

# Salt

THE MAGAZINE OF THE NSW SEA KAYAK CLUB  
ISSUE 103 | DECEMBER 2016



**23,000 km  
finished!**



Also inside: Tribute to Mick MacRobb, Hawkesbury Canoe Classic results, trips all along the coast of NSW, a solo paddle in QLD, and Prince William Sound in Alaska.



Front cover: Sandy Robson approaches the finish of her journey with sail up in tribute to Mick MacRobb, who recently passed away.

Above: Sandy Robson in Papua New Guinea (images provided by Sandy)

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## NSW Sea Kayak Club Inc.

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The NSW SKC is a voluntary organisation run by members who give their time freely to the club. Membership is offered yearly. Please see the website for details and application. [www.nswseakayaker.asn.au](http://www.nswseakayaker.asn.au)

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IMPORTANT: Please review the Paddler Safety, Required Equipment, Grading System and Club Calendar sections of the club website.



# From the President's Deck

MEGAN PRYKE

"Are you going to Rock 'n' Roll?" I recall being asked this question as a newbie. I did not have a clue what Rock 'n' Roll was. Inflexion communicated that it was special.

Rock and Roll is an annual event straddled over a weekend plus a



bit of time either side. It has an amazing vibe. The number of sea kayakers, the chance for members to socialise, for newer members to learn more about sea kayaking and for older members to catch up. When selecting a venue for this event we take into account the

need for a location that can cater to a variety of different paddling opportunities and a large number of campers.

Summer is here and the enthusiasm to get in, not just on, the water is understandably higher. Even if you are an experienced paddler, don't forget to practice rescue skills. When you are out paddling with an experienced group, it can be a good time to push your boundaries a little. There is always an opportunity to learn a bit at every club event.

Thank you to those members that have renewed in advance for 2017. I hope to see you all out on the big blue, even if it is grey.



# From the Editor's Desk

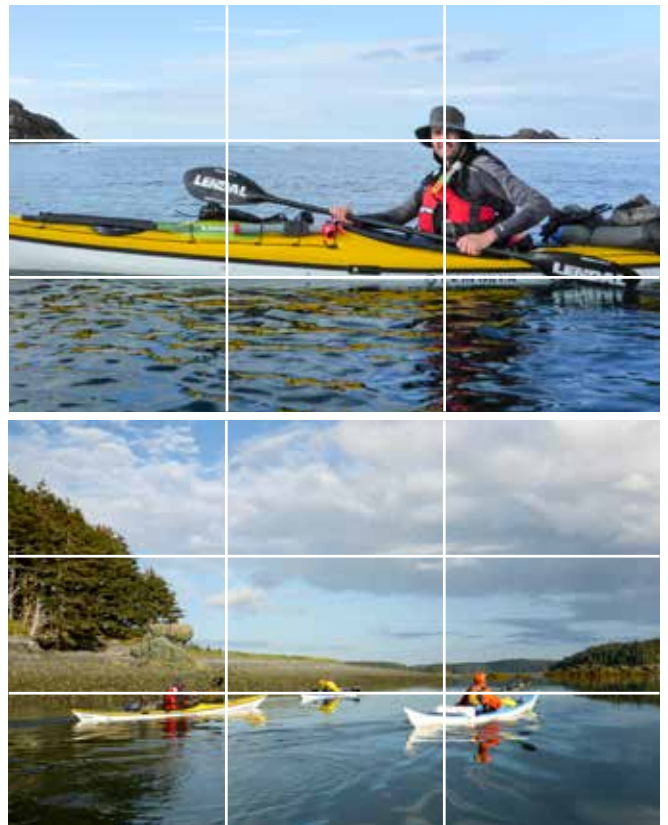
RUBY ARDREN

Thank you to all who contributed to December's Salt! We've taken a break from Tasmania in this issue, and given you an inspiring collection of articles that cover both sad and joyful occasions; how to's on a range of topics; and local, national and international trips. The next issue of Salt magazine will be delivered at Rock 'n' Roll so please get your articles to me any time between now and the end of January.

The two main elements of an article in Salt are the story itself and the images. Images do more than support your article – they create interest, drawing the reader in and making them want to know more. There are many ways to improve the images you use: here I will touch on composition.

When we're taking photos on a trip we're usually on bouncy water juggling paddle and camera, so it can be hard to get a great photo.

If you've got a bit more time to prepare, try to imagine how the image will look once it's printed. Apply the rule of thirds. Say you have a boat on the water - construct your photo so that one third is sky, and one third water, with one third of the photo taken up by the kayak and the person paddling (as in the first photo of Caoimhin). The water actually takes two-thirds of the photo, but the subject is across the centre third. Notice his head is on the intersection of the horizontal and vertical third. It works well to place your focal point (a person, animal, plant etc) one third of the space in from any edge of the photo. In the second photo (Shuyak Island, Alaska), the sky makes up two-



thirds of the space, but the horizon and vegetation creates interest in the centre third.

For a Salt cover, your image needs to have its focal point in the lower third, as we need room for the title at the top. Sometimes we just have to work with what we have. The cropping tool is our friend and can often make a good photo great!

# Rock 'n' Roll 2017

## Batemans Bay

SIMON SWIFT



Paddle to the Tollgate Islands, learn to roll, rub shoulders with paddling legends and lots more at next year's Rock 'n' Roll. This is our clubs premier event of the paddling year providing club members with the opportunity to meet like-minded people, experience a variety of great paddling destinations and enhance their skills via a number of on and off water training courses.

The next Rock 'n' Roll will be held at Batemans Bay over Friday 10 – Monday 13 March, 2017 based at Batemans Bay Beachside Resort (Ph 1800 217 533), which offers a variety of powered and unpowered camping sites, cabins and studios. Those wanting more than an unpowered camp site should book sooner rather than later as this is also a long weekend for residents of the ACT.

The Beachside Resort is located at Corrigans Beach, half way up Batemans Bay giving easy access to paddling in the open sea, around the bay or up the Clyde River. The bay has the spectacular Tollgate Islands and kilometres of interesting coast line to explore. For a quieter paddle there is the Clyde River that flows into the bay a short distance from Corrigans Beach.

Registration for the event is \$50 with the Saturday night dinner at the Catalina Country Club an additional \$45 per head. The guest speaker for the Saturday night is yet to be finalised.

Registration for Rock 'n' Roll will be open on the Club's web site ([www.nswseakayaker.asn.au](http://www.nswseakayaker.asn.au)) from early 2017. Please note that you need to be a financial member of the club when you register for Rock 'n' Roll.

The schedule of events will be similar to previous years:

Friday: arrival and registration, informal trips (no organised trips or training)

Friday evening: welcome and light dinner supplied by Expedition Kayaks

Saturday morning: registration, briefing, trips or training sessions

Saturday afternoon: BBQ and off water training sessions

Saturday night: dinner and speaker at the Catalina Country Club

Sunday morning: briefing, trips or training sessions

Sunday afternoon: off water training sessions

Sunday evening: Pogies (a shameful rip off of the Logies with the paddlers showing videos of their trips in the hope of winning a prize – a lot of fun)

Monday – informal trips

There is a plan to set up a "Gear for Sale" area near the main marquee for those members that have surplus kayaking equipment they want to sell.

This event is run by volunteers who give their time to organise, manage the registration, run the beach marshalling, cook the BBQ, etc. Some of the volunteer positions have already been filled but we still need a few more. If you are interested in helping with these tasks, please contact Simon at [rnr@nswseakayaker.asn.au](mailto:rnr@nswseakayaker.asn.au).

Further details regarding Rock 'n' Roll will be published on the NSWSKC website as it becomes available.

*Image: The Blue Cave is a highlight of the Tollgate Islands in the right conditions*

# NSW Island Challenge

After the success of the Newcastle Sydney Wollongong challenge, a new challenge theme has been crafted - Circumnavigating Islands of NSW.

Caoimhin Ardren has been busy checking the charts and identified up to 20 different island trips spanning almost the whole NSW Coastline. Each trip will aim to circumnavigate as many islands as possible.

As trip leaders take up the challenge, individual trips will appear on the club event list. If you've been following trip notices on the website you'll know a couple have already been put on, and we already have the most northerly and southerly ones covered! Due to their proximity to Batemans Bay, a couple of islands will be tackled during or immediately before or after Rock 'n' Roll next March.

NSW Island Challenge trips already planned (or completed) include:

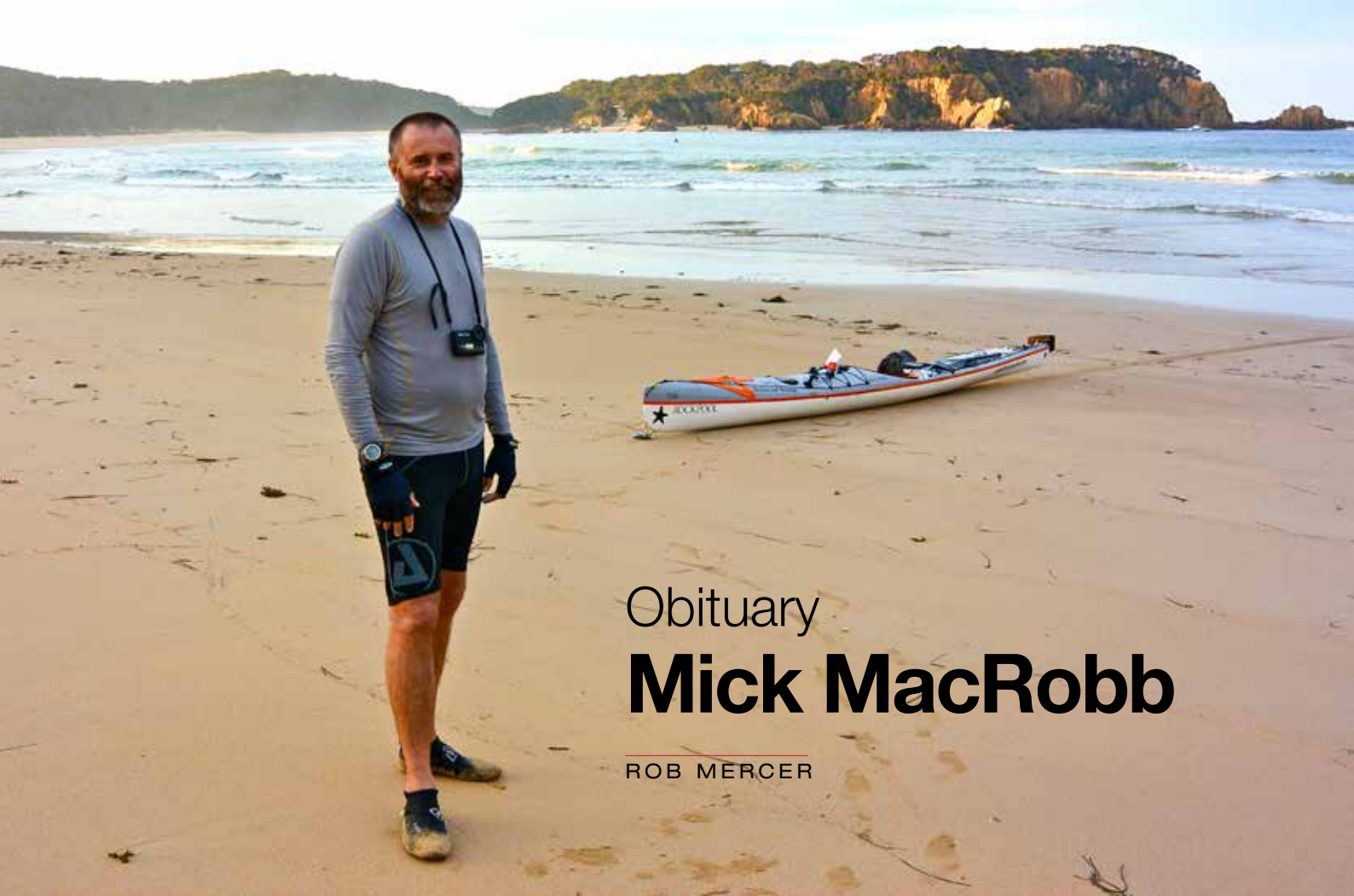
| Date           | Leader          | Island  |
|----------------|-----------------|---|
| 30 Nov 2016    | Nick Gill       | Wollongong Five Islands   |
| 10-11 Dec 2016 | Josh Andrews    | Montague Island   |
| 29-30 Mar 2017 | Adrian Clayton  | Islands of Sydney harbour, including an overnigher at Cockatoo Island |
| 10-12 Jun 2017 | Caoimhin Ardren | Split Solitary and other Solitary islands off Coffs Harbour           |

Here is a list of other potential NSW Island Challenge trips:

- Lion Island (From Ettalong Beach / Palm Beach)
- Wedding Cake Island
- Bird Island (north of Norah Head)
- Moon Island off Swansea heads
- Fingal Island (Fingal Bay)
- Cabbage Tree, Little and Boondelbah Islands
- Broughton Island
- Green Island / Fish Rock off SW Rocks / Smokey Cape
- Julia Rocks off Byron Bay
- Drum and Drumstick (Beecroft)
- Bowen Island (Jervis Bay)
- Brush Island / Belowla Island - off Bawley Point /Kioloa Bay
- O'Hara and Dawson Islands - off Pretty Beach
- Grasshopper and Wasp island - off Durras (at RnR)
- Toll Gate islands - Batemans Bay (at RnR)
- Jimmies Island - Guerilla bay (at RnR)







## Obituary

# Mick MacRobb

ROB MERCER

I first met Mick many years ago on the south coast at a NSW Sea Kayak Club Rock 'n' Roll weekend. He was paddling a boat he had made from plywood packing cases with a paddle made from recycled building timber. He seemed to enjoy the boat not just for its good sea manners but also for the fact that he had produced such a useful, effective craft from little more than unwanted scrap simply by the direct application of skill and know how.

More often than not when the EK team arrived to present, exhibit or coach at any significant gathering of kayakers, anywhere on the expansive East Coast of Australia, Mick would be there, in the beginning with a few home made items to sell, but ultimately as an exhibitor with his own range of equipment and especially his sails. He hit it off so well with Sharon and Mark and I that we often combined forces sharing display spaces, more so we could enjoy one another's company than for any serious business reason. When we had on-water activities to present Mick would often back us up helping as

a sweep or tail end paddler, picking up tips for his own kayak guiding along the way but also just to learn new techniques.

Mick's support for community groups and clubs meant that many a raffle was boosted by the donation of a Flat Earth Sail and even if it wasn't a kayaking group needing a sail to raffle he would turn his hand to just about any practical task that wasn't already covered, from operating a radio to setting up a marquee; always with the same quiet, capable, no nonsense approach.

Mick was a raconteur in the truest sense and would share stories and ideas drawn from his personal experiences. He was an outdoor educator, directing programs in hiking, climbing, caving, whitewater, diving and sea kayaking but he had also been a printer, a champion in the sport of fencing, an armorer, a drogue maker, sail maker, a builder of movie sets, a designer of theatrical costumes, a coastguard crewman and even a bushfire fighter rappelling from helicopters.

Mick's yarns from these and many other facets of his fascinating life were never boastful and just as likely to focus on some simple but amusing detail. He had the rare gift to see the extraordinary within the ordinary, to celebrate the nuances of life in a world of overstatement and to do so with his trademark humility and humour. He didn't treat his dyslexia as a barrier but rather just as another way of seeing the world, he had an enquiring mind and broad tastes in philosophy, literature and music. Mick's great mate John Woollard, in his fine tribute shared the story of how the Flat Earth brand had come into being during an amusing and whimsical discussion on a quiet tropical beach with Mick playfully defending the theory that the Earth was indeed flat!

One rain-swept morning whilst trapped weathering a storm under our tarp, watching gale force winds ripping the tops off the waves just across the beach, Mick regaled us with a tale of the trials of working as a dyslexic printer on a rural newspaper, especially when the

editor and typesetter were called away and he had to finish the copy for them! The story was so funny and told with such candour that I almost fell off my chair and out into deluge.

This was on a week-long trip, and included some of the wildest and most exciting sailing conditions any of us had experienced. At one stage Mick managed to untangle and re-rig the sail of our less experienced mate after he had capsized. Mick did this whilst rafted up in heavy seas and strong winds, he did it quickly and easily so we were surfing the big waves northwards again in no time. Mick knew we didn't really need to sail in these conditions, we would have made good speed anyway, but that wasn't the point, this was all about the thrill of sailing in strong winds, just because we could.

Long before Mick or I started paddling, Tasmanian Sea Kayakers had been fierce advocates for use of sails on their kayaks but it remained a very fringe activity on the mainland until universal joints and up-haul lines were added to move the sail towards the bow, keeping boom and rigging clear of

the paddler and allowing them more foredeck space for the full range of strokes.

With his usual humility Mick was always keen to point out that his sail was based on the earlier work of Norm Sanders who was one of the first to move the sail forward and it is true that Norm's combination of lines, stays and mast fittings solved a problem that was holding a lot of potential kayak sailors back, but for the Flat Earth story this was only the beginning.

For over a decade Mick patiently refined and improved every aspect of his Flat Earth design responding to input from the paddling community and surprising everyone with his simple elegant solutions. Under his steady hand the sails became ever easier to use yet more efficient, offering less setup time, less tangles when learning and more speed from small, simple rigs. Interestingly, the needs of serious expeditioners on long trips are often quite similar to those of newer paddlers on more modest ventures, they all want the extra drive from the sail without fuss or complexity, they don't want the sail to be a distraction but they do want it to be

stable and predictable whilst they focus on paddling, navigating and just generally making sea miles. I know Mick was thrilled to see his sails being used on so many of the serious expeditions and he watched with pride as the images poured in from all over the globe. I also know how much it meant to him to see images of happy day-trippers after their first paddle/sail with the wind at their back.

I have paddled thousands of kilometres with a Flat Earth Sail on my deck, in heavy weather and sea breezes, riding trade winds to tropical islands far over the horizon or big swells in cool Tasmanian waters, I have felt the hull humming, as wave after wave slides effortlessly under me with the salt spray stinging my face. I have seen time and again the equalizing effect of these sails in helping to keep groups together and lightening heavy loads on long days at sea. As always I look forward eagerly to my next adventure and as the sail snaps taut and the boat accelerates I will remember good times with Mick; his pirate's chuckle, a twinkle in his eye and a story to tell.







*The finish on 2 November 2016 on Saibai Island (image Brett Charles)*

# “Never Forget Your Dreams” A Journey Complete

DEE RATCLIFFE

If “a journey of a thousand miles begins with the single step” (Lao Tzu), how does a journey of 23,000 kilometres end?

Well, with a triumphant last set of paddle strokes gliding towards the finish banner. Having started in Germany on 14 May 2011, Sandy Robson completed her Oskar Speck Expedition at Saibai Island in the Torres Strait on 2 November 2016. Only 5km from Papua New Guinea as the crow flies, this northernmost outpost of Australia marked the end of her five and a half year quest to retrace the route of Oskar.

After five years in five stages with three kayaks along 18 countries, Papua New Guinea, the 19th

country and last before Australia, was to prove a formidable challenge to this resourceful and resilient kayaker. PNG was perhaps the most challenging of the countries, throwing all manner of obstacles at Sandy. She faced them all down, sometimes calling out on social media for ideas and input, always working with those around her to find a way ahead.

Starting in Papua New Guinea in May 2016, Sandy dealt easily with the natural and predictable challenges of headwinds and strong currents. It was the human element that brought strife. Following harassment while on the waters off the northern coast of PNG, she

began to use local support boats to shadow her, providing protection from unwanted attention. The crews of these boats were challenged to travel at kayak speed and to kayak-friendly landings. Their behaviour occasionally brought headaches, heartache and stress to Sandy as some crews surreptitiously took equipment and put their own preferences ahead of their role with her. Yet with much support from local communities, organisations and companies, she journeyed on. Following too much in Oskar’s steps when she also contracted malaria, Sandy took a short break from kayaking and travelled to Cairns for medical treatment and recovery time.



Despite these extra burdens, Sandy used her regular online posts to continue highlighting concerns about how plastic waste is being disposed. She met an array of colourful peoples, often landing to processions and ceremonies by locals in their traditional dress. She was greeted, hosted and cared for by many locals who openly shared their villages with her. Sandy's photos tell the story of how life is lived in villages along the PNG coast, often set in stunning scenery.

Sandy gained much coverage in local media e.g. TV, newspapers, and was presented with many gifts. The low moments were balanced with special highlights: meeting with Sir Michael Somare (prime Minister of PNG from 2002 to 2011), and in what must have been the highlight of the whole expedition, finding and making a direct connection to the journey of Oskar Speck. In Vanimo, she spoke to 84 year old Joachim Tekwie who had met with Oskar Speck in April 1939. Joachim showed Sandy where Oskar had

landed and slept. Finally, a link to that other kayaker, the one who was her inspiration.

Then all went quiet with her internet posts for well over a week, as she and her support crew navigated and crossed the big river deltas and dealt with yet more challenges: the creeks populated by crocodiles, the mud that held fast to body and craft. She made it to Daru and worldly connections again. This was her final place before the crossing to the 20th country, to Australia, to home. Yet, the tough times were not yet over. Now, on one of her final nights in PNG, the high jinks of her support crew caused more grief for Sandy; hotel management and guests were less than impressed with their antics and looked accusingly to Sandy for this disturbance of the peace.

Then, with great poignancy, she suffered the loss of a friend and a sponsor. In June 2016, Sandy had fitted a new Flat Earth sail to her kayak. The sail was from Mick MacRobb; this sail was one of many that he had provided her with, it

was the one that would see her to the finish line. And just as she crossed from PNG to Saibai, his sail aloft, Mick MacRobb was being remembered at a memorial service in Victoria. He had been taken too early, before Sandy could thank him for all his friendship and support. That day, the worldwide kayaking community both mourned and cheered.

Smiling as the first sights of her approach to Saibai were reported online, cheering as the first photos of her hugs with her father, Gordon Robson, were posted, Sandy's followers delighted in her achievement, her tenacity, her strength, her openness and her happiness.

The article title comes from the t-shirt that Gordon Robson was wearing on the day that Sandy reached Saibai. A little internet Googling has revealed its source:

<https://looktruenorth.com/index.php/2016/10/02/never-forget-your-dreams/>



Clockwise from top left: With Michael Somare (image Sandy), Oskar Speck, in Bangladesh by Khandakar Rahman, in PNG (image Sandy).



# 40th

## THE HAWKESBURY CANOE CLASSIC

111 km

This photo provided by Steve Hitchcock epitomises how most paddlers feel, even the fast ones, at the end of the Hawkesbury Classic. Happy but in need of aid to exit their kayak.

The 40th Hawkesbury Canoe Classic was a special one, not just because it was one of the darkest nights in its history. A new shorter race was introduced - the 65km Wiseman's Dash from Windsor to Wiseman's Ferry. Dragon boats were allowed to enter the race for the first time, and the starts were condensed to between 4-5pm instead of 4-6pm.

Here are a few accounts of the race.



*Standing proud before the race with Brian Burke and Wendy Marceau*



## Steve Hitchcock

Second time around, 14 years later, what's new? Well, I've upgraded my kayak to a Mirage 530 and acquired a new aero paddle. Plus, regular trips and training with the NSW Sea Kayak Club over the last few years must surely have improved my performance. Some unkind souls suggested that being 14 years older might negate these aesthetic changes. Well, I had to prove them wrong.

Comparing my paperwork between 2002 and now showed some interesting differences. My training hours this year were definitely longer, including several eight-hour daytime paddles and a few decent night-time paddles. Back

then, race entry and sponsorship required paper correspondence, compared to the online process now. I recall pretty good race organisation 14 years ago, but it was impeccable this year with hundreds of volunteer helpers. PFD checking has become a purely visual inspection compared to the thorough dunking it was subjected to last time. In 2016 I had an expert Brian and Wendy landcrew, diligently preparing hot soup, dry clothes and water top-ups at each stop. Contrast that to 2002 when my non-kayaking friends over-slept between Sackville and Wisemans Ferry.

However the most noticeable change was how many more paddlers are doing faster times.



Compare my Men's Veteran 50+ MREC group. Average time in 2002 was 13 hours 40 mins, this year it was down to 11 hours 25 mins, that's 17 percent faster. The Men's Veteran 50+ LREC group was down from 13 hours to 10 hours 40 mins, that's 20 percent faster. Even the Brooklyn or Bust group was faster, down from 14 hours 50 mins to 13 hours 10 mins, ie 11 percent faster. And of course stand-up paddleboards didn't even exist as a racing group 14 years ago. This year the average time of the six SUP finishers was 13 hours 50 mins

– that's faster than the average speed of the whole Brooklyn or Bust group of 2002!

Are we all paddling 10 to 20 percent faster? Well yes, but not in the same boats. What is not stated in these results is the significant changes that have occurred with our boats. In 2002 I recall many sea kayaks starting in my group. This year, at the 5pm start time, the three of sea kayakers were practically left standing as the skis pulled away from us. In fact most of the 5pm group were in skis. They still fall into

the same categories as the MREC or LREC classes, but with superior training, performance and hull designs, the Hawkesbury Canoe Classic has fundamentally changed. The majority of vessels are not really canoes any more.

So back to my performance, and thankfully the advantages of the fancy new sea kayak and NSWSKC experience outweighed the disadvantage of an ageing body - I proudly wiped one hour off my PB. If I continue the 14-year trend, I'll achieve around 12 hours in 2030.



## Adrian Clayton

Not sure what to say about the 40th HCC. A bit disappointed in my performance given the prep I'd put into the event. The upsides: negotiating the challenges of a very dark night without incident; the light show put on by the phosphorescence streaming off the bow and blades coupled with a clear star-lit sky in the pre-dawn light; experiencing the great sense

of community that the event engenders.

I had hopes of completing the distance in around 11 hours, which was highly dependent on getting good wash rides throughout. My strategy was thwarted right from the start because I didn't realise that I was carting a good deal of weed with my rudder for the first four or five kilometres and thus expended more energy trying to keep up. Despite leaving Sackville only a couple of minutes behind schedule I arrived at

Wisemans Ferry nearly half an hour later than planned. This was caused by underestimating the impact of the incoming tide coupled with an unscheduled five minute stop to fix my hydration system at Point F.

A 30 minute break at Wisemans and agreeing to accompany another paddler for the 40 kilometres to the finish had me taking a tad over 13 hours to complete the event.

I think a lot of paddlers struggled

with darkness during this leg. It wasn't an issue for me as I used MBSDS\* (as opposed to GPS) in conjunction with the official race maps (modified) to negotiate the twist and turns in the river in the inky blackness.

A couple of paddling mates outside of the Club, Lothar Metzner and Phil Wicks, formed my land crew. They were HCC novices but did a sterling job. I need to thank Rae Duffy for her help in my preparation and Trevor Waters for his support during the race.

\* Matt Bezzina Spray Deck System (patents pending?) (see image below).



## Ruby Ardren

Oh my, the darkness! The number of people I heard/ saw bumping into things in the night. You would see two cyalumes (glow sticks) ahead of you on the river and it was impossible to tell whether it was two boats or one boat sideways, which is critical information when shooting down the river at 10km/hr. I managed to avoid the pontoons, trees, buoys and boats to finish the race in a very similar time to last year. I was very happy with my result on handicap, and I'm pretty proud to have completed five events.

I keep coming back to this race because of the fitness benefits, my improved ability to talk myself out of needing to go to the toilet, see things in the dark (real or imagined), and endure storms. I no longer get nauseous during the race, and this year I didn't even get a sore bum (with no padding on my seat) or a single blister. There are added



bonuses like the companionship in the lead up to and during the race and the bio-luminescent algae that were prolific from Spencer; apparently safe to swim in but avoid the shellfish that eat it!



## John Duffy

I really look forward to each year's HCC but I can say I didn't enjoy this one as much. I take the preparation seriously (probably too seriously) and do lots of long sessions but I had lots of problems with my seating and that detracted from the exhilaration of completing another one. No excuses. I didn't find the darkness too bad although not taking the sharp right after Low Tide Pitstop and instead going straight suggests even experienced HCC'ers get caught out when exhausted. It was great to see the extra numbers this year and that the event still has a lot of life in it. I also thought the compressed start worked well, as boats were less spread out and there was usually somebody close by to talk to. I'll be back.

## 2016 Results

| Name                                | Class                  | Boat             | Time          |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------|---------------|
| Ruby Ardren                         | WVet40+ LREC           | Elliots Renegade | 11:03:40      |
| Mark Clarkson                       | BoB                    | Mirage 580       | 15:07:12      |
| Adrian Clayton                      | MVet60+ UN1            | Valley Rapier    | 13:07:24      |
| John Duffy                          | MVet50+ UN1            | Sladecraft Sonic | 11:22:12      |
| Steve Hitchcock                     | MVet50+ MREC           | Mirage 530       | 13:13:26      |
| Andrew Kucyper                      | BoB                    | Mirage 580       | 18:23:15      |
| Rodrigo Matamala                    | Open ORS1              | Think Uno Max    | 10:01:12      |
| Rob Mercer                          | MVet50+ LREC           | Sladecraft SLR   | 10:15:10      |
| Cathy Miller                        | LVet50+ LREC           | Mirage 583       | 13:46:48      |
| Anne Moore (with Sue Smith)         | LVet50+ K2             | K2               | Didn't finish |
| Mark Sundin                         | MVet40+ LREC           | Sladecraft SLR   | 10:15:59      |
| Martin Vanderpoel                   | BoB                    | Mirage 580       | 11:52:36      |
| Caroline Marschner                  | Wisemans Dash (65 km)  | Q-Kayaks Penguin | 10:15:00      |
| Dirk Schneider                      | Wisemans Dash (65 km)  | Q-Kayaks Penguin | 10:15:00      |
| Meg Thornton (with Trina Whittaker) | Wiseman's Dash (65 km) | Mirage 680       | 08:52:00      |



## Rob Mercer

I only bought the SLR1 about a month out and I must admit I wasn't sure I would compete until just before the race as I only had four training sessions in the boat beforehand. These four sessions were the only flat water practice that I did for the race so I was really depending on my regular sea kayak and ski paddling for general fitness. I also had encouragement and paddling tips from Mark and also the Sutherland Shire Canoe Club's Hawkesbury paddlers, especially Bob Turner whose advice on how to approach the race was invaluable and Steve Dawson who helped me with navigation.

**Low points:** Before Wiseman's I was jammed in the fork of a tree for around 10 minutes and later, with less than 10 km to go, I hit a jetty forcing me to capsize and costing me more time wading ashore to empty the cockpit and unsuccessfully search for my GPS, hydration packs and hat.

**High points:** The sights, smells and sounds of the river, the buzz of paddling in groups and watching the light slowly fade out of the sky. The wonderful smiles and enthusiasm of land crew (thanks Suzanne) and volunteers, and the hypnotic bobbing and weaving of other paddler's cyalumes, as we passed one another in the inky darkness. Discovering the voice of the guy who helped dislodge my boat from the fork of a tree actually belonged my mate and business partner Mark Sundin. Coffee and bacon and egg roll at the finish (thanks Davlin). Receiving the news that the GPS I lost during the jetty altercation had been found by Greg Hillier on his way down the river.

It was my first HCC in a single and considering how eventful the evening turned out to be I was happy with

a time of 10:15, and had no serious aches or pains when I woke up the next day. My hydration and nutrition worked well and my focus on form over winter, especially on the ski, had allowed me to get away with very little flat water distance training. I am not really sure I know how to avoid running into things in the intense darkness out on the river but now I have year to work on it and a target time to better.

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This is an excerpt from Mark's full account of his HCC paddle on the EK Blog at [www.expeditionkayaks.com](http://www.expeditionkayaks.com)

## Mark Sundin

At about 45km I ducked under a branch that my cyalume light illuminated dull green moments before it would have coat-hangered me, and on the other side of the tree there was a boat stopped dead. In fact it didn't even look like it was floating. I asked the paddler if he was okay, and he said 'actually not really'.

The conversation from there went like this:

*Mark 'Can I help you'*

*Paddler 'Yes, I think you'll have to, I'm stuck hard in a tree'*

*Mark 'Have you tried back paddling'*

*Paddler 'Yes but I'm too far up between the branches'*

*Mark 'OK, I'll come alongside and see if I can free you up'*

I pulled alongside one gunwale and the tree blocked me from getting closer, so backed up and came along the opposite side.

*Mark (in best I'm-in-charge-now-mate-do-as-I-say voice) 'OK, I'm going to lean over your deck and try and prise your boat out backwards'*

*Paddler 'Who is this?'*

*Mark 'I'm Mark'*

*Paddler (chuckling) 'Mr Sundin!'*

*Mark 'Who's this?'*

*Paddler 'It's Rob!'*

A healthy dose of hilarity ensued, firstly because it was so dark we couldn't see one another, and secondly because we were so bloody frazzled by near enough to 50km of effort that we didn't even recognise one another's voices! It just goes to show you where the race takes you mentally. Eventually we freed Rob's bow from the oversized slingshot frame he'd perfectly bisected, and took off together to make up lost time, after I reminded him that those seven minutes he'd lost I was gonna get back on recourse for assisting a stricken paddler!



# Rolling Practice in the Heart of Winter

ADRIAN CLAYTON

During July and August this year the Club conducted five mid-week two-hour evening pool rolling sessions. Four were held at the Sans Souci Leisure Centre on the Georges River and one was at the Valentine Pools complex on Lake Macquarie. Both of the pools were heated. More than 20 Club members (some of whom backed up for multiple sessions) took advantage of the opportunity.

The participants each had different objectives for the sessions they attended. Some wanted to work on improving the reliability of their existing rolls while others chose to work on developing new rolls. There were a small number of non-rollers who came along to be exposed to the dark arts of rolling for the first time. All made encouraging progress and at least one was rolling with good form at the end of the sessions.

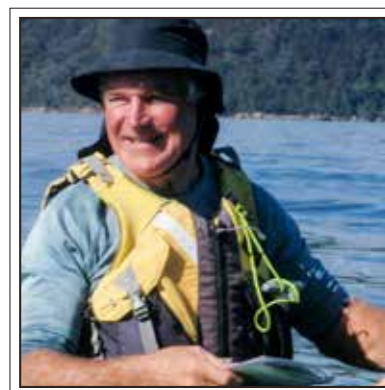
Some participants were provided with video clips of their rolls on the night for the purpose of self-evaluation and allowing comparison with the rolls demonstrated in The Kayak Roll training video at a later time. Post-session feedback has indicated that being able to do such a review proved to be a very effective way of identifying specific areas where more work needs to be done to improve technique.

Each session had at least two of the Club's instructors present to offer advice or provide tuition – Harry Havu (“...the tall very calm gentleman...”), Megan Pryke, Campbell Tiley and I each attended at least one session. The sessions also provided Sea Instructor candidates Chuck Murphy, Tony Murphy and Matt

Bezzina an opportunity to further their experience in providing rolling tuition.

Supplementing this article is a first-hand account of the sessions he attended by Alastair Morris, whose roll is a work in progress. Much of Alastair's article reflects the feedback provided by many of the other participants – particularly in respect of the merit of the sessions and wanting to see them offered again on the Club's winter training program.

Of the two venues used, the Valentine Pools complex was the more suitable. Apart from being cheaper to hire, the pool space allowed us to have five kayakers in the water at the same time compared with three at Sans Souci. There were other aspects regarding the Sans Souci pool, which make it unlikely that we will use it again. If the Club is to continue offering Sydney-based winter



indoor heated pool rolling sessions then a better venue needs to be found. If you have any suggestions please let the Club's Training Coordinator, Nick Blacklock, know.

*Images below: Caroline Marschner pulls off her first roll at the Sans Souci pool; Mark Clarkson working on his Pawlata roll in the Valentine pool*





# In Pursuit of the Holy Grail

ALASTAIR MORRIS

In my mind being able to roll your kayak is up there with finding the holy grail (sea kayaking now being elevated to a spiritual experience!). So it was with great interest that I read a club email announcing rolling classes in a heated indoor pool.

I applied on the off-chance that a place would become available as I am a novice roller and the sessions were primarily aimed at existing rollers being able to practise. However, luck was on my side, somebody pulled out and I was in.

Adrian Clayton, the activity coordinator, recommended viewing The Kayak Roll video before attending the session. I had bought this DVD many years ago so it was dusted down, viewed and visions of

a beautiful roll sprang to mind all in the comfort of a heated pool. Reality hits later on.

We met in Sans Souci at the appointed hour and were given a briefing about the night, reasons why the Club selected this particular roll to teach, and what could realistically be achieved based on an individual's starting point. My aim was to learn the basics and be able to get into a good starting position hopefully achieving some kind of roll with a variable degree of assistance.

My instructor was Harry Havu. Harry was terrific and I can't thank him enough for his patience, encouragement and advice. Steps in the process were approached in calm logical fashion and I always felt that with Harry's guidance a roll could eventually be achieved. However, as a novice it's not surprising that the novice mistakes quickly began to appear. Harry remained calm and optimistic. I remained optimistic but a bit frustrated. Then frustrated. Harry still remained calm and optimistic. The pool had to be vacated by 8pm and to be honest I think as much progress had been made by then as was going to be made that night.

Fast forward to the following session - again I was lucky enough to be allocated a place, again Harry was my instructor, again he was terrific. Again I made the novice mistakes -- but then again that is what learners do. I'm sure all this sounds familiar to those that have gone before and now seem to pop up like corks after the world spins 180 degrees.

I didn't manage a roll but do feel that I can move on and practice on my own, preferably in a mate's heated swimming pool!

It must have been very difficult for the Club to set up these sessions and I was frankly amazed to get a place when someone pulled out. Commercially you would be looking at \$150-\$200 a head for this type of tuition in the harbour - let alone in a pool. That so many instructors were prepared to give up their time to teach again demonstrates the passion that they have and willingness to pass on advice to less skilled members. I can't recommend this experience enough and hope it becomes a regular feature in the Club's teaching program.

Anyone in the Club able to volunteer a 20-metre pool in their back yard?

## Saltiest submission **WINNER**

Selim Tezcan, the winner of the 'Saltiest Article' from Salt #102 has been unable to collect his prize yet, as he's off paddling in exotic locations overseas.

Mark and Rob thought Selim's article about the damaging effects of being relegated to the 'slow group' on the NSW Challenge paddle from Terrigal to Norah

Head was a cracker, so they are awarding him a \$100 voucher for Vaikobi paddle wear.

On behalf of the club, thanks to Rob Mercer and Mark Sundin of Expedition Kayaks for their generous donation. Don't forget, another winner will be selected from this edition. May the saltiest submitter succeed!

## EXPEDITION KAYAKS.com



EXPEDITION KAYAKS

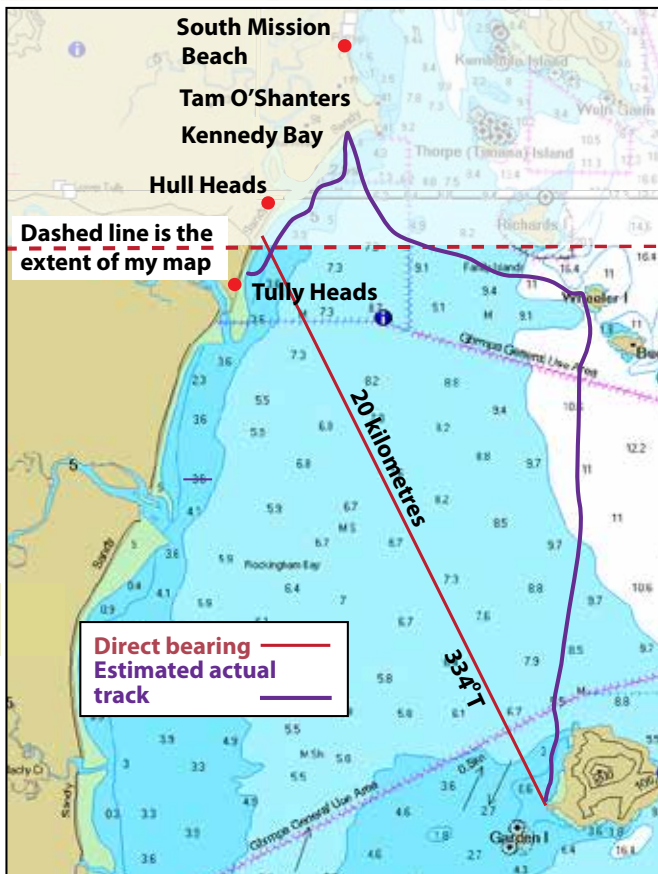
Drop in anytime from 0830 to 1800 Monday to Fridays.

3/185 Port Hacking Road, Miranda, NSW 2228  
Phone (612) 9559 8688 or mob 0417 924 478

# How I Ended Up on a Crocodile-Infested Beach

## My Navigation Mistake

MEGAN PRYKE



In Townsville, I split my supplies into two piles: those to take on my “Tropo Solo” trip (see the article in this magazine) and a replenishment pile. I left my laminated map of the Family Islands in the second pile, which was a bad move.

Long before my last day, when studying my map, I realised that arriving at Tully Heads could be a navigation challenge. I had looked at satellite photos at home, but these were a distant memory. Did Tully Heads have buildings on the coast? My GPS was dead.

I could head west from Goold Island and use the mainland coast as a handrail, but I was not keen on this idea. Crocodiles could have been

straight west to Tully Heads from Wheeler Island. I accounted for minus seven degrees for magnetic variation. Although tricky to keep an eye on my deck compass it was always south of west. I was 20 km from the Hinchinbrook Channel where the tidal current can be up to three knots at a pinch point.

With twenty-twenty hindsight, I realise that I would not have seen South Mission Beach houses from Wheeler Island due to Richard Island being in the foreground. As I knew the Hull Heads had a Coast Guard station, although I had never heard of Hull Heads before trip planning, I assumed it was a bigger than the town of Tully Heads. I wrongly concluded that more

encountered anywhere along my trip. I reasoned that rivers equal estuaries, which then means estuarine crocodiles. I was certain there would be a greater likelihood of resident salties along the mainland coast, especially with more than one river mouth.

This map shows the northern extent of my map and the direct bearing I had noted in red. The purple line is my estimated actual route. I intended to head

populated South Mission Beach was Hull Heads. Around the same time, I did see the real Hull Head houses which looked like fishing shacks. Like dominos, one wrong assumption resulted in more. I reasoned that the Hull River mouth would be north of Tam O'Shanter Point. Hull Heads I thought was Tully Heads. The mouth of the Tully was not easily discernable. It all made sense at the time. However, I did not realise the divergence of my intended course created by the current. It was when I could see cows on the beach dunes that I noticed my kayak side slewing.

Options to monitor the current were limited. There were no distinct coastal hills. The cloud shrouded mountains were beyond the coastal plain, thus not on my map. Islands had been my best clue for transit lines to date. The islands and rough seas were behind me. Not capsizing was more important to me than looking back to analyse a transit line or angle from the islands.

Excuses aside, my piloting skills were well exercised during my trip. However, I failed a navigational challenge posed by my lousy map!

Lessons learnt and reinforced:

- Never rely only on GPS.
- Tidal currents can remain strong near a shoreline.
- Take maps / charts that extend beyond your planned route, especially in unfamiliar areas.
- Never be truly lost and never be certain of where you are.

Oh yes, and Kennedy Bay is allegedly home to a large croc!





# Emergency + App

STEVE HITCHCOCK

This App was designed and launched in Australia in December 2013 by Australia's emergency services together with and endorsed by Government and industry partners. It is a free download for iPhones, androids and windows phones that offers an alternative to dialing 000.

Using the App links you automatically to the 000 emergency services for the voice call, but also provides on your screen the latitude and longitude coordinates, so you can tell them exactly where you are. It uses the same GPS functionality built into smartphones that ordinarily provides directions in Google Maps, to provide this location information to you. So even if you don't know exactly where you are, your smart phone does, and you can convey this to the 000 operator. That makes it easier and quicker for the appropriate services to deal with your situation. And as we all know, every second counts in a true emergency.

Given that most emergency calls are now made using mobile phones, then there is ample potential for faster responses as telephone callers switch to using the App.

For outside sports enthusiasts like kayakers, this is a very useful starting position for any potential contact with emergency services. Obviously if you're well out of mobile range, then it's no good – but neither is your phone. The App works wherever you are in Australia, so providing you can get enough signal to make a call (even if it drops in and out), then there will be enough data to determine your position, which will be invaluable information to pass on to start a search.

I have read a number of stories where the App has been used

to help save bushwalkers lost or injured in NSW. I'm sure it's only a matter of time before this expands to other hobbyists, travellers and sporting codes. I suggest you download the App, get yourself a reliable waterproof phone case, and add this to your kayaking emergency toolkit.

Official Website

<http://emergencyapp.triplezero.gov.au>

Official YouTube Demo

<http://youtu.be/hThHoRNhEnQ>

Author's Note

At this stage, the demo indicates that you, the caller, have to read out the coordinates to the 000 operator. They currently state that technical issues prevent that data automatically being sent to them. They also suggest that this will be resolved in later updates, as seems to have occurred in other jurisdictions.

## Lost Bushwalker

September 2016

A lost bushwalker has been rescued after police convinced her to download and use a GPS-locator app on her smartphone. Police were called to the Mooray walking track at Heathcote, NSW, following reports of a lost bushwalker at about 6pm on a Sunday evening.

Police contacted the 56-year-old woman and dispatchers convinced her to download the Emergency+ App on her smartphone so emergency services could get her exact GPS co-ordinates.

"Having the exact GPS co-ordinates from the Emergency+ App impacted our response time significantly," Inspector Mick Merrett of Miranda Local Area Command said in a statement.

"The App works in both urban and rural areas and we encourage everybody that owns a smartphone to download the App, particularly outdoor enthusiasts such as bushwalkers."

After getting her location from the Emergency+ App, police were able to establish a concise search area in order to find the woman and reunite her with her concerned family.



# Surfing and Rolling with Sea Kayaks

(a one-eyed view)



VINCENT WEAVER

## Catching

I like lots of different kayaking but my favourite is surf kayaking....and rolling.

I usually surf beach breaks and point breaks close to home from one foot to eight feet – depending on the wave and how it is breaking, I start feeling ‘uncomfortable’ six feet and above. I’m blessed in that usually ‘my surf’ is uncrowded and the surfers and I seem to have an understanding.

## Persuading

Surfing in a sea kayak is great practice, as it rapidly increases your skills in dynamic water and will make you more confident in beach landings and exits as well as paddling in moving water generally.

It’s also a good way to maintain paddle fitness and stay in tune with your boat – you can burn off a lot of energy in a short time leaving the rest of your day free...to do whatever you do when you’re not kayaking (there must be something if you think hard enough).

Bay side and harbour side surfers tend to keep to the calmer waters

closest to them and neglect surf breaks. Surfboard riders tend to cluster around car access points. We can paddle to ‘our breaks’.

There does seem to be a level of inexperience in the surf, judging by comments at the last Rock n Roll surf session...

There is also a sensual soothing element to catching waves – you are out in the elements.... sea, sky, spray, sun, dolphins, sharks, back-lit tubes (maybe)...’tis good for the soul and a remedy for our crazy Kardashian-smitten, pixel addicted culture.

## Defining

If you trawl around the internet there seems to be a range of loose definitions for kayak surfing:

- catching chop or swells in a following sea (surf skis like Epics and Fenns)
- catching the foam towards the beach
- catching standing waves (google ‘skookumchuck pygmy’)
- a plunging wave with a feathering lip and clean surfable face where you can turn (my preferred option but not Teahupo’o).

## Floating

I have owned and surfed in increasing order of ‘surfability’ the following plastic kayaks - Valley Nordkapp, Necky Elaho, P&H Delphin and my current boat, a P&H Hammer.

Plastic boats are pretty hard to break but I have had seats and sterns repaired.

Rudders - even in parked position, are a weak point in surf.

Skegs when parked won’t be damaged. They have limited value in the surf when deployed.

Generally shorter boats are easier to turn and also easier to kick off the wave at the end of the ride.

Hull shapes – surfable boats tend to have sharper chines and flatter bottoms. Sharper chines will turn faster.

Rocker – Surfable boats have more rocker (like a banana), with a kick up at the ends. A more pronounced kick up at the bow will help prevent pearling and endos, especially on late take-offs with pitching waves.

Slow boats – with you in a ‘surfable’ sea kayak, on a longer trip your paddling companions will quickly





morph into distant specks on the horizon way way ahead of you... sob. Sod 'em, abandon them and go surfing instead ...or rock gardening.

Rock boats – surfable boats, especially plastic, double their fun value, as they tend to suit rock gardening or any environment where there is moving water. Google 'Neptune Rangers' or 'Hurricane Riders'. Those 'over the horizon touring types'/'your ex paddling companions' are really missing out here.

### Evolving

Surf kayaks are short, have rocker, a flat bottom and have fins – I can't wait to see what Santa will bring me this year.... I've been ever so good.

### Outfitting

- Ensure nothing is going to wash off your deck.
- A quality skirt – whitewater skirts are less likely to 'pop'.
- Bring your seat forward as this makes it easier to catch the wave.
- Ensure your hatches are in good condition and well-sealed.
- You need to be snug in your boat. Some boats have whitewater

type cockpits with adjustable thigh braces, ratchet seat band adjustors and a foot plate instead of foot pegs.

- You will have more water swooshing between your skin and anything you wear, so you will need good seals at wrists and neck (the Australian Fur Seal (*Arctocephalus pusillus*) is generally well behaved). A light neoprene surfing top also works well. A sun/rash top will work like a canvas water bag quickly chilling you. That 'getting warm' feeling you sometimes get when paddling for a time probably won't happen.
- I have a helmet but rarely wear it. Yeah, yeah...if you don't need a brain, you don't need a helmet. Around other surfing sea kayakers, I reach for it; too many long boats spoil the broth.
- I have a paddle leash attached, which is against current best practice. Forgive me.

### Stroking (more shoaling ground here...)

Wing – never tried it while surfing but the scoop in the paddle face won't lend itself to control while moving quickly over a wave face.

Large Face Paddles – as above and probably more likely to break in a heavy wipeout. I have noticed surf kayakers in surf kayaks (such as made by Mega and Random) use these.....I'm at a loss.

Greenland Paddles – harder to catch the wave but the tapering convex foiled face gives a large amount of control on the wave face and while rolling. Probably less likely to break or pop a shoulder as it's a 'skinny stick.' All the truly enlightened paddlers use these. Gearlab Nukilik – is my current favoured Greenland paddle for surfing – the shoulders give you a quick tactile 'location' point for your hands. I also like the replaceable plastic tips and the pretty colours.

Breakages are more likely in more energetic conditions, yet I have broken paddles in small stuff without hitting anything solid. A more robust and shorter paddle may be a better choice than your 'gram shy' carbon fibre 'precious' wand.

### Rolling

As per the title you can't really separate the rolling from the surfing. You will need to be able to roll and the need will happen quickly and unexpectedly.



A surfable kayak with its more angular hull cross section may be more difficult to roll.

I dislike the term a 'bombproof roll', as it conjures images of a roll that will never fail. Sooner or later for a whole host of reasons your roll will fail. I average (touch wood) a failed roll once a year.

I also dislike the term 'combat roll' as it seems adversarial and stress. You're not trying to fight the water – relax – it's just a stroke which slowly twirls the boat.

Chances are you won't set up above water, and you may be 'rag doll'd' underwater and disoriented. Wait for the water to lose aeration and turbulence. Stay calm, and wait...and wait. After the long wait, your PFD will float you up. Try for an awareness of the paddle's face angle – rotate it so it is perpendicular to the water's surface, you will rise faster, and a slap on the surface with the flat of the paddle (once you are there) before you slightly twist it for the sweep is helpful.

I usually do a half-pawlatta Greenland roll – this is a low energy roll which works for me over a variety of boats and paddles. The

Greenland paddle has the further advantage of being unfeathered and the same front and back, left and right. Come up smiling.

#### Finessing

Consider starting out small in uncrowded conditions – 'read the water' with contingency plans in mind.

Take the time to watch a break before venturing out - long period swells can have long lulls between sets

See where you can paddle out, usually in rips..... and away from other beach users

Lean forward when catching the wave, and then lean back as you angle down the wave face – you are trying to maximise your time going across the face (and some turns would look good) with maybe a kick out at the end.

In a heavy wipeout I sometimes hold onto the paddle with one hand which can reduce 'rag dolling' – a firm two handed grip while being pulled underwater can break your paddle.

Protect your shoulders, locking in supported low or high braces (yeah

sometimes I extend too much) and keeping muscle tone around your shoulders is a form of protection.

#### Sharing

A lot of surf beaks have many people on various surf craft vying for too few waves – try surfing mid-week or very early or very late. As a paddler you have the ability to grab more than your fair share. Be cool, play nice and perhaps consider only going for the waves that no one else can get.

Have an awareness of where your kayak may end up if you get caught inside by a sneaker set or wipe out – surfers with their 'duck diving' low profiles tend to pop up unexpectedly. Despite all your winning ways and charming smiles, you may not be invited back to anyone's place after the surf.

#### Kicking Out

Surfing in your kayak is absolutely worth doing – you will notice an improvement in your kayaking/ paddling in a relatively short time and may have a lot of fun and even consider a more surfable kayak to add to your quiver!

Sorry - my Delphin is sold.



# New and Old members paddle Cowan Creek

KAREN DARBY, WITH IMAGES BY CLAUS BUSSELER

The idea was for a relaxed paddle from Apple Tree Bay boat ramp in Cowan Creek. Our trip leader Tony Murphy wanted to run a paddle that new members could participate in. We ended up with a good mix of long term and newer club members.

Low tide would be around 11.12 am so the plan was to head out with assistance from the ebb tide and come back with the flood tide. The planned distance was 20 km return and at low tide we could expect to find a beach for a land stop at the turn around point. We would pass Cottage Point on the paddle but this is not a convenient place to stop in a kayak.

Cowan Creek is a beautiful stretch of water surrounded by Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park. According to a book I'm reading on the Hawkesbury area Cowan Creek was used by smugglers in the early days of the colony. Apparently 200 rum casks were found in Cowan Creek in 1842. As a result a customs station was established at the entry to Pittwater the following year. Other than passing power

boats Cowan Creek is pretty quiet these days.

The weather gods looked kindly on our paddle. It was August and we had a chilly start at the boat ramp. However the day was sunny and perfect for winter paddling once out of the shade.

Selim was a late cancellation due to issues with his kayak racks. Note to anyone else planning trips out of Apple Tree Bay the phone coverage is poor and made it hard for Selim to communicate his change of plan.

After a trip briefing we headed downstream towards the Hawkesbury keeping to the side of the creek. The sunny day had attracted other people out on to the water and there were plenty of passing motor boats. While noisy they did provide fun for the team with people catching waves as the boats passed through.

Approaching our turnaround point we could see the proposed lunch spot was in deep shade. We needed sun for our lunch break, as it was still too cold in the shade. Off



on the other side of Cowan Creek a sunny beach beckoned so we agreed to paddle an extra kilometre or two and headed to the sunny side of the creek.

The lunch stop at Cottage Rock made a really attractive spot for a break. At low tide there was enough sand for us to pull the boats up and we had plenty of sitting spots on a big rock in the sun. There is no beach at high tide. A pipe from the creek above directed fresh water out over the beach. Winter in Sydney can be hard work sometimes. Claus provided chicken kebabs for those of us who couldn't resist them. It was hard to drag ourselves away from this idyllic spot.

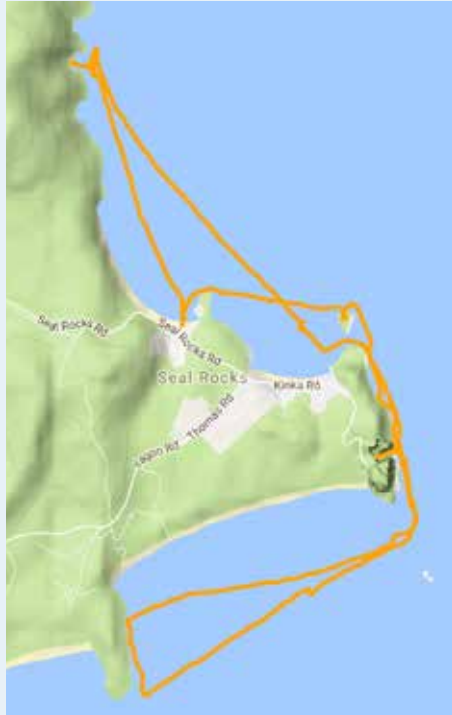
The paddle back was relaxed though the 22 km distance was a challenge for those not regularly paddling. I enjoyed the paddle and I hope everyone else had a good day out.



# Lake and Ocean Antics

## Seal Rocks 15-16th October 2016

MARK CLARKSON



Participants: Adrian Clayton,  
Caoimhin Ardren – Trip leaders

Colin Melrose, Richard Hackett,  
Brian Burke, Wendy Marceau, Troy  
Dunn, Cecilia Goon, Rod Wilson,  
Geoff Dauncey, Mark Clarkson

I've done several overnight trips with NSWSKC but had never been to Seal Rocks before so I was looking forward to seeing this stretch of coastline on the Lake and Ocean Antics trip on the weekend of 15-16 October. We all arrived at the Seal Rocks North Coast Holiday Park on the Friday evening. I got away rather late and only arrived after 9pm, just in time to set up the tent and then retire for the night. From what I heard it wasn't such a bad move because the usual Friday afternoon traffic out of Sydney had created a fair bit of pain for the earlier arrivals. The night turned

pretty chilly, dropping down to single figures which was a bit unexpected.

We awoke on Saturday morning to an absolutely glorious day. Sunshine and blue skies with no wind to speak of. The plan was to meet up at #1 beach, just opposite the camp site, at 8:30 for the trip briefing. We were all there ready to go by 8:15 which was an indication of everyone's enthusiasm to get out and explore the coast. The sea was pretty calm and the wind was light, but forecast to increase to 15-20 knots from the NNE in the afternoon. The trip plan was to head down the south coast in the morning, head back up north past #1 beach for lunch at a beach and then head back to the start with the wind to our backs in the afternoon.

After an uneventful launch from the beach we rounded a steep rocky outcrop where we all gathered to

*This page left to right: Day one at Seal Rocks; passing through the 'Gulch'. Opposite top to bottom: Richard looks back to the cave; 11 in a keyhole.*

marvel at the scenery. Adrian had lived in these parts some years ago so he had local knowledge of the area. He drew our attention to a white tipped rock at the top of the outcrop and asked us to guess what it's name was. Guessing that it was of significant geographic or cultural significance I heard suggestions such as "Sugarloaf point" and "Seal Rock". "Nah" said Adrian, "it's Birdshit Rock". Right-y-o, I thought, that's set the tone for this trip, we won't be stopping for soy lattes any time soon!

We paddled a kilometre east across Sugarloaf Bay to Seal Rocks Bay where there is a rocky island. Rounding the northern side of this I could see an inlet, just the sort that attracts kayakers like a moth





it figured out. Wait until the surge into the inlet has filled the pool till the water is flat, then paddle in – should be easy. So off I went and all was going to plan until the front half of my boat was in the pool and the rear half was about to follow. Then the keyhole just drained like someone had flushed the toilet and all I could do was brace and try to steer my retreat as best I could to avoid the rocks that were rapidly popping up around me. Once I'd managed this I was then met with the surge coming into the inlet hitting me side on. This was not going to be as easy as I thought! Troy and Cecilia watched on as I lined up for another go with much the same result. My third attempt was oh so close, but only a salmon could make any progress once the water starts draining out the keyhole. By now, Cecilia and Troy had figured out the perfect timing (at my expense) and Cecilia shot through without a problem. The trick was to go for the gap as the pool was filling so you have ample coverage to get through, but before it can drain. My fourth attempt was an easy run in and everyone else lined up one at a time to complete the world record of 11 kayakers in the keyhole. It was a lot of fun but it did come at the expense of a small hole in the gel coat on my hull. Maybe that's why it's really called the Keyhole! One day I'll be back in a plastic boat to even the score!

to flame. Adrian was the first to go in followed by two or three others whilst the rest of us waited outside. Adrian then disappeared around a corner to the left and out of sight. The next time I saw him, a minute or so later, his boat was upside down, he was hanging onto the side of it and pretty close to the rock wall. We watched on as he swam the boat a few feet away from the rocks to get some room to do a well executed re-entry and roll. WTF?? Was there a Loch Ness monster around the corner or what was it?

Anyway, one by one we sheepishly paddled into the inlet and then it

became clear what had happened. With about a 300 degree turn to the left there is a shallow passage over rocks which opens up to a protected pool, shaped like a keyhole, which is its name apparently. The problem was that after the surge going into the inlet had filled the pool and abated, the pool empties back into the inlet like a waterfall.

After two or three of us had successfully run the gauntlet into the keyhole, it was my turn. My mistake was that I hadn't seen those go before me. I watched the dynamics of the flows for couple of minutes and then thought I had

We then headed south, hugging the coast and admiring the cliffs. It was amazing to see how the forces of nature had buckled what was once flat sedimentary stone into rugged peaks. The next stop was a cave that was fun to reverse into. After that was a very long narrow passage called "Gulch". The Gulch would actually connect another parallel passage to the north if it wasn't for a small beach just a few metres wide at the end. As was becoming the trend, it was another case of 'let's see if we can fit 11 kayakers down to the end of this thing', which we did. Another

common trend is for a rogue swell to make its way into this sort of place just when you least expect it. Rod and Adrian were the two at the back who had to do some hectic paddling to just make it through the break zone.

Continuing south we rounded sugarloaf Point and spotted dolphins nearby. The well-maintained lighthouse and guest cottages were also very impressive from the sea. The next leg was parallel to Lighthouse Beach to Treachery Point. At Treachery Point we spotted a stunning Brahminy Kite riding the air currents back and forth in the vicinity of a steep gorge. The contrast of its brown back and wings against its white body was really spectacular. Adrian informed us that it's pretty rare to see this species so far south. The return leg was a bit choppier due to the swell and wind being in opposing directions. This time we ducked through the passage and back into Sugarloaf Bay. This provided protection from the easterly swell and the conditions were easy again. Here we spotted whales heading south just a short distance further out to sea.

We headed north in search of an accessible beach on which to have lunch. Caoimhin did a recce of three beaches to the north of where we'd begun our journey and decided that beach #2 had the most manageable surf. All 11 of us negotiated our way through the surf for a safe landing and well deserved lunch break on a pristine beach. After lunch the wind had picked up as forecast and the surf was a bit challenging. One by one we headed out, carefully timing the sets to avoid the big ones that were real dumpers. Wendy definitely gets the award for the fastest paddling. She was out of the blocks like a greyhound and didn't let up until the beach was far behind. We were on track for a 100 percent successful exit when Troy got caught broadside to a wave and had to make a wet exit. The next one went to plan. We all had

the wind behind us going home and made good speed home to #1 beach. Inconveniently, there was a wedding taking place on the beach and kiddies playing in the waves where we wanted to land. To the best of my knowledge the bride and groom are still married and the kiddies are all alive and well so it qualifies as an incident-free landing. Some of us returned to the sea for various reasons like grade 2 tasks and surfing and were rewarded with multiple whale sightings not far off the beach.

The most memorable aspects of the Saturday evening's camping were Geoff and Wendy's Thai curry and entertainment from a group of South American backpackers. We were very amused by the antics of the caretaker who dashed into the camp kitchen at 10:30pm and tried to expel all 20 or so backpackers for staying without a booking or paying. Most of them continued cooking their steaks (just cut the head and tail off) and partying whilst one of the young ladies disappeared to find evidence to fight their case. After all, where can you find accommodation for 20 people in Seal Rocks at 11pm on a Saturday night? She came back with what looked like a copy of an email and won a reprieve, much to the amusement of the others. Well, there was no stopping the party after that!

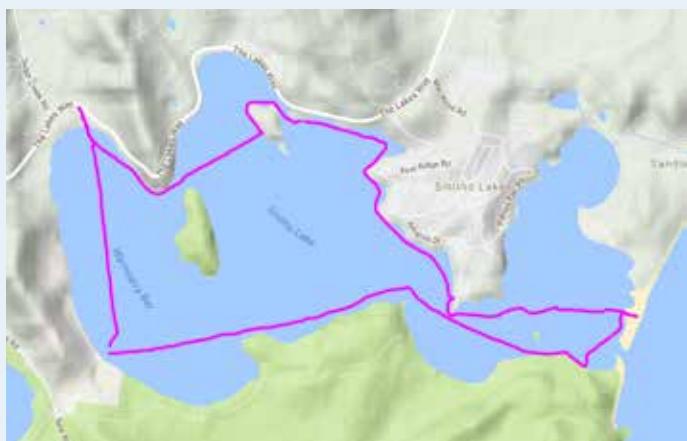
## Lakes

After all the paddling and sunshine on Saturday, Sunday was the metamorphosis of "Lakes and Ocean" into "Aches and Lotion". We had all packed up our tents and were on the road on an inland convoy to Smiths Lake by 8:30. It was just a short drive along Seal Rocks Road and then a right turn into a hidden lane that only our intrepid leader would have known about.

Smiths Lake was an absolute contrast to the previous day's paddle. From lively sea, rock gardens, surf and cliffs to a large flat tranquil lake. It felt like we were in a completely different part of the world. We paddled out from Wamwarra Bay over an old railway line that now lies at the bottom of the lake. We headed north to where the Wamwarra Creek enters the lake with the intention to paddle up the creek. The going was flat and easy because the wind hadn't picked up yet – well it would have been if it wasn't for the 'yellow peril'. You'd be paddling along nice and easy on a straight course when gradually you'd feel your stern drifting out to the side. After a couple of sweep strokes, to no effect, the cause of the interference became apparent. Looking over your shoulder you'd see the South African Leprechaun with a huge smile on his face as he pushed







your stern broadside with the yellow plastic water hog. No one was safe, not even the more senior paddlers or fairer sex. The trip around Smiths Lake was generally a tranquil paddle interspersed with mad dashes for safety!

We had a pleasant paddle up the creek for a few hundred metres, then encountered a huge tree that had fallen right across the creek with no room to pass. That put an end to that venture, so we changed the plan to 'lets see if we can fit 11 kayaks into this little space – which was becoming our theme for the weekend. The next point of interest was a huge eagle's nest high up in a tree at the tip of Big Point. It's been there for many years and no doubt the biggest nest I've ever seen. A bit further on from that on the north shore of the lake we came across the pyramid tops that explorers had brought back from Egypt many years ago. That's the

story that Adrian gave us and I'm sticking to it. If you don't believe that's what they are, you'll need to find them yourself and prove otherwise.

About two hours and 8.5kms later we arrived at Frothy Coffee. That's not an artistic description of a place or feature, it's the name of a boatshed café that serves as the name suggests, frothy coffee. After coffee was world record time again. How many people can you fit on a Wilderness kayak and stay afloat? You guessed it, the answer is 11. How Adrian's boat managed to regain it's shape after becoming a banana is still a mystery to me. The wonders of plastic!

The trip across the far eastern section of the lake was very tropical. The water was crystal clear with shallow sandy bottom and big sandy dunes in the distance. This was where the lake almost meets

*Clockwise from top left: Day one on Smith Lake; Caoimhin approaches the tank trap; 11 kayaks in Wamwarra Creek; 10 people on Adrian's kayak.*

the sea and was our turnaround point. The wind had picked up to 10 knots plus and was behind our backs, so it was fun trip back. Jeff made the most of his sail under these conditions. We arrived back at the start 16.5kms and 4.5 hours later which was lunch time and the end of the trip.

Many thanks to Adrian and Caoimhin (AKA the yellow peril) for organising the Lakes and Ocean Antics. It was a very enjoyable and memorable weekend.



## Our first six months

CAROLINE MARSCHNER

This is the story of Dirk's and my first six months at the NSW Sea Kayak Club. By joining several club activities over the winter months, such as Saturday morning paddles, rolling sessions and Tuesday Night paddles, as well as undertaking our own little trips we found a new hobby that perfectly fits into our mindset: physical and mental exercise in the most beautiful and stunning sceneries, with a positive and supportive community!

### Making a bargain

After 3 ½ years of bush walking almost every trail in the Sydney region we were looking for a new hobby, something new and more exciting! A membership at the Woollahra Sailing Club in Rose Bay had the potential. Dirk, already an experienced sailor, could easily teach me how to sail. I managed the basic sailing skills when we saw a flyer on the blackboard: 'Kayaks for sale, \$550 each, including all equipment'. We always wanted to have our own kayaks and this offer finally persuaded us. It took one hour and we had the boats!

Now we were proud owners of two second hand Penguin kayaks. After our first easy paddles around Shark Island we quickly realized that we had no idea how to maneuver and efficiently paddle them. We needed to join a club!



### Saturday morning paddles

After a short online search we joined the "NSW Sea Kayak Club" and Tony Murphy recommended the Saturday morning paddle as the most inclusive for newcomers.

We asked Sharon Betteridge to join the group and were kindly invited, though we had to learn the wet exit first. To prepare for this we watched some YouTube videos and on the next Saturday we met Sharon, Rob Mercer and other group members at Vacluse Bay to learn our first essential kayak skill. It was already June and the water temperature had dropped significantly. Nevertheless Sharon, Rob and Tim Pearce were determined to teach us how to exit our kayaks. After practicing all sorts of strategies to re-enter a kayak we got our Grade 1 signed off on the same day. Hurray! Now we could join the Saturday morning group and in the next couple of weeks we learned much more about kayaking.

Many thanks to all members of the Saturday Morning Group for their

warm reception and for sharing their skills.

### Whitsunday Island

After three months of paddling in Sydney Harbour and building up a few muscles we decided to go on our first expedition on our own. We would not have much time (I'm a fulltime PhD student in addition to having three jobs and Dirk is an IT manager), so we decided on an extended weekend at the Whitsunday Islands, where we rented two touring kayaks from 'Salty Dog Sea Kayaks' to take our camping gear for a real adventure.

Within four days we managed to paddle 80 kilometers along Whitsunday Island, Haslewood Island, Border Island and Hook Island. We felt like we were in paradise! Every day we encountered sea eagles, whales, sea turtles, Wobbegongs, little pretty box jellyfish, and we were snorkelling the most beautiful coral reefs in this area. When a Manta Ray jumped two meters high out





of the water our expectations of an adventure were clearly fulfilled!  
**Indoor pool - Rolling Session**

Back in Sydney, Rob taught us more about efficient paddle strokes and there was another important skill to learn - rolling! On the club website, Adrian Clayton invited members to an indoor rolling session, which allowed for two unexperienced people.

Learning key rolling drills gave us a kick-start to practice further on our own in the harbour. Thanks to Adrian for the great organization of this session. Due to his valuable teaching skills we made mayor progress and over the coming summer we will bomb proof the roll.

#### Preparations for the Hawkesbury Canoe Classic

As time went by we decided on our next challenge, the Hawkesbury Canoe Classic – Wisemans Dash. We would still have another three months to prepare. Driven by a lot of will power to finish the ‘Dash’ we had to train much harder now. I am not sure why people call it the ‘Dash’; paddling 65km is an ultra-marathon! So we paddled and paddled and paddled, again mostly in Sydney Harbour, but also at Port Hacking, Jervis Bay and on the Myall Lakes to get in shape.

#### Tuesday Night paddle

The days were already longer in October and the water became acceptably warm (by European measures). In agreement with Rob we joined the famous “Tuesday Night Paddle”. I heard a lot of interesting rumours, which made me quite nervous. Rob however was very positive and said that all newcomers would fall into the water and there would be a bunch of great kayakers eager to rescue us every time.

The water conditions at our first Tuesday night paddle were worse than anything I expected (swell of three metres from all directions) but I found everything else much better than expected. The team spirit, the experience and the level of skill of this group is just remarkable. Of course we fell into the water and I got incredibly sea sick, but we were not left unattended for a second by team members and I did not feel scared at any time. Thanks to all Tuesday night paddlers! You are an awesome group to paddle with.

#### The Hawkesbury Canoe Classic

Now the time was ripe for the HCC. I again was a little nervous if I was prepared for this and now I can tell, I was not! Nevertheless the HCC was very enjoyable and well organized up to our finish line at Wiseman’s Ferry. As expected it took us the same time for 65 km as for others to finish the classic course, but that was almost of no importance for us as we accomplished what we were working hard for and we enjoyed every single hour on the water preparing for this event and during the course!

*Top left: Paddling with Sharon’s Saturday morning group.  
 Bottom left to right: camp and beach in the Whitsundays; at the start of the Hawkesbury Canoe Classic.  
 Below: Training for the HCC on Myall Lakes.*



# Cruising Nadgee



RAE DUFFY, IMAGES BY  
ADRIAN CLAYTON

In September Neil and I joined Adrian Clayton and Campbell Tiley on a Nadgee expedition. It's a stunning coastline, which very few Australians are lucky enough to enjoy. The weather and logistics favoured a start from Boydtown, gambling on not being hit by a wild southerly at the end of the trip.

After shuffling a car to Mallacoota we paddled south with a good following breeze to Mowrrie Beach, choosing the lower campsite over carrying tents to the top of the hill. This may have been to avoid the wind or perhaps a sign of the relaxed nature of the trip.

The next morning we bypassed Bittangabee and cruised with sails hoisted along the spectacular coastline, around Green Cape and across Disaster Bay to Merrica River. The tide was out so we took a long lunch watching the toadfish clustered in the pools until we could wade to the upstream campsite.

After selecting campsites we paddled up the river past flowering wild orchids, heaps of oysters and lush bush land to where fresh water is available, flowing over rocks into the river.

The weather held and we pushed on to Nadgee River the next day. After another fairly tame surf landing we chose the elevated northern camp site with views over the beach and river. The next day heralded a bit of a southerly blow so rather than battle the winds we paddled well up Nadgee River and into Wombat Creek where the biggest drama of the trip unfolded: an unsuspecting victim was capsized by an overhanging branch and he and his GPS ended up in the water. Despite repeated dives with a face mask, the GPS could not be retrieved from the mud.

With wine and chocolate severely depleted we set out the next day for Gabo Island and then Mallacoota. The southerly had passed and it was so calm that we all paddled through the gap between Gabo

Island and the seal covered rock off the southern tip. Gabo lighthouse is an impressive sight, built with the locally quarried pink granite. There is a lovely protected beach to land on the western side of the island. After spending some time exploring the island which is home to the largest colony of little Penguins in the world, we reluctantly made the short dash to Mallacoota and returned to civilisation.

Such is the remoteness of the Nadgee wilderness at this time of year, we didn't meet up with anyone else in between Boydtown and Gabo Island. It was a different matter with marine life encounters. We saw seals aplenty, whales from afar and Neil and I had enjoyed the company of dolphins at close quarters for about 10 minutes as they piloted us towards Nadgee River.



*Campbell, Rae and Neil sailing past Green Cape  
Top: Rae and Neil passing Boyd Tower*







*Above left to right: Camp on Nadgee River,  
Rae and Campbell on Wombat River;  
Below: Rae at Gabo Island*

**Log:**

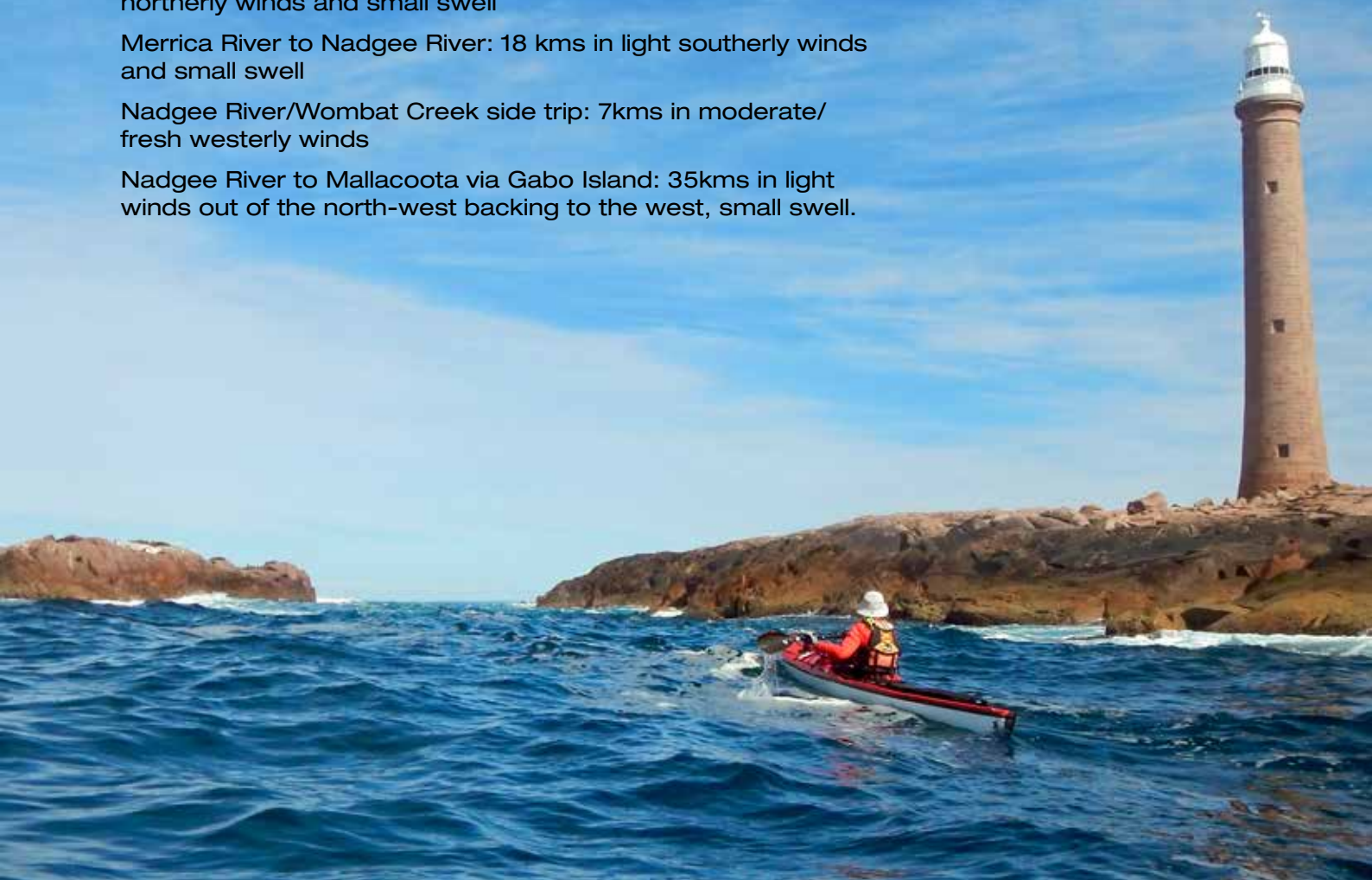
Boydton to Mowarry Beach: 13kms in light northerly winds and small swell

Mowarry Beach to Merrica River: 26kms in light/moderate northerly winds and small swell

Merrica River to Nadgee River: 18 kms in light southerly winds and small swell

Nadgee River/Wombat Creek side trip: 7kms in moderate/fresh westerly winds

Nadgee River to Mallacoota via Gabo Island: 35kms in light winds out of the north-west backing to the west, small swell.





# North by Nadgee

JOHN ATKINS



A trip to the north coast of New South Wales came as a default to a planned trip to the Raja Ampat islands of West Papua. Shoulder trouble ruled out Indonesia but to test the efficacy of the steroid injection I'd opted for over surgery I packed up and headed north. No sure or precise plan but with a view to visiting those sections of the coast I'd always driven past and with an intention to check out the Yuragir Coast walk as an adventure option if paddling proved too difficult.

So from north to south this is a taste of some pretty pleasant paddling options available between Iluka and Red Rock.

## Paddle 1 (maybe 20 km) Iluka-Woody Head

Iluka on the northern shore of the Clarence gave easy access to the ocean. Starting from the harbour used by the prawn trawlers and with an obliging tide providing the last of the ebb to carry me past the long northern training wall, I slipped out and paddled north for Woody Head. The trawlers were coming in as I was going out but there's plenty of sea room round the entrance and once clear of the river mouth you clear their track in no time! Two beaches, and one headland and

Woody Head was getting close, the day was a cracker, slight seas, light winds, warm not hot...the marine equivalent of the baby bears porridge.

Woody Head is protected by rocky reefs which run for a considerable distance north from the point but given the benign nature of the seas I was able to cut in as soon as I rounded the rocky headland that shelters the beach. A couple of sub half metre waves rolled over but just served to hasten my progress to shore. There's a boat ramp at Woody Head but in a kayak a landing could be made just about anywhere. Woody Head is a NSWNP camping area and the Park itself preserves the largest remnant of littoral rainforest in the state. It's a good place to plan a walk when you get out of your boat.

I had breakfast (I left early and was at Woody Head by 8.30 am) then went for a sightseeing paddle round the cutely named Shark Bay. I paddled back to Iluka seeing quite a few turtles. The water itself was disappointing a bit yellow which I put down to the effects of the 'big river' but I found over the next few days that all the inshore water was pretty much the same...definitely not great for a snorkel.

I finished a very pleasant day with a beer at the Sedgers Reef Hotel, won the meat raffle and enjoyed this 1929 classic with a roof and floors that undulate nicely and make you feel like you're still at sea rolling over a gentle ocean swell.

## Paddle 2 + Walk Sandon-Minnie Waters-Sandon River (10 wet and 11 hot dry km)

Drove down very early to Sandon River in the heart of Yuragir NP. This little place is 9 km along a dirt road south of Brooms Head and has a dozen or so fibro shacks and a small NP camping area.

I drove to the river mouth at the end of the camping area and dropped the kayak in, leaving the car keys with the President of the North Coast Fishing Club. The Club has a swish little club house in aged corrugated iron right at the edge of the river with a view across the entrance to the ocean. He was busy organising a fishing comp' for the coming weekend and seemed a bit sceptical about an old bloke who intended paddling to Minnie Waters then walking back to Sandon before swimming the river to retrieve his vehicle, but I told him NSWKC members did this sort of thing all the time and I'd see him in around six hours.





The tide was just on the flood as I paddled out of the Sandon. It's more an estuary than a river; the northern side is protected by Plover Island, the south with a typical rocky headland. It's very shallow with a few rocks sprinkled around but the Nadgee is pretty smart and avoided the nasty ones!

Minnie Waters has one prominent building and applying Aussie logic I deduced that it had to be the surf club. I'd never been anywhere on this coast so was going to be landing without benefit of prior knowledge but again the day was a kayakers dream, gentle following sea, gentle following breeze, lots of turtles and dolphins and some flying fish putting on a show. Along with a small to medium shark this made for a most pleasant two hour paddle. The bonus was that the building was indeed the surf club and right across from it was the very smart Minnie Waters General Store, so after an excellent milkshake I left the kayak beside the shop and headed back to Sandon River up a sandy track that constitutes one of the middle sections of the Yuragir Coast Walk.

It only took one dune and a few bushes to block the cooling breeze I'd enjoyed in the kayak but I made

it back to south Sandon in three hours, pulled out my big dry bag and shoved boots, small rucksack, clothes and crap into it and used it as a floaty to cross the mighty Sandon (50 metres if you don't get swept out to sea).

#### Paddle 3 Red Rock North West Solitary Island (15 km)

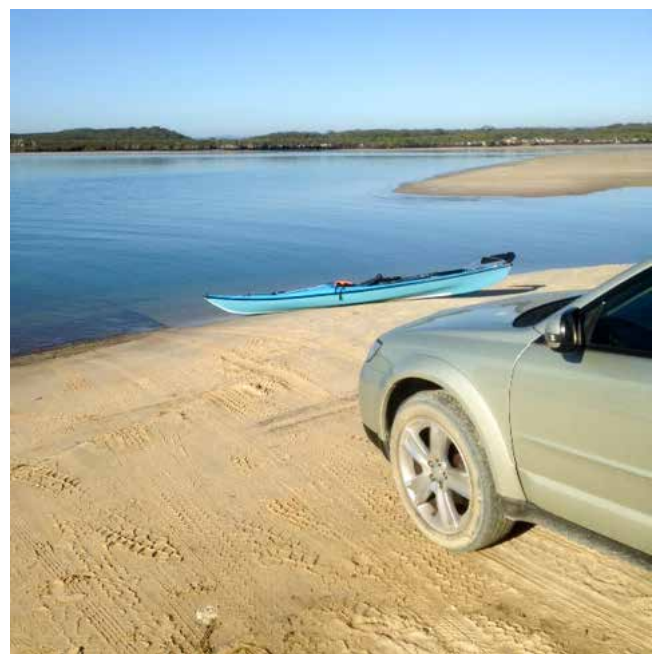
I did sneak a paddle in up the Wooli River because hot and windy conditions made the ocean unattractive, but this is a sea kayak club so let me stick to the ocean.

Saving the best till last is always good, but good is about eight orders of superlative below the word needed to describe this destination! The Solitary Islands have always fascinated me, the confluence of northern and southern species and their protection for more than twenty years in a Marine Park made me sure that they'd be worth visiting and for the first time I was in the right place with a good boat.

The Nadgee practically took itself out of the creek (Corindi River, sand at low tide, big tidal pool at high tide) at Red Rock, we lined up the island and between the two of us came ashore in an hour and a quarter. I had the best 40 minutes snorkelling I've ever had

in NSW and since I've been a keen spearo' and snorkeler for half a century plus, that may give you an idea of the fabulous range and tremendous abundance of sea life round this island. Three or four corals, plate, staghorn, encrusting not everywhere but certainly well represented, morwong, drummer, luderick, bream. So many in places they were hard to see through and then coral trout showing off like exotic prima donnas. I could have spent a week in the water just around this island and from reports North Solitary is better, however I headed in for \$6 whiting and chips at the Red Rock Shop and then headed home to Sydney dreaming fishy daydreams of three perfect paddles on the Solitary Coast!

*Images left to right: Plover Island, Sandon River, 'Fishville' or North West Solitary Island looking to Red Rock, Sandon River access*



# Whitsunday Wanderings

TOM COX, WITH LISA MCCARTHY, ANNE CUMMING, MARK DABBS, MARK FULLER, HUBERT WIEST, AND CATH NOLAN



## Overview - Tom Cox

Owen Kimberley invited people from his regular Friday paddle to set off for sunny Queensland in early August. He was rushed with enthusiastic responses. The lucky ones who got to go with Owen were Michelle Powell, Cathy Nolan, Hubert Wiest, Mark Fuller, Anne Cumming, Lisa McCarthy, Mark Dabbs and Tom Cox.

We booked our campsites ahead through [www.qld.gov.au/camping](http://www.qld.gov.au/camping).

Anne and Cathy arranged for The Kayak Courier <http://www.thekayakcourier.com.au> to transport their boats from Sydney to Airlie Beach, and in due course to take them back again. Anne and Cathy flew there and back. The rest of us drove up over three or four days, singly or in pairs, and then camped a couple of nights at Airlie Beach. A couple of days before we were to launch, a kayaker was attacked by a crocodile off the coast about 300 km south, and spent three days on an island before setting off his PLB and being lifted out by helicopter. It gave us something to joke about. Two nights before we launched, we sat in an al fresco restaurant in Airlie Beach making up a story, Nine Little Kayakers, about how we each might meet our demise.

August is a great time to visit the Whitsundays. Temperatures are in the low to mid – twenties, and winds are generally from the south and

south east, and not too strong. It is a most wonderful seascape and landscape. The beaches are arcs of white sand or coral, edged by luxuriant growth, palms studding the edge of the beach. The NPWS campsites sit right on the edge of the beaches, three or so metres from the water. Tides can range up to around three metres. The islands are lush with dense rainforests and tall grand hoop pines. Our campsites were the idyllic tropical islands of which dreams are made. We went for a few walks to some of the peaks, from which we had panoramic views.

We were up before dawn on Tuesday 9 August, and ready to launch at Shute Harbour at 8am, before the tide ran out too far. Little did we know rising in the dark was to become a recurring pattern. That night we camped on Henning Island. The following day we paddled around the southern end of Whitsunday Island and camped at Whitehaven Beach for two days. Scamper <http://whitsundaycamping.com.au> did a water drop for us, so that we didn't need to carry 30 litres of water from the start. On the fourth day we flew up the east coast of Whitsunday and Hook Islands, the wind at our backs, to camp at Maureen's Cove. We were to have had two nights here, but the forecast strengthening winds meant we set out after one night to get to Cid Harbour and Dugong Beach

(Whitsunday Island), with a night at Curlew Beach (Hook Island). Dugong is reasonably protected from the southerlies. It has shelters under which we retreated, trying to get out of the rain and avoid getting cold, and reading to pass the time. We had a couple of days and nights at Dugong Beach, hoping the weather would ease off enough for us to paddle back to the mainland. Sadly it didn't, so Owen called Scamper. We were up in the early hours, ready for a pickup at 8am. Scamper ferried us back to Shute Harbour, heaving and bouncing over the wind-whipped swell. We unloaded our gear, and prepared for the trip home. Hubert and I drove back on the inland route in two long days.

We all agreed it was a most wonderful trip. We could easily have stayed much longer.

## Camping in the Whitsundays - Lisa McCarthy

For me, there is nothing that can compare with a camping holiday. It's my favourite pastime, regardless of the means used to get to one's campsite.

This time, our camp sites were the picture-postcard type. Our first night was spent at Northern Spit, on Henning Island. Grassy, roomy with amazing views, and wow... they even had toilets WITH toilet paper. What a spoil! However,



things got even better...no, not the toilets! Our next two nights spent at Whitehaven beach site were both beautiful and memorable.... Once the crowds had departed it was hard to compete with this truly spectacular spot. Glorious white sandy beach, turquoise water, forested island peaks to frame the setting...it really doesn't get much better than this. No wonder it's known world-wide. (Of course it is!) Its reputation for this was being threatened by the local wildlife, which seem to know who was just that tad too relaxed and made off with various 'prizes', sometimes of a dubious nature...

Maureen's Cove on Hook Island was a treat, too. It was such a spoil to have campsites that come with picnic tables to boot. We could have left our camping chairs at home. I think I might have to start insisting on this style of camping for the future. The snorkelling here was supposed to be fabulous... unfortunately, it was rather disappointing. It appears that the coral must have been damaged by the various kinds of boat traffic, or perhaps from violent storms....it was very sporadic.

Curllew Beach campsite was appropriately named. These are one of my very favourite birds, so

I was over the moon that we were sharing their home with them... or vice versa. This was a rather small campsite that required a bit of searching for that special flat spot for the night. However, a picnic table and toilet (OMG no toilet paper supplied for this one!!!!) were still provided.

Dugong Beach campsite is well regarded in the Whitsundays. It has a protected bay which provides shelter from the fierce winds for many sailing vessels. Due to the forecasted strong winds, the number of vessels anchored there was amazing, and continued to increase during our stay. There was ample camping, with good facilities including sheltered picnic tables, roomy toilet facilities, seemingly designated camping spots; these included some almost secluded areas that one could really 'get away' from other campers. Every camp was special in its own way.

#### Whitehaven Beach - Anne Cumming

Whitehaven is a stunning beach. As you round the corner from the south, it stretches for 6 km of white sand and blue waters. When we were there, the bay was full of chartered yachts. The National Parks camp site is set back, nestled

in amongst the trees. It looks deserted, except that day trippers arrive by the boatload! Some look a bit shell shocked, perhaps just landed from overseas and onto a boat! I went for a morning jog to the end of the beach where some more yachts sheltered on a small lagoon. I was amused by three small helicopters at this end of the beach, each with a beautiful couple sipping their bubbly beneath sun umbrellas and taking selfies. In the middle of the day hundreds of day trippers were scattered on the beach, communing with nature. By about 3pm they were strung out in queues to board their jet boats for the return to whence they came. The campers get to enjoy the gorgeous sunset in peace.

There was a chance to walk to a lookout for a view of the previous day's paddle and further to explore next time.

Look out for the lace monitors and crows at the campsite. The crows loved the silver wrapping of the water that we had delivered, dive bombing and puncturing it, and any hanging rubbish.



## Food and company - Mark Fuller

### *Food*

Journeys of this length and nature typically commence and end quite differently. This trip was no different. The communal visit to the supermarket involved spirited discussions on cheese dissolution rates, potato chip flavours and whether baby bel has any taste whatsoever. A highlight was seeing Hubert's trolley with over sixty litres of water stacked in it and shop assistants running around everywhere looking for more.

Fresh meat, fruit and veges eventually were consumed, rotted or swapped as we settled into our daily routines of cereals, wraps, avocado and canned meat. Envious eyes would occasionally dart from person to person as someone would produce a fresh or unique item.

As the end drew near we resorted to the usual lentils, peanut butter, dehydrated food and those packet Indian meals, all spiced by an increasing quantity of parmesan cheese, pesto, garlic and ginger to drown the taste. Highlights were

Lisa and Mark's bravery in cooking brekkie as the barge was on approach, Anne's yummy rum and Lisa's nightly custard.

### *Company*

A huge part of any journey is who you meet along the way. Some of our more memorable encounters include:

- likely drug smugglers/dealers who would operate along one or two of the beaches late at night.
- a New Zealand couple paddling a double sea kayak. He had only one leg but it didn't stop him in any aspect, including hiking up the highest peaks in the Whitsundays. The stories of his adventures were inspiring.
- annoying sailors from a broken down yacht constantly coming ashore to use our camp toilet all through the night.
- large goannas insisting on using our campsite as exercise yards.
- the hordes of tourist day-trippers transported in and out of Whitehaven Beach each day, it was like watching peak hour commuters waiting for the bus.

The most memorable company we came across was each other - the stories at night, the banter, finding out more about each other, and the lasting friendships.

## Paddling with whales - Hubert Wiest

We were all very keen to spot some whales. Beginning of August is the perfect season around the Whitsundays. But the whales kept us waiting for the first two days. On day three we launched from beautiful Whitehaven Beach just for a little excursion. We aimed for the coral reef of Haslewood Island. A snorkel trip was on the agenda. When we crossed the channel, we suddenly saw the blow of whale. We were all quite excited and paddled a bit closer, but the whale dived away. It took a while until the whale showed up – this time right next to us. And we saw it was a female whale together with its calf. We had the chance to accompany them at a safe distance for a little while on their long way to Antarctica. It was a wonderful experience to watch these gentle giants.

*Whale and calf spotted near Haslewood Island*





### Sailing the Whitsundays - Mark Dabbs

"Whoa there", again...as the kayak broaches on another wave. The sails are up, the waves are from the stern at 1-1.5 metres and the wind, also from the stern, is hitting around 15-20 knots. Great fun, in other than a fully loaded boat.

A pre-requisite for joining Owen's trip was to bring a sail. And knowledge of how to use it! We all knew the penalty of no sail so we were good little boys and girls and obliged. And did we enjoy it! Some of the waves gave fantastic rides chewing up the kilometres, water spraying out from the bow and the odd nose dive. What appeared to be a long day turned into a pleasant, quick, exhilarating down-wind trip.

Some of us got the hang of it and found the deep rudders assisted with steerage while on the wave. Those without rudders did a fair bit of stern rudder control.

This day we sailed from Whitehaven Beach, at the southern end of Whitsunday Island, to the top of Hook Island.

A few other days produced the right conditions for sails up, but nothing to compare with this day.

For those who don't sail ... you are missing out on a real buzz!

### Coral and snorkelling - Cath Nolan

Well the Whitsundays didn't disappoint with regard to snorkelling opportunities. Coral and fish life abounded close to shore off Haslewood Island, south east of Whitsunday island. A small contingent paddled across to



Chalkies Beach, on Haslewood Island from Whitehaven Beach (1-1.5km) on day 3 of our trip. On this crossing to Chalkies we also spotted a Southern Right Whale with her calf cruising by which was a welcome diversion.

At Chalkies we were pleasantly surprised with a variety of hard and soft corals, clams, tropical and star fish. Some drop offs provided for a variety of larger fish species also. We had heard that Hook Island was even flusher with coral, particularly Maureen Cove, however we were disappointed when we arrived. I

think repeated anchorage had damaged much of the hard coral and the fish life was scarce. We did travel over some fabulous coral sites on the north western side of Hook and I understand the Pinnacles also supports an abundance of hard coral, large fish and manta rays... next time!! A great website for coral destinations on the Whitsundays is 100 Magic Miles, also a book, which is regularly updated.

Footnote: Owen and Michelle were walking in the Australian Alps when this article was conceived, so were unable to add their bits of the story. Anne wrote hers on her mobile phone in Jamaica, having just completed the

New York Marathon. Mark Fuller wrote his just before boarding a plane to South America for multiple adventures including kayaking in the Antarctic.



# Tropo Solo

Far North Queensland,  
Townsville to Tully Heads

MEGAN PRYKE



*A refreshing break at Zoe Falls, Hinchinbrook Island*

I planned to escape winter to the tropical realm where every season is summer. It was a short-notice trip, so I did not expect an able taker when I invited potential paddling pals. I had to make an effort to appease my husband who did not like to think of me paddling solo. Meanwhile, I prepared for my solo, sea kayaking expedition.

## The Sunny Days: Days 1 to 3

At West Beach on Magnetic Island with Townsville in view, I received an SMS. It was from Stuart Trueman – how unexpected. “Hoping you were not paddling at Shoalwater last week?” I consider texting back: “Don’t worry Stu, the club’s reputation is intact. The President is safe. The only crocs I have seen are fake ones which I wore on my feet this morning.” I reply with a less cocky message, then embark on the most committing part of my trip being a 26km crossing to Acheron Island.

I was heading north-west, and I had three days of 15-20knots SE winds forecast. Who wouldn’t be chuffed with that? Lively seas demand my attention and the views of islands ahead are all new to me.

“Hello,” I holler as a booby bird flies straight across my bow. My camera gives “Out of memory” message as I attempt a photo. It circles nearby and I enjoy keeping an eye on its graceful gliding as I approach Acheron Island.

Tim Trehearn’s book “Gone for Shore” describes an Acheron Island east side camp. I recall Tim’s description as being





*Acheron Island Camp*

between granite boulders. I develop visions of a secret passageway and landing through a rock garden. Acheron Island was obscured by cloud on the satellite images I had seen. It was mysterious. I drop my sail to get a clearer view of the cliffy east side. Among messy chop, a large brown, submerged creature rises towards the water's surface. I am alarmed. Then I feel silly for thinking that a turtle could be a crocodile!

I need to get a good distance covered over the next few days as stronger winds are forecast. I consider pushing onto Havannah Island having arrived at Acheron by 2:30 pm. I opt to rest and spend a relaxing afternoon on this remote island. Granite walls, the sea and the unexploded ordnance risk confine me to a small, private beach. I am glad that it is close to neap tide cycle as a big high tide could make camp rather soggy.

I write in my journal, watch the sunset and gaze at the islands ahead. An occasional gecko chirp and small waves pulsing are the only sounds.

The following day I wake early and leave Acheron by 6 am. My stop at Havannah Island is prolonged as I need to fix my sail, which has a missing nut. Zip ties are handy things!

The skies are blue and visibility ideal. With moderate winds behind me, the sail lightens the heavy kayak. I'm engaged by the textured seas, as I journey along. I pass by rough and smoother seas depending

on fetch. The arrangement of islands changes, confirming my progress and location.

With the morning ebb tide, the current is with me. I will be close to islands by the afternoon, where I hope that any opposing current will be nullified or create favourable eddies. Everything is going my way, and I feel great.

With Fantome Island shielding me from the rougher seas, I pause for a good drink and snack. "Ker-Thump!" Was that a joy ride high-speed motor boat? No, I reason as I could not hear an engine. I look towards the booming sound to behold a massive humpback whale breaching. Later, while meandering up the Orpheus coast, I hear heavy breath-like sounds. I stop to watch a travelling whale's progress as it rises and falls through the azure water. I see shoals of fish and another huge turtle.

I chat to some yachties at Pioneer Bay, the campsite on Orpheus Island. They are planning to go through the Hinchinbrook channel for the big blow and agree with my Zoe Bay plan.

At my second camp, I become lavish with my fresh water. I use it to wash up pots, cutlery and myself. I don't have the heart to dump it all and settle on keeping about eight litres.

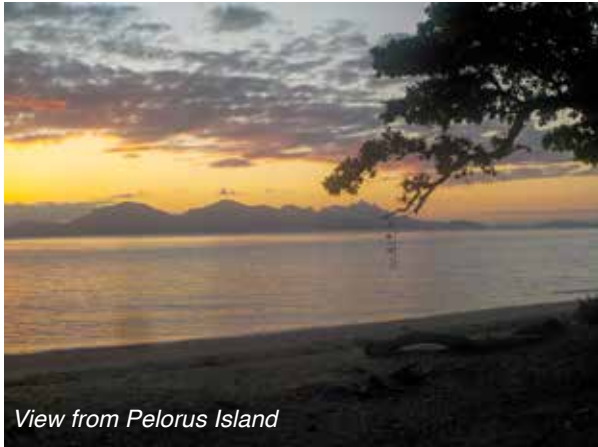
From Pelorus Island's west coast I have a good view of the iconic Hinchinbrook Island. Despite the cloud engulfed mountains I work out my aim. When making the crossing, I reach my set break time. The wind is strongly gusting, so I decide to wait

until the next lull. I pause several times to take photos of Hinchinbrook Island as the light and cloud changes. I muse on how simple decisions when solo just happen. No conflict, no communication, no misunderstandings or wrong assumptions. You are in sync with yourself reacting to the sea's demands and your whims.

En route, I set down on the lee side of Hillock Point. While searching for views, I make a short ascent and get phone reception. After my land exploration, I paddle once again, meandering beside the shore. Rounding the corner towards the southern end of Zoe Bay a gentle wave picks up my kayak. I gracefully curve into the creek with its energy. The tide is low and the base of the mangroves are exposed. I am happy it is crocodile free - unless it is one less than five centimetres tall!

I set up camp, catch some sunlight rays on a solar charger, have lunch and take a walk. Later, I make the 10-minute walk to Zoe Falls. At the base of the falls is a superb plunge pool. I share this paradise with dauntless jungle perch. I am pleased and salt water free!

Sea kayakers are recommended a camp at the south-east facing Sunken Reef Bay on Hinchinbrook. I have decided to head to the more sheltered Zoe Bay, hoping that no bushwalker will mind my intrusion. I wake to a severely buffeted tent when the gale strikes during the night. Rain showers come and go and wind rushes through the trees as I fall asleep.



*View from Pelorus Island*



*Hinchinbrook Island from Hillock Point*

#### Day 4: Hinchinbrook Island Walking in the Rain

I awaken to the dawn chorus. It's not raining. With a dry bag slung over my shoulder, I set out for the day to walk part of the Thosborne trail. The Thosborne trail has lots of rock hopping and rarely level walking. When I reach the top of Zoe Falls, I hear bushwalkers talking below. I suspect it is the four chaps who spent yesterday afternoon futilely fly fishing.

Twenty minutes later, I am donning my cag. Strong wind gusts and showers come and go throughout the day. With several creek crossings, a sodden track, and wet vegetation, I am soggy but not cold. Two hours from camp on a high ridge I figure I will get reception. Unwanted commands to my phone from wind driven rain garbles my messages. I decide to try again later. The rain eases off by the time I reach the Mulligan's Creek crossing. Thirty minutes later, at Mulligan Falls, it starts pounding down. I take shelter during this downpour under the glamorous pit toilet veranda. I write in my journal, glad the bushwalkers have not arrived. The rainforest is exquisite with bright, rinsed vegetation and my photographs plotchy.

I decide to make the detour to Sunken Reef Bay on the return walk. Just before reaching the beach, I come to a creek crossing with a leafy base and clear, knee-deep water. I feel like a kid as, I "look to the right,

look to the left, look to the right again." Then splash across the creek hastily, knowing I am in estuarine crocodile country. Sunken Reef Bay, with its south-east aspect, looks uninviting in a strong southerly blow. The surf is messy, the water brown, and I am glad I did not camp there in the current weather.

The rainforest before camp is gorgeous. The bark of some rainforest trees, which I think is coachwood like, has turned bright orange. By 4 pm I reach my tent, escaping inside to avoid another shower. I complete my mozzie swatting ritual and dry off with a pack towel. With a dry set of thermals and socks on I become nice and dry.

My laminated map of the upcoming coast is a bit small, so I fire up my GPS. I press the upper arrow to examine the coast further north. Darn...the arrow key is not working. I study the A4 Thosborne trail map instead. It is paper and suffering from getting wet as my damp phone was moved in and out of my map case during this drizzly day.

During the night, I hear something shuffling under my vestibule. A small rodent startled by my torch-light dashes away with a prize muesli bar. It was too cute to call a rat!

#### Day 5: Walking, paddling up the Hinchinbrook coast in rain

Rain is on and off today. I cannot find any evidence of my muesli bar, so I pick up a couple of other lost wrappers to add my garbage.

With my kayak packed and tethered I set out for a morning walk along the Thosborne Trail to the north. On the beach, I see a shorebird calling, and then I see its mate. I do not know this species, so I nickname them "Bandit" birds due to the black stripey marks near their eye. (Later I find out they are Stone Beach Curlews, listed as vulnerable.)

The northern trail is beautiful. I pass by a lovely grove. Trees with splayed upper branches crowned with vibrant lime-green leaves; straight trunks coated by knobbly, roasted coffee-bean coloured bark and their mass stabilised by umbrella-like roots growing out of a swamp. The still water mirrors the colours above. It's a resplendent scene. Alas! My camera battery is flat and left my phone in my kayak. At a stand of melaleucas, I turn back and enjoy, once again, shades of green.

At the beach, the sky is mottled with grey tones and the sea is brownish and fringed with creamy surf. The bandit birds don't mind as they strut on the sand, calling to the breeze.

As a strong wind warning is current, I don't take my decision to paddle lightly. I paddle back four kilometres into rain driven by a headwind to Hillock Point for phone reception. The forecast and observations present no reason to think it will get stronger, so I make the dash across Zoe Bay. Occasional showers and the gusting wind comes and goes. It is good to get around Agnes Island as the most exposed for





*Blacksands Beach, Hinchinbrook Island*

## DAY 6 Walking to Nina Beach and Nina Peak

Well before dawn, I am awake, organising and packing. With breakfast supplies, I set out for a Nina Peak sunrise. The moon has set, and it's cloudy thus inky dark.

The Thosborne trail markers are reflective so my torch's light signals the next one. I never fail to feel repulsed by cane toads, so halt when I spot two small, glowing red eyes. I stomp a foot close to the insolent beastie hoping it does not leap towards me.

I think I may have passed the Nina Peak offshoot track when I start a gentle descent. I reach a creek crossing; the downhill may have been due to its drainage, so I keep going. I reach another creek crossing, then another, and as I ascend a dune decide that brekky will be at Nina Beach. In the light, I make better time on the return trip and quickly find the unmarked Nina Peak trail heading off.

My heart rate increases with the steepness of the track. I stop to check phone reception before the summit, as it's not raining. The wind is blowing like billy-os. I take care that nothing is blown to kingdom come. When drizzle starts up, I stop my communications. At the summit, I enjoy the cloudy mountain views. Below are silver ribbon streaks cutting through the green carpet of Missionary Bay mangroves.

## Day 6 (Part 2): Paddling Around Cape Sandwich, Hinchinbrook to Gool Island

After the last pack, I drag my kayak backwards to launch. The surf is soft, refracted waves and seas, not swell waves. I have plenty of battery power and plan to use the electric pump to empty the cockpit rather than drag my kayak further up the beach. Before I get in a larger wave swamps my kayak. I tilt it sideways, empty most of the water, then jump in and paddle out beyond the small break. I turn the pump on, let the

today is complete. I continue onto Blacksands Beach.

To my surprise, with no building or boat nearby, a wetsuited surfer is playing in the surf. I land in gentle surf at Blacksands Beach and locate the campsite. The surfer comes in for a chat. He was just as surprised to see a sea kayak appear with what he now knows is a kayak sail up. I welcome his generous offer to help

carry my kayak. Later he sets off for his 4 pm pick up at Missionary Bay. He paddles around a small headland to Ramsay Bay then walks across the dunes.

The little stream in the scrub behind the campsite was flowing due to recent rain, so I have plenty of water. I enjoy another peaceful afternoon and night with the occasional downpour.



kayak drain as I fit my skirt, shut down the pump and darn, the pump is still humming away. I paddle back to shore to the quiet corner. The only temporary solution is to disconnect the battery, rather than draining it flat. I am disgruntled as I expect rough waters near Cape Sandwich today.

Grant, a local sea kayaker, advised me to expect rough waters near Eva Rock. The forecast is 20 to 25 knots today with occasional showers. The seas maintain the energy of stronger offshore winds from the past few days. I can occasionally see Eva Rock, 2km off the Cape Sandwich, rain and waves obscure it.

I encounter the largest seas this trip; estimating up to 2m at times and directly on my beam as I make my way northwards. Torrential rain and mammatus cloud are to the northeast. I apprehensively scan ahead. Then I realise; I am not going to spot rough water ten kilometres away after paddling less than ten minutes. If I did, I should turn around now!

Having admonished myself, I get over my worry and settle into the paddling. I know weather does not just arrive; it builds and dissipates. The mammatus lumps thin out as the clouds let go of their moisture. After 8 km of paddling, I reach the

rocky shoreline. It is not raining, and the wind has stilled. I stow the sail, have a snack and drink then take a line closer to Eva Rock than the Cape.

The seas start coming from everywhere. Then it seems the only direction is vertical as opposed slosh meets. In different places, small wave peaks appear. I joke to myself that the spires of water look like pop-up dorsal fins of orcas. There are a few small whitecaps. I relax my hips and focus on getting through. I think of the muscles I would need to engage if I capsized. In this murky water, a roll would be by feel. I am alert and kind of enjoying this new experience while hoping it won't last too long. I have been in plenty of rebound, but this was unquestionably different. After thirty minutes of assiduous paddling, with the occasional brace stroke, I am through this crazy, confused water. I had just gone around Cape Sandwich in a mid-ebb current, thirty-six hours before a full moon. I wonder whether the "Sandwich" name is due to colliding currents.

The seas are back to their east-south-easterly march and the trusty trade wind is behind me. I shoot across 9kms to Cape Richards, sail up, of course!

Signs along the tree line identify a no go area and potential fines. Somewhere in the trees are ruins of a resort destroyed by Cyclone Yasi. After a short walk, I find a line of nasty rocks between my kayak and the water as low tide approaches. I wait for the tide to return to reduce solo dragging mistreatment of my kayak. I have time to relax on this lovely, tropical beach. Blessed by a big patch of blue above, with my tent and other belongings out to dry.

With 20 plus knots behind me for the 8 km crossing, it was a blast to Goold Island. I have my last campsite all to myself and plenty of time to enjoy it. I had my GPS in sunlight to dry; in hope, I turn it on. It displays a strange software message then its screen ghosts out.





The campsite is on a spit, and it is easy to walk from the calm lee side to the windward side for a reality check.

#### The Final Day: Goold Island to Tully Heads

Before leaving Goold, I walk one last lap of the spit starting on the exposed side. At the tip of the promontory, a group of pelicans stand with a flock of little terns huddled at their feet. The skittish terns take to flight when I walk closer. I stop; the terns settle back at the feet of the austere, statuesque pelicans. The pattern repeats. When I reach the lee side, I'm pleased to see another pair of "Bandit birds."

My laminated maps cut out before my planned finish location, Tully Heads. I have the direct bearing and distance needed. I had been in touch with Grant and Deanne who live at Tully Heads and had kindly offered to help me at the end of my trip. Grant recommended going to Wheeler Island, contacting him again, then head to Tully Heads. I can see Wheeler Island in the Family Islands; after that Tully Heads is due west. Simple!

In calm, wind protected conditions

I slip by a boat moored near the northeast end of Goold Island. I'm in a pensive mood thus glad not to see a soul awake. Soon after my sail is up and the lively beam seas exhilarate me. I pilot my way to Wheeler Island, which is part of the Family Islands group and on my map near its edge. "Hello," just like on my first few paddling days, a booby bird soars above as I approach an island. I land at 10:30 am and call Grant, who describes what I should see. I cannot see any houses due to haze. I figure it will all make sense when I get closer.

At first, I head well south of west as I can always turn and go downwind with ease and know I need to compensate for the northerly current. The textured seas, which occasionally demand a brace, are quartering on my port side. My oscillating compass shows a snaking heading, so I focus on the shape of the mainland coast. Further along, I spot houses that were not visible earlier. Just to the south of the houses is a headland. About 4kms further south is another headland.



*Opposite: Palm Islands from Havannah Island; Approaching Hinchinbrook Island, Hillock Point in sun.*

*This page: View from Wheeler Island; Friendly Jungle Perch, Zoe Falls pulge pool; Stone Beach Curlew A.K.A "Bandit bird".*

"Bingo," I can see a tower between the two promontories. Hull and Tully Heads are about 4kms apart, and Grant mentioned a communications tower.

I turn downwind for a fun, fast and engaging bow burying stretch. The seawater changes from teal to be taupe. Hmmm, that tower has a roundish head, how peculiar? Maybe it's a windmill, or more likely a palm tree. It disappears before I could identify what it was. Beyond the beach dunes, I can see green hills, evidence of cleared land. I head for the middle of the beach. I don't expect to see Grant's white vehicle as it's 12:15 p.m. He was in town during the morning, and he planned to meet me at 1:30 pm. I look for where he may drive onto the beach. The town of Tully Heads is probably a bit of a sleepy hollow, but cattle on the beach? Really? I have been swept further closer to the north corner where I can now see mangroves. Thinking possible crocodile habitat, I get out in the shallowest water possible. I drag my kayak up a bit, fetch my phone, turn on my maps app and confirm my suspicion. I am north of the Hull Heads and well off my chart.

Over the dunes a vehicle appears, no wait it's a boat, only with no

trailer. What the? It has wheels. It drives into the shallow waters, to get afloat lifts it's wheels and sets off in aqua-mode. Bizarre!

I figure I have time to make my 1:30 pm rendezvous. I hurriedly launch then push into a headwind until past the Hull River mouth. With the sail up I paddle parallel to the shore, just outside the breaker line. I see a small white speck, which may be a car, later it disappears confirming it was a car. I spot a square looking thing that could be a tower, due to my earlier mistake I reserve my judgement.

The number of breakers has increased with the dropping tide. I stow my sail and surf in, drag the kayak up and fetch my phone to call Grant. As I suspected, the white speck was his car. I was quick to Wheeler Island so Grant and Deanne figured I could arrive before 1:30 pm. I landed at 1:40 pm further down the beach than I needed to be.

I felt my daily Facebook posts were becoming hedonistic so stopped after a few days. It was, however, lovely to get the most number of "likes" of a picture of Grant and Deanne carrying my kayak. I reported I had just ended a seven-day solo expedition.

## Wrap Up

Everything Grant told me was correct. I missed our Plan A rendezvous spot by 5 minutes; they had gone to our Plan B point being the Coast Guard station within Hull Heads. Ironically, the Plan B was made in case the current swept me too far north. My preference was to land on the beach, as it was closer to Grant and Deanne's home. Secretly, I liked the idea of finalising my trip with a surf landing, albeit mild surf.

Being solo heightened my senses. Earlier experiences bolstered my decision-making confidence. I could paddle and walk at my pace, sing out of tune with incorrect lyrics and talk to booby birds. This trip has enriched my life. To all those whom I have shared other sea kayaking adventures with, thank you! Especially to Alan my husband, Deanne, Grant and Paul, I am grateful for your support.

PS: I drove through misty mountains a few days later and found this message scribed on a public toilet door punctuated with a love heart!

She turned her CAN'TS into CANS and her dreams into plans.

*Megan Pryke started sea kayaking in 2008 and is a qualified AC Sea Instructor.*

*"Now this is the way to finish a solo expedition. Thanks Grant and Deanne for being porters!"*



| Day | Details   | Paddling Distance (km) | Wind (kn) |
|-----|---|------------------------|-----------|
| 1   | Pallendra to Acheron Island                     | 35                     | ESE 15-20 |
| 2   | Acheron Island to Orpheus Island                | 47                     | ESE 15-20 |
| 3   | Orpheus Island to Hinchinbrook Island (Zoe Bay) | 31                     | ESE 15-20 |
| 4   | Landlubber day. 8 hour bushwalk.                | 0                      | SE 20-30  |
| 5   | Zoe Bay to Blacksands Bay, Hinchinbrook Island  | 22                     | SE 20-30  |
| 6   | Blacksands Bay to Goold Island                  | 31                     | ESE 20-25 |
| 7   | Goold Island to Tully Heads via Wheeler Island  | 31                     | ESE 15-20 |





Living north of the Harbour Bridge we often fail to consider the southern coastline for paddling trips. Which makes no sense as it is a shorter drive than the Central Coast or Palm Beach and we often choose to do that. So we made a radical plan to cross south of the Harbour Bridge. There was a forecast of a calm start to the day with a rapidly strengthening northeaster from late morning. With this forecast we planned a paddle starting at Long Bay heading north to Bondi and turning around as the wind started to strengthen.

The start of the day was magic. Sunny, light winds with a 1.5 m SE swell. Very easy paddling as we headed north. Off Maroubra we spotted some activity in the water. I had a nervous moment as all we could see were reasonable sized fins charging around in the water. Was it some sort of shark feeding frenzy? I was pleased when they calmed down and started swimming more like dolphins than sharks. The dolphins had found a school of fish and were enjoying a feed.

We chatted to a guy on a jet ski off Bondi and he told us that we had

## South of the Harbour

KAREN DARBY

passed some whales. Sometimes you don't see very much low down on the water in a kayak. I had noticed people hanging around on the cliffs staring out to sea. Turns out they weren't admiring my forward stroke.

We turned around at Ben Buckler and headed back to Gordons Bay for a break. The wind had started to increase and Gordons Bay was full of people enjoying the sun and sheltering from the wind.

The dream was for a downwind run back. The wind had a lot of east in it and mostly we ended up side on to the waves. With the rebound from the cliffs and the SE swell it became interesting as the wind increased and wasn't the fast, cruisy run we had thought would happen. If you did catch a wave you typically

got hit with a wave from another direction moments later.

When nearly back to Long Bay over the noise of the wind and the waves hitting the cliffs I heard another loud noise and spotted a huge spray of water out to sea. It had to be a whale and the whale didn't disappoint. A huge tail waving out of the water and plenty more tail slapping followed. I didn't feel any need to paddle closer with the scary quantity of water being displaced with each tail slap.

Turning in to Long Bay we got out of the wind. This is a civilized location to launch from, with seats well located to allow you to stare out at the white caps in ocean while you finish your lunch and contemplate an enjoyable paddle.



*Leaving Long Bay*



*Passing Wedding Cake Island*

# Kayaking Tonga/Friendly Islands

MARK DABBS

Mmmmm ... where next for Kayaking?

M: Has anyone kayaked there before?

L: No.

M: Let's go!

And that is how Lisa McCarthy and Mark Dabbs decided to kayak in Tonga during July 2017.

Tonga is an archipelago in the South Pacific Ocean, directly south of Samoa and about two-thirds of the way from Hawaii to New Zealand. Its 169 islands, 36 of them inhabited, are divided into three main groups – Vava'u, Ha'apai, and Tongatapu – and cover an 800 kilometre long north-south line. It has a population 103,000 people of whom 70% live on the main island of Tongatapu. Tonga became known as the Friendly Islands because of the congenial reception given to Captain Cook and his crew on his

first visit in 1773, because they first thought they would be scrumptious to eat. However, after the festival they were having at the time, they were too full for further "food".

Geologically the Tongan islands are of two types: most have a limestone base formed from uplifted coral formations; others consist of limestone overlaying a volcanic base.

The climate is tropical with a distinct warm period (December–April), during which the temperatures are above 32 °C, and a cooler period (May–November), with temperatures rarely rising above 27 °C. The average daily humidity is 80 percent.

The tropical cyclone season runs from 1 November to 30 April, though tropical cyclones can form and affect Tonga outside of the season.

Sounds interesting! We manage to

have zero days of rain, lots of sun, bit of wind but rarely over 15 knots and a glorious time slacking it in two different resorts, while the rest of you were struggling in cold, windy, storming, rainy days.

Our first resort on Atata Island (Royal Sunset Resort) was a 30 minute boat trip from the southern main island of Tongatapu. The views from our beach house veranda and bed were stunning, 10 paces from the beach and water's edge.

Being the only guest for the first few days we had the run of the place, we were there for a week. We had: one barman, two waiters, one chef, two office managers and various workers to keep the place neat and tidy. Oh, it was just so hard to take!

Kayaking, ah yes, one of the reasons for going. The resort supplied kayaks. Not sure if you could class them as "sea kayaks"





as they didn't have deck lines; nor a hatch cover over their central, and only, buoyancy tank; not of exceptional length (2.5 metres max); a paddle for the gym junkies and no method of giving a good foot drive. However they were exceptionally stable and easy to self-rescue. We didn't try any rolls as the seat belt to hold us in was missing.

A circumnavigation of the island, including sections fully open to the massive seas, took 50 minutes with many photo stops along the way. Included was some fun rock gardening. I think the swell may have topped the scales at 200mm.

The island had the obligatory white sandy beaches, coconut palms, clear water, coral (but not much colour), limestone cliffs about three metres high, few small caves, many small sea stacks, a lovely sandy bottom and gentle conditions. Yeah, it was pretty tough!

Our second week was spent in Vava'u group of islands right up north. We were going to catch the ferry but after finding it was a mere 300km north and the boat travelled

mostly at night we decided to fly, a one hour flight.

This time we headed for an even smaller island resort on Mala Island, Mala Island Resort. Again, we were the only ones there for the first two of the seven days. Our hut was further from the water with no beach front. But the views were magic. A 50 minute stroll saw us fully circumnavigate the island, quite a bit smaller than the last island. A very different resort to the last one. This one was owned and run by a couple who went out of their way to make our stay pleasant. They even suggested we cook our own meals to keep the cost down and insisted we use their commercial kitchen. The local produce was great.

Again we had kayaks supplied free of charge. One was somewhat better than the other but Lisa got that so I had to contend with the double sit-on-top. At least the buoyancy tanks had hatch covers this time! The paddle would again have suited a gym junkie.

The weather was kind. Sunny, light winds, clear water, low to nil swell. The paddle of 8km to Swallow

Cave was uneventful. The cave is in the side of a 15m limestone cliff, an easy paddle inside with great coloured rocks, but no swallows. At this point the coral atoll finishes and the sea bed drops dramatically down a few kilometres. The paddle back into a head wind was great for fitness building in the double sit-on-top while Lisa did donuts around me!

Snorkelling around our island was magical with lots of fish and a bit of colour in the coral. This time there was no rock gardening but there were quite a few small islands nearby that made for fun paddling.

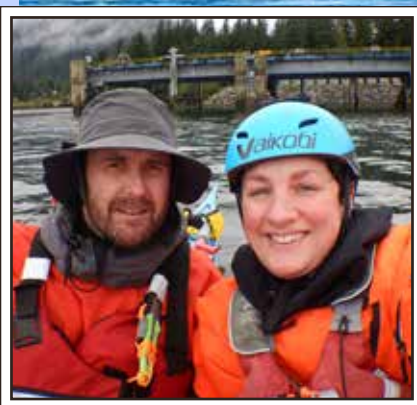
Add Tonga to the list of "visited destinations" for Lisa and me, and for the NSW SKC's list of visited paddling destinations. An interesting but not challenging place to kayak, unless you paddle between the larger three main islands – about 250km between each.

*Clockwise from far left: Atata Island, beach house, Mala Island Resort, the better kayak, Swallow Cave, rough weather at Atata Island, top quality sea kayak/SUP, view from Sunset Resort beach house.*



# Prince William Sound, Alaska

RUBY AND CAOIMHIN ARDREN



Ten minutes into the first day's paddle and a fledgling Bald Eagle with a wingspan of at least three metres swoops within metres of my head.

We couldn't land on a beach that looked good for camping because a black bear was heading to the nearby salmon stream for dinner, a porcupine raised its quills at us, orcas came hunting on a beach that we had just thought about swimming on, the weather was abnormally good, the flies bred like crazy, we forgot about work and selling houses and moving, it was all spectacular, and I couldn't have had a better honeymoon!

Let's slow that down a bit and start at the beginning.

Prince William Sound is south-east of Anchorage, Alaska, and is most often accessed from Whittier or Valdez. Caoimhin and I were in Alaska on our honeymoon and had just completed two weeks cleaning up marine debris on Shuyak Island in the Kodiak Island group. Having exhausted our backs and our will to cohabit with strangers, we hired kayaks and gear from Paddlers Realm (a kayak hire, tour and training company based in Whittier) for a one-way ten-day paddle through the heart of Prince William Sound.

**Packing is hard**

We hired a car to travel from Anchorage to Whittier, and then stayed there the night before boarding the last ferry of the season

to Chenega Bay on Evans Island. The ferry continues on to Kodiak Island and sometimes the Aleutian Islands every week or so during the summer months. Boarding the ferry wasn't without mishap. I had left my identification documents in Anchorage, and had to get special permission from the Coastguard to travel on the ferry. We were almost on the ferry, after piling multiple IKEA bags on the back of a ute and carrying in two kayaks, when the security guard asked us how we planned to paddle back to Whittier without any paddles. We found them on the back of our kayak operators ute. It would have been a five day wait to return to Whittier and no further ferries after that, which meant we would have been restricted to a five day paddle out of Whittier – not what we had planned!

The heavy cloud cover and accompanying rain that plagued our stay in Whittier gradually lifted during our five-hour ferry ride. Whittier was chosen as the location for a navy base in the Second World War, as the constant cloud cover protected the location from enemy planes. We arrived in Chenega Bay late in the afternoon, and set off for a short paddle to our first camp. After my run-in with the eagle, we spotted many more that afternoon,



in addition to sea otters and seals, which kept a much more respectful distance. We paddled into the bay we hoped to camp in and saw a black bear mooching down the beach. After a quick U-turn, we moved on to the next beach, only to discover a bear's dining room and recent evidence of a visit. It was getting late by this time, so we decided to risk it and camped on the beach, well out in the open and with clear access to run away very quickly. There were many calls of 'bear, bear' that night.

We set up our first bear hang (all food has to be hung overnight, well away from your tent), tripped over a porcupine that I was definitely not expecting to see in Alaska, and tried to ignore the smell of decaying fish on the beach.

#### Fish are dumb

Our camp was on a beach next to a stream. All the streams we passed on Evans Island were well and truly in the middle of the salmon run, when salmon return to their birthplace to spawn the next generation.

The salmon on this beach were thrashing their way up a very shallow stream to deeper more stable waters further up. The fish either died in the process of trying to get up the stream or died after spawning, so whichever way you look at it the outcome wasn't great. The fresh ones looked good; the ones that had been working at it for a while

had lost a lot of their scales. Some had impaled themselves trying to get over or around logs or sticks, and some just seemed to have run out of puff and were in the lower reaches sitting in an eddy getting their strength back. Those that arrived at high tide had it relatively easy. The journey into the creek was short and if they arrived just before full tide, they got an extra push. Those that tried to access the creek at low tide had pretty much signed their own death warrant. The smart ones stayed in the bay, swimming and eating and avoiding the urge to spawn. They just had to watch out for the odd seal. We literally only had to dip our hand in the creek to pull out a salmon for dinner, which I think the bears worked out long ago.

We departed the bear's dining room in fresh sunshine and passed the northern tips of several islands before stopping in Icy Bay. It was a long paddle, and I think our eyesight might have been going towards the end of the day. The suspected boats in the distance turned out to be icebergs, and we were delighted to play with our very first bergs that were the size of a kitchen sink.

#### Ice with that?

The camp was on an island that connected to the mainland via a low tide land bridge. It was high tide when we arrived and there were very few icebergs near the campsite. We awoke to a beach covered in icebergs and the bay choked full, which we dodged between for

our early-morning jaunt to see the Nassau Glacier.

Our first sight of a tidal glacier (by kayak) was pretty impressive. Unfortunately it was a bit of a grey and cloudy morning, but there was no doubt that the glacier was dauntingly huge with a field of icebergs all around it and throughout Nassau Fjord. Sea lions were lounging on several of the icebergs. Caoimhin couldn't help himself and paddled up to one that housed four of them. Three abandoned ship, but the last was huge and obviously the effort of removing itself from the platform far outweighed the fear of Caoimhin's approach.

We didn't get too close to the glacier face, having been warned of the dangers resulting from calving of large pieces of ice into the sea and the ensuing fast moving waves. An iceberg turned over just as we passed it, and I have to say I wouldn't want to get caught too close to that.

#### A strange encounter

After breakfast we continued on to Jackpot Bay, where we found a protected campsite above a narrow strip of beach that disappeared at high tide. We were sitting and enjoying the gorgeous sunset when a small boat went past, quite close to the beach. We watched with puzzlement as they turned around at the headland and came back past us again. They then turned again to pass us much closer in. No



*Left to right: Red Salmon with a death wish, Caoimhin approaching a sea lion on an iceberg in Nassau Fjord*

smile or wave; the three people on the boat just looked at us and then disappeared. I assure you, Caoimhin and I were both dressed and quietly sipping on hot chocolates at the time. They were the first people we'd seen on the trip, and we found the experience disquieting.

You orca see this!!

We moved on along Dangerous Passage, and after a fairly uneventful day, set up camp on Knight Island Passage at Point Nowell. We had started finding established campsites by this point, with tent sites levelled out in sheltered spots on a bed of smoothed slate pebbles. We stopped on the steep pebble beach and considered a swim, but decided not to as we'd had one the night before. The water was about ten

degrees, so a decision to swim was not taken lightly. beach, creating a wall of water that they pushed before them, only to suddenly turn at the other end of the beach with a mighty flurry of fins and tails, thrashing the water to stun the fish into submission before gulping them down. They repeated this many times over a period of about 40 minutes, with Caoimhin and I standing in awed silence, hearts pounding and afraid to call out in case we disturbed them.

As they drifted back into the main passage, with an occasional tail slap for good measure, a salmon leaped out of the water, thumbing its nose at the giants who were departing. A male orca with its straighter and much larger dorsal fin drifted past about half an hour later and a local sea lion cleaned up the leftovers.

wind ruffled our hair (Caoimhin grew a beard), we complained that the conditions were getting too rough and we might have to stop.

We travelled on to the mouth of Culross Passage, and were disgruntled to discover a boat-full of young men on the beach at our planned campsite. Fortunately they were just leaving, but the rotters left a pile of prawn heads on the beach to fester in the sun, which we caught a whiff of every now and then as the wind came through. The campsite was clearly a popular one, with established sites, and even a swing seat made from driftwood. We had a swim, relaxed in the sunshine, and collected water (most days you could pick this up every few kilometres). I watched as Caoimhin paddled into



degrees, so a decision to swim was not taken lightly.

We were in the process of setting up camp when we noticed a couple of fins far out in the passage that appeared to be moving towards our beach. We grabbed our cameras, as we hadn't seen any whales yet and were excited to see what they'd be – Caoimhin heading to the rocks at one end, while I stationed myself in the middle of the beach.

They came closer and closer...and closer, until they were practically on our beach. Then, just to up the ante the pod of about eight female orcas, including one calf, took turns to sweep up and down the

It's sunny again

It was about this time in the trip that we started to wonder about the weather. We were warned to expect bad weather and to avoid certain crossings with 50km fetch in case we experienced gale force winds and seas up to three metres. However, we ordered the honeymoon bliss package, so we heard the same thing each night when we listened to the weather forecast on the VHF radio. Tomorrow will be 70 degrees Fahrenheit (about 20 degree Celsius), sunny, with little to no winds. If there was the slightest increase in pitch on the water, or the

the beach after collecting water, followed by a hopeful seal.

We saw many Harbour Seals, but never more than one at a time. They often followed one of us at a distance, with just the top half of their heads above water. I think they spent more time stalking Caoimhin, but as he pointed out, that's because I couldn't see the ones following me. Fishing is a popular pastime in the Sound, so the seals have learned to associate boats with free fish scraps. I'm not sure why they had to follow us when there were streams full of salmon just hanging around waiting to be eaten.



### A missing campsite

Culross Passage was a lovely diversion. The passage splits Culross Island in two and gets very narrow and shallow. We spotted a group of five river otters catching fish. River otters are smaller than sea otters, sleeker and darker and with a long tail. We found we could usually get closer to river otters than to sea otters, but they were still very shy.

There was a little wind, so we stuck close to shore, but it was mostly welcome as a way to reduce the heat. Based on advice we had about typical conditions in the Sound, we had bought dry suits for the trip. While we were packing for the trip, we had opted to wear them throughout the paddle, and not

bother with “wet” paddle gear. Given the sunny weather and light winds we experienced, we had no cause to fall into the water, so we baked. If anyone wants to lose weight by the old-fashioned method of sweating it off, I can recommend wearing a dry suit in the sun in 20 degree, calm weather. The upside of a drysuit is you can float really well – like Dead Sea kind of floating.

We were unable to locate the campsite marked on the topo map at the northern end of Culross Passage, so paddled on to Point Cochrane, where we could see barges being towed up the main shipping channel towards Whittier. We had paddled all the way back to near our starting point, but we were not returning just yet.

### It's raining parachutes

Our paddle around to Blackstone Bay was hot, and so calm we once again had a mirror finish on the water. A large plane kept flying overhead in wide circles, creating an annoying drone that made you want to swat it away like a mosquito. Suddenly it dipped closer to land and spewed out a string of parachutists and cargo. They drifted down to the water just off Point Pigot. The plane continued to fly around for a while, but we couldn't see what the parachutists did next, as they were too far away.

With regular glimpses of distant glaciers we paddled into Blackstone Bay, stopping at a campsite for lunch. A quick paddle up the adjacent creek found more salmon,



and we returned to the bay to the sound of more huffing – another group of orcas was passing. They didn't stop this time, and we only managed to get a few glimpses of their fins before they moved on.

As we moved off to our camp on Willard Island, I veered off to follow a sea otter that was moving at a cracking pace into the bay. Even though he was on his back with his paws on his chest, I was struggling to keep up with him in my kayak. Caoimhin came over to see what I was doing, at which point the otter dived under. A few seconds later he came to the surface again immediately next to my kayak, got a huge fright, as did I, and dived again with a big splash. We saw him surface again some distance away, moving even faster (if that was possible). Caoimhin caught him on video later in the day from the land.

#### Light show

Our camp on Willard Island was almost directly below an eagle's nest that housed two well-developed fledglings. We would see them fly overhead regularly. The island trapped water in pools at low tide, giving us great opportunities for reflection photos. There was plenty to reflect. We were surrounded by snow-covered peaks and glaciers, and apart from two tour boats visiting Blackstone Glacier each day we had

the place to ourselves. We spent a day investigating the Blackstone and Beloit Glaciers at the end of Blackstone Bay. One had lots of tiny icebergs; the other had none.

While the sun dipped over the horizon at approximately 9 pm, darkness usually only descended at about 11 pm each night. We were between the 60th and 61st parallels north, so had about 19 hours of light each day. We stayed up late on our first night on Willard, as we had a fairly easy paddle planned the following day. I was just heading to bed when Caoimhin called to me to join him. A faint green shimmer could be seen in the sky over the western flank of mountains in the bay. I grabbed my SLR camera and found myself a stump to prop it on, hoping desperately that I could capture the growing green and red shimmers that were snaking across the sky. We had never thought we would see the northern lights, as we were so far south, so we were well pleased that we got the opportunity. I was even more excited when after returning to civilisation I was able to adjust the light on my 30-second exposures to show a sky full of colour that I never dreamed I had captured.

#### Racing the flies

The warm weather had taken its toll by now and led to a situation that was both annoying and funny.

Warm, calm weather is perfect for flies. They love it and breed like crazy in large numbers. And then they hang around you in clouds of loving devotion, following you wherever you go. Paddling fast and away from land doesn't help. They drop behind a little, but as soon as you stop, they catch up to shower you with affection again, covering your face with little kisses. Caoimhin didn't seem to appreciate them much, and expended a lot of energy trying to out-distance them. It didn't work (that was the funny bit). We've got lots of photos of our little friends, who ruined many a glacier shot. Thankfully we were advised to take head nets, which kept the 'no-see-ums' away. The flies kept us company for another night on Willard Island.

#### Traffic

It was time to head back to Whittier and into the main shipping channel. We left the quiet retreats behind, stopping for one night in Passage Canal near Trinity Point, listening to boats drone by until the wee hours. It was the start of a long weekend in Alaska and everyone was making the most of the good end-of-season weather. We still had enough privacy, but didn't set up our tent until dark, as we didn't want to attract attention from the hordes passing by. We then had a short paddle





into Whittier under increasing cloud cover, where we returned our gear, shared our stories with Ryan Collins from Paddler's Realm (top bloke), and headed back to Anchorage for the comfort of a bed and hot shower. We couldn't have had a better honeymoon.

### Trip Notes

Chart: <http://www.charts.noaa.gov/OnLineViewer/16700.shtml> (Prince William Sound)

Topo Map: National Geographic: Prince William Sound – West (shows kayak camping spots)

Distance paddled: 220km

Dates: 25 August – 3 September 2016



*Left: Our Tetris skills came in handy when packing our kayaks with gear and 10 days of food.*

*Clockwise from below left: Northern lights from Willard Island; A lurking seal; The racing sea otter; Caoimhin in front of Beloit Glacier; Evening reflections in Blackstone Bay.*



Weather: Unusually awesome

Hire: Ryan Collins, Paddler's Realm, Whittier

Kayaks: NDK Explorer

Gear: Took some of our own, bought more in Alaska and hired the rest. We loved our Xtratuf Boots – perfect for Alaska and you'll fit right in wearing them down the main street of Anchorage! We had a great tarp, but didn't use it.

Satellite phone: Surveyors Exchange in Anchorage

Icom VHF radio: worked once set to "USA" instead of "Int!"

Compass: Use a Northern Hemisphere compass





*Ruby Ardren in Jackpot Bay,  
Prince William Sound, Alaska  
(Image: Caoimhin Ardren)*

