

Riverland Paddling Marathon 2016 by Tony Hystek

Lane Cove can be justifiably proud of its mantle as Australia's premier Ultramarathon club, a title held almost unbroken for two decades with the Hawkesbury Canoe Classic, and reconfirmed again this year with a superb performance in the Riverland Paddling Marathon.

The RPM 200 starts at Berri and finishes at Morgan, 208km downstream. It passes through relatively barren country but the river itself offers spectacular views of high cliffs, redgum forests and the occasional floodplains. Days distances are 76km, 68km and 63km, with a lock to traverse each day. To have all paddlers arrive at the lock together, we are sent off in several starts for the 12-20km to the lock. We gather upstream of the lock, then paddle in together to chill for a while, then are released like young carp.

Our 2016 team comprised:

- Anjie Lees
- Duncan Johnstone
- Ken Holmes and Ross Fraser
- Tom Simmat
- Richard Yates and Craig Ellis
- Tony Hystek

That's 6 out of 17 starters in the 208km event; not bad from one club. Most of the locals choose the softer option of the shorter Murray 100 km event, or even shorter versions on offer.



Anjie chose to paddle in a K1, and improved her performance as the event progressed. By day 3, she was powering. 'If only this went for another week, I'd be very happy'. One of the new rules was that anyone taking a 'swim' had to be checked by the medical officer. In Anjie's case, hitting at the checkpoint and falling into 6 inches of water constituted a swim, and was enough for her to be sidelined for 30 minutes waiting for the medic to arrive. Lets just say that another swim the following day may possibly not have been as diligently reported!

Anjie got her V35 K1 record too.

Duncan started with a bad back, and with the intention to finish. His seat was a problem on the first day, but he had it sorted by day 3. Unfortunately, his stomach contents were not as sorted on day 3, and he struggled on through the first half before coming good toward the end.

Ken and Ross were definitely along for the experience. With picnic lunches and a steady pace, they had a leisurely paddle towing a washrider almost the whole way. Not once did the other paddler offer to lead. As you can imagine, tempers were a little frayed especially when the other guy raced ahead at the second lock to get out at the only steps off the water. The third morning brought heavy frost to the start. Ken had forgotten his gloves, and with no gloves was lucky to escape frostbite on the first, pre-dawn leg. It was seriously cold!

The cold didn't seem to affect Tom as much, except when he hit a log and fell in. Craig was fortunately there to render assistance. As all paddlers had to carry a dry set of clothes this year, he was able to change and set off without anyone being the wiser.

No gloves for Tom...he has hands of steel. With no records to break, he had a relatively relaxed paddle otherwise. His new campervan created quite a stir, and I think he had orders for around 6 at last count.



Richard and Craig drew straws for who would paddle each leg of their relay. Craig drew the straws in Adelaide before Richard arrived. The guys had a very enjoyable journey and provided great help to the rest of the team. Craig also suffered on the last morning with frostbitten fingers, but had the benefit of a heated steering wheel for the next leg.

Tony had great first and third days, with a very low point on the second day caused by a combination of bad food choice and a seat pad in the wrong place. After having an extended stop at a checkpoint, he then paddled on to catch Tom basking on a riverbank. Stopping to check, he fell over his boat and bent the rudder. Had another go at destroying the rudder on the third morning, but fortunately the weed deflector took the

brunt of the force and no damage done. Highs and lows..that's the RPM.

The success of the Lane Cove team didn't go unnoticed, and it would be great to take a bigger crew next year, especially if some wanted to do the relay. That's a really fun way to do it. We have a club trailer. There's no reason why those short of time couldn't fly over for the weekend and be back at work on Tuesday.

A special thanks to the landcrew who all buddy up, have a lot of fun together and make this possible; Sue (Ross), Meg (Ken), Sally (Craig), Michaela (Richard), Clayton (Anjie and Duncan), Christine (Tom), Alanna (Tony).



It's a great way to see the Riverland area and to sample some local produce along the way (especially at Claudio Vineyard – welcome coffee and cakes riverside at a new checkpoint). We all dine together at night and share tall stories, and the kids had a ball at the adventure park, visiting Banrock Station and being cheer squad for their Dads!

Have a go at the RPM...It's a great event for everyone.