

BALLINA CLUB CAMP

3rd - 12th MAY 2015

Submitted by Sue Alcock

Images by Margaret, Ian & Sue.



The muddy waters of the Richmond River at Ballina just kept flowing continuously out to sea, creating a dirty beige skirt pushing out into the ocean, and taking with it huge tree trunks, old TV sets, and sadly a dead horse along with other assorted debris. How on earth were we going to kayak in these flooded waterways over the coming week?

All the preparations regarding tides, launching sites, morning tea stops etc. were virtually 'out the window' and it was now back to making new paddling plans, according to mother nature's rules. The rain had stopped and the river looked a little tamer on our first kayak outing, but we still had to watch out for the rogue debris still randomly floating down the river. And so we took the safest kayaking route, which was around **Ballina Island**. We had a little hiccup, when we watched the waves pounding into Missingham Bridge, which prompted us to change our course and head around the island the opposite way. All up we had an enjoyable paddle. The days just kept improving, with clear blue skies and warmer temperatures (which caught a few of us out with our clothing selection).



Happy Hour took a new approach with nibbles being prepared according to car reg. numbers of odd evens, determining who would be responsible for catering on alternate evenings. The general feedback was that this bought about a wonderful new selection of delicious treats for us all to try, while sipping on the occasional beer or wine.

Margaret led the way on the second day, paddling upstream along the still muddy waters of **Emigrant Creek** while Ian, Richard & a few others searched for the 'all important' morning tea spot. Miraculously we found suitable areas over the first few days, but not without a few minor incidents. It

seems some seniors just couldn't wait to visit a beauty parlour for their mud treatments and so 'threw' themselves into the waters repeatedly over the coming days. Not quite sure if it really did show any noticeable improvements to their outward appearances oh well each to their own! A little more about the mud baths later. Richard, our 'fast & furious' leader, lead the way after the morning tea break and wanted desperately to reach the 10km mark (20km return) as he had announced earlier that he did not think it was " worth putting the kayak in the water unless we did 20kms". The 'slow & steady' group meanwhile were enjoying the warmth of the sun, the various birds flying overhead and the picturesque environment along the creek banks.



Still needing to give the Richmond River a miss we decided to paddle up **North Creek** on our third day. Launching at the boat ramp, at the end of Martin St we ambled upstream passing the Sea Bird Rescue Centre, Ballina Airport, the oyster farms and up into the heavily treed nature reserve, west of Lennox Head and once again the scouts found a beautiful stopping point and again we had some eager folk who just couldn't hold back from their mud treatments.

A few keen cyclist took their bikes to the camp, so were able to ride around the caravan park, into Ballina and one fitness fanatic cycled to Lennox Head and back again, but we won't mention any names (will we Vivien!).

We arrived at the Lismore Bridge to find workmen, cranes & lots of activity, which meant we had to off-load the kayaks & park a little distance away. Amazingly some of us were escorted back passed the 'danger area' by a very handsome young man. A different type of vegetation (bamboos, palms, conifers & gums) followed us along the **Wilson River**, around Lismore's outskirts and to the west. Only days earlier this river had been seven metres higher, which was indicated by the muddy colour of the trees either side of us. The scouts had a little more trouble finding a dry spot for morning tea, so we agreed to land at what looked like a nice grassy paddock. **OMG** were we surprised when the first people to land fell in (yes eager to have that beauty treatment again) after that experience each individual, from then on, was helped out of their



kayaks. Venturing up the very muddy slopes we had more rolls/slips on the banks, this rare performance continued again as we left. The Wilson River is 102km from Ballina, so mainly fresh water with lots of meandering turns along the way heading towards Boat Harbour, near Bexhill.



On the Friday the winds were a little stronger when the group headed south along the Richmond River towards the Wardell Pub for lunch, while the continual flow of the floodwaters heading out to sea against the in-tide flow which barely effected the paddling strength of the 'seniors' who put their expert skills into practice & paddled the distance in 2hr 15 mins. The return trip was a totally different story, with the winds behind them and the advantage of the swiftly flowing waters; the trip was completed in a record time of 1hr 15 mins. Non-paddlers joined the kayakers for a counter lunch at the Wardell Pub.

A fabulous roll up of 46 people joined the Ballina Camp at the Lakeside Holiday Caravan Park nestled in next to the Shaw's Bay Lake, where we enjoyed our evening get-togethers, watching the sun set over the hills. 34 people paddled and 12 non-paddlers had coffee each day, went out exploring or just spent a relaxing afternoon in the sun.

Only two people took up the option of paddling with the dolphins, at Byron Bay, on the last day.

A special thanks to Jim, Margaret, Derek & Rick for their support in planning & general running of the camp and to everyone else for your patience & understanding.