

Trip Report
Gibbston Valley to Fruitlands
via Coal Pit Road Nevis Valley and Kopuwai Conservation Area
Sunday 13th April 2008

8 vehicles arrived on time at the prearranged rendezvous point on Coal Pit Road, Gibbston Valley for day 2 of the clubs weekend tag along autumn tour of Central Otago.

Trip leader and organizer Warwick McArthur double checking the number of vehicles lined up hoping members who overnighted in the Arrowtown area had not taken the option of following a fellow member, who decided to travel to Gibbston Valley via the Arrow River the night before so as not to be late, subsequently washing the inside and outside of his vehicle at the same time and missing day 2 completely.



A notable vehicle in the fleet was a 1976 Series 3 short wheel base Landrover being driven by Andrew McArthur and co piloted by Andrew Mcdougall. This was the Landrovers first serious outing after a thorough refurbishment taking more than a year to complete

With introductions and briefing completed the group headed up Coal Pit Rd towards the Mt Rosa summit. Being mind full of the rate of climb and the age of the oldest vehicle in the fleet, a quick radio check established that a short stop was required to allow the Landrover's water temperature to return to a respectable level. A very opportunistic stop as members were able to take in the view of the vine covered valley below which was covered in fog and silhouettes from the light of the sunrise. This view was to be the first of several spectacular vistas to be enjoyed during the stunningly clear sunny day.

A further stop at the site of the original coal pit provided Gordon Perkins the opportunity to inform the group of the fact that in the early days the coal was extracted from the pit and transported by dray down to the road below and subsequently distributed to the various gold dredges that were working in the area at the time. Several remnants of the equipment used could be seen scattered around the site.

Whilst the dust rose quickly due to the dry track the group very quickly became aware of how heavy the rain can be when it does rain in the area, as drivers began to pick their way through the wash outs and deep under runners. Similar track conditions prevailed as the group made its way to the first refreshments stop at the stock yards and musterers hut on the banks of the Doolans Creek.

Traversing up to the Doolans Saddle provided one of the more interesting challenges of the day for the drivers, a narrow zig zag with a steepish ascent on the exit through very deep ruts. A great 'photo' opportunity quipped Mike Vercoe who proceeded to alight from the passengers seat of the Terrano with his trusty Canon set to 'continuous' shooting. A short delay ensued as assistance was rendered to those who found how slippery and dusty dry clay can become.



With the dusty but happy photographer back on board, 50 odd action shots 'clicked' the group continued without further incident across the Doolan Saddle and down to the Nevis River crossing for a well earned lunch break.



From the peace and tranquility of the Nevis River the group moved off and upwards towards the Duffers Saddle, turning right onto the track leading to the 'Old Woman Range Conservation' area.

As the group proceeded towards the highest point of the route 1746 metres above sea level 360 degree panoramic views were enjoyed. Mount Cook at a distance of 200kms (direct) could be seen along with views of Mount Aspiring and the south east side of the Remarkables Range. Track conditions were

open and reasonably flat lulling drivers and passengers unfortunately into a false sense of comfort. As the group headed towards Boundary Hut, although still reasonably dry the track conditions became extremely bumpy with some vehicles chassis enduring contact with rocks due to suspensions bottoming out. With the 'Obelisk' in sight, track conditions improved although more 'wet' patches were being encountered. The site of the 'sticky' stuff proving too much of a temptation for one driver who, whilst enjoying demonstrating the traction capabilities of his VX Toyota, over looked the fact that one of his passengers was getting a close up view from a very wide open rear window.



The trip concluded enroute to the gates at the start of the Kopuwai Conservation Area above Fruitlands. Mike Vercoe clicked off a final photograph of an extremely happy and thankful group of offroaders. A hearty thanks to Warwick for organizing and leading the trip. Whilst the weather was stunningly still, clear, sunny and warm across the province, I'm sure everyone in the group will agree that we were in the right place at the right time.

Ian Vercoe, Nissan Terrano. Pictures can be seen at <http://offroad.earthlight.co.nz>