

New Zealand Canoeing

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Welcome to the Winter Edition of New Zealand Canoeing. This has been a long time in the making with very few keen contributors this time round. I would like to thank those that have supplied copy and allowed me to draw on existing blogs to get this newsletter complete.

It's nice to see a rarely-talked-about-run from Fergus and his dad regarding Atiwhakatu Stream, and the couple out exploring local Canterbury Rivers with packrafts. This may be a way to rekindle any lost interest you might have with boating.

If you haven't read Jordy and Barny's blog, here's your chance to catch up on their revisit to PNG. The boys are back in action, along with Matt Coles and Ari Walker. Congrats for stepping up and being recognised for a Sport NZ Hillary Expedition.

Paddling ladies seem to have turned to motherhood over the past few years, or so it seems... but are they still paddling ladies? Here's a little extract from Em and her status on the matter.

Until next time... *bye bye!*

About

New Zealand Canoeing

New Zealand Canoeing is the official newsletter of Whitewater NZ Inc. *New Zealand Canoeing* is published quarterly and distributed free to around 1,200 members of Whitewater NZ 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 Whitewater NZ.

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WOW 2013

After the lack of rain last year stopped our annual North Island Women on Whitewater gathering from happening we are well on track with having set the date and location of this year's gathering.

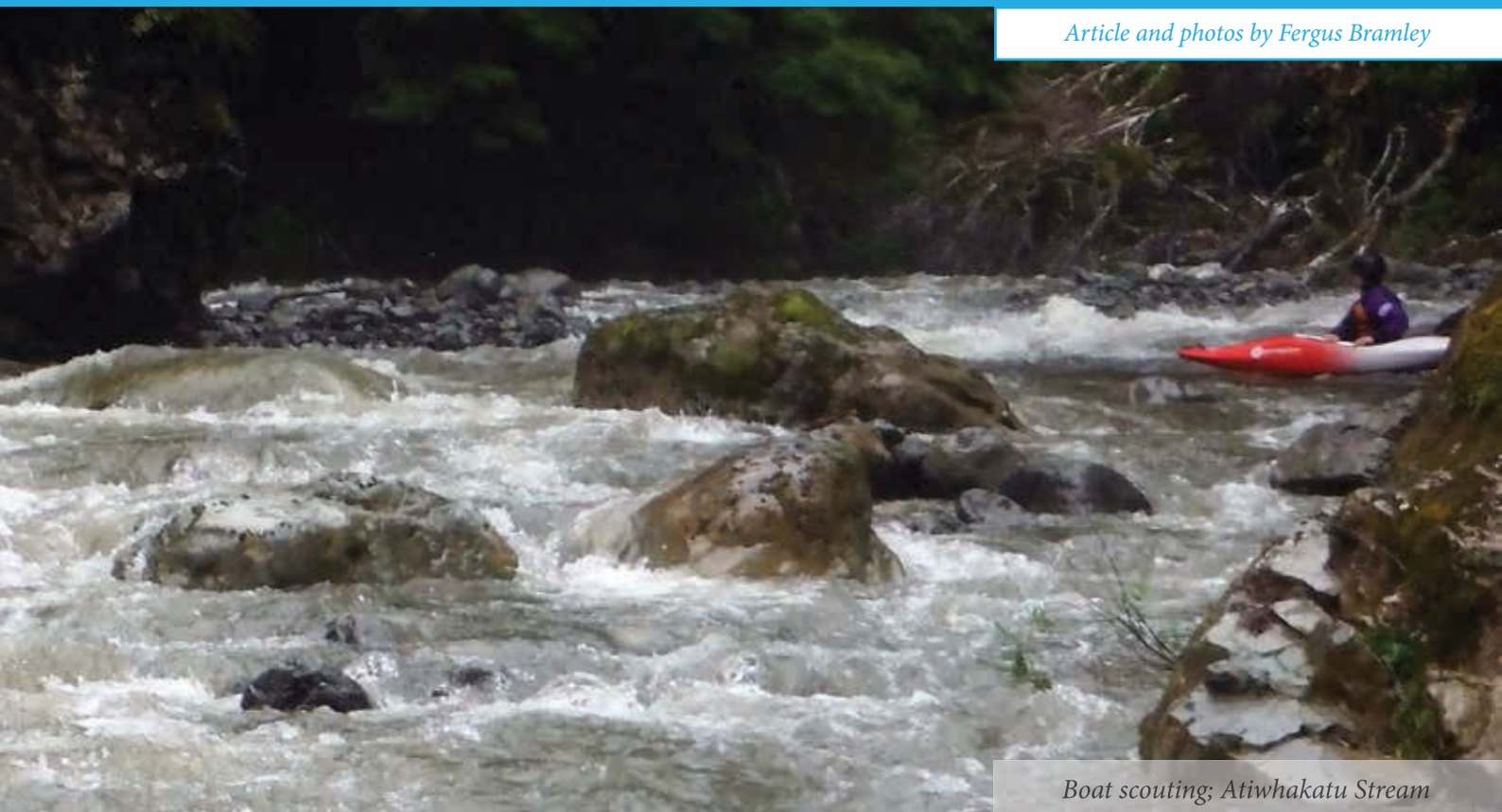
THIS YEAR'S WOMEN ON WHITEWATER (WOW) WILL BE HELD ON NOVEMBER 2-3 on the Tongoriro river, giving us plenty of paddling options in the area for both beginner and more experienced paddlers without having to worry too much about the rain, or the lack of.

For those who don't know what WOW is let me give you a quick explanation. WOW was set up to get women paddlers of all levels together, to give them the opportunity to meet other female paddlers, learn of them, get inspired and generally have a great time. For now, we have been getting together only once a year at this stage but this may change in the future. There is usually a contingency of about 20 women or so taking part. The only requirement for someone to join our weekend is; to be female and to be prepared to get wet and have fun.

For any women interested to join us or to connect with other like-minded women, look us up on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/244235435599202/> and come and join our annual event.

If you do not use Facebook you can contact us on martinaplawa@gmail.com.





Boat scouting; Atiwhakatu Stream

*Mark Twain once said
“Whenever you find yourself on
the side of the majority it is time
to pause and reflect.”*

Well, kayakers on the whole are a minority and as we headed up to the Atiwhakatu Stream we were a minority amongst the kayaking minority. Rarely paddled before, the Atiwhakatu Stream drains the area around Mt Holdsworth in the Tararua Ranges. On a rainy day in the autumn of 2013 the flows coincided with a Sunday and we headed out looking for adventure.

On arrival at the stream my initial skepticism was transformed into excitement, as we found that we had a flow of about fifteen cumecs barreling down the watercourse that usually holds two or three. The usual flurry of tie-downs, dry-bags, last-minute snacks and carrying preparations took place in a light drizzle, with the noise of the rapids playing on our eardrums. With boats on backs we began one of the easiest walk-ins I have had the pleasure of partaking in, strolling along a wide, liberally-gravelled path with a distinct lack of overhanging greenery. Arriving at the brown

water’s edge we looked upstream to see a steep long boulder garden and downstream to an imminent horizon line.

So began the character of the day, paddle fifty metres and jump out to scout. The first rapid looked a little rocky with a must-make eddy before the unknowns downstream. In my infinite teenage wisdom I decided that I could easily make the move but did ask for cover with the throw-bag. All was well and I was having a smooth line before being brushed off by a rock just as I began to enter the eddy. It’s funny how a small piece of speedily recirculating water beside a wall with a few vines thrown in for good measure, became a brilliant safe haven at that point. Thus with minor drama averted I descended the rest of what turned out to be a beautiful class III+ boulder garden.

As we moved downstream the walls of the canyon grew steadily, along with the quality of whitewater. Just as the gorge walls reached their maximum in height, the Atiwhakatu presented us with a horizon line. A rock sat in the middle of the river and a huge log had fallen parallel to the river right wall. The only line was right heading left but as had become the norm, no amount of neck extension could enable us to see the drop from the comfort of our boats. Fortuitously, this was the only drop we had scouted from the track on our merry way up the river. Although I knew the drop was flushing and wood-less, I decided to reward myself with a



Sweet drop; Atiwhakatu Stream

scramble up a vertical bank of mud, moss and rotten logs to no further visual aid. I then decided to stop procrastinating and pushed off to a successful line into the eddy at the bottom and pulled up at a convenient shingle bank.

It being such a rainy, mist clad day in mid-autumn I then decided that it looked like a perfect time to swim to the rock beside the drop as it was the best place to throw-bag from. I then proceeded to watch my father style the drop and disappear around the next corner backward. More (slightly hyperactive) swimming ensued and I was back in my boat and on my way downstream. Much to my relief he was casually pulled up at a shingle bank, contemplating the wonders of life in a peaceful manner. When before the walls had gradually risen on either side of us, now they tapered down to become mere remnants of their former intimidating selves. Soon the river eased to an urgent class II float through spectacular beech forest all the way down to the road end.

In a mild drizzle we fastened our boats to the car with grins etched onto our faces and no care for the aroma of perma-damp polyprop that diffused throughout the vehicle. Today had been a perfect river trip; a bit of hard work, spectacular gorge and forest, difficult(ish) whitewater and a few hairy situations thrown into the mix. We have now added a few more stories to our kayaking tale repertoire and many people will undoubtedly hear the tale of when “he missed that eddy” or “he went round the corner backward”, embellished of course completely out of proportion, as dictates kayaking lore. Until next time...



That's not a wave...

Article and photo supplied by Emily Moore

Paddling Mums

In the year that my little man has been around I have definitely cut down on the paddling, compared with how much I used to go out. I guess it has been a bit less of a priority and I have had less time for it. Having said that it's easier to achieve than say taking off for a multi-day tramp. Dave and I have managed to convince the grandparents to come along on river trips to look after Max while we paddle — they double as great shuttle bunnies. Sans grandparents. The Hurunui is good because you can take turns running the gully while the other babysits. Same goes in Wanaka where you can take turns getting on the play-wave or doing slalom. I certainly have no intention of quitting and am looking forward to family paddling trips to come.



The most important paddling accessory for a mum is 'the grandmother'.

Papua New Guinea Revisited

Article and photos courtesy of gwpng2013.blogspot.co.nz



Looking at the changes to the exit of Sikewage Gorge

MATT COLES - gradientandwater.blogspot.co.nz

Part 1 of 2: First Descent of the Grand Canyons of the Chimbu — Papua New Guinea

So after what I would call a pretty smooth start to the trip it was time to make our way to Kundiawa and begin the meat of our expedition. Our first hurdle was a small one, where exactly was Gom Yomba Guesthouse? We arrived in Kundiawa late afternoon and absorbed the always unsettling feeling of being the new 'whiteys' in town. Don't get me wrong we were almost always warmly welcomed into areas we went, but there is always a certain amount of apprehension in the local community when it comes to white people being there and when you roll into a 'city' like Kundiawa it is impossible to get across the message that we're just some kiwis trying to go for a paddle, that is all! We grabbed some supplies from the supermarket, there is a very limited selection in Kundiawa's supermarket, and then Barney and I jogged our memories while we drove around the back-roads of Kundiawa looking for our safe and warm place to sleep. Fortunately we worked it out, more like stumbled upon, and were soon unpacking our gear and relaxing. Well, relaxing as much as you do in PNG. After hanging out our gear we were reminded that we were idiots, and then moved all our gear to a secluded clothes line where people passing by couldn't see it. We then introduced ourselves to the other occupants of the guesthouse, which were a group of hand-selected anti-corruption police officers that were carrying out an investigation in the neighbouring province

of Giwaka. To top this off, they were staying in Kundiawa so there was LESS chance of retribution attacks from the 'won-toks' (like an extended family that you're obligated to) of those being investigated and those arrested. Less likely, but they still slept with their machine-guns in their rooms. We had other things to think of so set to the task of feeding our growling stomachs and making sure we got our gear sorted before getting as much sleep as possible, tomorrow was going to be a big day.

Woken up by the infuriating crow of roosters (you never become accustomed to it while you're there), we quickly had some breakfast and loaded the truck. Food, paddling, camping gear and bottled water... keeping it simple. I jokingly told the cops that were also staying at the guesthouse that if we were not back in like 5 days to come up the Chimbu guns 'a' blazing, and Mattieu quite seriously assured me that they would. Somewhat reassuring I guess. Our plan was to drive up the valley and let the people in the area know what our plan was, identify places where we would get out for the night and arrange a place to stay in the vicinity and also to identify places where the road intersects the river so we could let Tony, our driver, know we were okay and whether we would continue or get out. Barney and I were somewhat familiar with the road and area up to Banana Market Bridge, so we didn't take too much time to inspect the river while driving up. We did, however, notice that current road development had blasted a huge amount of rock to the exit of Sikewage Gorge. The same gorge that Barney swam and

lost his kayak in last time and also the same gorge that we knew went underground at the end. We figured we had a few day's paddling above this to think about first, and decided we would try and inspect the gorge when we came to it, since we were planning to take out and stay with the villagers above the gorge.

The road is always littered with people. People walking to and from the market. People manning little stalls selling vegetables, betel-nut (which has a doping like effect), crackers, oreos and sometimes cans of coke or even SP Beer. And in most instances, people smiling and cheering as our loaded truck bounced up the often rough 4wd road. The drive was broken up by several groups of villagers working on parts of the road that were in dire need of attention, well mostly. Two of the occasions we were stopped we were asked to pay a fee towards the work the group were doing. This wasn't something mandatory and their original request was way too much, morally more than monetary wise, so we offered them \$10K and \$20K (\$5 and \$10 NZD) respectively which they accepted happily. There was one instance, disappointingly, where some young men stopped us and demanded some money. This was obviously a bit of a have but before we could get into proper negotiations \$5K passed hands, much to the dislike of an approaching elder from the area. He reiterated what we already knew, this would set a bad precedent but Tony, thinking he was taking the initiative for a good price, had made a mistake. Lesson learned and for a small price, so we carried on a bit wiser. But I must stress, pretty much everyone who saw us travelling up the Chimbu was happy to see us, waving and cheering.

Our goal was to drive to a 'Lake', its size and the time to get there very much unknown. You very rarely get a concise or definitive answer in PNG, but this lake really took the cake. "Between 2-4 hours drive from Kundiawa", "only 2 hours walk from here", "only 1 hour walk from there", "it's just around the corner", "it's like another 3 hour's drive from here..." You get the picture. No idea whatsoever. We trudged on, continuing our process of meet, greet and look for a place to stay etc. I guess it was about 4 or more hours into our drive before we came across the stunning high-alpine settlement of Gembogl Station. This was where I thought we'd be putting on in my original planning, but the size of the river definitely encouraged us to continue up the river. The road continued, and so did we. Another road block was negotiated and then we noticed a sizable tributary branch off with much needed water. With another promise of the 'Lake' being not too far away, we carried on to Gembogl Bridge, just before Denglagu Mission. By this stage the river was reduced to a very small creek, still navigable but it would mean some definite boat-abuse. No local information was helpful, we got told it was only like 2km to the 'Lake' but then were told it would take another hour or so to drive there, then got told it was hours away. We really wanted to put on at this lake, but also had to take

into the consideration whether we would find a safe place to stay for us, our gear and even the truck. We figured we had a good chance of securing that at Gembogl Station just a few kilometres downstream, but should we go to the lake? After thinking through numerous possibilities we finally decided this would be a good place to put on our expedition. From the sounds of things the river flattened just above into an even lower volume braided section and our entire crew's safety was the primary concern. So this would be it, we were putting on for the First Descent of the Grand Canyons of the Chimbu.

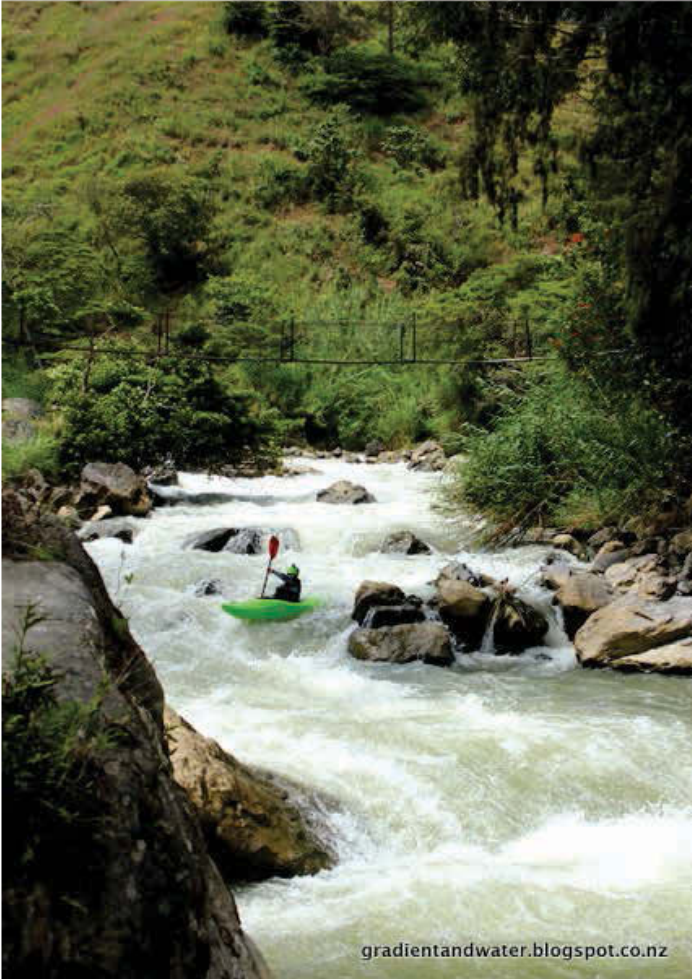
We hastily got our gear together, as the longer you take the larger the crowd becomes, and prepared to put on the river. Toni, our driver, would see us off then drive back down to Gembogl Station and try and organise some accommodation. He had to go back through a couple of the road-blocks previously mentioned which concerned us as he would be by himself with a lot of our gear. We had other things to focus on though, uncharted class III - V in the remote Papua New Guinea Highlands. Not to mention whether we'd be accepted by the locals or not. We were optimistic and had a good feeling, so before long we pushed off the bank and set off on what would be a trip of a life time.



Colesy getting wet for the first time on the Chimbu

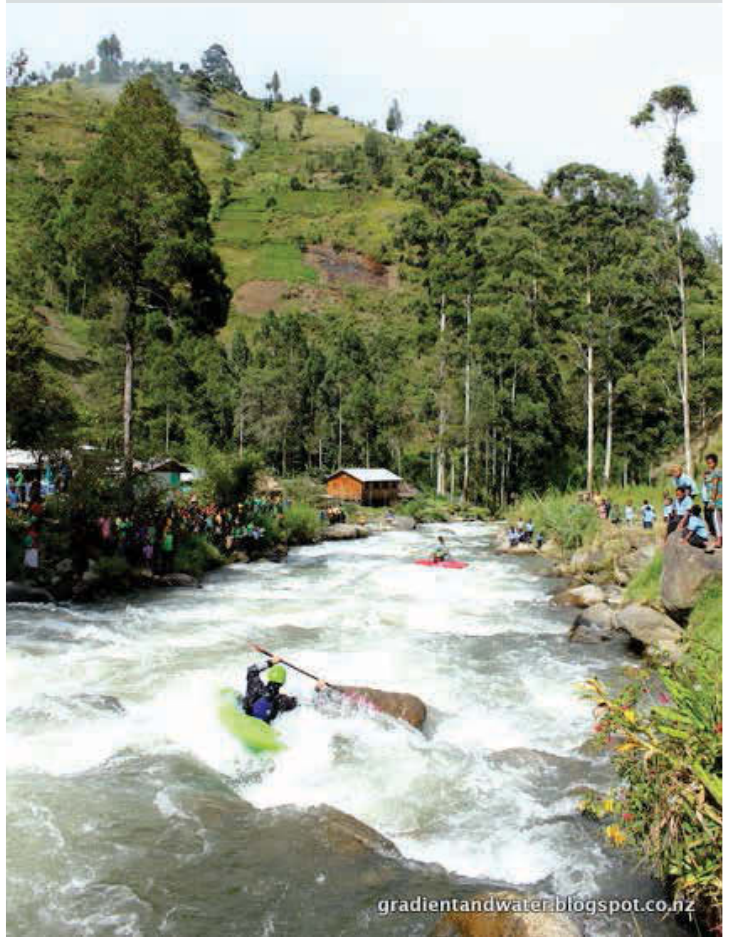
Things felt right, logistics were working out pretty well and more amazingly we were on the river about 5 days ahead of when I thought we would be. The creek was very low volume but luckily it remained relatively constricted so we had use of most of the water. Many of the locals who waved us off at Gembogl Bridge tried their best to keep up with our progress downstream but soon no familiar faces were there. Instead we could hear a communal cheer echoing down the valley, and once people heard it they would flock to the river. Doing anything and everything to get a view of the 'long-long (crazy) white-man'. This even drew the people away from the road-blocks which left Toni with the road to himself, so he comfortably made his way to Gembogl Station and set about finding us somewhere secure to spend the night. For us it was all warm waves and smiles, truly unbelievable. The white-water wasn't too bad either, consistent class III+ with a few harder things here and there. We took full advantage of this warm-up section, reacquainting ourselves with our kayaks and our beloved white-water. After a couple of

Cruisy but some goods for sure



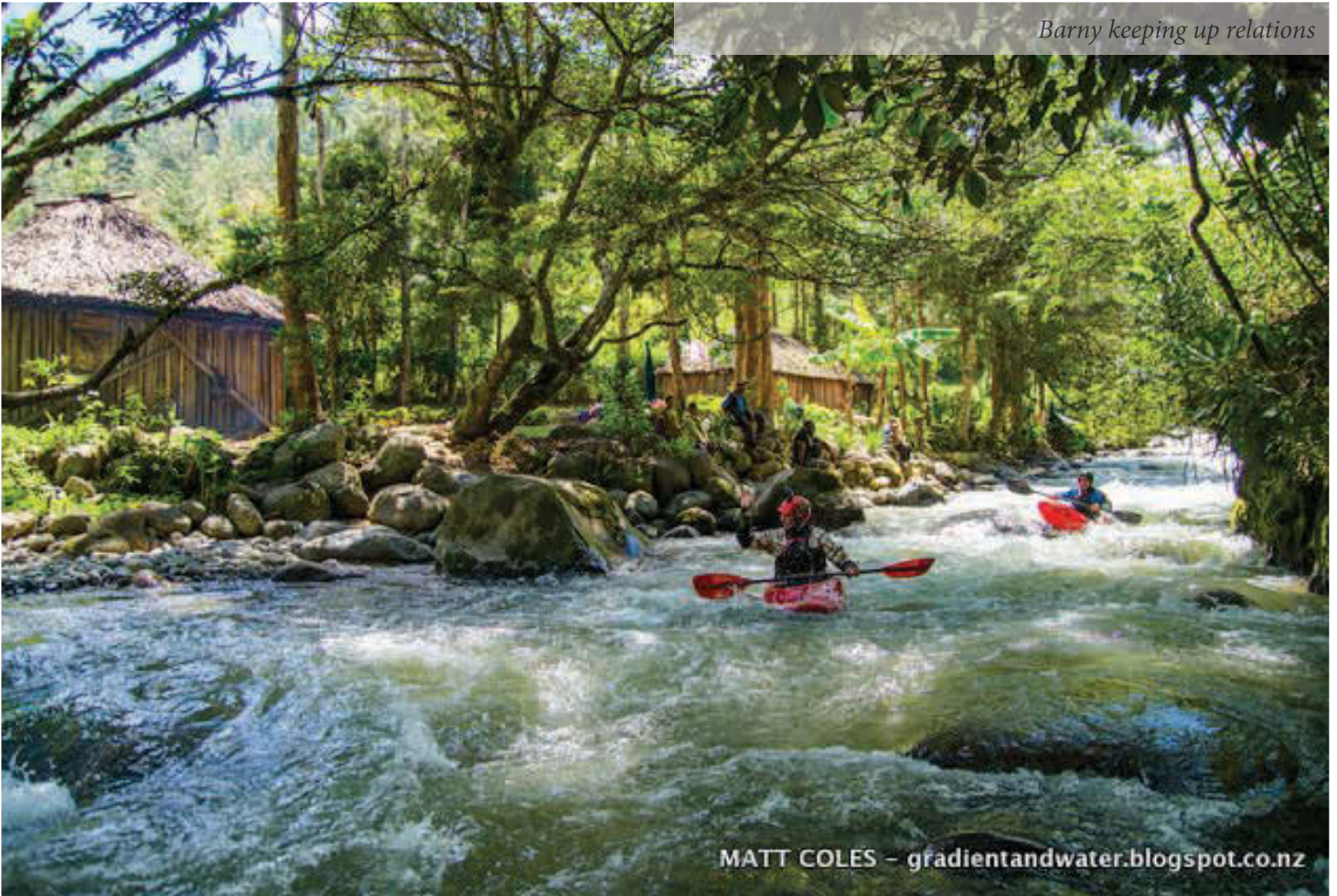
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Again the next day, still a lot of people on the banks but nothing compared to the first day



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Barny keeping up relations



MATT COLES - gradientandwater.blogspot.co.nz

kilometres we made it down to a small wooden foot-bridge, a good vantage point for a photo I thought.

So I eddied out and walked up into a very well-kept garden and was greeted by the familiar grin of Toni. He was just talking to the owner, whom I'll introduce later, about accommodating us for the evening. Things seemed to be going well but I was definitely keen to paddle some more, even if it meant driving back to stay at this place. I asked how far it was to the Gembogl Station Bridge and they said it was about another kilometre. I had noted from the drive up the primary school right next to the main bridge in the village and thought it would be a cool place to finish the day... by stirring up all the village children. We'd get that AND a whole lot more. The boys shared my enthusiasm so we carried on down a bit further, which would turn out to be one of the highlights of the trip.

We carried on, and things just got better and better. Almost immediately downstream of the bridge that large trib we saw earlier came in almost doubling the flow and the river stepped up a bit to mainly class IV.

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The best thing, however, would be our reception to Gembogl Station itself. I fell slightly behind with Ari as I did some filming and tried to give a kid a ride on my kayak, but when we rounded the final corner before the bridge I couldn't believe my eyes. The banks of the river were literally full of people, I am talking close to 1,000 people.
.....

The news of our presence had passed us while we stopped at the small bridge and the town was buzzing with anticipation. The school had emptied and the cheering was almost deafening.

We knew there was a low log-bridge downstream and thought we'd be taking out above it, but getting caught up in the moment I thought about flipping over and floating under it then rolling up downstream. I bounced the idea off Matt who was sitting on the opposite side of the river, with a better vantage point I was hoping. He gave me a 'shrug/nod', I took this as a 'solid yes' and pulled back out into the current. Floating down, children were cheering while they chased me and concerned adults urged me to come to the side. As I approached the log there was plenty of room to float under so I tucked up and flipped upside down. I gave myself plenty of time to clear the log, but just before I was about to roll I smashed into some submerged rocks. I rolled up all good and the pain in my shoulder waned to the overwhelming excitement and adoration that the locals were showering us in. Matt and Barny followed suit, both hitting the rocks but were unfazed as the whole experience was so awesome. That said, none of us were that keen on doing it again.

We had to keep our guard up though, so once we took off the river we quickly jammed our gear onto the Hilux and drove back towards where we met Toni earlier, to the Gembogl Orphans Resource Centre. This was a facility managed by Willie and his partner Pat, which provides shelter, funding, support and anything else to help support the numerous orphans in the area as a result of AIDS. This place was beautiful, like a piece of paradise tucked up in the PNG Highlands. We were assured that our gear wouldn't be messed with and were free to explore the area. Toni had pulled through and then some! So we hung out our gear and spent the afternoon hanging out in probably the most relaxed fashion of the whole trip. Matt, Ari and myself walked across and hung out with some children at the neighbouring school and Barny talked the afternoon away with Willie and some other interested people.

We were sharing a dorm-style room with some other guests, BSP (Bank of the South Pacific) rural managers, who were very interested in our impression of their area and country. All positive, although we all agreed that PNG wasn't for the faint hearted. Next our dinner was served, yes served even though we repeatedly insisted on cooking, but Pat (very motherly figure) wouldn't have a bar of it. The meal was great, back-country's with roast potato, rice and something else I'm pretty sure, but something wasn't quite right. Where was EVERYONE else? It felt almost like eating in lunch-time detention, not another soul was even audible. So after we crushed the huge amount of food before us, Wild Bill leading the eating charge, I took the dishes with the intention of making sure I did them. I found everyone out the back in a thatched hut where they were cooking on a open fire. Much more our style, but before I could settle that I would do the dishes... again I failed, Pat dismissing my good intentions like it wasn't even an option. So I sat down for what would be a long evening of cups of tea and talking around the open fire, only interrupted every now and again by someone 'shhhhhhhhh'-ing a dog out. The dark slowly crept in and the fire eventually burnt down to an amber glow, it was time to get some much needed sleep as we were hoping to get all the way to Banana Market the next day. The boys went up to the dorm but I decided to sleep in my tent, trading the orchestra of snores for the sounds of the jungle and the calming sound of the river.

Tomorrow was going to be good...

To read more Part II is now viewable @
http://gradientandwater.blogspot.co.nz/2013_08_01_archive.html

Packrafting

Article and photos supplied by Shane and Jane Davidson

An extended world of adventure has opened for us – packrafting. The rafts caught our eyes several years ago but it was a spur of the moment decision when Shane was feeling jealous of Jane tramping the length of the South Island on the Te Araroa Trail by herself. Have you ever thought while you're tramping down the side of a river that it would be much easier kayaking? Well now is your chance. These rafts only weigh 2.2kgs so add one to your pack next time and float back out instead.

Soon after our Alpacka packrafts arrived we took them up to Jollie Brook to check if we'd made the right decision. Amazing! While you'd hardly expect to overtake anyone down the Brass Monkey they turn faster than anything else, skim over eddy lines, and hardly notice boils.

The next weekend was time to try the packrafts for real! On a morning of predicted northwest wind and rain when all normal people (kayakers are NOT normal) would stay at home we tramped and gravel-bashed up the Waimakariri River to Carrington Hut. We didn't expect a lot of water so left the sprayskirts at home to save on weight (hey, they weigh another 250 gms each). Driving over the Bealey Bridge there was even less water than expected and we considered not even taking the packrafts up. Leaving the car park we left the helmets behind too, for the first hour or so the weather was good and even after several river crossings of the Waimakariri our boots were still dry – this is not looking good. As we got closer to the hut it started to drizzle then turned to light rain, then heavy rain, on arrival we were soaked through, chilled to the bone but welcomed by a warm fire lit by the resident hunters. We lay in a fitful sleep while it blew hard and the heavy rain tried to force its way through the roof above us... instead of no water we were expecting a dirty brown torrent with logs!

Out came the packrafts in the morning, Shane inflated them with the clever inflation bag, assembled the split paddles and tied them onto the backs of our packs. There was fresh snow down to 1200 metres and it was freezing outside, we donned every item of clothing we had including wet weather gear (left our normal thermals and dry tops at home to save weight)

and made our way down to the river, ducking down under the trees to avoid damaging our new watercraft. Fortunately the river was still clear and actually an ideal flow (well it would be with sprayskirts and helmets!) The hunters were eager to see some carnage, the first rapid looked bigger than we expected but manageable so we literally jumped into our rafts and went with the flow, making it down the wave trains and dodging the rocks, we managed to stay upright (sorry hunters!) Water poured into our boats through the waves and we soon learnt the packraft back-paddling technique in order to keep most of the water out. Regular emptying was still needed and we walked a couple of rapids (one a 3+ with an off-putting wave followed by a choice of a steep pour-over on one side or a tricky hole on the other). The rain stayed behind us up in the headwaters, just, and the sun occasionally was out warming us, marginally. The river eased from 2+ down to braided sections as we headed down, packrafting was everything we imagined, and 3 hours after leaving the hut we arrived, by raft, at the car, smiling! Only a moment later more rain and wind arrived. Heater on full bore in the car, we drove back to a beautiful warm and sunny nor'west day in Christchurch.

At Easter, a fortnight later, we were booked to kayak down the Grey on the WWCC trip with a raft taking our gear. We were wondering what to do for the Sunday and Monday when we came up with a cunning plan – let's take our packrafts and keep paddling to Greymouth and come back on the train! The Grey river would provide an ideal opportunity to see how the packrafts went on G3 with help if needed and without the burden of the gear.

Everyone was very intrigued by our boats which were said to be plastic marshmallows, Warehouse duckies, and other unmentionables, that may burst and deflate at even a glimpse of a rock. We arrived at the river to find very little water and we were wondering how anyone (and especially us!) was going to be able to paddle! However, we all managed, the packrafts coming in very handy to help get the gear raft through the shallow spots. When a sticky spot came along Shane would jump out mid-rapid, toss his packraft onto the tower of raft gear, help haul the raft to deeper water, and then plop the packraft down to head on down again. The packrafts were very easy to paddle without any gear on board, the only tricky bit was when Jane needed a 180 degree roll through a big hole; we've heard they can go a full 360 degrees but you'd be doing very well.

When we all arrived at the get out, we said goodbye to everyone and continued downstream with our packs tied

onto the front (there are tie down points especially for this). Fortunately the weather was perfect with 4 days of clear sunny days forecast for Easter. We knew we had a long way to go and hoped to get down to Ikamatua that evening. We were surprised that the next 1.5 hours paddling was quite delightful with unusual rock formations through some scenic gorges, only one play hole and a wave train that we recall but it would make a pleasant addition if you have the energy at the end of the normal day section. That afternoon/evening we saw several fishermen trying to win the prize for the best Easter catch.

The next day dawned fine and clear again for our 50km paddle to Greymouth, this was going to be a long day. The river stayed low with several portages across gravel bars to where we met with the Ahaura River, then the wind started coming up the valley – the thing we were afraid of most – however we were making good time despite the slow forward speed of our unusual craft. Apart from the scenic gorge above Dobson there is little to recommend on this stretch, though it's much easier than walking! Near Dobson we started seeing bottles floating down causing us to wonder, then round the corner we saw the Warehouse duckie version of our own boats with three drunken West Coasters sinking the boat right down to the waterline! We finally arrived at the Cobden Bridge absolutely spent, packed up the packrafts and walked to our B & B for the evening.

Our final day on Monday enabled us to have a walk out to the breakwater and another to a lookout over the town and up the Grey Valley to see where we had come from. Our lunchtime train awaited us for our journey back home. As we travelled back we looked down at all the rivers on the way wondering what was packraftable. Broken River looks a starter, there is a 4WD track above, and there are instructions on the website on how to tie a MTB to the front!

Come November, with the winter kayaking season finished, we decided the Cameron River (see photos at <http://tinyurl.com/am2qzys>) above Lake Heron would be worth trying out, friends had mentioned it looked good and we had been up to Cameron Hut on a previous tramp. We headed up to Cameron Hut on the Saturday loaded with our packrafts (this time with sprayskirts, helmets, and dry suits) in snow showers which continued into the evening. We had hoped to paddle all the way from the top but a G4/5 gorge in the middle with a heinous walk around (we were too busy looking at the rapids on the way up to notice the track heading up onto a plateau) made us think again.

The next day dawned fine and sunny for a pleasant walk up to the Cameron Glacier in fresh snow. We headed back to the hut, packed, and then back down on the well-marked track above the gorge we had missed the day before. Arriving at the put-in we knew we were in for an exciting time, we could see from the trip up that most of the river was continuous 2+ with the occasional 3. We launched with the packs tied on

the front paddling through many small waves and holes. Jane made it all the way through one G3+ rapid really well when she relaxed and got flipped in a large hole at the bottom, fortunately the dry-suit did its job and we were on our way again. The excitement was almost too much for us, a 10km run with no flat spots at all, on returning to Christchurch we looked to see what the gradient was – 23m/km, compare that to the Ashley G3 section – 7m/km, we knew it was steep! It seems likely that this was also a first descent!

We're into it now! The next Saturday we did a day trip walking into the South Ashburton river (see photos at <http://tinyurl.com/av4pdow>) to the Boundary Creek hut. The top of this river has a very narrow gorge where at one point the whole river goes under a chock-stone, the top section has some 3+4 which we decided was too much for us to jump straight into. We walked down to the start of the 2+ and found everything easier than anything we did on the Cameron River. This would be a really nice river to do in a kayak, it's an easy walk in (though 2.5 hours), and hey, have you ever kayaked under a chock-stone?

Continuing in the region we tackled the next valley south, the Potts River (see photos at <http://tinyurl.com/bfmmr82>). We felt like a bit more exercise and climbed (stupidly) nearly to Mt Potts (> 2000m a.s.l.) taking ice axes with us this time. It was a hard climb up and a long descent down scree, and a paddle across the river to the Potts Hut, a pleasant well-stocked musterer's hut. We started out the next morning with enjoyable 2+ paddling, becoming more difficult as we descended. We were paddling low flow 3+ water when we stopped because we couldn't see around the next corner which clearly went into a tighter gorge. Sense over-riding valour, we decided to portage this section which probably took 2 hours in mixed weather of sun and snow showers. For you first-descenters out there this would likely be an easy grade 4 but a relatively hard 3-4 hour walk-in, climbing 600m before dropping back down to the start of the gorge. We managed to bush-bash back down below the gorge then enjoyed a nice 2+/3 paddle back to the car.

If you're keen to try packrafting then head to the kayak school in Murchison, Mick Hopkinson has recently purchased some for hire. You'll be pleasantly surprised, they are well suited to low flow rivers where kayaks are less enjoyable, and are very stable in most other conditions – just paddle like hell through big holes!

The original and most popular packrafts are made by Alpaca Raft, also worth checking out are Feathercraft's self bailing packrafts. Try <http://vimeo.com/52134818> for a good video on packrafting or <http://lostcoastbike.blogspot.com> for bikerafting.

The scope is immense; we now want to paddle the headwaters and side streams of the Rakaia and Rangitata and have many other rivers up our sleeves to explore. If you enjoy walking as well as paddling and are keen on some adventure give packrafting a go – you might become hooked too!

To see exactly where we went and details on our other adventures have a look at <http://janeandshane/followmyspot.com>.

To check out a river's elevation profile and gradient etc. for planning your own adventure (or just to see how your favourite river sections look) go to <http://followmyspot.com/rivers/profiles>.



Starting up the Cameron River Track - carrying 2 packrafts on outside of pack



Potts River just above get out, near junction with Rangitata River



Potts River - ready for portage

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