

## MANSFIELD HIGH COUNTRY 19<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> March 2011

Mark C – GQ Patrol (Leader)

Maureen & Michael D – 80 Series Landcruiser

Glenn R – GU Patrol

### Day 1 - Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> March 11

We met up in Myrtleford (an hour south of Albury). I had originally intended to head south towards Lake Cobbler for our first night. However, heavy rains and flooding in January had caused a lot of damage to tracks around the King River and some were still closed. We had to divert west towards Whitfield and around Lake William Howell, although a lot of it was on bitumen.

We were headed to a campsite at Sandy Flat on the King River. As we approached the river we had to get through a series of bog-holes.

Unfortunately Michael got stuck and we had our first recovery of the trip. A snatch and he was soon free. We crossed the river and set up. Glenn and I had a quick swim while we enjoyed a beer but it was a little brisk. Glenn took charge of the fire that night and showed such natural talent that we voted him as the official fire warden for the whole trip.



### Day 2 - Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> March 11

We headed back across the river and Michael avoided getting bogged. It was a steep climb up the Buckland Spur. We visited a series of huts along the ridgelines in what was to be a busy day. Tomahawk Hut is a small hut built from notched logs like in a western movie. No. 3 Refuge Hut has been newly built by horse-riders and is constructed of metal. It replaces a hut burnt down in 2006. It includes all the mod cons including a slow-combustion heater and metal axe chained to a chopping block.



King Saddle Shelter is a magnificent octagonal building supported by large hewn timbers. Razorback Hut was almost a small village consisting of a main building with kitchen and

several lounges, a bunkhouse to sleep about 30 people, a shower block and horseyards. There were plenty of grassed areas to camp on. It was all plumbed with water from tank and dam. The original Howqua Gap Hut now has a new hut next to it which includes a cupboard full of emergency food – instant noodles, baked beans and chunky soup.



We then climbed up the steep, loose track through snow gums to the windswept barren top of Mt Stirling (1742m). This gave us a complete panorama of the surrounding high country including Mt Buller resort. We followed this ridge over towards Craigs Hut. This was initially built in 1983 as a set for “The Man from Snowy River”. It was rebuilt by locals as a tourist attraction but unfortunately was burnt down during the 2006/07 fires. It has again been rebuilt but, controversially, now sports a tin roof to prevent a re-occurrence. With Craigs Hut almost in sight Michael got bogged again in a hole with a steep lip. Another snatch recovery needed.



A quick downhill run and short walk took us to Bindaree Falls. The walking track allows you to stand behind the waterfall under an overhang. There are many ferns growing out of the walls and roof. We set up camp nearby at Bindaree Hut on the Howqua River. A great campsite, a swim in a mountain stream, happy hour and a roaring fire (courtesy of Glenn), this is what a Vic High Country trip is all about.

### Day 3 - Monday 21<sup>st</sup> March 11

We started the day with a quick look at Bindaree Hut. Maureen then announced over the radio that they should go tail-end just in case they get bogged again and needed recovering. Michael didn't comment.

It was a steep climb out of the valley up to Bluff Hut. This had been built in 1956 for horse riders but had been added to and changed over the years. It was burnt down in 2006 but rebuilt similar to its original design. It had great bushcraft woodworking inside. Nearby Lovicks Hut is also being rebuilt following earlier fires.



We followed the grandly named "Cairn Creek Road" back down the mountain – a rough, narrow and tortuous track. This led us to the well-preserved Upper Jamieson Hut, tucked away on the Jamieson River. Maureen had not been to this hut before in all her high country travels. It was great to show her some new areas.

We entered the old goldmining areas of the Howqua Hill Historic Area. There are lots of camping areas along the Howqua River, many with horseyards. Tunnel Bend is a sharp horseshoe bend in the river where the river was diverted through a small tunnel cut in 1884 to get at the gold deposited at the sharp bend.

We spent the night at Pickerings Hut. Another swim. During happy hour we watched a small herd of cattle approaching along the river. Red safety mesh had been placed along part of the river bank where the bank had eroded.



One of the cattle in the herd was wearing some of the safety mesh as a fashion accessory on her horns. We attempted to relieve her of it but she wouldn't let us get close. And then the skies opened up with heavy rain and there was a rush to get under shelter.

### Day 4 - Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 11

We woke to a sunny morning and luckily this gave us a dry pack-up. We continued through the Howqua Hills Historic Area which included Fry's Hut. The hut was built by Fred Fry in the 1940 and, unlike most high country huts, is divided into several rooms. The Fred built many of the huts in the surrounding area.

We then climbed up on to the high track through the Mitchell Flat area before joining the Heyfield-Jamieson Road. This alpine road is at an altitude of between 1400m-1570m. We were intending to camp on the Barkly River. Just as we arrived it started raining and soon torrents of water were flowing through the camping area. We decided to move to the Wellington River. This was the next valley over - about 5 km. Unfortunately this involved a 20km drive. We set up in clear skies and on dry ground but we put up shelters just in case. We had a great swim in a rock pool but had to give happy hour a miss.



### **Day 5 - Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 11**

We drove into Licola where it was refuelling and ice creams all round. It was a bitumen run south until we turned off west at Cheyne Creek onto to a steeply climbing and loose track. We then followed a series of good forest roads into the historic township of Walhalla (about 45km north of Moe).

Walhalla was the site of one of Australia's richest gold strikes. The gold rush started in 1863 but ran out in 1914. Walhalla is in a narrow, steep, isolated valley. Electricity was only connected in 1998. Life was hard for the miners with floods, fires and disease. After the gold mines closed it became a ghost town. Many of the original building still survive and have been restored.

In 1910 a narrow gauge railway line from Moe was completed. Parts of this have since been restored and it now operates as a tourist attraction. The train track runs inside the narrow Stringers Creek gorge and includes several wooden trestle bridges. We bought tickets for a 3pm ride then headed to nearby Coopers Creek for lunch and set up camp. The train trip is a must if visiting Walhalla.



After our return trip we had happy hour in one of the pubs. Although dark, we stopped to collect wood on our way back to camp and soon enjoyed another roaring fire. It was a simple dinner – noodles or jaffles.

### **Day 6 - Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> March 11**

We each spent the morning walking through Walhalla looking at the beautifully restored buildings. We started at a small cafe for coffee and toast and finished back at that same shop



for a homemade meat pie for lunch. Our walks were interrupted by several heavy showers. There are only about a dozen permanent residents in Walhalla but it swells to capacity on weekends especially during the ski season.

We started the long trek back north but the weather worsened with drizzle and low cloud. We decided to stick to the main gravel road as the steep side-tracks could become treacherous in the wet condition. We reached Woods Point and went straight to the campsite just north of town. Because of the wet weather Maureen and Michael opted to head back into town and stay in the local pub (a fine perhaps?). Glenn and I set up our tents and joined M&M for dinner. An open fire was glowing and the pub was full of miners, timber workers and road crews sheltering from the rain. The meal was generous and delicious.

### **Day 7 - Friday 25<sup>th</sup> March 11**

After a look around Woods Point we headed north following the Goulburn River. There were many great campsites along it. As luck would have it we reached the Kevington Hotel just in time for lunch. We had a chance to look around this beautifully restored pub while we waited for our steak sandwiches. The hotel features an ornate dining room. The rooms and attached campsite is fully booked out each weekend.



We had a look at another Tunnel Bend. This time the tunnel was cut over 3m square and would have taken a very large effort by the miners. We stopped briefly in Jamieson and then headed east to a campsite at Running Creek. This was a top spot but, being Friday night, we had some noisy neighbours.

There were two fords nearby and Glenn was asked to help recover a bogged vehicle. It was a Land Rover Discovery with road tyres, 4 people, one dog and no idea. They had driven up from Melbourne to have a look around but were totally unprepared and had never taken it off-road before. After being recovered they headed across the other ford and were not seen again.



We decided that this would be our last night together. Maureen and Michael were heading west to drive the Great Ocean Road and Glenn had some family commitments back in Canberra. I got really serious about collecting firewood and got the chainsaw out. This ensured a glorious fire for our last night. We had a mammoth happy hour as we pulled out all our unused goodies.

### **Day 8 - Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> March 11**

A sunny morning allowed us to pack up dry tents. After a leisurely breakfast we said our goodbyes and headed our separate ways. A big thanks to Maureen, Michael and Glenn for such an enjoyable trip.

Mark C.