

Ebbs & Flows

Murray River 2011
From the mountains to the sea



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The Right Time!



After years working on a dairy farm, teaching and studying at University, Peter and Heidi Hutton paddled off in February 2011 to fulfill a dream they have held onto for more than 10 years. Residents of Nowra (NSW), they competed in the 'Murray River Marathon' in 1997 and it was then that they decided they would one day make the time to paddle the length of the river.

They are not working to a schedule and camp on the banks of the river wherever possible, carrying all of their camping equipment and a weeks worth of food in the canoe with them.

They began at Towong (near Corryong) and will finish at Goolwa (SA) - a distance of approximately 2,500 km around the 1,000km mark. Completing the adventure means a return to the real world so they are in no real hurry - they will get there when they get there!!

They are travelling in a Mirage 730 double sea kayak and are pictured above leaving Barham, Koondrook on Tuesday 22nd March

They do spoil themselves a little however and stop over at caravan parks every now and again to have a hot shower.

times
sportliftout
 Thursday, May 5, 2011

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From mountains to the Mouth

By MICHAEL SIMMONS

KAYAKING: Heidi and Pete Hutton arrived at the Murray Mouth on Monday, May 2 after travelling 2,500 kilometres over nine weeks in their kayak.

The journey began for the intrepid couple nine weeks ago from the Upper Murray town of Corryong at the foot of the Snowy Mountains.

The couple experienced the adventure of a lifetime, as they were one with nature as they paced their way along the nation's lifeblood, the River Murray.

"We have been living and working in New Zealand for two years and after returning we wanted to do something we have always wanted to do," Heidi said.

"We have had an amazing time with the water so high, the lakes full and the bird life, it is a flowing postcard. "It was great to meet so many

people who live along the river during our trip and there is a good soul to the people.

"There is a spirit along the river that is unique and from the sunsets and sunrises to the yabbies biting our toes it was a memorable experience," Heidi said.

It was not lost on Heidi and Pete of the plight of the River Murray over the past decade and the debate of water rights that continues between states.

"The viewpoint changed on how water from the Murray should be utilised as we came down the river," Pete said.

"Paddling downstream it was such a transition from the mountains in the Snowys, to the steep banks and red gums at Echuca, then into the Mallee, the magnificent limestone cliffs the irrigated plains and the lakes, it was absolutely stunning.

"The Murray has everything and the river took us on our journey," Pete added.

For the first time in 63 days Heidi and Pete enjoyed a bed and a toilet they did not have to go outside to use by staying in comfort at the Goolwa Boat Haven Studios.

"We have roughed it for nine weeks and appreciated a few of the comforts we normally take for granted," Heidi said thankfully.

THE MIGHTY MURRAY: Pete and Heidi Hutton paddled from Corryong to the Murray Mouth, a distance of 2500 kilometres during the past nine weeks.



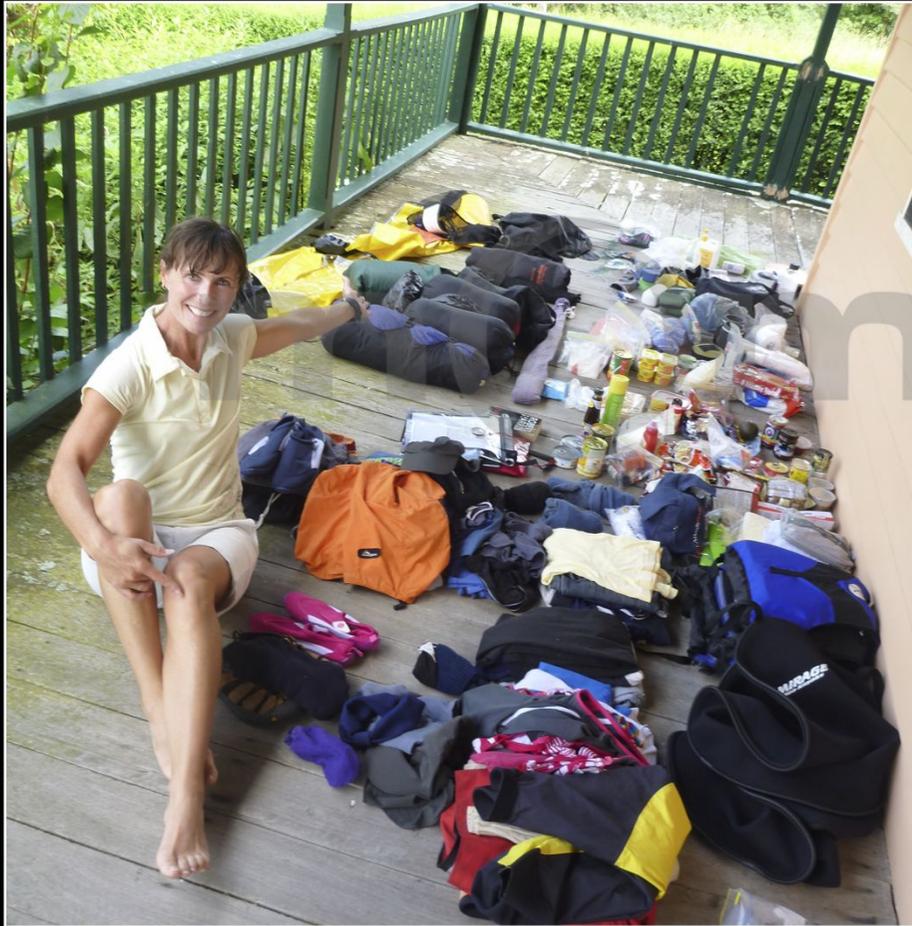
For us it was the right time

Life on the Murray

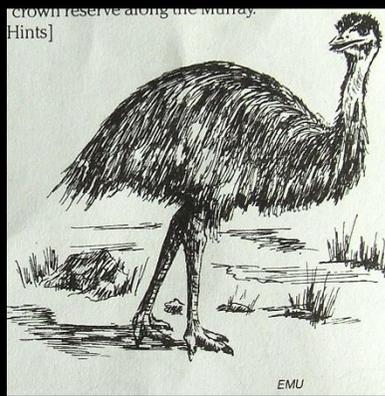
The river, like our lives, ebbs and flows. Our beautiful green Mirage seems at home on the endless meandering snake. We connect tenuously to the majesty of the ancient Murray through lightweight carbon shaft and propulsion blades. The deep scallop grabs decent bites of river water to push us through and away. Our paddle strokes set a primeval rhythm and we feel the squeeze of kevlar through liquid. A peaceful swish permeates our being and combines with our exertion to induce a meditative state. Time and space distort and the kilometres slip away. Our minds are released to contemplate. Childhood memories, words to once well-known poems... we are in the present, the past, the future... we sing, we live.



We had been planning our trip for 8 months but widespread flooding throughout the Murray/Darling catchment threatened to prevent our start. As it was, we delayed for a couple of weeks until the water levels receded enough to give us confidence that we would be able to navigate our way through.



Set to go and very excited



Our wonderful support crew Marty and Gai dropped us at the start. We shared excited chatter and many a laugh on the way down from Nowra to Khancoban

We were about to step into the wonderful history of Strzelecki, Sturt, Hume and Hovell



20TH JULY, 1797 PAUL EDMUND STRZELECKI ARRIVED IN AUSTRALIA ON 25TH APRIL, 1839.
FROM 1839 to 1843 HE EXPLORED AND SURVEYED VAST AREAS OF NEW SOUTH WALES, VICTORIA AND TASMANIA. WHILE EXPLORING IN THE SNOWY MOUNTAINS REGION OF NEW SOUTH WALES HE DISCOVERED AND CLIMBED AUSTRALIA'S HIGHEST PEAK "MOUNT KOSCIUSKO", WHICH HE NAMED IN HONOUR OF THE POLISH LEADER AND PATRIOT, TADEUSZ KOSCIUSZKO.
HE DISCOVERED GOLD AND SILVER IN NEW SOUTH WALES, COAL DEPOSITS IN TASMANIA, INVESTIGATED THE POSSIBILITIES OF IRRIGATION, MEASURED THE HEIGHTS OF MOUNTAINS, CARRIED OUT SOIL ANALYSIS AND COLLECTED AND IDENTIFIED MANY FOSSILS AND MINERALS.
PAUL EDMUND STRZELECKI WAS ONE OF THE FIRST SCIENTISTS IN AUSTRALIA TO UNDERTAKE INVESTIGATIONS



SEA TO SUMMIT waterproof

Front hatch: loose food items, freezer bags, laundry soap, repair kit, toilet paper, detergent, toiletry bag, metho, tie-downs, pillows, yellow dry bag, light, dinner bag, knife, mozzie coils, alfoil, towels, thermarest, sleeping bags

Front deck: map, compass, PFD

Middle deck: fishing rod, radio, rubbish

Rear deck: breakdown paddle, fishing gear, tarp

Behind Heidi: sunscreen, moisturiser, repellent, sunglasses, vaseline

In front of Heidi: PFD, spray decks, 10L water bladder, yellow dry bag (maps, books, first aid, batteries and chargers), sponge, scoop, Keens sandals

Behind Pete: Snacks, toiletry, sunglasses, rope

In front of Pete: Frypan, frozen meals, eggs, water

Day hatch: Dry bag (camera, phone, money, keys), bowls, mugs, lunch bag, breakfast bag, change of clothes

Back hatch: plates, cutlery, cutting board, thermarests, tent, chairs, Trangia, clothes bags

1. *The mountains*







Quite nervous today, the first day of our adventure after months of planning. Not sure what to expect. Where we will be paddling in the next few days was flood declared until only a few days ago. The water is running faster than expected and we are worried about log jams and how the boat will handle after we load all our gear in. We arrive at the proposed launch site, Bringengbrong bridge - the river is narrow, flowing fast and immediately turns a blind bend. Caution prevails and we launch at Towong where there is easier access and we have a better view downstream.



At 12 noon we were off in the rain! The first day was a series of emotional ups and downs. We had an immediate feeling of isolation. We were concerned with the recent floods and subsequent fast flow. Had we prepared well enough? Would our trip end on day 1 with the boat wrapped around a fallen redgum?



The late afternoon was filled with the sight & sounds of white cockatoos and corellas. It was a terrific feeling to be part of this wonderful landscape



Little corella



First camp site: Tintaldra

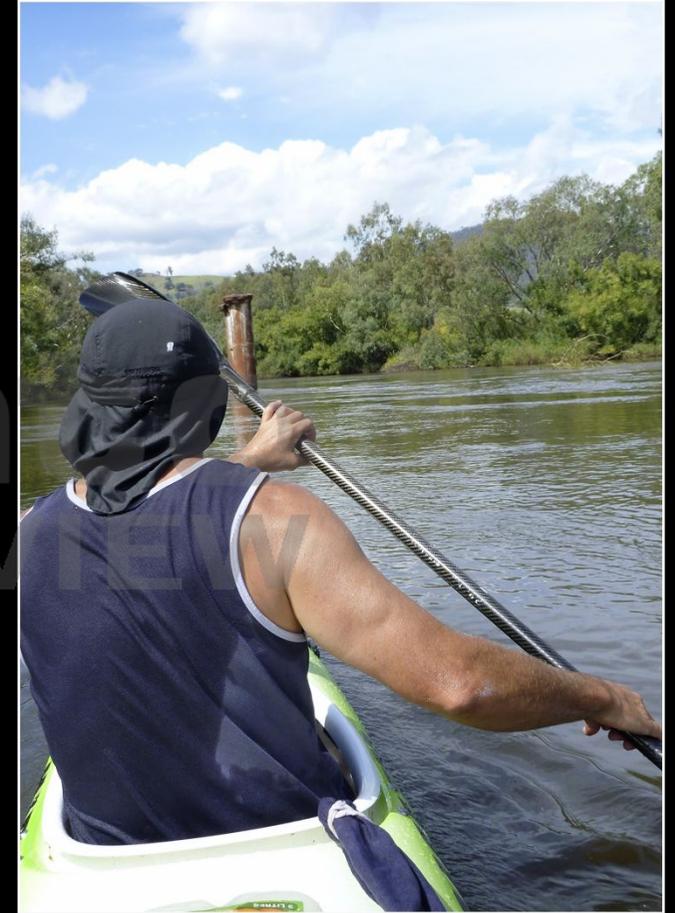


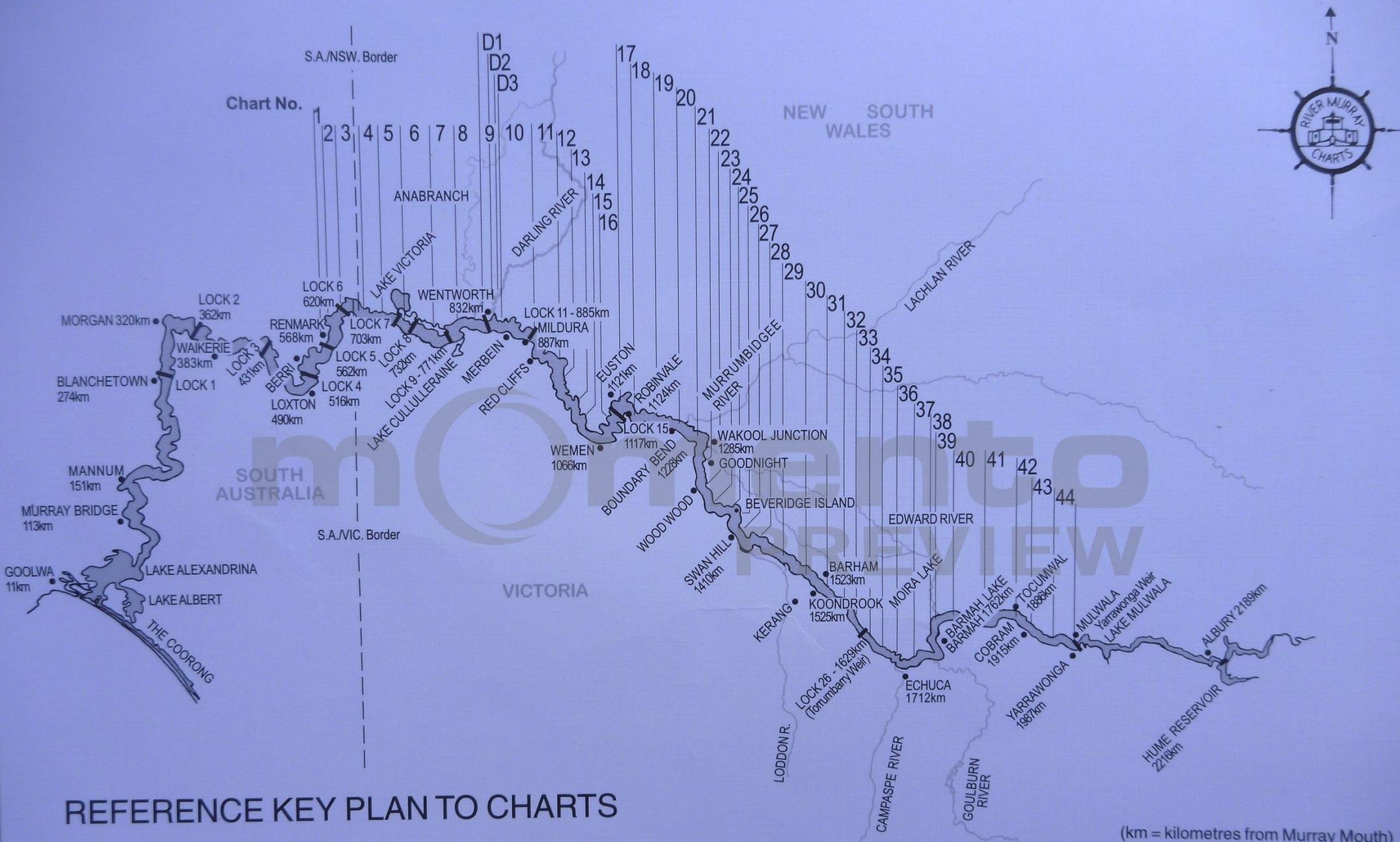
Royal spoonbill

The day started slowly with a mist and low cloud hiding the sun until mid-morning. We made good time through gorgeous cattle country. The river had widened somewhat which reduced our concern for navigating strainers

We are getting accustomed to paddling now and our muscles ache less. We are building up to 5 hours paddling per day and feeling quite good, but are still to have a contented nights sleep on our thermarests.

The paddle today showed the full carnage of the recent floods. Trees and logs stacked up high against each other at heights of over 2m above the current water levels. Although we always had plenty of time to avoid strainers there were places where it would have not taken too much more debris to have dammed the river





REFERENCE KEY PLAN TO CHARTS

(km = kilometres from Murray Mouth)

After three days paddle we made it onto our river charts at the upper reaches of Lake Hume

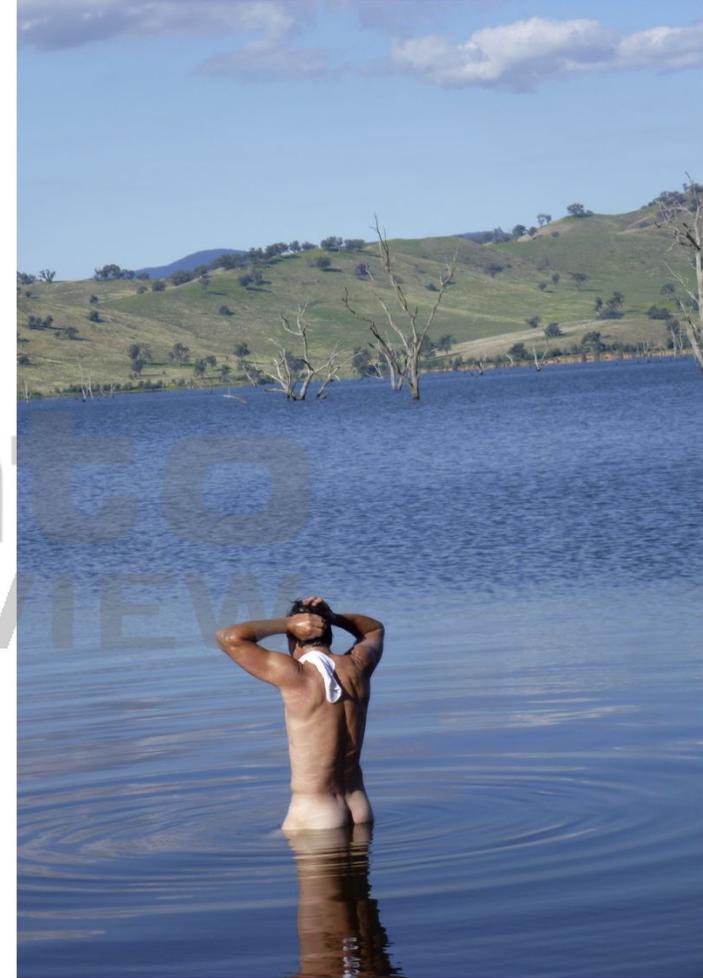


The upper reaches of Lake Hume

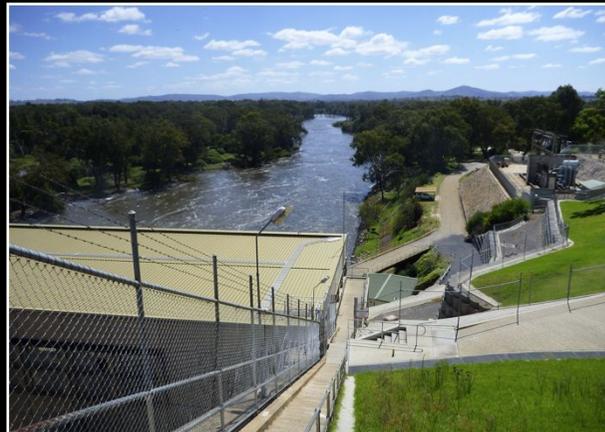
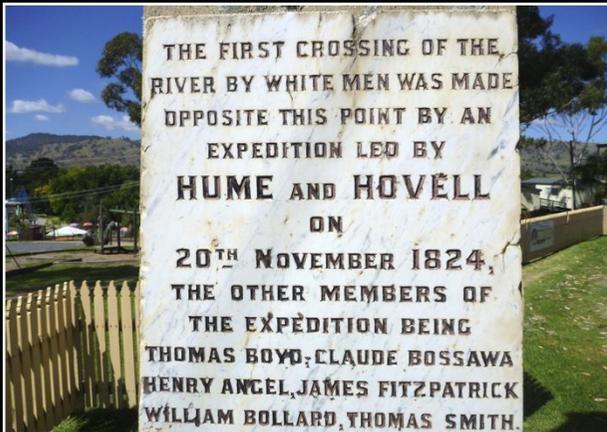


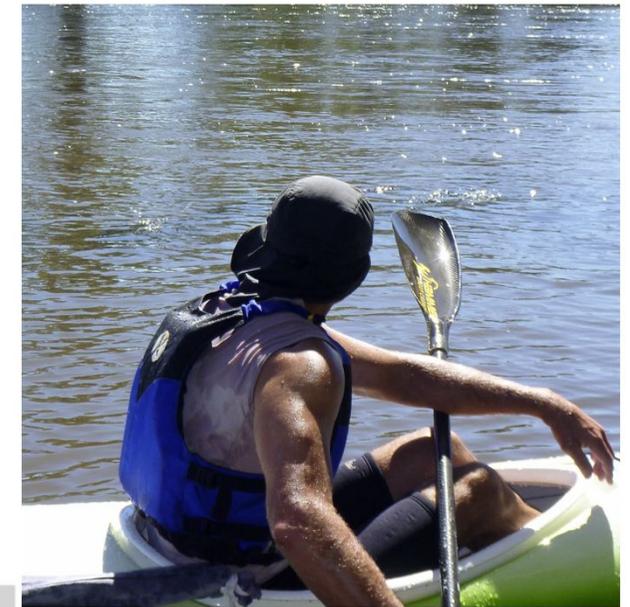
Lake Hume

An eerie paddle across Lake Hume amongst the many dead trees

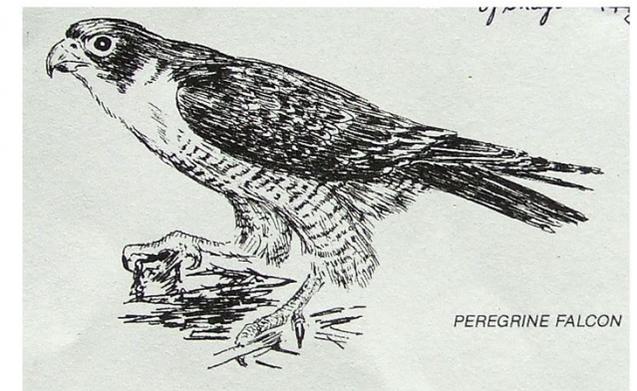


The isolation along Lake Hume was sublime. Noone could reach us by road and there were no houses in sight. Nudgy swims were becoming the norm.





At the Hume weir was the first of the blue kilometre markers which escorted us downstream to the mouth. Quite a way to go.



We are now under the influence of the Hume weir. This is our first experience of human intervention on the Murray flow. It is a controversial subject and we hear differing points of view from the locals as we move downstream, everyone, of course, blaming the poor water management of those that live upstream. But for now the river is full and we have good flow. The mountains fade and we see remnants of the recent floods in the form of "billabongs" that have been cut off as the water recedes. Some of these places are just muddy backwaters but others are pretty spots in the farmland such as the one below. Although beautiful, these stagnant waters are breeding grounds for mozzies and at sunset the air hums with their bloodsucking ways. Local communities fear Ross River fever and encephalitis outbreaks. The mozzies are big and ravenous, we pray that we do not get a hole in our tent



2. Steep banks and river gums





Azure Kingfisher

Very scenic today – swinging ropes, still lots of fallen trees, good flow and gorgeous weather. The river level has dropped from flood levels, making it possible to find good camp sites





Less than 2000 km to go

Lake Mulwala: Yarrawonga
Cold, wet and spooky



Two great camp sites in two days





Yellow-stained toenails and cracked heels from the muddy water





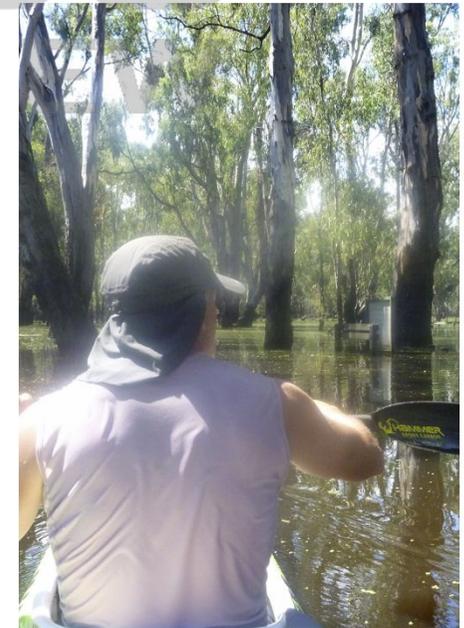
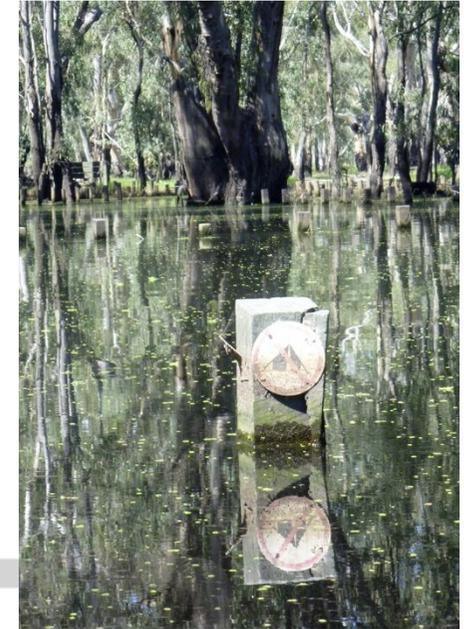
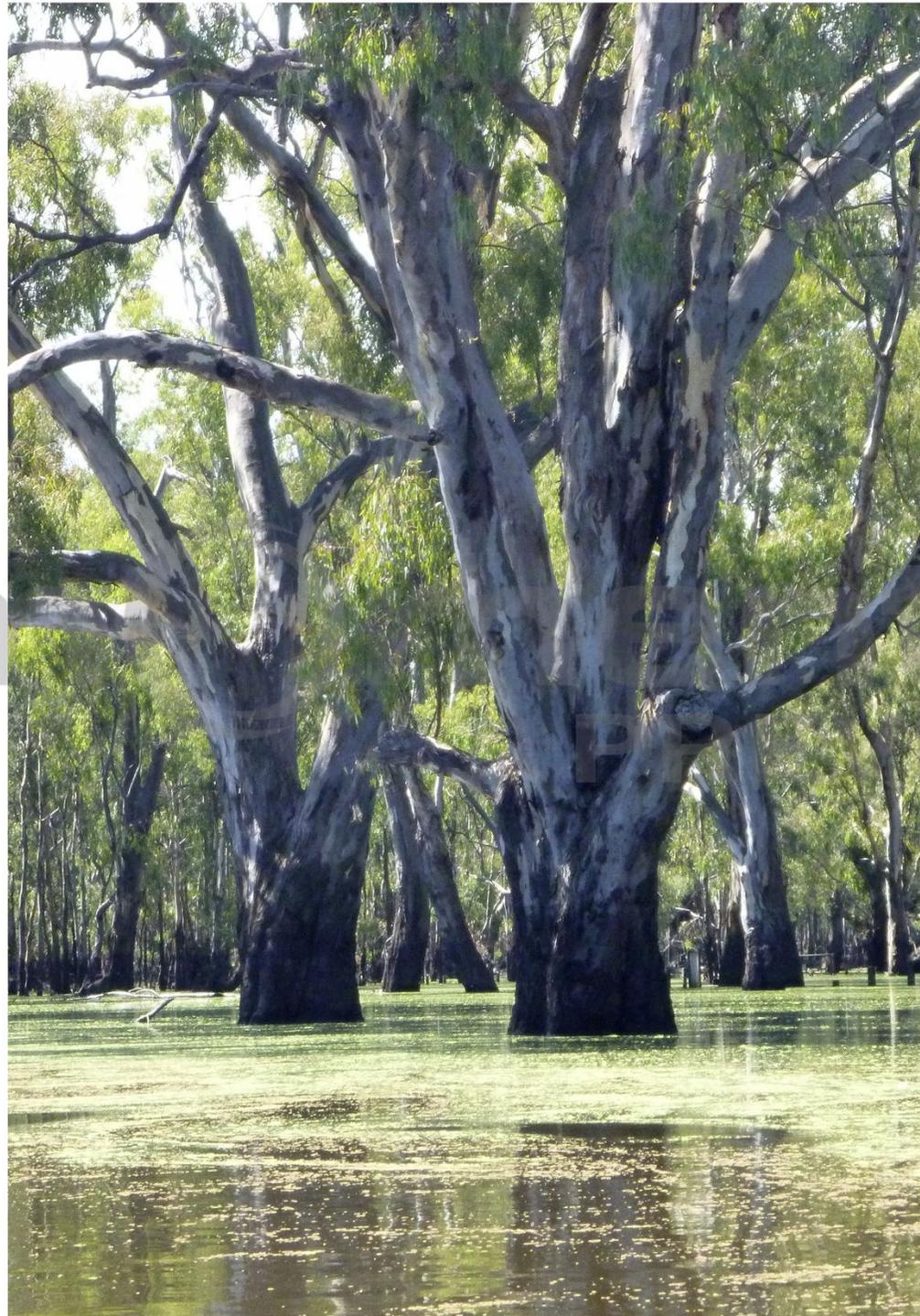
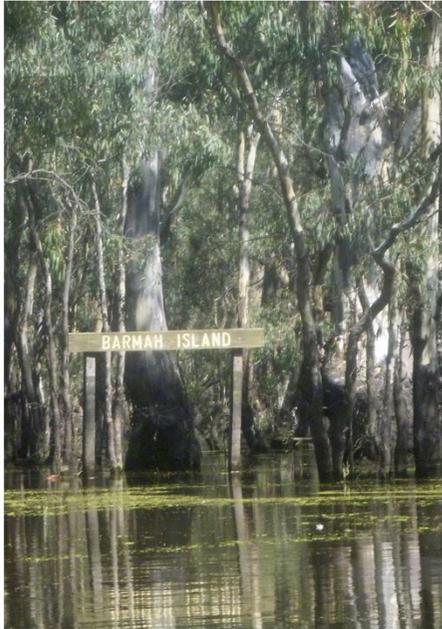
The enchanted Barmah forest



We entered the Barmah State Forest. Low lying land & heavily treed. Lost are the sandy beaches, replaced by steep muddy banks. An eerie night spent in the enchanted forest. It was a living, breathing, pulsing thing. Centipedes and wonderously ornate beetles clamboured over our tent. Fish flopping and smacking their lips as they sucked at insects on the surface. Stomping and movement, snorting and growling and vegetation crashing. Our minds raced to picture the animals responsible. We chuckled nervously inside our tent and drew our knife just in case. The next morning revealed a defiant stallion and his mares, wild pig tracks, goats and kangaroos which accounted for all the bizarre noises.



Ghosts of the Barmah brumbies



Flooding from the Barmah
Lakes



We had to paddle for about 4 hours longer than anticipated to find a bank to rest on as we went through the Barmah Lakes. The river was choked with duckweed from the high nutrient load which had drained into the lake system during the heavy rains.

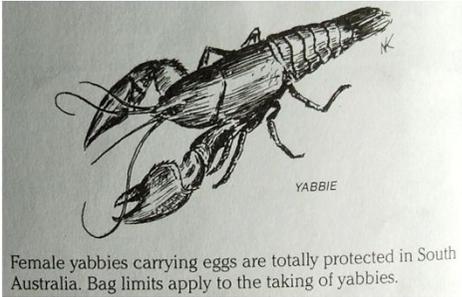


Echuca





Muddy river banks



Toe-biting yabbies.
Yabbie numbers were high due to the increased nutrients in the river. Unloading & loading the boat meant that we had to stand in the mud for extended periods. The yabbies would get cranky with this and give us short sharp nips on the toes





The feet washing ritual. A good camp site always had a fallen tree to wash feet and collect water



Heidi





Camp spots









River Red Gums drop branches

River Red Gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) are unique to the Australian bush and grow along waterways as well as in coastal areas where water is not apparent at surface level. In fact, River Red Gums are the most widespread eucalypt in Australia. They produce when bushfires run high and can live to 200 years or more.

A feature of River Red Gums is that they drop branches in times of drought to conserve water. The hollows created by this falling branches are ideal homes for a host of wildlife, making the River Red Gum a magical eco-system along the inland waterways of the Australian bush.

The Murray's River Red Gums are particularly prone to dropping large branches at any time without warning. So the safest place to enjoy a feed, pitch a tent, park your car or have a picnic is in a spot well away from large trees.

The risk of falling branches applies not only to River Red Gums, but all trees regardless of their type, so be sure to stay well clear of large trees near rivers.

Be safe, not sorry. Don't let this happen to you! You can't drop branches, or entire trees, can fall, without warning. There is no way to determine when a tree might fall or drop a branch.

Trees may be particularly prone to dropping a branch or falling when they are under stress, including:

- High wind
- Extreme temperatures or sudden changes in temperature
- Drought
- Fire
- Competition
- Flood

The recent floods, following an extended drought period, have severely increased the likelihood of trees falling or dropping branches, especially those with roots that they've grown loosened as a result of river bank erosion and destabilisation.

There is no way to predict which way a tree might fall so it is important to stay clear of trees in all directions. Branches before hit trees away but straight ahead they may bounce against other branches and swing out well beyond the edge of the canopy of the tree.

The guide below will help to minimise the risks to you and others.

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tell us camp, park your car and picnic well away from trees as branches can swing out beyond the edge of the canopy of a tree. - Take extra care in very hot or windy weather as these can be particularly dangerous. - Observe all warning signage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Camp, park or picnic under or near trees, even if it is a hot day and you are seeking shade. - Damage trees in any way, including cutting or marking them.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stay well away from trees that appear to be dead or have dead branches. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Climb trees or attach rope swings to trees.

For more information or advice on safe camping go to www.parks.vic.gov.au, call the Parks Victoria Information Centre on 13 1963 or speak to a ranger on patrol.



ABOVE: This tent fell on New Years Day 2008 near Colveran. At the time the tent fell there was a person in the tent that you can now see under the tent. They luckily the person had rolled off the tent to the edge of the tent. The second tent in as they would have been crushed if they had been in their usual sleeping position. The mattress just how risky carrying near trees can be.



These camps and visitors were lucky to escape unharmed when trees and branches fell on their vehicles. You can see from the photographs how large some of the trees and branches are, hence the importance in setting up camp and parking well away from trees.

3. The Mallee & Outback



memento
VIEW



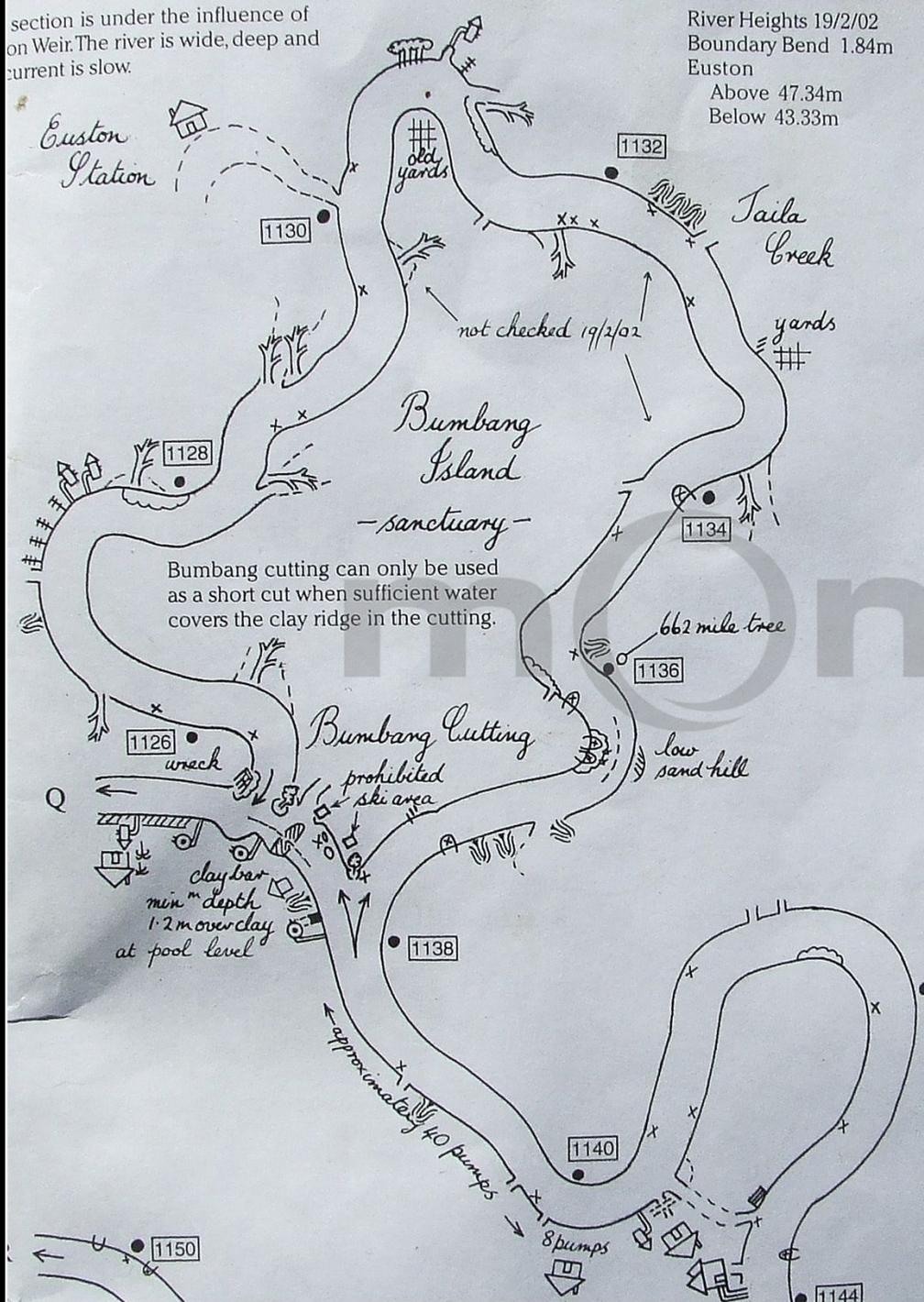


The birdlife has been magnificent. The mischievous chat of cockatoos and corellas; kokaburras with their routine wake-up laugh at first light and settling-in laugh at sunset; the elegant movements of spoonbills and herons; Wood Ducks that fake broken wings to distract us from their chicks, the chicks that bob under just as we get close. Then there are the shags. As we paddle past their nests the fully feathered but still flightless chicks fling themselves out of the nests and into the water, sommersaulting, bouncing off branches and bellyflopping. They soon resurface transformed into expert swimmers. Not sure if/how they get back to their nests.



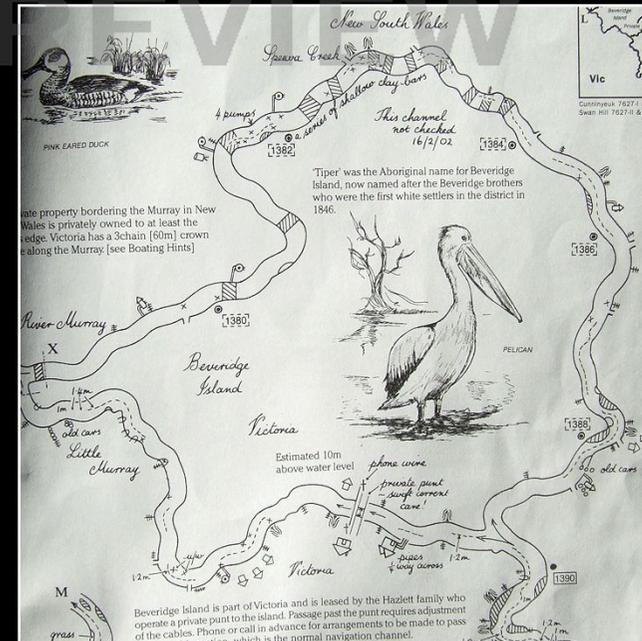
section is under the influence of
on Weir. The river is wide, deep and
current is slow.

River Heights 19/2/02
Boundary Bend 1.84m
Euston
Above 47.34m
Below 43.33m



The moral dilemma of cut-offs.

A cut-off is a section where the river has changed course either naturally or by human intervention. In most cases the "new course" is shorter and presents a test of the moral fibre to the tired paddler. And so it was when we approached the infamously named Bumbang Island (map left). The dilemma was a 12km loop around Bumbang Island or a 2 km paddle to cold beer at the Robinvale pub. In the end Pete decided that the Island's name had the sound of "Deliverance" about it so we took the short cut and drank the beer. It tasted so good and when a day later we were confronted with a similar short cut (map below) we flagellated ourselves by paddling around the loop twice.



High but receding water



News headlines

Our radio became the major link to the outside world during our trip



Clarkey gets the nod

Tsunami swamps Japan after powerful earthquake

Arthur Freeman jailed for 32 years for throwing daughter off bridge

Elizabeth Taylor dies aged 79

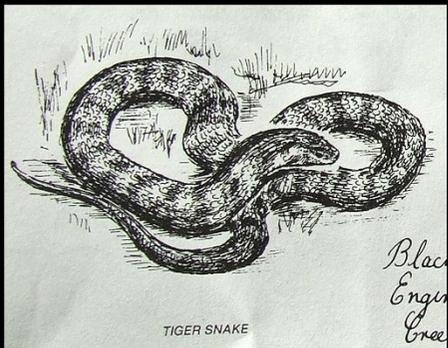
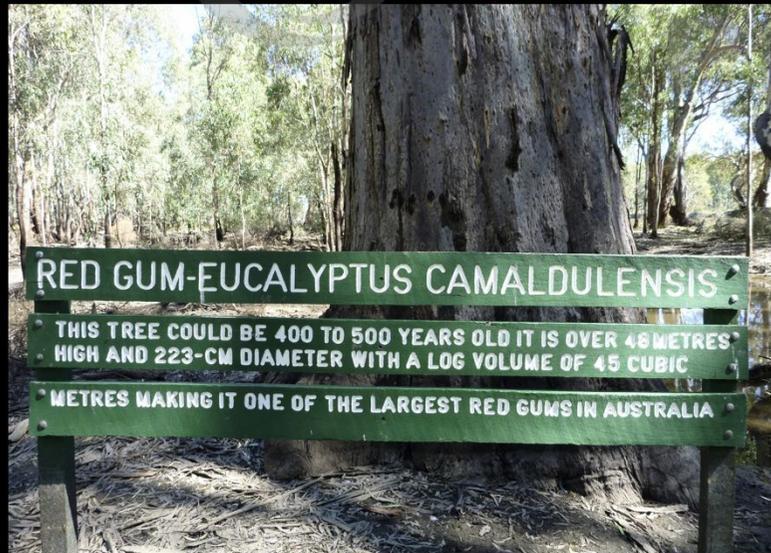
Kate & Will's big day

Osama Bin Laden killed





The 1000 km to go marker had disappeared so we were forced to improvise





Wentworth

Where the Darling meets the Murray



“At 3 pm Hopkinson called out that we were approaching a junction, and in less than a minute afterwards we were hurried into a broad and noble river...” Charles Sturt describing his discovery of the River Murray in 1830 during his journey down the Darling River. “It seemed that we were now on the high road to some important outlet”, he continued. And so began the charting of the Murray



4. Golden limestone cliffs



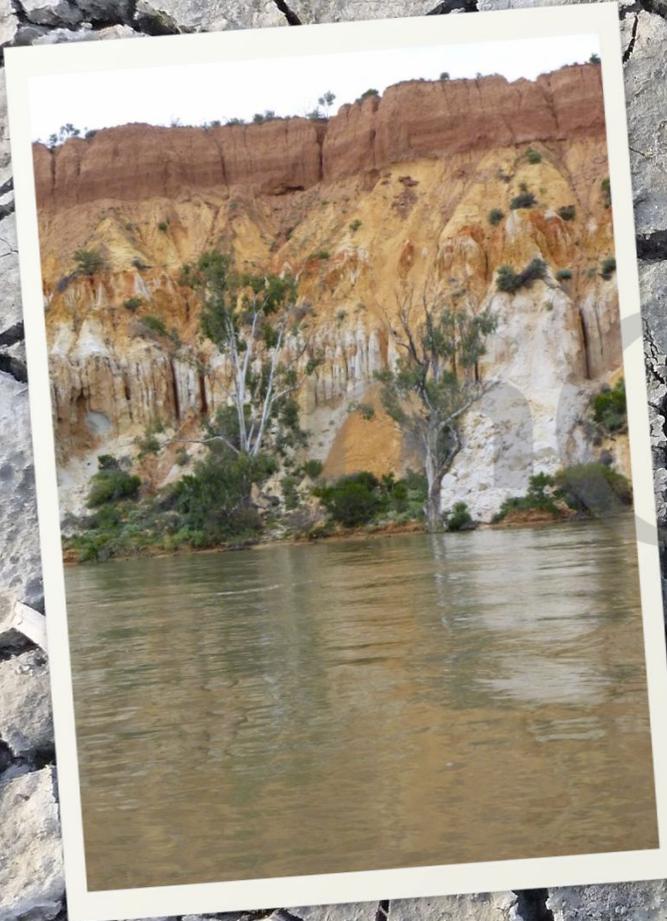


Daily rituals

There's Heidi with her regular toilet stops, anywhere from 45 mins to 1.5 hrs into the morning paddle depending on what she's had for breakfast. If it has been cereal then definitely within 1 hr of starting. Of course every time we need to get out of the boat there is the whole foot cleaning ritual. This involves sitting in the boat with our feet dangling over the side. We get ourselves into the middle of the current to make use of the flow before cleaning the mud from our feet and shoes prior to putting our feet in the boat. The stretching ritual (almost depicted in the photo here) is where Pete looks like he is rooting the sky - body stretched out along the boat trying to get blood supply back to his hamstrings and buttocks. Note that in the photo Pete is using his one shoe approach to try to even up his wonky body.









MAJOR MITCHELL COCKATOO



WHITE EGRETS



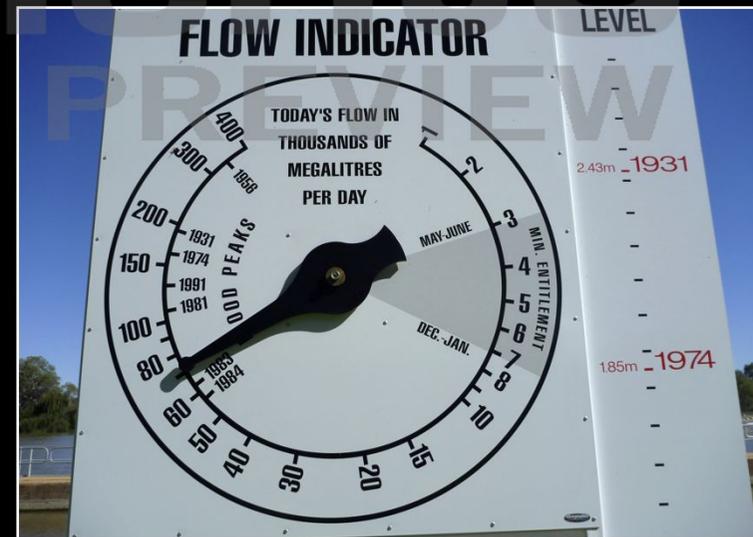
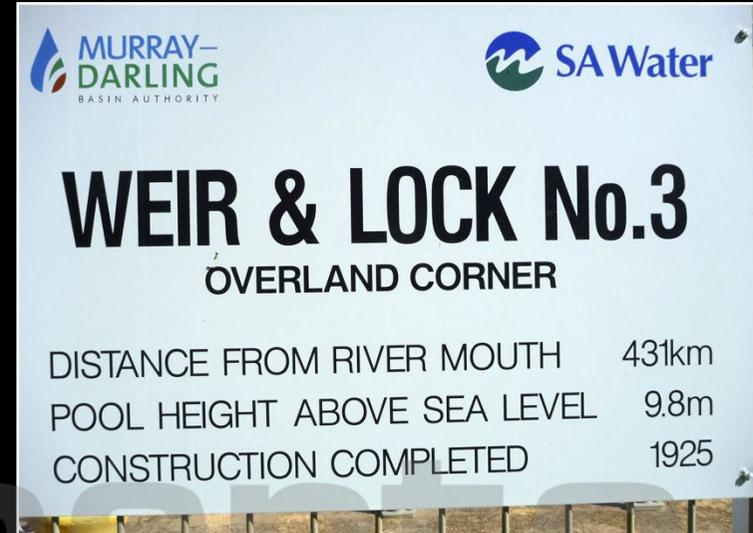




Locks & weirs

13 weirs, 2 dam walls &
1 sea barrage







momento
PREVIEW

We found ourselves on an expansive river, wandering across its own floodplain, anything from 5 to 30 km wide and forested by glorious redgums and blackbox. We pass through the main tributary but are always aware of flanking lagoons, lakes and other tributaries. It would take a life time to explore the whole system and we met some skippers along the way doing precisely that.







Sulphur crested cockatoo



Morgan: the town on the great northwest bend. This is the point where the river turns sharply to the south. For the previous 2200km we had been heading in a westerly direction



Harvey the naval officer helped to build the morgue on the riverbank at Morgan. He laid wagers on who would be the first to occupy the space. He never could have guessed that it would be him... drowned the next day.



Today we were shocked to come across many holiday houses still inundated with water. It was weeks after the peak of the flood and it made us wonder how council ever approved the building sites.

5. Plains, lake and mouth

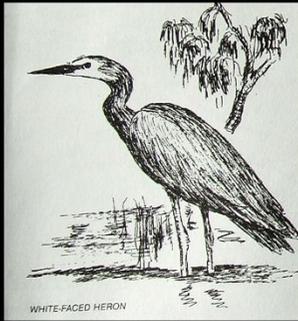


Tajlem Bend



Photo to
PREVIEW

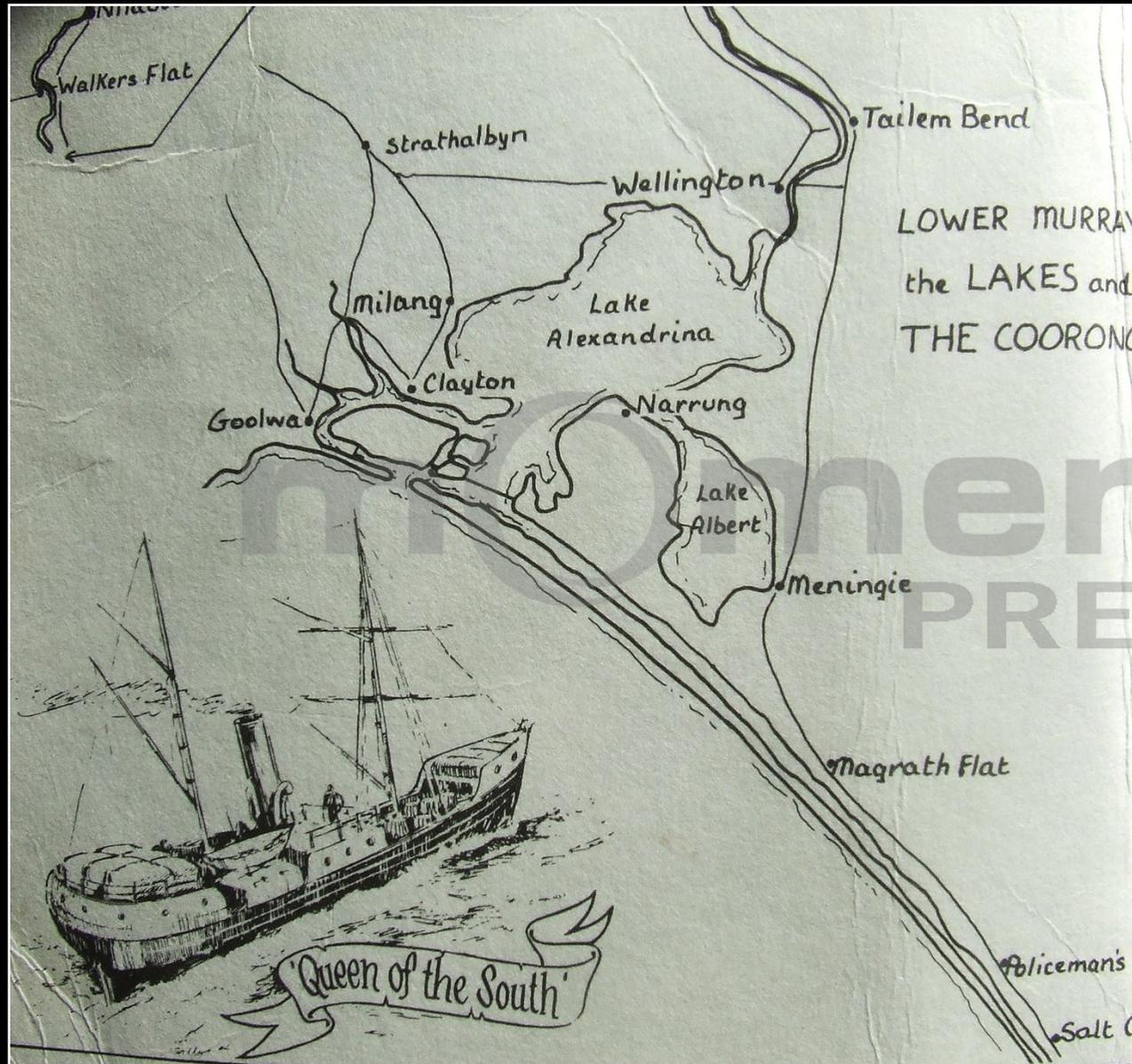




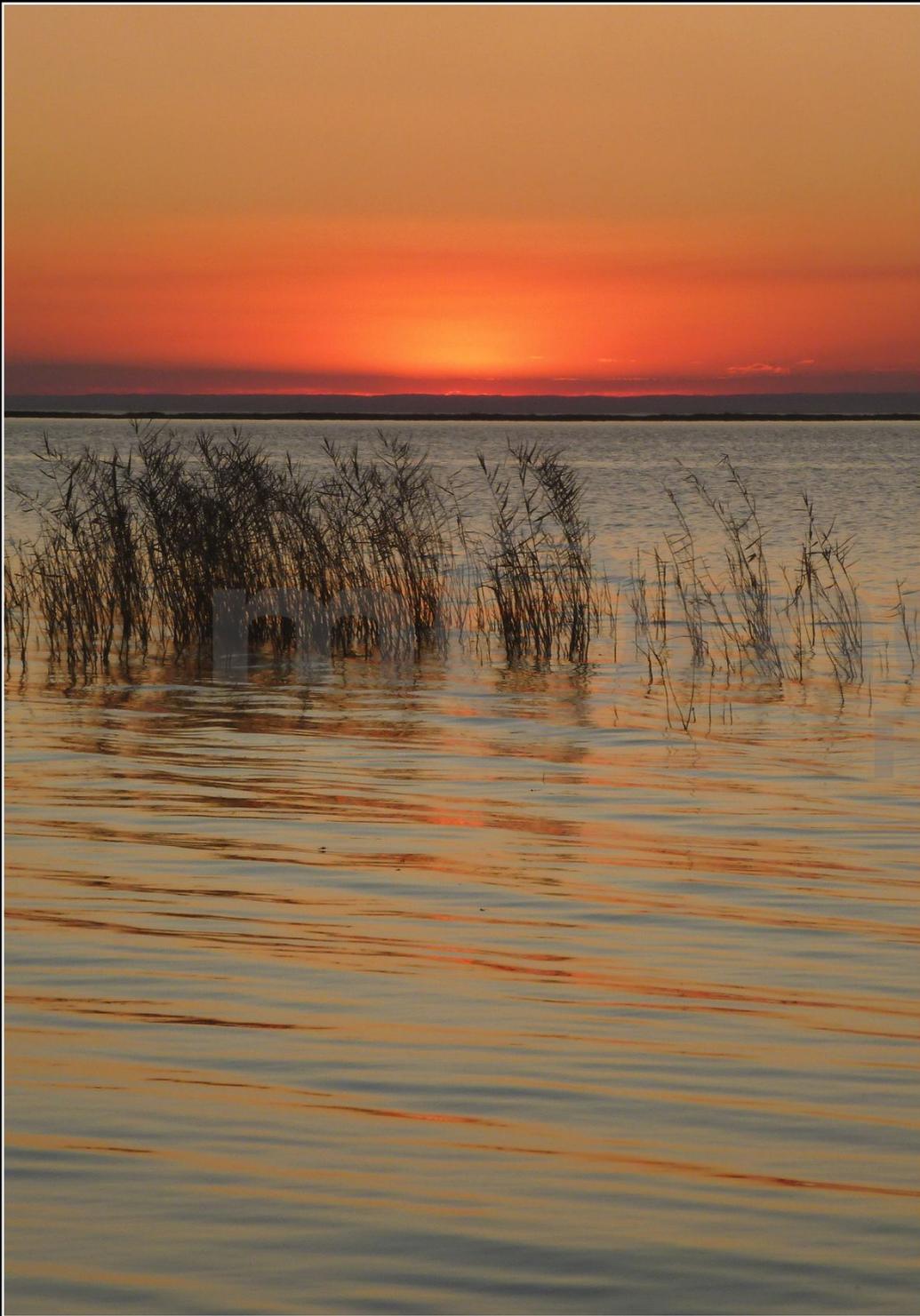
The biggest paddlesteamer on the Murray



Lake Alexandrina



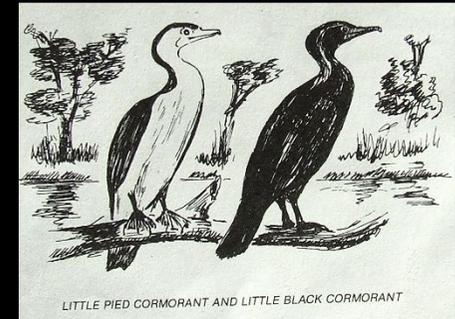
Wellington Lodge to Start point. It was with some trepidation that we approached our final challenge. Lake Alexandrina is classified as open water because of its size, shallow bottom (which makes waves steep and confused) and the flukey winds. We had heard stories of many a lost soul on the unpredictable lake. We had timed our run to coincide with favourable weather and on the eve of our crossing camped on a beautiful sandy beach on the threshold of the lake and under a golden sunset. We woke at 4:30am and set out at dawn with a light following breeze. The far side of the lake was over the horizon and as the sun rose so did the breeze. The predicted 20km/h winds soon hit 40 and it was fair to say that the trip was a little bit white-knuckled. Crumbling, steep waves threatening to broach us but the boat was superb as were Heidi's constant rudder strokes to correct our broaching. Only once was Heidi heard to utter "I'm not happy". We opted to paddle halfway across the lake to Narrung where we set up our tent in the wind and waited it out. By 2pm the wind had dropped and we enjoyed a great crossing to Start point and a brilliant camp site. Feeling very satisfied with ourselves we revelled in our final night of camping but with just a tinge of sadness that it would all soon be over.





Contrast

The glorious sandy beaches of Lake Alexandrina were so refreshing after the steep muddy banks that dominated much of NSW/ Victoria



Lake Alexandrina



The muddy banks that we had become accustomed to



Waiting out the wind near Narrung



The final campsite on the banks of the expansive Lake Alexandrina. It was beautiful.



So glad that we made the crossing yesterday because the NE wind was up again early making the conditions very messy. As it was we were presented with a great following swell into Clayton. Nearly got lost but our charts saved us. The wind dropped as we approached Goolwa and the bridge loomed. We had pictured this sight many a time not only during the paddle but in the months leading up to the adventure. It did not disappoint. We paddled under the bridge on glassy water under skyless conditions which made for a surreal experience. We had made it - we paddled to a lone fisherman on Goolwa wharf and asked him to take our picture. He said "Welcome to Goolwa". It was understated and perfect to be welcomed by this stranger, our arrival had not even made a ripple in the township of Goolwa. Nothing to do now but drink champagne and book into luxury accommodation for a couple of days while we waited for the arrival of our wonderful support crew, Neen and Steve. A bed, an ensuite and indoor living are highly underrated in today's society. The inventor of the chair was the greatest human that I could think of. Later that night we were enthralled by the invention of the TV as we watched the riveting Royal wedding of Kate & Will.



Goolwa and the mouth





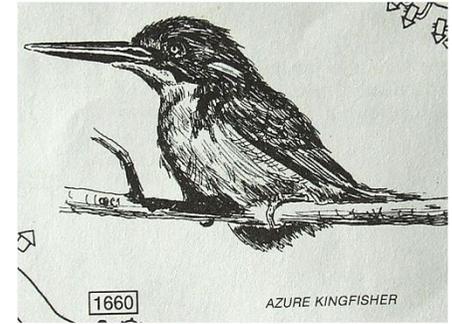
After nine fantastic weeks at last we reach the mouth of the Murray, 11 km down the Coorong from Goolwa







Retracing our steps



Barham the day we stopped for lunch during our paddle



When we called in on the return trip the level had dropped by a long way



The final word

We would do it all again in the blink of an eye. Oh yes please



The washup

Distance paddled: about 2500 km

Time: 63 days from 27 Feb to 30 April 2011 (but we could have taken years)

Average distance per day: 40 km (includes days off)

Support: Meggie & Graham (thanks for looking after us while we prepared for the trip), Marty & Gai (the great road trip down to Khancoban), Neen & Steve (the great pub crawl home from Goolwa)

Stopovers (1 to 3 nights): Khancoban, Hume Weir, Corowa, Yarrawonga, Echuca/Moama, Swan Hill, Robinvale, Mildura/Baronga, Renmark, Morgan, Mannum, Goolwa

Favourite meals: Trangia pizza, fire roasted pork, Indian at Echuca, Rump steak at camp grounds, pub meal at Corowa

Worst meal: Pickled jar vegetables (desperate times)

Nicest beers: All of the towns above (plus trip home)

Tense moments: First scratch on the boat on a pebble race on day 2, submerged mooring post at lock 9, Heidi falls on the tent and breaks 2 poles, broken tent zip in the middle of mozzie country, crossing Lake Alexandrina

Most satisfying moments: Coffee & cashews at sunset

