

Trip Leader	Craig Marchant	Date	8 th to 15 th February 2025
Location	Victoria High Country starting in Licola and finishing at Kooyoora State Park		
TLCCSA Members	Michelle and Leon, Peter B, Michael P, Phil A, Rob, Andy D		

Day 1 – Saturday 8th Feb – Licola Caravan Park

With everyone having arrived by 5pm, we met in the undercover BBQ area. Phil had already done the domestic duties, cleaning out the fire drum and getting the fire going with the complimentary wood that had been chopped up for us, after a big branch had come down.



With everyone settled in front of the fire, we did the usual trip admin that is necessary at the start of a trip, and then went through some of the finer details for the coming week.

We cooked dinner on the complimentary BBQ. A nice touch the caravan park provides, as it was a bit dizzily, so having a 4-burner hotplate to cook on was much appreciated. After dinner, we stoked up the fire, had a few more drinks and sat around chatting and looking forward to the week ahead.

Day 2 – Sunday 9th Feb – Walhalla Town and Gold Mine Tour. 175km, 6hrs driving.

We woke to a drizzling cool morning and it felt a lot like we were in the Adelaide Hills in the middle of winter! As we departed for Walhalla at 9am, we took the opportunity to get a photo in front of the picturesque Licola General Store.



The drizzle continued as we headed south, twisting and turning our way along the alpine road. With big mountain tops, long green valleys and flowing rivers, it felt like we could have been in a different country.

After 50 minutes, we were off the bitumen, heading west on the Cowwarr – Walhalla Road. With a lot of rain overnight and with parts of the road having a clay surface, sections had become very muddy and slippery. After a few sideways slides it became a little too treacherous to continue on highway pressures, so we stopped to air down to 25psi to get a bit more traction.



We continued on without any issues, arriving at Bruntons Bridge. This would be a nice spot to stay for a few days with its flat camping areas, fire pits and toilets. The Thompson River also provides a great place to swim and fish, just be careful of the river crossing. It is wide and can become impassable if water is released from the Thompson Dam.





Continuing on to Walhalla, we had enough time for stroll around, admiring the period buildings and rich history of the town and general area. A few of the crew had lunch at the Wicked Café, enjoying toasted sandwiches and freshly brewed coffee.



We were booked on The Long Tunnel Extended Gold Mine tour at 1:30pm. It was great and our guide Ben was very knowledgeable and passionate about the mine and the area's history. He demonstrated how they bored into the rock using the Hammer and Tap method, before blasting away the rock. Working 24hrs a day, they progressed the tunnels at a rate of about 30 metres a week.

Physically demanding and working by candle light with poor ventilation, it is amazing how the men endured such gruelling conditions. The Long Tunnel Extended Gold Mine tunnels and shafts eventually reached 8.5kms in length, and to a depth of 923 metres. Impressive!



They extracted approximately 440, 312 troy ounces of gold or over 13.6 tonnes, which is worth over \$2 billion Aussie dollars in today's money.



The intention was to take the scenic route north bound back to Licola, going cross country on Cheynes Bridge Track. Craig's Garmin Overlander had other ideas though, deciding to take the crew towards Aberfeldy, rather than continuing on Binns Road, towards the stipulated Waypoint, grrrrr.

After a while it became obvious the Garmin was geographically disorientated, so we reverted to paper maps. With the rain continuing, it was unwise to try and go cross country, so we planned our route by staying on maintained forestry roads. This enabled us to go over Mt Selma, and at over 1,400m would provide great views on a clear day.

We were back at Licola by 6pm, and once again made ourselves at home at the undercover BBQ area. Phil got the fire going, and it wasn't long before we had drinks in hand, and folks were cooking up a feast on the BBQ. Afterwards, we sat in front of the fire, and Phil pulled out his fire fork and roasted marsh mellows for us all, Yum!

Day 3 – Monday 10th Feb – Caledonia River and Camping at Altitude on the Howitt High Plains. 120km, 5hrs driving.

Heavy rain started around 4am and by 8am, it was not looking good. Quite a lot of rain had fallen over the prior 48 hrs and it was starting to look like the planned itinerary was going to have to change. Because of the rain, and the crew needing to fill up before our 5 days off grid, we didn't need to meet at the general store until 10am.

Amazingly at 9:30am the rain stopped, the clouds disappeared and we were basked in bright sunshine. Steam started to rise off the ground, and all of a sudden it felt like we were in the tropics, with sky high humidity and a sun quickly warming the morning air. We headed along the Tamboritha Road, a great drive as it twists its way up from the valley, following the Wellington River. The road turns to dirt and gets more twisty, as it continues to climb to 1,500 metres. Stopping at Bennison Lookout, we got stunning views of the high country.



With the ground dry, it appeared all the rain that had fallen on Licola for the last 2 days, none of it had passed this way. It was with a little trepidation that it was decided to stick with the planned itinerary for the time being, and continue a further 10km's before turning onto Dingo Hill Track.

The call went out to engage Low Range, as things were about to get a bit more interesting. Dingo Hill Track drops from 1,250 metres to 600 metres very quickly. There are a series of switch backs you have to do 3 point turns on to get around, before a very rough and rocky section takes you down into the valley.





Making our way down to the Caledonia River, you then follow the valley, criss crossing the river numerous times. It was amazing how many fallen trees laid across the track, with park rangers and 4 wheelers cutting gaps just wide enough to get your car through.

It felt a bit like an obstacle course, with the smug Prado's having a laugh at the fat 200's trying to squeeze their way through. At one point, a huge tree having recently fallen and blocking the track, forced you to drive down into the river to make your way around it.

With the river surprising low, most of the river entries and exits were quite easy. One though had some decent rock steps and river boulders to negotiate, requiring a second set of eyes to help you get across safely.



After an enjoyable morning of scenic driving, an exciting descent and lots of river crossings, it was time to stop and catch our breaths, before having lunch and enjoying the serenity of the Caledonia River.



With some grey clouds appearing overhead, it was time to get going as the northern end of the Caledonia River track is quite long and very steep in sections, climbing from 600m to 1,500m.



Parts of the northern end of the track are certainly difficult. Loose shaley sections and others with sharp exposed rock, mean to need to pick your lines and be careful with wheel placement and momentum. We all made it up safely, and just in the nick of time, as the heavens opened up, and it started pouring down.

The plan was to camp at Howitt Hut, but at an altitude 1,500m and the wind blowing hard, we decided to make a beeline to a restored hut, 20km's south along the Howitt Road. McMichaels Hut would have made a great stop for us, but we were literally 2 minutes too late. Another vehicle arrived just before us, and claimed the hut for the night. Dam!

Hema was showing several other huts in the area, but after driving around in the pouring rain for 30 minutes they were all ruins, so we gave up, and headed back to Kellys Hut which is near McMichaels hut. You cannot drive right up to Kellys Hut, but at least we could use it to put the fire on, and have a cosy night under shelter playing cards and chit chatting.

Well tonight was simply not going to be our night, as when we got there, 2 other LandCruiser Troop Carries full of hikers had arrived, and were making their way over to the hut! Oh well, and with that we made the most of the flat ground around us, and setup camp as best we could.

Rob and Andy called beer o'clock at 6pm, putting out chips, biscuits, and Humus. So, a few of us huddled under the awning with drinks and nibbles in hand, as the rain continued to come down.

Dinner was a simple affair for everyone, as it was cold (8 degrees), wet and getting dark. We all had an early night, bedding down around 8:30pm after a big day.

Day 4 – Tuesday 11th Feb – Howitt High Plains, Butcher Country and the McAlister River. 50kms, 2.5 hrs driving time.

What a difference a few hours make in the Vic High Country. We started to rise around 7am and it was a perfectly clear and still morning. The birds were chirping and everyone was in good spirits. At around 1,500m, the air was fresh and cool, with a morning temperature around 4 degrees. The scenery was stunning, with mist settling on the large peat bog / wetlands. As the sun rose and settled on our camp, steam started to rise off the ground and our awnings, helping to dry everything out and warm the cool morning air.



By 0930, we were back on Howitt Road, heading north to Dimmicks Lookout. It is well worth the short detour off the main road, as the views are amazing looking eastwards, towards the Wonnangatta Valley.





Just up the road from Dimmicks lookout is Howitt Hut. Another well restored and maintained hut that is worth a visit and is rich in history. It is linked to the famous Wonnangatta murders of 1917/18 and is where the body of John Bamford was discussed in May 1918. He was shot in the back of the head and his murder, and that of Jim Barclay have never been solved.



With a warm morning and the sun drying the ground, it was decided to continue with the planned itinerary and hit up Butcher Country Track. This track is about 20kms long, with a large part of it a ridge line drive. You generally stay above 1km in altitude, giving you more great views of the surrounding countryside.



With storm clouds on the horizon, we had to press on as at the end of Butcher Country track, the descent to the McAlister River is steep, and with a clay top, not a track you want to be doing if it is wet. Thankfully, our luck was in, the clouds cleared away, the sun stayed out and it was a perfect summers day.

Arriving at the McAlister River, there was a big camping area that was too good to leave. With a great swimming spot, it was an easy decision to have an early day, set up camp, and jump in the water. With our soft feet feeling every inch of the round river rocks, you couldn't say we entered the water gracefully, but we all made it in the end!



Invigorated by our swim, we had nothing else to do but put the fire on, and call an early beer o'clock :) We all enjoyed having a lazy afternoon, with the subtle sounds of the bush and the river flowing in the background. It was a great way to take in the summer feeling of being in the Vic high country.



Most of the crew cooked dinner on the fire, with Andy and Rob even heating up puddings with cream on top. Talk about posh city folk! With dinner over, we stoked up the fire up, enjoyed some Port and chocolates before doing a bit of star gazing. Once your eyes adjust, it is amazing how many satellites you now see, you literally see them constantly passing over head.

Day 5 – Wednesday 12th Feb – Steep Tracks and Camping at Upper Jamieson Hut. 62km. 3.5hrs drive time.

We woke to another perfect morning, warm and no wind. With no dew, pack up was a simple affair, and we were all ready to go by 9am. McAlister River track is another very enjoyable drive, cris crossing the river with great views through the valley and onwards to the mountain tops.





The river levels were very low, so all the crossings were easy. It would not be a track you would want to drive if the river levels were up though, and it was flowing strongly. Some of the crossings are quite wide, and there are big river rocks that you would not want to hit. Even at low levels, you needed to be careful where you placed our wheels.



With all the river crossings safely negotiated, it was then onto Black Soil Gully Track. Another exciting drive as it climbs steeply out of the valley, from 350 metres up to 1,300 metres. It was heavily rutted in sections, and we all had to be extra careful to straddle the ruts and not fall in.



Making good time, we were back on Bull Plain Road by 10:30am. A perfect time for morning tea and Andy pulled out a large Lions Christmas cake. Desperate to get rid of it, he insisted we all have a piece, so we got stuck in and got our sugar hit for the day.



With our tummies full of cake we continued on, north along Bull Plain Road as it ascended Mountain Ash. An easy drive with great forest views. That was until we got to a section of the road that had been washed away! Big boulders had been exposed, that required precise wheel placement to negotiate. Michael did the honours, successfully spotting and guiding us all through without any vehicle damage. Phew.



It took a while to get us through this technical section, so by then it was getting onto lunchtime. We also needed to collect firewood for tonight, so with lots lying around, we decided to pull up, collect what we needed, and have lunch in the shade of the valley.



It was once again starting to feel like the tropics with the heat and thick forest around us. No wind and bright sunshine meant the temperature was rising as quickly as the humidity. We hopped back in the Cruisers and to the comfort of our air conditioners, and continued onto Nobbs track which ascends towards Mt McDonald at 1,600 metres. Slow and rocky, it becomes a ridge line track that veers east towards a Helipad. We stopped at the Helipad for a break and to let the cars cool down.

Keen to get to our camp spot for the night, we pushed on, down Clear Track towards Brocks Road. Hema rate this track Difficult and it would have been if not recently graded. It is very steep, dropping from 1,300 metres to 800 metres over a couple of kilometres. With everyone safely down, we arrived at Upper Jamieson Hut around 3:30pm. And this time, we had the hut all to ourselves!



We contemplated setting up inside the hut and putting the fire on, but it was too warm and nice outside. Once camp was setup, a few of us went for a swim in the river to freshen up. It was then the crew had their 1st drama for the trip. While Andy was doing his vehicle checks, he noticed oil dripping from his diff. Oh No! So, it was all hands to the pump as we recreated a typical council work scene, to ensure Andy had all the help he needed to fix the problem :)



Once the crew had successfully managed Andy's issue, and continuing the council theme we delayed any important decisions to a later date, it was back to the important business of getting the fire on, cleaning the hotplate and having some drinks and nibbles while enjoying the serenity of our surroundings. Warm and humid, no wind and with the sounds of the bush in the background, it was the perfect way to spend the late afternoon.



We took turns cooking dinner on the fire before settling back for another night around the fire, chatting the evening away.

Day 6 – Thursday 13th Feb – Howqua Hills and Jamieson River. 80km, 3 hrs driving.

We were greeted with another perfect morning, cool and calm so we made the most of it and had a slow start to the day. The fire was brought back to life and we enjoyed eggs and bacon on the hotplate. It was Phil this time who went all posh on the crew, cooking up a fancy serve of scrambled eggs!



Regarding Andy's leaking diff, it was decided the best option would be for Andy and Rob to leave the trip at this point :(From our overnight stop, it was an easy and safe drive back to Mansfield on maintained forest roads. At Mansfield a mechanic could do a proper assessment of the diff, to hopefully give Andy and Rob the ok to continue their travels back to Adelaide. The itinerary had the crew going on steep, isolated and potentially challenging tracks today, so if there was a mechanical failure, it had the potential to be a difficult and costly recovery. As we had already had a great few days, and with a safe exit point available, this was the best option available.



At 10am we headed off, back on Brocks Road towards Mansfield and the Howqua Hills. We stopped at Tunnel Bend, a spot where many years ago miners dug a tunnel looking for gold. If you are game, you can walk all the way through and come out on the other side of the road.

Once we were back at the cars, a couple of horse riders came along. After chatting for a while, they both mentioned how they'd come past here many times, but had never walked through the tunnel.

The lady was keen but her companion was content to stay on his horse, having a smoke. So Michael being the gentlemen he is, stepped up and offered to lead her through the tunnel.

After 10 minutes the lady came back up the road alone, with Michael nowhere in sight. We asked where Michael was, as she said "I've left him down there for later on!!!" Someone quipped that we'd been trying to lose him all week.....but thankfully Michael returned a few minutes later, and saved Craig the hassle of filling out an Incident Report.



With the crew back together, we continued on to Howqua Hills Track. This track climbs steeply from 400 metres to over 1km, before skirting the western side of Mt Darling.

With a clay base we got a reminder of how quickly track conditions can change, when we got held up by a track maintenance crew. Having bulldozed and graded the track, the water truck then sprayed the road. That little bit of water changed everything. It has us slipping and sliding as we made our way down to Tobacco Flat. Thankfully, it was a relatively short section and a great reminder of just how quickly track conditions change, if you get some rain.



We continued on Mitchells Track where you pass an old Slate mine at the top of the mountain. It's a great spot to stop and have a break, and being at 1,000 metres elevation, you get more fantastic views of the countryside. An added bonus was good phone reception, so we all took the opportunity to call and text family members to let them know all was ok.

The track maintenance crew had been on the other side of the mountain recently, grading Mitchells Track all the way to the bottom at Mitchells Creek campground. Being a very steep descent on a mostly clay base, it is another track you would not want to be on after rain.

Being on the south westerly side of the mountain it is noticeable how much more like rainforest the bush is, verse what it is like at elevation or on the more exposed northerly facing aspects. Large ferns, mosses and thick growth dominate in the cooler shade of the southern side.

After lunch at Mitchells Creek campground, we continued on to the well-maintained Mt Sunday Road and our destination for the night, the Jamieson River at the end of Ferguson Track. Not a very well-known spot, there are a couple of large campsites with tables and firepits.

Another warm afternoon, so a few of us delayed our camp setup, and went for a swim. The river level was very low, so we had to crawl over the rocks in search of a spot deeper enough to submerge. It was worth it though, as you feel nice and clean and invigorated by the cool mountain water.

We repeated last night's routine of putting the fire on and cleaning the hotplate. With all the hard work done, it was then time to sit back to watch the Bush TV.



With some rain passing over at dinner time, it was a bit of a rushed affair, getting dinner cooked and having it out of the rain. It continued drizzling into the evening, so we had an early night after another very enjoyable day.

Day 7 – Friday 14th Feb – Jamieson and Kooyora State Park

Today was planned to be a rest day, just relaxing by the river and taking it easy. Therefore, we had a bit of sleep in, listening to the morning chorus and the sound of the gently flowing river.

Once we stirred, as a collective we decided to head back a day early. It was going to be around 10 hrs of driving to get back to Adelaide from where we were, so too much to make the journey an overly enjoyable one. Much better to break it up over 2 days, and be able to take your time and see some sights along the way.

We headed off at 10:30am to Jamieson. A nice easy drive, and along the way we got more great views of the mountains that you never get tired of looking at. Jamieson is a small picturesque town rich in history. It is definitely worth spending time walking around the town, following the heritage trail, and admiring all the old homes and street scape. There is also a café and coffee outlet where you can get freshly brewed coffee, that from all accounts was excellent!



It was getting onto lunchtime so we headed to Mansfield to fill up, and get some pastries from the local bakery. With our bellies and tanks full, it was time to start heading back to Adelaide. It is a much more relaxed way to travel, knowing you don't need to crank out 850 odd kilometres to get home.

Our destination was Kooyoora State Park, 3 hours west of Mansfield. It is an ideal spot to stay on the way to and from the northern side of the high country. It appears to be not that well known, and you literally drive straight past it, so it adds no extra time to your journey. Dog friendly, good toilets, a large shelter with tables, firepits and accessible for caravans.

On the way we stopped at Colbinabbin for a snack and to visit the silo art. Well worth a stop as the murals are amazing.





We arrived at camp at 4:30pm. There were only 2 other campers in the entire area, so we pretty much had the place to ourselves. So, we set up camp and you guessed it, put the fire on, cleaned the hotplate and sat back to watch more Bush TV.

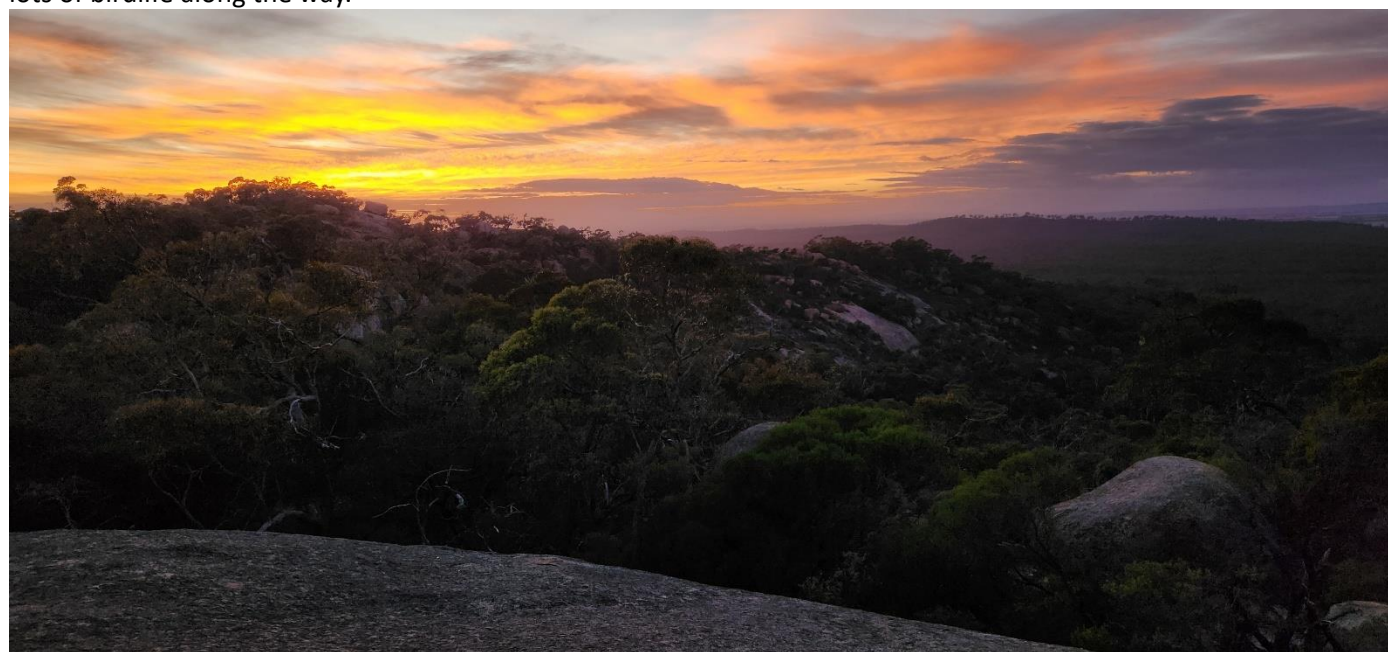




Another great day of travel and feeling pleased with ourselves that we had decided to do the trip home over 2 days, we stayed up later tonight, chatting away and finishing the chocolates, Port and red wine so it wouldn't go to waste.

Day 8 – Saturday 15th Feb – Homeward Bound

We woke to another perfect morning, cool and calm. Kooyoora has a nice lookout that is an easy 800m walk from the campsite. Facing east, it is worth getting up early so you can see the sun rise. Expect to see wallabies and hear lots of birdlife along the way.



It was then time for us to say our goodbyes and head home at our own leisure. In summary, another excellent LandCruiser club trip. A great crew, pretty much perfect weather, lots of sightseeing, great countryside, some exciting drives and plenty of R&R. What more could you want from a trip away.