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# TRACK WATCH

**NEW THOMASTOWN BRIDGE  
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MT BUCKLAND SNOW TRIP  
WALKING THE MURRAYVILLE TRACK  
THE MALLEE DOG FENCE  
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# From the President



The word 'unprecedented' has been used a great deal in 2020 – and for good reason.

The year began with many still in the grip of long-term drought and then, the ferocity of the bushfires. With so many communities already seriously impacted, the COVID-19 crisis has brought widespread business shutdown, unemployment and vastly increased levels of isolation. We start to get more than a bit irritated with the changes to our lives we have to endure, yet in the midst of how things are something else unprecedented and good has happened. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II has awarded our Australian BlazeAid volunteers with the prestigious 'Commonwealth Point of Light' beacon award for outstanding volunteerism after the Australian 2020 Megafire. Rhonda and Kevin Butler, are the founders of 'BlazeAid', the organisation which brought together an army of volunteers to clear ground and rebuild fences following devastating bushfires.

Many volunteers from clubs affiliated with Four Wheel Drive Victoria have willingly and generously given their time and energy to work with BlazeAid. The selfless difference made to farming families has been part of this volunteer work. Many days and in some cases weeks of time have been given by our volunteers to this effort.

Four Wheel Drive Victoria wishes to thank those of our club members who have played their part in this work for which the beacon award has been made. We may not know each of you by name, but you and your club can be very proud of your volunteer work to help people needing assistance to re-establish their lives. Congratulations! Your help is appreciated.

Our hard-working staff at Four Wheel Drive Victoria are all working from home at the moment as many of our club members may be too. It's a whole new ball game with those things which are just there when you're at work and just not there when you're working at home. Wayne, our CEO, is receiving a number of requests to provide training, some of which may need to be delivered during the current lockdown. This has added an extra layer of effort to make the preparations necessary to operate in

restricted conditions.

We had anticipated training income may slow in the second half of this year, but this will help the budget. Our thanks to the staff for making this transition to work at home. We appreciate your resilience.

The Four Wheel Drive Victoria Board is preparing for our association Annual General Meeting, with a difference. Many questions and ideas have been discussed to find the most appropriate way of holding this meeting, given the COVID-19 restrictions we have to consider. It will be a bit different from past years where catching up with familiar faces has been part of the meeting. Our very capable Board Secretary, David Craineane, has been working away preparing for our meeting to take place in the most hassle-free way possible. We have yet to decide on the date but will advise you, by email, as soon as we know. Please keep checking your emails from Four Wheel Drive Victoria. There will be communication about our AGM coming to your club Secretary.

Some of our clubs have been making plans to celebrate significant stages in the life of their club. A couple I am aware of are the Idlers 4WD Club and the Bendigo Four Wheel Drive Club. Idlers were looking to celebrate their 25th year, had the plans made all ready to go but regrettably have had to follow the COVID-19 requirements and wait for a time down the track. I understand Bendigo Four Wheel Drive Club are also making plans to celebrate their 40th year some time around October 2020. Four Wheel Drive Victoria is always keen to encourage our clubs to celebrate milestones as these times are enjoyable, to recall the fun, good trips and enduring friendships made, as club members have together engaged in their chosen leisure activity. It is the custom of Four Wheel Drive Victoria to make a presentation to clubs on these occasions to acknowledge the club's important milestone, the club's affiliation and our working together through our association. Please let the office know if your club is planning such a time, we would love to join with you and present to your club a commemorative plaque to celebrate the occasion.

*Continued page 5...*

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## Sun Country on the Murray - Your Nature Escape Dreams Come True

Spring weather in Sun Country on the Murray offers a warm welcome to you when the time is right.

Four wheel driving in our region allows beautiful views of the waterways, along winding bush tracks that nestle up to the Murray River and Broken Creek. Many tracks meander through impressive tall red gum forests, home to ancient trees and alive with abundant flora and fauna, including the Barmah National Park, which should be on your 'must see' list.

Camping by the river is an ideal way to create new memories and rediscover old ones. In the Sun Country on the Murray – from Bundalong to Barmah, through the towns of Yarrawonga, Cobram, Barooga, Tocumwal, and at sandy river beaches right along this famous stretch – there are beautiful places to pitch a tent or park your van and settle in.

Camping brings all five senses alive. But mostly it's the smells that we remember: That fresh air that smells like nothing and everything all at once; the campfire smoke, especially

on those days when it always seems to blow in your direction... Sausages on the hotplate, gum leaves, dust, sand and water.

So if you're dreaming of your next nature escape, we have the solution for you. Enclosed in this month's edition of *Trackwatch* is your complimentary copy of the Sun Country on the Murray Nature Escape brochure, highlighting walks, drives, canoeing, kayaking, cycling, cruising, accommodation and much more.

Perhaps you're looking to stay off the beaten track or do something a little unique. Our Sun Country on the Murray Nature Escape brochure highlights our 'must do' nature experiences.

Other amazing experiences on offer in our region include:

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Our region is popular for day tripping and overnight freedom camping, fishing, bushwalking,

cycling and bird watching. It's all easy to do here. With sweeping beaches and shady campsites right on the water's edge, you won't be disappointed spending a night or two under the stars. For those who like home comforts, try one of our friendly holiday or caravan parks.

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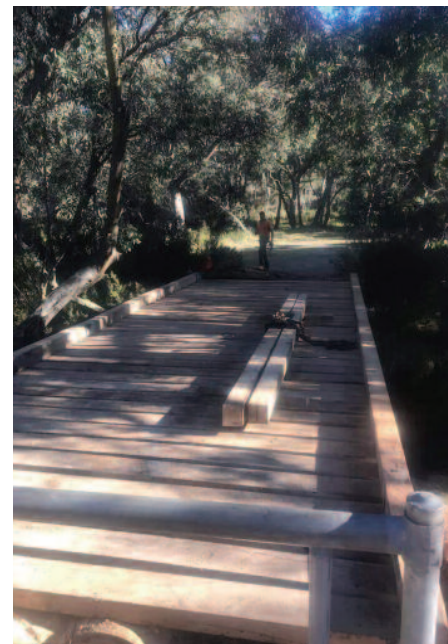


# The New Thomastown Bridge

Thomastown is located in the Alpine National Park, off the Tamboritha Road north of Licola. At an elevation of 1280 metres above sea level, Thomastown is a popular, easily accessed camping and picnic place. The southern end of Kelly Lane starts at Thomastown where the track crosses Shaw Creek. The track has previously featured in TrackWatch and has two huts, Kelly Hut and McMichaels Hut. The historic huts have been worked on by various four wheel drive clubs. At its northern end Kelly Lane, at 1448 metres, joins the Howitt Road near the scenic area known as The Gorge. Close to the northern end of the track Shaw Creek is crossed on a concrete bridge. There are seasonal closure gates at each end of Kelly Lane. The closure of Kelly Lane is unique in that the closure and opening dates are negotiated, usually following a track inspection, with Four Wheel Drive Victoria and Parks Victoria each year. This flexibility is designed to protect the fragile and ecologically important Shaw Creek environment. The track usually closes a little earlier and opens later than the normal seasonal closure dates.

The bridge over Shaw Creek at Thomastown is a wooden structure with the seasonal closure gate at the Tamboritha Road side. The bridge is sited near a superb section of Shaw Creek, where there is a shelving rock bank on one side and a pool deep enough for a cooling (very cold) dip on a hot summer's day. There is a picnic table and up the hill a long drop toilet. In the last quarter of 2019,

the deteriorating bridge was inspected by an engineer and deemed to be unsafe for vehicle traffic. Over the years the timbers had rotted. The gate was locked, and a sign placed to warn of the closure of the bridge. Four wheel drive access to Kelly Lane was still available from the south by taking Dingo Hill Track at Tamboritha Saddle and then Scrubby Hill Track.



It was originally planned that the bridge would be repaired or replaced in time for summer, however the devastating fire season of 2019/20, delayed the letting of contracts and the work being completed.

Options for repair or replacement were discussed by the Parks Victoria Foothills and Southern Alps team at Heyfield. The most cost effective option was a wooden bridge constructed in the same style as the old bridge. This option would retain the scenic values of the site and cause the minimum of disruption to the creek environment.

Maffra based company, Macalister Earthmoving were awarded the contract to remove the old bridge and construct the new one. Established in 2007, Macalister Earthmoving regularly do work for Government agencies, and have considerable experience in remote site operations. Sections of the bridge were constructed off site and trucked to Shaw Creek. Construction started on the 2nd of June and was completed by the Queen's Birthday weekend.

We travelled up, in mid-June, not long after the bridge had been completed. Our tyres crunched through the thick frost on shady corners of Tamboritha Road. The interior of the Land Cruiser was filled with the tempting smell of pasties heating up in the Travel Buddy oven, perfect lunch for a very cold day.

At Thomastown pools of water in the creekside rocks had turned to ice. We were very impressed as the new bridge looks almost exactly like the



*Photos by Greg Rose and Wayne Foon.*

one it replaced, totally in character with the area. It doesn't yet have the decorative mossy growth on the sides, that will come with time. The bridge is beautifully constructed, and the surrounding area shows no sign of the work that took place. A credit to the contracted company and Parks Victoria.

Wayne Foon, Parks Victoria Foothills and Southern Alps Team summed up the bridge work and final result.

*"The delivery of this project and the rebuild of this bridge is satisfying to have been completed to such a high standard. Thomastown is one of the most iconic locations in the Victorian High Country and sees many visitors; campers, walkers, hunters and four-*

*wheel drivers visit each year. The ability to be able to replace this bridge with a timber construction that aesthetically fits well into its surrounds will hopefully see many travellers, travers it over the coming years."*

Thanks to the Parks Victoria Foothills and Southern Alps team for their assistance in writing this article and to Wayne Foon for the use of the bridge construction photos.

**Greg Rose.**

*Four Wheel Drive Victoria Regional Representative, Southern Alpine National Park.*

*Land Rover Owners Club of Gippsland.*

*Land Rover Owners Club of Victoria.*





Continued from page 1  
President's Report...

Talking of special occasions – did you know FWDV is forty-five this year? How about that! Even better, looking down the track we'll be having our fiftieth anniversary in 2025. We're thinking this year would be a good time to start planning the party for 2025. It would be good if there was a historian in one of our clubs who could perhaps be part of getting together some of the fantastic history that is Four Wheel Drive Victoria. Please contact the President if you can help with this. It's goin' to be a big party!

All the best,

**Colin Oates, President**

### Piranha open for business

In very trying times, Piranha have remained open in a COVID respectful way by offering consumers the choice of ringing, selecting products and paying by credit card.

We have a "PARK & COLLECT" area at the rear of the building to facilitate pick ups. Our products for web site orders and emailed orders from the wholesale trade around Australia remains functional. The retail showroom is

closed and the workshop is available to do work that supports the trades or if the work required is classified as emergency, safety related, etc. As we are mainly fitting accessories the workshop is effectively closed.

Contact Piranha on 03 9762 1200  
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### The Lockdown Lament

by Alison McLaughlin 3.9.2020



Wayne is in Warrandyte  
Sheila's in the hills  
Karl is in Balwyn accounting for bills  
I'm based in Frankston  
Near Port Phillip Bay  
Our team's been together yet so far away.

We're thankfully busy  
Clubs, courses and more  
Via email and phones, just not through the door.  
Working in lockdown  
Slippers slipped on  
Pajamas and trackies, our uniform's gone.

Restrictions abound  
In this year of the mask  
At home we tread lightly, keeping to task.  
Outside Spring has sprung  
But you know where we've been  
Socially distant and stuck on a screen.

### Support our supporters..

At this difficult time many businesses are doing it hard, so we ask members to support our valued advertisers.

We are fortunate to have some of the biggest names in Australia's 4WD industry as strong supporters and ask that when considering a 4WD accessory or service to visit the companys that you find advertising in Trackwatch. The expertise they bring to the industry is second to none.



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Brake Fluid





# Idlers 4WD Club

## Yalmy Fence Restoration

- July 2020 -

The call for help, and we can finally assist. Buchan BlaizeAid asked 4WD Vic to ask a 4WD Club to assist with fencing on a remote property east of the Snowy River, too far away from Buchan for them to viably repair the fences.

This request put our ever-ready Community Support person, Barry into action. He rang me (Geoff Pontin) and by the end of our conversation we had arranged a tentative date for me to lead a trip to a farm at Yalmy, approximately 30 kms north of Orbost.

No facilities, camping on the property. It was proposed that we needed to be self-sufficient. Enough food and water etc. to last the duration of our stay.

Barry posted the trip on the Club's web site, organised all the paper work that BlaizeAid required, registration form etc. which left the final arrangements for me to make with the BlaizeAid coordinator at Buchan, Graeme Allen, the farmer Darren Downey and a man who had a BlaizeAid trailer at his place at Newmeralla, Jason.



**Trip 1 Sunday 5th July – Sunday 12th July**

**Trip 2 Sunday 12th July – Sunday 19th July**

Barry and I were hoping for groups of at least six for each week, I was going to stay for the fortnight so that meant five others each week. The initial ask left us a few short so Barry made himself available for the fortnight. With Martyn Lacey, Geoff Brennan, Phillip Tran and Keith Osbourne we were set for the first week.

I arrived on Saturday 4th met Darren and his wife Lisa at their house in Orbost, then made my way to the farm at Yalmy. (Don't bother looking for a town called Yalmy, it is a small rural location). After setting up the camper and having a little look







around, it was just before dark and a dog approached me wagging his tail to the point he could barely walk, a young hound dog, I don't know what breed, but too small to be a Blood Hound. I put a bag under the camper and that is where he stayed all night. I heard a couple of rifle shots that evening but the dog didn't move, he was content with my company. Next morning, he was still there. I gave him a feed of my sausages that I was going to have that night and went for a drive to see if I could find any sign of the dog's owner and get some fire wood for the first couple of nights. No success finding the dog's owner but I did drag in a good-sized log to cut and split for fire wood. The dog greeted me the same way as before.

Time to head for town and see Darren. He was busy building a toilet, and as I had a few hours to kill before picking up the trailer at Jason's place, I asked Darren if he could use some assistance, which he gratefully accepted. I picked up the trailer from Jason and headed back to Darren's to assist a little more. The first of our group arrived at Orbost Bakery before 14:00 and the last just before our planned departure time of 15:00. In convoy we headed approximately 30 kms north of Orbost to the property at Yalmy. I had told everyone about the dog and had anticipated a greeting the same as before. On arrival the dog was nowhere to be seen so I figured he had left. I went in and out of my camper a few times and was

surprised later to find the dog laying on my bed, as if he owned it. I had left the door of the camper closed and zipped up, fortunately no damage. By the end of the day Phillip had a new best friend. They say the best way to a "man's heart" is through his stomach. In this case "dog's heart." On one of Darren's trips back into town he took the dog to the vet (no chip) and posted a message on Facebook, hopefully the owner will be found. Camp was set up in front of a machinery/hay shed, the only available flat area in an idyllic picturesque setting, happy hour, dinner then sleep, ready for an 08:30 start.





Monday 08:30 Muster with BlazeAid's daily safety processes put into place, then a checking of tools and equipment in the trailer. By the time we were completing the check Darren arrived with a trailer of his own with lots of stuff including a newly made toilet cubicle constructed around a shipping pallet. All it needed was a hole to put it on. After introductions Darren put the post hole auger onto the tractor. Not long after we had a ready to use drop dunny. Who said no facilities? A couple of days later Darren bought in a shower cubicle with a 12v shower and all it needed was a BYO bucket of hot water. Keep this up and nobody will want to go home!

Darren and Barry put their heads together and devised a plan to keep

us busy, working on an 8-acre internal paddock fence for the next few days. Did I tell you that there are lots of hills, very few flat areas?

Darren was running around keeping up with the installation of anchor assemblies installing posts and rails, while we were removing burnt posts, installing star pickets, replacing or repairing damaged barbed wire, re-tensioning and tying the wires to the star pickets.

Wednesday morning Darren wanted to show me a new job, installing new barbed wire on a boundary fence. On the way he noticed that a number of cattle had "done a runner," seeing tracks through a gap in a fence; the thought of repairing the fence became second priority. Off we walked, following tracks, approximate-

ly 3kms later we caught glimpses of the cows. We tried to circle around behind the cattle so as to drive them back towards Darren's property. We couldn't move fast enough so Darren called it quits, to return later with enticement.

Anyway, back to the boundary fence, we installed 120m of 4 strands of barbed wire fencing that afternoon. Did I tell you that there are lots of hills, very few flat areas?

It was about this time we heard that greater Melbourne was in threat of lockdown and contemplated how we were going to continue the following week. At happy hour that evening Phillip, Martyn and Geoff B volunteered to stay longer. That made organising the following week easier.

The terrain was becoming too steep to tow the BlazeAid trailer around to run wire from and carry tools for work. It was decided Darren's Ute would do the job. By the end of the week with this crew we installed an additional 400+m of boundary fencing. Did I tell you that there are lots of hills, very few flat areas?

Sunday morning, we said goodbye to Keith and thanked him for a fantastic effort.

Also Sunday afternoon we said hello to Bruce Smith, Robert Neumann and John Green, that gave us a group of eight to start the week with; fantastic!

The rain started quite heavy at times, not a good omen considering how steep and slippery the ground was getting. Although the rain didn't totally stop us working on the fences, it did slow us down.

Darren owns an excavator and had it delivered on site to clear tracks that would enable us to access different parts of the boundary fence line.



Intermittent rain persisted, access and the ability to run wire was becoming more difficult. Because of this Darren said with a couple of weld on modifications we could run the wires from the excavator, so on the Wednesday we wouldn't be running any wire while Darren made the modifications

Wednesday morning Martyn and Geoff B's tenures were over. Again a very big thank you for your great contributions. Oh well back to 6 again!

Wednesday is now a lay day so we decided to have a look at the Raymond Creek Falls, I was blown away, lots of water, very impressive. Back to the farm and do some house-keeping. As you can see by the picture the clean-up around the shed made our temporary home even more comfortable. Other than because of the rain why would you want to leave?

Although the excavator was relatively slow it was the workhorse that was needed as it enabled us to construct the rest of the fences that we finished. Except for one 150m section which was run by hand, even too steep for the excavator. Did I tell you that there are lots of hills, very few flat areas? As a group of old f—ts we do a good job. All in all, a very full, busy and gratifying fortnight. Again, the Idlers were able to help a farmer in need following a disaster. It makes me feel warm and fuzzy inside. Oops, I think that was aches and twinges from the physical work. No, no, no warm and fuzzy!

There is one unsung assistant that needs to be mentioned our Ground Charlie, Maree Wells. I have never heard of a ground Charlie actually being used before but the amount of coordinating that Maree did with Graeme Allen the incoming crew and departing crews regarding travel authorities was a necessity. I know the boys coming up on Sunday had to pass a roadblock at Longwarry and I was checked at Nowa Nowa on my way home.

Over the fortnight we either repaired replaced or installed 2,655m of fencing in difficult, challenging conditions and terrain.

I am and we should be proud of that!

**Thanks to all: Geoff Ponting**

## > | Club Spotlight



### Nissan 4WD Club

## lend a hand with Blazeaid at Bruthen, East Gippsland

*I have been a member of the Nissan 4wd club for 19 years and spent a lot of time on the tracks in Gippsland as the club property is north of Heyfield, so I asked some members to join me to help the burnt out farmers in the region.*

*We soon had a team together and ready to go with self contained caravans and we were welcomed to Bruthen camp by Linda Jenkins where we were part of a 100 strong group.*

*The first part of this report is by Wanda McLauchlan covering 6 days.*

Our next visit to Bruthen was March 18th. For 6 days with 10 members helping out at Clifton Creek and Tambo Crossing where we cut down 10 Killer trees and cleared around 50 on the ground across tracks. We were becoming very efficient with club

teams working well together and training backpackers who were keen to learn and once they did some became team leaders as well.

Backpackers would offer their time for 88 days which allowed them to extend their visa for another year, so they were very willing workers and usually young and fit, which is handy as some of our work is in very steep country.

We were forced to cut short our stay as the camp was shutting down due to Covid 19, with only those prepared to stay for a long period to continue. As the Nissan team had commitments in Melbourne, we elected to return home. The camp was reduced to 20 people.

Around 19th May it was possible for us to return but only to Buchan as Bruthen was full, so Barb and Russell





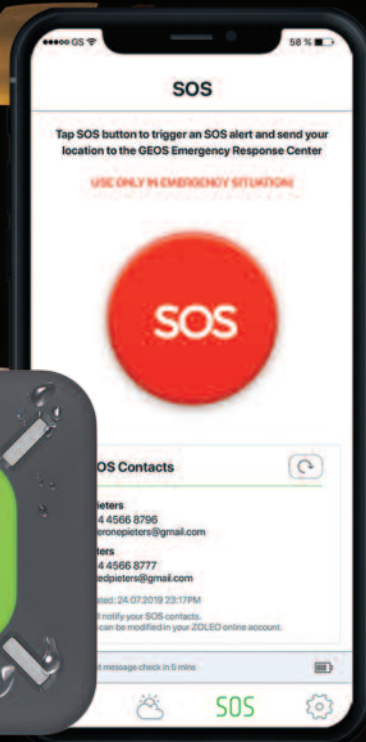
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Masterton, Wanda McLauchlan, Gary Moloney, Bev Clark and myself headed to Buchan where Graeme Allen made us welcome before taking us to a remote farm at W Tree about 50km. east.

Fred our new host arranged power and water for the caravans on his Garlic farm (ONTOS) where we had to build 9ft. high deer fences, but the rain had other ideas with 16mm the first night followed by 22mm the next.

During our time waiting for the rain to pass we were made welcome in his B+B with coonara heater and puzzles to do and books to read.

A few days in I had a phone call from Linda Jenkins at Bruthen who was diagnosed with cancer and had to go to Melbourne for treatment. She had run the camp with Julie for 5 months. We had worked well together before and she asked me if I would take over Co-ordinator for her. Without knowing exactly what was required I said yes. Bev and I packed up and headed back to Bruthen leaving the others to build the deer fences when the rain stopped.

Bev immediately started in the kitchen helping our chef Damo with the extra cleaning and prep work with new Covid 19 rules in place and social distancing in the dining room while I was given a crash course in rosters, ordering tools and materials, visiting and talking to distressed farmers and working out who was next to get our help. After 4 days of instruction, Linda gave me the company credit card and headed off to Melbourne for surgery.

As luck would have it, I was able to convince Julie Coulton to stay on and help with the paperwork involved with signing up new volunteers, dealing with the seed allocation enquiries and the ever changing Covid rules that seem to change every few days. I would not have survived without her help.

One of the important parts of the job was meeting with each farmer and working out what needed to be done to restore the fences so they can get animals back on the farm to make money. It is a hard decision as to who gets help first and which crew to send in as some of the properties are only suitable for mountain goats, so a young and knowledgeable group is required with good 4WD skills to tow the big heavy work trailers around with safety. These trailers have around \$20,000 worth of tools in them which have been donated by various



organisations.

Each trailer has 2 petrol star picket rammers, 1 petrol auger with 2 different sized bits, a battery drill, impact driver, angle grinder, 2 bolt cutters, 4 wire cutters, 10 twitching tools, 2 shovels, 2 crow bars, 2 post hole shovels, 2 wire tensioners, 2 wire spinners, 4 sets of ring lock pliers, a defib machine, first aid kit, 2 way radios for each crew member, 2 petrol chain saws, 1 battery chain saw, helmets with ear muffs and face guards, 2 sets of chain saw chaps and a roof rack to transport materials.

With such a small camp of only 20 people we had 190 farms on the books in February and now have around 95 that still need help so I estimate there is at least another 5 months work yet to do. If anyone has any spare time to give please contact one of the many camps of which there are around 20 in Australia. Anyone who gives their time will have 3 meals a day, free accommodation and safety gear supplied as well as training,



so please consider giving some of your time to the farmers who really need all our help.

A large number of the properties were a total loss with some insured but not enough to cover buildings and fences, some of which are up to 15km in length, others with no insurance at all.

A large number of farmers are still living in hay sheds, tents, camper vans and, if lucky the odd caravan. We have not seen one new building started in the last eight months that we have been coming to the region, so where is all the donated money that people have given to help these people.

Bev and I have handed over the Bruthen camp to David Geekie after 59 days on our last camp. Thank you to all the people that we worked with to make a difference to those who need it most.

**Mike Hale**  
**Nissan 4WD Club Melbourne**



Early pastoralists in South Australia's northern arid lands sorely underestimated the capability of the land to carry stock at sustainable levels, nor the impact of the dingo on their sheep mobs.

The impact of the dingo on sheep was felt almost immediately, and graziers began constructing dog-proof netting fences around their properties to protect flocks from dingoes and wild dogs.

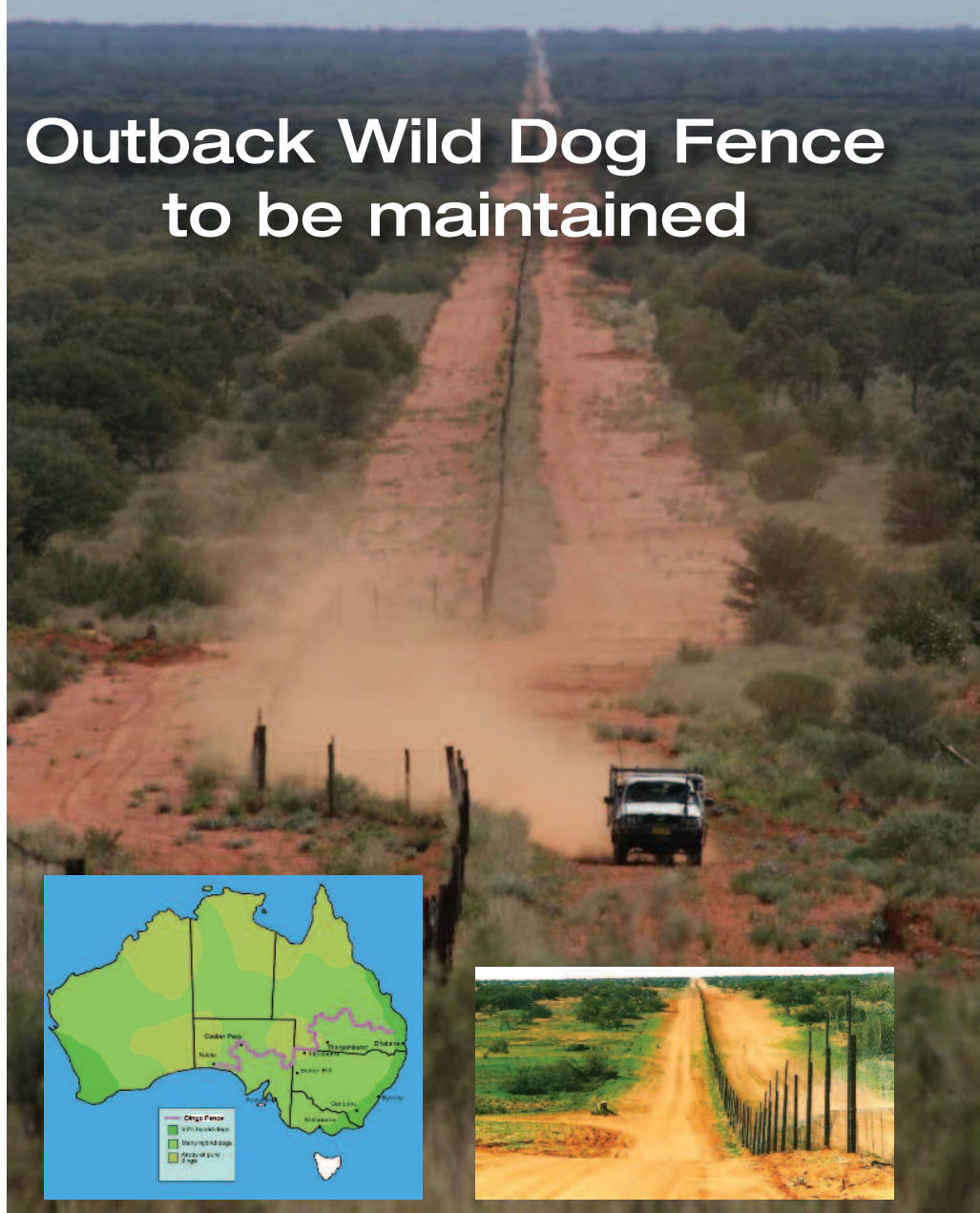
The first Vermin Districts Act was passed in 1894, with amending legislation passed three times prior to 1931. By 1931 the Act defined vermin to include rabbits, foxes and wild dogs, and aimed to establish Vermin-Fenced Districts in areas of the State not under the jurisdiction of local government. At its peak, Vermin-Fenced Districts included more than 48,000 kilometres of fencing.

The enthusiasm for the Vermin-Fenced Districts started to wane in the 1930s, largely driven by the inner (southern) districts where wild dogs had not been seen for some years. The first Districts began closing in 1932. In 1936, a meeting of stockowners was called to discuss the abandonment of Vermin-Fenced Districts and a possible reliance on a single fence. The Second World War then made it very difficult to get the materials and the labour to maintain the network of vermin-proof fences.

In 1945-46, the Pastoral Board and Stockowner's Association looked at the remaining vermin-proof fences in the northern pastoral districts. It was apparent that there existed an almost continuous 'fence' from the far west coast of South Australia to the east coast of New South Wales. The condition of the fence varied dramatically, and so recommendations were made to the Government that future efforts and resources be concentrated on this 'outside' fence, and that the remaining 'inside' Vermin-Fenced Districts would be disbanded.

In 1946, a Dog Fence Act was drafted and approved on 19 December; it came into operation on 17 June 1947. The legislation provided that a dog-proof fence was to be established and maintained in the northern areas of South Australia 'for the purpose of preventing the entry of wild dogs into the pastoral and agricultural areas of the State'. It did not delineate or describe the fence, but gave the

# Outback Wild Dog Fence to be maintained



Governor the power to proclaim the site of the Dog Fence on the advice of the Dog Fence Board. The re-alignment of the fence was not completed until 1960.

Many four wheel drivers will have driven along sections of the dog fence, and noticed it in various standards of condition. The 1.8 metre high wild-dog fence traces a crooked line from Jimbour in Queensland's south-east to the Great Australian Bight, and at 5412 km, it's the longest fence in the world. The Queensland Border Fence stretches for 394 km westwards along the border with New South Wales, into the Strzelecki Desert. The fence passes the point where the three states of Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia meet at Cameron Corner. At this point, it connects with the South Australian Border Fence, which runs for 257 km southwards along the border with New South Wales. It then joins a section known as the Dog Fence in South Australia, which is 2,225 km long.

Recently it was announced that the 100-year old dog fence will receive a \$25 million upgrade financed jointly by the Federal and South Australian governments. Under the upgrade it is proposed to replace 1,600 kilometres of the ageing 2,150 kilometre-long South Australian Dog Fence.

South Australian Minister for Primary Industries and Regional Development Tim Whetstone, said "It is the longest continuous fence in the world, and a crucial part of supporting and protecting the South Australian sheep industry.

"South Australia's component of the 5,400 kilometre Dog Fence is approximately 2,150 kilometres, with approximately 1,600km being more than 100 years of age."

The replacement of 1,600 kilometres of ageing fencing will not only ensure its continued effectiveness and support pastoralists from the ongoing threat of wild dogs, but maintain an iconic part of Australian history.

**Brian Tanner**

# The Futile Attempt to rid northwest Victoria of Dingoes and Rabbits

Officially it was called The Mallee Fence, but to anyone who lives in northwest Victoria, it has only ever been called The Netting Fence or The Vermin Proof Fence. With a length of 204 miles, (328 kilometres), when constructed it was the world's longest netting fence.

The Victorian Parliament passed The Mallee Pastoral Leases Act in 1883 to open Crown Land in the northwest of Victoria partially or fully covered with the Mallee plant. With some 11.5 million acres, roughly 20% of the colony, subdivision was a huge undertaking. The area was divided into two regions, large blocks to the north of the 36th parallel and allotments with a maximum size of 20,000 acres to the south. Blocks were not to be subdivided, while allotments could be subdivided into smaller farms. Many family groups who had earlier fled persecution in Germany and Prussia, after settling in the Barossa Region of South Australia, migrated across the border to the southern Mallee country and remain to this day. Edward Lascelles leased large blocks of land in the Mallee and was the prime instigator for a vermin proof fence. He had fenced large areas of his own land and was able to control dingoes and rabbits. Lascelles

proposed that a fence be erected between the blocks and the allotments by the Government and interest on the expense charged to landholders at a rate of 6%. After initial apathy and disparagement from the govern-



ment of the day, Lascelles was able to have the fence approved and it was erected in 1885/1886 at a cost of almost £14,000. The South Australian government advocated a second fence along the border from the Murray River to the boundary of the Mallee country south of Bordertown. The cost was divided equally between the Victorian and South Australian governments and the Border Fence was erected between 1887-1889.

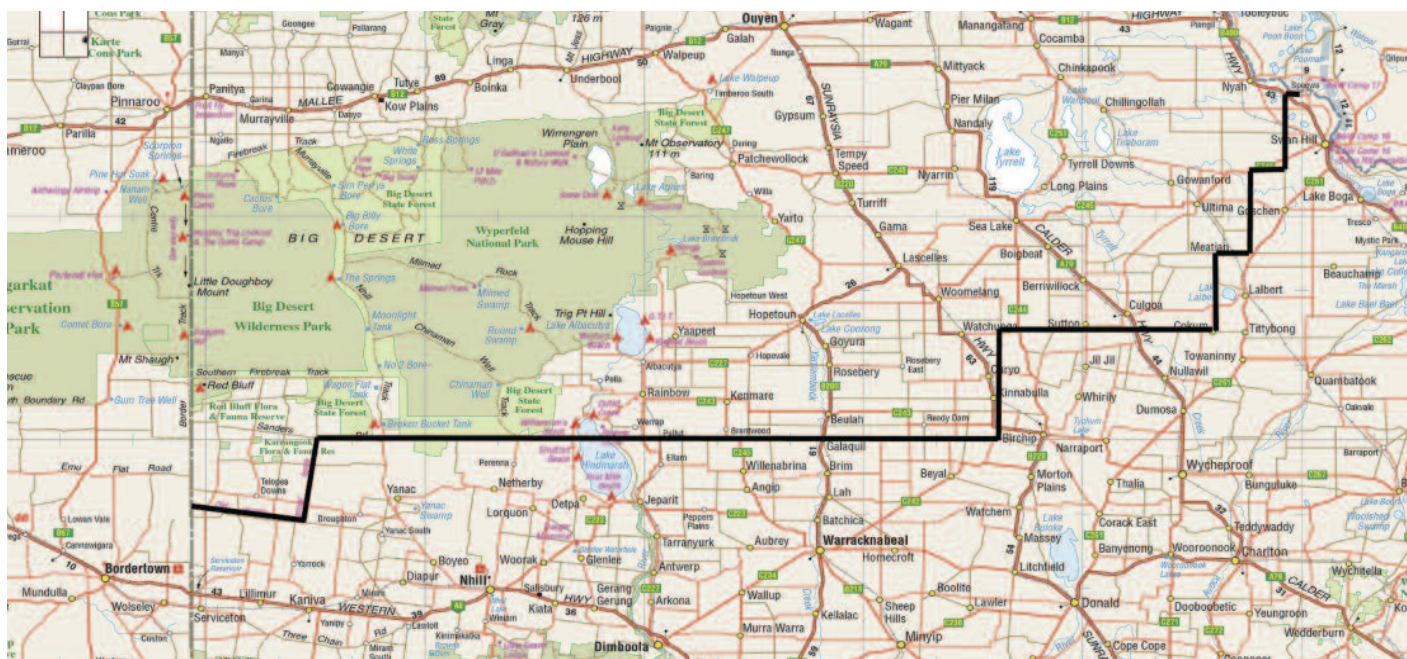
There are few references to The Mallee Fence in the press of the time. No announcements of an 'official

opening' attended by government representatives, nor any claims of its efficacy. Within five years of the fence being built, lessees of the larger blocks were subdividing their land, with or without government approval, and selling the land to hopeful wheat farmers. Smaller landholdings meant more roads and tracks and the Vermin Proof Fence became largely ineffective. At one time the fence crossed more than 80 public roads and an unknown number of farm entrances. Other concerns included gates being left open, Mallee scrub growing back after clearing along the fence line, sand drift and the netting becoming rusty and brittle. In 1959 the government ceased all support and the fence was abandoned.

The Netting Fence Road/Track runs from the Rainbow Nhill Road near Lake Hindmarsh through to the Murrayville Nhill Road and in parts can be a challenging sand track.

**Jo Ussing  
Westprint**

*Sources include Trove, John Deckert's notes and an article by John Pickard in the Victorian Historical Journal, June 2019.*





## Sandhurst 4WD Club

# Mt Buckland snow trip



This trip wasn't officially the snow trip, but it was an amazing three days of snow driving, we had fresh powder on the tracks, to ice and muddy trails. Some of the scenery was spectacular with every peak covered with that white stuff we go and chase. And chase we did, just kept on following it. We met in Bendigo Friday afternoon at 5.00pm, 5 vehicles headed off for Buckland Valley, as we were on the Snow road the rain settled in fairly heavy, which only meant one thing up in the High Country, plenty of snow.

We got to Myrtleford and fuelled up with Alpine diesel and a bite to eat at the local pizza shop. We got into Buckland Valley and pulled into AH Young's Campground about 9.30pm where we set up camp and got the fire going (bringing dry wood from home made it easy to light the fire). We sat around the fire for a little bit and we headed off to bed.

### **Mt Selwyn track Saturday**

We woke to a fairly chilly morning so I got the fire going and the kettle

boiling for a hot coffee and breakfast. There were a few campers there this weekend and this camp isn't right on the Buckland river, but just a short walk down a walking track. We all got packed up and ready to go and had a quick briefing. Seeing that I knew that the Buffalo Range area was seasonally closed because of the bush fires in January and the road works going on up there, I had an idea that, that area was going to be off limits.

We took off at 9.00am heading down





Buckland Valley Rd to Scotchmans Creek track. It had a Road Closed sign so that changed the whole trip right there, so we kept on going till we got to Mt Selwyn Rd and headed up there passing a heap of deer hunters. As we continued along we could see Mt Selwyn ahead all covered with snow then the track was covered as well down as 800m. It was fresh powdery snow that no one had driven in it as yet, so into Low Range 2nd gear and it was an amazing drive up until a locked gate where they were



working on Mt Selwyn doing road works, then the sun came out which made for some great photos, so we turned around and headed back down the mountain to Buckland Valley Rd and turned right passing Beveridges Station. I decided to take Mt Selwyn Creek Rd and see how far we could get. This track had already had vehicles on it, so the track must go all the way through, so we kept going having Mt Selwyn to our right now and the track was still covered with snow and deer hunters everywhere.

We came to an intersection and went right along Tea Tree track. Just up a bit we had smoko and a bite to eat in the snow. We kept going passing the other side of Mt Selwyn Rd and it was closed but the vehicle tracks heading up that way was not good. We continued along Tea Tree just following the snow so I thought we will go

onto Mount Sarah. On reaching Mount Sarah above 1500m the fog came in so the view wasn't that good. We went down McKenzies track with plenty of snow to drive through and the trees covered in snow slapping over our windscreens and covering us in snow, then the track came back out onto Tea Tree where we turned left and I thought we would go on to Talbotville if we have to but the snow started to run out at McBrides track so we turned around and headed back to Mount Sarah for lunch. The fog was still hanging around so a quick break as it was fairly cold up there and the vehicles were a lot warmer. We headed off Mount Sarah back along Tea Tree and down Mt Selwyn Creek rd and it was time to find a campsite, so we headed back towards Beveridges Station and found a great campsite on the river with plenty of firewood, so we set up camp, got the





fire going and had a great night around the big fire.

### **Gunns track Sunday**

In the morning when we woke it was very mild not cold at all, the fire was going already stoked by someone who was up earlier. With breakfast finished, we packed up camp and after a quick briefing we were on our way up to Mt Buckland. We drove through the beautiful Beveridges Station getting to the end of the station and the start of Pheasant Creek track. We went through the river crossing which wasn't very deep and started the climb up Pheasant Creek. It's a really nice drive up with the valley to the left then we started to drive through some fairly thick fog and I just thought the view from Mt Buckland was going to be terrible. All of a sudden we started to come out of the fog to beautiful blue skies and mountains covered with snow then at



about .900m we started to get the snow on the track. The last little section of Pheasant Creek is really steep and being covered with snow made it more interesting, so with the diff lock engaged up we went with one little section we had four wheels spinning but made it easy. At the top we turned right onto Gunns track and the snow became fairly thick and the drive was awesome. You come to another section on Gunns track that has a steep decline which was slippery then it has an incline that's steeper and longer - thank goodness vehicles had already gone up, we found out later it took one vehicle about three or four attempts to get through. At the top of Gunns track turn right up to the Helipad with a nice climb up there as well. At the top there was campers who told us they made the track up through the snow.

When you are up on top of Mt Buckland it's a 360 degrees view of the whole High Country. We told the campers who were there to leave the fire going as we stayed there for about an hour and a half just taking those views in. When it was time to leave we put the fire out and headed back down along Gunns track again, and at the bottom we turned right down Paddy's track. This track is fairly easy, it's just long and takes about two hours to travel. It finally comes down back into the valley again onto Cairn Creek track. About 1 o'clock so I looked for a place for lunch, seeing I knew of some good campsites along here we pulled into a campsite for lunch beside the Cairn Creek with fire wood already cut for us and decided to stay for the afternoon. We set up camp, got the fire going for the afternoon and did our own thing walking along the river as there was plenty of



history with the gold mining and all the man made rock walls on the other side of the river bank. It got really cold about 5 o'clock so we cooked dinner and sat around the fire for the night.

### **Mt Buckland Monday**

We woke to another good morning having breakfast and packing up we were off at 9.00am heading along Cairn Creek track passing more campsites along the way. The track starts to head straight up, and again with the valley down to the left, made a great drive. After about 20 minutes we came out onto Demons Ridge track and went left passing through a bit of snow. We made it to High Point with good views to Mt Buffalo and the other way to Mt Feathertop: it was a bit windy and cold and we jumped back into our vehicles and headed back along Demon Ridge track heading towards Harrietville. We got to Albion track and turned right then down to West Ovens track where we went left. The track now became really easy so just through the river crossing we got out of 4WD and the nice drive into Harrietville. In Harrietville we went through town then turned right to Dredge Hole picnic area which was a gold dredge back in the day and now is a popular swimming hole in the summer months. We had a look around, took some photos and this is where we ended the trip. We aired up and headed for home with everyone going at their own time.

#### *Participants*

Russell. 105 LandCruiser

Andrew. Triton

Frank and Reg. Nissan Patrol

David and Angela. Nissan Patrol

Nathan and Bailey. Nissan Patrol





# Four Wheel Drive Victoria - Keeping you informed

**22-May-20** Mansfield Shire announcement of closure of the Jamieson / Licola track and advising that FWDV will announce to all, when and if anything changes.

**19-Jun-20** BlazeAid seeks interest from clubs to help two farmers in the Orbost area to rebuild their fences, badly impacted by the recent bushfires. The two farms are on the Snowy River remote from Orbost, such that the clubs would need to camp on the farms.

**24-Jun-20** Be aware of the new COVID-19 restrictions that came into force on 22nd June, 2020 and Victoria is in a declared State of Emergency through to 19th July, 2020.

**26-Jun-20** Mt Skene permit applications closed. For July Permits already approved and issued will be honoured on the condition that driver/ passenger numbers per convoy comply with current gathering restrictions of a maximum of 10 people for outdoor gatherings and social distancing is maintained. Failure to do so jeopardises the future of the Mt Skene Permit system.

**8-Jul-20** As you are all aware, Stage 3 Restrictions 'Stay at Home' come into force for six weeks across metropolitan Melbourne and the Mitchell Shire apply from 11:59pm, Wednesday 8th July 2020. In view of these restrictions and the uncertainty of their easing, we have consulted with Mansfield Shire and have regrettably decided to cease the Mt Skene Permit Scheme for 2020. Link provided for all details.

**24-Aug-20** Advising the opportunity through the Victorian Government's Jobs, Precincts and Regions to apply for funding for your Club. [Link provided] for full details on the 'Let's Stay Connected Fund' and the application process. Applications close on 31st August, 2020. Should your club choose to apply and be successful, FWDV would love to hear about the initiatives you will be taking.

*Communications since 16th May*



## City West 4x4 Tallarook State Forest



As luck would have it, Karl had picked a beautiful sunny day for his first gig as Trip Leader. Jamie and I hadn't been up around Tallarook before, and were looking forward to exploring somewhere new. We met at Wallan at 9am, had a quick briefing and set off for Flat Rock campground.

Stopping to air down, it was easy to see how the camp ground got it's name. Lots of areas of huge granite, not boulders but flat to the ground. I'd

hate to be pitching a tent here. Not far from the camp it was time to get into low range as we headed up Mountain Track. We were off! Mountain Track was a nice way to start. Quite steep up hill with some gnarly rock steps. Karl kept us all informed over the radio, advising of what lines worked well for him.

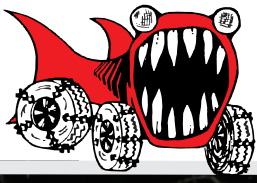
Larry found the first mud of the day before continuing up the hill. Close to the top of Mt Hickey was a rock step

that was a little more challenging. Karl did a bit of minor boulder rearrangement, then spotted everyone through.

Mount Hicky is just over 800m high and we paused at the top for the obligatory pic(s). Meantime a couple of other cars came up from Phone Track. Karl had watched some YouTube clips on Phone Track and said it was way worse than Mountain Track. Not one for us today as most of us aren't keen on vehicle damage. We headed down Hickey Track then turned left on to Cadell Track to Gravel Pit Track.

At the end of Gravel Pit Track we once again turned left, this time on to Dam Track which loops back round to Flat Rock. About 3/4 of the way along, Karl pulled up to walk the next section. He came back reporting all good and advised the left hand line, straddling the ruts would be best. He wasn't wrong. At the top of the ruts there was a decent size boulder that could have led to significant damage. We continued up over more rocky steps and around the corner.





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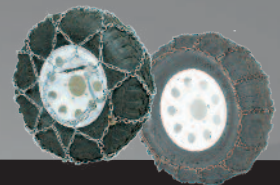
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SUSPENSION



Once back at Flat Rock, we headed off to Freeman's Camp for an early lunch and pit stop. Freeman's camp was a lovely spot with picnic tables and long drop loos. Over lunch Karl filled us in on the plan for the afternoon and promised plenty of bog holes. I have to admit I was pretty sceptical as so far despite recent rains, the tracks had all been dry and dusty. Karl said he'd been here last in December before the rains and there were bogs back then.

Bills Track certainly didn't disappoint. Plenty of muddy ruts, most of which had an easy option. There were quite a few where we erred on the side of caution but still plenty of stinky fun.

Once we were off Bills Track we started to make our way north to our next destination – Trawool Reservoir. We headed up tracks such as Falls West Track, Falls Creek Road, Loop No's 1 & 2. The forest had been consistently bushy so far but now began to thin out for a while, opening up to some clear, flat areas.

West Falls Road was the final descent to the reservoir and was a bit like a long, dusty rollercoaster with stunning views right over the Goulburn Valley.

The reservoir itself has an old dam wall. A short walk past the wall you find a quarry where they must have cut the rock to make the dam. On my Rooftop's map it says that it's bluestone, however the DEPI forest notes say the following "Traawool Reservoir was built in the 1890s to supply water to Seymour and the nearby railway.

The 350 foot long, 23 foot high granite ashlar masonry weir is no longer used as a water supply." Maybe Granite Ashlar Masonry and Bluestone are the

same thing – I'm no rock expert.

All these tracks with FALLS in the name made me think that there must be some waterfalls in the area but this was all I could find today, a little below the wall. Once we were done sightseeing it was time to hit the track again. We started off with a quick little loop below the wall which had some good rock steps and then began the trek south.

As we meandered south along multiple tracks (Rockwell's Track, East Falls Road, Army Road, George's Road, Jenkins Track to name a few) there was a discussion about chainsaws and Karl lamented that Santa had yet to bring him a chainsaw, just lumps of coal. A bit of indecision on the turn into Bridge Track and his co pilot Yvette said it looked like a chainsaw was unlikely this Christmas either. Santa can be so harsh sometimes.

The day was wearing on when we hit Cable Track. My Rooftop's map was last surveyed in 2014 and had an arrow pointing to Bog. 6 years is a long time for a bog to have been around but sure enough it was there and a good one at that. Everyone got out and had a good look at the options, poking the deep bits with sticks to check the bottom. Once again there were options to one side which most people opted to take. Brendan however decided to power through the deep side – I'm so glad he did as it made for some great action shots. He made it look so easy I convinced Jamie to give it a go in the Patrol. Surely with the higher clearance it would be a piece of cake. Oh well, some things don't go to

plan and hey, it's always good to practice some recovery skills on the track. The team worked well together and before long the Patrol had been winched out safely.

Once the recovery was done we were on our way again – Karl stopped briefly, contemplating this track up to the right. Straight up with lots of deep ruts and roots – we decided against it.

For anyone doing this trip – look out for the turn on to Rocky Track. It looked very much like there was only one option but this soon came to a dead end. Once we got back out to the junction we could see that Rocky Track was in fact to the right – a sharp turn off the track. Australians are famous for their creative road names and it was evident how Rocky Track got its name..... rocky indeed.

From the end of Rocky Track we headed up Magazine Track and were soon back at Freeman's camp.

Karl's first trip as Leader was a big success. It was well researched and planned and Tallarook State Forest has a lot of variety to offer in a small space, from rocky tracks with challenging steps, to deep ruts and bogs – something to satisfy a range of different skill levels and vehicles.

Looking at the map I'm sure there are lots more adventures to be had in the area.

Lee Kernighan sung that things were crook in Tallarook, but on this day I would disagree – things were beaut!

**Mandy Pitts**  
**City West 4x4 Club**



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# Walking the MURRAYVILLE TRACK



*The crew at the finish line. I'm on the left. Big Desert*

Things don't always go according to plan. 2020 is evidence of that. However, I like to think I am resilient and can adapt as needed and so my planned walk in South Australia was changed to a walk in Victoria. Specifically, to walk the Murrayville Track and then ride a pushbike back home again.

I am always amazed that other people will willingly join me, no matter how ridiculous the scheme sounds.

'Would you like to come for a 100 kilometre walk, during winter, camping when it will be freezing overnight and the days unpredictable?' does not sound like a great idea, however we started with three walkers and a small support crew.

My support team are my parents, Bev and John Deckert. John is often known as the map-man as Westprint was his idea and he has far more knowledge of the bush than we will ever have. I could have asked my husband Graeme – but someone has to keep the map business going. 'Support Crew' is the professional-sounding term for making lunch, getting the campfire going, moving camp and listening to us, (usually me), complain about how everything hurts, the road is hard, it is too far etc.

The Murrayville Track, or the Murrayville - Nhill Road as it is now officially known, is the main thoroughfare through the Big Desert in north-west Victoria. Currently its main use is as a starting point for 4WD

adventures. A series of campgrounds are popular as base camps and there are tracks winding through the Big Desert State Forest, Wyperfeld National Park and the Sunset Country to the north. Originally the Murrayville Track was a wagon track, cut through the desert in the 1860s to provide droving access for cattle and sheep between Nhill Station and Kow Plains Station. A series of wells and bores were sunk in the early 1900s making the movement of stock easier, although it was still difficult to walk stock through the dense low scrubland that makes up the Big Desert. Many of the original names of the bores; Cactus bore, Big Billy, Little Billy and Sim Perrys Hand Pump remain in use.

The Netting Fence marks the southern boundary of the Big Desert and starting point for this adventure. While I

know where the Netting Fence is, I'm a bit vague as to why we have one – or at least the ruins of one.

Poring over history books hasn't made me any wiser. Newspapers and government records of that time state variously 'it was to prevent dingoes and rabbits moving further south', 'keep dingoes in the north and rabbits in the south', 'stop dingoes following the rabbit invasion northward'. The only detail all records agree on is that the Netting Fence was erected in 1885 and ran from Swan Hill to the South Australian border in an effort to control rabbits and dingoes.

The Little Desert and Big Desert are often taken for granted by locals, and more appreciated by those who leave the city for a break. Whatever it is you want to do outside – look for birds, animals, flowers, remnants of history or just get in a 4WD and test yourself in the sand – there are plenty of opportunities in the sand country of the Wimmera.



*Walking the Murrayville Track*

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*Most of the time the Murrayville Track can be easily traversed by 2WD – unless it rains.*

There are three designated camping areas along the Murrayville Track. We used two of these as base camps, Broken Bucket and Big Billy. Forest Fire Management Vic (FFMV) regularly checked the campgrounds while we were there, keeping them spotless and the toilet facilities well stocked.

Day 1 of the walk was pretty easy as the Netting Fence is only four kilometres from Broken Bucket campground.

There are a couple of Mallee fowl that can often be seen at Broken Bucket, but not this time. They have no fear of campers and will wander right through your camp, on their way to wherever Mallee fowl go in their spare time. Over the years I have looked for their mound without success – which is probably a good thing as it means it must be well away from traffic.

On day two we were joined by others who heard we were camping and wanted to come along. Fortunately, there is plenty of space in the desert to observe social distancing. Today's stage is from Broken Bucket to Chinamans Well Track. Like the Netting Fence I'm vague on the details of the origin of this track but the remains of the well and the cleared area that was once a market

garden still exist and can be found on the southern edge of the desert.

Winter skies are often a glorious blue in our area, and seem even more so when the horizon is dark green every way you look. It has rained in the past few days and the clay topped track is either slippery or sticky to walk on. At one stage I slid along the clay and my knee went clonk in the way that dodgy knees seem to do. Graeme does not have dodgy knees and has no comprehension of the medical term 'my knee just went clonk'. It was a little painful but still seemed to move okay so we headed on.

It was frosty when we were ferried to the Chinamans Well Track intersection to begin day two. The banksia is just starting to flower and there were quite a few commercial bee hives on the side of the track. Bees are usually pretty tolerant of people and go about their business. But not these bees. We all had bees in our hair at some stage and I copped a sting to the face. This provided good life balance – the pain from my swelling face distracted me from the pain from my knee.

We passed the campsite at The Springs. This is much smaller and because there has been rain, we didn't

consider using this campground. We would have chopped up the area driving in and out. There is no toilet here but for those who are self-sufficient it would be a lovely place to camp. A few days could be spent exploring the springs area and watching the local birdlife. Today's finish line was the Milmed Rock Track intersection.

From Broken Bucket we moved our base camp to Big Billy Bore campground. This is opposite Big Billy Bore, sunk in 1912 and still providing a nice watered area for wildlife. Again, FFMV were checking the campground, which has recently been upgraded and has wheelchair access toilet, sheltered barbeque area and on top of the highest dune a platform giving 360° views of the surrounding area.

By day three I had some serious leg pain, especially when going down hills. There are no mountains to climb in the Big Desert but in the northern parts there are many smaller dunes. I had even for the most part forgotten that my face still hurt and that I could only eat mushy food. My original plan included riding a pushbike south on the return journey but decisions needed to be made on what was sensible and what was foolhardy. My knee was puffy and hot to touch. I couldn't even manage to ride the bike comfortably in the campground and knew that if I fell while on the road, I could very easily break bones, specifically my pelvis, which did not seem appealing. I reluctantly abandoned the bike ride idea.

My walking buddy reminded me that I had only ever said that I was going to walk The Murrayville Track, and that the track refers to the part of the road through the desert. If we ended the walk at the northern boundary, we would have completed 'The Track' and would avoid a 13 kilometre walk on hard sealed roads into town. This seemed like an excellent compromise.

That night I limped up the nearby dune to the viewing platform. The track is well marked with reflectors, and if you are ever camping at Big Billy, it is worth the 600m trek. Wow! During the day you get an uninterrupted view of the landscape but at night the view of the stars was just incredible. I live in big sky country so a view of the stars has to be pretty spectacular to impress me – and I was impressed. A clear winter night and a view like you are lying in the bottom of a snow dome. It made up for the fact that I had come up here to send a text to my family to come and pick me up the following day. On the platform, if you hold your phone in the right direction, with arm outstretched you can just get enough mobile service for texts.

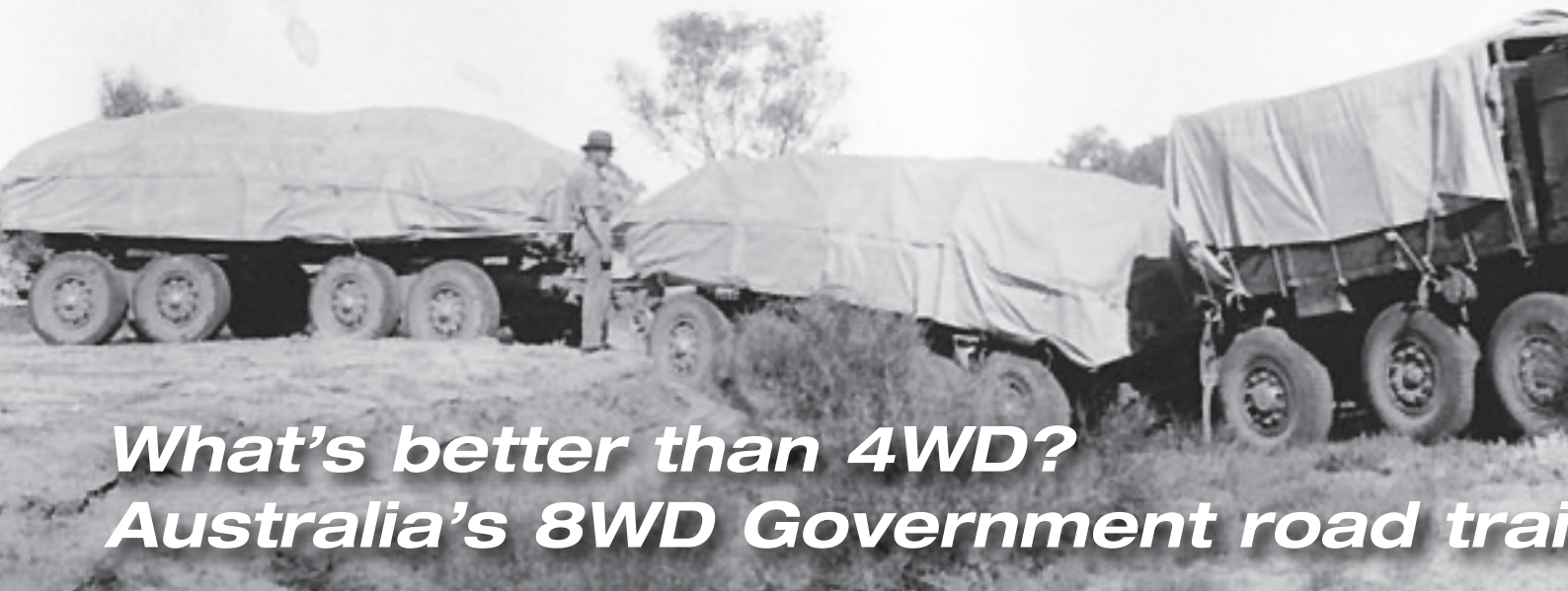
**Jo Ussing  
WESTPRINT**



*Sunset from Big Billy Campground*



*The finish line, northern edge of the Big Desert.*



# What's better than 4WD? Australia's 8WD Government road train

## Four Wheel Drive is older than we think

**86 years ago Australia's first 8x8 road train went into service in Central Australia. Surprisingly it was built in Liverpool and while only three were ever constructed, one unique vehicle survived and is today on display in Alice Springs.**

Servicing the vast expanses of Central Australia has been a problem governments have grappled with since the 1870s. There was a reluctance of successive Australian governments to extend rail routes into remote areas, which resulted in the development of the trackless multi-unit vehicle which has become a unique part of Australia's history - the road train.

In the 1930s the Federal government took over from South Australia Northern Australia, and created the Northern Territory. Reluctant to expand the rail network from Alice to Darwin, an experiment was conceived in Britain as a joint Australian and British government initiative resulting from the Colonial Conference of 1927. The 23 countries in attendance agreed to share the cost of developing suitable transport for use in underdeveloped and remote regions of the British Empire. Consequently the Overseas Mechanical Transport Directing Committee was formed. Their solution was to build a trackless train, which could pull a number of self-tracking trailers. To be an all terrain 'train', the Committee determined that the prime mover should have four axles, with eight driving wheels. Behind the

prime mover were two self-tracking trailers, also with eight wheels.

### Construction and testing

The mighty truck was built by AEC (Associated Equipment Company) of Southall, Middlesex, and the trailers by R.A. Dyson & Co. of Liverpool. The actual prime mover was built by Hardy Motors, a subsidiary of AEC. The road train consisted of an eight-wheel drive tractor and two trailers. The first and last axles on the tractor steered in opposite directions giving good manoeuvrability.

The tractor was one of only three such vehicles manufactured, with the others sent to West Africa and the USSR.

Fully assembled the road train was an impressive sight, being 21.5 metres in length and with a carrying capacity of 15 tonnes - three on the prime mover and six tonnes on each trailer. The trailers were self tracking, in that the front and rear bogies also turned in opposite directions. By these means wheels on all twelve axles would follow each other in the same set of wheel tracks. This improved the road train's off road ability, also enabling a right angle turn to be made through a ten-foot gate.

The AEC road train arrived in Australia

in April 1934 where it underwent extensive testing by the Australian Army in tough terrain, including cross country sand driving in the 90-mile desert of South Australia. Upon arrival in Australia at Adelaide, a 15 tonne load of superphosphate was loaded for a 180-mile run to Bordertown. The route chosen was across unmade roads, similar to what might be found in the Outback. The next test was a delivery run to Alice Springs, the 1,000-mile trip taking three weeks, but proving that the road train had the capability to carry huge loads across challenging terrain.

Australian Army Captain E.M Dollery, who at the time was in charge of development of motor transport for the Army, was the driver of the road train. The inaugural trip north had its moments with numerous creek crossings. The Finke, Palmer and Kurulla river beds presented major challenges for the road train, with matting used across the soft sand. On the final leg into Alice Springs the road train followed the route of the Hugo River, which involved crossing it some eleven times in 22 miles. The road train had passed all tests with flying colours and was duly handed over to the Department of the Interior



in



for general haulage in Northern Territory.

According to Tony Duffin, the grandson of one of the engineers who drove the truck on its inaugural journey to the Centre, "it was the biggest all-wheel drive, off road truck that was ever produced."

"It could carry 15 tonnes, which is not much today; but in the 1930s that was a huge quantity of material."

#### Drivetrain

The AEC prime mover was powered by a 97kW six-cylinder diesel

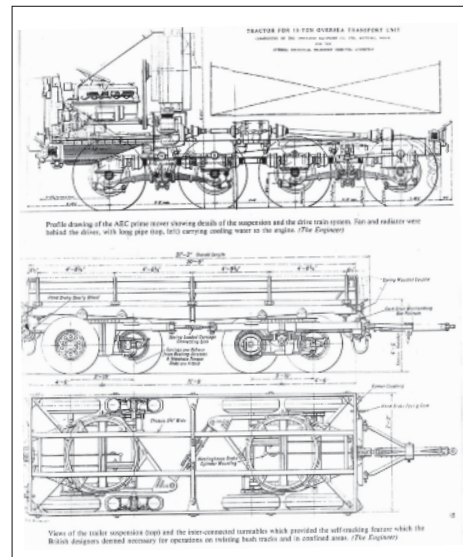
engine. The 8.8-litre unit had a bore and stroke of 115 x 142mm. An electric starter was fitted to the engine, but provision was provided for hand starting by two men using a crank handle to turn pulleys which were connected by belts to the engine mainshaft. A 24-volt electrical system utilised four 6-volt batteries, with 22 volts required to turn the engine over.

An ingenious power transfer system was employed to deliver power to the 8 driving wheels. A 4-speed gearbox was mounted behind the engine and was backed up by a further 3-speed auxiliary box from which the propeller shaft ran to a point almost above the last axle. From here power was distributed via a small transfer case to a series of four shafts running through each axle from the rear to the front. Each axle had a differential, but acted independently of each other. If wheel-spin occurred on any axle it did not effect the operation of the other three.

The front and rear axles were equipped with steering mechanisms but no brakes. Air brakes however, were fitted to the two centre axles. Air tanks were mounted at the rear of the cab and a hose provided for tyre inflation. Brakes were operated by a foot pedal, with air going first to the trailers. There was also a mechanical handbrake. Suspension was fully articulated consisting of a pair of semi elliptic springs on each axle, which were inverted with their ends attached to the axles and the centre bolted to the central chassis.

Mounted at the axle ends were swivel joints, which allowed for articulation when travelling over rough terrain.

The cabin was functional and did not even have a windscreen. The engine radiator and fan were fitted behind the driver at the rear of the cab and



mounted up near the roof. This was for the dual purpose of escaping accidental damage and to stop spinifex from being sucked in. The fan drew air in through the cabin and made driving the vehicle a Spartan experience. In front of the main fan was a second, smaller fan, which was driven by a belt from the auxiliary shaft on the engine. With the radiator mounted well away from the engine, cooling water was circulated by conventional water pump with radiator and engine connected by a long diagonal pipe across the centre of the cab. Another fan was located at the front of the vehicle on the engine, which was designed to duct air under the bonnet. The front of the vehicle carried two spare wheels, but after continual bracket breakages, they were transferred onto the tray.

#### Serving the Outback

The AEC road train became an essential road and mail service in the Northern Territory. The Government Road Train was based at Alice Springs, where most supplies for the Territory were distributed.



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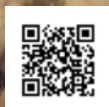
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**Restored 4-axle self-tracking trailer. Note inter-connecting turn tables, which provided self-tracking facility**

The prime mover had a tray type body and carried three ton, while six tons could be carried on each of the two imported four axle Dyson trailers. A further two trailers were built locally to give a massive nominal total payload of 27 tons.

A Government report of 1937 (Payne Report) on land use and development in the Northern Territory commented:

*"A development of outstanding importance in land transport was the introduction three years ago of a 15-ton motor transport unit. After operating less than three years it has succeeded in redeeming its cost paying all working expenses and making a small profit..."*

The first regular driver of the road train was Ewan Clough who commenced driving it in October 1934, through to November 1936. He recalled that while the road train was designed to carry 15 tons, that on occasions this limit was greatly exceeded. The biggest load credited to the road train was two railway carriages weighing an enormous 45 tons each.

The road train operated for 12 years, with pressure after the second World War for the Government to relinquish its freight operation in favour of private enterprise. By 1946 the Government officially closed its road and rail service, with vehicles sold off. During its 12-year life in Government service the AEC road train covered around 850,000 miles.

**Road train reborn**

In 1946 the AEC prime mover and its trailers were sold in Darwin and bought by Territory Timber and used locally, until engine failure saw it sold as scrap. Like so many machines and buildings, their historical importance are not recognised, often resulting in priceless assets celebrating aspects of our past, and Australia's development being allowed to be lost for future generations. The AEC government road train was a unique vehicle featuring advanced engineering, and being one of only three in the world, could easily have been lost once its working life had concluded. The prime mover lay derelict for many years in the wreckers yard and it was through the initial efforts of Northern Territory identity Noel Fullarton in 1979 that the historically significant commercial vehicle was rescued from its Darwin deathbed.

The wreck was returned to Alice Springs for restoration. The frame and mechanical equipment were intact, although the bodywork had suffered the ravages of time. In 1981 it was acquired by the Northern Territory Museums Board and restored for display in 1984.

Today this unique truck and one of its trailers takes pride of place in one of the best collections of motor vehicles to be found in Australia, at the Road Transport Hall of Fame, part of the Transport Heritage Centre at Alice Springs.

**Brian Tanner**  
Editor

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Four Wheel Drive Victoria training courses can now be booked entirely online. Being a Registered Training Organisation (RTO 21605), all bookings can be done via our website link. Both accredited and non-accredited courses can now be booked online and online payments will also soon be available. Four Wheel Drive Victoria offer non-accredited Proficiency 4WD training and a range of Accredited 4WD and Chainsaw Courses.  
Check out all the details at [fwdvictoria.org.au/training](http://fwdvictoria.org.au/training)



# The great outdoors

I am not sure about you, but these last few months have thrown up some challenges that I had not ever anticipated. ISO 1.0 was definitely difficult, but what made it a little easier to deal with was the fact that we were all in this together. Now when I say "all", I mean everyone, everywhere, the world over, was being faced with the inevitable struggles that come with a pandemic.

ISO 2.0 has presented further challenges, some made it across the border, some got to go out on local trips, while others have a 5km bubble that they must live their lives in and 1 hour a day to make the most of it.

How fortunate we are to be a part of an organisation (FWDV) with members that have been prepared to look out for each other. The phone calls, texts,

emails and zoom, webex/, teams, goto meetings, skype gatherings, even the humble letter or card via snail mail has made a comeback in our efforts to reach out to one another and keep spirits high. Mental wellness has become a key focus for all of us as we become less reluctant to share our struggles and pleasantly, less surprised to find there are others that struggle with life just like us.

This pandemic has brought out the best and the worst, but overwhelmingly it has highlighted the importance of community and the power of mateship. Hopefully it won't be long before we are all able to get back out and enjoy the camaraderie of our 4WD community, not just our club but the activities of all of the FWDV clubs individually and collectively.

To all those people that are doing it tough right now, reach out and let others share in your struggles, you are not in this alone. Together we can overcome all these challenges and together we will get back out there and enjoy time with our friends in the great outdoors!

Safe travels

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