

Dingo Tops to Werrikimbe Trip Report

2nd to 4th October 2010

6 vehicles met at the Beresfield Service Centre near Newcastle for an 8.30am start to the long weekend. The attendees were Craig and Bec R (GU), Ross M (GU), Andrew James (GU), Andrew Jand daughter Joelle (Prado), Fred and Robert (Pathfinder) and David C and friend (GU). Steve and Laura (GQ) joined us at Gloucester.

After dragging everyone away from the local markets at a busy Gloucester and taking an unscheduled



detour through the town of Barrington, we proceeded up to the picturesque Tapin Tops National Park. The weather started off overcast and had turned to fog and low cloud at various points on the steep climb up. The Dingo Tops Camping Area was wet and quite busy, but the large shelter shed was perfect for a quick lunch. There are large grassy areas on both sides of the road, with many covered tables and fireplaces, although the camping areas are unfortunately bollarded off. There is a good display of antique forestry machinery, which Laura couldn't resist climbing on and a few photos were taken. It was mentioned that "Tapin" is Aboriginal for Dingo, which the trip leaders already knew, of course!

A short drive away we turned off to the curiously named Blue Knob Lookout and we encountered our first slightly slippery track. There is a wooden fire tower on top of the mountain, which only Steve and Laura were brave enough to climb in the rainy conditions and they assured everyone upon coming down that the view of the fog was great! Craig and Bec had been there before and it is certainly worth a look in sunny conditions.

We continued on, passing the start of the notorious Blue Range Mountain Road, which we planned to tackle the following morning, on our way up through The Cells River Area. We took Causeway Road down to Maxwell's Flat, with the continuing light rain starting to turn things a bit sticky in places. We were hoping to find drier conditions at lower altitude. Arriving mid afternoon, we crossed the little creek crossing and sighted a large open grassy area, which was occupied by a couple of groups at one end and had a pit toilet block at the other. Maxwell's Flat did not live up to its name though, as it was, upon closer inspection, quite undulating and getting a little boggy in places. It would be a great spot in better weather, the camping area being in a deep valley, surrounded by a river and thick forest. We decided to set up camp as best we could, as the other options were some drive away and there was certainly no guarantee of them being any drier.

The steady rain unfortunately continued through the afternoon and into the night, thus preventing any large happy hour gatherings and relegating the camp fire, which we were invited to share and add to by others, to being something to stand around with an umbrella, as you attempted to dry out. We were caught a little short on tarps, etc, as we had all no doubt been focused on a quick set up and quick pack up situation for each of the two nights.



The rain continued throughout the night, with little reprieve and we awoke to more rain and a wet, muddy quagmire around our tents and vehicles. Taking the Blue Range Mountain Road up through The Cells River Area to the Oxley Highway, which is very steep and apparently very slippery when even a little wet, was obviously out of the question. Setting up for another night elsewhere with wet tents and sleeping gear in the rain, which had appeared to have set in for the weekend, was also unfavourable and a consensus was quickly reached to cut the trip short.

We packed up our wet gear as best as possible and took the long, safe way out towards Ellenborough Falls. We viewed the falls from the adjacent lookout platform,

which are very high and the volume of water plunging into the rocky gorge deep below was great. We had some morning tea and parted ways, with most heading back towards Wingham and onto Sydney and more rain!

All attendees commented that whilst the rain and abbreviated trip length was disappointing, they found this rain-forested area, about 4 hours drive from Sydney, to be very scenic and the 4WDing very promising. It is clear that this area gets a lot of rain and many of the tracks can quickly become very slippery. Despite this, everyone vowed to come back again as soon as possible, with the hope of seeing it at its spectacular sunny best. The next trip up this way will have to start at the Oxley Highway and head north, to take in the great wilderness, rivers, waterfalls, tracks and camping that we missed.



Craig and Bec R, trip leaders.