

Stockton Beach Driver Training May 2008

Saturday morning meeting place was the garage, where passes to the beach were purchased, stocks checked, usual vehicle checks made before proceeding onto the carpark. Everyone else made the meeting place but we went to the carpark and waited there (after heading onto the beach and finding no-one).

Tyre pressure let down, pass checks by the two rangers who had set up checkpoint at the beach entrance, and then finally, off the procession went toward the beach. The convoy consisted of first time sand drivers and some of the fully-laden vehicles that are heading off to the Canning Trip.

Following our leader, Chris, was at times a game of chasings. He had us scrambling over dunes, some low and long, others shorter and higher. The sand varied from nice firm sand around the lagoon to the very soft windblown sand on top of the dunes. His tracks often were sand covered if you happened to be near the end of the convoy.



There were numerous radio calls from people finding the sand too soft, and many of us quickly learnt about backing up and trying again. Snatch straps were in great demand as we helped each other over the dunes.



The sand dunes provided us with the opportunity to experience the thrill (or terror) of driving over the edge. After several chances to try “over the edge” driving, we watched as Chris tried to find another place to challenge us. It proved too difficult and we had a recovery lesson using two cars, along with some manual labour, to eventually retrieve his car.



Saturday lunch was on the beach near the wreck, a welcome break from the dune work. This was followed by a wonderful drive along the beach to the Artillery range and we explored the practice shooting range with its targets and casings. It was interesting to find out how the gallery worked and the stories that went with it. The strongholds further on gave us in insight into some of the ways we were protected from enemy attack during the War.



With the prediction of a severe storm coming through on Saturday night, we took advantage of the sheltered camping site we found and bunkered down for what we thought would be a difficult night. Following tea, the campfire and general conversations, the night did not live up to the wild expectations. We all survived the night, although the wind did get a bit strong and shook the canvases.

Sunday morning saw us packed up, checking tyres again, and setting off for another trek among the dunes. The wind on Saturday night had covered the dunes with light dry sand, making them softer and more treacherous. We (Bruce and I) found ourselves sitting on the edge of a sand dune with a steep drop to our left. All we could do was sit still and let the rest of our trainees and leaders secure our vehicle to prevent us from toppling over the edge.



After the rescue, we realised how important the information given to us at the land training the previous month had been, especially when shown in a very practical way, how the theory worked. Our sincere thanks go to Chris, Chris and all those who jumped on board to either stabilise us or help pull us off the brink of the dune. (The photos don't show just how close we were to the edge of the sand – probably a tyre width, then a steep fall to the water below).

After a few more dunes and steep drops, we eventually found our way to Silver City and onto the morning tea stop. Once we were all together again, the convoy set out for Anna Bay via the beach. Lunch was a welcome break, either as fish and chips or a quick bite at the pub. The clean amenities were very welcome.

A feature of the weekend was the tyres that needed changing.



From here, some people chose to leave the convoy, the rest deciding to take the beach run back to the carpark exit. This was a meandering rive as Chris tried to find the best way home, travelling on the beach near the water line and then inland on the much softer sand. We eventually made it back to the entrance/exit track, through to the carpark and solid ground. The tyre pumps were quickly found and employed, afternoon tea enjoyed, cards signed off, final farewells and “Thank you”s said.

What a great weekend of fun, fears, wind, storms, sun, friendships, learning, trusting, history, and self discovery.

Thanks to Chris, Chris and Brad for taking their time to show us all how to drive on the shifting sands.

Susan and Bruce Robins

Thanks to Pauline and Peter, and Chris Browne for help with the photos.