



QUICK, SAND!

The wild west coast's beaches really sucked in our boys

4WD WORDS BY JOHN ROTH PHOTOGRAPHY BY OFFROAD IMAGES

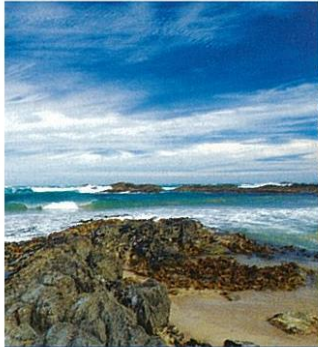
032 AUSTRALIAN 4WD MONTHLY





S of Zeehan on a hilltop. I'm on Milo's roof and the view is spectacular. The other lads are scattered around on a patch of thick moss that covers the hill and makes it feel like luxury carpet underfoot. Brian and Coz are in a tent, as is Wattsy, who likes to cuddle up to his camera gear. The rest of us are in swags.

Unfortunately, I'd been awake most of the night or it would have been fantastic. No, not that palette of Boag's Premium, although we'd given it a good shake the night before. Sheer stupidity, a lesson in camping Tasmanian style that I'll never forget. See, it can get exceptionally cold at night on a west-coast hill in Tasmania, to the point where every breeze rattles your bones, and that's before the early-morning mist settles an inch of frost on your mug. No wonder the local blokes swag it in tents down here. I decide then and there to pitch one of the Oz-Tents from now on because this shivering caper is ridiculous!



Milo and Otis run down the track to Granville Harbour and that wonderful west-coast freedom

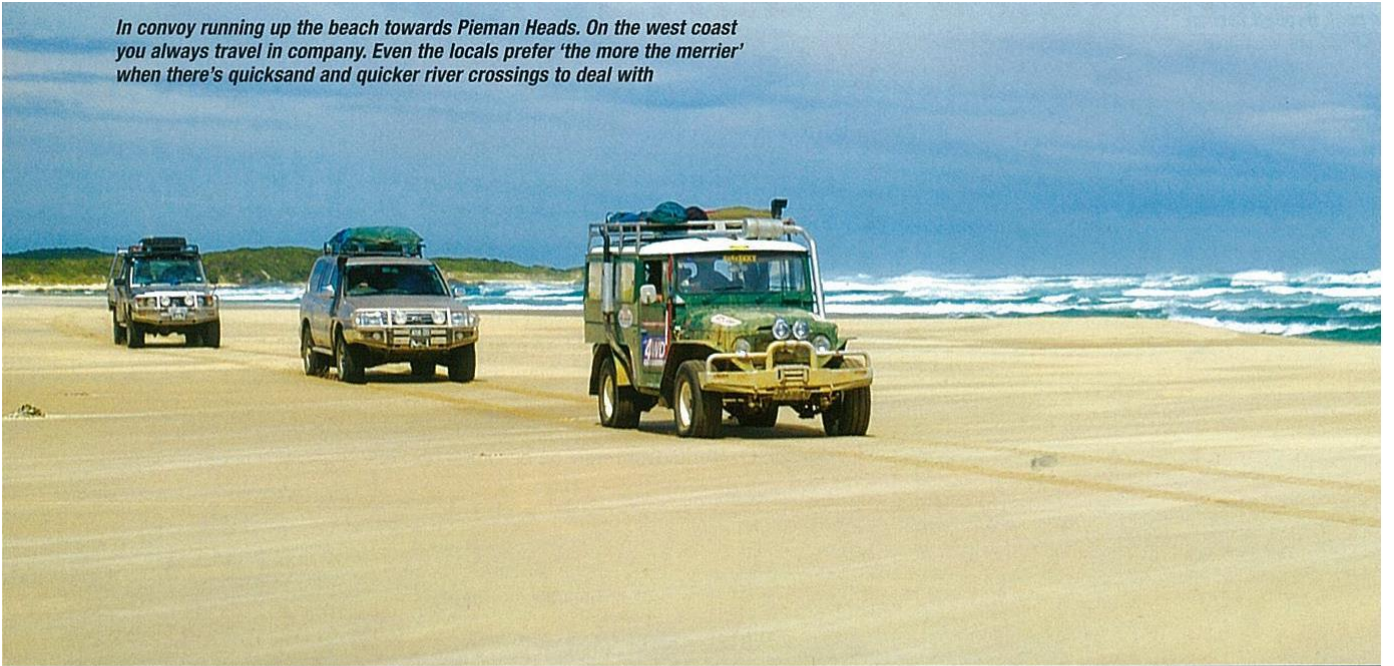


Pat punts Otis over a soft sandhill south of Granville Harbour



We found the remains of another 40 Series Toyota, a reminder of how dangerous any trip up the west coast can be, where Mother Nature is boss and trucks can be swallowed with hardly a burp

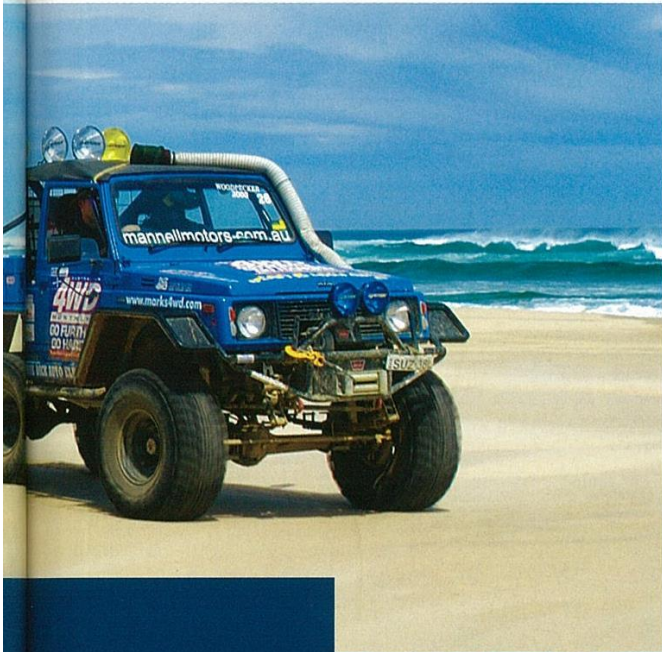
In convoy running up the beach towards Pieman Heads. On the west coast you always travel in company. Even the locals prefer 'the more the merrier' when there's quicksand and quicker river crossings to deal with



**OUCH, DAMN ... NO SHOPS ... HELL,
WHAT WAS THAT? ... PLENTY OF BANJOS...**



The 79 leads the 100 Series through the bush and another beach, but as always, there's a creek or

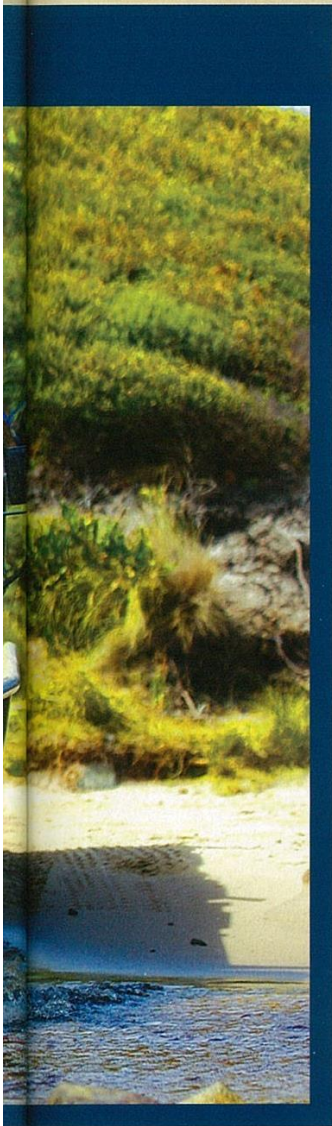


After a quick pack we rolled down into Zeehan and spent a quiet hour looking around the old town. One hundred and twenty years ago they found big concentrates of silver and lead near Zeehan and for the next 30 years the town boomed. Now it's home to 1200 people, the West Coast Pioneer's Museum and one of the best 'little' supermarkets anywhere. Little changed since the old days; main street Zeehan is a slice from past, less the people.

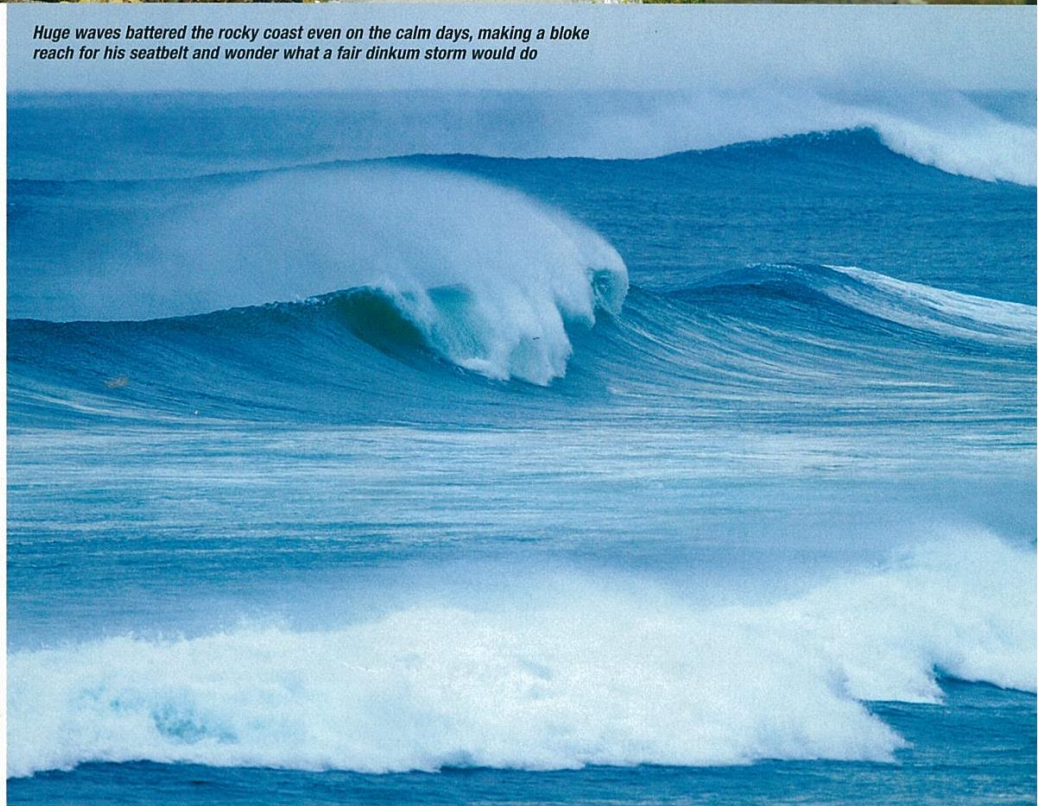
Loaded with supplies and fuelled up, our convoy set off north-west towards Corinna. About 20km out of town we swung off the sealed road down the track to Granville Harbour. Coz was riding with me and when I asked him what we'd find at Granville, he pretty much described it in three gasped sentences (we were running over some bumps at the time): "Little fishing settlement ... ouch, damn ... no shops ... hell, what was that? ... plenty of banjos..."

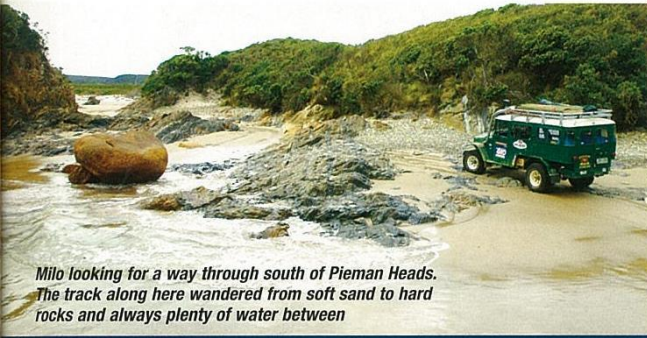
Granville Harbour is typical of a west-coast settlement. The houses are beach shacks for the most part, cobbled up from whatever flat materials could be found and mostly shuttered up against the winds. No fences, dirt tracks running between the houses and about as much town planning as you'd expect when people are free to do their own thing. In other words, it was a fantastic little place.

From here we swung north up the beach road towards Pieman Heads. Brian Imlach has a crayfishing licence, so we convinced him he'd better make the most of it! In company with father-and-son team David and Mark Redpath, Brian suited up to brave the cold Southern Ocean and bring us some dinner. Within no time at all the lads caught their allowance and we were heading on to Pieman's to cook it up.



Huge waves battered the rocky coast even on the calm days, making a bloke reach for his seatbelt and wonder what a fair dinkum storm would do





Milo looking for a way through south of Pieman Heads. The track along here wandered from soft sand to hard rocks and always plenty of water between

PAT LEAPT INTO OTIS, DEAD KEEN TO HAVE A GO AT ANYTHING DEEMED 'IMPOSSIBLE'

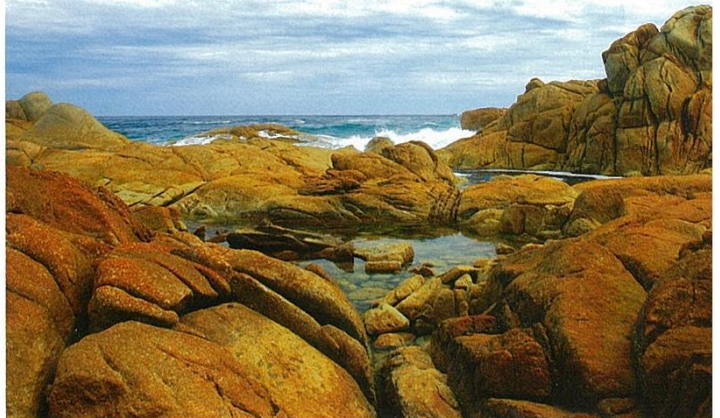
Pat couldn't resist climbing the steepest rocks he could find including this beauty south of Pieman's. He and Otis got all the rock they could handle later in the trip!



Brian Imlach bags another cray for our dinner at Pieman's. Life doesn't get much better than this, especially when you're in a nice warm truck and watching!



Dinner at Pieman Heads. Boag's and fresh cray go together like nothing this side of barra and a Darwin stubby!

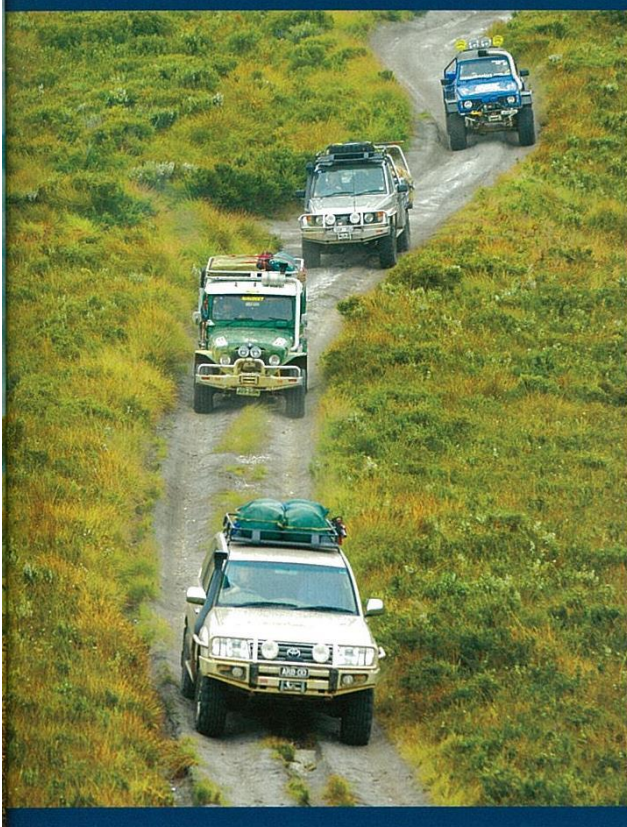


The seething Southern Ocean on a good day!



TRAVEL

Tasmania, Part 2 of 3



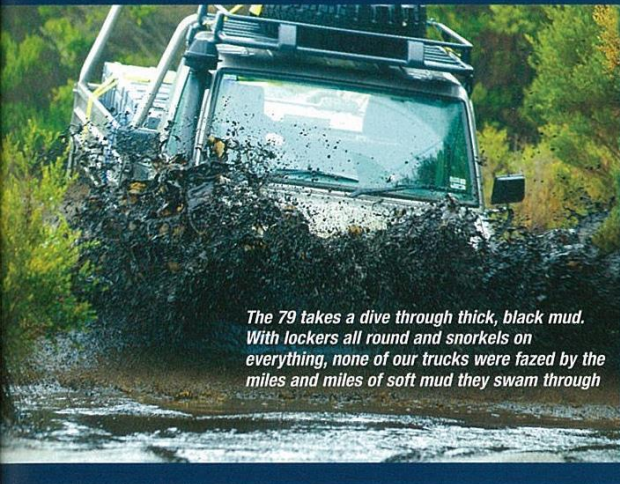
Yep, sprung by a couple of members of the Braddon 4WD Club. It seemed the rest of the club were camped up around the point. That night, as we settled down to a round of superb cray burps and another couple of hundred of James Boag's finest, some of their members came over to join us, and before long it was party time with a capital P. Except for Lowmount Mark that is. Always the company man, he'd slid underneath Brian's winch bar to do some mounting research. No doubt ARB will be releasing the Lowmount Special before long, one with velvet covered handles and a soft, but seductive, set of rollers. But I've said too much...

Talking climbing steep things, Pat couldn't resist punting Otis up the steepest rock face he could find on the beach. He got some air and an awesome angle too, making our cameraman's day.

Before long we were punting south towards Trial Harbour. This track used to be the main road to Granville from Trial Harbour, but once they'd constructed the road through from Zeehan maintenance, except for a bit of bridgework, it was stopped. Anywhere else you'd expect a bit of wear and tear, but on the storm-strewn west coast, the track has eroded severely. That's right, making it absolutely perfect for some off-road adventure!

Although only 25km long, the track usually takes at least four hours. It probably took us longer still because we kept stopping to clown around on the soft sandhills alongside the beach. In many places they're the only alternative, something Editor Pat in the mighty-light Otis couldn't help but relish.

From soft sand to tight winding tracks through dense undergrowth and always plenty of water, it seemed our trucks were forever getting wet. If it wasn't rivers and creeks crossing the beach, it was little lagoons left over from the last storm or made by water running down through the sandhills under the ground. A lot of it is treacherous too, especially the fast-running water cutting across the beach. But more of that later!



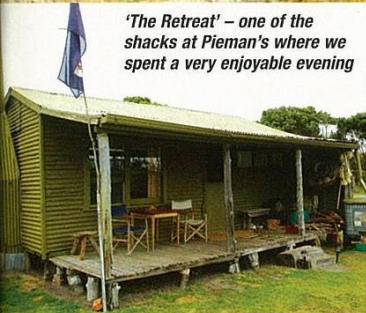
The 79 takes a dive through thick, black mud. With lockers all round and snorkels on everything, none of our trucks were fazed by the miles and miles of soft mud they swam through

The weather can change very quickly on the west coast, and within minutes the clouds had rolled over and a dirty grey drizzle had set in. By then we were slightly inland, following a path through the low scrub as it climbed around and over the coastal hills. There's too much wind for anything to grow tall around here but the scrub itself is thick and wiry. No doubt it has to be or it'd be in New Zealand by now...

With the rain, the already sodden ground seemed to weep water and soon we were plunging through bonnet-deep slush. I felt the water dripping down under the dash fill my throttle boot and couldn't help thinking how wet Pat must be getting in Otis's virtually open cockpit. Ah well, at least he wasn't bothered by the windscreen misting up – the mud was too thick to see any mist.

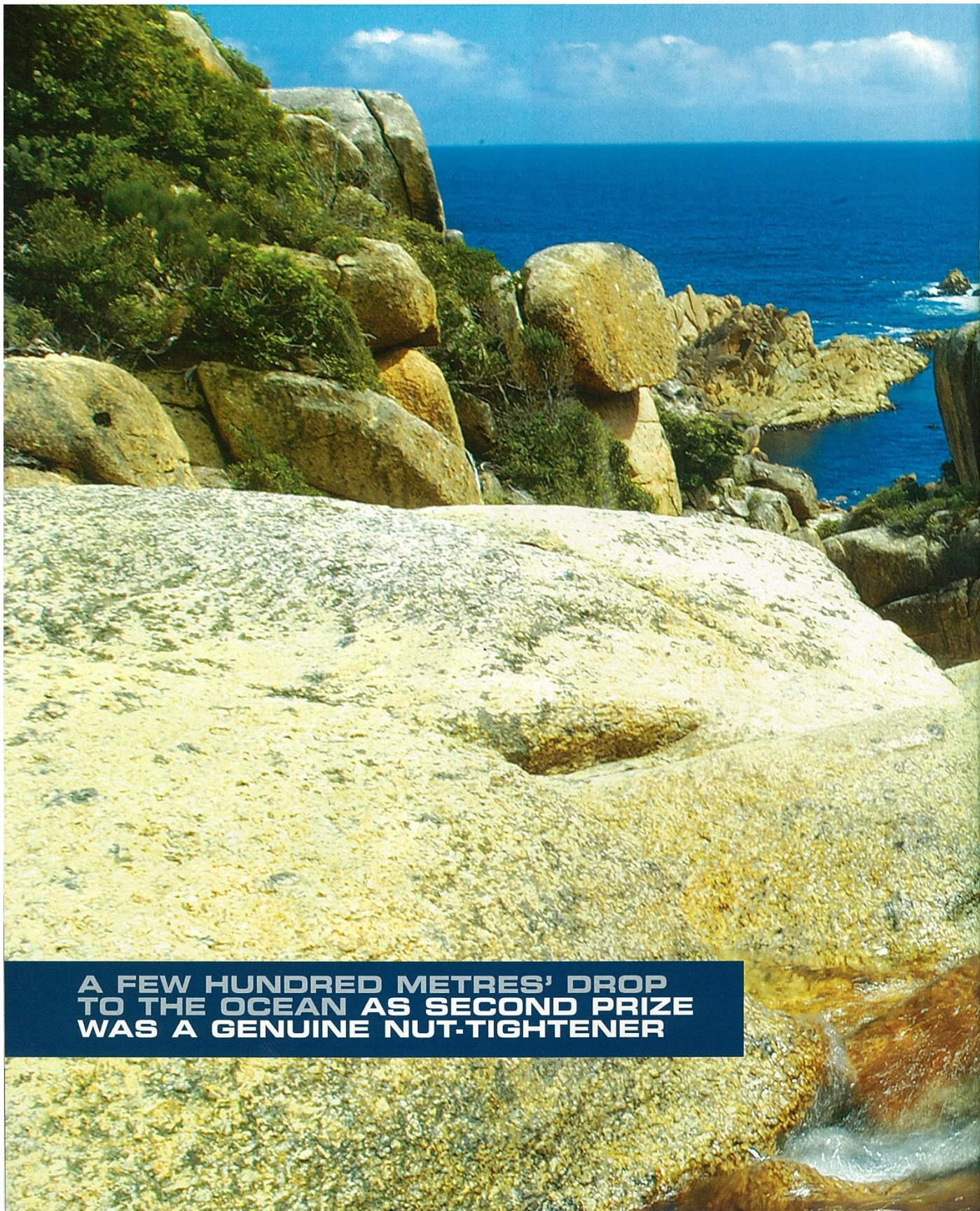
As soon as it came, the bad weather went away and the track turned from dirt to rock. Soon we came to the high point of that day's drive, scenery-wise anyway – the crossing at St Clair Creek. In a massive break in the granite rocks, surrounded by boulders on either side, runs the crystal-clear St Clair Creek, just moments before it tumbles down a series of waterfalls into the ocean below. It's incredible country and the driving isn't that easy at all.

Milo launches up one of the rougher sections of the inland track. There were probably easier alternatives not far away, but hey, have Air Lockers, will travel – anywhere!



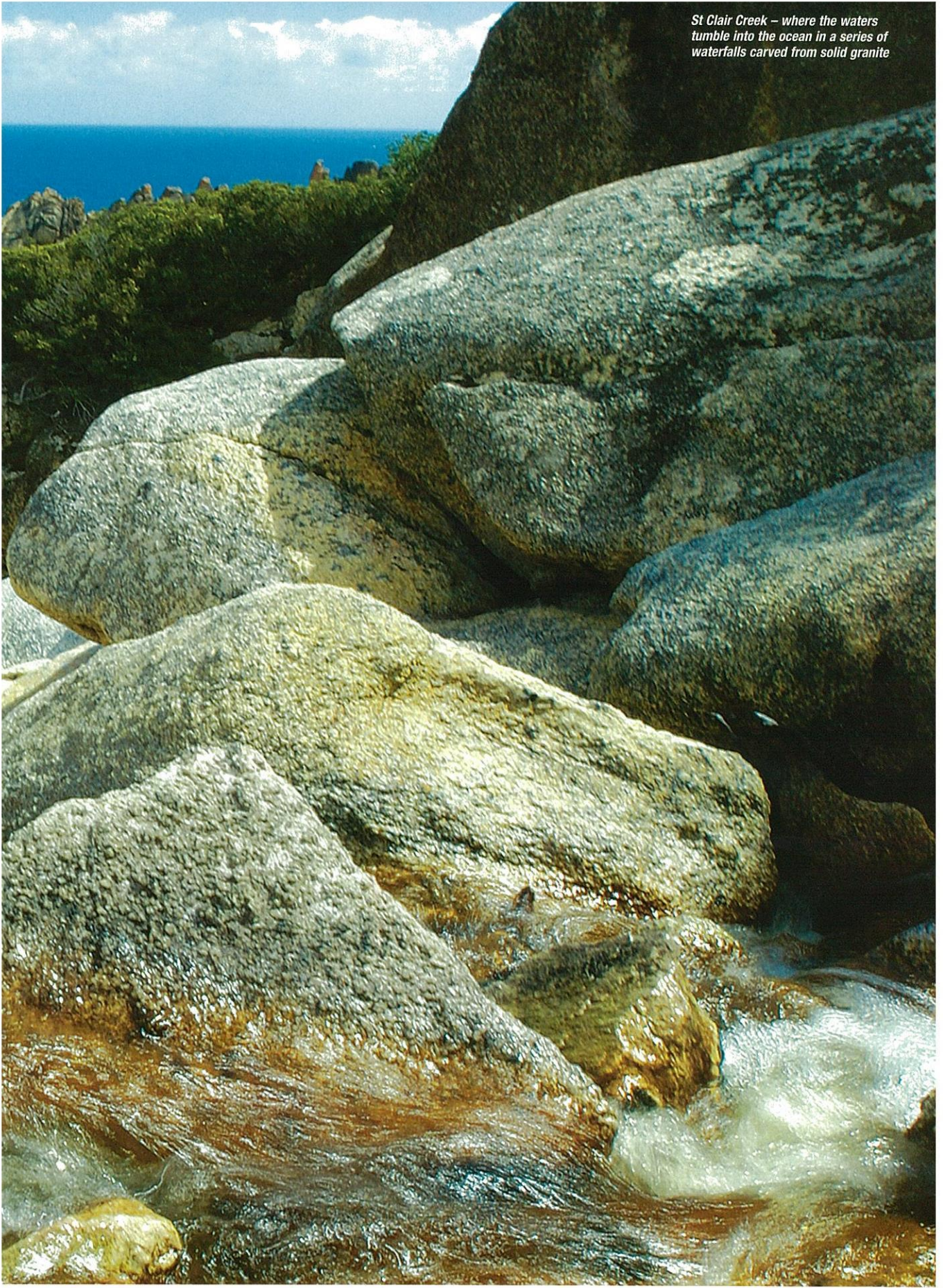
'The Retreat' – one of the shacks at Pieman's where we spent a very enjoyable evening



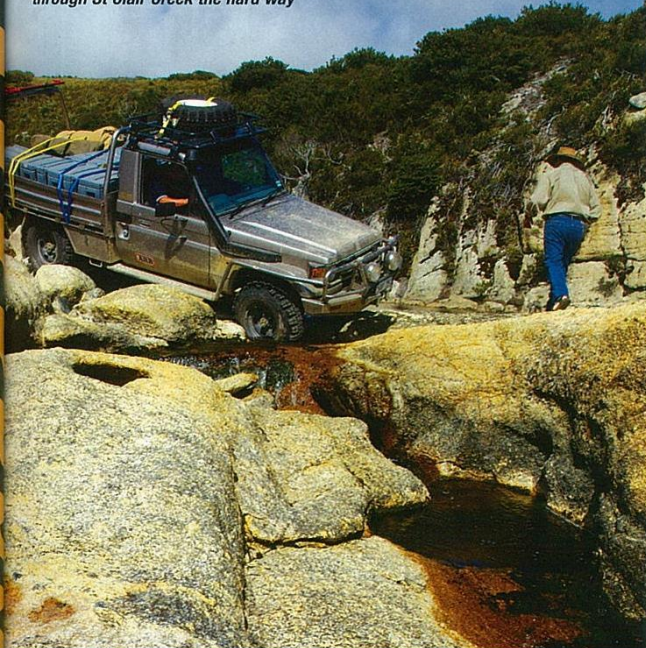


**A FEW HUNDRED METRES' DROP
TO THE OCEAN AS SECOND PRIZE
WAS A GENUINE NUT-TIGHTENER**

*St Clair Creek – where the waters
tumble into the ocean in a series of
waterfalls carved from solid granite*



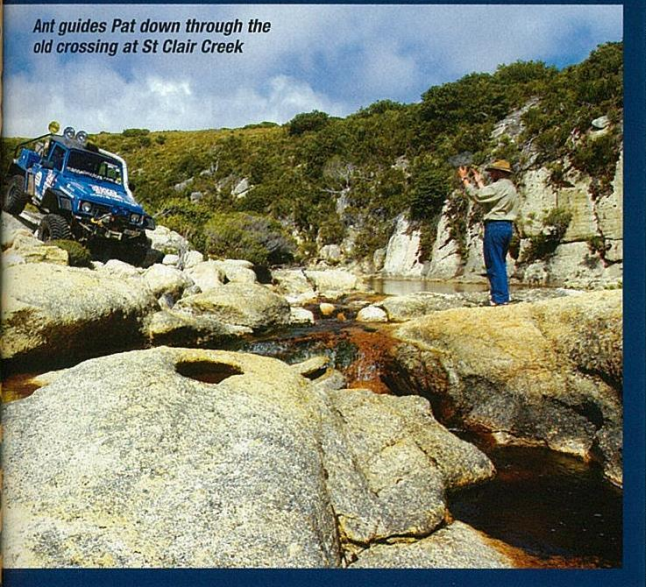
Trying very hard not to dent the boss's car, Lowmount Mark drops the 79 through St Clair Creek the hard way



ANDY BROWN'S STILL TRYING TO GET THE CLENCH MARKS OUT OF HIS 79'S STEERING WHEEL



Ant guides Pat down through the old crossing at St Clair Creek

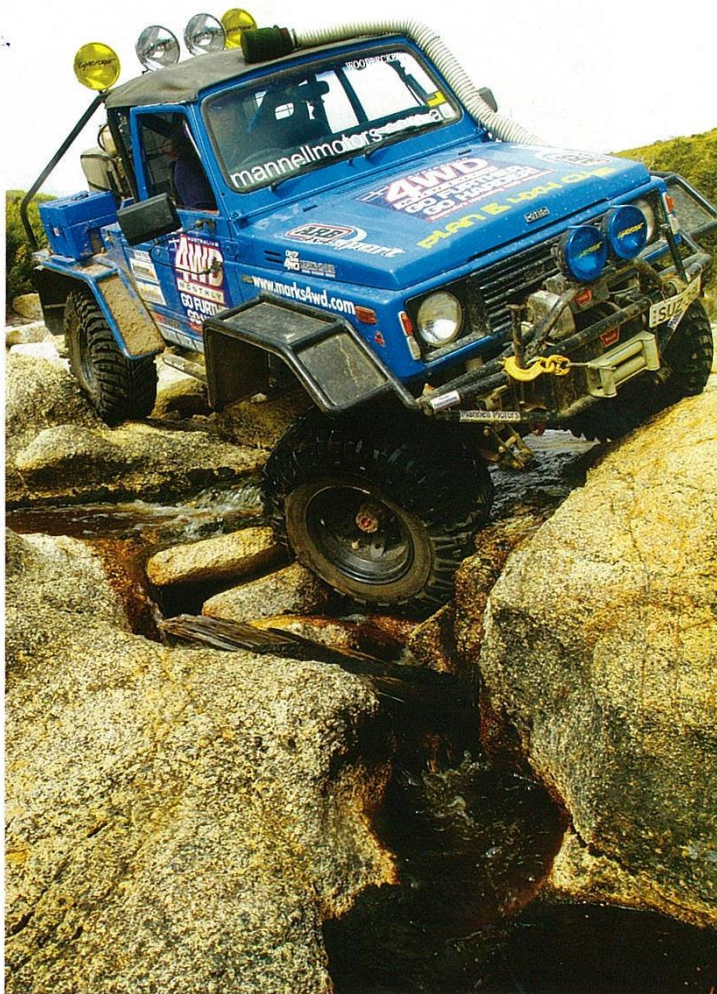


There's a bridge that's been repaired a few times at St Clair Creek that makes crossing the void a whole lot easier than the old way, up through the rugged granite boulders, before picking a narrow path along the crest of the hill. Naturally we took the hard way, once Pat had put Otis through and set the challenge! The rocks weren't too bad, although the sidebars on the 79 really had their work cut out for them, but that slither up the loose, scree-covered crest with a few hundred metres' drop to the ocean as second prize was a genuine nut-tightener.

Which made it a great place to stop for lunch. Once again, Brian and Coz handled the catering with aplomb, setting up the tailgate sandwich bar right next to the old bridge so we could wash up before gobbling down half a loaf each. Cold winds and wild tracks can give a man a big appetite!

Over the lunch, the lads kept talking about the Lake Cumberland track with plenty of suitable 'oohs' and 'aahs' from Brian and Coz when Pat asked how easy it'd be. That was our destination for the afternoon, and in typical Tassie touring form, we were there within a few hours of talking about it. Along the way, we rolled through some grandiose open country with ocean views on one side and the mountains looming on the other. It was sunny, then it rained, then it was sunny, then the wind blew and then 10 minutes later it did it all again but with gusto!

At the base of the Cumberland Lake track we stopped to work out how we'd tackle the drive. The track itself is less than half a kilometre but there was a bit of choice. The most direct way narrowed to an incredibly steep rocky gully that looked like no chance at all. Naturally, Pat bounded down the track and leapt into Otis, dead keen to have a go at anything deemed 'impossible'.



SHEER STUPIDITY, A LESSON IN CAMPING TASMANIAN STYLE I'LL NEVER FORGET

The rest of us followed slowly, although after almost scraping more panels on the 100 Series, John decided to leave his truck before the climb really began. It was a wise decision because even the high trayback 79 copped panel damage when it got hung up on boulders further up.

Milo tried in vain to keep up with Otis but there was no beating the little hybrid buggy on this section. With those huge Mud Claws let down to a couple of pounds, Pat found enough traction to push on past the intersection before being stopped by a gap that was just too narrow. He tried riding tyres on both sides of the crack but after plenty of excitement poor old Otis just seemed to get wedged even more.

It was breathless work for the rest of us as we packed stones under Pat's wheels and yelled encouragement. Brian didn't know of anyone who'd done this section without a winch, but with night closing in that wasn't even an option for us. There were leaches dropping out of the trees and mist as thick as ocean waves rolling all around us before Pat finally called it quits and reversed back to take the slightly easier track to the top. Unable to turn around, the rest of us reversed down the hill, beaten maybe, but by a mighty big hill!

It was after dark when we trundled in to Trial Harbour, another little settlement of shacks on a magnificent stretch of wild coastline. Just before town Brian pulled us over near a new pit toilet and we set up camp in the bush alongside the track. I remember making a huge pot of spaghetti and meat sauce (the old fall-back when a

bloke's too tired to cook but his mates all need a feed) and flavouring it with a carton of Boag's. Actually, only a couple of Boag's made the sauce, the rest were drunk watching it cook...

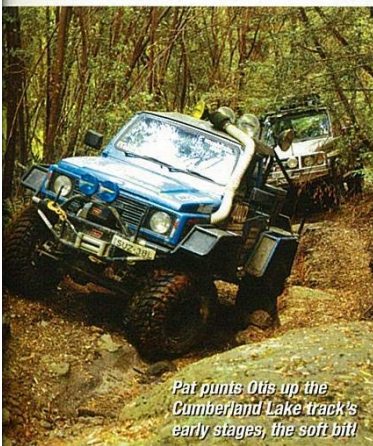
Next morning there was a queue at the new toilet that quickly earned it a new name – the Fasta Pasta Passion Pit. I'll thank Coz for that little bit of Tasmanian wit because I'm pretty sure it's his fault.

After breakfast we loaded up and ran south down Ocean Beach, making good time on the huge flat sands and only slowed down by the creeks and rivers running across the beach. The Little Henty River, a well-known soft spot according to the locals, almost claimed the 79 when Mark tried crossing just a tad too slow. Within seconds the engine had stalled and the tyres were starting to sink but almost just as fast Chinese John (hey, you do one little load of washing and...) rushed in armed to the teeth with ARB straps and shackles.

If anybody ever questioned keeping the recovery gear close at hand they'd have to eat their words about now. Knowing where the snatch strap and shackles were meant John had the 79 hooked up to Otis before the 79 was lost forever to that raging Southern Ocean. They reckon Andy Brown's still trying to get the clenched marks out of his 79's steering wheel. Good thing he had thick canvas seat covers...

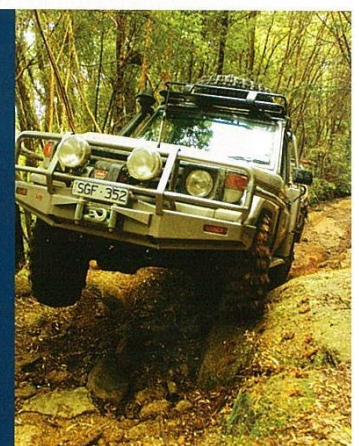
After that near disaster we settled down for a cup of tea and a chat: Brian had an interesting theory on the pattern of the waves gleaned from spending many years ducking big west-coast surf. He

Getting ready for our ascent of the Cumberland Lake track. Mist and cloud helped disguise the fact that it's getting late in the day



Pat punts Otis up the Cumberland Lake track's early stages, the soft bit!

The grave of the last guy who tried to drive the Lake Cumberland track in the wet at night! Actually it's Joseph Brown's grave; he died warming up dynamite in a billy over the fire back in 1881. And we thought we lived dangerously



QUICKSAND!

01 – I figured quicksand was right up there with drop bears and two-headed Tasmanians. Wrong, big time wrong, as I found out on Ocean Beach. This series of photos starts with the 100 Series passing close to a beach waterhole without even budging

02 – The 79 passed exactly the same place but slowed slightly as one side dipped into the sand. Note that there are puddles of water forming on the surface, pushed up by the action of the first vehicle and almost ready to swallow number three

03 – Milo hits the same spot, and feeling her go down I hit the throttle, only to have the old girl drop straight through the crust. They told me later it was almost always the third vehicle that sank. Bastards

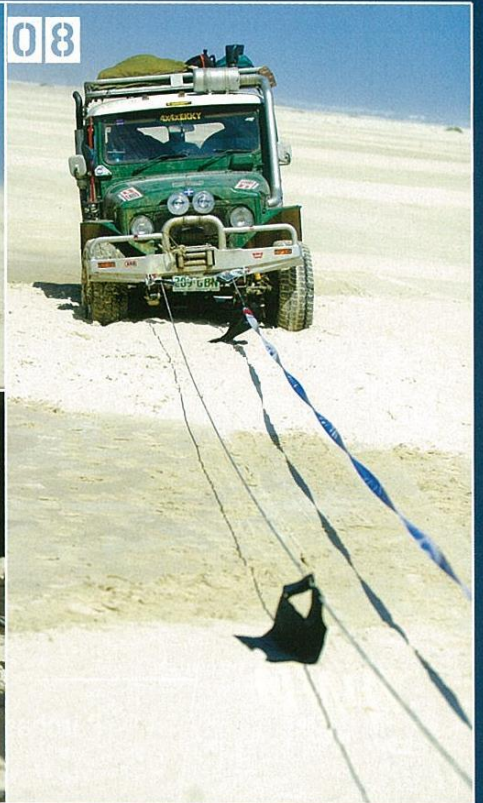
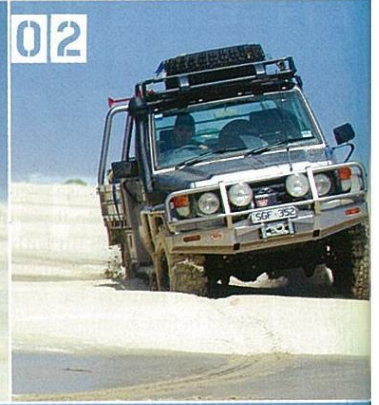
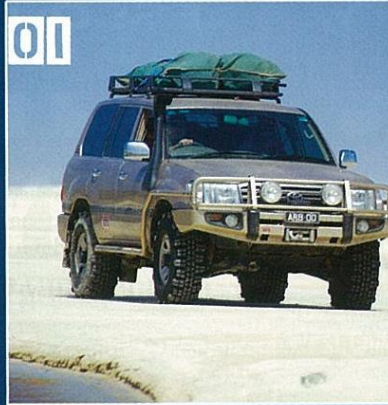
04 – After about half a wheel spin, it's obvious the old girl's sinking faster by the second. Sitting in the cab, watching the sand come close to my elbow, I was starting to get a tad worried about now!

05 – Ooh, how's that for a sinking feeling? In the few seconds it took the photographer to get closer, the old girl's started displacing some serious water

06 – As everybody ran for recovery gear, the wet sand closed in around Milo's rump, setting her faster than concrete in Queensland

07 – We used snatch blocks on each side of Milo's ARB bullbar to spread the load and halve the effort. Boy was I glad that ARB Dave had put so much work into strengthening the chassis when he'd fitted the winch. A single-sided pull would have definitely warped the chassis about now

08 – There she is, almost out after making more sucking noises than a room full of state politicians. I just about kissed that 10,000lb Warn on the 100 Series after it'd pulled Milo out so quickly





Milo plunges through the Little Henty River on Ocean Beach. Nothing a bit of speed won't fix



said you should wait and count the waves, avoiding the seventh to ninth waves, which are the biggest, and looking for that slight lull as the ocean draws breath for another attack. That's the best time to ford rivers or anywhere else the swell might catch a bloke out. I did the count a few times and found it worked, so now it's a permanent part of my beach-drive thinking. Hell, if they ever make a 20ft board with a diesel motor, I might even take up surfing...

Another thing worth mentioning is that beach rivers are best crossed at about 45°, heading from upriver towards the ocean. That way you've got the current pushing the truck rather than having it fight against it. And if you do stall, the sand build-up around the wheels will be a bit slower. The best bet is to aim for the point where the waves are breaking over the beach, because the sand is hardest

close to the sea. Unfortunately, anywhere near the sea is a lousy place to get stuck – one big wave and your truck's gone forever.

Little did I know that within the hour Milo would be breaking through the crust and sinking to above wheel height in the other notorious trap on the west coast – quicksand. Now I'd heard tales of this stuff but nothing prepared me for the shock of having the old girl sink in less than a turn of the wheel. I've written some notes to go with the pics of that incident, so hopefully the lads will package them in this yarn so you can see for yourself.

But whatever else, be warned about quicksand. Despite having a winch, a Hi-Lift jack, a great motor, low gears and a strong clutch, there was nothing that would have got Milo clear from that wet and soft sand other than a big tug from another vehicle pulling from





higher ground. As someone who lives to travel alone through the outback, this quicksand stuff had me thinking 'groups are nice'. And a big group is even better, especially when it's made up of such competent vehicles as these two ARB trucks with all that recovery gear and experience on board.

From the bottom of Milo's bashed and dinged sump, let me thank you blokes for your rescue efforts. She might be an old and ugly bird but I love her all the same. No dear, I'm talking about the truck again... ouch!

As the fourth day of our Tasmanian adventure slowly drew to a close, we found ourselves playing in the sandhills up behind the

Henty River. Pat was busy trying to get all four Claws off the ground, and Ellem had the rest of the pack circling him, kicking up plenty of sand for some action photos. You'd hardly have thought we were all tired, dirty, hungry and... no, you'd definitely believe we were thirsty! But Tasmania being what it is, one minute we haven't seen a soul all day, the next we're driving salt-encrusted trucks through the main street of Strahan looking for a pub.

Oysters Kilpatrick and a double dose of Boag's finest never tasted so good. That night, the first in a bed since the ferry crossing, all I could think about was how awesome our whole trip had been so far.

And we still had plenty more tracks to drive! **4WD**

IT WAS FRESH UNTIL I SUBMERGED A HUNDRED KILOS PLUS OF NAKED ROOTH IN IT



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