

Top Crossing Hut weekend

22nd – 26th Jan 2021

Attendee's: Matt, Tam, Lori & Taryn Ahern, Peter Hugo, Andy & Dylan Kass, Jeff & Heather Davey

Friday 22nd January 2021

Matt, Tam, Lori and Taryn headed off at about 10am with camper trailer packed and new rubber on the car with the plan of securing a camp site early given it was a long weekend.

After stopping off at Mansfield for supplies we headed towards Whitfield and soon found the turn off to Powers lookout. A fabulous view down the King Valley



We stopped for lunch at the Whitfield General store, topped up with some ice and headed towards the hills.

Before long we came across the William Hovel Dam, where a few families had made the most of the warm weather and were enjoying a cool swim. We continued along the Upper King River Rd that quickly turned to dirt. The thoughts of a conversation with Peter Hugo came back to me

about the track being marked as a black diamond track on the Hema map and we pushed on with a nervous feeling.

It wasn't long before we were engaging 4WD for a little security as the track climbed ahead of us, but nothing the Ranger couldn't handle with a camper trailer on the back.

About a kilometre further along we were forced to stop when we came across a Nissan Navara parked in a shallow creek (facing us), the kids and wife out of the 6x4 camper trailer unhitched from the car (also in the the creek) with the jockey wheel down.

Behind that was what could only be explained as a steep climb out of the creek with two options.

On the right, a rocky staircase with large holes and protruding rocks or, on the left a steep dirt/rocky section off to the left with a possibility of sliding off the track into

The man in the Navara advised me that he had been thousand times and never had a problem, I guess this different? as he had already had one attempt, had to and jackknifed the trailer. Anyway off he went again for another try with his road tyres and a little more "right peddle". CLUNK, BANG, VROOM and he was up. Now it was my turn. After surveying the site, I opted for the rocks on the right and avoid the sloping dirt/rocky area. With the added pressure of Mr Navara and family watching on we crept across the creek, engaged low 1st and the diff lock.

In one steady, secure climb we were at the top (insert fist pump here).



car and a middle of

short

damaging that slid the scrub. up this a time was reverse

Final comment from Mr Navara "well you made that look easy"



From there it was a fairly straight forward drive into Top Crossing Hut, although there were two river crossings that were not that challenging.

After arriving at the camp and only three other campers set up, we set about setting up our camp including an additional site with a two-man tent to ensure we had sites for everyone.



We were lucky enough to secure the sites at the end of the camping area and quickly erected the club banner which seemed to deter others as they came in.

As night fell on the Friday evening Tam and I started to wonder if Pete managed to escape the need to work during the day and if he would be arriving tonight or if he would come up on the Saturday. Given there was no phone service we had no way of knowing. At about 10:30 pm we decided that obviously Pete would be arriving in the morning and we went to bed.

At 12.30am we were woken to the glare of headlights and the sounds of a car. Pete was arriving in the morning alright! Only missing the evening by 30minutes. He had managed to conquer the track in the dark and admitted that he was in Whitfield at 10.30pm, taking nearly two hours to reach camp. He quickly erected his 30sec Tent and went to bed.

Saturday 23rd Jan 2021

Up at “sparrows fart” as usual, a little bit of breaky and given the track condition it was decided that we head out to meet up with Jeff and Heather who were due to arrive during the morning. We met Jeff and Heather just before the track started getting nasty and a decision was made to head back to phone service area and advise Andy (arriving later that afternoon) of the impending challenge to get to camp.

Arriving back at the “rock wall”, which had quite the gathering of spectators now, with a large Asian family setting up their picnic spot next to the entertainment. Jeff and Heather got their first look at it and Pete got his first look in daylight. Which to his shock, he actually took the most dangerous route up there in the dark.



Matt decided he would try it without the diff lock and quite frankly “made a meal of it!” going too far to the right, dropping the rear left into a hole, (didn't listen to the guide) and gave the onlookers something to cheer about. Pete as well as Jeff and Heather on the other hand chewed it up and spat it out.



After negotiating the river crossings again we arrived back in camp. Jeff and Heather set about building their campsite and then it was time for a quiet bevvv and a cool off in the river.



River crossings



Cooling off in the river

Later that afternoon Andy and Dylan arrived safely and set up camp.

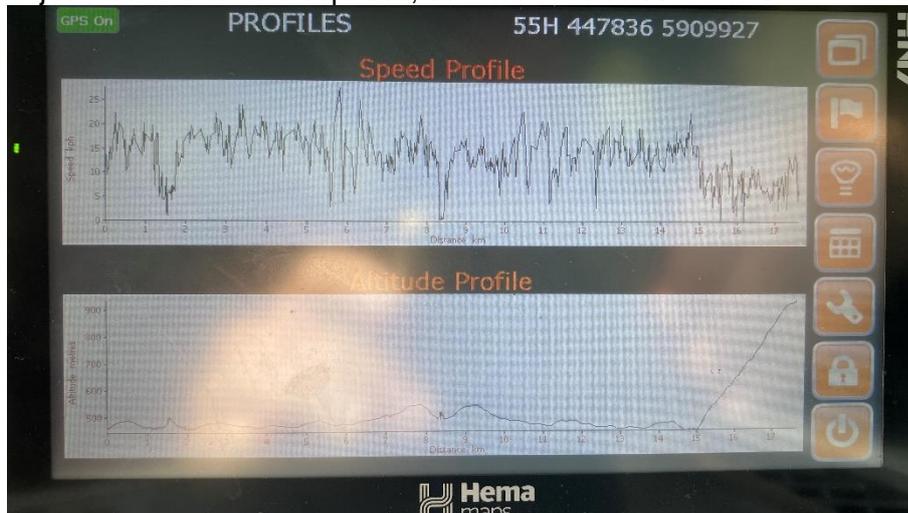


Camp sites (didn't get a pic of Jeff and Heathers)

Sunday 24th Jan 2021

Up early again as usual (must be loud sparrow farts again). Today's plan is to head to Tomahawk Hut via Buckland Spur Track and then return via Evans Creek Track.

Buckland Spur Track is graded as Difficult (Black Diamond) by Hema. For the first 3km it is sort of justified due to its steepness, as we climbed 450m in 2.5 KM with some spots fairly rocky.



However, the day before when Pete and Matt were out gathering fire wood they were parked a couple of hundred metres up Buckland Spur track when they saw a vehicle coming down the track. A Volkswagen Touareg (8 speed auto, all wheel drive, SUV with low profile road tyres). As the gent past by his comment was "it's a little rocky up there".

The track levelled off and there were cheers of excitement from the kids when we suddenly got phone service. There was a rush of phone calls, text messages, snap chats (maintaining their "streaks"?? and FaceBook posts before it disappeared again. Eventually we arrived at Tomahawk Hut, a well maintained and neat little hut with a picnic area and carpark. Time for a quick (late) morning tea and then head off for Evans Creek Track.



Evans Creek track was a relatively easy run with a couple of little slow sections. The northern end of the track had had quite a bit of work done by a dozer in preparation for a future planned burn. This made the track reasonably wide but also had created a copious amount of Bull Dust which made one steep hill climb a little tricky with Pete losing traction halfway up and having to take another shot with some more momentum.

All up it was a good run and also provided for time later in the day to sit back and enjoy another cool off in the river with temps during the day reaching 38deg.

After arriving back in camp Matt and Tam decided it would be a great opportunity to try out the Joolca hot water service with a shower. AWESOME!

With Monday forecast to be 40+ and a Fire Danger Rating of Severe it was decided that Matt and Pete would take a run out to get phone service to find out the update on Total Fire Ban declaration and also forecast for the change expected overnight on Monday night and into Tuesday.

The forecast wasn't good as there was 18mm of rain due to start Tuesday morning about 8am and given we had a camper trailer to get back out down some steep red clay tracks, it was decided that we would pack up on Monday and head out to a campsite on the main road for safety.

Monday 25th Jan 2021

It was a slow start to the day with a casual pack up, with the aim to be on the road at about 12noon. A paddle in the river prior to departing and a discussion about possible alternate routes out. It was decided that we would try crossing the river and heading up Sandy Flat Track and then head down Long Spur Track back to Upper King River Rd north of the dam.

Pete headed up the convoy and went for a bit of a “recce” up the track as Matt was towing the camper. As the group were gathered at the bottom of Sandy Flat Track Matt raised concerns over the growing dark clouds and didn’t really want to be stuck in a location with what looked to be rain.

Matt advised that to be safe he was going to head out via Upper King River Rd and the others should try out Sandy Flat Track and he would meet them at the other end.



The rest of the group headed off up Sandy Flat and Matt & Family made it back to hard ground just prior to a shower of rain.

Long Spur track provided some steep descents and some challenging sections but nothing too difficult.

Everyone met up again on the main road and headed to Cheshunt for lunch.

We then headed off to check a few possible locations to spend our Monday evening. Whitfield Caravan Park (no pool, no river), Gentle Annie Caravan Park (river, but crowded), Edi Cutting free camp area (river, reasonably crowded). We decided to stop at Edi Cutting and we eventually found a site for us all amongst the hum of the generators, flip flop of thongs, blue singlets, stabbies, swearing and patriotic Aussies.

The hum of the generator across the track from us powering a caravan and more lights than the MCG (strategically placed by the owner so they couldn’t hear it but don’t worry about others) hummed its way until about 11pm, but this didn’t stop the campers at this site, who continued to talk (yelled) loudly until about 2am.

Tuesday 26th Jan 2021

We were woken by the pitter pater of rain on the tent at about 5am, which gradually got more steady and eventually turned into a downpour that lasted a few hours. We managed to get breakfast done and thankfully a break in the rain provided us the opportunity to do a mad pack up and we hit the road.

Andy decided that he would head back toward Mansfield and may head across to Jamieson then Eildon and home. The Ahern family headed back to Oxley and out to Glenrowan, while Jeff and Heather headed into Wangaratta to do some shopping.

All up it was a great weekend with some good four wheel driving and plenty of time to relax, and a good



mix of quiet country camping, combined with a reacquaintance with the harsh reality of why we work so hard to head into the bush and to be out of reach of the 2WD’s.