



**THE NEXT
GENERATION
4WD CLUB**

Craig's Hut Trip (Mansfield State Forest)

29th/30th May 2010

Trip Report: Evan Davidson

Weather: Cool, damp and drizzly with an average daytime temperature hovering around the dizzy height of no more than 10°C.

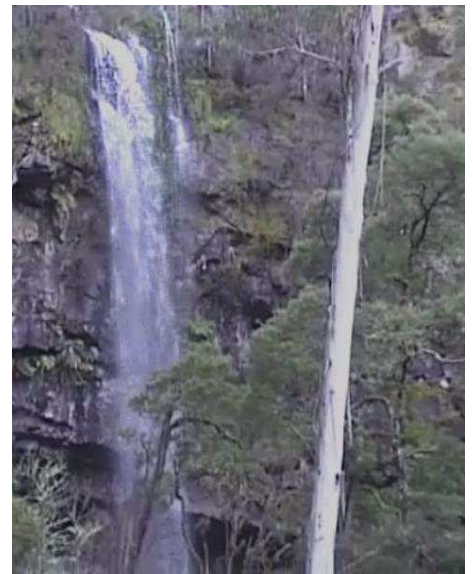
Trip Participants: Belinda (RAV4), Evan & Sarah (Jackaroo), Ray (Subaru), Adelaide (Escape), James (Subaru), Anthony & Nathan (HiLux), Ian (Going 4WD Mazda Bravo), Jamie (Going 4WD Troopy).

Sarah, Belinda and I met up with the rest of the crew at the Mirimbah long term car park around 10-30am amidst a break in the fine windy drizzle. It wasn't the best of days for a trip with the odd dark menacing overhead cloud and a stiff chilly wind slowly brewing. Another couple of degrees lower and it would have been snowing. Amongst our fellow travellers we had Ian and Jamie from the Going 4WD television series who were probably wondering what they were in for with such a strange assortment of vehicles.

Our first stop was at Telephone Box Junction where everyone deflated their tyres in readiness for the next section of the trip. Belinda's plan was to visit Bindaree Falls before striking camp at King Hut on the King River but first we had to tackle the Bindaree Falls track which had just been graded by DSE. Talk about icky sloppy mud!! It was up to 8 inches (200mm) deep and even more in some places which gave our cars a total top to bottom spray job. Upon arriving at the falls we looked at our once pristine clean cars with their newly acquired spray coatings in awe. At this point we should have renamed the club as the Beige All Wheel Drive Club.



With Sarah opting to stay and look after the cars the rest of us took to the walking track in search of the falls. The path ascends fairly quickly up a number of steps testing both man and woman with aching calf muscles and strained lungs. Boy was it worth it!! The falls were in full flow with the overnight rain and the sound of the falling water was really something.



At the base of the falls Ian did a quick on scene intro for his program with Jamie being the videographer. It was rather hard trying to hear Ian above the roar of the water and I was only 2m from him. I don't think we will see this bit of film on Going 4WD as the presenter was outdone by mother nature.

After a quick recovery from the frenetic activity of walking back from the falls we hit the road again with everyone getting excited about having to drive back up through the slops to Circuit Road. A lot of fun was had by all negotiating some pretty boggy sections of the track complete with tight bends and eroded rutted parts.



Upon meeting up with Circuit Road Belinda was insistent (or maybe that should be hell-bent) that we go up The Monument Track despite the map indicating that it was rough.

In true Top Gear fashion we paraphrased Jeremy Clarkson's immortal cry of "**how hard can it be?**" 😊



After much discussion it was decided that Anthony and Ray go the long way around to Craig's Hut while the rest of us attempted The Monument Track with Belinda in the lead and the Jackaroo following just in case she needed a bit of assistance.

As none of had been up this track for a long time if ever, we alternated the convoy with a smaller car in between larger dual range vehicles just in case anything went wrong. The track started off rather steeply with the AWDs getting up the first third or so with relative ease getting around rocky projections, tight switchbacks and deep ruts until we came across a series of rock steps on a sweeping uphill right hand bend. At this point Belinda and I plotted what we thought was the safest route up keeping in mind that her RAV4 didn't have as much ground clearance as my Jackaroo let alone low range gearing.

After the first step the little RAV just picked its way up and over the steps in true text book style without any belly scraping or banging of suspension bits. I wish I had my in-car video as it would have made quite an interesting movie. Next it was my turn which I did in low first (crawler gear) casually walking up and over the various steps with Adelaide behind noting where I placed my wheels. Adelaide in her little Escape was the next car which like Belinda slowly but surely crawled up the steps like a mountain goat. Unbelievable!! We were all gob smacked at her gutsy pluckiness considering this was her first trip with us. Her attempt and success along with Belinda's was "*monumental*".



Following Adelaide was Ian who like me found the track also challenging despite having a diesel powered car with a crawler gear. Ian was quickly followed up by James in his Suby (well done James!) and Jamie in his diesel Troopy taking up the rear. Having completed what we thought was a reasonably difficult track but not impossible, the rest of the track was almost dreary in comparison until we met up with Clear Hills Trail. The only bright spot on the way up after the steps was Jamie taking photos of us at various sections where there were ruts, rocks or mud.

Just above the rock steps we came across five large 4WDs heading downhill. They gave us a funny weird look at seeing stock standard all wheel drives going the other way. It was beyond me what they were thinking of. The intersection at Clear Hills Trail was a nice flat easy turn around until things changed.....



Not much notice was taken of the sign post here until I spotted the side of it indicating that The Monument Track which we had just come up was rated as a Double Black Diamond Track **in dry conditions**. For readers unfamiliar with the Double Black Diamond standard, it is at the extreme end of hard which for our club is something from another planet as the majority of our trips are rated easy to medium. Here we are at the top of a track that a lot of other clubs would balk especially in sloppy wet conditions. Does that make it Triple Black Diamond track?

Upon hearing my comment everyone looked at me with blank faces until it sank in at just what they had achieved. At this point we really needed a couple of bottles of champagne to toast our achievement but all we had was coffee. Who was it that said all wheel drives are just soft roaders and can't cope off road? Four Wheel Drive Victoria's Driver Training Unit will be informed of our achievement. They will have to now revise their thinking.

I know now why the guys we saw going down The Monument Track had puzzled faces.

From the top of The Monument Track it was a quick short trip up to Craig's Hut where we encountered several other groups of large 4WDs and met up with Anthony and Ray who had been listening to our radio transmissions. As per usual

the other 4WDs gave the AWDs in our group the disapproving glare because after all *this was tough four wheel drive country*. If only they new where we had been!



Lunch was had by everyone in the car park picnic shelter with a lively discussion about getting to King Hut before dark and setting up camp. As most of us were worried about the plunging temperature and increasing rain and wind Saturday night was starting to look more like a nightmare than an adventure.



Sarah convinced me (ie twisted my arm) that a night back in Mansfield in a warm dry motel was far better than a cold damp tent which would need drying back home. Considering it would be dark by the time we got to the camp site and not looking forward to setting up in the dark we all hit the track back to Mansfield with Sarah calling my son back home to look up accommodation places on the internet that had vacancies.

As it turned out we had a chance of slumming it at the Alzburg Resort where we shared a four bed room apartment with Ian and Belinda.



Alzburg Resort, Mansfield

Yes I know dear reader, it wasn't up to the usual high standard of accommodation that we club members expect on a trip but desperate times call for desperate measures. Despite having to cope with 5 star digs we spent the night cooking our amp dinners in the well appointed kitchen, talking about the day's adventure, how well all wheel drive cars cope with rough terrain and contemplated a communal spa in the luxury bathroom which also had a TV with which we could use to watch past episodes of Ian's show.

Sarah and Belinda hit the sack early leaving Ian who has filmed many four wheel drive trips over the last few years spending the night with me mumbling on about how all wheelers are misrepresented in mainstream media as just soft roader cars and not capable doing anything much other than shopping.

Just before we decided to retire for the night we managed to get a pic of our fearsome trip leader in the land of nod –



Looks angelic doesn't she?

Sunday morning arrived and believe it or not it looked just like the day before. Arrrrgh, Groundhog Day. After a quick repack of our absolutely filthy cars we headed off to the local BP service station to meet up with Adelaide who stayed overnight in her caravan at a camping park also in Mansfield. We were unsure if we were looking at the right Escape as it was pretty much whistle clean. I think someone has a cleaning complex! After refuelling we once gain hit the Buller Road meeting up with Jamie who spent the night camping at Sheeppark Flat. Our convoy was now a little smaller as Anthony and his son Nathan, James and Ray were going home that morning.

Our first stop was again at Telephone Box Junction where we once again deflated our tyres for traction and a comfortable ride. As we had yet to reach King Hut we made up for lost time with a quick pace up Circuit Road while keeping an eye open for falling trees, twigs and bark as the predicted south westerly change had arrived earlier than expected. After about 8km we came across our first tree across the track which was quickly cut up and removed thanks to Jamie and his chainsaw.

Guess what? Around 5 minutes later we came across another fallen tree a little bigger than the last. Out came the chainsaw once again with Jamie at the helm. Someone ought to place a bounty on fallen trees. We'd be rich!



Yet another fallen tree to slow us down



Belinda supervising Jamie

These two fallen trees were quickly cleaned up with everyone pitching in to help. After a quick break to get our breaths back we were once again on the road. Whilst commenting over the radio on how the south west changed had arrived earlier than expected the convoy came to another grinding halt. Would you believe it? Another wind fall.



Just as Jamie started chainsawing a couple of hunters stopped on the other side of the tree and helped us with their chainsaw as well which made light work of the job. After moving a tonne or so of timber we were on our way again only to come across yet another tree across the track. As time was starting to run away we decided to cut a section out of this tree to allow our cars through leaving the rest to a DSE crew who we thought would come by soon enough.

Having worn ourselves out in tree removals we were looking forward to reaching King Hut for lunch. After crossing over two bridges straddling the King River we stopped for a photo session of our cars driving through the optional shallow ford at the second bridge.



After taking a few ford crossing photos Jamie radioed back that there was another tree across the track and there was no way his little chainsaw was going to cope. The tree was a monster having a girth of over a metre and it appeared to completely block the track to King Hut – so close and yet so far. Goode luck to the poor DSE crew having to deal with this problem.



Arrrrrrgh! Time for a cuppa and a look at the map for an alternative route. While having a cuppa and talking about reluctantly turning back we noticed three Nissan Patrols driving from the direction of King Hut. Upon closer investigation we noticed a track had been beaten through the bracken, saplings and tall grass around the fallen tree which the Patrol drivers used. Thinking that if they can do it so can we, our little convoy tentatively tried this bypass which was rather handy as it cleaned a lot of the previous day's mud from underneath our cars. After removing the free loaders we picked up on the bypass (grass & bracken) we were soon on our way reaching the hut site in a few minutes. As it turned out King Hut was lost in the 2006-07 alpine fires and all that remains today is the corrugated fireplace.

Immediately after the old hut site was our first real river crossing with a depth of about 14-16 inches (350-400mm). The river entry was a bit lumpy and after watching Belinda enter the water I built up some of the rough spots for a smoother entry as Adelaide was next. The Escape made it across reasonably easily and like Belinda without having to resort to using a crossing blind. Ian followed Adelaide with Jamie taking video from the other side and me taking video on the entry side.



Jamie from Going 4WD tries out the depth (pics taken from trip video).



Belinda has a crack at the first crossing (pics taken from trip video).



Adelaide in the Escape makes a grand entry (pics taken from trip video).



Ian from Going 4WD chugs through easily (pics taken from trip video).

After we all successfully completed the first crossing we proceeded on to the next crossing wondering what it had in store for us. As I turned out the water was running a little faster on the exit but much the same depth as the previous crossing.



(pics taken from trip video).



(pics taken from trip video).

Crossing #3 presented us with a couple of problems being extra depth and a steep rocky entry with a step half way down near the centre of the track.



(pics taken from trip video).

As Jamie was keen to get some good photos of us at each crossing he took off ahead with the odd message over the radio about obstructions on the track,. At this next crossing he found the water somewhat deeper than before and we decided to fit crossing blinds to the RAV4 and the Escape as a precaution using small plastic tarps and ocker straps.



Belinda was next to go with her crossing blind –



(pics taken from trip video).

As Adelaide's car is a bit lower than the RAV the entry track step had to be modified with a ready supply of various river pebbles. Quite understandably as a beginner to off roading, Adelaide was apprehensive about this crossing. After a bit of guidance the plucky little Escape marched on without the slightest of problems -



(pics taken from trip video).

After successfully crossing the King River three times we were getting to the stage of thinking that water crossings around this neck of the woods were nothing too much to worry about until Jamie who was some two or so kilometres ahead radioed back about the next crossing advising everyone to stop at the entry and await his guidance as this crossing had a dog leg bend due to a half submerged fallen tree. Crikey, another fallen tree and in the crossing. At least our humdrum crossings were starting to liven up a bit.



(pics taken from trip video).

OK so now we are becoming masters of negotiating half submerged fallen trees. But that was in relatively calm water. The next crossing presented a bit of a challenge as it too had a bend about half way across, but it was a blind bend because of the shrubbery on the crook of the bend. Jamie being on the other side knew where the shallowest water was and directed the AWDs by radio on where to drive.



(pics taken from trip video).

Despite our numerous water crossings our cars were still caked in mud from Bindaree Tk except of course, Adelaide's Escape. From what I believe none of our cars or trucks suffered any cabin leakage although our floor pans would have had a good wash.

After our final river crossing for the weekend we headed up King Basin Road to where it meets Black Landing Rd and finally Circuit Rd which took us back to the trip start at Mirimbah where we washed off our headlights and number plates and reinflated our tyres in readiness for the trip back home.

Summary: This trip was originally rated as a basically easy trip with a few medium sections thrown in. As it turned out our trip varied from mild to wild with a surprise double black diamond track featuring half way through the weekend. All AWD Club members did exceptionally well in the mud on Bindaree Track, over rock steps half way up The Monument Track and through all river crossings without mishap. As a reasonably seasoned off roader I am in awe of the skill and tenacity shown by our members of the gentler sex and it would be a pleasure to accompany them on further trips .

Thanks goes to Belinda for organising and running this trip and thanks to all those who attended.

Thanks also goes to Adelaide for allowing us use some of her photos for this report.

As a matter of interest, Belinda now wants to retrace her trip up The Monument Track and is going to organise a trip maybe in Spring later this year. If you would like to join her please let her know.