

Franklin River – March 2010

Where: Collingwood River -> Franklin River -> Gordon River

When: 5th – 10th March 2010

Who: Dave “Captain” Chiam; Gavin “Thirsty” Bye; Paul “Sinking” Shipp; Claye “GPS” Mace

Gradient: Grade 2-3 (this trip)

Friday: 5th



Met at Dave’s 1700, Shippy with the Land Cruiser ready to go. Tied the 4 boats on every different way possible until we were happy with the alignment, aesthetics and fung shuei. Big pizza pig-out at Deloraine - very embarrassed that 4 hulking guys couldn’t finish 2 family pizzas. A lovely drive through to Rosebury and stayed at Kerrie’s place 2130 (Shippy’s artistic and very friendly local). Rained overnight, and we all hoped that it would put a bit of water into the river. Slept very well on the comfy mattress.

Saturday: 6th



Up at 0600, breakfast delight; Kerrie provided croissants to go with the Weetbix and cold pizza...yum yum! Kerrie kindly did the car shuffle and got us to the Collingwood Bridge in 1.5 hours. Had to develop a new packing strategy for the Nomad and palm off a bit of gear to Dave (nice guy really). Completed packing and on the water at 1045. Passing light showers. Level 0.56m -> Very low!!! (Rafters minimum is 0.6m) Scratched and bounced our ways down the Collingwood. 1.5 hours to the junction of the Franklin. There was stuff-all water coming down the Franklin. Shippy doubled the volume of water by taking a pee. All the rapids were fairly straight forward, though scratchy. This got a bit tedious, however the fantastic scenery makes up for it, the beautiful greens of the rainforest and the tannin brown river. Portaged the Log Jam, another new log jam, a couple of other log jams, and then Nasty Notch. Descension Gorge was fun but no real challenge. Dave and Claye practiced rolls in the Irenabyss, now 1615. The water was so warm and so was the air temperature. Set up camp on river left, Shippy spending hours fine tuning his new hummock. Cuppa on the rocks, watched the weather clearing and the pink sunset. Beef with pasta for mains with apple/apricots with custard for dessert. Bed at 2130. Roll count: Gavin x 1; Claye/Dave x 5 practice.



Sunday: 7th



Up @ 0700. The air warm and skies clear. Muesli for breakfast and a coffee kick-starter. On water at 0900 – public service hours! Water level up a fraction. Gav discovered the “anchor” bolt that Dave hid in his boat and promptly launched it to a watery grave at the bottom of the Franklin. I do recall Shippy touched it last. Claye had to wack in 2 rolls on some tricky rocky slots. There was a compulsory roll under a low log just before Tree Dive. Finchams Crossing gauge showing 0.67m. Still very low, hitting plenty of rocks but definite lines now. Did low level Churn portage, took a bit over 1 hour to do. Shippy let his boat get away (didn't clip on tow line properly) Brave Dave dived after it to stop it going over the drop. At



Coruscades camp 1815. All pretty worn out, but had fun on most rapids. Another de-hyd dinner, 5 person supposedly, quick and easy, but nowhere near enough for 4 hungry men. Apple & custard dessert with port nightcap. A few light showers coming through during the night, but still warm. Bed at 2100.



Monday: 8th



Weather forecast was for rain, but only got a few showers overnight, and there was no movement in the river level. Up @ 0700, breakfast, packed gear then portaged boats down just above Forceit. Took 1.5 hours. Ready for the Great Ravine, we all paddled the remainder of the rapids. Low-low-low portage of Thunderush. Dave & Gav re-lived their horror story high portage of Thunderush from last year. Shippy and I were quite happy to never have experienced that one! Low portage on Cauldron (45 minutes). It's so much less stressing at this level, and I don't miss doing the high portages at all. Played at throwing Gav's drink bottle into a whirlpool hole under a rock, it always re-surfaced...until Shippy touched it!

At Rafters Basin for a lunch break then on to Pig Trough/Rock Island Bend. Took a refreshing rinse under the waterfall. Newlands Cascades were only a trickle. Quick inspection and Dave led. Last of the rapids done ☺. It was nice to have a few decent rapids, but still only grade 3ish. Now pretty much flat paddling, the Nomad really isn't a fast boat on flat water. We were hit with a number of thunderstorms and pelting rain. Stopped to look around in Proina Cave. Dave disappeared down a "sump" and nearly didn't make it back with the no-traction cave mud. Camped at Flat Island with fleeting showers interrupting pitching tents and getting changed. Shippy couldn't find a



good set of trees for his hummock, so Dave the engineer volunteered for the project, but only if he could climb trees, use lots of rope, fancy knots and it must involve at least 2 kayakers... Shippy slept well. Beef curry de-hyd for dinner with our standard dessert. Great views of the orange swirls of Cromlech Cliff and setting sunrays through the pink clouds.

Tuesday: 9th



It started raining heavily during the early morning. Ate breakfast and packed up a wet tent in the rain. The river had hardly risen 50mm. On the water 0845. Lots of lovely limestone cliffs. Shippy required an extra plastic bag, which when accidentally placed on the water...sank! Further down the river, as we were having a drink using Dave's floating, unsinkable cup, when Shippy took a sip from it and he threw it in the water...sank. No one wants to paddle close to Shippy! Down through Little Fall, Double Fall and then



stopped at Big Fall for a snack break. Being boys, we had to throw logs into the excellent (fatal) stopper at the falls. Claye launched a tree toward the stopper and despite Dave's best kayak shunting, couldn't get it into the falls. The challenge was on and we all had a go at "drowning" some flotsam. Shippy was the only one to fail, guess what, his log sank!

We found a great wave to surf on and to relieve the tedious flat paddling.

Another snack break at Pyramid Island, there was no flow from the Gordon power station. The wind and rain picked up for the last 30 minutes before Sir John Falls with waves breaking over the decks of the kayakers.

At the jetty at 1515. We all paddled under/behind the falls, it was very cold water, and CAGs are not design to be waterproof to that kind of pressure. Crossed the river to check out the old Hydro Warners Landing site, pretty much overgrown now. Had a chat with "Jim" a silver-haired expedition climber/adventurer who was relaxing here for 2 weeks in his very expensive looking yacht. Forecast was for storm force winds tonight and tomorrow.

Trees and waves being swept up all over the place as we settle down in the old Police Barracks hut. It had become very cold and everyone had put on all their clothes and thermals. Bed at 2030.



Wednesday: 10th



It blew a gale and rained all night. Slept very well on the comfy mattress in the hut. Up at 0500. An amazing record pace was set (for us anyway) and we'd had breakfast and packed and on the water in 1 hour. Paddling at 0605, still dark, but no wind yet, just as we'd hoped. Excellent!!! Timed ourselves – doing about 5 kph, not bad in the fat slug boats! Kept a steady pace, and after a brief chat to 2 sea kayakers at Eagle Creek track start, we were at Heritage Landing 0945. My back was giving me curry for the last hour, so was very happy to be upright and out of the boat. Shippy and I cleansed our bodies in the pristine Gordon waters. Caught the 11am Gordon River Cruises boat, \$60 including a great buffet meal and a Sarah Island interpreted tour. Back at Strahan @ 1400. Casually loaded up the Cruiser and on the road back to Rosebury for a café stop at Ol' Jacks Café and Gallery (where Kerrie our car shuffler works). Enjoyed the most excellent coffees and cakes before hitting the road again. Back in Launceston 2000.



Summary



This trip never gets boring, though the water level was too low. I don't think I'd start again at that level. This part of the World Heritage area is just fascinatingly beautiful, and the unpredictable and changeable weather keeps things interesting. It would have to rate as a low stress trip, but not great paddling. Thanks to the guys for their fun loving company and being such easy trip companions! PS. Don't let "sinking" Shipp touch your boat...

Claye