

ALL WHEEL DRIVE: Victoria

TRIP REPORT

ADA TREE EXCURSION

Date: Sunday, 22nd May, 2005

Participants: Lorna & Alan Downing (Territory)
Jacqui O'Connor with her guests Emmaly, Anthony & Zach (RAV4)
Elena & Geoff Lines & their children Alex & Bob (Grand Vitara)
Charles Tam & Paula (Forester)
Darren (Harvey) Merrett, his children Sean, Rebecca & Matthew, and his guests, Adam & his son Nathan (Patrol)
Wendy & Richard Stead with their sons, Kyle & Codi (X-Trail)
Adrian Clark (Guest) (Prado)

An early morning call from Lorraine Anthony to let us know they would be unable to participate, as they planned, owing to an illness in the family. We all hope Bill is well on the way to recovery by now!

So seven vehicles were to meet at Warburton for an 11:00am departure.

Everyone found the meeting place before time, with some minor diversions, as I had failed to recall that the entrance to the meeting place parking lot is a good distance from the Water Wheel Visitor Centre and on a side road rather than the highway. As a result most drivers went past the turn and had to do a bit of backtracking. Better guidance in future! Although even with some advise via CB a couple of pilots still managed to drive past the entrance. Problems of geography were to surface later in the day!

With everyone present and the pre trip administration dispensed with, we departed for Big Pat's Recreation Area a little after 11:00 am. So far as anyone was able to recall, this is the first Club event where there were no duplicated vehicles involved – Richard felt rather alone with only one X-Trail in the convoy. Our route took us along Riverside Drive with the Yarra meandering in the opposite direction, a right turn into Big Pat's Creek Road, over Big Pat's Creek and other right turn into Smyth Creek Road to the Recreation Ground. Lorna & Alan leading with Richard and family acting as Tail End Charlie.

Here we paused and discussed an itinerary alteration to move the lunch stop to the Starling Gap Picnic Ground, as it is a much more pleasant place to have lunch with lots of space for children to work off some energy. While the major part of the party chose to walk along the "Walk into History" walking track rather than the more strenuous Richard's Tramway Walking Track, Richard and Harvey, who had elected to try the Mississippi Track, conferred with Alan about track conditions, radio communications and maps. Since they were going to use a track, which climbs a ridge line, we guessed that their communications could be monitored by the main group with a hand held using channel 12 while the main group stayed with channel 10. This proved to be the case and avoided messages between the various groups being confused with one another.



Starling Gap Picnic Ground

The main group took a leisurely 20 minute drive along Smyth Creek Road arriving at Starling Gap at about 12:45 pm. Lunch!!

Richard and Harvey, with their passengers, joined the main group after about 20 minutes, having traversed the Mississippi Track with out incident other than a minor under carriage scrape or two on the way. (See the annexure for an account of their experiences)

Starling Gap Picnic Ground is on the way to the Ada Tree parking lot, and is quite popular as a result. The parking area was full to overflowing. But there was space to spread out across the grass. The “Walk Into History” track passes through the picnic ground and continues on its way along the path of the Ada River via the various Ada Mill sites. One branch of the track can be used to get to the Ada Tree, but this is an all day walk from this Picnic Ground. Another track, adjacent to the toilet facilities, allows investigation of an abandoned boiler and winch, used to extract timber from the area until about 1920. Getting this machinery into position would have been some task, and it is not surprising it was left in place when logging in this part of the forest stopped, early last century. The effort to remove the machinery would have cost more than the scrap was worth.



Winch & Boiler Remnants at Starling Gap

And so to the Ada Tree via Big Creek and New Turkey Spur Roads, In a straight line the tree is about 6 km from Starling Gap but about 15 km as the wheels turn. A pleasant 20 minute run at careful speeds along a well formed dirt/gravel road that probably sees logging trucks during the week. Some oncoming traffic, one or two wanting more than their fair share of the road surface, were encountered on this stretch. The parking lot has limited space, but we managed to fit in. Harvey elected to give the walk to the tree a miss as there were four very young children in his car and only two adults to carry them if they got tired, the walk is about 3 km return. In any event Harvey wanted to challenge his navigation skills (again!) by trying his hand on the New Turkey Spur Track, which runs parallel to the road for 6 km or so. He has let us know that this was an interesting alternative. See his account, also in the Annexure.



**Don't let me fall in, Dad!
Alex investigates a large stump!**

The walking track to the tree follows a creek, which feeds the Little Ada River and passes through some temperate rain forest containing Eucalypt, Myrtle and Acacia trees with clear demarcation between the species. At one point the remains of a large felled tree exist. Evidently it proved too difficult to extract after it was cut down. Wasted resources! It was an interesting walk as Alex, Elana and Geoff's elder son kept up a running commentary and continuous questions about the forest and its inhabitants, both real and imagined.



**Ditto!
This time it's Bob's turn.**

His comment about the tree? “That’s Too Big!”



How Tall Is This? 76 Metres!!



A Living Timeline



In Comparison with?

The general consensus was that the view of this forest monster was worth the effort of the walk. Excepting for Smyth Creek Road all the roads had sections where clear felling had occurred recently. The new growth is quite low, with the result that there are some breathtaking views across the ranges. But the damage done to the forest to allow these causes us concern as the scars will take some years to disguise. Turkey Spur Road leads back to the Yarra Junction/Noojee Road after a distance of 15 km or so and then a quick run to Powelltown of another 15 km. The party stopped here to exchange feelings about the day and its activities, and to say their goodbyes for the time being.

The feedback we received indicated that everyone had enjoyed the day and the various activities were a good balance between driving and getting out of the vehicles, especially for the younger members of the party.

We all look forward to the next club outing.

Lorna & Alan Downing.

Annexure.

Harvey's account of the trials of the Mississippi and other tracks!

“We started the track with the pressure down in the tyres. Looked like it was going to be a bit rocky. The first few K's were fairly straight forward, nothing too dramatic. Came round the corner and saw the first of the three climbs. Would definitely not recommend this in the wet. You could see the clay top and with a slight angle to the right, a meeting with an immovable tree might ensue if the track was slippery. But in the dry it was nothing more than a steep, slightly rutted climb. The Diesel Patrol had no problems. Richard went first in the X-trail. He seemed to climb it with ease, kept the revs up and consistent, almost no wheel spin, just picked his line (later to become my line) and away he went. Continuing on, the track had a number of conservation mounds, only a few mud flap scrapes here. The ridge line amongst some magnificent old trees with a few “grandpa” silhouettes standing tall, proud and defiant, remnants of a fire no doubt many years ago, looked absolutely majestic. There was one section of the track, wide almost all the way along, that was full of corrugations, rather like conservation mound moguls. The kids had a ball as we ambulated our way through them. The remainder of the track was fairly open and scenic, before we knew it we were at the main road. We could not believe that it came up so fast. Some conjecture was had as to which exit we had come out on. The difference being a right or left turn to make it to the lunch spot to meet the others. The wise head of Harvey capitulated and went against his rather dubious map reading skills, and agreed to follow Richard's suggestion and turn right. Reminding Richard that if he was wrong he would never hear the end of it. Richard, to his credit has never really reminded me of this!! My excuse being that I was driving and concentrating on wheel placement. (do you think he will butt into that one !!!) All in all a great track, in the dry. We were contemplating doing it in reverse on the way out, had time and light not beaten us. Recommend this one again next year, in summer.

“We are not sure if we found the Turkey Spur Track, I think we might have turned off a bit early down a logging track that was wide and had gravel laid at the start of it. It was in about the right place and was well worn and looked as if it had been there for some time given the cuttings that went through. The land all around it was burnt out after the loggers had done their bit. The conservation mounds were in reverse...ie: they were more channel ruts than mounds. Had to put in some fill in one channel to ensure clearance. And to ensure my mud flaps came home with me....they have a tendency to half rip off. Rather like my tow plug that I tore off at Mt Disappointment...(I must get round to affixing them properly. Nothing that a bit of “TLC Truck time wont fix” but with kids and day light saving ended, time is always the issue.) Fantastic drive for about 5 kms. Wound across a ridge line before descending via a few tight switch backs to a valley floor. It was at this valley floor that the recent scaring of the landscape had taken place, the by product being wet bark and boggy mud etc. It looked very unsettled underfoot so we did not go anywhere near it. So we turned back up and enjoyed the climb back out. Headed home via Poweltown and a snack at the Golden Arches in Lilydale (purely for the kids sake!) and made it home about 6.15 p.m.”

Darren (Harvey) Merrett.

Many thanks for this account Harvey.

Lorna & Alan.