



New Zealand 03.1 Canoeing

Editorial

Welcome to a new edition of NZ Canoeing, complete with a new editor. "How on earth did that happen?" asked a few of my friends. Well, a few months ago I naively offered to help out the NZRCA, as I knew a couple of members of the exec. Their AGM seemed to last all day which I couldn't understand, so I didn't bother showing up until beer and lunch time. By this time I had been elected editor in absentia.

For the rest of the AGM it began to dawn on me what I'd let myself in for, and why the AGM lasts all day. In short, there's a hell of a lot going on.

For the first time ever, the power companies are having to justify their water rights and NZRCA has been active making submissions on the Waikato, Tongariro and Clutha. The consents last 35 years so this is a once in a generation opportunity and Muzz and the troops have been super busy. At the same time population and economic pressures mean that new dairy, irrigation, and power schemes abound, leading to more work for the same people.

On the safety side things have never been busier either. New liability laws relating to volunteers, clubs and individuals are coming into force, which will impact all of us. When things do go wrong the Maritime Safety Authority are still applying an oil tanker approach to a playboat problem resulting in a lot of collateral damage.

So there is a lot of work, but it is a fun and worthwhile organization to be involved with. If anyone can lend a hand, especially if you have legal experience, please get in touch.

Have a great time out there, and play safe

Tony

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Cheers!

Autumn 2003

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About *New Zealand Canoeing*

New Zealand Canoeing is the official newsletter of the New Zealand Recreational Canoeing Association (NZRCA) Inc. *NZ Canoeing* is published quarterly and distributed free to around 1,000 members of the NZRCA throughout New Zealand/Aotearoa.

The views expressed in *New Zealand Canoeing* are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Executive of the New Zealand Recreational Canoeing Association.

NZ Canoeing welcomes advertising from organisations associated with recreational canoeing. Please contact us for our advertising rates, and find out how to show your products and services to kayakers around NZ.

Thanks to all contributors and the myriad of e-mail correspondents for their contributions to this issue of *NZ Canoeing*. May the rivers flow for you!

Contributions of articles, trip reports, classified advertisements, and letters for publication are gratefully received.

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All map references are to NZMS Infomap 260 Topographical series.

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From the Presidential suite

Recently the news has been worrying me. It seems like, politically and economically the time is right to dam even more rivers. There are some very ambitious hydro schemes out there on the drawing boards at present.

Maui gas reserves are estimated to run out much sooner than predicted, power companies are predicting lower than acceptable lake levels (through to 2004/5), NZ's commitment to the Kyoto Protocol means we can top up using fossil fuels and the unstable situation in the Middle East is pushing up the price of oil. The grape growers are pushing for irrigation like there's no tomorrow and their dairy farming cousins seem to alternate between that and wanting to use what's left as the cow's lavatory. Add to this the calls from the Manufacturers Federation to "loosen the shackles" of the Resource Management Act and we could be up the creek with out a paddle – that is if there are any creeks left.

So where does this leave us?? The good news is that the NZRCA are committed to ensuring that rivers continue to flow. But we need your help, to keep an eye on what's happening in your community. The biggest threat at the present time is dams that get presented as "small" and relatively innocuous – yet these may ruin the kayaking values of some rivers. Please contact the NZRCA if you hear of any proposals, and also start to keep a log of the rivers you paddle, when, who with and in what flows. Information like this will be important to establish the "value" of rivers to recreational users and is likely to be vital in any submissions.

By the time you read this, the news of the drowning on the Waikaia River (Southland) will be "old hat". MSA have been much easier to work with over this and a report should come out much quicker as a result. From what is available so far it seems like the river rose dramatically whilst the group was on the water and that the deceased man was caught in a slot/strainer (pinned). He was paddling a high volume creek boat.

My last newsletter "blurb" drew plenty of comments in response to the points about keeping safe on rivers. Some of the comments were well deserved, especially the one which read "throwing a cellphone or EPIRB at (him) would not have helped". Next time I draw conclusions from an accident I'll choose my words with more care. So on that note – be careful out there and remember to update your logbook.

Robin
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Newssplashes

Website Forums

The NZRCA website www.rivers.org has had a major upgrade courtesy of Jon Hunt. As well as the Buy/Sell, there are now General, Conservation, Access/Touring, and Education/Safety forums. Use is starting to crank up: there are warnings of new tree hazards, access info for the likes of the Crooked and Turnbull rivers, people are networking about building of play holes, hooking up for trips and getting into action on issues like the regional council thinking of removing "Rock A" on the Rangitaiki.

Weather

Finally, the DOC forecast is available online and even better still, it's FREE!

<http://www.doc.govt.nz/Explore/Weather/weather.aspx>

River Safety Courses

The updated list of instructors and the new subsidy form are online at <http://www.rivers.org.nz/education/safetycourses.php>

NZ river running footage

The NZRCA has some early film of NZ river running, initially for use in submissions. The footage of "Rainbow Reach" on the Waikato in the 1950's. 60km of grade 3 and 4 big water flowing past active geysers, is mind boggling. Now we'd like to add to the collection for historical purposes. The idea is to convert it to digital format before it is lost. There's some great stuff out there, e.g. rowing the Whitcombe in dories, and we've heard rumours of a film of some guy in a 3.6 m cool store doing ends in Pigs Trough on the Rangitata gorge. Then there's lost rapids like Sargoods and The Gap, and more recent descents such as the Waitaha.

So if you have or know of any interesting footage, let us know. We'd also like to hear from you if you are able to loan the time and use of gear to transfer from miniDV Tape onto CD and/or DVD.

Tsangpo

Mike Abbott and friends have been upstaging "The Lord of the Rings" in the a.v. show of the summer. They have been showing their descent of the Tsangpo in Tibet, one of the most out-there expeditions that has been done for years. Apparently 70 boats were counted on top of cars outside Andy England's place for the Greymouth show.

Southern Andes Expedition

Graham Charles and the boys at AdventurePhilosophy.com are having fun dealing with lawyers, police, navy and rain, trying to sea kayak in the Southern Andes. Grum reported they'd had 41 consecutive days of rain, and that was before an epic fortnight long storm. And they're not paddling any rivers! So if anyone wants an overseas paddling destination with guaranteed water, check it out.

MSA

The Minister of Transport is looking for candidates for the MSA to represent public interest. "Nominees should have knowledge of the maritime transport industry & regulatory environment, the marine environment, oil pollution issues, shipping industry operations & financial management." Err... Am I missing something here or do rivers not appear in the job description?

It looks like NZRCA patron Hugh Canard might accept our nomination. He doesn't have half the experience they are asking for, yet has tons of experience that they are missing. It will be interesting to hear what the Minister says.

Active Years

John Bridges publishes "Active Years", a national newspaper for over 60's. He would like to talk to any over 60's kayakers out there, so if you are one or know any he'd love you to drop him a line at Active.Years@snl.co.nz

Rangitaiki and Waikaia accidents

In January an Auckland paddler, Alex Graham died while on a private raft trip on the Rangitaiki. She was pinned on "Rock A" at low flow. More recently an English tourist, James Acton, died kayaking the

Waikaia, presumably in some kind of sieve or vertical pin. Our condolences to friends and families of Alex and James.

Release Date Corrections

Unfortunately, the current issue is always too late to correct any mistakes in water release dates in the previous issues. So always check the web site!

Wanted: Tekapo Whitewater Course Coordinators

There is a scheduled release on the Tekapo whitewater course every month of next summer. These releases cannot proceed unless a club or group takes on the responsibility of opening and closing the course gates and coordinating with Meridian over the flow. Any clubs or groups that would be willing to take on that job, or even are just interested in what is involved, please contact me at access@rivers.org.nz as soon as possible.

Mike Savory
access@rivers.org.nz

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Conservation

A thank you from New Plymouth

Always nice to see some feedback, Peter O'Keefe sent us this:

Just thought I would drop you guys a quick email on behalf of the New Plymouth canoe Club to thank you for all your hard work to get some sort of commitment out of Genesis for river flows.

There is more there than I thought they would be prepared to concede to us. Especially the 2 flows on the Whakapapa with back up flows. I bet you had to work hard for those. That is a river I have never had the opportunity to tackle so looking forward to that. Can't wait for the dates!!

(The NZRCA has recently heard that the access road has been padlocked. We're working on it.. ed)

Waikato / Mighty River Power submission

Mighty River Power have changed the flow regime in the Waikato River over the last three years or so. They now provide peak load generation instead of base load, and as a consequence, most of the time there is no wave at Ngaawaparua. The flows are unpredictable and over a wider range. This means very sporadic availability for paddlers, erosion of cliffs and riverbank, loss of fauna habitat, inundation of swamp wetlands and erosion of the river bed and banks.

Erosion during winter 2002, believed to be due to weeks of flows greater than 250 cumecs, has changed the wave itself.

The changes in the wave are most pronounced at flows of 180 cumecs and rising, which made life tough for some competitors in the 2003 National rodeo team selection event.

Fortunately, Mighty River's resource consent is up for renewal and they are having to justify themselves to other users of the resource.

Mighty River Power have been playing very hardball on these issues. Paddlers can generally give as good as they get however, and Mike Birch and Wade Bishop did a great job presenting the NZRCA submission to the resource consent hearing. The attention of the hearing was riveted by film of 1950s first descents of the "Rainbow Reach", a long section of the Waikato from Mihi bridge to Atiamuri. Sadly, it's been drowned by hydro lakes, but back then featured Kawarau sized big water rapids flowing past volcanic terraces and geysers.

So from being required to mitigate adverse effects on one rapid, Mighty River are now faced with mitigation for the loss of a world class and unique big water run, worth millions in terms of commercial rafting let alone lost opportunities for paddlers.

Great job Mike and Wade, and special thanks to Lew Vause and Jim Mason (founder of the NZRCA / NZCA) for their footage.

Clutha / Contact Energy

People from Otago Canoe & Kayak Club, Central Otago Whitewater and NZRCA have been busy making submissions on the Contact Energy water rights hearings and trying to work out what will best mitigate the loss of the most superb white water in New Zealand.

The submissions to date have been well received, with establishing credibility being half the battle. Muzz (NZRCA Conservation officer Maree Baker) sent the following comment :

"The hearing went so well, we were well received, and came across as a very credible, sensible group, who knew what was relevant, what wasn't, and what the worth was of what we have lost. The committee took us very seriously, other parties supported what we said, and now Contact will also have to take us seriously around the negotiation table. "

Gowan River/Buller Water Conservation Order

The immediate threat to the Buller Water Conservation Order, and the Gowan River in particular, has now been removed.

The Majac Trust has withdrawn its appeal to the Court of Appeal, challenging the legality of the Buller Water Conservation Order. The objective of Majac Trust's proceedings was to remove water take restrictions on the Gowan River, paving the way for a conceptual run of the river power scheme, with comparatively unrestricted rights to take water.

The appeal is now withdrawn. However this is likely to be an issue that will arise again in the future.

Old Man River

So the Buller lives another day without a dam. Graham Charles reports on a big day out:

It seemed like the obvious thing to do. The Buller from its source at Lake Rotoiti to the river mouth at Westport – but in a day and in one boat all the way? That's where the adventure lay.

I knew Mick Hopkinson had paddled from the Lake to the Iron Bridge in six hours during a huge flood but couldn't find out if anyone had ever done the whole thing in a day. Not that I really cared anyway it looked

a great trip and was perfect training prior to departing for Tierra del Fuego and our Adventure Philosophy expedition to sea kayak 600km into the Chilean Fiords and then swap paddles for ice axes and traverse the Cordillera Darwin back to our start point.

A spur of the moment decision meant pre-warning potential paddling partners (yes there were others keen to play) was out of the question. 'Off the couch' specialist Dave Ritchie was really the only choice available and he was as exhausted as I prior to beginning thanks to three days of gib stopping and house gutting. Fatigue is a great way to start because life can't get much worse. Jenn Bestwick supported us as chief cook, driver, backup videographer and motivator.

We unpacked the van on the shores of West Bay, Lake Rotoiti, December 18 at 5.45am. The early morning bird chorus was an excellent accompaniment to our first 'hard to swallow' muesli bar of the day. We slid into the calm lake waters at 6.20am and Dave nearly fell in straight away. It's lucky he's a fast learner.

Westport seemed a very long way away as we skimmed across the lake and rounded the corner at the birth of the Buller. We were ushered into the river channel like good friends into a home. That's how we felt. Between Dave and I we have been pleased, entertained, humbled, frightened, awed and taught by the waters of the Buller for over 35 years and this journey was a mark of respect for this place and to hear the stories it had to tell along every inch of its path. Flows were up slightly in the upper river catchment – just enough to cover the rocks and make manouevring our Prijon Seayaks possible. Our main task was just to keep the boats running true and avoid getting spun sideways or caught on a rock. Cruising the class II and III water in the upper section was a delight as we got the feel for the boats in whitewater and we managed the first 21km to Harley's Rock bridge in 1.5 hrs. In no time at all we swept under the Gowan Bridge and entered the familiar territory of the Granity

Creek section. A brief video stop at Granity and fun lines through the 'graveyard' we put rudders down and settled into the long haul as the old man river swung SW towards Murchison.

4.5hrs and we made our fourth eddy turn of the day into the Murchison Campground backwater and were met by a team of supporters and a plate of bacon and egg butties. A quick scoff and cup of soup and we were off again. Our apprehension towards the end of the first leg was mainly due to not eating enough and the lowish water in the upper section. The rivers of the Four Rivers Plain joined forces to help us on our way and between them pumped up the volume considerably and our average speed crept back up as we straight lined it to O'Sullivan's Rapid. Fun waves, huge boils and whirlpools made the O'Sullivan's section very fast and exciting. Ariki Falls was filled in but the narrow gorge immediately afterwards had sea kayak sized whirlpools. I paddled past Dave up to his spray deck spinning around in one whirlpool – not bad in a 5 metre long sea kayak.

The section of river from Ariki Falls to the Lyell Ck put-in was a section of the river I had never seen in 22 years of paddling on the Buller. It is a scenically stunning section of the river and also contained the biggest hole/wave on the entire length of river much to our surprise as we cruised around the corner in complete relax mode. In no time at all we zoomed by the Lyell Ck put in and fair flew down the earthquake lake. All the known rapids in the Lyell section were big but very straight forward and at 3.30pm we made our 7th eddy turn at the Iron Bridge. More bacon butties, a welcome stretch, change of clothes (we paddled the rest in T shirts, caps and sun glasses) and grabbing a head torch (just in case) we pushed off for the final 62 km down to Westport.

The Buller is a huge, wide river in its lower section. Far more so than either Dave and I had realised despite numerous trips alongside it in a vehicle. Like the famous song 'that old man river just keeps rolling along' and

we went with it. Still averaging about 11-12kph we paddled through beautiful sub gorges, past amazingly sorted river stones and verdant green forest. Our silvery highway was happy to play as we followed it towards the setting sun.

By this stage we were both hypnotically happy with our journey and our paddles seemed to turn without much effort at all. Besides a numb bum we were in fine form. In no time at all, it seemed, the Westport Bridge appeared around a corner. We stopped briefly to film the finishing sequence and then cruised the final couple of kilometres through the port and out past the tip heads at the mouth of the Buller. The moon was full, the sea was inky calm and the last vestiges of the purple hour of sunset filled the sky as we introduced ourselves and our friend the Buller River to the Tasman Sea.

We made an easy landing on the beach and finally climbed out of our kayaks for the last time 15.5hrs and 156km after climbing in them for the first time. Jen met us on the beach with the perfect accoutrement for any West Coast adventure – a cold Monteiths ale. It doesn't get any better.

The Buller River is the longest undammed section of river in the country. It is a magnificent river in its entire length and is a true jewel in the crown of Aotearoa. Dave and I were truly honoured to have been able to explore and travel its length and go through its growth states from small bubbling river to powerful and majestic in the middle section and to finish with true class and vastness as it settles into the final leg to the sea. It is a fantastic journey, regardless of how long or short you might choose to do it.

*I go to the river to soothe my mind
To ponder over those crazy days in
my life*

*To sit and watch the river flow
(Natalie Merchant, Where I Go)*

Eight days on the Franklin

Over Jan/Feb, Mike Savory, Polly Miller, Jon Hunt, Doug Rankin and Tony Ward-Holmes explored Tasmania and the legendary Franklin River. Polly writes:

I'm sure you're all well aware of that slightly maniacal trip planning that can overcome paddlers in the winter. This certainly happened to me last winter, as I plotted an entire summer of boating, with the finale a trip down the famed Franklin river in Tasmania. The Franklin is famous for the protracted conservation battle that Tasmanian recreationalists fought to save it, involving a blockade, 2600 arrests and the toppling of a government. So it seemed only sensible that as a team of keen river conservationists – in fact nearly half of the NZRCA Executive, we should go and investigate.

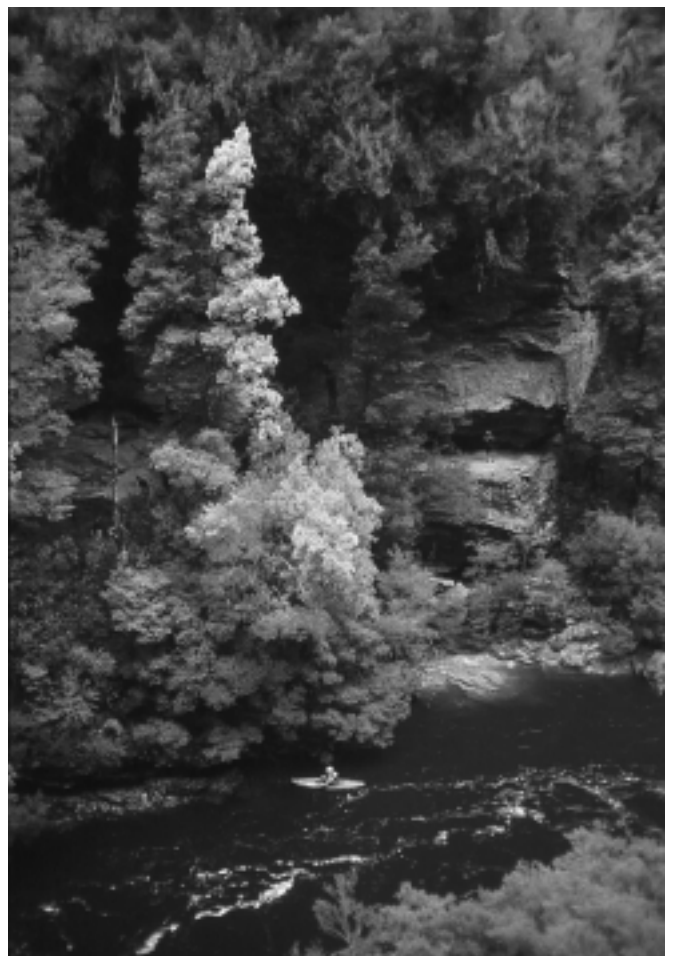
Our first day on the mighty Franklin was my third in Australia and my second in Tasmania – and I was amazed and bewildered by the logistical circus involving planes, ferries and rental cars (with some secret surgery at an engineering workshop), that it had taken to get us there. Thanks to Mike's impeccable planning, we finally did manage to arrive at the put-in on the Collingwood river, and our first sight of it confirmed that Tasmania hadn't had rain for weeks. The stream was brown and slow moving, and the level read something like 0.4m on a gauge measuring six (?) metres. We sat on the bridge and drank our beer, raising our cans to Jon, who had driven the rental car to Hobart, and we devoutly hoped, would be back on a bus in the morning.

Our morning at the put-in was my first low moment. Rain started during the night, and our campsite (why did we pitch the flies on the only green bit of ground?) turned into a swamp with several major lakes. The mozzies were amazingly large and very ferocious, and the discovery of leeches meant we were all more than ready for Jon to arrive off the bus from Hobart, so we could finish our complicated packing and get on the river.

Finally on the river we float in clearing rain down the Collingwood to the confluence with the Franklin. I'm not sure how they get rafts down here at low flow – there are some impressive log jams and the occasional one metre drop. Our first view of the Franklin has me a bit concerned – it just looks like a creek! Where is the mighty river from whence the legends spring?! I console myself with the fact that the Arahura is really just a creek too, and the scenery is awesome – brown water reflects the steep rock sides of the riverbanks, and the enormously tall eucalyptus trees.

We float further down to our campsite for the night, a huge overhang well sheltered for the rain we hope is still forecast. Angel Rain Cavern is a huge outcrop with room for an entire rafting team. Tony enthusiastically describes possible rock climbing routes on the crag opposite while Doug makes dinner and the rain begins again.

Waking up in the morning to more rain, a slowly rising river, and the earsplitting cry of a currawong, we decide to stay put for the day. Resisting my small supply of lunch food (it's not like I need heaps of energy today) we hang out, read each other's books, and I catch up with some of the history and description of the river to come. Oh, and brew coffee of which we have about a months supply. An indepth survey after the trip proves the best coffee in all of Tassie was brewed right here.



Angel Rain Cavern. A great campsite when raining !

The first people to explore the Franklin were convicts escaping from the penal colony on Sarah Island and escaping to the east coast. In a well known case only 1 of a group of 8 reached settled country after 49 days. They'd drawn lots to see who would be eaten next. The authorities did not believe this when the survivor was recaptured, and he was sent straight back. After a second escape, the same guy was recaptured with a fellow escapee's arm in his swag. This time they hung him for murder.

The early paddling teams exploring the Franklin all ended up walking out of the extremely rugged country, their river craft overwhelmed by the river, which can rise and fall extremely quickly. The first raft team ended up with only 4 inner tubes out of 25 still inflated, after 19 days. They roasted a snake rather than each other. Taking a look at my kayak and all our flash gear I reflected that although technology has changed, we are just as respectful of the isolated and wild nature of this adventure.

On our second morning in Angel Rain Cavern, we wake to clearing skies and a river 1.5m higher – the beach we got out on has completely disappeared, and the eddies are sweeping thru the trees. Huge, ancient Huon pines interspersed with white flowering leatherwoods and the ever-present eucalyptus tower over the river banks as we paddle our first major rapid of the trip and float down to the beginning of Descension Gorge.

We get out and look at Nasty Notch, an impressive drop where most of the river goes into a spectacularly nasty feature, but with a narrow, steep line between rocks on the hard right. I pull out my new digital camera to record Jon's descent, and manage two shots before my brain processes the images I'm taking. Jon is swimming, his paddle is lodged in the drop so second-in-line Mike can't follow, he's out of range of our throwbags and his boat is drifting downstream. Our lack of protection for a swimmer results in a frantic scramble for the boats, and we portage Tony's Blunt and seal launch him in below the rapid to give chase. I have time to note that Mike has retrieved Jon's paddle, before Doug and I carry my boat down and I paddle after Tony. A quick wave to Jon, who has self rescued and is standing on the right bank, and I round the corner and the second rapid in Descension Gorge. Things always look bigger when you're paddling by yourself. I comfort myself with the thought that this is an Australian river, there will be so much flatwater at the bottom of these rapids that we're bound to catch up with Jon's boat eventually.

Happily, by the time I do catch up with Tony, Jon's boat has made an eddy, and together we retrieve it and empty it of driftwood. The rest of the team catches us up, and I take a photo of Jon having lunch in the sun with his boat. We are all a little sobered tho – thinking of how much gear Jon could have lost, and the fact that we're pleased we're not escorting him to one of the four tracks from which you can walk out of the Franklin.

The campsite at Ireneabyss is sunny, with fewer mozzies and not a single leech. We relax and consider that the weather for a day trip up Frenchman's Cap, a 1443m peak, will be perfect, and the river will have time to go down again before we continue on to the Great Ravine, the biggest gorge on the Franklin.

Next morning, the route up Frenchman's Cap starts off very steeply. We charge up though rapidly thinning eucalyptus forest to the scrub above the bushline – official snake country. I'm wearing specially brought gaiters just in case.

In reality, the track up must be well known by snakes, cos it's extremely well trodden, and we don't see one all day. A fantastic walk, Frenchman's Cap boasts a 1000 foot quartzite face. We take the back route – 9 hours return of gentle scrambling and amazing scenery. It seems our Tasmania-wide high pressure system has arrived.

Bodies are a bit slow the next morning, despite Tony's excellent meal the night before. The river has dropped over a metre in 2 days. We're all a bit reluctant as we paddle away from the beautiful sanctuary of Ireneabyss into the middle

Franklin. We have about 20m of easy water to paddle, but what we don't expect is the almost total lack of moving water. By lunch time I am totally fed up, and my two muesli bars do little to help. At the Brook of Invanestra, our proposed campsite, the suggestion to move on to the first part of the Great Ravine is made. Only with the help of a couple of emergency toffee pops do I manage to get back in my boat.

We reach the Churn, the first rapid on the Great Ravine. Despite it being 5.30pm, I'm impressed by how the incredibly steep bush climbs above us to the impossibly high bluffs above. The Churn is a mass of boulders and the gradient we've been praying for all day is lost in 100m of nasty drops ending in a huka falls with a rock at the bottom. We portage via a steep track over the bluffs on river left. As the boats are heavy and full of gear we use pulley systems and two people struggle with each boat. The last thing we need to do is lose precious gear.

The team is revived and energised by the view of the rapid and portage, and we paddle across Serenity Sound with smiles and hopeful looks for our campsite – just above the second rapid in the Great Ravine – the Coruscades. Yet another beautiful wilderness campsite and we are joined by a quoll – a lithe, unafraid marsupial local who appears very interested in our food. We hoist it high into the trees for safety.

The morning brings an early portage around the Coruscades. I scout for a line – there is one there, if you can link messy class 5 moves together. Not feeling especially big and brave, I leave running rapids until lower down the Coruscades and the Forceit rapid. It's my first difficult move in a loaded boat, and despite my complete failure to boof, the momentum carries me through the drop.

We paddle cheerfully until the roar of the Thunderush rapid approaches. I am glad that I left reading *Death of a*

River Guide until after the Franklin experience – this gorge is plenty scary enough, and the team finds Thunderush especially intimidating. At very high flows, the only option of the high portage track, recommended to be 7 hours long and a solid class 5. We are determined to find a line to portage and paddle at river level. We eventually do manage a combination of both, thanks to some courageous paddling by Mike who showed the way.



Scouting the Cauldron

Looking downstream eagerly for some whitewater we can actually run, we instead come across the Cauldron. The last stonking horrible mess in the Great Ravine, we finally have to take a high portage track – the river is flowing over the low portage route. The track winds steeply uphill and over the next three hours we consider New Zealand analogies for this epic portage. Mine was climbing Mt Bealey in Arthur's Pass with a 35kg boat on one shoulder.

We tumble back into our boats with team-wide mutters – why do people do this river? The scenery in the next 2km tries to make up for it – with Marble whatsits and stunning waterfalls leading down to our balmy campsite at Rafters Basin.

We sit on the rocks in the evening sun with the relief of having the Great Ravine behind us. However it's not all over, as Jon makes us a meal to match the day. With mouths and lips burning with a rather too-authentic curry, we crawl into our bivvy bags.

It is with great misgivings that I examine the description for the lower Franklin. It worries me that there has been no mention of flat water paddling – and yet we've seen so much of it! However, I'm pleasantly surprised. Constantly flowing water leads us down through fun class 3 and 4 drops, culminating in the Newlands Cascades before lunch. I'm persuaded out of my brave line by the more experienced Mike, and together we make an eddy in the middle of the rapid and portage the last drop.

The bush is looking more and more like NZ podocarp forest. The similarities persist until you get close to the trees – and then Myrtle Beech just does not look like anything we've got in the Lewis Pass. After a few hours of leisurely flat

water – I'm only five minutes behind the rest of the team – we reach our campsite at Blackman's Bend.

The last day on the Franklin and even I am feeling a bit nostalgic. However, the promise of cold beers at St John's Falls and the nacho chips stashed there makes us all jump in our boats with enthusiasm.

Our first stop of the day is a Kutikina Cave, an Aboriginal site and evidence of Aboriginal inhabitation of the area at the time of the last ice age. It is a well preserved site, and we walk along a steel walkway with suitable reverence.

We run the very last drops on the Franklin, steep 2m chutes, the last of which, Big Fall, Mike runs alone. Looking at the way his longer, faster boat is stalled in the nasty riverwide feature, I decide the short portage is no trouble.

The confluence with the Gordon river comes as a surprise. The Gordon is a huge, flowing, cold river and I find myself being blissfully and effortlessly swept downstream. The whole team smile broadly – until we encounter our first float plane landing on the lower Gordon. Tourists gape at my rapid paddling to the side of the river, where I cling to a branch, only to be surprised by the very small wake.

At 2pm we arrive at the jetty by St Johns Falls. We drink beers, take commemorative photos in the sun and agree that it has been a once-in-a-lifetime trip. I write in the registration book that we've had LOTS of everything – and now we need a large helping of civilisation, preferably in the form of at least eight courses with plenty of wine.

Safety

(Glenn wrote this before the Rangitaiki and Waikaia accidents – ed)

The paddling season is well upon us and so far appears to be a relatively incident free season. Long may it continue. There are several things going on at the moment...

The Government recently passed the new Health and Safety in Employment Amendment Bill.

NZRCA is concerned about the impact this legislation may have on people who do volunteer work for clubs. There is potential for clubs or individuals to be liable for fines of up to 250,000 if they breach the rules set by the legislation. However, at this stage we feel that there is no need to panic.

In the meantime NZRCA is developing a Code of Practice. This will be a template that clubs can use to develop their own guidelines and parameters to operate club trips and instruction sessions within. Several clubs are also voicing concerns over potential liability issues, and we hope that this Code of Practice can be utilised to address these concerns also.

Rest assured that NZRCA is continually working to make kayaking as safe and enjoyable as possible for your club members. As soon as the Code of Practice is finalised we will be in contact with your club to give you an update, and further advice.

For more information on the proposed legislation you can look at www.osh.dol.govt.nz.

Once again NZRCA is offering subsidies for members attending approved River Safety or River Rescue courses. A subsidy of \$45 is available for River Safety courses, and \$60 for River Rescue courses. For more information see the website, www.rivers.org.nz.

NZRCA is continuing discussions with the Maritime Safety Authority regarding the way they investigate and report kayaking accidents. Recent reports contain little or no information that the kayaking community can learn from. We are meeting with NZOIA and the NZ Rafting Association soon to discuss our concerns, which are also shared by these organisations, and approach MSA with some recommendations about how they conduct their investigations.

Stay safe out there.
Glenn Murdoch
safety@rivers.org.nz

Cell phones

One of the MSA's recommendations in their report on the Buller accident is that Tai Poutini should investigate carrying "satellite telephones". Robin's Presidents column in the last issue created a lot of discussion, e.g. his point that carrying some means of calling for outside help be considered. This was meant literally however, as opposed to backing the MSA recommendation. Such means may be appropriate on some wilderness trips where escape after an injury or loss of boat is extremely difficult.

Access officer Mike Savory did some research on the benefits of carrying cellphones in case of accident, as opposed to evacuation after the fact. Here are his findings.

We need to fight the call for us all to have to carry "Satellite Telephones" to be safe.

I have just spent a few hours looking through the AWA whitewater fatalities database. Over the last 5 years they have compiled information on 135 fatalities. 52% of these involve the victim being trapped underwater. 13.3% are tree entrapments (18)

In the last year where detailed information is available (32 fatalities):

- 10 of these involved tree or rock entrapments
- From my reading, NONE of these cases would have been helped by the immediate availability of a cellphone, drowning happening very quickly in all cases.
- One fatality occurred even after being recovered from 8 minutes underwater
- 4 of the rescues took more than a day to recover the body (one took 2 weeks).

Being able to call in unskilled outside assistance is more likely to result in a situation similar to the one described here:

Slippery Rock Creek, a popular destination for intermediate kayakers in Western Pennsylvania, was the scene of a tragic triple fatality on April 8th 2001. The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reported that Neil Balcer, 23, met his death while running the Class II lower stretch of Slippery Rock below Eckart Bridge. Balcer, a novice paddler, spotted a downed tree just above the Harris Bridge takeout. He flipped while taking evasive action and made several roll attempts before washing into the strainer. He became solidly pinned about 20 feet from shore. His PFD and helmet washed off and were recovered in an eddy below. Boaters in the vicinity rushed to the scene, but there was nothing they could do.

When firefighters arrived, paddlers told them that Balcer had been underwater for 45 minutes and was clearly dead. They suggested that they use a chain saw to cut the downed tree loose from shore. But the dive team from the Unionville Volunteer Fire Department had another plan. They elected to have two men approach the strainer from upstream. Lines from shore

were tied to static harnesses (which have no quick release), a procedure which has resulted in many firefighter deaths nationwide. In addition, the two men were connected by an additional line which created a serious snag hazard. Minutes later something went terribly wrong. It's not clear if the pair lost their footing or something became snagged, but the ropes pulled Anthony Murdick 25, and Scott Wilson, 25, under water. Both men, married with young children, were killed. A few minutes later the ropes were ordered cut, but by then it was too late. The pair were dead when they washed ashore below Harris Bridge. The next day firefighters cut the downed tree at the shoreline, allowing Balcer and his kayak to wash free. This incident teaches us the importance of swiftwater rescue training, and that we shouldn't take unnecessary risks to recover a person who is already dead.

Think this sort of thing wouldn't happen in NZ? Think again. A helicopter was downed (fortunately without injuring the occupants) whilst trying to haul a raft off a rock in the Shotover. The towline snapped a D-ring and wrapped around the rotor. No lesson was learnt from this... in the Clarence drownings a helicopter was used to try and shift the canoe at a stage when there was no hope of a live rescue.

Letters

Maggie Oakley (awarded in the last issue) would like to say thanks:

"I want to say that I was surprised and really thrilled to be the recipient of the award for 2002.

However the award is a reflection of the first kayaking stories that inspired me, The years of practical support from my husband and children and acceptance from the members of OCKC. I did not get this on my own.

People who have kayaked white water with me will agree I have not been the most accomplished kayaker, held back because I have been slow to get a bomb proof roll. Indeed over the years I have swum many wild rivers that alas are now no more, lost to progress. However my kayak partners will tell you I was always having a good time and the roll is at last almost bomb proof on both sides. (Can hear 'Hooray' from Alan Woods)

But kayaking is not for all women. It is always wet, mostly cold, often frightening and sometimes causes injuries. In fact we can feel very vulnerable on big water that seems to just overpower us. Nevertheless I get much from kayaking. One satisfaction involves the teamwork. Trips away on the river are like fun projects, concrete, contained and focused enough to get the whole team to reach their personal goals and then get everyone safely back home. The second pleasure comes from the beauty and simplicity of the wilderness, and it is so refreshing to have time for anticipation and reflection on this.

Finally, I do believe my life has been changed for the better by those people who have encouraged me to kayak. Also for the stunning places I have been, and now care about. I feel all people who come on kayak trips must have richer lives for the experience.

So the COTY award is a positive reflection on the people and efforts of OCKC.



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New Zealand Recreational Canoeing Association
PO Box 284 Wellington
E-mail: nzrca@rivers.org.nz
Website: www.rivers.org.nz

Individual Membership

\$ 30.00

Includes three issues of *NZ Canoeing* and a Water Safety Subsidy of \$45 per person per year for River Safety and River Rescue Courses. Note that club and associate members pay different fees, see the website: www.rivers.org.nz for details of other membership classes.

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