

North Otago 4WD Club Trip to Napoleon Hill - Waipuna Caves 26th 27th July 2008

A mid winter road trip through the Arthurs Pass culminating in a chance to tread lightly on a track that had not been traversed by the club before sounded like a good idea. Add the opportunity to drive through 2 large caves, the idea proved irresistible.

8 trucks from the club rendezvoused on an extremely wet and dreary Friday morning in Oamaru and headed for Greymouth via Methven and Lake Lyndon.

Looking for the best photographic opportunities brother Mike and I consulted the weather forecast which indicated our route to Greymouth should be via the West Coast. We were not disappointed. The west coast experienced brilliant weather and with the southern alps carpeted in fresh snow and basking in sunshine, photographic opportunities abounded.

Arriving at the Top Ten Camping Ground in Greymouth we were rather surprised to hear of the unplanned 'snow trip' the North Otago team experienced on the short cut road via Lake Lyndon to the West Coast Road, 'strange how the tow rope the club purchased has come in handy so often' quipped Ron Sim.



Saturday's trip began with the group progressing through Greymouth towards Ahaura ensuring that everybody had sufficient refreshments and fuel for the day. Passing notable landmarks such as the 2

Jaguar cars standing in sentinel positions as gate posts to a dismantlers yard, the group proceeded to the locked gate on Orwell Creek Road where we were introduced to the Smith Family.

Mrs Smith presented the group with a brief outline of the mining activities undertaken in the area in the 1860s and then invited those members who were suitably attired in gumboots and torches to trek through the streams and bush to view the various mine shafts and remnants of the mining era.

A short refreshment break in the company of a herd of dairy yearlings allowed one member of the group the opportunity to reflect on the potential value of wearing gumboots with a tread pattern that offered grip in the mud equivalent to the grip of the mud terrain swamper that he had fitted to his power truck.

Subsequent to the close encounter of his butt with the muddy creek the member was observed receiving assistance crossing the next stream with his hand being tightly held by his wife. (The writer hastens to add that while the members were participating in the field trip he considered it a prudent decision that he remain in his truck with the heater on reading an historical account of the mining activities.)

After expressing their thanks to the Smith family for sharing their knowledge of the early history of the area the group headed along the track ultimately leading to the top of Napoleon Hill where an historical cemetery was located. As the group proceeded, the track began to descend towards the Nobles Creek area and the vegetation changed from forestry to lush native bush. The rate of descent increased dramatically and the track became very narrow with many of the wider trucks pleased to see the soft ferns acting as a buffer between the sheet metal and the solid banks. Suspension articulation was tested to the maximum as many and varied comments were heard on the radio as drivers described the amount of scenery viewed between the rear wheels on the preceding truck and the track. On completion of the descent into the river gorge the group stopped for refreshments and a stretch of the legs. Many members were heard discussing the challenge in traversing the track in the opposite direction, that is if one could find a space wide enough to turn around. With lunch completed it was time to tackle the river gorge and navigate the renowned 'Waipuna Caves'. Whilst following the route was rather easy, cliff faces 20 to 30 feet high on both sides of the gorge meant there was only one way one could go, navigating the rocks along with logs submerged in the waterway proved very challenging. A particular log displayed signs of serious contact with a multitude of vehicle chassis whilst another partially submerged log played host to a Landrover Discovery, providing a further photo opportunity on how to use the 'club tow rope'. Navigating the huge caves proved to be an interesting experience.

The first cave whilst being quite short contained the remnants of a wooden foundation for a track or line of some sort. 2 rows of short wooden stakes protruded from the stream bed about 6 inches high. As the outside row was approximately 2 feet from the cave wall the driver faced the dilemma of driving through the dark cave with the left wheels in the middle of the row of pegs or completely to the one side of the row of pegs risking contact with the wall on either side of the cave. One driver decided to solve this dilemma by driving over a number of the pegs, subsequently flattening them and removing the source of the problem. All vehicles safely negotiated the first cave and eagerly anticipated challenges of the second. This one was substantially longer than the preceding cave necessitating vehicle lights to be turned on to identify any submerged obstacles. An additional benefit of the vehicle lighting was the illumination of the effects of erosion on the walls of the cave. The high water flows over the years have eroded the surface material to expose the gravel and stones that make up the soil structure.

A small beach at the exit of the tunnel provided the group with an opportunity to park and photograph the preceding vehicles navigating the tunnel. The break also provided leader Richard with the opportunity of choosing which branch of the stream to follow given the absence of a formed track. With no option but to follow the river bed the 'trial and see' approach inevitably becomes a fifty fifty call when one ends up at a water crossing that looks ok from the safe side. In no time at all the group were treated to a demonstration of Richards 'commander of the ship' skills as the water hole proved a lot deeper and softer on the bottom than was first thought. With some



determined reversing skill the VX clambered back on to dry ground minus rear mudflaps and an unplanned rear floor carpet wash. Further scouting of alternative stream channels lead to the discovery of the way out to Waipuna Road. Having advised the farmer that we were leaving the area, the group headed back to Greymouth via the Grey River valley. A brief stop was made at Ikamatua where members could replenish fuel and their own fluid levels. Unfortunately the hotel was closed and the local service station sign displayed that low octane petrol cost an arm and high octane petrol cost a leg. As group members were reluctant to trade in their respective limbs for fuel, they continued their return journey to Greymouth, with some interesting radio discussion between landrover drivers just what the fuel station might accept as payment for diesel purchases and whether the type of payment depended on the male or female settling the account.

On Saturday evening a bbq n beer preceeded a review of the photographers efforts with photographs of the days fun. Suffice to say the photographic record of a white seat cover in a VX Toyota with a very brown



mark on it received the highest acclamation for the bugger! act. A pair of pink and white spotted gumboots received the award for the most stylish equipment for an off road trip. An image of a partially submerged VX Toyota also received considerable applause.

Sunday began with most members packing up in preparation for the return trip to Oamaru. The group toured through to a recreational area beside Nelsons Creek where the trip concluded with a debrief and a word of thanks to Richard for organising the event.

Many thanks Richard for providing the opportunity for members to safely traverse this challenging track as a club. Thanks to for organising the social activities which everyone enjoyed.