

# Wesley 4x4 Club Trip Report

## Flinders Ranges South and Border Track Easter 2007

### *Participants*

Terry and Ros Jones, Samuel Johnson (grandson) - Nissan Navara (with new suspension)

Graeme Giles and Alex Curlis - Nissan Patrol (with new wheels)

Peter and Helen Rashleigh - Nissan Patrol

Trevor and Ginny Adcock - Toyota Prado

Gerard, Pam, William and Phillip Sexton - Nissan Patrol and trailer

### *Thursday*

We mostly traveled separately from Melbourne, and met at Burra on Thursday evening before Easter and exchanged greetings over a few sherbets at the Kooringa Hotel. We enjoyed a counter dinner at the Kooringa, and then retired to bed relatively early – however restful sleep was soon disturbed by a live band which set up in the bar area immediately below and began to grind out some very loud and very bad music.

The Adcocks had forecast this turn of events, and had booked into another hotel on the other side of town and had a very restful sleep.

### *Friday*

Following an early morning stroll around town, we left Burra around 0830 and headed for the Flinders Ranges via Hawker. On the way we stopped in at Terowie to inspect the old hotel there, which looks like a pre-production model of the Birdsville Pub, and stopped in at Peterborough for morning tea.



Our aim was to camp that night in Brachina Gorge north of Wilpena, and decided to get in by mid afternoon to beat an anticipated horde of Easter trippers to the best campsites. Nonetheless we had time to spare, and Gerard led us along a more scenic route off the main drag north of Hawker.



Brachina Gorge was formed by the Brachina Creek washing out sediments approx 600 million year old, and still runs through the gorge today. There are a number of 2WD and 4WD campsites along the creek, and we found a nicely secluded site. Surprisingly there were not many other campers around.

After setting up camp, taking a stroll and having dinner, we settled down to a campfire and canvas evening. It was terrific to be back in the great outdoors again.

## Saturday

After breakfast we packed camp, fed a young kangaroo which looked a bit starved by the drought, and headed east out of the Brachina Gorge and down to Wilpena.

The Flinders Ranges through here was very dry and ground vegetation very sparse – a testament to the drought. However the Flinders Ranges still had their characteristic blue hue with scattered olive green patches of native pine, and rugged strata of the uplifted ancient sediments.



At Wilpena we split up for the remainder of the day. The Rashleighs, Sextons, Adcocks and Alex Curlis all climbed up to St Mary's Peak, a six hour walk to the highest point of the Wilpena Pound. Helen was first to the top, much to Peter's chagrin, and all enjoyed the walk and the views.



Meanwhile the Joneses with grandson Samuel, and Graeme Giles, tripped around for the day to visit other sites including Sacred Canyon where there are Aboriginal rock carvings, and the Bunyeroo Valley area including the Bunyeroo lookout and Bunyeroo Gorge. The Bunyeroo Gorge is probably more picturesque than the Brachina Gorge.

That evening we met up again at Willow Springs Station on the eastern slopes of the Southern Flinders Ranges, and pitched camp in one of their campsites complete with drop toilet and hot showers.

Willow Springs Station is a working sheep station that has been operated by the Reynolds family for more than 80 years, and runs approx 5000 sheep on 70,000 acres of leased country. The station also has a tourism business, offering good camping facilities and various hardtop accommodation, and the fantastic "Skytrek" which has some of the best 4 wheel driving and scenery in the Flinders Ranges (more on this tomorrow).

We made camp, and enjoyed a campfire dinner with a few reds. Brendan Reynolds, the station manager, visited camp and relayed some details for traveling the Skytrek next day, and then talked at some length about his sheep station, sheep, and the sheep/wool industry.

We then settled down for the night – but there was some odd rustling and skittering sounds outside during the night. Next morning all was revealed – the eastern bilby had been out and about during the night delivering goodies for Samuel, Phillip and William.

## Sunday

After a cooked breakfast we packed the vehicles and prepared to do the Skytrek. The Skytrek is a 60 Km circuit around the Willow Springs Station and adjacent lands, along working station tracks and approx 26 Km of additional high country tracks put in for the purpose. Travel time for the Skytrek is approx 6 hours, however we were somewhat slower because there is so much to see and photograph and enjoy. Cost to travel the Skytrek is \$40 per vehicle, which is great value.



Before setting off each car was given a folder containing a map and detailed description of features and points of interest at some 40 markers placed along the route. The complete Skytrek package is very well prepared and presented.

So we set off, following the map and detailed descriptions. During the day we visited various landscapes, stands of different native vegetation, Aboriginal engravings (Petroglyphs), stockman's huts, bores, conservation areas, etc.



The first half of the Skytrek is relatively flat and is easy driving.

However things change in the second half of the Skytrek, which gives the track its name. The track climbs up and over several ranges, traverses along narrow ridges, and offers absolutely fantastic scenery over the Southern Flinders Ranges from high points such as Murrays Lookout, Mount Caernarvon (920 metres), and Kibble Hill Lookout. At times the track in this section has some very

steep ascents and descents, however is well maintained and relatively easy to negotiate given appropriate care.

After coming down from the high country, we visited Skull Rock which is a calcareous formation resulting from calcium (lime) rich waters flowing over a waterfall. The formation looks like the face of a skull, hence the name.



The Skytrek in summary - the Skytrek is a great way to spend a day, and the writer highly recommends the Skytrek to other club members whenever they visit the Flinders Ranges.

So, after a terrific day we returned to camp, and enjoyed another campfire dinner and some more red.

### *Monday*

Today is a travel day – the objective is to get to Blue Gums campsite near Murrayville at the top of the Border Track ... except for the Adcocks, who have to grind out 1200 odd Kms back to Melbourne by tonight.

Trevor and Ginny choked down a quick breakfast, said their goodbyes, and headed off around 0730. The rest of us had another cooked breakfast, packed up camp and headed off. The Rashleighs and Sextons left early to have some extra time in Burra on the way back – an objective thwarted by some turbo hosing problems with the Sexton Patrol along the way.

We all met up again in Burra, and the now four car convoy headed for Blue Gums via Morgan, Waikerie, Pinaroo and Murrayville.

We made camp on the white sands of Blue Gums, cooked a campfire dinner and enjoyed some more reds.

### *Tuesday*

After breakfast the Rashleighs and Sextons packed up, said their goodbyes and headed off home to Melbourne.

The Jones/Johnson team and the Giles/Curlis team turned south and headed down the Border Track towards Red Bluff.

The Border Track is a pretty good drive, with four or five sand dunes along the way that ask the question a bit. Over time there has been a tendency for more and more side tracks to form on some of the dunes as drivers chickened out on the challenge of the main track. However on this trip we saw that the track management people have been closing off many of the chicken tracks to conserve the dunes, forcing vehicles to use the more difficult original track. Your intrepid club representatives only used the more difficult original tracks on ALL sand dunes!!



After a great day in the sand, and some good practice for the Simpson Desert later this year, we arrived at Red Bluff and made camp.

Here we witnessed another drama of the drought – there were many honey bees buzzing around, and the number was increasing with time. We guessed that they were looking for water – Terry put down a bowl of water with some tissues loosely bundled in the water to prevent the bees from drowning in the free water, and hundreds of bees came in to drink at the bowl rather than buzz around the camp. Amazing.

The last night under the stars, we made a big fire and enjoyed another dinner cooked around the campfire and polished off the last of the red.

Tomorrow the trip is over – after making some more kilometers back to Melbourne.

Terry Jones and Graeme Giles