

Australia 2009

Victorian Alps

Leg details

Date January 17 - January 23, 2008

Leg Melbourne - Healesville - Woodbourne - Alexandra - Lake Eildon NP - Bonnie Doon - Mansfield - Mirimbah - Alpine NP - Clear Hills Hut - Upper Jamieson Hut - The Low Saddle - Mt. Skene - Connors Plain - Mt. Selma - Mt. Singleton - Aberfeldy - Thomson Dam - Rawson - Walhalla Historical Area - Coopers Creek - Erica - Moe - Yallourn - Warragul - Melbourne

PDF 

Leg map (click to enlarge in separate window)



On Saturday, January 17 2009, we leave Melbourne towards the **Great Dividing Range** in search of sunshine and warmer weather.

In **Healesville** we turn north following the road along the **Bicentennial National Track**. The road is quiet steep and takes us through forests with some magnificent fern trees.



In the late 1800's paling splitters and bush sawyers had arrived in this area and felled some of the finest mountain ash for fence palings. These were milled within the forest and removed by horse and bullock wagons.

By 1900 the demand for timber increased and numerous bush sawmills and cottages were established. A system of bush tramways linked the forest to the outside world.

In January 1939 disastrous bushfires destroyed a vast area of forest and most of the mills, homes, tramways and bridges. An extensive network of roads and new mills followed to enable salvage harvesting of the fire-killed timber.

An 815 ha reserve in the heart of the Toolangi State Forest along the lower reaches of the Murrindindi River was established in 1981.

We intend to explore some of these roads and tracks in the reserve in the next few days.



At the **Toolangi State Forest** we turn into the **Monda Track**.

By now the sun has managed to dissolve the light clouds but the temperature still is only at 17°C so much for summer in Melbourne!

The OKA climbs uphill and soon we reach the **Yarra Ranges National Park** where we decide to visit the Telstra and CFA tower on the **St. Leonard Walk**.



The walk leads though some large eucalyptus and some fantastic fern trees.



There are also lots of flowers along the track.



We reach the Telstra and CFA tower and of course have to get up to the viewing platform.



The info sign says that on a clear day one can see the skyline of Melbourne from here no doubt about that!

We continue on until we reach the **Mt. Tanglefoot Picnic Area** where we stay for the night. Some Black Cockatoos have a noisily late afternoon meal in the tall stringy bark Eucalyptus.

We enjoy the late afternoon sunshine and warmth.

But as soon as the sun sets the temperature starts dropping (overnight to 8.5°C).

The sun is up early on Sunday morning but the temperature does not really raise that fast in the forest.

We continue on through the forest.



The tracks are very dusty, an obvious sign of the drought.



Just before reaching the bitumen of the **Whanregarwen Road** we spot a Koala sitting in a tree just beside the road.

The docile creature only decides to climb further up its tree after we have finished the photo session.

What a chance!

We continue on pass the Great Dividing Range and head towards Alexandra and stop at the **Goulburn River Bridge** for lunch.

By now the temperature has risen above 30°C and we start feeling a bit better - a bit more summer-like.

As Susi walks towards the back of the OKA she hears a hissing sound hmmm looks like work for Ruedi



A very sharp rock has worked its way into the tyre.

It sits so deep in the rubber that it cannot be removed.

After cutting away some of the rubber Ruedi and Peter see that the rock has damaged the steel belt looks like a "fatality" not even a professional tyre place will be able to repair the puncture

Well, we cannot complain.

This is only the second fatality in 65 000 km and with a lot off-road driving, not really much to whinge about, but still, Ruedi is not very happy

We drive through **Alexandra** and over the **Haines Saddle** into the **Lake Eildon National Park**.

The shop is closed and we wonder how we can find out about the camping availabilities.

Luckily the ranger comes past and sends us to the Devils Cove camping area.

Apparently there we can stay over night for 17\$ per site and he recons both cars can easily fit on one site.

The camping is not really open: the toilets are covered with spider webs, leaves and dirt we are not really impressed.

Not willing to pay a cent for these amenities we turn around and head back.

As we pass the **Candlebark Camping** we see that it is almost empty and after checking out the toilets decide to settle here for the night.



Some King Parrots come and visit.

After a cool night with only 10.5°C we wake up to a sunny Monday morning.

When checking the OKA Ruedi realises that the right front airbag had shifted and needs some adjusting.

The angel grinder is unpacked and soon Peter & Ruedi are busy fixing it.

This gives Susi time to watch the birds a bit closer.

They are desperate for water and queue up along the camper and at the taps for a drink.



Then we hit the road again and travel north on the **Skyline Road**.

It is a nice drive on top of the mountain ridge giving some good views onto Lake Eildon.

It also shows the low levels of the water

Further along we come past some houses and caravans that used to be along the shore of the lake.

The concrete driveway for the boat ends somewhere and then it is a loooooong distance to where the water can be found.

The bridge crossing Lake Eildon between Bonnie Doon and Maingdample used to stand some 10 meters deep in water; now all that is left are the marks on the pillars and some dry grass underneath it.

We estimate that water level at Lake Eildon must be at least some 30 meters higher when it is full of water

The temperature climbs and climbs, we reach 32.5°C.

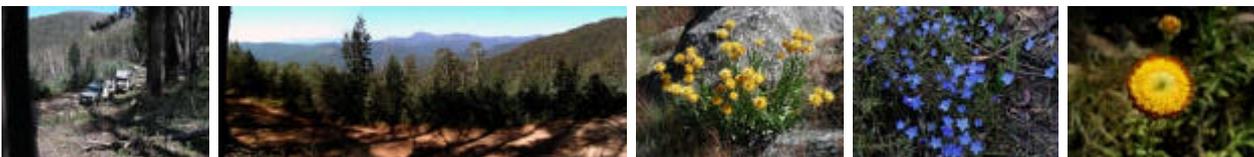
Bliss!

Summer has finally found us!

After stopping at **Mansfield** for some shopping and internetting we continue on towards Mt. Buller.

We deviate into **Circular Road** and climb up into the mountains.

There seems to be more water here.



More and more flowers start appearing.

We stop to take in the very pretty views.

Then we reach the turn off towards Craig's Hut; it is marked as 4WD only.
 The track is quiet steep but it seems that the track is travelled often by large and high vehicles.
 The OKA has no problems getting through; no hitting of branches or having to squeeze between narrow standing trees.
 Probably tour-operators go up to Craig's Hut



Then we reach **Craig's Hut**; the views are great!



Susi goes "views -and- flower-spotting"



The flowers are quiet different depending on the ground they grow on.



Amazing what grows up here!

Even at the height of over 1'460 m the temperature is over 25°C so we decide to stay for the night.
 The only downside of the warm weather is the flies they go absolutely nuts once Heidi starts grilling some meat and it is not easy to eat without getting flies on your food either.



The sunset is just stunning.

It stays rather warm over night (16°C) and on Tuesday morning we are not surprised to hear that they have implemented a complete fire-ban and declared extreme fire danger.



From Craig's Hut we take the track up to **Mt. Stirling**.

In comparison to the track up to Craig's Hut this one is less travelled by large vehicles.
 We even encounter one section where we have to remove a dead tree.

There are some steep sections and Ruedi is very happy with the new set-up of the breaks.
[Click here for a movie of it](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 6'701 KB).

Ruedi is pleased that he only has to tip the breaks lightly for them to perform correctly.
 In rear sight the breaks of the OKA must have been faulty for quiet some time and we only really felt it once the rear breaks gave up completely and all the breaking was done with only the front breaks which resulted in the OKA standing in the middle of an intersection instead of being able to stop properly at a red light



We take a short walk to the **Bindaree Falls**, a pretty little waterfall with some moss gardens.



Then we continue on along **16 Mile Road** and enjoy the pretty flowers along the track.



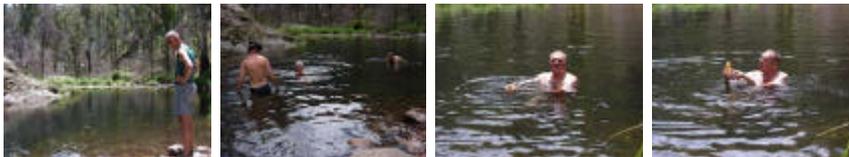
This area must have burned a few months ago. Due to this lots of sunshine reaches the ground giving the flowers enough light.
 We stop at the intersections with the 16 Mile Jeep Track for lunch but decide not to take that track as it is marked as very rough.
 We don't want to risk our "houses" for a track.



We continue on along some areas that must have had a severe bush fire: large areas are still in a sad state.
 Along the track we cross a CFA vehicle with a sign on its door "Today is a day of a total fire ban"; now we know it for certain.
 We head down to the **Jamieson River** and decide to stay for the rest of the day and the night.
 Clouds are forming and we could be receiving a bit of a storm later on well, let's see.



We pick a camping spot besides the river with a small lagoon.
 The spot is a bit elevated so we would be safe from a raising river should the storm eventuate and in case of a fire we could even escape into the water.
 As the spot we have chosen for the night is not really level Ruedi reverses the OKA by a few meters.
 Now the OKA is perfectly level and the driver is happy!



Happy with our choice we set up camp and go for a swim in the rather fresh water (only 20°C brrrrrr too cold for Susi).
 Refreshed we unpack the computers and work a bit on our diaries.
 Every so often we hear noises like breaking wood.
 Sounds like some trees are dropping limbs because of the drought.
 But we are camping just besides the river and those trees have enough water and should not drop limbs.
 After dinner while washing the dishes again we hear a noise like breaking wood but this time it does not stop it just goes on and on
 We look out the window and see a large Eucalyptus tree just hitting the ground some 50 m above us and then sliding down-hill with full speed.



It come strait towards our vehicles, bounces of some shrubs and ferns, gets slightly redirected, crosses the road and stops halfway between the OKA and Peter & Heidi's Toyota.



We all rush out of the vehicles and in the dust cloud inspect the unexpected visitor.
 The tree trunk has missed the OKA by approx. 3 meters and has stopped approx. 7 meter before the Toyota.
 We can hardly believe our luck.
 Had Ruedi not reversed the OKA to get it level the tree would have rammed the OKA ... not a pretty thought at all!
 Again our guardian angel has been on full alert and made an excellent job!
 On Wednesday, January 21, we wake up to a fresh morning with only 14°C.
 But soon the sun is here and the temperature rises quickly.
 That's how we like it!

We continue on to **Low Saddle Road**.



The track leads through some very pretty sections with lots of flowers along the track.
 Then it starts climbing gets steeper and steeper and in addition it also gets narrow!
 Some hairpin bends have to be negotiated and the track still gets steeper so steep that we would love to stop and turn back. But we can't. If we would stop we wouldn't be able to continue. The recorded GPS track reports a slope of up to 47%, which we really can't believe.
 Then we reach an intersection on **Mt. Sunday**.



As it is hard to tell from the map which track is less steep Peter & Heidi head up the track to the mountain while we wait at the intersection. They report that the track gets even steeper and is not often driven and on top of the mountain the track is overgrown and hard to find. So we decide to take the other track which at least seems to be used every so often.

We head down again and are please that the track is not really steep.



We reach **Wren's Flat** and have a bit of a break at the little river.



Then we climb uphill again until we reach the **Jamieson-Licola Road**.



The drive is very pretty. Here too the flowers are still blooming.



The views on **Mt. Skene Scenic Reserve** are unobstructed due to some recent bush-fires.

As soon as we leave the reserve the forests are logged.

Large areas are just flattened and look shocking; it is not a very pretty sight to drive through!

It is time to look for a spot for the night but this is not easy in this area.

After a few fruitless efforts we reach **Connor's Plain Camping Ground** and decide to stay there for the night.

During the night the wind picks up and some sheet lightning can be seen on the horizon.

On Thursday morning the first rain drops fall.

It is just enough to moisten the surface of the road a bit and keep the dust to the minimum.

We don't mind at all.

We continue on through more deforested areas.

Via **Mt. Selma**, the **Walhalla Road** and past **Lake** we drive to **Walhalla**, where OKA-guru Paul Nott joins us with his OKA.

In Walhalla Susi nearly steps on a nasty big, black snake sunbathing on the grass.

Just outside of Walhalla we leave the bitumen again and head into the forest.



We head down to the banks of the **Thompson River**.



Ian is already waiting here with his green OKA.

We set up camp and get organised.

A thunderstorm is brewing and every so often some very strong wind gusts blow through the valley.

After seeing Ian's sunshade collapse Peter & Heidi decide not to lift their roof with the canvas yet

After dark the winds quieten down and it gets peaceful.

What a shame that we cannot make any fires; it would be the perfect setting, the murmuring river, the company

Just as dinner is ready the first drops fall.

So we squash into our OKA, Ruedi, Heidi and Peter on the bench, Paul on one seat and Susi as kitchen-staff on the jump-seat.
After dinner we hang around a bit but it gets cool and we decide to have an early night.
Shortly after midnight an OKA arrives we will have a look at it tomorrow.



We wake up to a sunny Friday morning.
Soon the camp is hustling and bustling.

The OKA from last night is Greg and his family.
The kids soon are busy throwing rocks over the calm water of the river.

We have to leave today and return to Melbourne as we have to get organised before catching the ferry to Tasmania on Sunday.
We pick the track passing **Happy go Lucky** to head down to the Coopers Creek.

The track looks as if it has just been cleared a few days ago: freshly cleared trees lay along the dirt track.

Then we reach one that has fallen down since and now is blocking the track and there is no way that we can get around it.
The tree is quite large and lays half down the board. In addition the roots of the tree are still attached to the edge of the track.

We will have to be careful when pulling the roots out of the ground and make sure the tree does not slide down into the valley pulling the OKA along.
Ruedi decides not to use the chain but to hook a snatch strap on to some of the roots.

As he pulls suddenly the roots let go and the shekel at the end of the strap comes flying towards the OKA like a bullet.

Luckily it only hits the side of the back section, but it leaves a nice dent.

Now we know what they mean when they mention the dangers of recovery!

So Ruedi tries a second time but this time fixes the strap properly to the tree.

Carefully he pulls the roots out of the ground, then accelerates backwards and pulls the tree along the track.

Then a bit of pushing it to the side and we can pass it.

After passing **Coopers Creek** we continue on via **Erica, Moe** onto the Princess Hwy to **Melbourne**.

And this is the end of this journal



Note to the reader:

Had we started our trip just 2 weeks later we would have been in the Mt. Tanglefoot Picnic Area on the Saturday when some devastating fires ravaged through this area killing some 178 people and destroying huge areas including the ones we had just travelled through (the blue line is our GPS track).

It would have reached us in such a speed that we would not have had a chance on earth to get out of there alive.

Again our guardian angel

No liability for timeliness, integrity and correctness of this document is taken.
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