

Jeff Hosnell – Early Kayaking Memories - April 2020

Hi Everyone!!! This is a very bad time for all of us and our families but I know we will get through it all. I remember Naomi mentioned a while ago if members could share their introduction to our great sport of kayaking, so with all this spare time now I thought I would share my journey.

I grew up in a small town Upper Hutt 30km from Wellington, New Zealand in the Hutt Valley, we had the Hutt River which flowed the length of the valley, starting in The Tararua Mountains. In the 60's it was a great white water river, today because of a reservoir a lot of the water is piped out and only flows when it floods. Having this river in our back yard was a massive part of our lives, I remember making canoes out of corrugated sheets and crashing down rapids, so I always had a love for rivers.

In my last 2 years of primary school we would go to woodwork classes at Trentham Army Camp, I was 11 and I noticed all these kayaks at different stages of completion hanging from the ceiling, I asked the teacher and he said they were being made by kids at Everyboy's Rally a bit like Scouts. I joined up and 2 years later I finished my 1st kayak, 12ft canvas over timber ribs and stringers based on a Popular Mechanic Magazine design , over the next 10 years I made a number of kayaks always changing the design a little, ending up with some beautiful strip plywood boats, fiberglass hadn't happened yet.



Above: Fun on the river, our early kayak designs canvas over timber strips and ply ribs based on Popular Mechanic Magazine.



Above: My first Rally Camp I was 11 notice how small I was, even after I finished my first kayak I wasn't allowed to go on the long trips I had to wait till I was 14-15.

We had a very active group of boys and leaders so we were on the rivers nearly every weekend. Now canvas canoes and rocks don't like each other, so we used to lose a lot of boats. I remember one trip we started with 11 kayaks and finished with 3 - my boat had nearly every rib broken, we didn't have buoyancy like today just plastic bottles shoved in, very poor spray covers made by our mums on their Singer sewing machines.



Above: how's this for a paddle Plywood blade very early wing blade, no spray covers, no leg drive Tony!

FIRST MAJOR TRIP WAIKATO RIVER

The Waikato River is one of the longest rivers in NZ, starting at Lake Taupo and finishing near Auckland, we started the trip paddling around Lake Taupo, then onto the River, the only rapid on this river is the famous Hauka Falls, so we put in well after that and took 2 weeks to paddle the river, very boring paddle just a slog every day, this would be New Zealand's (Murray River) but the leaders would organise lots of games on the water to keep us going, at that time of the year there were lots of young black swans so for fun we would chase them.

WHANGANUI TRIP

The following year we did the Whanganui River, if you have the opportunity you must put this on your bucket list of things to do, Wade has done it and loved it [report to come] This was a big trip, I was 15 and looking back the organising of this trip by our leaders was just incredible, 35 kids and kayaks in some of the wildest country at that time.

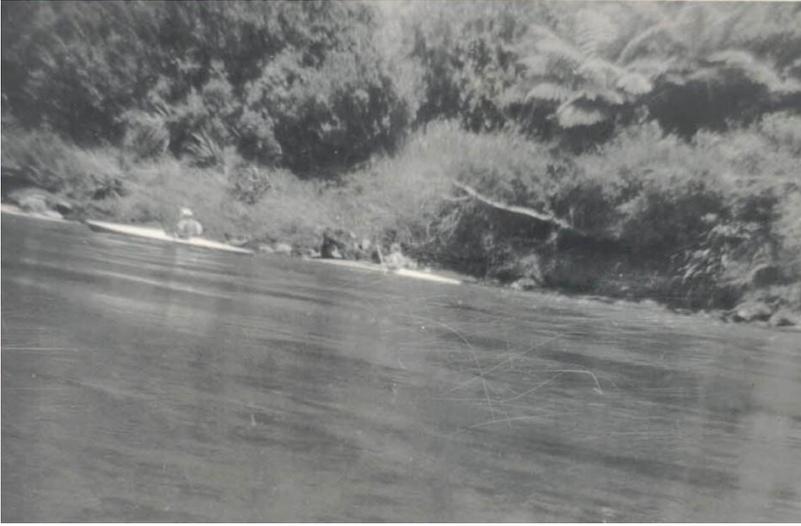
This was the largest group ever to paddle the river, in 1967 the roads following the river were all dirt roads running along cliff faces very dangerous - any problems we would have had no help. Our land support had 8 vehicles and 3 kayak trailers, homemade wooden frames and 1 trailer carrying the tents and cooking gear. The vehicles were a 1938 Ford Mercury V8, 3 old Bedford Vans with sliding doors and 2 Commer Vans and some cars.

At this time, the population of this area was mainly Maori, organising where we stayed each night had to be planned well in advance through letters! No mobile phones and a lot of these farms and Maori settlements didn't have phones, a truly amazing achievement by the Leaders. Looking back as a teenager you just took it all for granted. When we left the camps in the mornings everything was packed up and when we arrived tents were all erected and meals prepared.

The Whanganui river is a challenging river grade 2-3 lots of long rapids in today's plastic boats no problem but in canvas you needed to be careful. Some of the boys were not very good paddlers, and repairs were hard to do.



Above: The end of the Gorge over 20km long, nowhere to get out, at the beginning there is the John Coul Hut you have to stay there.



Above: Me at the back on the first day.



Above: Went back to the river as a Rally Leader with another large group of boys, this is a side shot to the river so many of these very beautiful



Above: Better paddles now! Check out the door in the deck no way that would keep water out



Above: Another small river feeding the Whanganui



Above: This is the Ohura Falls really beautiful, further up there is a smaller falls with lots of pools to lay in and have the water pour over you.

This trip started in Taumarunui and finished at the Wanganui river mouth to the Tasman Sea, 290km with over 239 rapids. We had so many adventures on this river here are a few:.

In 1967 this area was full of wild animals, pigs, deer and mountain goats, we had lots of fun chasing after herds of goats trying to catch the baby's, we would jump out of our boats and run and tackle them and put them in our kayaks and paddle with them for the day and then put them in a pen. We finished the trip with 18 goats that were brought home to Upper Hutt.

I remember one time I was chasing these goats up a cliff and they just disappeared I looked down and I had climbed so high and I couldn't see how I had got there and I still had 20+ft to go if I fell I would have died, I made it to the top by clinging to small gorse bushes.

We also got to go on a pig hunt with some local Maori lads no guns just dogs and knives. They killed 2 pigs and that evening we had a Hangi Dinner, pork, chicken and potatoes.

A major event happened on this trip that will stay with me for ever!

Today most of the river trips finish at Pipiriki. Ours carried on the next day we stayed at the Maori village Koroniti if you ever get the chance please visit, it's very beautiful has an amazing PA and lovely people. When we arrived, the old Chief couldn't believe his luck he had been praying for help. This PA was not very old, the old PA was on the other side of the river dating back 100s of years on low ground and every time the river flooded they were losing parts of the carved buildings and the main treasure was the 30ft ceiling carving. Now the reason they hadn't moved it, was because there were no young men left in the village - they had all gone to the cities to work at GM or Ford.

We stayed there 2 days floating these artefacts across the river and dragging them up the path to the PA. Today they are there in the Museum and the larger carvings have been used in the new Meeting House and there is a book with all our names in it. I have been back a few times and have always been made welcome even slept in the meeting house.



Above Left : The Old PA

Above Right: The New Meeting House all the carvings are what we helped bring across the river



Above Left: The Museum, there is a book there with comments each of us have written

Above Right: View of the village on the river notice the right side this where the old PA was, it was quite a distance to the new PA and also the road up was steep

The next couple of days were hard paddling to the river mouth in Whanganui, the local Newspaper were there to record our journey. So you can see the Wanganui River has strong memories for me!!

I would really like to one day take members of our club down this incredible river, I know it will not be like 1967 but I know everyone will love it.

I have many more adventures to share let me know if you want hear about them!