

HAWKESBURY RIVER CAMP REPORT - 10th to 18th February 2018

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Prelude:

The Hawkesbury River Camp ran from Saturday 10th to Sunday 18th February 2018 with paddles on all days. A paddle was arranged on the Bellinger River for those who wished to break their southern journey staying at the Bellinger River tourist park and a paddle on Myall Lakes for those who wished to break their northern trip home based at Great Lakes CP, Tuncurry.

The Hawkesbury Camp was based at "Greemans on the Hawkesbury" Caravan Park upstream from the main highway at Mt White. An old park in the very early stages of being upgraded, it provided a delightful setting with ample room and good facilities for the mandatory happy hours each day, coupled with abundant wildlife. The steep and roughish drive in and the dubious phone reception were challenges we happily overcame. The isolation and surrounding hilly bushland paved the way for a very relaxed and informal stay. Bruce N was camp co-ordinator.



Kayaking:

By Friday evening most were comfortably settled. At happy hour Bruce gave a general briefing of the 9 days ahead and a more detailed synopsis of Saturday's first paddle. With the weather forecast favourable, the paddle to Barrenjoey Beach was confirmed. It was agreed that we rendezvous at the top of the hill for the 55 minute convoy drive to Patonga Beach. This became our regular starting point.

What a lovely drive and staging post for the first paddle! Patonga Beach welcomed us with ample parking and glistening waters and at 8am we headed out into the semi-open waters of Broken Bay and the Hawkesbury entrance. As can be expected, the swell of the ocean ran through the heads and made the paddle across to the southern shore interesting and a little nerve racking for the less experienced, but never the less an ideal way for these paddlers to get a taste of the sea and add to their paddling experience. To the delight of those that saw it, a seal popped its head out of the water, looked at us then disappeared. We made our way to below the lighthouse where a lovely beach beckoned for morning tea.



Following this, some decided to walk up to the lighthouse and take in the history and beautiful view whilst a number preferred to paddle further up and explore the Pittwater area with the remaining choosing to relax on the beach. We grouped again for lunch

before heading across the Pittwater to a little sandy bay below West Head and the old battlements, before a swim in the crystal clear waters. The crisp water was a joy on a hot day. Homeward bound conditions were ideal for a comfortable sail with tide and wind helping us along. It was agreed that this was a wonderful opening paddle of roughly 16K.

After an hour and fifteen minute drive, Sundays paddle was from the Akuna Bay boat ramp in the Ku-ring-gai National Park taking us down Coal & Allied Ck, into Cowan Ck before turning right into Yeomans Bay for morning tea. A total of approx. 18k return. It is true that the convoy did break up en route when a turn was missed, causing some to have a longer drive with somewhat higher stress levels; fortunately all managed to arrive ready for a timely departure. This paddle took us through the National Park with high rocky shores and wonderful scenery. After some anxious moments we managed to find a perfect landing at the end of the bay for a pleasant morning tea.



Heading home, conditions changed dramatically with a severe south easterly change blasting through. This tested all paddlers as we punched directly into the blow. However, with everyone pulling together, we managed to arrive back at the launch site a little tired but smug in the knowledge that we'd beaten the conditions. As an aside, we received a number of comments on how good it was to see the procession of 24 kayaks heading en masse down the highway. What a great way to promote our sport!

Monday saw us heading to Dust Hole Bay boat ramp in Berowra for a paddle in Berowra Creek. One can't overlook mentioning the spectacular drive down the range to the vehicular ferry we needed to use to cross to our starting point. Awesome! What an interesting paddle it was. Quaint houses squashed into the narrow flat between the cliff behind and the creek in front, many we believe being holiday homes for the rich and famous. Many are only accessible by boat. We passed these and entered the Marramarra National Park on one side and headed up to Crosslands Reserve before returning to the boat ramp for morning tea. Some then headed downstream and into Calabash Bay before stopping below a high cliff for a well earned swim on the way home.

No cars were needed on Tuesday as we paddled from the caravan park up the Hawkesbury for a short distance before heading into Mangrove Creek. We followed the creek up to the Wisemans Road Bridge where we found a suitable landing for morning tea. Unfortunately

the locals have been somewhat lax with their rubbish which detracted from the area but otherwise it was fine. One drama was Sue misplacing her new radio which we eventually found in the water under her boat, fortunately none the worse for the ordeal. A few ventured further up the creek before turning for home. On the way home, Dean & Jim detoured up Popcorn Creek (which they said was great) whilst the rest headed for the coffee shop at the mouth of Mangrove Creek. Unfortunately, to our dismay, the shop closes on Tuesdays so it was a dry argument - thanks for the recommendation Garth! Still, it was another interesting and scenic paddle of about 16+k.



Our club dinner was enjoyed at the Mooney Mooney Workers club this evening. They welcomed us heartily and provided a wonderful dinner with a great outlook. A memorable evening was had by all.

Wednesday heralded a change of scenery when we drove to Ettalong Beach (45 min) and due to the conditions decided to explore Brisbane Waters up towards Woy Woy. This paddle is highly populated and probably the least scenic of all the paddles, however it did have some interesting aspects. At Rip Bridge the river narrows and as the name suggests the tide can really race as a vast amount of water tries to enter/ exit. Fortunately we timed our arrival with the turn of the tide so had no problems. We also had to be alert to the oyster beds which frequent this area. We again found a comfortable park for morning tea and met some local paddlers about to embark on their regular paddle. This paddle could best be described as casual and relaxed and about 16k.

To this stage I've not mentioned the social aspect of the camp. Suffice to say that happy hour each evening was the normal jovial event synonymous with our club camps and each evening after dinner many gathered on the waterfront to solve the world's problems and exaggerate their experiences on an adventure or two. Daylight saving was beneficial as we had the pleasure of the setting sun over the river to add to the ambience. All really enjoyable! However, today Garth had a visitor in the form of a corella which descended on to his shoulder while he relaxed after his paddle. Obviously somebody's ex pet, it was an extremely social bird and loved everyone. It took a particular fancy to Dennis who alas did not share the passion. This only made the bird more desirous and it decided it would have none of this being rejected. We were in stitches watching 'Cocky' chase Dennis around the car repeatedly, ducking back or under the car and really giving him a hard time. I'm not too sure Dennis was that amused!

Brilliant weather greeted us for Thursdays paddle from the Parsley Boat ramp in Brooklyn down the Hawkesbury and into and across Cowan Creek to America & Refuge Bays. After a delightful paddle, morning tea was enjoyed on a sandy strip at the end of America Bay. We then paddled around to the waterfall which was barely running and where some left their canoes to play in the sprinkling water. Here is truth to the story that old people do go back to their childhood! After Refuge Bay we crossed back over Cowan Creek and followed the coast home. In all, this was another particularly enjoyable paddle of about 19k.

Our inordinate luck with the weather continued into Friday morning. When we arrived at Patonga Beach the wind was calm and sea relatively flat and the decision was made to circumnavigate Lion Island and then go into Pearl Bay for morning tea. There was a good swell rolling toward us giving challenging conditions for the less experienced. For many, this was the biggest swell that they had encountered and it was stressed to give the island headland a wide berth. All handled the conditions admirably and after making safe landfall in choppy conditions in beautiful Pearl Bay, exuberance was running high.



Following morning tea we headed back into Patonga Creek where some availed themselves of the coffee shop before heading up the creek for varying distances. By the time all had returned the breeze had strengthened, reinforcing how fortunate we'd been. Many chose this paddle as their pick for the camp.

Bobbin Head was the starting point for Saturdays paddle which incorporated the upper reaches of the beautiful Cowan Creek. This 18k paddle was broken by morning tea under a cliff overhang, sitting on a narrow sliver of sand behind mangroves. This was indeed a unique and delightful morning tea stop. Well found fellas! This paddle wasn't unduly affected by the wind although the reflections were lost due to water turbulence. The scenery more than compensated.



Numbers were down slightly for our final paddle on Sunday when we rocked up to the Deerrubbun Boat Ramp just below the highway bridge over the Hawkesbury at Mooney Mooney. Surprisingly, parking was a slight issue due to overnight campers and early morning fishermen, however we all found spots without too much hassle. We headed left under the bridge and immediately left again entering Mooney Mooney Ck. This paddle exceeded our expectations and we were thrilled to be directed to the original old wharf which was constructed by convicts for our morning tea. It would be interesting to learn some of the stories that were made at that spot!

So ended our nine days of paddling. Variety, magic scenery, kind weather, some entertaining paddling and great company made for a wonderful camp. Thanks go to Martin for his input of local knowledge and sage advice and to all those who attended for their good spirits and camaraderie.