

**Following in the Footsteps of John Holland**  
**The Holland Track – Hyden to Coolgardie, Western Australia**  
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In September 1892 gold was found near Coolgardie in Western Australia which generated a wave of excitement throughout the state and the rest of the country. As a result, fortune seekers made their way first to Perth and then to Coolgardie, via the railway towns of Northam and York where they purchased their supplies and headed off on foot pushing a wheel barrow with their meagre belongings in it.

Soon a number of attempts were made to forge a track from the south so that these fortune seekers could leave from the southern port at Albany. Unfortunately a number of those attempts failed until in April 1893 John Holland took up the challenge to blaze a trail from Broomehill to Coolgardie.

Holland was an experienced bushman from the Broomehill region in southern Western Australia and with the backing of local business men he meticulously planned the expedition to clear a track from Broomehill to Coolgardie. His plan included not only finding a route through the remote country but to also clear it as they proceeded so that it could be used straight away.

Holland waited until after the summer before heading off with his team which consisted of the brothers David and Rudolph Krakouer and John Carmody. Their equipment consisted of a small dray which carried a 100 gallon water tank and their supplies on it, five horses, one to pull the dray as well as tools for clearing the path. Once everything was ready they set off cutting their way through the scrub.

Each day Holland would head off in front of the others and search for water and to mark the route as the others followed behind clearing the track. Then in early June 1893, two months and four days after they started they finished their journey and had completed a cart track that was over 500km in length.

Soon the track was being used by fortune hunters as well as supply teams taking supplies to the new goldfields of Western Australia from the Port of Albany. Unfortunately the track was only in use for a few short years before a railway line from Northam to Kalgoorlie was completed and it fell into disrepair and soon forgotten.

Over the years a number of attempts were made to retrace and open the track again and in 1992 this was achieved by some local history enthusiasts and this was followed by an expedition in 1993 to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the track.

The Holland Track as we now know it goes from a start point about 50km east of the town of Hyden to where it enters the Victoria Rock Rd south of Coolgardie as most of the southern section of the track is now incorporated into the farmlands.

Fast forward to Easter 2015, 122 years after Holland and his teamed blazed the track and we had arrived in Hyden in preparation to doing the track along with 10 other members of our 4WD Club. In the weeks leading up to our trip the region had

received considerable rainfall from a tropical cyclone and the track had only just been opened.



After everyone had assembled and final preparations including refuelling had been completed we headed off to drive the 50km to the start point. An uneventful 30 minute trip had us arriving there just after 10am. On arrival at the start point we aired down our tyres to 20PSI and organised ourselves into two convoys to make the trip a bit easier to control.

We also prepared our vehicles for any recoveries that may eventuate over the next few days by checking that shackles were fitted to all recovery points and this included on our Campertrailers. Some of us even went a bit further and fitted our snatch straps and kept them secured to the bull bars while others secured them in easy to grab places within their vehicles.

Whilst airing down we observed a number of other vehicles in convoys entering the track and continued straight on without stopping to air down and the damage caused by these drivers and their high tyre pressures became apparent soon after as we hit the first lot of corrugations and water obstacles. If we wish to keep these tracks open for the future we need to ensure that we all do the right thing and the simple act of airing down your tyres is just the start.



Once we had aired down and the final check of our vehicles was completed the trip leader gave us a final brief and we were off. We locked our vehicles into 4WD high and moved off; however, no sooner than we started and we came across the first water obstacle. Taking it nice and easy all of our vehicles comfortably navigated this water obstacle but this was just a teaser for what lay ahead.

As we drove, the terrain was constantly changing from sand plains followed by open Eucalypt woodland to gimlet thickets and so on. These gimlets (long narrow looking trees) were used by the local Aborigines to make their spears and on a closer inspection you can see why and how effective they would have been.

The track for the entire distance is a single lane track so care must be taken and a constant lookout for oncoming vehicles is a must. Also you need to keep an eye out for vehicles stuck in the many obstacles as you come onto them very quickly. Constant passage of information via the UHF radios is essential in these situations.

With our tyre pressures set at 20PSI the run was really smooth and in some spots we managed to sit on 30kph for short distances before dropping down to a couple of kph as we worked our way through the many obstacles along the track.



The main thing to watch for were the mallee roots that were along the sides of the track and in some cases on the track as these can and will slice tyres open so great care was needed when passing them. One advantage of having the lower tyre pressures is that the tyre can mould over the mallee root and reduce the likelihood of tyre damage happening.

As you approach many of the larger obstacles there are chicken tracks that allow you to navigate around the worst of the obstacles but there was evidence that many drivers had tried the harder sections and had become bogged which was doing more damage to the track than necessary.

As the morning went on we were making steady progress when we came across a vehicle stuck in one of the water obstacles. There were two other vehicles with him and they were having difficulty recovering it. As a result, our front vehicles moved forward to lend them a hand. It was at this point that it became apparent that none of those vehicles were correctly prepared for the trip as none of them had any recovery gear and their tyre pressures were way too high for the conditions.



With our help, the bogged vehicle was quickly recovered and they were on their way oblivious to how lucky they were that we came along and helped them out. At any other time of the year it may have been a different story as the amount of traffic reduces outside of holiday periods.

While the recovery was being undertaken one of our vehicles noticed that they had damaged their steel rim and air was slowly leaking from it so a quick repair job with a hammer stopped the leak sufficiently for us to continue, well so we thought, as no sooner had we set off that one of our other vehicles discovered that they had

broken the bead on their front passenger tyre and as a result mud and grit had got into the bead and caused air to leak out.



Attempts to clear the mud proved futile so it was decided that a quick wheel change was required and with a few of us pitching in this was completed in no time and soon we were on our way. All this in the first two hours, this was going to be a great trip.

After an hour or so of driving we found an excellent spot to stop for lunch so both convoys pulled off of the road into a nice clearing. During the break further repairs were made to the steel rim and this stopped the leak, while everyone else conducted a quick once over inspection of their vehicles.

Once this was completed we headed off for the last leg of the day. The track that afternoon was similar to the morning but some of the water obstacles were getting bigger and even the chicken tracks were becoming major obstacles but our convoys made their way through.

At one particularly long water obstacle one of the vehicles got into major trouble when they lost drive to the front wheels so effectively they were in two wheel drive and this required them to be snatched out of the quagmire and as a result they had to take it easy for the rest of the trip.



About 3pm we arrived at Mount Holland which is located at the intersection of the Holland Track and the Marvel Loch – Forrestania Rd. Care should be taken when accessing this road from the track as it is used by large mining trucks servicing a number of mines in the local area.

Mount Holland was named after John Holland and a climb to the top gives an excellent outlook over the surrounding terrain. During their construction of the track, Holland and his team rested here for a day before moving on.

At the base of the hill is a large cleared area and was to be our campsite for the night. The ground is reasonably flat and all of the vehicles found a spot to park and set up their tents or Campertrailers.

Once everyone was set up the communal campfire was lit and we moved into our night routine of a few snacks, a couple of quiet drinks and some very tall stories. By 9pm most of us were in bed asleep.



The following morning saw everyone up and ready to go by the allotted start time and we had only been on the road for a few minutes when we hit our first obstacle for the day but this was due to a number of vehicles from another group of travellers parked on the track so we had to wait for the owners to come and shift them. Once this was completed we were able to get on our way.

The terrain was much the same as the day before, sand plains, Eucalypts and gimlet with each one changing on a regular basis. Following the rains the countryside was looking stunning and everything was starting to green up and there was the smell of freshness in the air. A trip through this region in spring with the wildflowers blooming would be just stunning.



Also along the tracks there are lots of places to stop and explore with a number of large rock formations along the way and for the keen photographer there are numerous photo opportunities so take your time and don't rush.

Soon we passed Sandalwood Rocks, which can be accessed by a deviation in the track and is located in the south eastern part of Jibadji Nature Reserve. This reserve is about 200 000 hectares in size and was set aside to protect flora found nowhere else in the world.

With mid morning fast approaching and stomachs starting to rumble we arrived at the intersection of the Holland Track and the Bunker – Mount Day Rd where there is a plaque located as well as an unique collection items left by previous travellers. The plaque was provided by the Broomehill Historical Society and erected by volunteers in 1993.

Also located here with the plaque is a visitor's book for everyone to sign and after the obligatory photos had been taken and with morning tea finished we continued on with our journey.



At this time it was decided to separate both convoys as the traffic on the track was increasing and it was decided that this would make it easier for us and oncoming traffic to get through. For the rest of the day both convoys were separated and our convoy reached the second nights campsite about 3pm that afternoon with the second convoy arriving an hour or so later.



This campsite was atop of a knoll across the road from Centenary Rocks and we had clear views all round. That night we were treated to the 'Blood Moon' as it rose in the east and a stunning sunset in the west.



On the morning of the third day everyone was up and ready to tackle the final leg of our trip. After a few minor repairs were carried out on a couple of the vehicles we were ready to head off.



Much of the terrain was now sand plains for most of the mornings drive and there were a lot less water obstacles so we made very good time and before long we reached Victoria Rock Rd and this marked the end of our journey.

We turned onto Victoria Rock Rd and made our way to safe spot where we aired up the tyres. Again this road is used by large mining trucks servicing the local mines so care should be taken when entering it and finding a safe place to pullover.

Having completed this we made our way towards the Victoria Rock Campground where we decided we would have lunch before we made our way to Coolgardie and turning west towards home.

We were now driving on a nice firm gravel road so we made vey good time and sat comfortably on 80kph until we reached the Victoria Rock site. After a quick lunch and we set off towards Coolgardie to refuel and start the long drive back to Perth.

After refuelling in Coolgardie a small group of us decided to make our way to the Boondi Rock Campground which is located about 100km west of Coolgardie to rest up for the night before heading off home the next day.

That night as my wife and I enjoyed our dinner we reflected on the previous few days travelling along the Holland Track and our admiration for John Holland, his team as well as all those that followed him grew. Here we were in nice shinny modern vehicles and they had to do it by horse back, drays or foot – they made them tough in those days.

If you get the chance the Holland Track should be on your lists of tracks to do and the best time to do it would be either in spring when the wildflowers are in bloom or in autumn after the summer heat.

This is remote travel and there is no fuel between Hyden and Coolgardie so you need to take all your fuel and supplies with you for the duration of the trip. The trip is less than 300km so plan accordingly. The track is suitable for Campertrailers and courtesy should be applied when approaching vehicles coming from the opposite direction to allow everyone to pass safely.

Take all your water with you and do not rely on natural water being available. Take out all your rubbish – unfortunately a lot of the campsites are becoming littered with rubbish especially beer bottles and toilet waste. If you go to the toilet, dig a big hole and ensure everything is buried properly.

As this is very remote travel I would strongly suggest that you don't travel by yourself but if you do let someone know when you are going and when you will be back. I would also suggest carrying as a minimum a Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) with you as well as a satellite phone or HF communications. If you do travel by yourself and you do get stuck stay with your vehicle until help arrives. Take along a good first kit and any medications that you may require.

For the trip I used a Hema HN7 Navigator and it proved to be very accurate; however, it did lack a bit of detail in-regards to points of interest so a good set of paper maps as back up is essential.

This is a great track through a wonderful region so look after it so everyone can get to enjoy it. See you out there on a track one day.

## **Destination Details**

### **Getting there**

There are two ways of doing this trip one is from Hyden and the other is from Coolgardie. Hyden is approximately 340 km east of Perth and the start point for the track is about a further 50 km east along the Hyden – Norseman Rd.

Coolgardie is approximately 514 km north east of Perth and the start of the track is approximately 53 km south of Coolgardie on the Victoria Rocks Rd. The Holland Track is approximately 280 km from Hyden to Coolgardie.

### **Access**

This is a 4WD only track and is remote travel. The track is suitable for Campertrailers, but as with the tow vehicle ensure that you let your tyre pressures down and also ensure that it has suitable recovery points in case it needs to be recovered.

### **Permits**

There are no permits required to do this trip.

### **When to go**

Summer in this area can be very hot with the temperature up into the high 30s and 40 degrees and often there will be total fire bans and during periods of total fire ban activities such as 4WD are prohibited.

Autumn and winter are much cooler with sunny days but cool to very cold nights and if there is any rain the track becomes muddy and boggy very quickly so check to see if the track is open before you head off after any periods of rain.

Spring will probably be the best time to travel as the wildflowers will be in bloom and much of the rain would have stopped, the days sunny and the nights warming.

For track information contact the Shire of Kondinin (Hyden Office) on (08) 9880 5160 or the Shire of Coolgardie on (08) 9080 2111.

### **More information**

In WA state road law applies to all areas of the state except private land therefore only registered vehicles driven by licensed drivers can be driven on the track. As this is a one lane track be aware of oncoming vehicles and convoys from the opposite direction. Also it can be very busy during holiday periods such as Easter so take care and have lots of patience.

You also need to be aware of campfire bans as the track passes through different shires and each has different restriction times. Whilst there is lots of wood available it would be better to take in your own fire wood and leave the other stuff for the animals.

Take care and watch out for mallee roots which dot the entire length of the track as they can do major damage to your tyres; however, lowering your tyre pressure and driving carefully should reduce the chance of doing any major damage.

Please take all rubbish out with you many of the campsites have large amounts of rubbish being left behind in particular beer bottles and other glass. Also at some sites there was issues with human toilet waste being exposed so make sure you dig a big hole and bury it properly.

Do the right thing and look after it and it will be there for everyone to use in the future.