

Trip Report – Paddle for Life

3 members of QSKC; Cheryl Christensen, Mark Hessling and Tony Hirst, set forth on Thursday 11th September 2014 for northern NSW to prepare for the 2014 Paddle for Life.

In previous years the Paddle for Life was held over 3 days from Lismore to Ballina down the Wilsons and Richmond Rivers. 2014 saw the event shortened to 2 days from Coraki to Ballina. Mark had paddled the first leg from Lismore to Coraki on 2 occasions in 2012 and 2013 and still wanted to complete the whole journey, so ran the Paddle for Life Prelude paddle from Lismore to Coraki on Friday 12th September.

After doing an early morning car shuffle between Lismore and Coraki, we set off about an hour after our scheduled departure time. The day began clear and sunny with a very light breeze and a small outgoing tide. Despite its distance from the sea, the Wilsons River at Lismore is still tidal with a tidal range between 0.5 and 1m. The outgoing tide lasted for about 30 minutes :-(



Departure at Lismore. Others also did Lismore to Coraki.

The group stopped at what is loosely described as a boat ramp in Wyrallah for lunch. The ramp was just a bit of the muddy bank cut away and overlaid with gravel. All that did was add bits of sharp pieces of rock to the soft mud when it entered your shoes while getting in and out of the boats. As we were eating lunch at the small park near the boat ramp, a motorist who stopped at the toilets informed us that a koala had just climbed into a small tree beside the road. This koala was one of 17 we spotted on the first day. In greater numbers were water dragons sunning themselves on the overhanging limbs of the trees. We even spotted a very large goanna several metres high on an overhanging branch enjoying the sunshine.

After lunch the tide became stronger and the south easterly wind also increased. This pattern unfortunately continued over the weekend.



Arriving at Coraki

After several hours of slow but steady progress, the small township of Coraki poked its head around the last bend and we completed the day's paddle together. After another exit through the mud, although this mud was just a few centimetres thick over sand, we set up camp for the night, got showered and headed to the pub for dinner.

After an early night, we packed our camping gear away and checked out. The local council, who owns the caravan park at Coraki, waived the camping fees for those on unpowered sites who were paddling in the Paddle for Life!

As the time for the start of the Paddle for Life approached a very eclectic group of paddle craft started appearing. The majority of the vessels were Mirages, but there were a few SOTs, a hand-made wooden kayak (with absolutely nothing on its deck) and Steve Posselt;

<http://www.kayak4earth.com/Darling/index.htm> with his modified Eco-Behzig, which did the Brisbane to Adelaide via the Darling River trip in 2007. In all 22 boats left Coraki with a light winds and a small outgoing tide.

The outgoing tide lasted about 30 minutes, so the rest of the trip was against the ever increasing tide. The wind was also predominantly south easterly; they direction we were generally heading. Lunch was a welcome sausage and steak sizzle at Woodburn where a barefoot water skiing carnival was also on. We managed to come ashore and relaunch on the 2 metres of beach that didn't have ski boats. The biggest effort on this leg was the 3 young guys who paddled their SUPs from Coraki. The first leg from Coraki to Woodburn doubled as a race, with only one entrant, Chris in a Mirage 580, so naturally he won.

The leg from Woodburn to Broadwater was also another slog against the tide and wind. This leg was not a race, but Tony was in a determined mood. Not only did he push Chris, he went passed and stayed their and ended up being the first single vessel into Broadwater. Not to be outdone, Mark also pushed hard and stayed with Chris, finishing about 1 minute behind Chris, and 2 minutes behind Tony, to be the first rudderless boat into Broadwater! Cheryl also remained stoic and completed the leg under her own power, with no help from her sail.

The Broadwater overnight location was a private dwelling right on the river with a great yard for the tents. The boat ramp was unfortunately half a metre deep with mud due to recent heavy rains, but the Broadwater Caravan Park was across the river so the mud was washed off in the welcome hot shower.



Broadwater camp site

After another delicious meal, Tony somehow ended up with a guitar in hand. The owner of the house we were staying at happened to be a guitarist (and mad footy fan), so he and Tony hit it off straight away. With Terry Munsie (ex QSKC member) on ukulele, we were afforded another memorable night of songs.



Lots of mud!

We woke to a very foggy morning and quite a strong westerly blowing. We hoped this would give us some respite from the headwinds. Alas, the westerly stopped as the fog cleared. The launch resulted in many muddy boats and legs and we once again headed downstream against the tide. The Richmond River downstream of Broadwater is quite wide, and with the wind swinging toward the north, we faced headwinds again.

As we got closer to Ballina both the wind and tide increased, making finishing the paddle quite an effort. Once again the QSKC contingent finished the paddle under their own steam. Mark and Tony did their ritual rolls at the end of the paddle in front of an appreciative audience.

Cheryl again show true grit and determination and without any assistance from her sail, finished the paddle as several other required the services of the SES flood boat.



Cheryl glad to be out of her kayak

Another filling lunch was waiting for us, and after some formalities our group started the car shuffle to pick up our vehicles and head home, exhausted but very satisfied.



The finishing boats



The finishing QSKC crew

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