

## CoffsHarbour Camp Report

### General

The Park Beach Holiday Park was selected as the recommended accommodation. It is located on Ocean Parade across from the surfing beach and Coffs Harbour Creek, well positioned for non-paddlers re shops and bike-paths and central as far as our range of paddles is concerned. These paddles ranged from the Kalang River, 31km South, Bellinger River 38 km South West and the Corindi River, 43 km North.

The Coffs Harbour Region is backed by impressive coastal mountains close to the sea, with many intervening forested areas linked to the sea by short, strongly tidal sandy creeks. Bonville and Pine Creeks are flanked by Bongil Bongil National Park; Coffs Harbour Creek penetrated wild bush gardens with bird hides, city central, industrial areas and suburbia, while the bordering rivers pass through grazing land to the south and rural small holdings to the north. The paddles were characterised by many passes under bridges, where coastal railway, main highway and old highway crossed the waterways, very little boat traffic and mostly sheltered stretches that were an anathema to our sailors. The basic paddles were 12 – 18 km long with opportunities for 'hard-core' members to extend further upstream, past the morning-tea sites and/or out towards creek/river mouths. Care was taken that any 'break-away' groups were supported with the necessary leadership.

Ref:- Scott Thorsbourne: " The Paddler's Guide to NSW."

### The Paddles.Tuesday:- Bonville Creek./Sawtell

Owing to the early high tide, we needed an early (6.45am) getaway for 8.00 am at Moller Drive with 22 paddlers. That is except for Bernie who ran out of petrol for the second time in two days. How did this man run a school? As the creek continued to narrow through pristine national park, we encountered reflections, that on a still day, are reminiscent of the 'Noosa River Narrows'. Turnaround occurred when Brian was confronted by an angry swimming Black Snake that objected to being photographed. Morning tea was enjoyed just short of the horse paddock on the south bank. Arriving at Moller Drive, we were greeted by kayak-friendly residents who were familiar with the local kayak club- the Plywood Pirates, who launch here. A small group preceded cautiously another couple of kilometres toward the creek mouth on the out-going tide.



### Wednesday:- Bellinger River Descent.

Personally, we regarded this 18km paddle as the “Jewel in the Crown” – frequently found on kayaker’s ‘bucket lists’. Launch time at the George Edmund’s Reserve, across the river from the farming and craft town of Bellingen, was 9.00am in order to ride, first, the freshwater flow and then the out-going tide while enjoying the early cool of a 32° day. Ian may know something of the surprise appearance of the photographer? Perhaps we shall end up in the tourism publications?

This river drains the high Dorrigo Plateau and attendant Gondwana rainforest region and frequently floods, so water speed and levels are crucial for a good safe paddle, highlighted by a rare launch, for us, into briskly flowing freshwater. We needed to ‘negotiate’ a rocky shelf at the launch, followed by fast flowing water over rocky shallows on the first bend. We drifted and paddled through an impressively forested stretch and then through lush dairy farmland, full of what Terri referred to as “Dutch Cattle” (Friesians). John, Brenda and Charlie joined the group at Fernmount, just before our morning tea stop, where most of us enjoyed a cool dip, with both Mike and Miro resplendent in their “budgies”. Unfortunately Miro’s ‘Dead Dog’ impression shows that he has yet to master the tricky manoeuvre of getting his lycra shorts back on while standing!! Fernmount is an ideal place to commence the paddle if the Bellingen section has water levels either too low or too high and daunting.

On leaving the farmland, the river passed through familiar mangrove shorelines backed by steep cleared slopes, often crested by impressive houses. We passed under the Pacific Highway Bridge onto a long NE reach which can be particularly difficult to paddle when there are strong NE winds blowing. Not so for us though, with conditions remaining near perfect, albeit a little hot, with our loss of earlier shade. We encountered the Raleigh Milk Factory, dredge and Raleigh caravan park, with its new cabins all built on high stilts. Our exit point was the Mylestom boat ramp and beach. Many thanks to Carol, Bernie and Ian for their car shuffle efforts, while John and Brenda deserve praise for leaving their wash stands as extra riverside seats for the locals.

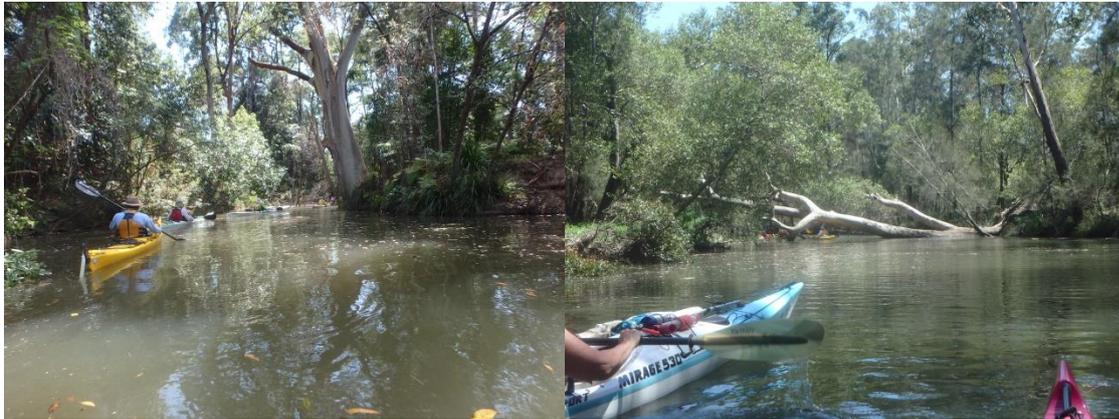
Mylestom lends itself to extending the paddle out beyond 20km, by heading across Back Creek into the Kalang River, with caution required, on an outgoing tide, where the two rivers meet.



### Thursday:- Coffs Harbour Creek

Part A Early birds George, Richard, Mike, Margaret & Rick, paddled out to the break at the Creek bar and rode a small swell back in a few times, agreeing that a paddle out to Little Muttonbird Island with its very rough shallows was not on, this day.

Part B With wind and high temperatures predicted, the group enjoyed a change of tempo from the previous two days. A later start saw us doing a 13km return paddle through a range of Coffs Harbour City's environs under shady, breezy conditions allowing some sailing on the city gardens reach and a restricted turnaround near the tidal limit. Morning tea at Rotary Park, just north of the City Mall, was remarkable for the 'Poo and Spew' by one of the traditional owners drinking nearby. Our returning to the pull-out spot at a little beach packed with swimmers, produced an interesting array of expressions as 17 kayaks arrived in quick succession, like Indian war canoes out of the western wilds. Our camp dinner was held at the excellent Bowls Club, within walking distance up Ocean Parade.



#### Friday:- Kalang River / Urunga

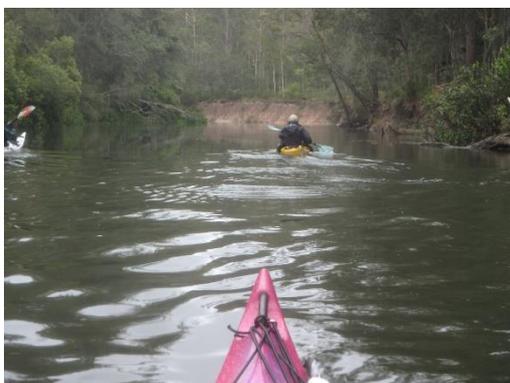
This 16 km paddle started near the old Yacht Club on Atherton Drive and we were able to ride the strong incoming tide through large fish schools, past a dead cow, while flanked by impressive homes on the southern river slopes and grazing cattle to our north on Newry Island. It was planned to paddle under the new bypass bridge and explore Picket Hill Creek but we were thwarted by 'Unauthorized vessels do not proceed' signs across the river under the bridge. Margaret, not to be daunted, noticed a very small contact telephone number in the bottom corner of a large sign, rang through on her mobile, and after at least 3 public servant 'flick passes', she was politely but firmly denied by someone just below the Minister. Morning tea was enjoyed on the south bank, just short of the West Newry junction. Our return paddle was via the longer northern channel around Newry

Island, through canal-style housing and past oyster leases. This paddle could be extended to Urunga township and boardwalk and, on a high tide, over a gap in the channel wall into the Urunga Lagoon, a renown waterbird sanctuary. The Happy Hour entertainment was provided by 'High-Tech Bernie' cavorting around on his amazing one-wheeled Chinese Segway with considerable skill. His offers of test rides were politely ignored.



#### Saturday:- Corindi River / Redrock

This paddle started at the village of Redrock, the northern edge of civilization here, and we rode a very strong, incoming tide, measuring around 5 km/h, around Jewfish Point . Paddling conditions were ideally cool with a gentle breeze. Above the mangroves, the area is sparsely populated and almost as pristine as a national park. On a warmer day, we predicted that the morning tea spot, with its lovely sloping, sandy beach, would necessitate a swim. Only Miro obliged with an involuntary effort as he attempted to alight from his kayak. This was a truly beautiful river especially further up, where Brian, Robert and Margaret continued somewhat spontaneously, extending their paddle more than a kilometre. Richard, Robert and Rick continued with the now rapidly outgoing tide to investigate the channel around Redrock toward the mouth.





### Sunday:- Pine Creek / Sawtell

A cool but foreboding overcast morning, again at Moller Drive, saw 8 stoic survivors paddle bravely forth into the gloom. 'Ye faithful band of brothers!' This creek is a sister to Bonville Creek, but wider, shallower and longer. It impressed with the number of White and Grey Egrets seen. While a 15 km return paddle to terminal pools surrounded by epiphytes is possible here, this was not attempted today.

### Conclusion

A further, short 2 hr paddle in Boambee Creek was prepared, if required. It needs a \$5 entry fee to the privately-owned reserve and top of the tide timing. It is hoped that camp attendees will report favourably about these paddles in the Coffs Harbour region, deeming it worthwhile to proceed more than an hour past our previous southern-most camp at Yamba.