



LAT LENTULES

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Briefly:

- We've just heard that Mountain-Top Experience is a finalist in this year's PIGD Tourism Awards, which will be publicised on Channel 10 TV.
- Look out for our stand at the Victorian 4WD Show (Wandin), near Lilydale on Sunday 17th February 2002, or the Latrobe Valley Outdoors Expo (Morwell) 22~24th February.
- Recent media coverage includes Australian 4WD Monthly (Sept & Dec 2001), The Walhalla Chronicle (Dec. 2001), Latrobe Link (Aug 2001), Trackwatch (Summer 2001), Victorian Sport and Recreation Strategic Audit (Nov 2001), News From the Australian Alps (Dec 2001), Moe Narracan News (May 2001), The Express (Sept & Nov 2001).

Hi friends,

Welcome to our latest newsletter where we try to outline some highlights of recent trips and things that we have been doing. But there have been so many!

The past few months have been exceptional in terms of the fantastic experiences and friendships we've shared. Also since last November business has definitely picked up, as more people come back, and refer friends to us as well. It seems like we've touched on something special, which Andy reflects on in this issue.

Inspector Gadget has another big project on, and we've got some great trips coming up, especially if autumn weather turns out better than the summer we didn't quite have!

Impeccable Timing

We were on the bitumen and the CDMA phone had just picked up one bar of service. Our 5 day trip was almost over when the call came over the radio: "Jill and Paul have broken an axle, I think you'd better come back"

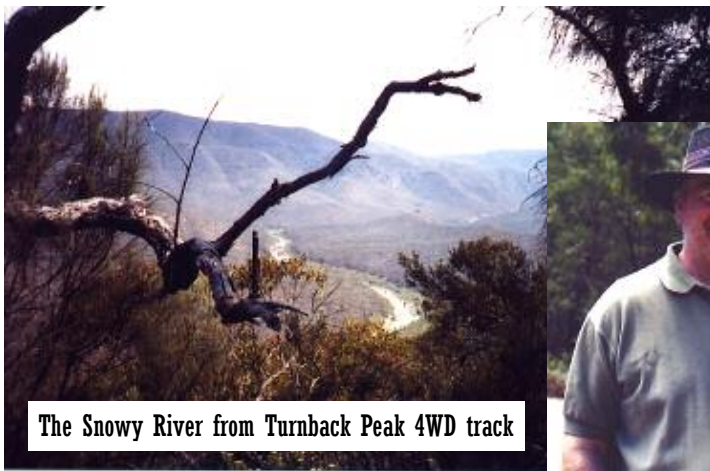
For once Andy was not exaggerating! The back wheels of the Pajero were at a crazy angle because the axle housing had split in half. The vehicle had come to rest on a grassy patch beside the road, and it could not drive another metre.

What a place for it to happen though. Instead of being on a remote 4WD track by the Snowy River, we only needed a couple of phone calls for a tilt-tray truck to be despatched from Bairnsdale. Furthermore the repair was not too expensive, requiring a change-over rear end which took a few days to source from a wreckers. In the mean time NRMA/RACV provided Jill and Paul with a hire car and accommodation so they still had a great holiday!

Although we never discovered the real cause, a collapsed wheel bearing is a likely suspect (similar to the story in Issue 2 of this newsletter). The moral? If your 4WD has done over 100,000 km, check the wheel



The Pajero finishes the Snowy River trip on a tilt-tray



The Snowy River from Turnback Peak 4WD track

Snowy River Beaches: Our first ever honeymoon couple!!

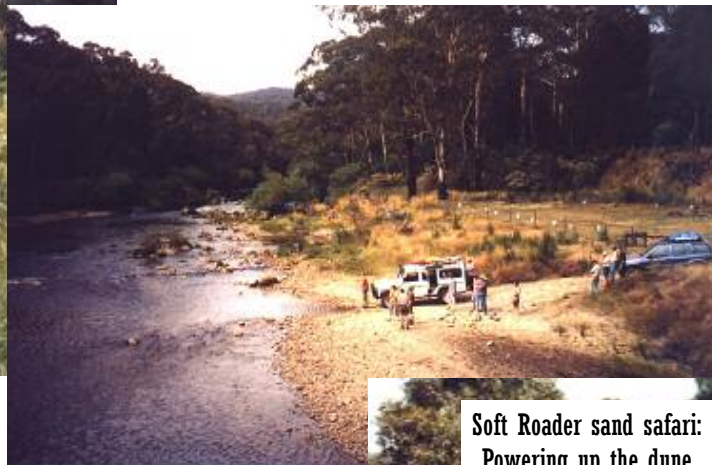


Photo Gallery

The Mullins Prado takes the plunge!



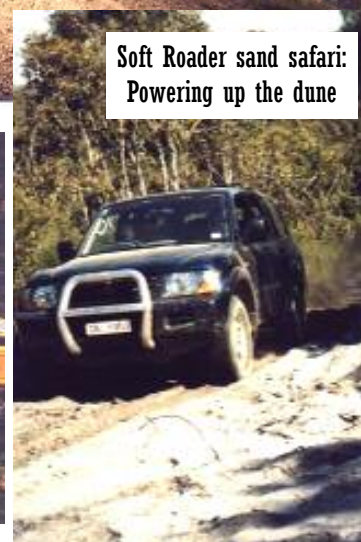
High Country trip: Taylors Crossing on the Mitta Mitta



Soft Roader sand safari:
Powering up the dune



Inspector Gadget clears a log, but this is the way to do it!



A Business Perspective

I was going to write an update on adventure tourism and the Public Liability Insurance issue, but I found this instead:

An American businessman was at the pier of a coastal Mexican village when a small boat with just one fisherman docked. Inside the boat were several large yellowfin tuna. The American complimented the Mexican on the quality of his fish and asked how long it took to catch them.

The Mexican replied, "Only a little while, Senor." The American then asked, "Why didn't you stay out longer and catch more fish?" The Mexican said he had enough to support his family's immediate needs. The American then asked, "But what do you do with the rest of your time?" The Mexican fisherman said, "I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take siesta with my wife, Maria, stroll into the village each evening where I sip wine and play guitar with my amigos. I have a full and happy life, Senor."

The American scoffed, "I am a Harvard MBA and could help you. You should spend more time fishing and with the proceeds, buy a bigger boat. With the proceeds from the bigger boat you could buy several boats. Eventually you would have a fleet of fishing boats. Instead of selling your catch to a middleman you would sell

directly to the processor, eventually opening your own cannery. You would control the product, processing and distribution. You would need to leave this small village and move to Mexico City, then LA and eventually NYC where you will run your expanding enterprise."

The Mexican fisherman asked, "But Senor, how long will this all take?" To which the American replied, "15-20 years." "But what then, Senor?" The American laughed and said, "That's the best part. When the time is right you would announce an IPO and sell your company stock to the public and become very rich, you would make millions." "Millions, Senor? Then what?"

The American said, "Then you would retire. Move to a small coastal fishing village where you would sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, take siesta with your wife, stroll to the village in the evenings where you could sip wine and play guitar with your amigos."

This comes from a Rancho suspensions newsletter, and I'm sure there's a message in this story for 4WD tour operators. If you're wondering what a Rancho suspension is, take a look at the gadget machine (Defender 3) some time: Dual rear and single front air-adjustable dampers operable on the move by an on-board compressor. This means that

Andy's Inspiration

In my everyday work (well someone has to earn the real money) I work as a Speech Pathologist with preschool children with special needs and their families. Recently, I attended an in-service training seminar. The presenter, Heather Lawrence from Melbourne University, challenged us with a number of exercises to rethink what should be the priorities of early intervention and education.

Building up children's self sufficiency or emotional 'resilience' to changes and challenges in life, also developing their ability to relate well with others in community, were emphasized as crucial but often neglected.

One exercise involved brain storming the contrasting images of what makes us feel 'stressed' and 'relaxed'. In the midst of this it suddenly struck me why our 4WD trips seem to work so well. Many of the 'relaxed' images are experienced on our trips!

- Being in the midst of beautiful natural environments especially beside flowing water, overlooking beautiful views of mountains or open spaces.
- Being in warm and cosy soft places.
- Having choices and some control over what one experiences.
- Being in a community where one feels accepted and valued.

For me, one of the most exciting features of each of the trips again, this summer, was this sense of 'community'. It was really special seeing young and old enjoying sharing experiences together.

Sometimes it was during the more challenging experiences that these bonds developed, such as a tree across the road, cramped under a tarp or assisting each other set up in wet weather. Sharing resources (including the cookie tin) was part of the process too.

It is so cool how people from totally different backgrounds or nationalities, who have never met before, can come together and everyone's lives are enriched. I know this is how our Master Designer intends us to live!

Peter & Penny, and Inspector Gadget

What have our horde of hyperactive helpers been up to lately?

Ian (Inspector Gadget) is now "full time" in the business as well as Ron, having ditched his Telstra job last August. That doesn't mean he has any more spare time though! His latest mega-project involves building a new workshop in Morwell with welding gear and machinery for fabrication of accessories. The triple car port and storage shed for vehicle camping kits and lawnmowing gear (another little business) are up. Currently we are digging the pit for vehicle servicing.

Another major project recently involved Ian and Ron learning how to rebuild a centre diff and transfer case on the red Land Rover. It took four days of struggle, but we've now discovered lots of things that the official Workshop Manual doesn't tell you! Having now bought/made all the special tools for the job means he is raring to go on the other vehicles!

Just to make sure life doesn't get boring, Ian still provides unscheduled extra entertainment on trips too. For example on this years' Jewish Boys Camp where one of his sideways mud-slides nearly launched Defender 3 off the road. Also there was the Dad's Weekend where his attempt at "saving" someone from the tarzan-rope swing resulted in his landing, fully-clothed, in the Aberfeldy River!

When it comes to 4WDing, Peter & Penny have had their wings clipped a bit, as they are in the process of trading in the old Landcruiser on something a little less rust-prone. This has been an agonising on/off decision for quite some time now, so we're all awaiting the final outcome. The old Sahara had its last outing in the mud on

Briefly:

- **Introductory Day Trips.** The fun way to get some 4WD driver training in spectacular country around the Thomson Dam. **Saturday 23rd March and Thursday 25th April. \$80*** per vehicle tag-along.
- **Driver Training, Latrobe Valley.** Our next SCOPE Adult Education course is 12, 19, 23 March 2002.
- **Nationally Accredited Driver Training.** In the regulatory-mad world we live in, formal 4WD driver training has become very complex (and expensive). There is now an approved course of three competency units available as a qualification aimed at corporate, government and tertiary institution clients. So we've gone with it! We now have a joint venture with the SMART Driver Training Division of GippsTAFE, using ANTA syllabus, ANFWDC materials, through a Registered Training Organisation with Ron as a qualified Certificate IV instructor!

www.mountaintopexperience.com

Newsletters like this are rather tedious to produce and mail, which is why they come somewhat infrequently. However if you have access to the internet, our website has over 20 pages of stuff, including news of coming trips and a page of feedback letters and photos from past trips.

We try to update it monthly. Also it has forms for booking trips, hiring vehicles and buying accessories. Just fill in the details and hit the "send" button. In addition we send out emails several times a year with news and info on coming trips. So if you'd like your email address added (or removed), just drop us a line on camier@mountaintopexperience.com.

However if you have questions or suggestions to discuss, please feel free to

Holiday Ideas



Discover some of Gippsland's amazing gold mining heritage hidden between Dargo and Omeo. Explore the ghost town of Stirling. Marvel at the efforts of the constructors of the King Cassilis gold processing plant, the Jirnkee water race and river diversion at Harrisons Cut.

Easter: Fri 29th March~ Mon 1st April (4 days), \$320*/vehicle tag-along or passenger (catered). Rental vehicles (with all camping gear) available from \$680*.

Butchercountry!

Wild 4WD country beyond Licola near the headwaters of the Macalister River. Alpine high plains. Superb camping. Spectacular tracks.



Usually the best 4WD weekend of the year!
Labour Day Long Weekend: Saturday 9th ~ Monday 11th March (3 days), \$240*/vehicle tag-along or passenger (catered). Rental vehicles available from \$510*.

***Less 10% for past customers**

A unique opportunity:

CentralAustralia

The romantic history of the Oodnadatta Track. See the ruins and hear the stories. The best of the Simpson Desert. Meet the characters of Oodnadatta. Savour the hot spring delights of Dalhousie. Witness the shimmering salt expanses of Lake Eyre. Camp out amongst the stars, but away from the crowds!

Kulgera~Port Augusta. Monday 13th ~ Tuesday 21st May 2001 (9 days). \$1100/vehicle tag-along (inc. camping fees). Passengers (catered) or rental vehicles available: POA.

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Hi Ron, Andrea and Ian

Just wanted to send a message to say thanks for the fantastic tour you put on for us yesterday. As you know the trip was a family history pilgrimage to see how our ancestors lived in the Gippsland goldfields. Your preparation and knowledge of the area made our mountain top experience very rewarding, insightful, a little bit of adventure and most importantly very enjoyable. Thank you very much from all us for a wonderful day. Regards Robert S.

Hi Ron and team,

Thanks for being such great leaders on the NSW foray. The Cup weekend trip was magic to say the least, and I have no doubt that you will be faced with an ever increasing South African contingent in the years to come. Your whole team runs a superb show, with end to end laughter and fun. Kaitlyn is still in absolute awe of you and is thinking of more stories to tell you. All the best.

Alison, Brett, Kaitlyn and Dillon F.

Above are a couple of examples of the great feedback that we have received recently. It's these sort of responses that helps us believe we're on the right track. Thank you!