving up Dingo Hill was quite interesting. Very steep with a lot of 3 point turns. We started at an altitude of 775 m above sea level and it took us about an 25 mins to climb to 1300 m above sea level. Then we drove to Thamboritha

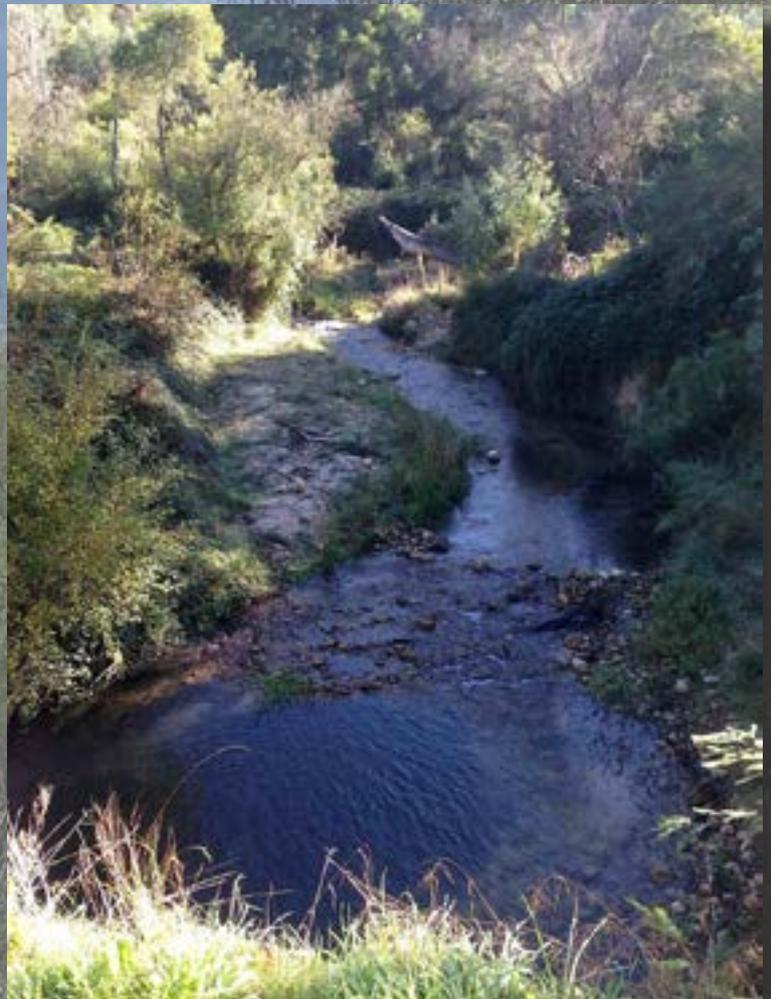
Road where we had a tea break and parted with the Pretorius Family.

On the junction of Dingo Hill Track and Caledonia River Track we saw a beautiful hidden camp spot with river view and chopped firewood ready to worm us. Without doubt we drove back Dingo Hill Track and set up our camp there.

With hindsight we should have known the day would not be normal.

It started with the unusual and very relaxed start. Stefan was not "warming his engine" at 8.50am sharp in an attempt to chase those of us struggling to pack up. We left the beautiful campsite at a leisurely 10.30 and meandered along the Caledonia River Track for around 10 mins until Brian's alter ego, Barry, appeared. (Barry was the confused version of Brian). "Guys, did anyone see my speakers?" questioned DJ Barry - Brian/Barry had apparently left his portable speakers on his roof at camp and drove off without packing them inside. He turned around, and we all waited whilst Stefan attempted the first serious climb of the day.

With Stefan up the hill the conditions were communicated: "a bit slippery, steep, very interesting". I was up next. Waiting for Marian (or Mario as he was at times renamed) half way up the hill, the call came over "Mark come down", very calm, 3 words only. Stefan and I then took a careful



## Trip report



walk down the hill to look for Marian. At the point where we could see Marian's car half over the track edge we both started running. Calls over the radio for Barry and Stuart to come quickly were met with relaxed responses until a few choice words were used to express the urgency. Stuart and Brian arrived with the necessary recovery/restraint gear.

We are still unsure whether Stuart found one recovery too boring, or was jealous of the attention Marian was getting. A request for an additional strap caused Stuart to go back to his car, and unexplainably reverse onto the ONLY rock within a 30 metre radius causing a loud crash and the eyes of all parties up the hill temporarily avert to him.

With the vehicle restrained it was decided to attempt a tow first. I reversed down the hill (at this point my 4WD experience was more walking up hills, down hills to video and reversing my car) and we attempt to tow. When this failed we turned to the winch on Stefan's Defer. Stefan had to look for a suitable turning point on the narrow track. With no Helipad nearby for the Defenders 35 point turn, Stefan made his own and returned to winch the vehicle.

Marian's vehicle was eventually freed after 3 hours with a winch attached to a Defender attached to a Discovery and many man/woman hours of worry and effort. A great team effort!!

With that done, we broke for morning tea.

All cars eventually moving over some very steep, rocky tracks and slippery terrain we made our way onto the legendary Butcher Country Track. This track had everything – steep rocky climbs, muddy sections, sheer drops offs (that could not be seen at night) but not 1 Kangaroo.

The highlights of the track included some great road building with Brian and Stuart taking pride in placing interlocking rocks to form a ramp over; Stefan self-wincing over some difficult section; A slippery section that some vehicles needed multiple attempts to conquer but eventually the day ended the only way it could – Marian getting a puncture 10 mins from camp.

Camp was eventually made at 21.30 and by 21.45 everyone was asleep after an adventure filled day.

Quote of the day: "Are we there yet?" – by everyone still

driving at 8.30pm....

After an exhausting previous day, and unexpected night drive and late set up, we bid farewell to Marion and family on this morning. Our remaining 5 trucks were now down to 4.

The weather was perfect and it was a very easy few hours of driving (compared to the previous day and night). Mind you, our trip leader did find a little deviation for us to play in for about half an hour, where we did some fantastic pose shots!

We arrived reasonably early in the afternoon to Wonnagatta Station and set up camp next to a pristine deep running river. We took the opportunity of the beautiful weather to do some airing of our sleeping bags and blankets. It was commented that our site in particular, looked more like a street garage sale than a camping site.

We relaxed and read and also walked around the grounds and found the remains of an old homestead and a tiny cemetery which is lovingly maintained by the Friends of the Wonnangatta . Community.

A couple of our brave troopers took a dip in the icy river before dinner and there was even an unsuccessful attempt of hair washing in a small bucket!

Tracks covered on this day:

Zeka Spur Track  
Wonnangatta Track

Written by Stu and Wendy

– Bryan and Susan

Notes – Wonnangatta Track, Herne Spur Track, Cynthia Range Track and Talbotville Road

After a wonderful afternoon yesterday at Wonnangatta Station we are ready and packed to head off to Dargo via the Herne Spur Track which, as I could see on the map, was once again a very steep incline.

After crossing many rivers and mud puddles and once





we were all up the Herne Spur Track we turned right onto Cynthia Range Track and made our way to the top of Cynthia Range. Cynthia range was spectacular overlooking Billy Goat Bluff and the Pinnacles. The view was amazing. We then carried on down along the Crooked River Track turning left on a short cut road to Dargo. We arrived in Dargo at 4:15.

Once in Dargo the main objective was to refuel and to look for accommodation. A couple of us headed over to the Pub for a beer and to find out about accommodation which was a bit ordinary and expensive. We had a quick look around at the town and local store and then had to head off to the Wonnangatta Caravan Park before the office closed for the day. Dargo was such a quaint little town.

Wonnangatta Caravan Park was absolutely lovely with flat green surfaces to pitch our tents on and lovely views of the river, mountains and trees. Once we had all pitched, Stuart and Bryan got a fire going and we all enjoyed afternoon cheese and biscuits. Most of us decided to go back into town for dinner but Stewart and Wendy opted of stay put and have a quiet evening around the fire.

We had a great meal at the pub and after dinner made our way back to camp and enjoyed many laughs around the fire.



Wonnangatta Caravan Park / Wonnangatta Road/ Billy Goat Bluff / Pinnacles / Castle Hill Track / Junction Spur Track / McCarthy Spur (Blocked) / Scrubby Creek Track / Wonnangatta Road.

The trip was down to 4 cars by now; and with Sue/Brian deciding to venture into the booming metropolis of Dargo it was up to Stefan, Stuart/Wendy and I to conquer the infamous Billy Goat Bluff.

With 40kms of dusty road, the trip to Billy Goat was pretty uneventful. BGB – lived up to some of the hype, some interesting rocky climbs, few steep sections and a nerve wrecking “saddle” at the top but above all blew everyone away with the views from the Pinnacles viewing platform. With 360 degree views of surrounding valleys it was well worth the climb. On a clear day it is claimed you can see the sea and we had the best days weather on this trek – more photos, less words needed here.

Down Castle Hill Track and onto Junction Spur saw the first real “let’s get out of the car and look” challenge. A 100m muddy, steep with some smooth rocks downhill. Numerous mud ruts to the left with panel damage written over the rock laden bank, slippery rock faces to the right, with rollover car written on it. Stefan went first, with the bumps and slides looking very ominous from behind. Stuart and I, reviewed, looked, pondered, studied, discussed the track first. I cheated, pressed every electronic gizmo the car had drove down quite comfortably. Stuart pointed his car downhill, and gravity safely did the rest with the careful use of a brake pedal.

The next major decision for the group was McCarthy Spur (an overgrown looking track, with some evidence of vehicle activity) or Scrubby Creek Track. Being an adventurous bunch we headed down the overgrown path. After 500 metres the “thousand finger nails down a chalk board” sound became too much for me, I could see we had covered less than 10% of the track, and envisaged popping out the other side in a Shiny Silver car with no paint. Much to Stuart’s relief I called “Chicken” first, and Stefan laughed as the trees were adding to the character of his car.

We returned to camp quickly along Scrubby Creek Trk and Wonnangatta Road and quickly setup the BBQ grid over perfect coals. Steaks and Potatoes all round.

Quote of the day: “Oh, next time I’ll set up your awning for you before you return so it’s ready when you get back” by Sue while helping Stefan setting the awning up, and being really helpful, polite and caring, until Stefan reminded her that it was attached to his vehicle !

By Mark

Bryan and Susan & Stefan

Notes – Conway Track, Randall Track, Crooked River Track, South Basalt Knob, Ritchie Road, Basalt North Track, Blue Rag Track, Dargo High Plains Road.

Today is the last leg of our great Victoria High Country trip.

# Trip report

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We were all up early and ready to head off to Bright via the Blue Rag Track and some small mining towns.

At midday we stopped just before Talbotville for morning tea and lunch combined and then headed on towards South Basalt Knob which eventually became Basalt Knob North Tack ..... I can't report on this as I was under the dash board for most of the way up. How these vehicles get up these inclines amazes me. I should have, by now gotten used to these steep tracks but holy cow.... what a challenge. (Susan)

By the time we got to the top of the Basalt Knob North Track and Blue Rag Track I had had enough and we decided not to carry on up to Blue Rag lookout but instead head off down Blue Rag Track to Dargo High Plains Road and on to Bright. Stewart and Wendy decided to join us.

By Stefan

Mark and Myself who both had done Blue Rag before decided that we still make the little detour and do blue rag once more and this time it would be in the clouds.

After around 20 minutes driving through the clouds we arrived at the lookout and had clouds swirling all around us but opening up from time to time and presenting a great view. It was a great feeling standing in the clouds but it was very, very cold so after 20 minutes taking videos and pictures we headed back down to civilisation with the goal to catch up with the rest of the group at Bright. It turned out the autumn festival was on in Bright and accommodation was impossible to find so we stopped at Harrierville and Mark settled himself in a comfy Hotel room while I decided to tend it all the way and opted for the local caravan park which was very picturesque right next to little brooke. The town in autumn was absolutely beautiful with the trees in every imaginable colour. Mark and myself had dinner at the local pub and afterwards settled early to bed for a very early start back home.

