



# New Zealand Canoeing

05.2

## Winter Issue 2005

### Paddling towards slightly more moderate paddling temperatures...

Another winter season is coming to an end. The inaugural releases of the Whakapapa and the Tongariro Rivers were a raging success. The Tongariro has probably never seen as much action with 100 plus paddlers roaming its icy banks and enjoying the planned releases. Running Tree Trunk Gorge on the Tongariro has always been considered fatal, but in April, an international team took advantage of the fact that floods in 2004 had cleared the trees out of the gorge, and at the normal (hydro-controlled) flow they made the first, successful descent (photo: Charles Sage). The paddlers who can claim the glory are Toby MacDermott (USA), Stephan Paetsch Foerster (Germany) and Florian Daltrozzo (Italy).

2004/2005 was another busy but successful year for the Exec officers. After many years of hard work by Muzz and many others, some great results for kayaking have come to fruition. Agreements have been finalised with Contact and Genesis with respect to the Clutha and Tongariro Power Schemes and the protection of the Rangitata is looking more promising. Unfortunately, other threats are already serving up. Dams on the Mokau and Kaituna Rivers, both excellent kayaking rivers, and a power scheme on the Gowan, weakening the integrity of the Buller WCO, are a possibility in the not so distant future. We, and the wider kayak community with us, will fight hard against these threatening developments.

The AGM, held in Taupo at the 16th July saw a bit of shuffling around within the Exec. Robin "Nutter"-Baumann resigned as our faithful President to take up a "hopefully" less time-consuming job as Communication officer. Mike Birch takes up the Presidential portfolio and Tony Ward-Holmes was voted into the Vice Presidential role (he didn't see that one coming). Thanks to all for your extraordinary dedication over the years.

To satisfy the Ministry for the Environment's legal aid rules, Muzz Baker regrettably resigned as our SI Conservation officer. Her valuable services will be retained as Legal Counsel. Other changes include the departures of Rob Wells and Steffan Lamont, we thank them for the exceptional hard work they have put in. Simon, our former Communication officer, will sink his teeth into the Treasurer position. We also welcome Bruce Webber, a well known face among kayakers, as our new Education officer.

Which brings us to the Newsletter Editor, which has been handed over to me by Tony. Like many before me, blissfully unaware of what exactly I got myself into, although feeling at ease in a team dedicated to fight the good fight for the preservation of our rivers.

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*Toby MacDermott makes it clear there are no limits to adventure boating or (in)sanity.*

## 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.

NZ *Canoeing* welcomes advertising from organisations associated with recreational canoeing. Please contact us for our advertising rates, and find out how to show your products and services to kayakers around NZ.

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!

All map references are to NZMS Infomap 260 Topographical series.

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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

### Mangahao

Dam No. 2 Sat 10 September 10:00 - 16:00

Dam No. 2 Sat 29 October 10:00 - 16:00

### Tongariro

Pouto Intake Sat 24 September 09:00 - 15:00 35 cumecs

Rangipo Dam Sun 25 September 08:00 - 16:00 30 cumecs

### Wairoa

McLaren Falls Sun 25 September 10:00 - 16:00

McLaren Falls Sun 09 October 10:00 - 16:00

### Waikaretaheke

Piripaua Sat 17 September 10:00 - 16:00 12 cumecs

Piripaua Sun 18 September 10:00 - 16:00 12 cumecs

Whakamarino Sat 17 September 09:00 - 15:00 20 cumecs

Whakamarino Sun 18 September 09:00 - 15:00 20 cumecs

Please refer to our website ([www.rivers.org.nz/events/](http://www.rivers.org.nz/events/)) to see the updates on the complete latest release schedules.

## Newssplashes

**Ngaawaparua** – The Tauhara North No. 2 Trust has erected a locked gate at the “Hay Barn” on the access road to Full James rapids, on the Waikato River. Access (including foot access) past this gate is not permitted at the time of printing.

The NZRCA understands that the landowners have closed access because of a number of instances where people are being disrespectful of their land. The landowners are concerned that people and large groups have been camping without permission, and with disregard for the land - e.g. unsatisfactory toilet facilities, and leaving rubbish and mess. The landowners are also worried about their liability for people's safety. They also have concerns about other non-kayaking related issues including unauthorised hunting, house truckers and dumped cars.

The vast majority of kayakers respect the land and don't make a mess or disrespect the area, but we ask that all kayakers respect the closure. Anyone who trespasses may jeopardise any future availability of access. The NZRCA will be exploring solutions for access and will be communicating with the security company which is managing the access on behalf of the landowners.

Please refer to our website for updates on the Full James access developments.

**Gowan River** – A few weeks ago, the fight against Majac Trust's proposal to vary the Buller WCO to gain resource consent for a power scheme on the Gowan took a new twist. We and numerous other parties, along with Fish and Game, initially lodged submissions in opposition (122 out of 130 total) to this amendment and requested new amenity values such as kayaking and fishery values be added to the Order in respect of the Gowan, and an appropriate flow regime imposed to protect these. Due to legal reasons, the High Court ruled that, unless a party submitted in support of Majac's application, one couldn't submit to extend the order, and add new values. In a nutshell, it means that the Special Tribunal cannot consider anything other than the rafting amenity, on which the WCO was granted originally, of the Gowan and what is needed to protect that. This basically rules out most of the submissions that oppose the amendment.

The NZRCA is now considering what course of action will be most effective to ensure that the integrity of Buller Water Conservation Order (of which the Gowan River is part) and Water Conservation Orders more generally are not weakened.

**Mokau** – King County Energy's (KCE) application for resource consent to erect a second dam on the Mokau, flooding one of Taranaki's best whitewater stretches in the process, entered its early stages with the pre-hearing, held on 22 June in Te Kuiti. Of the 20 submitters present, 19 opposed the dam including the NJBA, local Iwi, affected farmers and white baiters. Nick Collins (New Plymouth Canoe Club) and Craig Peters (Ruahine Whitewater Club) drove a strong discussion on the importance of this river to kayakers. KCE stated they learned more about kayakers that day than any other time, which says a lot about their consultation with the kayaking community to date.

KCE considered the impact of its project to be minor and rejected potential alternative solutions including an upgrade of the existing scheme. Its initial “*Assessment of Environmental Effects*” report contained significant errors including a total misinterpretation of the flow regime. Although most of the factual errors were corrected eventually this may have biased the resource consent process.

On April 17, paddlers from Hutt Valley, Kupe, New Plymouth, Ruahine, Waikato and AUCC paddled a very low volume Mokau as a show of solidarity. Duncan Catanach and Nick Collins provided an interview about the consequences of this project, later to be aired by TVNZ.

The dam, to be built just below Dragon tooth will drown all the significant rapids including Little Huka and will flood the valley up until the existing Wairere dam basin. The lower Mangaotaki River, a tributary of the Mokau River, will also become difficult to complete because of the low water levels.

The project will generate an ample 10 MW electricity per hour max (44 GWhr/yr), the equivalent of only four windmills. The NZRCA and other affected parties will present its submissions at the hearing. We thank all who have been beaver away to preserve this unique stretch of whitewater. A special thanks to Craig, Nick, Duncan and Alan for standing strong on behalf of the paddling community.



**Attention Kayak Club Members**  
this is the ideal "safe start" to kayaking for 2004

<p><b>River Safety</b> Regular Price \$285 Club Price \$245 including NZRCA subsidy \$200</p> <p>A two-day course designed to teach you the skills necessary to assist someone while you are still in your boat. Along with some basic rope skills this course is all about being safe on the river. Some of the techniques you will learn include:</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;">   </div> <p style="text-align: center;">Components of an efficient Rescue Organisation Boat based rescues, Deck carries "All in" rescues Strong swimmer rescues Swimming on to strainers Combat swimming with victim, boat and paddle River crossing Techniques Simple boat retrieval methods</p>	<p><b>River Rescue</b> Regular Price \$295 Club Price \$255 including NZRCA subsidy \$195</p> <p>Run over two days this course is designed for those people who are leading kayaking trips and/or those who would like to paddle more adventurous rivers. This course covers:</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;">   </div> <p style="text-align: center;">Knots, Pulley systems, Z-drags Improved harnesses Improvised Abseiling on River Rescue gear Pre Protection of rapids Rescues from Holes with boat and throwbags Vertical Pins and Vertical Hoists (Please note the River Safety course is a prerequisite for attending this course)</p>
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Courses are run on a regular basis. View the course calendar at [www.rapids.co.nz](http://www.rapids.co.nz)  
For groups of 6 or more we will run the course at any time to suit your needs.

These courses are subsidised by NZRCA with money received from Water Safety NZ. Individuals and club members attending approved River Safety or River Rescue courses can apply for the subsidy on completion of the course. The subsidy is on a per head basis \$45 for River Safety and \$80 for River Rescue. Funding is on a first come, first served basis.

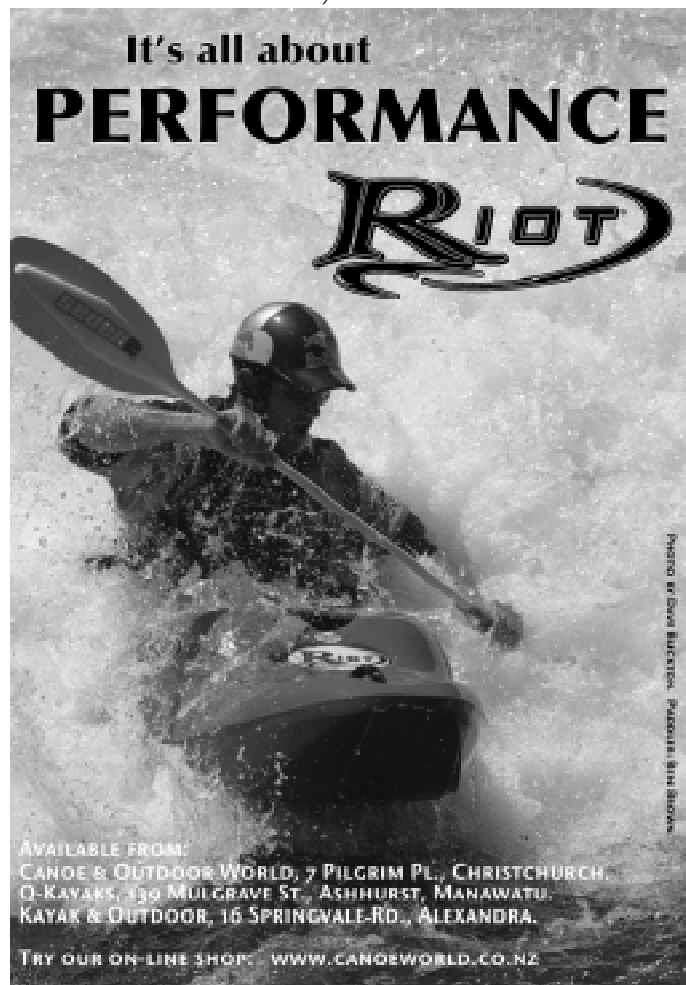
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## Hottest Conservation, Access, Safety and Education news

**Rangitata WCO** Finally the Environment Court issued a decision recognising the upper Rangitata, Rangitata Gorge and Rangitata from Gorge to Arundel as having outstanding whitewater kayaking and water-based recreation features, needing protection. The court recommended the flow regime as currently in place to remain in order to protect those values, and that no further abstraction be allowed at low flows. Now the appeal period has lapsed it's a one-way ticket to the Minister for the Environment, who has the discretion to accept, modify or reject the recommendation. If accepted, the Rangitata will become protected by a Water Conservation Order.

**Clutha Hydro Scheme Renewals** In the context of Contact Energy's renewal of resource consents for Hawea, Clyde and Roxburgh Dams, NZRCA and COW (Central Otago Whitewater) reached agreement with Contact for a mitigation package that compensates for the loss of Sargood's Weir, the Clutha Gorge and Bannockburn rapids. A package of funding and construction rock worth up to \$1.7 mil. has been allocated for the design and creation of (hopefully) world class, natural-looking whitewater features on the Hawea River. Scott Shipley has been commissioned to design and oversee the construction. Along with John Philpott, NZRCA and COW are responsible for obtaining the resource consents for the river works that are needed (with the assistance of Contact and the consultants).



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### Access to Waterways and RMA Election Issues

The NZRCA usually does not comment on politics, however recent debates on the access to waterways and amending the Resource Management Act deserve some mention.

The background to the waterways issue is that Jim Sutton (Minister of Rural Affairs) commissioned a Land Access Ministerial Reference Group to consult and report on land access issues nationwide, and to recommend suitable changes if necessary. NZRCA submitted on the LAMR Group's request for input in early 2003, and then submitted on the draft report later the same year. The resultant report, entitled *Walking Access in the New Zealand Outdoors*, stated that "The submissions received by the Group make it abundantly clear that New Zealanders believe very strongly that there should be practical and secure access to and along the nation's waterways, lakes and coastlines as enshrined in the commonly accepted view of the Queen's Chain." (page 61)

The issue concerns everyone and should not be split along party lines, however some unscrupulous politicians and interest groups have chosen to spread much misinformation and turn it into a football for electoral points scoring. They have proven either ignorant or heedless of the community's submissions to the LAMR Group. At the Mystery Creek Field Day, Don Brash even promised that a National government would repeal access legislation that Labour passes, even though he hasn't actually seen it yet.

In a nutshell, Labour and the Greens support the Queens Chain, National and ACT do not. NZ First has contradictory policies.

The Resource Management Act then became the next political football. National is promising a raft of changes, which would make it extremely difficult for groups like NZRCA to oppose RMA applications. In particular, fewer applications will be notified at all, many that are will be fast-tracked to the Environment Court which means lawyers will always be required, once there Environmental legal aid will no longer be available for said lawyers, and not only can costs be awarded against submitters, but security for such costs may be required before submitting. This is something NZRCA could rarely if ever do, a single loss would completely bankrupt us. Many of the gains NZRCA has made recently (eg: Tongariro, Whakapapa, Fuljames releases, Hawea course, Rangitata WCO) may not have been achievable under such a process.

Labour has plans of its own to streamline the RMA, however without gutting the intent of the law as National intends. ACT proposes repealing the RMA entirely.

Do what you will with this information, but if paddling or the environment is a priority in your life then your voting choices appear limited. *by Tony Ward-Holmes*

## The Inaugural Tongariro and Whakapapa Releases

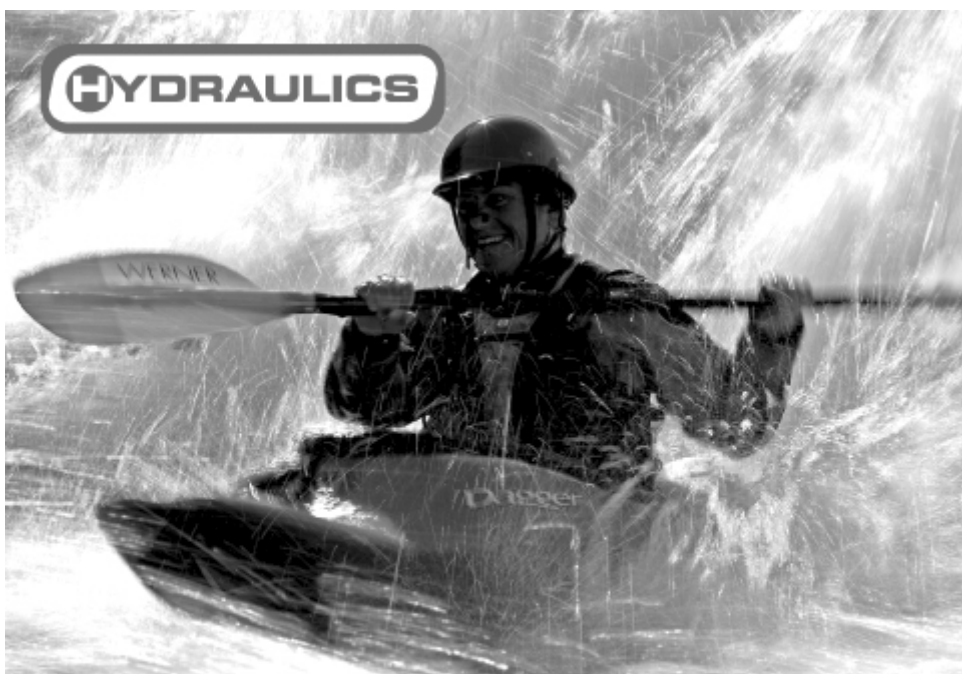
The inaugural Tongariro and Whakapapa releases occurred earlier this year. The consultation process with paddlers for these releases began back in 1991. For those who can remember paddling the rivers before the dams and intakes were built, it's been an even longer wait. And as the paddlers who enjoyed the releases will tell you, it's a great outcome for paddlers - hopefully to be enjoyed by paddlers for many years to come.

The NZRCA is grateful to Genesis Energy for arranging the dates, notifying the public and erecting signs, and providing the releases.

The Tongariro Power Development (TPD) Scheme was conceived in the 1950's and was constructed between 1960 and 1983. Rivers and streams were diverted into the "eastern diversion" and the "western diversion", which then supplied water to the Tokaanu Power Station. The Whakapapa Intake forms the start of the "western diversion" of the TPD Scheme. A large tunnel carries the water from the Whakapapa Intake to Lake Rotoaira. Unless it's raining heavily, there usually isn't enough water to paddle the 23 km stretch from the intake to Owango. The Tongariro River is usually described in terms of the names of the old access roads, which were built as part of the TPD Scheme:

- Access 15:** Waipakihi River to Rangipo Dam
- Access 14:** Rangipo dam to Tree Trunk Gorge
- Access 13:** Tree Trunk Gorge to Waikato Falls
- Access 10:** Poutu Intake to Blue pool

The Tongariro River is partially diverted into Lake Rotoaira at the Poutu Intake (the start of the Access 10 run). The remaining flow in the Tongariro below the Poutu Intake is 16 cumecs, which although just paddle-able, is still a great run for intermediate kayakers. The Tongariro River is also diverted through the Rangipo Power Station, which means that the Access 13 and 14 sections cannot be paddled at normal flows. The water from eastern and western diversions then flows from Lake Rotoaira through a tunnel to the Tokaanu power station to generate electricity (240MW) before joining Lake Taupo.



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### Tongariro Releases, April 2005 *by Alan Bell*

Four of us from Hutt Valley Canoe Club headed up to Tokaanu to be ready for the Access 10 release on the Saturday morning. At the Poutu Intake there was a great turnout of paddlers from all over the North Island and several rafts as well. Three hours of bouncy rapids, kayakers everywhere and heaps of fun. A few got tipped up at "Side-pocket" and swam, but they were the exception.

The car park was full of shuttle vehicles, rafts, kayaks, friends etc. Mostly people were saying what a great little run - Access 10 at 35 cumecs, plus a bit of sunshine, had been. After running Access 10 we went to scope out the Access 13 take-out. This is quite a steep, bush track, which is signposted on the river's edge on river left (well above Waikato Falls). We left two ropes hanging from trees at the top, which we would use to help pull our boats up to the last (steepest) 40 meters. After sorting out the Access 13 take-out we checked out the Access 14 take-out to make sure everyone knew where it was.

On Sunday we headed to the Rangipo dam. Access 14 features steep rapids, spectacular wave trains, banks lined with pristine beech forest, and continuous boulder garden rapids. Rapids with names like Mother's Nightmare, Oppat's Ordeal, General Disaster and Kerkham's Mistake give some idea of the potential for carnage on this run. It was great fun to listen to Max Grant, Lucy Forde and Ian Campbell talking about their old trips on the Access 14 & 13. Of course, boat

## The Inaugural Tongariro and Whakapapa Releases



*Garth enjoying a cruisy access 13 gorge paddle. Photograph: Alan Bell*

breakages were the norm in those fibreglass days. Lucy recalled being pinned against the far wall for 15 minutes in Mother's Nightmare and requiring a heroic swim-rescue from John Frost. Another trip on Access 14 ended up in carnage due to the river being in big flood. That day, the extreme level of the river wasn't quite appreciated until the paddlers had embarked upon the second rapid, after which the group got pretty much out of control, desperately seeking to pull to the side, and just managing to do so above Oppatt's Ordeal. They were forced to walk out, via various routes, some ending up halfway along the Desert Road. Max also remembers lots of things, but from a different perspective. His memories seem to be mostly of rescuing people and boats, such as when a few people swam in General Disaster at the same time, resulting in two people with rearranged faces and three broken boats (hence the name 'General Disaster').

The first eddy below the dam was full of kayakers - bit like salmon waiting to go up a rapid, except for going downstream. The first rapid looked fast but you couldn't actually see where it went to from the put-in, which just added to the excitement. Once on the water it was time to get hard and head down. The first rapid turned out to be nothing much and calmed the nerves, and so we grouped up into a couple of bunches.

The next rapid was a steep one - I think it's called Mother's Nightmare. At Oppatt's Ordeal we eddied out at the top and some of us went river right, down the chicken chute, but Oppatt's was okay anyway. Reunited at the bottom of the rapid we headed away to a great series of wave trains and holes, culminating in a rapid called General Disaster. The next few rapids included the infamous Kerkham's Mistake - named after Nick Kerkham - a colourful paddler, who was one of the first to paddle Huka Falls and who seemed also to be in the habit of crashing cars. However, the next few rapids were steep and busy and we still don't know where Kerkham's was.



*Mason Slako carving through the wave. Photograph: Colin McIntyre*

Soon we were at the must-make get out point above Tree Trunk Gorge. There was a big eddy, a shingle beach on river left and some good signage as well (thanks Genesis). Everyone congregated on the bridge over Tree Trunk Gorge. Unbelievably, some people's shuttle drivers were brewing coffee, how organized was that? Then it was off to Access 13. We arrived at one possible put-in: a steep pumice face down which boats and people were lowered with throw bags. From here you can paddle upstream into the bottom of Tree Trunk Gorge.

The river was quite wide and fast, but not as busy or as steep as the Access 14. About halfway down we encountered the Pillars of Hercules - an amazing narrow gorge, like Tree Trunk Gorge without the gradient. As we exited the Pillars it seemed like we had entered a new river - more gorge-like than the open nature of the upper section. The steep sided canyon walls were smothered in moss and ferns. We got sore necks looking up so much. The river was beautiful - with easy rapids. Soon we were at the take-out and it was time to pick our way through the muddy forest floor and up the steep, narrow track. I'd recommend Access 13 highly for the scenic value alone. It's not as full-on as the Access 14 section but the experience is awesome.

**Don't miss the last releases of the year!!!**  
(see page 2 for the dates)



## The Inaugural Tongariro and Whakapapa Releases

Graham Egarr wrote in 1981:

*"Before the hydro scheme drew off water from this river, the Whakapapa was well known among canoeists as offering some of the most difficult and exciting white water in the country"*

Times have changed - shorter, better boats and increased skills have seen paddlers taking on more challenging rivers. However, the Whakapapa remains a popular run with those paddlers who are close enough to the river and can drop everything to catch a rare flood trip. Graham Charles' guidebook says the Whakapapa is a hidden treasure and his hot tip for the river is: "no kayaking CV is complete without this one".

Leading up to the release it wasn't looking good, it hadn't rained for days and the flow was low. We had about eight Taupo-based paddlers keen for a mid-winter river run, but with the predicted lack of water, our numbers dropped to four on the day - Pete, Richard, Yak and me. Fortunately, it rained heavily on the Friday night and the river flowed at about 30 cumecs on the day of the release.

We packed lots of warm gear and headed for the river. It was as cold as expected (4°C at the put-in) but it could have been worse. We got on the river at about 10:30 am (the first group to go, apart from a raft with three guides from Blue Mountain Lodge). I quickly realised two things: **1.** I hadn't been paddling for three months **2.** My boat was heavier than normal and slightly tail heavy. I was wishing I hadn't packed so much gear - extra clothing, split paddle, first aid kit, food and thermos. Within five minutes of getting on the river I had a wee wake up call with an unplanned surf in a hole. The icy cold water woke me up while I rolled out of the hole and I found my old river running skills slowly re-awakening and fell into the familiar rhythm of picking lines through the bouldery rapids.

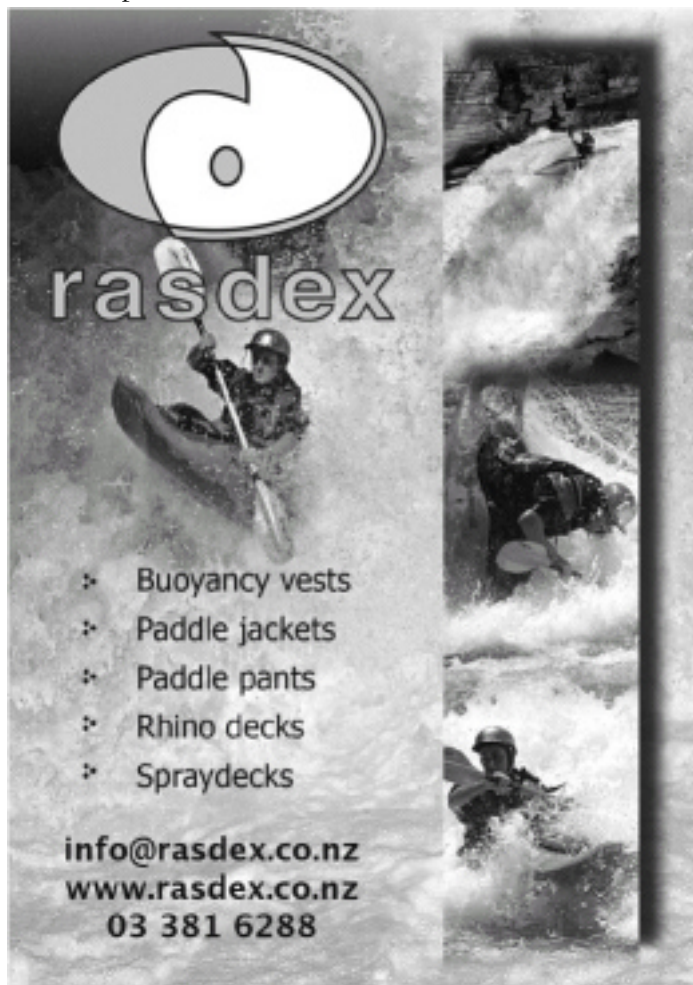
We came across a group of half a dozen blue ducks who stayed just ahead of us until the river widened and we were able to give them a wide enough berth to pass on the opposite bank. The blue ducks were the reason that this release was happening in mid-winter, rather than spring, when the chances of natural flows above 16 cumecs would be higher. (Genesis Energy provided data to show that the probability of flows above 16 cumecs is 31% June and 35% July compared to August 39% and September 41%) DoC raised concerns with the timing of the recreational releases on the Whakapapa river in 2005 and its effect on blue duck nesting. This river has a one of the highest densities of blue duck in the country with 19 birds located between the intake and Owahango in the summer of 2004/05. DoC has agreed to undertake research this summer (as part of the work for the Central North Island Blue Duck Trust) to assess if blue duck nests are at risk during the recreational releases (i.e. at a certain flow), and if so, what proportion of nests are at risk. In the

Whakapapa release, July 2005 *by Mike Birch*

meantime, Genesis Energy and NZRCA agreed to shift the Whakapapa releases to July this year. Once the study is completed this summer, the timing will be reassessed.

Yak was the only one in a playboat and he didn't play much, so we made good time. We had lunch at about midday, just before the river takes a turn to the north. The bush-clad steep banks of the gorge gives a remote feel, and it's similar to the gorges on the Tongariro River, but the large Rimu and other Podocarps are more reminiscent of lowland forest than Tongariro's beech forest. There are a couple of notable rapids in this part of the river. One has a large drop that forms a large hole in mid-river at high flows (above 40 or 50 cumecs). The second is on a tight right hand bend with a volcanic ledge that forms a near river wide ledge hole, which is skirted on the inside of the bend. The run finishes with a nice rapid at the take-out. If you have found the run challenging, then this rapid can be a bit daunting - especially after three or more hours on the river. We all paddled it no problem and watched from the bridge as other groups of paddlers arrived. One paddler gave us some entertainment by falling over mid-rapid and taking a couple of attempts to roll.

As we chatted at the take-out we all agreed that it was well worth it and a shame that a few more other paddlers hadn't turned up.



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### Rescue equipment and Techniques

Paddlers should obviously avoid putting themselves in a position where they need help from others; they can go a long way towards this by developing their skills such that they are always paddling under control. Many rescues are the result of taking a swim which have two common roots:

1. Getting in a position where a swim is the only way out, usually a pin or entrapment, these are usually due to a lack of control or ability to navigate the boat exactly where you want.
2. The other root is where people fail to roll whilst on the intended line; this can be linked to allowing yourself to be capsized in the first place. Good support strokes and a bombproof roll are important skills to possess, marginalising the chances of a swim and thus needing the assistance of fellow paddlers.

A swimmer can see far less and is so much less manoeuvrable than a kayaker that it is little wonder that, once separated from their kayak, boaters get into trouble so easily. However some incidents are down to bad luck, bad judgement or equipment failure. You will improve your chances of avoiding rescue scenarios by improving and practicing your skills until a level where getting it wrong does not have dire consequences, and familiarising yourself and practising rescue techniques such that when it has all gone wrong, you and your paddling partners can sort it out. The old scouting adage still rings true as ever “**Be Prepared**”.

Every whitewater paddler should metaphorically go down to the riverbank with two bags. In their right hand they should have a bag of tools and in the left a bag of techniques. Between the two bags and the principles of rescue from the last article you will be equipped to solve, if yours or another group's safety measures fail, most rescue puzzles that you might meet on your trip.

#### Technique bag

In the **techniques bag** you should have familiarity with selecting and using the tools below to deal with various common situations.

- Assisting a roll, H assist, T rescue, or Barrel roll, quick early measures to stop a situation from escalating
- Rescue of swimmers using a throw bag, X rescue, or towing them to the side
- Rescue of people from places of danger, islands or mid-stream rocks
- Rescue of entrapped victims in or out of their boats, accessible from the bank and not
- Free-floating boats and paddles
- Entrapped, pinned, and wrapped equipment

The ability to think outside the square is an important trait to be developed and nurtured in every ‘would be’ rescuer. Every technique and tool collection needs to be adapted to suit the particular circumstances as no model exists that fits all scenarios; they all have subtle differences. Every now and then there is a really curly rescue problem to solve. This is where the lateral thinkers and the left-brained people in the group come to the fore as they are often able to come up with new and radical solutions. If you are unable to think outside the box, or have limited rescue repertoire, then you will often be bound into attempting those doomed plans over and over again in the vain hope of it somehow working if you only try often enough, only to be finally and inevitably defeated. The ability to realise when “*enough is enough*”, pull the pin on your efforts and redirect to a plan that is more likely to result in a successful resolution, is an important one.

Clean (ish) knots are surely a contradiction in terms but it is possible to make systems relatively clean by using suitable knots. In many rescue situations we have to join ropes together to make them long enough. Any knots we use must be able to pass through karabiners on zip lines and through belays so that the system is fully releasable, leaving the rope as ‘clean’ as possible. A joining knot that meets these criteria is the overhand. This knot is simple to tie, it retains up to 50% of rope strength and most importantly, it passes around rocks, through pear karabiners and Munter hitches, always presenting its flat side to the bar of the karabiner allowing the bulk of knot to pass through. This is one reason why pear-style karabiners should be used throughout the system so that any karabiner you have in the team can be used for any of the jobs. If you have different karabiners you will sooner or later use the wrong one in the wrong place.

#### Tool bag

Your **tool bag** should contain the following:

- Yourself, helmet, spraydeck, paddle and boat
- Buoyancy aid with chest harness and cowtail
- 2 x 15 m Throw bags
- Sling and karabiner
- Duct tape, knife and pulley
- You might also consider having a multi-tool with wire cutters and a pruning saw

**River Rescue Knowledge** is also a very important tool; the following is part of some vital knowledge to get you out of trouble.

- Throw bag and knowing how to use it
- Hauling systems; Z drag, Vector pull, Armstrong
- Ferrying people and equipment across rivers, Zip lines
- Knots; Clove hitch, Trucker's hitch (Marlin spike hitch), Italian hitch, Releasable locking off hitch, Over hand,
- Getting to out-of-reach places, V lowers, Zip lines, Telfers, Reverse pendulum, Tracking

To form Z-drag haul systems it is necessary to use knots or prusiks. I have moved away from prusiks to create Z-drags as they do not seem to grip wet, slick rescue ropes enough. Clove hitches can get hard to untie but are probably slightly stronger than the much easier to untie reverse trucker's hitch or marlin spike hitch, which is a trucker's hitch used upside down to form a karabiner attachment point. When it is necessary to tie off a belay rope, the preferred method of tying off an anchored rope is to use a Munter hitch around a pear karabiner and use a slipped half-hitch to lock off, which may be half-hitched a second time for added security. This system is quick to release in emergency, strong, totally clean, and will just run out if released.

Over the years I have seen cow's tails used both badly and to good effect. Correct uses of the cow's tail include V lowers, belaying, live bait rescues and zip lines. Cow's tails are not appropriate for towing, the main problem being that they don't release fast enough with the limited pressure that these situations develop. I have witnessed cow's tails wrapped around the back deck of a capsized rescuer preventing them to roll; numerous people pulled backwards over a drop or into an undercut due to slow release and even a towed paddle and cow's tail getting wrapped around a rescuers neck in swirly boily water, eventually causing a capsize and swim. Other disadvantages are that you can use it once only, there is no drop and pick-up facility and it pulls too high up on the body. However, the cow's tail is quick and easy to deploy.

I would like to encourage towing using a sling over one shoulder instead of a cow's tail, this allows for long, medium and short tows, it is instantly releasable and most importantly provides a multiple drop and pick-up facility but has the disadvantage that the pull is high up on the body. I recently

had a query involving the use of a sling versus a cow's tail to tow a weak or unconscious swimmer by their shoulder strap. The argument was that if you had to release an unconscious person being towed with a sling, the swimmer risks being snagged by the open sling whereas with a released cow's tail, the snake sling and metal ring configuration is far less likely to



become snagged. This is indeed true but the ability of the rescuer to release a sling at the very last moment and picking it up to resume towing straight away could prevent that swimmer from being caught in strainers, sieves or washed into undercuts. A cow's tail is slower in release and, once released, very tedious to resume towing. Therefore it does not protect the person in the water very well. All rescues involve risks but always try to work in the best interests of the injured party.

A couple of recent rescues have highlighted the problem of getting assistance or a line to someone who is more than 15 metres (the length of a throw bag) from the bank. Two techniques that are rarely taught or seen on rescue course syllabi that could be used in this situation are the reverse pendulum and tracking. Both these techniques can be used to get someone close enough to pass or throw a line to the victim or someone nearby.

**Reverse pendulum:** a paddler starts upstream of the belay and makes a downstream arcing ferry carrying a line in the teeth or in one hand, holding it on their upstream side, this paddler can either be caught or throw a further line attached to the first. It is possible to get a line 50 metres plus with this technique.

**Tracking:** is a technique borrowed from Open Canoeing and involves attaching a line to either end of the kayak. With some good railing and rope adjustment, keeping a good ferry angle away from the controller on the bank, you can move the kayak upstream and across the river to the victim. You do need a good clear bank for this one though. Gear and techniques change continually, so don't get stuck doing outdated techniques with new gear, adapt and experiment to find new ways to deal with old problems while using your equipment to the best possible effect.



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It is important to research and practise these techniques and see if the tools you carry can deal with any scenario that you can dream up. You will be far more effective when the time comes if you are familiar with your, and your teams, equipment and fully conversant with, and practised in, the techniques needed to carry out simple and complex rescues and recoveries. Familiarity will save valuable time and possibly someone's life. So get out there and do a course or look-up and practise the techniques with your paddling partners, you never know when you might need them and they might need you.

I have had queries regarding the previous article and whilst I believe it is good to encourage thought, discussion and debate on these matters of safety and rescue so that we can all carefully think through our own practices and beliefs I would like to make a few further points. Not necessarily to convince the reader that the methods I am suggesting are the right and only way but rather to more to fully inform them about the merits of the systems that I currently use that have been borne out of many years of thought and practical application so that they can be used where appropriate and not used where inappropriate.

It is accepted that a clean throw bag rope (i.e. with no handle or knot on the loose end) is harder to hold onto if you are free standing than something with some sort of lump at the end, but



*Example of a tied off Italian hitch.*

in the event of a swimmer becoming tangled in the throw rope (just ask anyone who has swum through a stopper, over a drop or been pendulumed through a big swirl, on the end of a rope) and the rescuer has to let go of their end, then a clean rope is far less likely to jam in the boulders or wood on the river bank or bed thus avoiding a life threatening scenario. If there is any danger of the rescuer not being able to hold on to the rope or losing their footing then the rope should be belayed and therefore the problems of holding onto the end are eliminated. If a quick throw has to be made without the time to set up a pre-planned belay, then fortunately New Zealand rivers are well blessed with trees and or boulders adorning the banks, which a few steps sideways or down stream can bring into play as a direct belay and take most of the initial force.

Look out for further articles on useful knots and creating haul systems, and the use of the sling in whitewater.

## Canoeist of the Year Mikey Abbott

Jonathan Hunt explains his well received nomination...

**Mike Abbott** has excelled at every aspect of whitewater canoeing including expedition paddling (first descents in New Zealand and around the world), freestyle, extreme races and instruction (including canoe polo). His role as co-leader in the audacious Yarling Tsangpo expedition in Tibet, described as the Everest of rivers, makes Mike the 'Edmund Hillary' of New Zealand kayaking and is an illustration of his leadership ability.

His outstanding ability is further demonstrated by other notable first descents include various new rivers in Norway and Northern Laos, Upper Chenab (India) in 2003, Maykha (upper Irrawaddy, Myanmar) in 2003, Utle (Norway's deepest gorge) in 2002, Mekhong (Laos) in 2001, Upper Sutlej (India) in 2000, Upper Rangit (Sikkim) in 1999, Kothmle Oya and Mahawel Ganga (Sri Lanka) in 1998, Mangde Chu; the Mangde chu, Punasang chu, Mo chu, Po chu and Wang chu (Bhutan) in 1997; Parvati, Sainj, Tirthan rivers (Northern India) in 1994, along with the Upper Whitcombe and Waitaha rivers in New Zealand.

Mike's boating has taken him to the Zanzkar Gorges, the Indus and covered Nepal, Norway, USA, Canada, France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Austria, UK, Australia, Thailand, Indonesia, Zimbabwe, Laos, India, Morocco, and Spain.

Mike has excelled in international extreme races amongst the world's elite kayakers, including: 1st Sweet Boatercross (Norway, 2003), 1st Voss Extreme Race (Norway, 2003), 1st Teva Val Sesia Cup (Italy, 2003), 2nd Teva Val Sesia Cup (Italy, 2002), 6th Montreal Big Water Invitational (Canada, 2001), 2nd Asahan Whitewater Festival (Indonesia, 2001), 2nd Wairoa Extreme Race (NZ, 2001), 1st Asahan Whitewater Festival (Indonesia, 2000), 1st Zambezi Big Water Invitational (Zambia, 2000), and 1st Voss Extreme race (Norway, 2000). He has represented NZ at three Freestyle worlds with top 20 placings in 1997 (16th in Canada), 1999 (19th in NZ) and 2001 (13th in Spain).

Mike has worked to advance the sport of canoeing in Aotearoa by guiding groups of recreational kayakers from abroad around New Zealand, on two-week tours of the South Island, introducing them to kiwi whitewater. He has guided several film crews shooting TV and video productions about our whitewater (the first descent of the Waitaha was filmed for US television). He toured New Zealand with slideshows of his expeditions, and has published articles in Adventure magazine, helping inspire other kiwi paddlers to achieve their paddling dreams. He recently achieved NZOIA Kayak L1, and has been busy teaching the next generation of kayakers at CPIT and Aoraki Polytech, as well as the New Zealand Kayak School.

The Canoeist of the Year award recognises Mike's outstanding achievements to date, and will hopefully help him gain support for future challenges.



# 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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