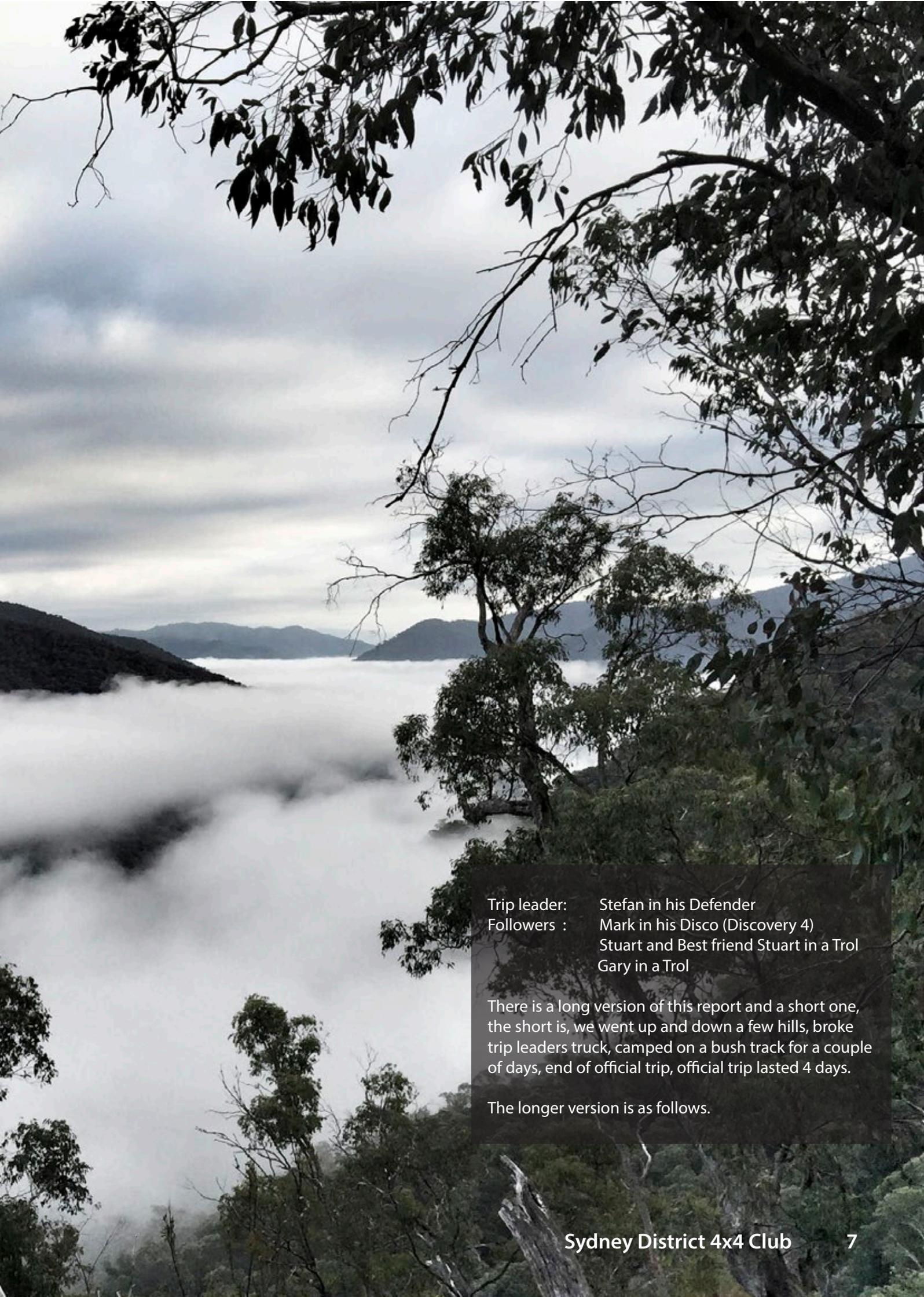


Trip report

HIGH COUNTRY TRIP





Trip leader: Stefan in his Defender
Followers : Mark in his Disco (Discovery 4)
Stuart and Best friend Stuart in a Trol
Gary in a Trol

There is a long version of this report and a short one, the short is, we went up and down a few hills, broke trip leaders truck, camped on a bush track for a couple of days, end of official trip, official trip lasted 4 days.

The longer version is as follows.

Trip report

Roll up, roll up, roll up...gather around for another exciting episode of Stefan's Victorian High Country adventures...staring Stefan (in his invincible looking Landrover Defender on 35" muddies); Stewart and Stewart (Stu paired / Stupid as they were known – in the trusted Nissan Patrol on 33" Muddies); Garry (with an exciteable GPS unit inside his lifted Nissan Patrol on 33" Muddies) and yours truly Mark in the Landrover Discovery 4 (vehicle of mocking choice apparently on std 31" LT AT's and lots of electronic gadgetry).

Stefan and myself met up at the usual spot of Pheasant's Nest on Thursday 2nd at the unthinkable hour of 6.30am. After the necessary caffeine hit we set off for Buxton and the first campsite – Keppel Creek. The first surprise of the trip was finding Stu, or Miss Daisy from the last trip (due to his slow driving habit) already at camp; Garry arrived at 12.30am, drove around the campsite with spotties on, and parked and shut off his engine once we were all awake.

Driving around the High Country on Friday 3rd (also known as Good Friday) looking for a campsite proved interesting. Every man, his dog and family from Melbourne ascend into the hills and occupy

the quiet land. Driving around the Stockmans Reward area and with pure fluke Stefan found the campsite for Night 1 – down an unused track (which caused minor pin striping. A small creek entrance/departure caused the usual Nissan Patrol bumper tail light pop – which made Garry very happy to test his bush mechanic skills); Thankfully the misreading of the GPS map had led us to the only quiet campsite in the VHC and we set about our Campfire building skills.

Saturday 4th April a renaming ceremony took place. We set off from the secluded campsite, along Big River Road, Ryan Spur Track and turned off planned route into Mt Terrible Track. Yes, Correct – Mt Terrible Track – never in the history of 4WD has a track been more appropriately named. We had only travelled around 33Km, when a rather rocky ascent was sighted in front of us. After watching a Nissan Ute almost roll down the hill, Stefan decided to climb up. From lower down the hill, and even from the hill on the other side, the sound heard mid way was instantly recognized as "Not Good". Mechanical terms aside, the Defender stopped with a broken rear Prop shaft. "Defender Hill" was born, and another 3 hour VHC recovery commenced.



Books are written on recovery techniques; but human invention, common sense and a working winch will often suffice. We only had 2 of the 3, after Stefan's winch refused to work (despite its recent service) and the common sense quota was severely tested at times. After securing the vehicle, Garry took an alternative route to the top and proceeded to winch the stricken Defender up Defender Hill. It took many, many reiterations of winch cable, winch extension strap, bridle to eventually get to the top. In this process the Handbrake was damaged – which we thought would be the 3rd of the bad omen trifecta. Did I mention it was initially called Mt Terrible Track?

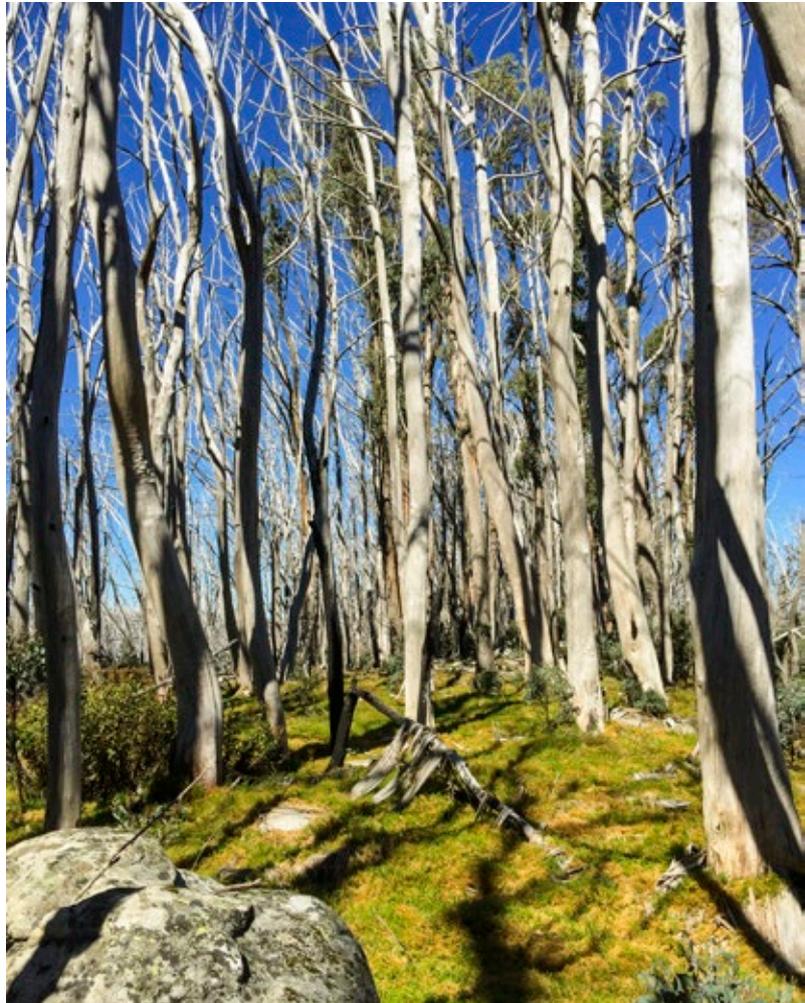
In attempting to drive down the hill a small incline caused another bang from the front of the 2WD. A snapped front stub axle! With the vehicle now a 0WD many phonecalls were made to a mechanic friend. Trackside mechanics safely reduced the Defender to a rolling kart, which was then towed/restrained down the hill to a flat track area that would become our campsite for the next 2 nights. Australia is all about mateship; and having a friend that will drive 900Kms from Sydney to some hill in the VHC on Easter Sunday must demonstrate this in bucket loads. Stefan is very lucky to have a friend called Dave, who on Sunday morning packed up his Landrover, drove to a mechanic (Bruce Davis) who opened his workshop to source a used rear prop shaft and some spare front stub axles / CV's. Dave arrived at the trackside campsite at 10.30pm Sunday.

Easter Monday, and the Landrover was ~~resurrected~~ fixed. A new rear prop shaft created a 2WD, with RWD. Unfortunately the front stub axle was too damaged to risk removing and not being able to replace the wheel. The thought of towing a 3 wheeled 3T vehicle down a steep hill was too much now. With the entire group safely in Jamieson, the trip was formally closed.

The following events never took place. No trip was convened. Names were not changed to protect the guilty.

By pure coincidence on Monday 6th April, 4 strangers met in Jamieson. Stu times 2; Garry and Mark. The term "I am going for a drive now, I cannot stop you from following me" may have been used in a layman's attempt circumvent a rule no one could remember.

After restocking with supplies we headed out of Jamieson to the many campsites along the



Mansfield Woods Point road. Being the closing Easter WE day, camp spaces were aplenty and in no time another cracking campfire was setup at Flour Bag Creek Reserve; along with the Hot Shower – both very much needed.

Tuesday 7th April / Day 5: Sappers Link Track, Burke Bridge Road: 23kms / 2 hrs

We awoke on Tuesday to the sound of rain; Stu had mentioned that he found the pitter patter of rain on his swag very therapeutic and calming. I was worried about the track conditions and my AT tyres – so not so calm.

A short drive up Sappers Link Track tested the AT tyres, a rather steep descent on wet clay saw the first of a sliding Landrover and signaled another renaming ceremony ahead. The Patrols on Muddies handled fine. We continued along the Jamieson-Licola road, passed through Grannys Flat campsite, completed a nice small river crossing then attempted the climb up Burke Bridge Road.

You gotta love it when the authorities run a Grader through the most interesting tracks and reduce them to the F1 equivalent surrounded by trees. It gets even better when said grading reduces a wet surface to a quagmire of clay.

Trip report

AT tyres, wet clay, 2.5T vehicles and hills do not play nicely together. The D4 struggled up 1 small incline; tested all the electronic gadgets and the leather seats when it slid backwards despite a considered right foot. Reducing tyre pressure and hoonish right foot saw the first climb made. Again the Patrols on MT's were fine.

The next climb was twice as long, and steeper; It was renamed Discovery Hill as we turned around – no damage to vehicle, track nor animal. Granny Flats Campsite became home for the night and the best campfire made so far; with Garry creating a wind tunnel flame through an hollowed out log.

Day 6: Burke Bridge Road, Symes Track, Steiners Road, Howqua Hills Track, Brocks Road, Bluff Link Road, Bluff Track, King Billy Track: 81Kms / 5.5hrs

After a windy night the tracks had dried out a fair bit and Stu decided it not safe to share a tent with Stu. The drama of yesterday was gone and we proceeded to take in the sights around Howqua Hills, Bluff Hut (also looking back towards Mt Buller), Lovicks Hut and intended to push on through to Howitt's Hut. The temperature at Bluff Hut, midday, at 1500M above sea level was 6 Deg C. The wind was blowing a gale, and we still had an estimated 10-15Kms to travel to Howitt's.

Along King Billy Track Garry was spotting campsites and calling them out. After the third such event, we took the hint and decided to camp trackside, in a sheltered enclave, at 1000M above sea thinking it would be warmer. It was for a while, but the campfire was useless as no dry wood could be found. Mark made some mulled wine which lifted spirits / temperatures for a while.

Day 7: King Billy Track, Howitt Road, Zeka Spur Track, Wonnangatta Track. 42kms/3.5hrs

From a cold King Billy Track valley enclave to the beautiful Wonnagatta Station valley – day 7 was a great drive. Nothing too eventful; another hot shower and another great campfire.

Day 8: Wonnangatta Track, Herne Spur Track, Cynthia Range Track, Sugarloaf Creek Track (dead end), Eaglevale Track 34Kms / 3 Hrs

After a quick tour of the historical site at

Wonnangatta station we proceed to one of the steepest climbs in the VHC. Herne Spur track rises over 500M in 2.5kms, with one climb of 150M on 500M. It is STEEP. All vehicles safely up, we cruised along Cynthia Range ridge with some stunning views on both sides. A steep descent into Eaglevale campsite saw some mild entertainment with some trail bikers crossing the river, almost flooding their bikes and choice language used to describe each other. Another awesome campfire was setup, some strange jokes told, a few limericks shared and then an early night as realization that tomorrow signaled the start of the trip home.

Day 9: Wonnangatta Road, Billy Goat Bluff Track (up and down), Conway Track, Hiberna Road, Dargo High Plains Road. 53Kms / 3.5Hrs

Day 9 was sad yet happy. After countless days (well 8 really), we were heading home. But first the infamous Billy Goat Bluff Track. Since our last visit here the ever present Graders had been pushed/dragged/pulled up and down this once technically challenging track. It is now steep in some sections, with loose rubble, a few sticky parts – but the views are truly breath taking. The 350m walk from car park to viewsite up a few sets of stairs also causing lost breath. We made in up in 1.5 hrs, taking our time; enjoying the views. The Pinnacles view site well worth the time. Travelling down, with gravity assistance – was in 1 Hr.

It was supposed to then be a leisurely drive out, towards Dargo High Plains Road; but Conway Track had other ideas. As a final sendoff to our glorious trip Conway provided some steep, technically challenging sections which was then followed by a muddy section. A great mixture. We followed in convoy down the Great Alpine Road into Harrietville; some comments were made about travelling speed, which cannot be repeated.

All up a tremendous trip, full of unplanned adventure, forever changing environment and tracks, cracking campfires and great views.

