

Noosa River

Water serpent through Cooloola Sands

Seriously! Come on weather Gods! Not another strong wind warning. Looks like this overnighiter could be called off too. Since there were only four, the call was made to go, meet at Elanda Point Saturday morning and see what the wind was doing on Lake Cootharaba. After the body shock of alighting from a warm car to a crisp 7 degrees, we were delighted to find the lake not quite a smooth mill pond, but a consistent fluttering ripple. The decision was made to launch, so we got busy, stuffing small mountains of gear through little holes and like magic it disappeared and was stowed.

The group of four were Ian, Cathy, Dayna and Helena. The plan was - paddle across Lake Cootharaba, pit stop at the Kinaba Info Centre, follow directions past Fig Tree Point, then up Noosa River for late Morning Tea at Harry's Hut, past camp 1 and onto camp 2 for two nights. Total distance to Camp 2, about 15 kms.



in its warmth as our steady paddle strokes began to quench our thirst for a week end of nature play.

Our tired yawns from the four am start and two hour drive were swiftly banished once we set off across the lake under a dome of clear blue. The fresh breeze tapped at our right shoulders and licked across the bow of the kayaks. We tracked north east, the sun in our eyes, faces bathed

After a quick pit stop at Kinaba, we moved into the Noosa River proper, and since the wind had lost its fetch, the waters were almost glassy still. There were rafts of floating water lilies where the Kin Kin meets the Noosa, but the purple explosions were

missing, still tucked away, hiding from the chilled morning air. Just a few strong paddle strokes and the kayaks seemed to glide and aqua plane like silent stalkers slithering across the water. Paddling through the calm waters felt effortless, the silence and stillness akin to meditation where everything distilled to one point of focus - now. It was easy to fall behind and just be



appearing as tall, light green sentinels guarding the river banks. An eagle soared above, and the cacophony of bird life was testament to the rivers' riches.

immersed in the river, especially where it narrowed and closed in, the trees reached across the water, some fallen, now mere skeletons rising from the deep. The sedges too rose out of the depths, swaying as we passed, and



Harry's Hut already! We stopped for a rest and a late bit of morning tea. Thank goodness trip leaders think of all the important things like extra rope to tie up the boats. Good onya Ian. Next was a short paddle up to

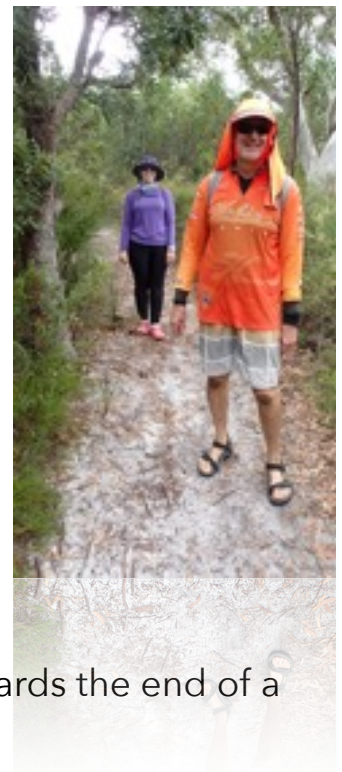
camp 2, haul the kayaks out, unload, pick a spot and set up camp. We whiled away the rest of the late afternoon and early evening sitting beside the river appreciating the changing colours of dusk and indulging in "sun downers" - red wine, cordial, nuts, crackers and dried fruit. What an outrageously awful way to end a top day!!



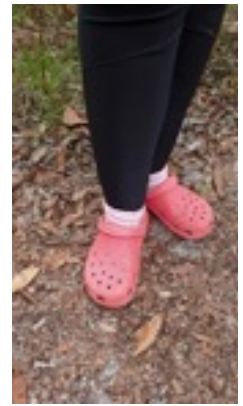
When you don't have to pack up and hurry to the next destination it's a pleasure to indulge in a leisurely breakfast - so we did. Our outdoor kitchen was an extravagant display of lightweight camping gizmos.

That "jetboil" gadget is the go and how about freezer bag cooking - now there's something to look up and try for the next camping trip. (Psst talk to Dayna).

We eventually set off around 9 am for a short 3 km paddle up river to camp 3, then a 12 km return hike to the Cooloola Sand Patch. This is a walk that gently rises east from the river up to about 200 m above sea level, then swings south through classic heath vegetation - banksias, grevilleas, hakeas, plenty of Scribbly gums and lots of delicate yellow and pink flowers adorning the shrubs. The sand patch was massive in area, like a mini desert and all that was missing were the camels and Omar Sharif and it could have been mistaken for the set of an Arabian sand sea. Having crossed the patch, our efforts were rewarded with sweeping views south to the Cooloola lakes system and beyond to Noosa Heads. Towards the end of a



12km walk through mostly soft sand, and depending on the footwear, the chances of blisters are pretty good. So, do you avoid getting blisters wearing crocs and socks or tevas and no socks? Dana who sported the European backpacker look with crocs and socks avoided them, but Ian's tevas and no socks called for a first aid stop at about the 10 km mark.



Our energy reserves spent, we rested and refuelled at Camp 3 before putting back in the river and returning to camp. By this stage the weather was making 180 degree spins between cloudy, sunny, showering, still and wind gusts. It was enough to leave you feeling whiplashed. We cozied up under the fly to once again indulge in "sun downers" as the rain set in and the early dark added a gloom to our weary bones. What else do you do when it starts raining? You eat, drink, tell a few stories then retire by 8 pm. Yep it was an early night and we were serenaded asleep to the patter of rain on nylon tent flies.

Defining small mercies - having to pack up wet, but at least it had stopped raining. Monday morning and it was time to paddle back the way we came, back through still sections of liquid mirrors, and wider sections of the river where the wind was getting up and in our faces. But we really faced off with the winds crossing Lake Cootharaba where the bows dipped below the surface, waves crashed across the kayaks, riding up and down, hold on, its a mini rodeo. Yeeehaaaaa, what a lot of fun. Now if the thought of that doesn't plaster a glee ridden grin from ear to ear, there is something wrong with life's outlook.



