

White Water at Bluegums, Eildon, Victoria 3 to 9 Jan 2016.



Sunday 3 Jan – Arrival at Bluegums

There was a great turnout for this trip, with fifteen (15) members of the Adelaide Canoe Club attending a White Water refresher/novice course at the old Olympic Training grounds. The location on the Goulburn River is just below Lake Eildon in Northern Victoria. As on previous occasions, the trip was led by Wayne Hooper and Libby Robertson with novices also being assisted by Chris Hofmeyer and Rob Bowen. Rob's wife Bron also attended, being a regular on previous trips. The novices this time were Jo Molsher, Chris Kemp and Mark Loram. The guns from the Kayak Polo team comprising Steve, Nathan and Aaron Wild, Leigh Richardson, Simon and Anne Langsford, Adam Hofmeyer, Stacey Goodwin, Kim Roper and Nicole Hendry were also willing assistants, at least when not entertaining Bluegum campers in 'The Sump' (see details below).

Many of the attending members were regular visitors, which shows the popularity of the event. A good range of kayaks (both old and new) were brought along – new at least until the Big River paddle! Wayne and Rob also brought along their canoe to provide some added entertainment. Wayne brought his Canadian Double Canoe and Rob arrived with his very new looking Single Canoe.



Eildon: Bluegums Riverside holiday park.

Sunday was arrival day with everyone getting settled in, meeting up and exchanging their travel adventures.

Chris Kemp's well-set-up Campsite



Chris Kemp and his Border Collie 'Buster' were already well into park life having arrived a few days earlier. There were a few admirers checking out Chris's 4WD and recently completed off road trailer – very professional looking.

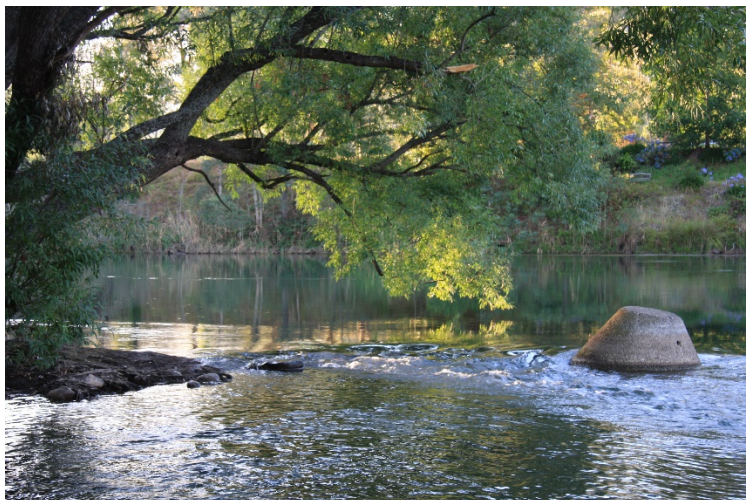
This was my first visit to Bluegums and I was full of anticipation, combined with a degree of trepidation when walking the river after checking into my Barrack accommodation. I was already excited after the very scenic drive in from Yea and seeing the Goulburn River at Thornton.

Sunday night was quiet with people unpacking and setting up campsites, we were all pretty well spread across the Park. Plenty of Melbourne holidaymakers were still around from the holiday season.

Monday 4 Jan – Strategy Meeting and Refresher Training

We agreed to start each day session by gathering at the top section of the White Water training course or kayak school ground at 0930 to plan the day's activities and provide an opportunity for overall safety briefs. Wayne and Libby ensured that everyone was introduced and the three (3) novices welcomed. Wayne then summarised the week's activities, commencing with novice training and refresher training on Monday and Tuesday. More of the same for Wednesday then the afternoon would include a paddle from the Pondage Wall and introduction to the 'S' bend for novices. Fresh trout was suggested for Wednesday evening dinner. Thursday would be a Big River paddle, followed by dinner at the Thornton Pub. Friday was allocated as a 'Free Day' and an opportunity to entertain the regulars by introducing the novices to the 'Sump'.

Everyone dragged their kayaks down and we claimed ownership of the kayak school



Bluegums: Kayak School Ground

ground for the week. We formed two groups with the experienced kayakers preparing for White Water refresher skills sessions before making their way downstream towards the Sump.

The water looked great - to a novice anyway, and there was good cloud cover making the temperature nice and comfortable. Water level was down and river flow less than previous years according to the

regulars, but this would make things better for training sessions. The day started with a fully geared up float downstream into the Sump for the novices: Jo, Chris and Mark. We were well chaperoned with plenty of helpers ready to drag us into quieter water in the eddies if required. I recall lots of emphasis on keeping feet downstream and away from rocks in addition to keeping clear of overhanging branches. Water temperature was a bit on the chilly side but this was soon forgotten as the adrenalin took over. Our downstream drift ended in the Sump and into the closest eddy – a very exhilarating start to the trip. Having all survived, we made our way back to the school ground after seeking out a bit of occasional sunshine to warm up.

While the experienced members started to play in the area downstream of the school ground, Wayne started to introduce the novices to the terms and skills of White Water kayaking. It wasn't long before our heads were starting to spin with terms like Ferry Gliding, Pumpkins, Eddy Lines then Breakin and Breakouts (to name a few). I could see this was going to be intellectually as well as physically challenging. After launching we started paddling upstream into quieter water and spent time getting the cobwebs out of our paddling to give the team the opportunity to assess our paddling skill levels. This all went well and we moved back down into the class room.



Kayak School: Wayne, Libby and Rob taking a break from Novice Training with Chris

Wayne, Libby and Rob and Chris Hofmeyer helped out with our training sessions and were always there with positive feedback when we stuffed up.



Kayak School: Just do as I do Chris!





Kayak School: Once you master surfing Chris, this is how you Break Out of an Eddy

The morning session flew by very quickly and we were starting to wonder how we would remember all this. We broke for a well-deserved lunch break with an opportunity to review all our new found knowledge. Back on the water in the afternoon for more of the same – slowly getting the feeling of Ferry Gliding but Breaking In and Out of the Eddy we found a lot more challenging, particularly around the Pumpkins with faster current flowing. By this time the majority of the gun paddlers had found their way downstream and into the Sump.

After a busy day paddling everyone gathered in the Community Kitchen for dinner, swapping stories of the day's highlights.

Tuesday 5 Jan – Novice Training

Another lovely day which started off well for me, with a nice visit from a couple of King Parrots looking for food. This happened a couple of times, so I assume it has been the custom for birds to be fed by guests staying in the Bunkhouse.



Bunkhouse: King Parrots looking to be fed.

After breakfast we all gathered at the kayak classroom for Wayne's daily brief, then quickly separated to continue novice training while the guns found their way down to the Sump again. Started off with a quick refresh around the beginner Pumpkin to get the adrenalin flowing once more. The extra couple of days Chris spent on the water before we arrived was starting to show, with his skill level improving very quickly, Jo and I were taking things a bit steadier but gradually building up confidence.

During the day Wayne and the team introduced us to surfing and we soon discovered this was a good way to relax in between the more complicated manoeuvres.



Kayak School: Wayne introducing Chris to Surfing

During the morning Lee and Nicole spent time helping out with novice training. It wasn't long before Nicole introduced us to the term 'Eddy Monster', a term we started to use regularly as we began to play around Cutting into and out of the Pumpkin eddies and taking the occasional capsize.

The gun kayakers were again keen to paddle down into the Sump for their adrenalin fix and building of their boat handling skills in turbulent water.



The Sump: Nicole at 'play'.

In the afternoon Wayne brought down his canoe and introduced me to the techniques of paddling a canoe vs kayak. I was placed in the bow while Wayne took control in the stern. We paddled upstream to master the different techniques and ensure I knew the difference between Forward and Reverse Stroke, Draw Stroke and Sweep when he gave the orders from his aft position.



Camp Kitchen: Ann's Black Bun – assisted by Google

We finished up another very enjoyable day on the water about 5pm to clean up and regather in the community kitchen for the evening meal. This time we were treated to Ann's special dish called Scottish Black Bun. The general consensus was that she might need to bake a few more loaves next time as it was very popular.

Libby took everyone's order for tomorrow night's trout dinner, either fresh rainbow trout or the smoked option.

Wednesday 6 Jan – Upper Goulburn River Paddle and Trout Dinner

We had plenty of rain overnight, and at breakfast paddling looked unlikely due to the heavy layer of mist over the park and Goulburn River. Great to hear heavy rain overnight after our very dry Christmas period in Adelaide.



Bluegums: Caravan Park and Goulburn River shrouded in mist

We reconvened at the Kayak School and planned the morning's continuation training and made plans for an afternoon downstream paddle from the Pondage Wall, once again the gun kayakers were given the opportunity to make their way to the Sump.



Dinner: Trout Farm on Eildon side of Thornton

Wayne and Libby picked up everyone's trout from the Thornton Trout Farm over the lunchtime break – think they also took the opportunity to drive into Eildon to visit

the bakery and ice-cream shop, seems to be the custom from previous trips!

After lunch break we loaded the kayaks onto four cars and drove to the Eildon Pondage Wall and set about getting ready for a downstream paddle. Wayne briefed everyone about the dangers of the 'S' Bend, particularly to the novice kayakers. He emphasised the need to watch out for willows and be sure to paddle hard when crossing the eddy line into quiet water after the Bend. Reasonable amount of flow from the Pondage Wall, we paddled downstream and halted before entering the 'S' Bend for a last minute brief and staggered paddle through the bend. All went well but Wayne was correct about the need to paddle fast crossing the eddy. There was plenty of prompting to the novices to 'paddle faster', however we all made it through successfully. The remaining paddle was very enjoyable and we were soon arriving at the Kayak School. We collected the cars from below the pondage and cleaned up for the evening's trout cook fest.

Everyone was waiting for the trout with anticipation, although Kim and Stacey had some reservations. After a bit of digging it transpired that neither of them had cooked fish before, let alone trout, and were not sure how to go about cooking a whole fish. As I had been describing how I intended to poach mine wrapped in foil with white wine after packing the fish with onion and lemon slices and seasoning, they willingly accepted my offer to cook their fish.

Thursday 7 Jan – Big River Expedition and Thornton Pub Dinner

The day had arrived for the novices to test their new found skills in Big River, although without Jo Molsher who had to leave early – always another opportunity next year Jo. We loaded the kayaks and car pooled to our kick-off point at Chaffey's in five (5) cars. Libby was having a rest day and offered to ferry drivers back to the start point to pick up the remaining cars on completion.

The river was far from fast flowing and the need to portage across rocky sections was mentioned a few times by Wayne, however we were lucky and managed to navigate the river with only the occasional exit when people got stuck on rocks or around the vegetation lining the river. River depth was 0.375m at the Big River gauge, just upstream from the bridge which would only be considered suitable for paddling by White Water-deprived South Australians.

Fantastic drive and scenery up to Chaffey's launching point, although increasingly winding road after crossing the Big River bridge, where we stopped to read the gauge

and make the final decision that the river was safe to paddle. A few of us were taking plenty of notes on the abundance of 4WD tracks to try out on future visits.



Big River: Steve Wild's Rig

On the way we all admired Steve Wild's camping and kayaking rig, these shots were taken by Chris Kemp – possibly getting some ideas for a few of his own modifications?



Big River: Single file down the river

any stragglers with Chris and Adam Hofmeyer in the middle, ready to rescue the novices. There was plenty of water in the pond where we launched but it wasn't long before we started dodging rocks.

We all arrived safely at Chaffey's campground around mid-morning, unloaded the kayaks and had a closer look at the river. Once kitted up we gathered for Wayne's safety brief with instructions for the novices to stay in the middle. Wayne headed off in the lead, Rob picking up



Big River: Wayne sliding over the rock ladders while we all watched. Mark relaxing in his Dagger – now with lots of scratches and thankful he managed to get through without mishap!

The kayak polo team were at ease during the downstream paddle and helped by passing the time with a few tennis ball chasing exercises – all part of their training. Adam was called upon to separate a few of us from the rocks, and probably spent as much time out of his kayak as paddling.



Big River: Lunch Break – what's in this sandwich Bron?

Didn't seem that long before we reached our lunch break stop at 'Platypus Point' – so named by us as it looks the perfect part of the river to spot platypus', dragged our kayaks up on the bank to enjoy the view and a well-earned break, stretch and lunch.



Big River: I'm sure we spotted a platypus surface in this pool – now named Platypus Point

Idyllic spot to rest and everyone was also keen to spot the first platypus. Couple of ripples were seen but no conclusive evidence.

After a nice break we were back in the kayaks and paddling down to 'The Slalom Rapids', often used as a training ground for White Water kayaking with easy road access

and room to walk the river and assist with rescues when required. However, on this trip our biggest obstacle was getting over and around the numerous rocks which are normally covered by raging water. Wayne and Adam closely inspected this stage before we lined up in single file to navigate the obstacles. We all managed to get through

without anyone capsizing, however it was a bumpy ride and a bit of assistance was



required from those on the bank.

It wasn't long before we reached Big River Bridge and our take out point. Another great spot on the river with a nice sweeping bend and the remnants of a 'man made' rock weir stretching across the river. In-between packing up, Adam, Leigh and a few helpers were busy changing



Big River: Navigating 'The Slalom Rapid'

the course of the river and creating what looked like an aboriginal fish trap – apparently this has been done before on completion or downriver trips. Libby then drove the five designated drivers back to collect vehicles. Slow drive back to Bluegums with most of us nursing tender backsides after the day bouncing over rocks. Considering the low level of water, the paddle was deemed to be successful and a good training environment for novice paddlers. Most of us prepared for drive to the Thornton Pub for dinner but the diehards took an opportunity to chase some more White Water and unwind in the sump.



Big River: Pack up from takeout point

Later in the evening we all gathered in the Thornton Pub for a well-deserved dinner and the odd refreshment. Very good menu including a range of Chinese dishes. Hotel was very busy and obviously popular. We spent a lovely evening swapping stories of the day's experiences and plans for next day's free-play – ie 'The Sump'.

Friday 8 Jan – Free Day and Sump Workout

The day we had all been waiting for had arrived – Free Day, either to spend honing our skills in ‘The Sump’ or just relaxing around our campsites. Some bodies were starting to feel the effect of four days of daily kayaking.

Most of us were up and about early, eager to find our way into ‘The Sump’, however it looked like Wayne and Libby were going to take the free day literally as they couldn’t be found. However, it wasn’t long before they were up and about, but not until 0830.

After breakfast we all met at the kayak classroom and planned the strategy for the day. Novices would spend time visiting all the pumpkins then make their way down to ‘The Sump’ in the afternoon, the remainder would warm up with a leisurely paddle down river, practicing around pumpkins before moving into ‘The Sump’.

During the morning Wayne spent time with Chris Kemp in his canoe, with Chris doing all the hard paddling up front and Wayne back aft yelling instructions. There were a couple of times that Chris got mixed up between a forward stroke and draw stroke at key moments navigating the pumpkins, but overall they went very well. Both novices (Mark and Chris) tried the canoe and found it lots of fun and very beneficial as everything happens more slowly than usual, with more time to observe the reaction to each stroke.



Bluegums: Kayakers at Play in ‘The Sump’



Leigh enjoying Adams Playboat



Nicole in action



Simon playing like a Collins Class Submarine

Adam showing Chris Kemp how to use is kayak

Wayne and Libby spent time with a family from Melbourne (live near upper reaches of Yarra River), whose 16-year-old daughter had expressed an interest in getting into kayaking. They spent a valuable couple of hours in the afternoon with some fast tracked kayak training. At the end of the session, it looked like kayaking may have recruited another keen paddler.

In the evening, those still remaining (Jo left on Wednesday and Kim and Stacey back to Canberra during the morning), gathered in the community kitchen for our farewell meal. Lots of discussions about how everyone enjoyed the week while being entertained with Adam's GoPro downloads of fun time in 'The Sump'. Only downside of the evening was that Ann had run out of Scottish Black Bun, however there were several requests for the recipe.



Blue Gums: Our farewell dinner with lots of tales told!

Saturday 9 Jan – Departure

All good things generally must end, so most of us packed up for early departure on Saturday morning. For Wayne and Libby this was the second phase of their trip with family having arrived late Friday and getting settled in ready for a week's kayaking.

Particularly from the perspective of a novice whitewater kayaker, this was a fantastic trip and with a wide range of experiences and one that I would love to repeat.

Mark Loram