

2013 Riverland Paddling Marathon (June long weekend)



by Tony Hystek

Lane Cove River Kayakers can well hold their heads up high when it comes to ultramarathon paddling. This year, we comprised one third of the field in the Murray 200, with another member in the Murray 100.

We were blessed with brisk, still mornings that warmed throughout the day to create ideal paddling conditions with occasional cloud to provide shade.

Toby Hogbin, Meg Thornton, Andrew Mathers, Angie Lees and Tony Hystek all presented to the start at Berri at 5.45am in darkness, and following a terse "keep to the right of the river", and 'the finish is that way', were sent off in glassy conditions to the roar of an antique blunderbus. Seems they hold this race annually as an excuse to fire the thing!



One paddler was unfortunate enough to take a swim not 10km from the start. He retired, the enormity of the task ahead and his lack of ability soon apparent.

At around one third distance each day, paddlers must pass through a lock. My campaign was almost over before it started, as I moved into the lock and down to the far end. Reaching out to a narrow ladder for support I missed my mark, but was too

close to the sheer concrete wall to brace with my paddle. Over I went, wildly pushing at the wall for any sign of support. Expecting a swim, I was amazed to find something to push off deep under water, and up I came. I had found a little ledge, not 300mm long, the only thing in the whole length of the lock.

'Nice roll' commented one paddler. I just smiled....it was all I could do with my heart in my mouth!



Unlike last year (20,000 Megalitres), the flow was its usual level of around 3000 ML, so the exit from the lock was a tame affair. Straight over to the fast water below the weir to milk it for whatever it was worth, then settle down to slack water and smooth conditions. Everyone seemed in good spirits, though the days end told a different story.

Craig Ellis started at the halfway point to do the Murray 100, before Toby and I came through. We didn't catch him. Andrew was going well after the lock, but was gradually slowing with several issues to contend with. He eventually retired at the end of the day. Meg didn't get to the end before the cutoff period, so was shown as a DNF. And Angie, keeping to the right as instructed, ended up in a side channel, eventually coming to rest on a barbed wire fence. Mmmmm...this can't be right. 8km later, she rejoined the correct course, but also finished after the cutoff.

This was Toby's first multi-day event, and a bit of a test. After several attempts to washride some faster M100 crews, he burned a few too many calories near the end, and I paddled on to gain an unexpected 5 minute lead.

Day 2, and a longer stint to the lock. Toby and I had the luxury of a 'sleep-in', as our start was moved 90 minutes after the first starters. This meant we could wear our normal day wear (in my case, wool T shirt and paddle shorts!) and paddle in warmer conditions. Our plans went awry though, as once again my boat found a submerged log and launched itself skywards.

Bending the rudder as expected, it took Toby and I 10 minutes to fix at the first available landing spot.

A group of sea kayakers were also doing the 200, as a buildup to a proposed Bass Strait crossing. They just missed the first flush of the lock, but were told to wait in their boats for Toby and I to arrive. Of course, with our rudder problems, we didn't.

They pulled over after the lock for a bite to eat, and eventually missed the cutoff time also. At a speed of around 5km/hr, it was obvious that some of them were in no way ready for the strait crossing, but good on them for trying in the first place.

Meg and Angie soldiered on, finding some seat adjustments making things more tolerable. Meg was enjoying herself, but not fast enough to make the cutoff. Angie just got in by a few minutes, all smiles.



Toby was not happy about our time difference, and with the previous days lesson learned, sprinted with 12 km to go. I gamely held on to come in 3 minutes behind.

The final day, Waikerie to Morgan, had earlier starts so we could finish at lunchtime. This morning is typically the highlight of the race, though the wonderful thick fog of last

year was replaced by bright reflective sunshine, making progress difficult in a different way. Sunglasses were 'de rigeur'



A quick stop at the lock, and a time to relax for a few k's afterwards, camera in hand, enjoying the scenery. Then, as the other paddlers caught us, it was time to get cracking once again.

We passed by the M100 start earlier this time, during their starts. Craig was yet to start, so Toby and I were gradually reeling the slower paddlers in. With a few K's to go, there were just two crews ahead, and spurred on by the finish line Toby and I crossed together, first home on the day.

It was obvious no records were going to be broken this year, so it was just the fun of the racing and the great scenery and people that were the reward.

My landcrew Alanna provided excellent support for Toby and I, while lending advice and assistance to others less experienced. Some holiday!

Hats off to the slower paddlers who took this event on. They didn't get a sleep-in and finish early. They started 6.30am (darkness in winter), paddled all those extra hours with the added discomfort, and finished late without the benefit of a rest before dinner. A quick meal and off to bed early to do it all again the next day. Respect!



As an event, the RPM is special. The river is wide, shallow in places but beautiful in its own way. It is the Murray at its grandest, but also most vulnerable, as the water is sucked from it at every turn.

I'd suggest the RPM is within the capability of nearly all club members, and with a little organisation (such as trailering the boats and flying to the event), is well worth doing as a major club event like the HCC and Murray Marathon.

