

Trip Leader	Craig Marchant	Date	7 th to 14 th February 2026
Location	Victorian High Country. Starting at Erica and finishing at Tolmie.		
TLC CSA Members	Jeff and Cathie, Corey, Rob and Andy, Peter and Sue.		

Day 1 – Saturday 7th Feb – Erica Caravan Park and a Pub Dinner

We all arrived within an hour of each other so with a few of the crew camping, and others enjoying the comfort of a cabin, we were setup and having beer o'clock by 4pm.

The usual pre departure admin meeting was held, reminding people on the standard radio and convoy procedures and etiquette, as well as the plans for tomorrow. It was a very warm and tropical late afternoon, so we used this as an excuse to book dinner at the Erica pub, across the road from the caravan park.

It's a great pub, very busy and full of the locals so it was a good thing we'd booked a table. Sitting outside on the patio, enjoying a drink and some nice pub food while we re-acquainted with each other, was a great way to start the trip.

Day 2 – Sunday 8th – Thomson Dam, Some Steep Tracks and a High Country Hut

We woke to a perfect Sunday morning. Still and clear and quite warm for the high country. The crew were keen to get going, so we were on the road by 9am, heading north for 35km to the Thomson Dam.

A nice drive through winding roads and thick forests and with large signs about Icey Roads and carrying chains in the winter time, it was a good reminder about how cold it gets even at lower altitudes once the seasons change.

It is quite an impressive sight when you see the size of the retaining walls and view the dam from the observation point. The Thomson Dam supplies about 60% of Melbourne's drinking water, and is part of a network of dams supplying the now 5.3 million residents.

It was then time to get the 4x4's off road so we continued a little further north before turning onto the Walhalla Road and airing down. Fultons Creek Track is one of the more popular tracks in the area, and does have a reputation for being a bit challenging. Today though it was fine, as it had been graded in the last 6 – 12 months. Still steep in sections so you had to be a bit careful, but with a smooth surface it was easy going as you descended into picturesque valleys and then up to the hill tops.

Continuing on Army Track took us to our lunch spot at Store Point Hut. A refurbished hut in great condition, it would certainly make a nice spot for an overnight camp. Particularly in the winter time, as it does have a fireplace inside the hut, with room for several swags.

It was pretty warm in the sun, so we didn't spend too long standing around chatting the afternoon away. Next up was another steep track :) Burgoyne West Track. This takes you

down to the Macalister River and in the past has been a rather challenging track. As will become the norm though, this too had been recently graded, making the descent easy going.

All except for a couple of hairpins that is. These are currently particularly tight, so you had to be careful not to cut the corner too sharp. One of the crew found out the hard way what happens if you do! Trying to reverse back up a hill when you are off camber will just have you spinning wheels. And trying to go forward results in you under steering towards the edge of a very steep and high cliff edge. Petering on the edge, calm heads were required and our TLCCSA training kicked in. Lowering tyre pressures, deploying a couple of max tracs and gently performing a correctly executed reverse hill start was enough to get the car slowly crawling backwards, and out of trouble.

A favourite spot for campers is Morning Glory hut, on the banks of the Macalister River. It is not sign posted though, so you need to know where the side track is, to take you down to it. Craig got a nice scare as he walked over to the hut while the others were driving down, almost stepping on a goanna, before it scuttled away and up the tree in front of the hut (can you see it in the photo?).



With a warm and humid after, we wasted no time jumping in the river to cool off.



There wasn't much firewood around, so Peter headed back up the track to chop up some fallen timber, while the rest of us prepped the fire area and collected up kindly. It was then time for our customary beer o'clock, which we enjoyed under the veranda, while gazing at the hills on the other side of the river.



The high country weather then did what it loves to do. Change in an instant. 1 minute it was nice and clear and swimming weather, the next it started to pour down. Amazing how quickly it can change, and we watched as torrents of water started flowing down the hillside, and flooding some of our campsites. It was almost enough to put our fire out, but the flip side was that most of our cars got a good clean, and were once again pearly white :)



As quickly as it arrived it stopped, so the boys jumped into action to rescue the fire, as we had planned to cook on it a little later on.



As late afternoon eased into early evening, the sky cleared and the temperature remained warm and blammy, so we sat around the fire, enjoying our dinner and chatting the night away.



Day 3 – Monday 9th Feb – Mattress Drama's and more Great Countryside

We all enjoyed lying in bed, listening the morning chorus, which started around 6am. No need for an alarm clock, the Kookaburra's do a perfectly good job of telling you when it is time to get up.

A latish start was planned today so folks cooked up Bacon and Eggs and sat around, listening to the river and the sounds of the bush. It was then that the overnight dramas started to emerge. One couple thought it would be a good idea to bring along an inflatable double airbed along the size of a small Bouncing Castle! All well and good until it deflates and has you bouncing off the hard ground by midnight.

Inspecting the Bouncing Castle led us to believe it must be slowly leaking out of the inlet, as there were no visible punctures and it was a very slow leak. Unfortunately, there was nothing we could do about that. This was a real spanner in the works. Another 6 nights lying on hard ground was not an option. Luckily the route had us crossing the Licola Rd (Bitumen) mid-morning, and then continuing east, ending up not too far from Bairnsdale. This gave us the option of a safe exit and re-entry point at Huggetts Crossing campground.

Therefore, we continued on with the original itinerary. Leaving at 9:30am, the 1st potential challenge of the day was the crossing of the Macalister River. Having researched the route, the trip leader knew there were 2 boulders on the drive line that are invisible once the water has risen, and can stop a vehicle in its tracks. Not great in fast flowing and deep water, which can occur after not a lot of rain due to how narrow the crossing is. Today though it was easy, with the river level being as low as you are likely to see it, we were able to idle across.



It wasn't long until we had ascended to the helipad, where you get great views of the Licola valley and Avon Wilderness area.



From here you can pick up phone reception from the Licola tower, and a quick search showed there was a BCF at Bairnsdale. After another review of the maps, it was decided it would be straight forward for Peter and Sue to continue on to Bairnsdale, get a couple of mattresses (self-inflating this time!), and then rejoin the group later that afternoon.

Continuing east after you cross the Licola Road, takes you onto Burgoyne East Tk. This was meant to be a bit more of a challenging track, with some decent rock steps and rough sections. But once again, it had been recently graded. Grrrrr. The amount of bulldozer work that had been done to smooth out the rocky section was quite impressive. Huge amounts of rock had been moved and crushed, widening the track at the same time. Result was a nice easy climb, and still enjoyable with more great views of the high country.

It was then onto Mt Margaret Tk. This is one of the longest tracks in the high county and had also been bulldozed and widened for we assume a fire break. It is an easy track to drive,

and remains at elevation for extended periods of time following ridge lines, giving you 360-degree views of the countryside.



Once we turned onto Hickey Creek Tk and continued eastwards, you started to get the sense you were getting quite remote. Now into our 2nd day, we had not seen another vehicle since leaving the Thomson Dam. This is one of the more remote and less travelled areas of the high country.

As you descend towards Ben Cruachan Creek and the Avon River, deep in the heart of the Avon Wilderness Area, the flora changes to thick forest with big ancient ferns. There are quite a few river crossings you need to contend with when traversing this area, and is definitely not a route you'd take after heavy rain. It's obvious how deep, wide and fast flowing some of the crossing can be. Luckily for us, we had Rob and Andy with us who at 6ft4', could walk the crossings without getting their nether regions too wet and cold.



It's a stunning drive through this part of the Avon Wilderness Area, you follow the valley and river for quite a few kilometres, as you continue eastwards towards Huggetts Crossing. Once we were within a couple of kilometres of our campsite, a UHF call went out to Peter and Sue and as coincidence would have it, had us all arriving at Huggetts literally at the same time. Must have been destiny.

After stopping to collect firewood, we continued onto the campsite, did the usual setup and then went for a swim. It's quite a big campground, and with flat ground, a drop toilet and decent swimming, makes for a nice spot to stay.

The evening was spent around the campfire chatting the night away, before everyone was ready for bed. Particularly Peter and Sue, who with their brand new stretcher beds, couldn't wait to test them out!

Day 4 – Tuesday 10th Feb – More Great Tracks, Perfect Weather and a Great Swimming Spot

The weather and travel gods continued to shine on us. After the customary Kookaburra wake up call at 6am, we rose to another perfect morning. Clear, calm and cool. Bacon and Eggs were the order of the morning. After cleaning up the packing away our swags and tents, we were on the road by 9am, heading south towards Huggetts Lookout.

With a bit of cloud and mist blowing in, it made for quite a scenic view.



The original itinerary had us continuing eastwards towards the Pinnacles and Dargo, but with the extensive fires throughout January, this was as far east as you could get. The main roads / tracks and areas north and east of Huggetts Crossing, remained shut. Therefore, we looped back around and headed north west back towards Licola.

The southern section of Mt Margarit Tk is an enjoyable and easy drive, with more fantastic views of the countryside, as the track follows the ridge line off into the distance.



We stopped at MacMillians Lookout for lunch. An easy spot to miss as it is not sign posted. You can stop here and walk out onto a rock ledge, where you look north towards Licola and westwards, where you can glimpse the main road, and several of the tracks in the area.



With our bellies full, we continued on as a few of the crew were keen for a bit of a challenge. East to West on Burgoyne's Tk is the more challenging direction. There is a rocky section that is a little challenging, and had the traction control systems kicking in. There are numerous sections where the gradient is 20+ degrees, getting to over 25 on the erosion

banks. So good fun all round :)



There is 1 camping spot along Burgoyne's where it crosses the Macalister River that is one of the best river side locations you will find. It is a large area, sheltered from the wind, and has a soft sandy entry into the water that after a few metres, is more than 3 metres deep. And as luck would have it, no one was there. Happy Days. So we wasted no time spreading out, setting up camp, and by 2:30pm, we were all in the water.



It was a pretty lazy afternoon after that. A couple of the crew even got their better halves to fetch them a beer so they didn't have to get out of the water! Shameful behaviour that's for sure. Late afternoon rolled around and it was time to dry ourselves off, put the fire on, and have drinks and nibbles.

Once again it was a usually warm and muggy afternoon. It really did feel like you were in the tropics. So much so, an after-dinner swim was in order, before nighttime arrived, and we finished another very enjoyable day, gazing up at the stars and listening to the sounds of the bush.

Day 5 – Wednesday 11th Feb – Summits, A Pub Lunch, Mini Golf and a Tropical Down Pour

Once again, we woke to a perfect morning. Not a breath of wind and the only sound being that of the gently flowing Macalister River. With mist lingering in the valley, it was a picture postcard start to the day.



Sue showed us all up by going for a 6:30am swim! Sue said it was one of the best swims she's ever had. Cool air, warm water and such a tranquil setting.



We decided last night to treat ourselves today to a pub lunch. Woods Point was 2 to 3 hours away, so if we were on our way by 9am, we'd be there in time for lunch. Anticipating a big lunch, we didn't bother cooking breakfast, so we were packed up and ready to go by 8:30am.

It's a fun drive back up to Black Range Road, with Burgoyne Trk ascending roughly 1,000m over approximately 8km.



With the couple of tight hairpins safely negotiated this time without any drama's, we were all up to the helipad enjoying the views in no time.



Once onto Springs Rd, it's an easy drive on the all-weather road as it ascends to 1,400m and caresses the top of Mt Useful. At this elevation, the tall eucalypts make way for the snow gums. Much shorter, often bent over and bare at their tops, weather beaten from the snow and harsh winds.

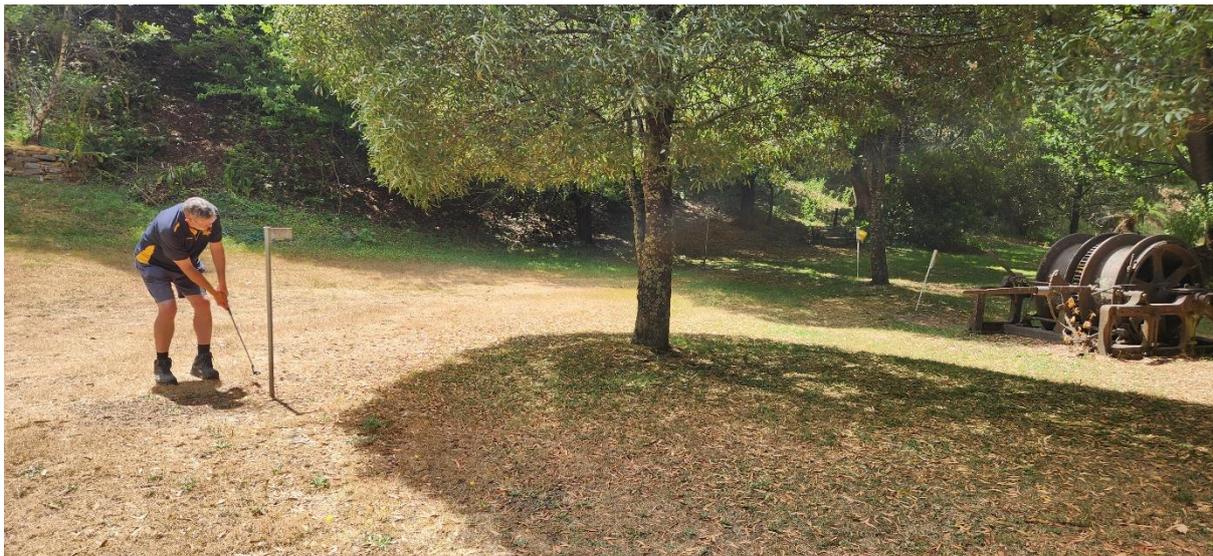
Springs road becomes South Road as it continues east at elevation providing amazing views of the distant mountains. Turning onto the Mt Selma road, we climbed a little more to the even higher Mt Selma at 1,463m. It is certainly a different landscape at the mountain tops. Rocky and barren ground, the trees and shrubs lack the fertility to thrive. The harsh extremes of the summer winds and in winter, being buried under snow, makes life a struggle.

As you descend and arrive at the Walhalla Road, the bushland has changed back to thick forest and towering eucalypts. The drive onto Matlock follows the twists and turns of the Walhalla Road that has been cut into the side of the mountains. Amazing how this was done back in the gold rush days. The time, effort and hardship to do this, quite amazing.

It wasn't long before we arrived at Woods Point, and pulled up in front of the iconic Woods Point Commercial Hotel. Tummies rumbling, as we'd been anticipating our pub lunch all morning, we'd decided to do lunch first, then go for a walk around the town.

But our 1st bit of bad luck was upon us. The pub was only open Thursday to Sunday! Arrrrgh, so it was with long faces we made alternate plans, and continued on a little way down the road to the Goulburn River Reserve.

Having done his homework :), the trip leader knew there was a little public golf course here nestled among the trees. So, after lunch Craig and Andy had a round of 9 holes (mini golf). With only putters available from the complimentary golf set, the fairways proved to be particularly challenging. Covered in acorns, gum nuts, twigs and leaves, it was up to the golf gods to decide where the golf ball went.



With another very warm and humid afternoon, we hit the road in search of a campsite along the Goulburn River. Tunnel Bend Reserve was where we ended up. With decent swimming spots, and having the whole camping area to ourselves, it would do us just fine.

It was not long before a few of us were in the water cooling off. Others took the lazy option, taking their camping chairs down and sitting in the river, wetting their feet while they had drinks and nibbles. Very civilized. The weather teased us for a little while, a spattering here and there, a little shower and then it would stop. Eventually though, it got heavy enough that even the camp chair crew had to vacate the river, and shelter under Jeff and Cathie's awning.

Thinking the weather system had passed, the rest of us joined in on beer o'clock but then a few minutes later whammo, the big dump arrived. We all scattered back to our own camps, to shelter from the rain and get on with cooking dinner.

This rain continued off and on for the rest of the evening. Therefore, it was early to bed. Warm and very humid, once again it seemed like we were in the tropics. It is certainly a nice way to end the day. The side of your swag open, and a gentle breeze keeping you cool while you listen to the sounds of the bush, as you drifted off to sleep.

Day 6 – Thursday 12th Feb – Historic Town Visit and more Scenic Drives

Waking to another calm morning, the overnight rain brought out the fragrant smells of the bush. Having been off grid for a few days, some of the crew were keen to treat themselves to a nice breakfast. So, we were packed up a little earlier than normal, and on the road at 8:30 heading to Jamieson. A picturesque little town with lots of history, old buildings and a café that serves up a proper old school country style full breakfast.



The crew were keen to tackle some more challenging tracks, so we continued north towards Mansfield before turning onto Stoney Creek Tk. Reasonably steep as it climbs to the ridgeline, it was meant to be a difficult track. But once again the bulldozer had done its thing within the last 6 months, smoothing out the rough sections making it a leisurely drive with great views of Lake Eildon and the Howqua Hills.



It didn't take us long before we were descending to Running Creek Camp Reserve. A great spot to stay, next to the Howqua River and we had planned to stay here, but with the morning drive taking a lot less time than expected, it became our lunch spot instead.

With the desire still there to put the Cruisers to the test, Three Chains Tk is about 18km long, very steep in sections and rated Difficult by Hema. So, we set off with high expectations but as you may have already suspected, the bulldozer had been all the way along here as well! Still a great drive though. It is certainly steep in sections, and with it starting to rough up, gave us enough of a thrill.

Before descending to the Howqua Hills Historical Area, we collected some firewood that had been cut up as part of the track widening, and then made our way down and found a large camping area next to the Howqua River. 14 degrees at 4pm, so a bit cool for a swim (even for Sue), so instead, we put the fire on and had beer o'clock.



Another enjoyable evening around the fire, swapping yarns and looking up at the stars. This was the first night where there'd been a chill in the air, and by 9:30 we were blowing

frosties. After so many warm and humid nights, we were looking forward to curling up in our sleeping bags and having a cosy night's sleep.

Day 7 – Friday 13th – Another Historic Town and the Ned Kelly Tree

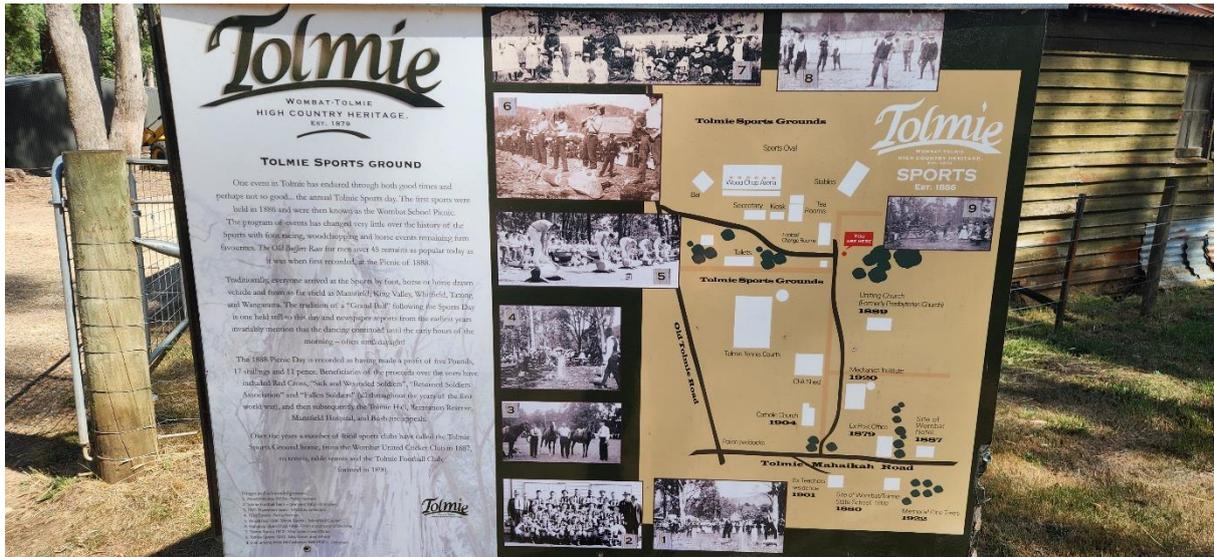
We woke at 6am when the Kookaburra's did their usual alarm clock call to get up. It was our 1st cold high country morning at about 4 degrees, and with steam rising from the Howqua River, rather magical. The cool moist air really brings out the smells of the bush.



The crew were getting pretty efficient with their morning pack up routines, so we were ready to go by 9am. A slower and more casual day was planned today, so the 1st stop had to be a bakery. After we'd treated ourselves, and refueled the Cruisers, we headed on to Tolmie.

Tolmie is a well preserved historic town dating back to the early gold rush days. You can camp here as well, with a toilet and shower block. Tolmie was featured in the ABC's Back Roads series, and is available on iView and certainly worth watching.

Tolmie is famous for its sport day. It has been going for 138 years and as luck would have it, when we arrived, they were busy preparing for their 139th! We got chatting to a few of the organisers who told us about the events and the day in general. Not wanting to miss this piece of Australian history, we decided we'd come back tomorrow and experience it for ourselves.



Next up was another piece of Australian History. The site where the Kelly Gang shot 3 policemen, and led them to being declared Outlaws. Stringybark Creek is a great spot. Towering eucalypts and thick bushland, there are quite a few information boards that tell the background stories of both the policemen involved, and those of the Kelly Gang. There is also a 1.4km walk you can do that takes you to the locations of where each policeman was found. Well worth the effort.

With another warm afternoon, we continued onto our campsite for the night, Jones Reserve. Holland Creek runs alongside the camping area and does have some swimming spots. However, with so little rain over the proceeding weeks, there wasn't much flow, so wetting our feet was the best we could do.

With plenty of firewood around, we did the usual and were having beer o'clock by 4pm.



Peter then treated us to one of his specialties. Fish patties! Having pre made the mixture, he set about rolling the paddies as we all watch on, eager to taste them. And sure enough they did not disappoint. With a little bit of Peri Peri sauce to give them a bit of tang, Yum! There

were no left overs that's for sure. Once we'd finished our appetizer, had another drink (or 2), it was time to get on with cooking our own dinners, before lazing away the evening in front of the fire.



Day 8 – Saturday 14th – Tolmie Sports Day

Another perfect morning. No wind or dew, warm and tranquil. We had been so lucky with the weather. With no rush to get away this morning, we decided to do a bit of a communal cook up, pooling our eggs, bacon, bread and wraps and cooking up a feast.

At 9:30, we were on our way to the Tolmie Sports Day. Getting there 30 minutes later, events were just getting underway, so we watched as the 1st round of wood choppers prepared their logs, as the horse riders got on with their events in the background.



Amazing to watch the wood choppers up close. Incredibly skillful. We were lucky enough to have a couple of Australian champions and international representatives as well competing.

These guys are incredible. Such power, speed and precision and being literally only a few metres away from the action, an amazing sight to see.



We were going to continue onto Porepunkah after lunch to complete the trip. It was almost 2 hrs drive cross country though, and taking us further away from Adelaide. So, as a collective we decided to finish the trip a day early, and go our separate ways from Tolmie.

All up, another fantastic Vic High Country club trip. Perfect weather, no major drama's, lots of scenic drives, historic towns, tranquil camp spots and a great crew. We could not have hoped for a better trip.