



# New Zealand Canoeing

05.3

## Summer Issue 2005

### Summer around the corner

Although the year is drawing to a close, activity in the NZRCA Exec is certainly not! October and November have kept us busy with a number of issues, and summer hasn't even started yet. I soon realised that I was left little choice than to stick a summer issue together to keep people in the know.

Firstly, the new releases for the Moawhango, Tongariro and Whakapapa Rivers have been agreed on with Genesis as part of the newly negotiated Tongariro Power Development (TPD) Scheme. As usual, flick to the release schedule inside for more information or visit [www.rivers.org.nz](http://www.rivers.org.nz) for the most current information. Hundreds of paddlers made use of the pre-arranged Tongariro releases this year which was considered a highly successful turn-out. Thanks to all for showing up and having a good time!

We hope the upcoming releases will be equally well-received and thank Genesis for providing the releases and putting up the signs. You may notice that the Whakapapa releases are a tad bit later, which is primarily related to delayed Whio nesting and operational restraints. This is actually a good thing as there is a higher chance of sufficient water available later in the year (probability of flows above 16 cumecs is 31% June and 35% July compared to August 39% and September 41%) and will avoid flushing Whio down the riverbed. Hey, it'll be warmer at the very least.

Other great news is the progression of the Wairehu playhole, which is part of the same TPD package mentioned earlier. Funding has been agreed on and a tentative date, March - April, has been set for when construction will commence. Many thanks to the driving forces behind this, in particular Muzz Baker, Grant Davidson from OPC, Graeme McIntyre and Duncan Catanach. We thank Trust Waikato and NZ Community Trust for their invaluable contribution towards the construction costs.

Undoubtedly, you will have heard about Didymo. Apart from the obvious ecological implications, this is going to make paddling in different catchments a bit more work. There has been a bit of confusion on what to do about it, so we liaised with Biosecurity New Zealand to find out what the story is. What Biosecurity New Zealand wants to tell you is the simple message - "Check, Clean, Dry between every river". Find out inside what this means for paddlers.

Well, things seem to be moving again within the Bay of Plenty Electricity ranks concerning the Kaituna dam proposal. Find out inside how they want to drown some of the most scenic gorges and exhilarating whitewater, to create yet another lake in a lake-filled lake district.

Have a wicked paddle out there,  
Guido

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*The Aratiatia Rapids - Another legend of Aotearoa.*

*Photo: Desre Pickers*

## About New Zealand Canoeing

*New Zealand Canoeing* is the official newsletter of the New Zealand Recreational Canoeing Association (NZRCA) Inc. *NZ Canoeing* is published quarterly and distributed free to around 1,000 members of the NZRCA throughout New Zealand/Aotearoa. The views expressed in *New Zealand Canoeing* are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Executive of the New Zealand Recreational Canoeing Association.

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Thanks to contributors and advertisers and the myriad of e-mail correspondents for their contributions to this issue of *NZ Canoeing*. May the rivers flow for you!

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Your contributions of articles, trip reports, classified advertisements, and letters for publication are gratefully received.

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*as elected at the NZRCA AGM July 2005*

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## Release Schedule

### Tekapo

Tekapo WhiteWater Course	Sat 31 December	11:00 - 17:00
Tekapo WhiteWater Course	Sun 1 January	09:00 - 15:00

### Pukaki

Pukaki River Release	Sat 4 February	11:00 - 16:00
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### Wairoa

McLaren Falls	Fortnightly	10:00 - 16:00
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### Tongariro

Poutu Release	Sat 29 April	09:00 - 15:00
Rangipo Release	Sun 30 April	08:00 - 16:00

### Whakapapa

Whakapapa Release	Sat 8 July	09:00 - 17:00
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### Moawhango Gorge

Moawhango Release	Sat 17 December	09:00 - 17:00
Moawhango Release	Sat 14 January	09:00 - 17:00

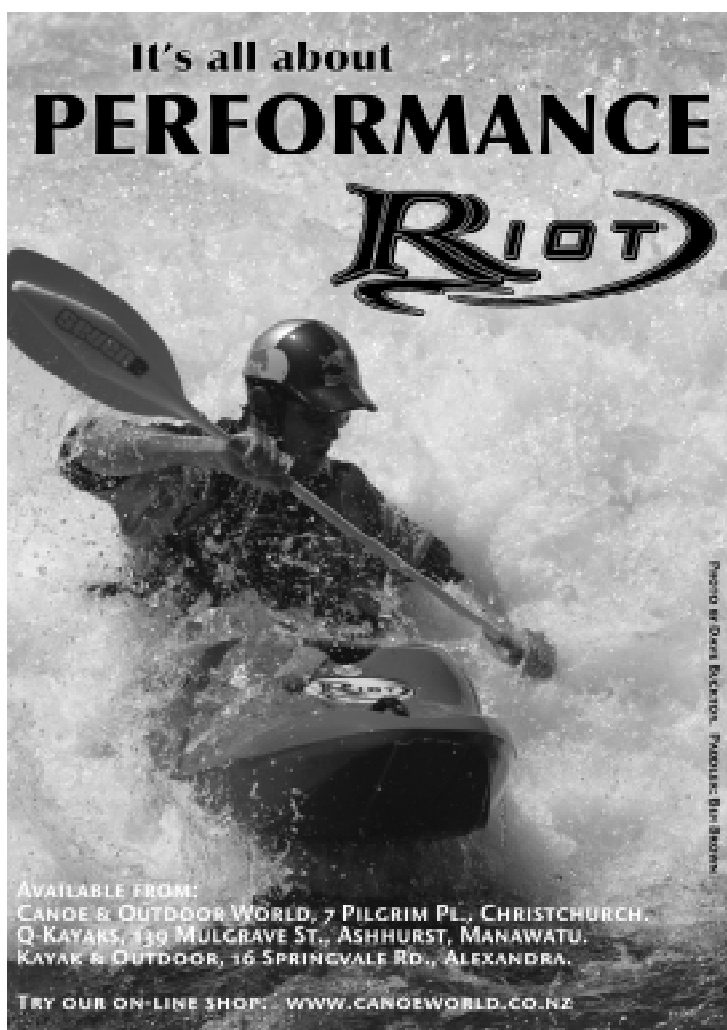
Please refer to our website ([www.rivers.org.nz/events/](http://www.rivers.org.nz/events/)) for the complete latest release schedules. Please note that the list above is **not conclusive**.

## Newssplashes

**West Coast Water Quality** - The Parliamentary Commission asked our opinion on the value of a potential investigation into the environmental issues on the West Coast, particularly those affecting water quality. As we all know, West Coast Rivers are internationally renowned for their whitewater and contain some of the most highly sought-after adventure kayaking rivers in the world. The Buller region offers a concentration of whitewater runs of all levels unparalleled in New Zealand. We consulted some local kayakers for their take on the issues affecting West Coast Rivers. Overall, a decline of water quality and poor resource management was cited as a major concern.

*Check out Mick Hopkinson's article (Sad but True, page 9) for a practical example of poor resource management on the Buller River.*

**Jetboat signals safety** - Despite a strained relationship in the past, positive communication between NZRCA and JBNZ has picked up immensely lately. In a pro-active effort to increase general river safety among Jetboaters and kayakers, Jet Boating New Zealand (JBNZ) has published safety guidelines and articles on commonly used kayaking hand-signals on their website. This should assist in adoption of the appropriate strategies when parties meet on the river and will hopefully result in a better, not to mention safer, relationship between kayakers and Jetboaters. Thanks to Safety officer Glenn Murdoch (NZRCA) and Ross Denton from JBNZ for getting this off the ground.



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Photo by Owen Ricketts, Photocall Film Works

**Wairau Hydro-Project Proposal** - TrustPower has launched a \$240m Hydro-Power Scheme on the Wairau, that would divert 50% of the Wairau river through six power stations on a 46 km private canal beside the river. The section affected is a braided, low-gradient reach from the Branch River to Renwick. The project plan includes a potential rodeo facility at the canal outlet. The company has lodged resource consents, which have been publicly notified, to the Marlborough District Council. The Nelson Canoe Club has lodged a submission in opposition to this proposal.

**Six Pack of Parks** - The NZRCA has joined ranks with Forest and Bird and the Federated Mountain Clubs in an effort to establish a "six pack of parks" in the South Island high country. If instantiated, the parks will protect the conservation and recreational values of these areas and, just as importantly, ensure indefinite access. Although some of the proposed park's rivers are not paddled as often, they would still help preserve the overall integrity of catchments such as the Rangitata and Nevis Rivers. Proposed parks with direct relevance to paddlers are:

**Kaikoura Ranges Park** - The Clarence River is one of the country's longest rivers and paddleable for much of its length. It flows through a number of remote spectacular gorges and contains high quality whitewater almost all the way to the sea. It offers the only novice to intermediate whitewater multi-day river experience of its type in New Zealand and is highly prized as a result.

**St James/Spencer Mountains Park** - The proposed St James/Spencer park contains the Upper Waiau River, a multi-day gorge run for intermediate to advanced paddlers. The proposed park will not only protect this area, highly valued for its natural landscapes and ecological diversity, but would also ensure access which is becoming an ever increasing problem for kayakers.

**Arnold Power Scheme revived!** - TrustPower has launched a new proposal for electricity generation on the Arnold River, just inland from Greymouth. The original proposal to divert water away from the river to a new lake and hydro-station at Dobson was thwarted by DoC's inability to do a land-swap for the land that TrustPower needed. The new proposal involves extraction of two-thirds of the water from the river, diverting it through a series of power-stations on an 8 km canal beside the river after which it's released back into the river. The water would be extracted from the existing dam, upstream of the paddling put-in, and replaced below the existing take-out. Trustpower's recent meeting had a good turn-out of river users, the majority of which opposed the project, and was attended by Andy England on behalf of local kayakers. The NZRCA is waiting for more definite flow data from TrustPower before commenting on this proposal and will provide assistance to submitters if needed.



*Below Trout Pool Falls lie several gorges which are said to beat the upper run in scenery and whitewater by far. Awesome Gorge, although easier than its upstream cousin, poses a challenge due to its narrowness and intense sense of claustrophobia. Just below lies Gnarly Gorge, a tight gorge filled with intense grade IV-V. The latter is one with plenty of risk, not in the least due to the non-existence of eddies and potential log jams above & below the water line. The rapids require full commitment as portaging is impossible in the gorge, which is closed in with 30 metre vertical cliffs.*

**Kaituna Gorge** - Dyl and I have always been keen to go down the Gnarly Gorge section after we were told stories of a narrow gorge so thin a raft couldn't get through, with continuous whitewater for ages! We hiked into the Awesome Gorge take-out and walked down the river to check out the entrance drop and scout the initial 400m where the danger of log jams is known to be present. We spent five hours abseiling down the gorge, and were impressed with what we saw.

The gorge looked relatively clear from the top apart from one log at the top which looked like you could paddle around it, if you had a good line off the first 3-4 m waterfall. The next day we went to find some other people to run it with us. After showing Andi Uhl the photo of the log he wasn't too keen anymore, and Mikey Abbot and Allan Ellard didn't make it. Finally we talked to Kenny who was keen to hit it. We raced down Okere Falls, Trout Pool and Awesome Gorge, jumped out to have a look at the log. It looked good so we committed.

We floated down around the corner when Kenny yelled out something to us and disappeared off the drop, Dyl followed about 10 meters behind and I charged last. After that first drop I managed to stop briefly in an eddy to check out the waterfall and the gorge. It lived up to its reputation. It was massively deep, dark and mysterious. I turned and charged down after Dyl. As soon as you go off the second drop there is no stopping until the bottom. The river races around corners, and keeps dropping at a crazy rate. The gorge walls continue up higher and higher until it is almost dark at the bottom of the gorge. There are heaps of drops in this section, including a surprise weir that almost caught Dyl.

The feeling that you get as you drop in is awesome. You are totally committed and have no real idea what's around the corner and you can't stop and have a look! The first 400 meter is followed by heaps of other unscoutable, unportageable rapids before the first take-out, otherwise you can carry on for the mammoth trip all the way down to Paeangaroa. *Written by Mike Dawson*



*Cutting corners in the Awesome Gorge.*

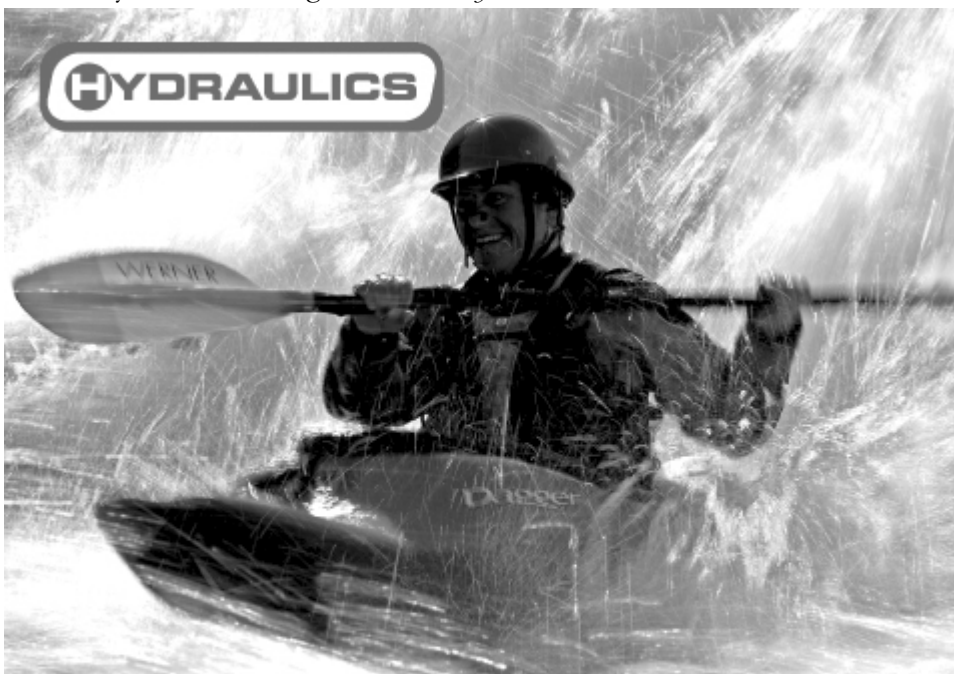
### **Kaituna Hydro-Project Lowdown**

Bay of Plenty Electricity's (BOPE) proposal to dam the lower Kaituna Gorges has gained momentum with its recent application for a concession in order to flood some of the Department of Conservation's (DoC) scenic reserve on river left. It is to be emphasised that this section of the Kaituna River is under serious threat. BOPE is putting a lot of effort in their proposal and the landowner on river right, Taheke Inc., has given its blessing.

The 7m dam is proposed to be built half-way down the Awesome Gorge at the spot that sledgers use as a take-out. The water will be diverted into a canal for 2.5 km ultimately feeding the power station, after which it will be released back into the river below the Gnarly Gorge. This leaves the river in between dry with all the water above the dam backed up to the Trout Pool Falls.

These gorges are unique in New Zealand. The only similar waterway is the Mangorewa which feeds into the Kaituna. However, this requires a specific flood flow and only enters a gorge system close to its confluence with the Kaituna. Not only does the Kaituna have spectacular scenery and whitewater, it is one of the few rivers in the North Island that flows all year.

*Continued on page 5.*



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Because the proposed scheme affects part of the Kaituna River Scenic Reserve, Bay of Plenty Electricity have to go through two approval processes – a concession process with DoC and the normal resource consent process:

**Concession process** - A concession needs to be granted by the Bay of Plenty Conservancy (DoC) as the scheme will flood some of the scenic reserve. The power company has already made an application with DoC. If DoC decides to decline their concession application, that will be where it stops. They may also decide to give an “approval in-principle” meaning that public submissions will be sought. Until this point, DoC doesn’t have to consider any information that people send to them.

**Resource consent process** - The hydro-power company is unlikely to apply for a resource consent until they have a DoC concession. Once they have got the concession, they will apply to Environment Bay of Plenty and submit an assessment of the effects of the dam on the environment including whitewater recreation. Paddlers will have the opportunity to submit on the resource consent.

#### **What can you do?**

- Submit if DoC invites submissions on the concession.
- Submit when the resource consent becomes public.
- Register your interest about the proposed Kaituna dam.

*Written by Duncan Catanach and Guido Wassink, with contributions from Mike Dawson, Donald Calder, Kenny Mutton and Johan Roozenburg*

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## **Paddlers and Rocksnout - Keeping it clean -**

The finds of Didymo, an invasive fresh-water algae, in several South Island Rivers, has highlighted the threat that aquatic pests may pose and the socio-economic impact it could have. Following Biosecurity New Zealand’s initial somewhat contradictory statements which resulted in confusion abound, we confronted Biosecurity New Zealand about their policies to shed light on how this affects paddlers specifically.

Foremost, Didymo is considered an unwanted organism under the Biosecurity Act and catchments, once affected, can be deemed controlled areas under the Act. Permits may be introduced to minimize spread which will make it increasingly problematic, if not impossible, to paddle between different catchments. At present, Didymo has been confirmed on the Buller mainstem, Mararoa, Upper and Lower Waiau and Oreti Rivers, Hawea, Upper Clutha and, more recently, the Von River which flows into Lake Wakatipu.

Recent research has indicated that Didymo will upset the ecological balance of the river if present in sufficient biomass. Moreover, it requires only a single drop of water to transfer Didymo between catchments. Because of this, precautions should be taken to prevent catchment cross-contamination or increase of biomass, even if the algae has already established.

Despite the above, our rivers are not a lost cause yet. The Buller tributaries are obviously at high risk, yet tests conducted so far, have found no evidence of Didymo presence. We can help by keeping the biomass of known populations as low as possible and thus minimise the ecological effects of the algae. We can help protect our rivers by actively preventing the spread of other aquatic pests which may enter New Zealand in the future. Keep in mind that pests can go undetected for a long time (like Didymo was initially). In response to this, Biosecurity New Zealand launched their “Check, Clean, Dry” campaign in November.

It is required by law that you Check, Clean, Dry your equipment if you want to move your kit from controlled areas including the Buller main stem, and the Clutha and Hawea Rivers. For ease of use, cleaning stations have been established at Riverview Holiday Park and NZ Kayak School in Murchison.

Biosecurity NZ recommends that you Check, Clean, Dry your equipment when moving between ANY catchment. The NZRCA supports this recommendation, despite the small imposition this puts on paddlers. NZRCA asks that you be especially careful with gear decontamination when moving from the Buller tributaries to any other catchments. Note that it is also an offence to knowingly spread (i.e., not Check, Clean, Dry) a declared unwanted organism such as Didymo, regardless of whether the river has been declared a controlled area or not. Additionally, paddling on the Mararoa and lower Waiau Rivers is currently not allowed without a permit.

NZRCA’s recommendations on how to decontaminate (i.e., Check, Clean, Dry) your gear, and some hints on what paddlers can do to reduce the spread of aquatic pests are given below.

#### **When moving between ANY catchment:**

**Check** - Before leaving the river, remove all obvious clumps of algae and look for hidden clumps. Leave them at the affected site. If you find any later, do not wash them down drains. Treat them with the approved cleaning methods below, dry them and put them in a rubbish bin.

**Clean** – Bring a sponge, some salt or dishwashing or laundry detergent (bio-degradable and low-suds is best to minimize the environmental impact) and a decent-sized plastic gear bin when you go for a paddle, and follow this easy (minimal fuss) procedure:

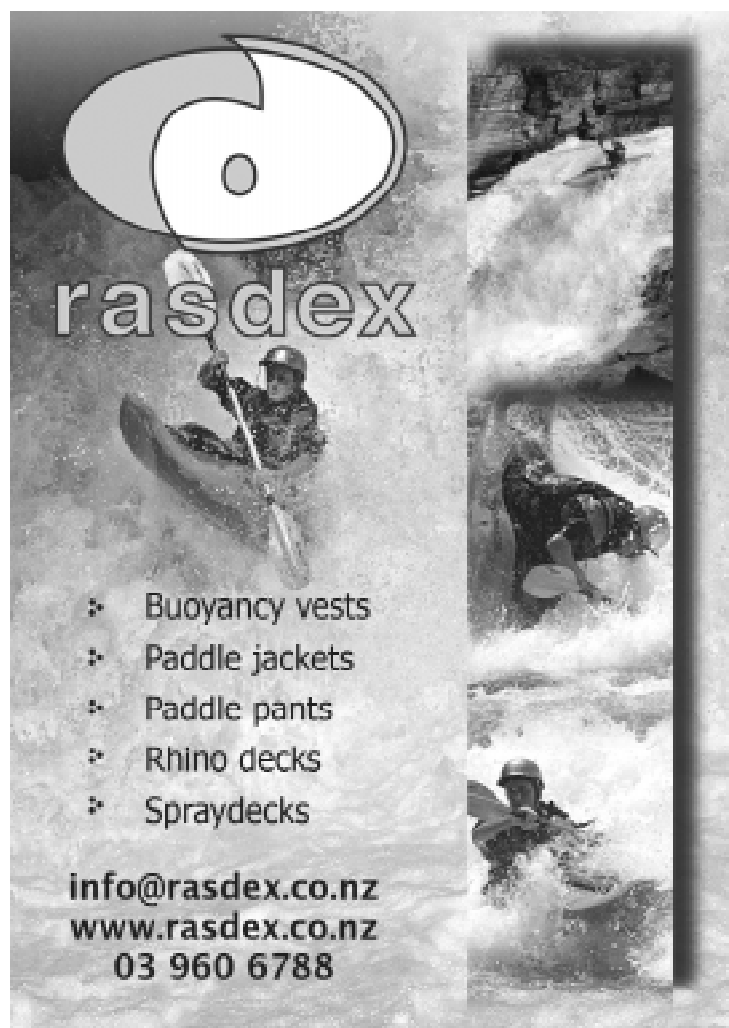
*Continued from page 5.* Fill your gear bin with water, chuck in salt or detergent and mix to achieve a 5% solution (for ten litres of water you'll need to use 2 cups of detergent). If you have no bin you could use your kayak as a washing container. Put all your gear in the bin and make sure everything gets soaked. Sponge the top and sides of your boat with the solution and leave for a minute. Then turn your boat over and sponge the bottom of the boat and your paddle, then leave for a minute. Take your gear out of the bin and pour the solution into the boat. Slosh the water around in the boat to clean the inside. Make sure that any solution is emptied well away from any river or watercourse (preferably into a septic tank or drain system). preferably, rinse your gear with freshwater afterwards (not from the river!).

**Dry** - If possible, leave you boat and gear to dry as an extra precaution. Note that if you don't clean your gear you need to dry all your gear thoroughly and then leave for another 48 hours. Given the difficulty of completely drying some parts of gear, cleaning is preferred.

#### *Other hints to reduce the spread of aquatic pests*

- Plan your trip so that you paddle affected or high-risk areas last.
- Help spread the message, Check, Clean, Dry between ALL rivers.
- Take multiple sets of gear and do all your cleaning at once.

**Disclaimer:** These recommendations have been developed in conjunction with the Whitewater Canoe Club and Biosecurity NZ amongst others. Salt or bio-degradable household dishwashing liquid appears least likely to damage your gear, if you rinse it with freshwater after cleaning. While no absolute guarantee against damage to equipment can be offered this is the best information available at present.



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## Creeking on the Val Sesia

*written by Polly Miller*



*Boating the Mastallone River. Photo courtesy: Polly Miller*

A trip to Italy to go boating in early Spring seemed the perfect way to end the London winter. A flick through the guidebook and chatting to other boaters promised steep creeks, sunshine, cheap wine and great food. Normally I compare most kayaking locations to New Zealand, and I found that home could not hold a candle to the Val Sesia valley for a week of boating. Two groups were going out to Val Sesia in the same week, and much to my surprise I turned down the small group of experienced paddlers from the Lakes who were flying over, and elected to travel with the Bristol Canoe Club, a group of eleven kayakers, two of whom offered to pick me up on route to the ferry. A 13 hour drive in a small vehicle is an acid test for new friends, and Nick, Matt and I emerged chirpy and keen to get on the river together.

My first impression of Val Sesia was that it was somewhere in Ecuador. The humidity and amazing green of the steep valley made me feel we had somehow driven to the tropics. Details proved that we were really in an off-season ski valley; small perfect villages, complete with slate roofs and tiny steep streets. At the campsite in Campertogno we were welcomed by broad smiles and a free cappuccino, my first decent coffee in far too long. Pitching our tents under trees next to a sparkling river was an amazing contrast to waking up in my dark London basement flat.

The Bristol team had a mix of abilities, and our first river section might have been made for us to jump on to. The lower Sesia is a busy class 2 - 3 stretch of beautiful blue-green water, with the road much of the time hidden by trees. The river was low, and we came back to the campsite hoping for either super hot sun to melt what snow was left, or a day or two of rain. We got the rain we needed, and while we had one cold evening, it meant we were free to eat wonderful pizzas from the campsite pizzeria, sample carafes of ridiculously cheap wine, and drink beer in the bar afterwards. The rain also brought up the river, and the team had a big day on the upper and middle Sesia sections, where rapids which had been an easy bimble the previous day, turned into stomping class four fun. *Continued on page 8.*



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## Steep Italian Creeking - Boating on the Val Sesia

*Continued from page 6.* When the sun came out we paddled some of the tributaries, the Gyronde and the Sorba, which were our first taste of steep slides. Drops that looked intimidating were actually straightforward which was well because, like the others from the team, I was still bonding with a new creek boat. While the others got out, three of us continued down the Sorba River, scouting drops with huge boulders and sharp corners. At one point, following Nick's directions, I found myself in a river-wide closed hole with lots of recirculation. A small swim into an eddy led to a discussion about holes and scouting but it was all part of the fun. The river dropped into a small gorge, and as Ernst disappeared upside down around a corner I checked my watch; it was 7pm and there was no way we were going to make the take-out.

The next day was some of the best of Italian boating; the Mastallone River. The whole team paddled the top section, and half the team continued down to the gorge. We portaged the entrance rapid and put on to a huge boily eddy. The river channeled into a narrow gap, and paddling down I thought of the advice we'd been given; a rapid in the gorge you can't scout or portage, and you must run it on the right.

I paddled the first small drop on the right and looked at the next one, Robin agreed to go first. After he paddled off I thought I was mad not to have done so myself, it is always much worse to watch someone take a beating from upstream when you know it's your turn next. Happily, it all went well and the whole team made the right line.

Gleams of sunshine shone though the forest above, the water flattened out and the gorge walls opened to a series of friendly bouldery rapids. I pulled into an eddy with bright yellow pansies on the riverbank, and felt blessed that I can still get my fix of adrenaline from running class four.




*Crossing a mountain village. Photo: Polly Miller.*

The next day it was back to the steep stuff again, this time on the Egua River. High above the Sesia valley, the Egua has an alpine feel, with more spectacular granite slides and green water. The first rapid bounced down a series of holes to a four meter blast. The team scouted and watched each other run different lines in the sun, and it was one of those rare days where you get out of your boat just to warm up. It was Ernst who took the major beating of the day. He dislocated his shoulder by bracing onto a rock above a 3m waterfall, managed to run the drop upright, and made an eddy holding onto his shoulder. Luckily for Ernst, an EMT who had considerable practice with shoulders was just down the road, and he was able to put the shoulder back in before it seized up completely.

On our final full day of boating we went to check out the Sermenza River; a run that had a high rating in the guidebook but which posed a pleasant surprise as it was mostly low-stress character and easy drops. Feeling a little shy of closed holes, I portaged one, but the rest of the run was fun and incredibly pretty, with a steep-sided gorge and clear water. John had a wee epic on the entrance rapid, of which I was blissfully unaware being in my boat at the bottom of the rapid.

The last night of any trip is always a bit raucous and I'm afraid that with the arrival of many famous kayakers at the campsite, many carafes of good wine, and an awesome bonfire, I definitely made the most of it. I woke up in the morning of our last paddle with a sincere wish that I had drunken less. However, this was not enough to prevent me from jumping on the middle Sesia for one last run. Dehydrated, tired, and very cheerful, we piled into the cars for the drive across Europe, back home.



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## Sad but True *written by Mick Hopkinson*

And it came about that there was a gradual realization amongst all the conservation tribes that all they held dear was about to be lost. The forests were being cut down, the sky was polluted and in the backblocks, the great rivers of the country were being dammed and controlled and were no longer to be free to flood and cleanse the environment. Soon there would be nothing “wild” left to conserve. So each of the great tribes; The Royal Forest and Bird, The Great Federation of Mountain Clubs, The Noble Fish and Game and the adolescent yet enthusiastic New Zealand Recreational Canoeing Association held many meetings and formed many committees and held great Pow-Wow’s. And there was much stirring along the banks of the Buller River.

Finally the tribes banded together for a big Pow-Wow with the Guvmint. This was the biggest Pow-Wow in the history of all the tribes and took the best part of fourteen and a half years. Each tribe sent its most revered and experienced elders who could remember the country from the time when all the rivers ran free and there were fish and eels aplenty and the very wildness of the rivers could appease the soul of those tribal members who had been forced into living in the cities, in suburbs, instead of along the river banks as had their ancestors. And the tribes were wise. They sent along their young people who had been educated in the ways of bureaucracy. They held degrees and masters degrees and PhD’s and were able to interpret the passionate cries of the old people and translate them into a language that the Guvmint representatives could understand.

And after fourteen and a half years a great Treaty was drawn up between the Guvmint and the tribes. It was called the Buller Water Conservation Order 2001. And the tribes were happy and made great celebration at having saved the mighty river from the onslaught of “civilization”. And this great Treaty came into the Law of the Land and all was well.



*The Teton River, Idaho and the Buller River at Longford.*



*One of these rivers has a Water Conservation Order! How Can you tell?*

When the Tasman District Council drew up its Resource Management Plan they incorporated the words of the Treaty into their plan and all was well. And the tribal elders consulted with their young people who spoke Guvmint-speak and all was well. For indeed, the intentions of the Guvmint and the Tasman District Council and The Royal Forest and Bird and The Great Federation of Mountain Clubs and The Noble Fish and Game and the adolescent yet enthusiastic New Zealand Recreational Canoeing Association were there for all to behold. And heads were nodded and all was good. There was great satisfaction in the land. The Great Treaty would protect the “Cultural, Spiritual and Recreational Values” of the Mighty Buller.

Then one day, a farmer who had many cows and an education and could read, studied the Great Treaty and realized that there were no constraints to the granting of resource consents for irrigation. So he applied to the Tasman District Council without the knowledge of the tribes and was granted resource consent in secret! The High Official from the Tasman District Council had also read the Great Treaty and in all fairness said; “their (the applicants) attention is drawn to Section 7 of the WCO which requires that any structure shall not visually intrude to the extent that it reduces wild and scenic values”. The farmer did not exactly understand Section 7 of the

Great Treaty since he had not been involved in the fourteen and a half year Pow Wow and he did not realize that the greatest philosophers of the land had helped draw it up. But he assumed that since the High Official of the Tasman District Council had said it was OK, then it was OK. He had no contact with The Royal Forest and Bird and The Great Federation of Mountain Clubs and The Noble Fish and Game and the adolescent yet enthusiastic New Zealand Recreational Canoeing Association. And therefore he assumed they did not exist.

The Farmer then hired a small irrigation tribe from another valley. They were young and callow and they had never heard of the tribes that loved the Buller river for its pristine nature. And their education was such that they did not realize that Section 7 of the WCO which requires that any structure shall not visually intrude to the extent that it reduces wild and scenic values of

## Sad but True

Continued from page 9. the Mighty Buller was the result of a great POW-WOW between the Guvmint and The Royal Forest and Bird, The Great Federation of Mountain Clubs, The Noble Fish and Game and the adolescent yet enthusiastic New Zealand Recreational Canoeing Association which had lasted for fourteen and a half years and had involved some of the wisest heads in the whole land.

The young men worked hard and in no time they had erected the irrigation device in all its shining glory on its own track next to the sacred Buller River. They knew nothing of the "Cultural, Spiritual and Recreational Values" of the Mighty Buller River. But they had been to elementary school and could read and on the last page of the resource consent in small letters it said that their glorious, shining structure "should not visually intrude to the extent that it reduces wild and scenic values." Coming as they did from the little town of Motueka, they did not entirely understand "wild and scenic values". However because they did not understand they knew it was important, so they had a little Pow-Wow of their own during their tea-break and they decided to paint the irrigation device black and green!

And to this day the irrigation device stands on the banks of the Mighty Buller exactly at water level as a Monument to...?

## Legends of Aotearoa

*Aratiatia is a steep and scenic gorge on the Waikato River. The name means "Pathway of stakes", apparently due to stakes used as ladders on the old trail that used to wind its way up sections of cliff beside the river. The full flow of the Waikato is squeezed between rhyolite walls, creating an awesome series of steep, big water rapids. Since 1964 the water has been diverted into the Aratiatia power station, but releases every few hours briefly bring the rapids alive again, sending shivers down the spine of any paddler who sees them.*

*For years Aratiatia was a last great problem of New Zealand paddling, and several people paddled the lower two drops. The first descent of all of Aratiatia was not until 1997, when Norwegian extreme water guru Flemming Schmidt broke the barrier. Local legend Donald Johnstone repeated the run the next day as the water level was falling, which Flemming thought was nuts as "you won't know exactly what you will get". Long before then though, rumours had circulated about local kids who used to tube Aratiatia. NZ being a small place we managed to find one of them, John Bockett. Here are some of his stories, followed by an account of a more recent descent. by Tony Ward-Holmes*




*Shredding through the Aratiatia Rapids. Photo by Desre Pickers John, tell us about Aratiatia in the early days*

I remember my father talking about going to a public meeting with the Electricity Department about damming Aratiatia, this must have been in the late 50's. There was quite a fuss when the Government spokesman said "We're not ruining the rapid, we're just taking the water away!" My father was a very keen fisherman, and had an English friend that used to come out often for the fishing. He'd been all over the world and reckoned one spot in Aratiatia was the best dry-fly fishing pool in the world. So they weren't happy when Aratiatia was diverted. I wish I'd seen it in its natural state, there must be some more rapids drowned under the reservoir.

*Rumour has it you kids used to tube Aratiatia, is that true?*

Well, some may have tubed it, most of us just swam. We'd wait in the top pool while the dam released until it had a nice flow to the next pool, then we'd swim down and wait for the next to fill up. I did give myself a bit of a fright once when I waited too long and the water got pretty big. We didn't have lifejackets or anything, luckily my mum never knew what we got up to. We used to swim at Fuljames a lot. I got taken down to the bottom by a big whirlpool once, and had to swim a long way sideways until it let me go. That was a shock but I didn't panic as I was a very strong swimmer, I swam across Lake Taupo when I was about 13.




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New Zealand Canoeing, Summer 2005 (05.3)

# Legends of Aotearoa Whitewater #3 - Aratiatia Rapids

Contributions - John Bockett, Jared Meehan and Steve Fisher



Toby Robertson on the lower corner drop. Photo courtesy: Kenny Mutton

*Did you paddle or raft as well?*

In 1976 we rafted the Motu. We hired these canvas covered tractor tubes and took 8 days, at the end of which all the canvas had been ripped off almost all of them. One night when it rained I made everyone shift camp into the bush, the river came up 15 feet. We had a couple of close calls, like when I got washed under a log. The next expedition down was a Gisbourne crew who had a fatality, as a result the police closed the river for many years afterwards.

*People were pushing the envelope just as hard in the old days! With new gear and technique, Jared Meehan and Steve Fisher made what could be the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> descents of Aratiatia, in Feb 2004. Here is some of their account:*

*What was going through your mind before you entered the gorge?*

**Jared:** I was trying to fight the fact that I was scared as sh!# at the top because I knew I was the first person to sit in my kayak above the rapid for the last 5 or 6 years. Also knowing that some great kayakers had attempted and failed to paddle Aratiatia wasn't helping my confidence. However I knew I had to forget about what had happened in the past and approach the mental side of the descent with a positive, open mind. I think the most important part of paddling huge whitewater is being able to control your anxiety before you get on the water and not getting psyched out by the challenge.

**Steve:** I looked at these rapids in 1998 and decided against running them. Since then I'd heard nothing of the stories that have evolved. After scouting them on this occasion, I was impressed by how my view of them had changed. I was quite confident that we could have good lines but it was still painfully obvious how bad the consequences of a mistake could be. The waiting for the water release was scariest. My mind was playing tricks on me, wanting me to once again walk away. But once I got on the water it was time for business.

*How did your run go? Were there any close calls?*

**Jared:** After my first stroke my mind was clear I was focused and at that point I knew I had mentally won against the rapid. It only got easier from there and I made it over the terminal weir which is the hardest part of the rapid. I slightly missed my line off the last corner drop; I went deep and re-surfaced only a stroke away from the second weir. I had made it but not without a little shake up. I was stoked at the bottom but I definitely have not lost any respect for the hardest rapid I have ever paddled.

**Steve:** I ended up in a really nasty situation in the first third of the rapid. As I went for an early move, my footrest clip broke. More than a physical disability, this threw my mental state and concentration. I panicked slightly. As I approached the crux move – through a very dangerous hydraulic, my boat angle was wrong and I looped back into the hole. We'd decided that this situation was potentially deadly. I got tumbled in the hole for a few seconds, gained control and signaled to Ben for the rescue rope. Just as he threw it to me I got a lucky 'surge' and found a moment to paddle out and save myself. After that I was a little upset at myself and entered the next sector of the rapid with the utmost determination – to redeem myself. I entered aggressively and had a really sweet run for the rest of the rapid. That left me on a high note and a good ending.



Skimming the crux rapid - Jared above Aratiatia's Weir.

Photo by: Desre Pickers



# New Zealand Recreational Canoeing Association Inc.

*Our purpose is to preserve New Zealand's whitewater resources and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely.*

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