

# **New Zealand CANOEING & RAFTING**



37 WINTER 1986



# New Zealand Canoeing & Rafting Magazine

PUBLISHED FOR THE NEW ZEALAND CANOEING ASSOCIATION  
P.O. BOX 3768 WELLINGTON N.Z.

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'NEW ZEALAND CANOEING & RAFTING MAGAZINE' is a quarterly publication published for the N.Z. Canoeing Association and its member clubs. The editorial board of the magazine is entirely separate from the Association and the views expressed in the magazine are those of the individual contributors and do not necessarily coincide with those of the editors, nor of the N.Z.C.A.

Subscriptions are \$10 per year (4 issues) mailed direct. \$5 via a member canoe club.

EDITORIAL ENQUIRIES should be  
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SUBSCRIPTIONS & DISTRIBUTION ENQUIRIES  
should be addressed to: Publications  
N.Z. Canoe Assn.  
P.O. Box 3768  
WELLINGTON



# COMMENT

It is now some considerable time since the last issue of this magazine appeared, and I guess most of you have been wondering where your copies have got to. Don't rush off to blame the post office - it's our fault this time. As most of you will realise, subscriptions only go some way to covering costs, and as I had over-committed my time over the last eight months or so, work that contributed to my livelihood got priority, and the magazine went to the bottom of the pile. We are in a bit of a 'Catch 22' situation here. The magazine will only become regular when we can afford to pay for the editor's time, and that will only come with increased subscriptions, and we are not likely to get an increase in subscriptions until we can produce a more regular magazine. So what do we do about the copies you paid for and didn't get? Rather than attempt to catch up by printing double the number, or bumper issues, we shall carry over your subscriptions from last year to cover this coming year's subscriptions - I hope this meets with your approval? So let's carry on from where we left off.

In the last magazine you will know that I was pretty negative about the flat-water racing scene. I am not sure that the situation has improved. The N.Z.C.A. Executive Officer given the responsibility to report and manage that area of affairs hasn't been to one meeting, and the Vice-President, who seems to be doing most of the liaison, has, like myself, been heavily over-committed with other matters and we are simply not getting the feed-back we really should be getting.

My comments regarding new club members coming, not from our Olympic results but rather from the tremendous growth in Multi-sport events was intended not to decry the advantages we have certainly reaped from the Olympic results, and they have been great, but rather to indicate that in reality, Multi-sport events really are a major factor in the rapid growth of our sport.

In speaking of Multi-sport events, the Coast-to-Coast went off without a hitch and, as time goes by more and more of the competitors have a more realistic approach to the canoeing events. This year I did not receive a letter from a potential entrant asking for plans to build a canoe a couple of weeks before the event - it has happened every other year. Safety lies in the hands of both competitors and the organisers, and I believe that the organisers have done the best to ensure that competitors do not get themselves into a potentially fatal situation. Unfortunately, some participants do little to help themselves. I was rather horrified to witness on T.V. an interview with a well known T.V. personality who, a few weeks before the Coast-to-Coast event, with a companion did the route in a single one day push of 18 hours. The organiser of the Coast-to-Coast was critical, stating that these two individuals had taken unnecessary risks - one wore no life-jacket or buoyancy-aid nor crash-helmet. Danny Watson, in defence stated that it was in the nature of adventure that these sorts of things happen. To follow a year of record drownings, particularly a record year for river drownings and canoeing deaths in particular, with this attitude is rather stupid. There was absolutely no need to embark on this venture without a buoyancy-aid - it is not adventure to venture with inadequate preparation and I fully support Robin Judkins in his condemnation of this stunt. To be first to do it is good enough reason to do it, but why with inadequate equipment?

This leads me on to the subject of safety and an incident recently that resulted in a measure of confrontation between a canoeist and those authorities who believed they had the right to enforce safety standards. Andrew Rees kayaked over Huka Falls. Nothing new about that you might say. Unfortunately, Andrew was seen going over the falls and it came about that the Police believed that a rescue was needed. After some degree of misunderstanding and miscommunication Andrew was confronted by the Police who, it appears, came on a bit heavy, and Andrew, placed in quite a corner, responded in like manner. Now I am not saying that the Police were in the wrong, they have a responsibility to ensure the safety of citizens and have a Search and Rescue role - it is better to gear up for a search as soon as possible, and they responded appropriately in the first instance. Unfortunately, the lay public do not understand the motives of canoeists that make them want to do such apparently crazy things as risk life and limb by paddling over waterfalls. Nor are they aware just



what a modern canoeist is capable of doing. From this unfortunate event, let us draw up some sort of list of things you really ought to consider when running waterfalls:

1. When doing actions that 'the general public' might consider dangerous in places where you might be seen: Station a canoeist to allay the fears of bystanders so that unneeded S.A.R. is not called out.
2. It is possible to get stuck in the 'stopper' or recirculating flow of some falls. It is unwise for another canoeist, stationed below the falls, to attempt to paddle into this area to rescue you. Float a rope into the eddy by tying it to a spare buoyancy-aid, and haul the victim out. So have a rope ready.
3. You could be held under for longer than you can hold your breath. In this case you will come to the surface unconscious and need resuscitation and/or C.P.R. Another canoeist stationed below the falls can carry out E.A.R. (expired air resuscitation) from the canoe, but C.P.R. needs a hard, flat surface - the deck of a jet-boat, or the shore. I do not believe that jet-boats are as valuable in this sort of rescue as some authorities would have it, but you must ensure that you can get a victim to shore fast.
4. I believe that all canoeists should attempt to educate the public, and particularly S.A.R. authorities just what you are able to do, and to assist in rescue exercises as much as possible.

It is embarrassing to be rescued by well-meaning members of the public, but that is just part of canoeing and I am afraid we are just going to have to live with it. Try not to react too strongly when placed in this position.

Finally, I detect a bit of aggro being metered out to the Commercial Rafting fraternity lately. It seems that some canoeists are upset about the growing 'commercialisation' of our rivers. Remember that without the rafters the Motu would be dammed by now, and even if it weren't, the road to the top of the river would not be useable. The Kawareau and Shotover would be on the way to damming too. There is no way that we, as canoeists, could ever get a river of any significance protected on the grounds of our use alone. Rafting is a fact of life - so live with it. The fishermen on the Tongariro have had to live with canoeists, yet it was the fishermen who got the minimum flow set for that river. It was the fishermen who got the Water Conservation Order on the Ahuriri, Rakaia, and the Rangitikei - if canoeists are going to take a selfish attitude to 'their' rivers, be prepared to loose all those rivers you currently value so much. - More about this topic in the next issue.

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: *Bevan Walker of Nelson Canoe Club doing a tail-stand in the Wairoa Gorge, Nelson. I believe the rapid is 'The Fire-hydrant'.*

Regards and good paddling,

*Graham Egarr*

Editor.



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# Nihon Isshu Canoe Ryoko

Paul Caffyn

"*Anata no tabi wa do data?*" (How was your trip?)

"*Subarashi demmo muzukashi.*" (Splendid but difficult.) *Subarashi* is the word to describe the beauty and contrasts of the coastal scenery, our contact with the Japanese fishermen, the magic of the sunrises and sunsets and the faith and support from our friends in Tokyo.

The coastal scenery is superb, snow capped volcanoes, 300m cliffs rising sheer out of the sea, tunnels, uncountable caves, archways, and a myriad of colourful ports. Sections of the coast are so rugged and remote that there is still no sign of man's presence. Japan must have the highest density of inshore fishermen in the world - and summer is peak season for the salmon and seaweed fishermen. The port of Uketo on the north-east coast of Honshu has over 200 fishing boats which leave through a narrow entrance between 3 am and 3.30 am. The roar of the engines was like peak hour traffic noise in Sydney, and the experience of joining into the stream of boats speeding out to sea in the soft light of dawn was brilliant. Many nights we slept by the open hearths of the *ryoshi no banya* (fishermen's quarters), rising at 2 am with the *okasans* (the old ladies) who cook breakfast and departing before dawn with the fishermen. We were taken into the homes and hearts of the fishermen.

In marked contrast to the previous 'big trips', not one person in Japan said that I was crazy for doing the trip; instead they would call, "*Gambate*" which has no exact English translation but is a combination of try hard and good luck.

The trip was far more difficult than I had anticipated. Taifu (typhoon) number 3 was in the offing when I started paddling from Choshi on the 26th of May and we had a dusting from Taifu number 13 right up on the north coast of Hokkaido. While I was plugging along the south coast of Honshu there were three of the bastards in the offing, Taifu numbers 12, 13, and 14. The effects of taifu are felt four to five days before they actually hit Japan with strong winds, massive seas and fierce thunderstorms. I came up with two new expressions on that section of coast, - "*an epic a day*" and "*red-lining*". The red line is an analogy with a vehicle's tachometer; in the canoeing sense it came to mean pushing on when conditions were prejudicial to my health.

One epic involved being caught in an electrical storm five kilometres offshore. I was making a run across a wide bight in the coast and the sky to the south became so black I could almost see the words - "The end of the world isn't far from here." Just before the storm hit I managed to escape off the two-metre swell into the lee of a small rocky island. Then the sky fell on my head with torrential driving rain and a fierce blustery gale-force wind. Between gusts I attempted to remain in the lee of a small reef, otherwise I was totally at the mercy of the wind. After 15 minutes the wind and rain eased, the sun broke out through the evil clouds and, dazed and dazzled, I resumed the original course.

The next day the epic involved running a tide race. There was a big sea running and all the boats were in port - there is nothing so demoralising as to paddle into a fishing harbour to find all hundred boats are hauled at least three metres above sea level in anticipation of a taifu. The fishermen all stayed home if there was a strong wind or a large wave warning out, but I preferred to make my own assessment of the conditions after having studied the morning newspaper weather map. The tide had turned as I neared a steep granite headland and, paddling flatstick, I couldn't make the slightest headway around the sharp point - the tidal stream being too strong. I resorted to the old surfing through the tide race on the standing waves trick, however the situation was further complicated by a two to three metre taifu-induced swell, plus a wind-chop, plus the rebound waves off the cliffs, plus the standing waves set up by the tide race. I picked up a hummer of a ride on a two metre wave but Haya Kaze (as I had named the Nordkapp kayak) skewed down the face of the wave to the left and towards the cliffs and a nasty reef. The Nordkapp flies when she is surfing and the paddle is used for support in a trailing position. If it hadn't been for the deep-draught rudder I would have piled up into the granite reef.



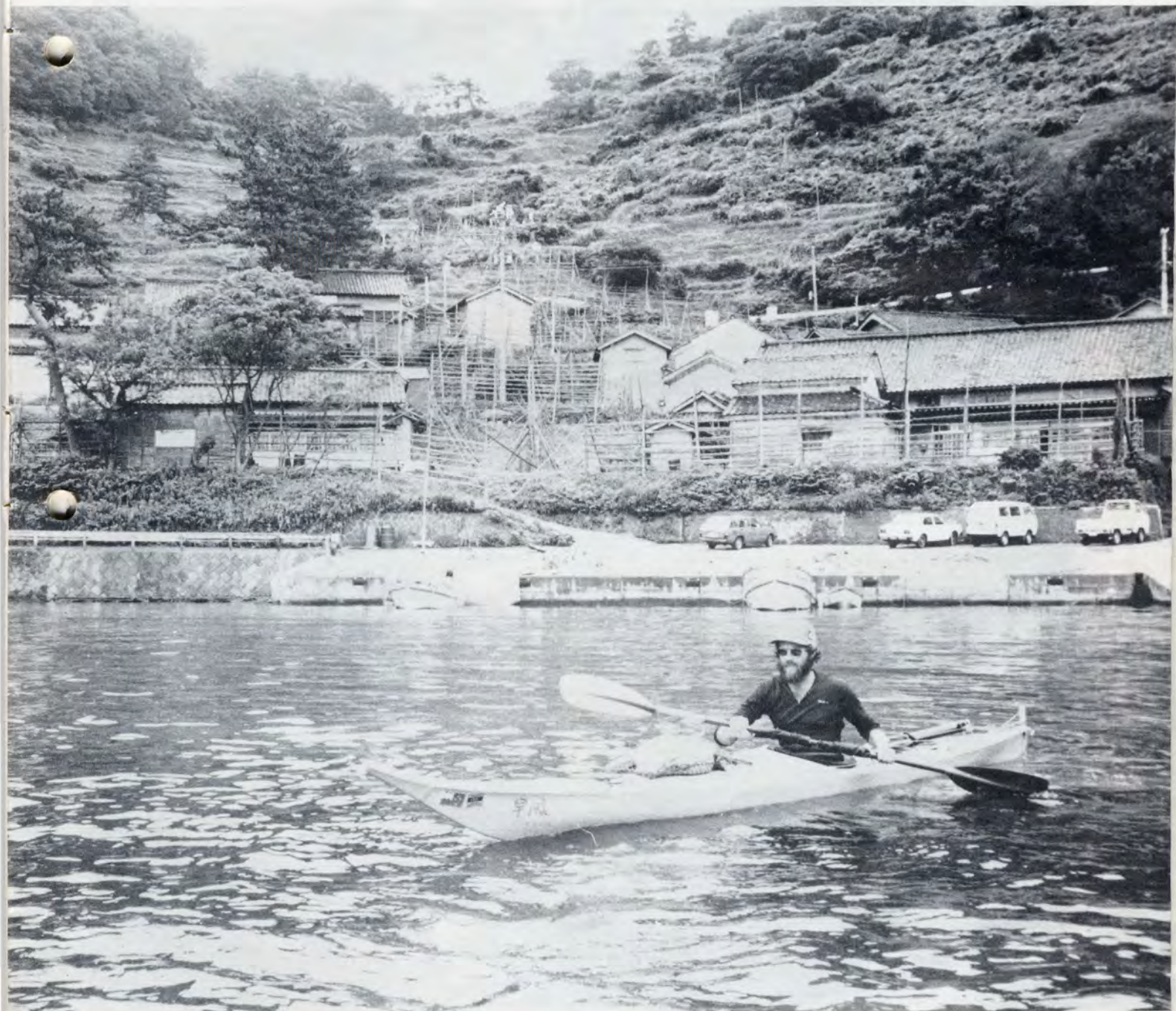


*Paul, battened down for the height of the rainy season.*



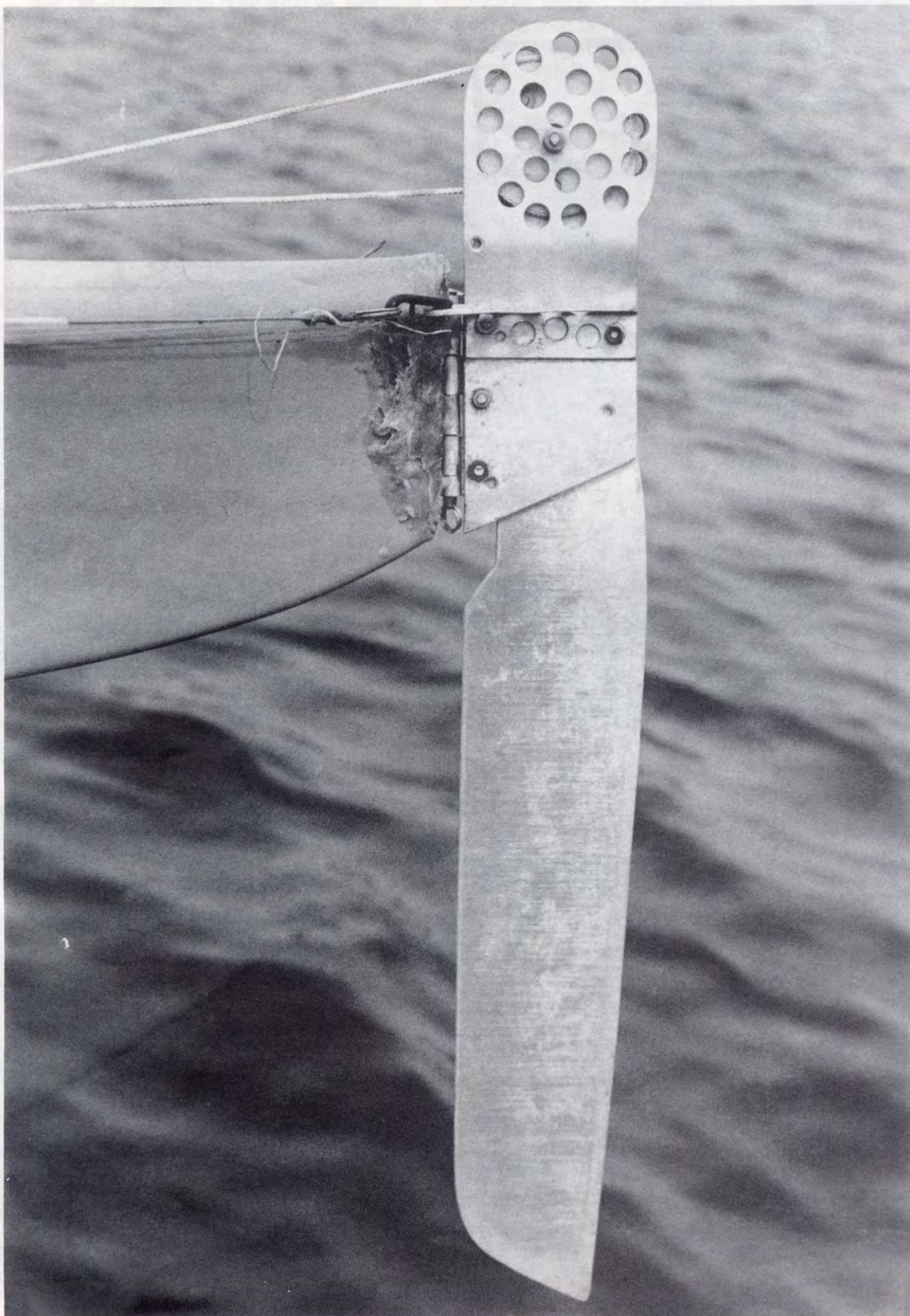
A source of continued irritation was being hounded by the uniformed dogs of the Maritime Safety Agency. I expected them to be the equivalent of the British H.M. Coastguard but their attitude seems to be "... it is better to stop sea canoeists paddling than have to worry about the possibility of rescues..." The M.S.A. have instilled a fear of the sea in Japanese people rather than a healthy respect.

At many of the smaller fishing ports we were the first "*gaijin*" or foreigners that the locals had seen and on several occasions the police were called to investigate the bearded *gaijin* in a canoe. They were quickly reassured when we produced one of the glossy magazines carrying a pictorial coverage of the trip and the police would take this along to the person who had telephoned in the sighting. Only once, during the crossing of Tokyo did I feel at all threatened when three armed police on a commandeered fishing boat tried to stop me. At first it was because the sea was too dangerous and the sea too rough - it was the calmest day of the month - but later because I wasn't carrying my passport. After an hour of cat and mouse bluffing and chasing the police departed with a warning that in future I must carry the passport.



*In the sheltered small fishing village of Unyu, West coast of Honshu,*





*The magic rudder - no Nordkapp should be without one !*



Media interest in the trip was high with four television channels and five newspapers covering the finish in Hokkaido. I completed the trip on the 19th of September with a 40 kilometre crossing of Tsugaru Kaikyo; the infamous strait between Honshu and Hokkaido. The total distance paddled was 6434 kilometres in 112 days for an all up average of 57 kilometres per day and a paddling average day of 66 kilometres per day. There were 14 weather-bound days.

*Haya Kaze* -fast wind, as I called the kayak, was sponsored by Graham Sisson (*Sisson Industries of Nelson*) I was keen to try a microlight boat to see if higher speeds were possible. Carbonfibre, kevlar and vinylester resins were used to build a 14 kilogram Nordkapp. That weight included the three hatches, bulkheads, and over-



*Wrecked fishing boat on the West coast of Honshu, near Wajima Ko,*





*A sea-gull's view of Haya Kaze as we leave harbour shelter. The new innovation for this trip was the third bulkhead and compartment immediately behind the cockpit. The hatch for this can be seen slightly off-centre to the right*



stern rudder. A new seat was built which, when glassed into the cockpit, formed a third, or middle bulkhead with two benefits : firstly the volume of water that can enter the boat is minimised, and secondly, the additional middle compartment is accessible from the cockpit whilst at sea - very handy for cameras and my play-lunch.

The total budget came to a shade over \$10,000. Fairydown were the only other New Zealand sponsor and supplied fibrepile clothing, camping equipment, and \$1,000 towards the cost of the expedition. In Japan, Honda lent a four-wheel drive Shuttle to Lesley as the support vehicle.

A in all a brilliant but tough trip.

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The New Zealand Canoeing Association will, over the next year, be publishing the accounts of Paul's expeditions as companion volumes to the already published story of his South Island trip. These will be followed by a technical manual on sea kayaking and other technical data for sea canoeists and Nordkapp owners.

The first volume, the account of the Stewart Island trip is now with the printer. It is our intention to offer, at reduced prices an advance order scheme for each volume. The next issue of this magazine should carry the order form and prices for this first volume. This will be followed by the account of the North Island trip, Australia and Japan.

## Wairoa dates

The following are the water flow dates for the Wairoa River, Tauranga, for the remainder of this year and for the first part of the next summer canoeing season. Further information can be obtained by telephoning Kaimai Canoe Club.

1986	July	13	
	September	14	
	October	12	19
	November	2	15/16 30
	December	6/7	
1987	January	18	
	February	8	21/22
	March	7/8	22
	April	11/12	26
	May	10	24
	June	14	

\* Note: When canoe slaloms are being held, other river users are asked to keep clear of the course.



# Karamea – in flood

Deirdre Hiller

"Mid January you want to paddle the Karamea ? It's dry, not much fun at all," we were told. However, plans were already underway. Living in Nelson it is too easy to put off a trip to do something else and we weren't going to be put it off again.

D-day dawned with rain in the Karamea, however the troops - Bevan Walker, Dave Tudor, Konrad and Deirdre Hiller were not disconcerted so preparations went ahead. We arrived at the pilot, Terry Belcher's, to find him screwing the canoe racks onto his helicopter! The rain was heavy and visibility bad, the crew began to hesitate.... a break in the clouds appeared and Terry was optimistic; we were off!

To our amazement that tiny Hughes 300 actually made it off the ground with Dave and Bevan's ton weight - fully laden canoes. On returning to collect us Terry told of having to hunt for a hole in the clouds to clear the Kakapo Saddle and he had only just been able to make it back.

It was a strange feeling on the banks of the upper Karamea as we waved the chopper goodbye - there was only one way to get out now. After a quick round of scrog in the Trevor Carter Hut we set off in the drizzle to conquer the Karamea. There wasn't loads of water; but enough and spirits were high as we arrived at the first rapid. Caution prevailing we all got out to suss the situation - a tight 'S' bend with drops on both corners. Our first portage perhaps? No, Konrad is used to such small technical rivers back in Europe and negotiated the section without any problems. Hence the team followed suit. Luna Hut was spotted to the right and we continued on to the shallow and bouldery Orbit Creek Rapid. Konrad was in his element again and lead the way with rock supports and seal slides, portaging a short section in the middle. A few panic strokes proved useful for us New Zealanders.

The Karamea consists of a series of lakes formed from earthquake landslides. We reached the first one, Moonshine Lake, just as the mist was lifting. It was an eery feeling canoeing amongst the dead trees which had previously thrived on the river banks, the silence only broken by the plop, plop of the paddles. Some paradise ducks accompanied us, continually diving for safety and leaving behind a few feathers. Towards the end of the lake the river became audible again and a roar grew louder and louder. Time for another inspection. The river had grown and its powerfulness in the small gaps between the boulders that were only too numerous led to our first big portage. Through scub and over these huge boulders, we dragged, carried and dropped the boats. Plastic is fantastic, portaging is not. The second half of this rapid provided good canoeing.

Thor Hut saw four happy canoeists arrive, however it was already full of trampers. Despite offers of the wet floor, tents were pitched and the fishermen set off. Meanwhile veges were prepared. As unhappy fishermen returned we settled on a can of sardines instead. No substitute for those huge Karamea trout we had seen in the shallow sandy pools though!

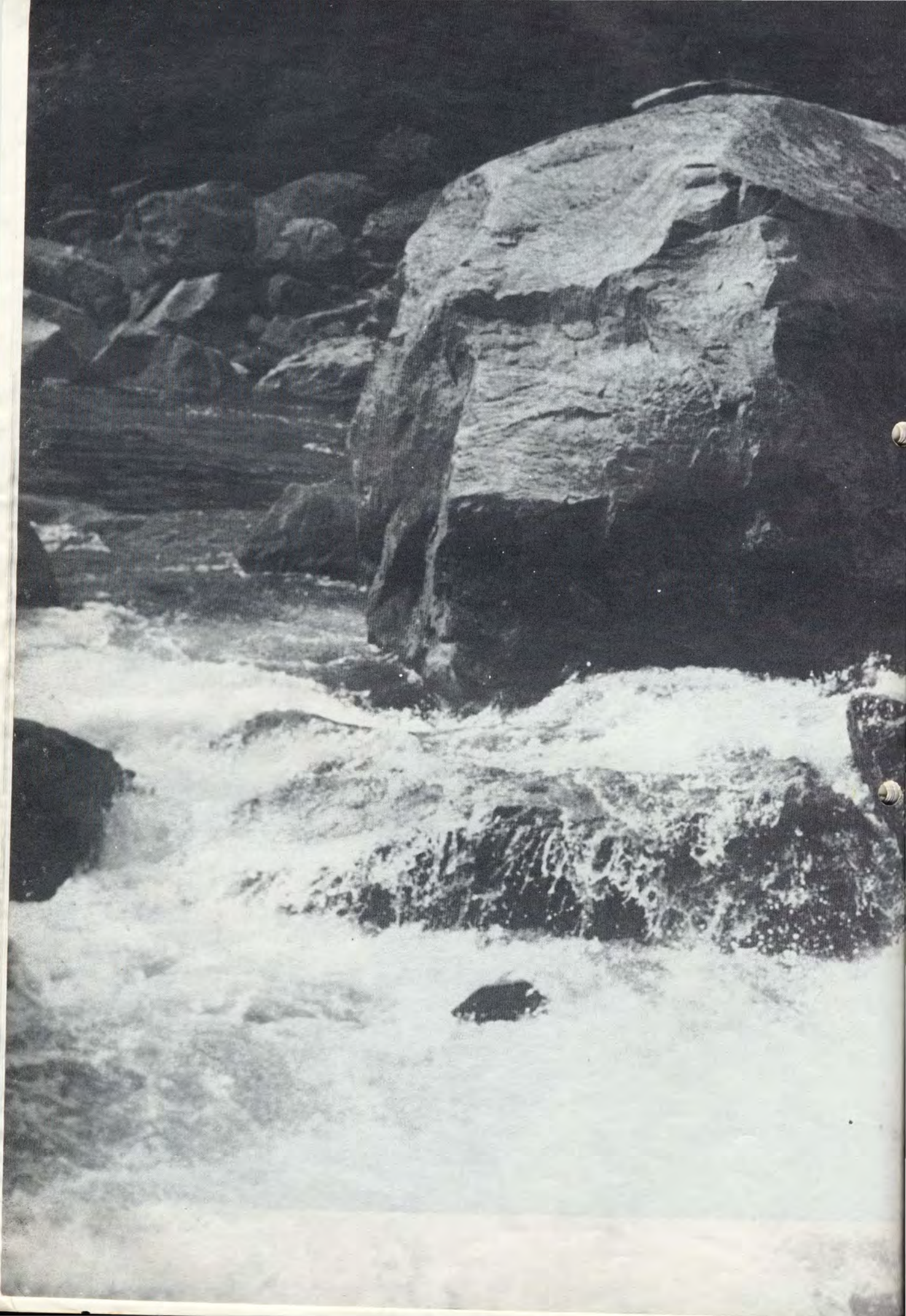
During the night the heavens opened - wow what a thunderstorm! The ground shook with the deafening cracks and it rained and rained and rained and RAINED. The result: next morning the river was a dirty, brown, raging, torrent. However the sun came out making our hut day quite pleasant. You can't fish in a muddy river though, can you? Oh well, veges and rice for tea.

The river had dropped and we were off to an early start on the third day. What an excellent day's canoeing! There was never a boring moment - almost continuous rock-dodging and white water down to the Leslie and then lakes followed by exciting rapids.

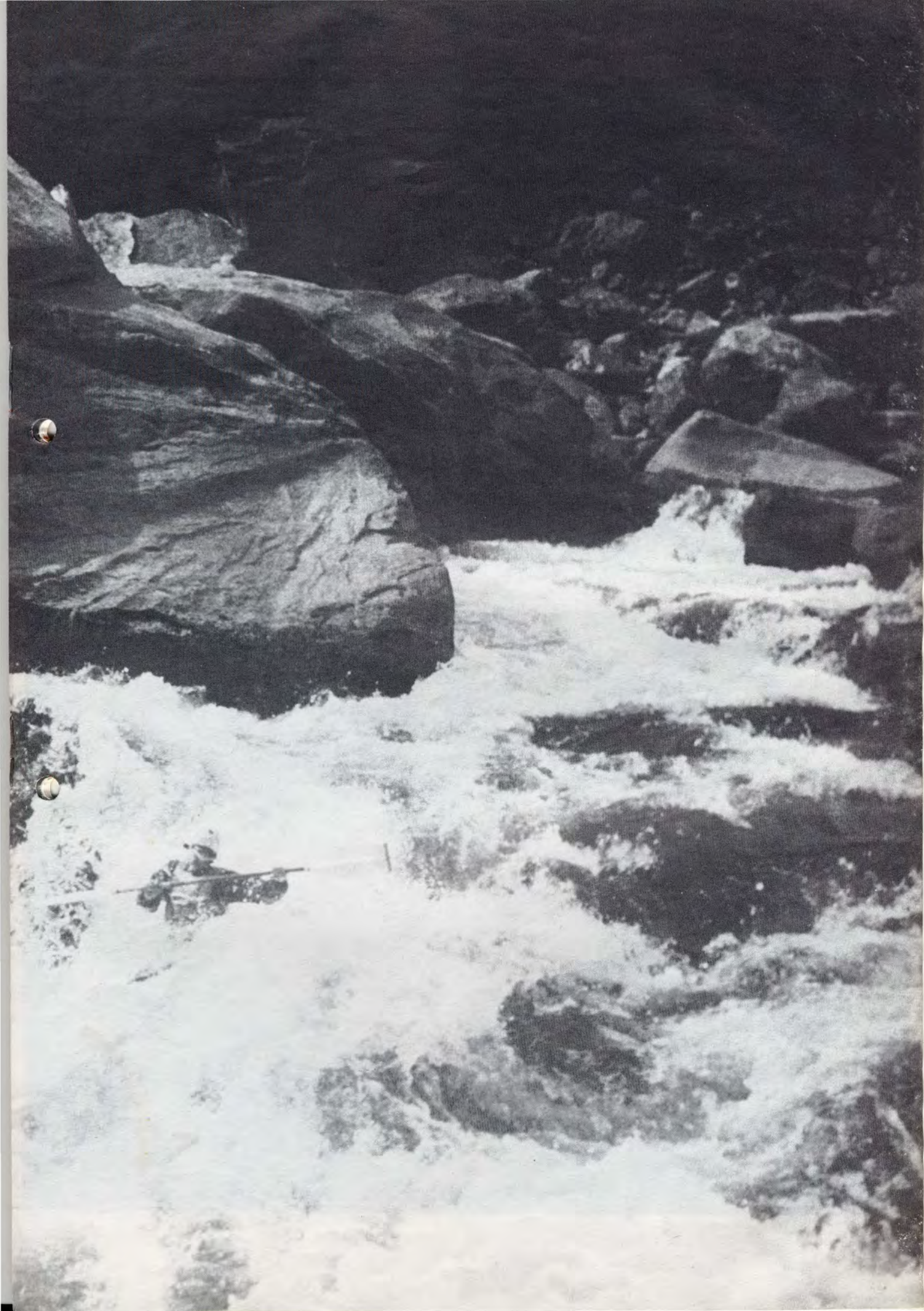


























We zoomed past Venus Hut too busy concentrating on the huge boulders to take much notice. As we were behind schedule rapids were inspected only by the 'long neck' technique. By lunchtime we had already reached the Karamea Bend but more fun was to come. Another big-looking rapid... neck technique... survival... survival... boom... Dave got jammed. Nothing serious though and he had just disturbed a few trout having their afternoon nap. Then the river split in two. Bevan pulled out his rod while we did a recce. The canoeing was good, the fishing....?

At the end of another lake the tops of the trees were visible below! Rocky Ariki - a drop of about two metres lay ahead. What a hoot! We would have done it again had the boats not been so heavy.

Roaring Lion Hut was reached just in time to do some more fishing - huh ! We're getting sick of veges and rice.

After another fishless breakfast we set off, knowing that the big meany was waiting for us at the end of the lake. Bevan feeling more than hassled was taking every opportunity to redeem his fishing career - he even started fishing from his canoe... and it worked and worked again! Trout for tea at last, a good omen perhaps?

The thunder of the Roaring Lion rapid increased. It was definitely time to investigate, for all except Bevan who carried on fishing nonchalantly. The rapid consisted of several powerful drops and bends with boulders the size of houses. Taken individually they may have been possible, but one after the other...? We portaged the first third of the rapid on the left bank, canoed the middle section where a little meany forced two of us to roll, and portaged the rest on the right bank.

The next major rapid was at Ferris Creek. Here, led by Dave, we took the chicken route to the right and portaged the funnel drop at the end. No doubt it is canoeable but we were not ready to trust those boils and backwashes. The river was gaining power and volume from all the side creeks. There were still rocks to be dodged but one had less say in the matter. Bevan was seen to be doing tail-stands and pirouettes in a stopper. Terrified and excited I panicked past Dave who had succeeded in pulling in behind a rock. Konrad headed to the left for safety, only to find that it was far more difficult there. Fabulous water - what a buzz! The troops were on a high as we pulled into Greys Hut and ... trout for tea.

But then the rain came tumbling down, and down, and down. Again the Karamea was in flood and writhed in its bed like a restless snake. The sheer mass and speed of the water passing by was incredible. The beach where we had landed the day before had vanished. So another day was spent erecting and observing river level markers.

Day six dawned. Although the river had dropped about two metres it still looked threatening. Food supplies were dwindling. So near yet so far. The group weather forecasters predicted more rain ... the river would probably rise again. Would we have to spend another day or three in Greys Sandfly Hut? The Karamea Gorge lay ahead ... "Let's go for it!"

The water was humongous. Every chicken route available was taken and when there wasn't one, we portaged. At the end of one rapid was the hugest, meanest, man-eatingest hole we'd ever seen! We didn't even throw logs in to see what they wouldn't do. Hearts shook with fear and trepidation. Onwards and outwards. Finally we emerged from the gorge - tired, satisfied, victorious and safe.

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*Photographs for this article by Bevan Walker.*



## Karamea flows:

When Deirdre's group of Nelson canoeists arrived at the bottom of the Karamea Gorge they paddled over to the water recorder staff guage - that is the yellow plank with the black numbers often to be seen on our rivers. The water level was at the 2.0 mark. These readings give a valuable indication of flow levels. These heights can be converted to water flow volume by reference to the stage height graphs held by the local catchment board, Ministry of Works hydrographic branch, or by the organisation owning the water recorder station. In the case of the Karamea it is the Ministry of Works. The Karamea, with a height of 2.0 metres on the staff guage is equal to 323m<sup>3</sup> per second (cumecs). At this flow the river should only be done by the most experienced canoeists and rafters as there is simply too much water going through the confined area of the gorge. The flow at which Kupe Canoe Club first ran the river and reported in this magazine in our issue number 29, the guage read 1.6 to 1.7 metres, a flow of between 206 and 235.5 cumecs. Douglas Hull who was on that trip considers this flow to be about the minimum at which the rock dams above Karamea Bend can be run. A later Kupe Canoe Club trip during Christmas 1984 found the water recorder at 1.1m or 95 cumecs and they discovered that the rock dams were largely reduced to filters, with boulder bashing in their plastic kayaks that allowed for only very slow progress.

If we take, then, these figures as giving the useable levels for doing the river from the top, and reading off the data for 1984. That is, for flows of between 200 and 300 cumecs, we discover that the river was only between those levels for 22 days. However, if you put in below the Bend you will be able to run the gorge without problems at much lower flows. It is interesting to note that in 1984 the river reached a maximum of 712 cumecs ( just short of 3 metres on the guage), and a low level of 18 cumecs ( about 0.5 metres on the guage).

For those paddlers wishing to convert guage readings to flow volumes, the following table supplied by the TIDEDA Data Archive, National Water and Soil Conservation Authority can be used. The table was supplied as at 29.05.1985 - silting and other river bed alterations since that time may make slight alterations since that time.

WHOLE METRES ↓	PARTS OF A METRE									
		0.1	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.9
0	3.9	6.0	8.4	11	14	18	24	32.5	43	54
1	68	83	101	121	143	168	196	225	255	288
2	323	359	398	438	480	524	569	615	662	711
3	762	816	873	933	994	1058	1122	1187	1254	1322

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Commercial Rafting Companies, in particular New Zealand River Runners, and Woodrow Rafting Expeditions recently donated their takings from their trips down the Wairoa river to the New Zealand Womens Kayak Team. Without the assistance of these companies, the team would have been desperately short of funds. On behalf of all canoeists, Thank you River Runners and Woodrow.



Hugh Canard

New Zealand is a country of rivers. Abundant rainfall and high mountains ensure that we are blessed with a wide variety of natural waterways. In one small country we have swampy, meandering creeks, the broad purposeful rivers of the plains, and the alpine rivers of the central North Island and the Southern Alps. Of all this multitude of rivers there are few which hold a special place in our history like the Arahura - this is the river that is the symbolic source of 'pounamu', greenstone.

Most modern-day New Zealanders' awareness of greenstone is limited to the items provided by the tourist jewellery trade combined with a sly knowledge of its monetary value. From time to time front page stories appear in the newspapers relating to herculean efforts made by somebody trying to extract a ten tonne greenstone boulder from some remote creek. Figures of \$100,000 are quoted and in the ensuing glare of publicity it seems that all the poachers in the country try to usurp the discoverer of his prize. This fabulous stone no doubt eventually suffers the ignominy of being sliced up into thousands of tiny kiwis and tikis to adorn, briefly, the ears, necks and wrists of tourists before being consigned to dark corners in drawers of dressing tables of Japan and America.

To the pre-European Maori, however, pounamu was highly valued - the name actually is synonymous with treasure (*Lake Rotopounamu is so named not because greenstone is to be found there, but because it is a highly valued and beautiful lake - editor's note*), not only for its hardness and durability, but also because it has spiritual qualities.

There are a number of accounts of the origin of pounamu but the one which appeals to a latter-day traveller like myself is the story of the god Ngahue. Ngahue originally lived in Hawaiki, fled across the ocean with his green fish Poutini, a quarrelsome creature from all accounts, and, depending upon the source of the story, he hid his fish in the bed of the Arahura River. Another account has the fish pursuing Ngahue and, struggling up the river, finally died and its body turned to stone. Whichever version you hear, the result is the same for the green fish Poutini gave his name to not only the West Coast of the South Island - the Poutini coast, but also to the South Island itself - Te Wai Pounamu - the place of greenstone.

Captain Cook was repeatedly told, when asking about greenstone, that it was a 'fish'. If you are as sceptical as Cook you might prefer to believe that greenstone, or nephrite, was formed along the shear plane of the alpine fault by immense pressure and heat over a 135 million year period. The crystals in semi-nephrites realign in a process called felting and thus producing the toughness that gives greenstone its principle practical value. I personally prefer the Maori myth as it links with other creation myths of the first settlers in this land.

The discovery of pounamu by the early Maori was a quantum leap in technology, as here was a material which held an edge better than any other material, enabling canoes to be hewn faster, pa to be constructed and to make weapons of great durability and strength. This valuable material thus became the principle medium of exchange, and treasured artefacts were fashioned by the artisans and artists of these early communities. Journeys involving incredible hardship were undertaken, and ultimately inter-tribal wars were fought in the quest for this lustrous green stone, pounamu. At the centre of much of this activity, over a period of almost 1000 years, was the Arahura River.

Today you can buy a licence to prospect for greenstone at the pub at Arahura for a few dollars. "If you can carry it out, it's yours", we were told. The bed of the Arahura River was ceded by the Crown a few years ago to the Poutini Nga Tahu people, tangata whenua of the Arahura River.



I needed to relate this tale concerning the Arahura River to try to explain why it was that I became fascinated by the notion of canoeing the upper reaches of the valley. The fascination was slow in maturing as the Arahura was just another river to cross on my way to a job in South Westland twenty-three years ago, before the Haast Pass road was built. The bridge is only one lane and is shared by the railway, and while forced to pause by the railcar, I looked up the gentle clear river to its source somewhere in the distant brooding mountains. Being cursed with an inquisitive nature I resolved at that moment to wander up this valley someday and see where this river came from. A few years later I tramped over the Three Pass route and was turned back at the top of the Browning's Pass, near the source of the Arahura, by a rapidly gathering westerly. For a few seconds there was a glimpse of a long valley leading north then west, and then all hell broke loose as we scampered for our lives back into the Wilberforce. This pass was one of the trails, or 'ara' of the Maori on their trading trips, or invasions to obtain pounamu. Many parties were never heard of again, due to either the notorious weather, for the pass is 1416m above sea level, or to the ferocity with which the pounamu was defended.

The early European settlers had an amazingly racist presumption when it came to place names in New Zealand. Most Maori placesnames have a simple purity and are often descriptive, as befits a culture with a purely oral language and tradition. Modern travellers would be far better equipped with the ancient names of the rivers than those of assorted British civil servants and colonial administrators. The Wilberforce was known as Rakaia wai tawhiri (swirling water) and the other tributary of the Rakaia, the Mathias, as Rakaia wai pakihi (dried up water). The very names form the guidebook. Travel on foot in these valleys today and you will readily appreciate which fork to take! Mountains and other physical features were sometimes named after the parts of a canoe or 'waka' in order that the traveller could remember the sequence of names and hence the sequence of features.

The *Westland Canoeist's Guide* gives a good description of the Arahura River and queries the neglect of this 56 kilometre of river by canoeists. So did I and could find little information about the actual nature of the water course in mountaineering journals or from other sources. I think it is significant that most recorded information was written over 100 years ago. Trampers avoid the Arahura, preferring the easier Styx River to the South. The Westland Canoe Club regularly paddle the lower, or First Gorge as a beginners trip, but the top section beyond the road was unknown from the canoeist's standpoint. There was only one thing for it - one weekend when my family were away I travelled over to Hokitika and then walked up the river from the end of the road. The track was abnormally wide thanks to the necessity to bring out greenstone, but I soon came to a huge wash-out and at least a kilometre of track was no more. Goodbye four wheel drives for carrying canoes! After looking at most of the river up to the junction of Jacks Creek I was on my way back when I thought I should have a look at the short Second Gorge which is not visible from the track. Just as well that I did because here the entire flow cascaded over a three metre fall into a foaming slot which formed a hairpin loop about two metres wide. The boulders were five metres high, sheer and smooth. The river tumbled on around the corner through curved overhanging rock walls. It was getting dark so I rushed back to civilisation without exploring the mysteries further down the gorge, resolving to have a better look when I returned.

Just before Easter 1985, Edgar Reese, having just finished his second season as a boatman in Queenstown (42 trips down the Kawarau in a fortnight!) had a week to spare before flying to Washington State for the northern summer. I phoned Ron Beardsley, a good companion on such expeditions, and suddenly it was a reality.

For a trial run, and because we like the river, we decided to run the uncanoed very upper Taipo River on the Sunday and the Arahura on Monday. The Taipo flows from a common mountain source, Kaniere, to the Arahura and was quite an appropriate choice for both the physical and mental attunement to the task ahead.

The Taipo trip went well and the next day we were at our helicopter rendezvous at 1 pm on a grey cloudy day with the river clear and low. At the start to the track we met two men with a substantial trailer who eyed us with what seemed to be unreasonable



suspicion. Illogical too, considering the brightly coloured kayaks, paddles, jackets, wet-suits, and other paraphernalia peculiar to canoeists. "You aren't up here for the greenstone are you?", the taller of the two enquired as he worked on the lock to the gate, which was made out of railway tracks welded into a monolithic rectangular frame straight out of 'Mad Max II'. "Where the .... do you think we could fit a ... rock in one of these?" retorted Ron, who displays a deep knowledge of the local dialect. Practical considerations are readily appreciated in such potential areanas of human conflict and the moment passed as quickly as it arose. These two explained that they had a claim high in the mountains and were on their way to bring out some of the fruits of their efforts. Nephrite lenses appear in some locations in the original strata and can be 'mined'. The conventional search for greenstone is of the needle in a haystack variety, looking in a creek-bed of stones for one in a million which looks just like the others but which is vastly different on the inside. The deep green of the polished stone is obtained by cutting and polishing the natural stone. In the wild, greenstone is covered with a 'rind' of weathered stone which is a whitish to a rusty colour. It looks different when wet and the Maoris used to say that this is because Poutini is a fish. It makes perfect sense to me.

The presence of the greenstone men was of benefit to us as they had hired the same helicopter as us and we received the bonus of not having to pay for the positioning time. Loading kayaks with rocks to stop them swirling about on the sling under the chopper, we ascended slowly and moved up the valley at about 30 kph...the irony of carrying rocks up this valley did not escape us. The gradient of the valley is more apparent from the air than from the ground and the view up the valley from the cockpit was of a steep valley with a ceiling of cloud giving the impression of flying into an ever diminishing tunnel. We had a good view of the river and the sight was not encouraging. The bed of the Arahura is littered with large boulders up to three metres across and everywhere there were white streaks indicating rapids. Our pilot, who did not actually come right out and say that we were crazy, had said that there was a gorge, longer than the Second Gorge before the Third Gorge. Why hadn't I walked up a bit further! A fourth gorge! The revenge of Poutini on those who would dare to violate his resting place.

The decision of how far up the river to take the chopper was made for us by the low river level and the fact of the late start due to the chopper not being available earlier. We landed near the bottom of this gorge which starts near Olderog Creek, the mountain source of Arahura greenstone. With the sound of the helicopter fading away down the valley we were left on a small area beside the river surrounded by native vegetation, less modified by the effect of introduced animals than its sister river the Taipo across the range to the north. We were mindful of the fate of other water-bound travellers in the past including Tane-tiki, the head chief who drowned in Lake Mahinapua when his canoe was overturned by a taniwha as a punishment for neglecting to say a karakia before setting out. Knowing neither if there was still a taniwha nor the correct form of karakia we nevertheless offered two green branches and a bunch of berries to the river and then busied ourselves squeezing into our kayaks.

From a canoeing point of view, this was not one of those carefree trips down a familiar stretch of river where rapids have esoteric names and one paddles back up the eddies to repeat a certain piece of water. From the moment we launched into the current it was a matter of negotiating a continuous maze of large boulders falling away in front of you like a staircase. Often you could see a short flat section of water a hundred and fifty metres away with the intervening river disappearing into a jumble of rocks. The water was very cold and within a few metres I was pulled around by a hidden rock and tipped over. A slow eskimo roll was followed by excruciating pain as my head restored to its normal temperature - eat a big mouthful of icecream and experience this sensation in the comfort of your own home!

In the gorge below Olderog Creek the river drops in a confined boulder-strewn bed at 100 feet in half a mile then eases to 100 feet in  $1\frac{1}{4}$  miles. Just above Jills Creek on the right bank there is a large slow moving pool which ends as the river turns left and falls through a steep mass of boulders. Ron portaged this section when he ran out of water on the right. Edgar and I ran the left against a cliff and managed to thread our way down the multiplicity of small twisting drops between the boulders. It was impossible to plot a course because you could not see over the boulders.



Every quarter of an hour or so the helicopter would appear carrying a sling with a bundle of rocks on the end. Each time it flew overhead I thought 'another twenty thousand tikis' and then concentrated on the video game rapids ahead. The river was still dropping at 100 feet per mile which was still a respectable gradient and causing us to break out into the surging eddies behind the boulders to try and scout the water ahead. Some rapids are concave - that is, steeper at the top so that once you are over the edge you can see all the water below. These rapids, however, were convex so that the steeper portion was at the end and hard to read from the kayak. We did not want to inspect everything so generally we took it as it came.

Eventually we arrived at the forbidding entrance to the Second Gorge and dismounted to inspect the obstacles I had glimpsed on my earlier visit. Oh dear oh dear, the river was lower and the rapid was plainly showing its ribs. In canoeing terms this was a genuine grade V rapid, the crux was a three to four metre drop onto foaming water with maybe some rocks; maybe not. To get to this drop we had to negotiate two sharp drops of one metre without getting swept over the wrong spot, or getting broached against the snaggle-toothed guardians at the top of the main fall. Although we were fully equipped with climbing ropes, pitons, and descendeur, the rapid below was unportageable and disappeared over a huge chockstone into more noise and spray. Beyond this obstacle there is a further rapid where a boulder about a metre across divides the flow and creates a diagonal stopper of the 'taniwha' variety, to coin a phrase. Furiously justifying our actions to one another we carried our boats up the track over the spur to the bottom of this short but severe gorge, which drops 100 feet in less than one third of a mile.

The section below the Second Gorge is a sweeping righthand bend about a kilometre long. At normal flow the river forms fast chutes with powerful stoppers, but the current is so fast that the canoe will be fired through without much effort on the paddlers part. This open stretch culminates in the 'Cesspool'. The Cesspool is a deep pool into which tumbles a whitewater rapid of grade IV difficulty with the piece de resistance (or coup de grace) a large hole formed behind a smoothly curved boulder on the right. With the low level we experienced, this boulder towered above our heads as we plunged down through now familiar rocks and foam.

An hour of easier rapids followed until we arrived at our car, standing like a sentinel in the Westland landscape at the road end. Thirty minutes later, just as the glow of satisfaction was starting to be accompanied by the glow of warm fingers we stopped for a quick beer at the little pub in the middle of nowhere at the Arahura river mouth. We parked at the back and wandered into the bar. Leaning on the bar were two customers and the barman. There was an awkward silence. "You must be the three jokers that canoed the Arahura then." It was not a question but a statement. In the gloomy interior we drank a single glass and headed back to Christchurch, contemplating the miraculous efficiency of communications on the Coast.

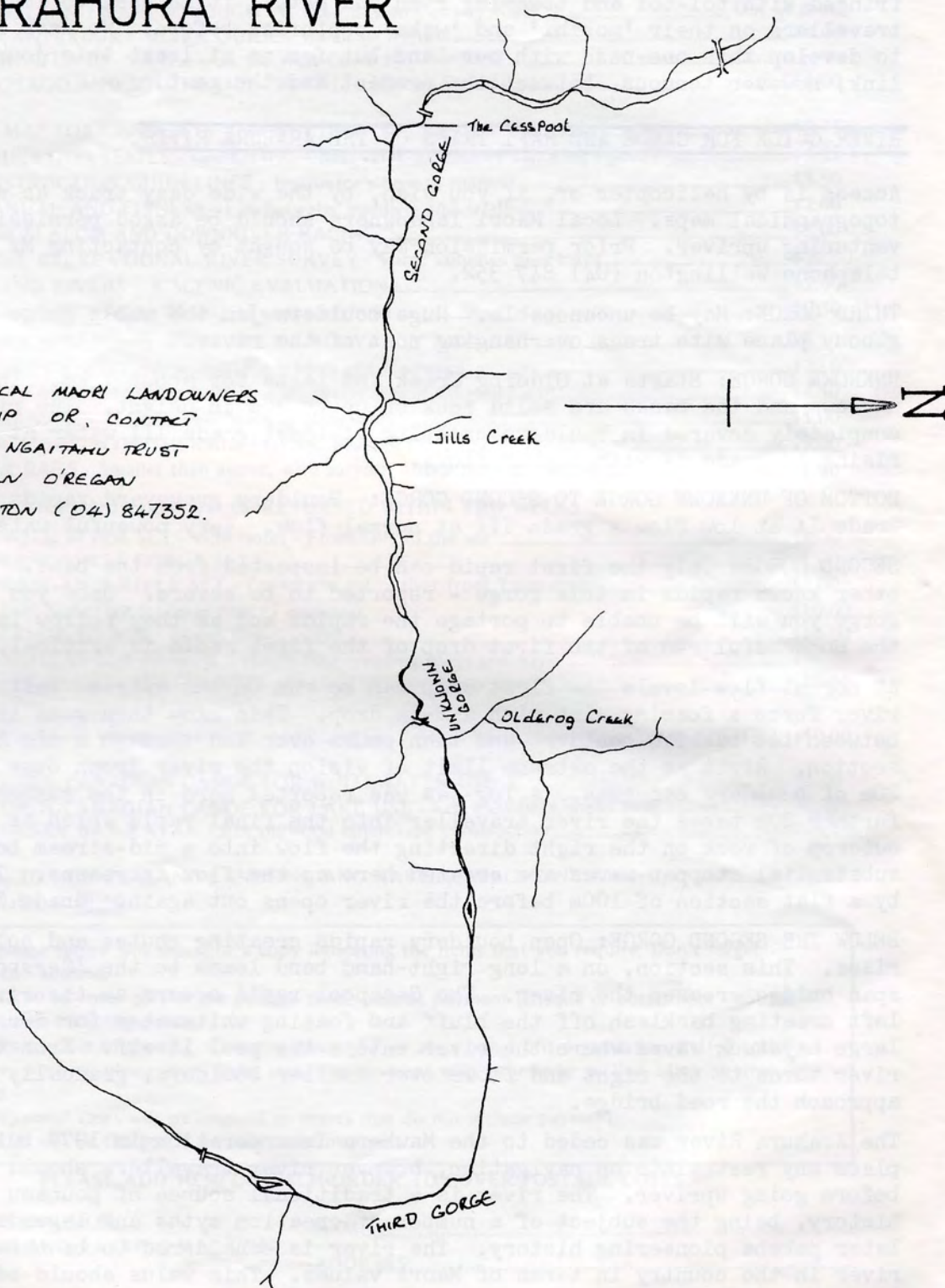
When some three hours later we were almost home I said that I had seen a large greenstone boulder in the middle of one of the rapids. I had crashed through a series of drops and spun into a thrashing eddy behind a rock over which the water surged, covering then exposing a deep smooth green boulder. The colour is unmistakeable once you have seen it. Where the river covers the greenstone and where the surface covering would be ground away by the ceaseless transport of glacial silt down the river you would expect to see the true colour. While I had bobbed about trying to stay upright, more and more of this green monster was revealed. This was a truly massive piece of pounamu! Finally relenting to the insistence of the river to have me move on, I had cut back into the current and was whisked away over more falls and around a bend in the river, to gather my thoughts in a calmer spot.

This had been the driest summer in living memory and the Arahura would never have been so low. No one except a canoeist could have got to such a position in the river and we were presumably the first. After informing Ron and Edgar of this discovery, I was told by each in turn that they too had seen a really large piece of the deep green stone in a rough stretch of river. A piece that size could have remained undiscovered through the centuries, given its location in mid-stream in the extremely fast cold water. There was no more discussion on the subject for we knew that at least one part of Poutini, the fish, the gift of a god to the Maori, was safe. Perhaps a future



# ARAHURA RIVER

CONTACT LOCAL MAORI LANDOWNERS  
BEFORE TRIP OR, CONTACT  
CHAIRMAN NGAITAKU TRUST  
MR. STEPHEN O'REGAN  
PH. WELLINGTON (04) 847352.





explorer with a better use for this gift and a heightened awareness of the spiritual significance of Pounamu will uncover this hidden treasure and truly add to our cultural wealth by using it to create articles of lasting value, to be handed down from generation to generation, not scattered to every country on earth in tiny forlorn pieces. The Maori do not value any work of art if it lacks 'wairua'. The wairua comes from the creator of the object and that is why the mass produced greenstone articles cannot possibly have true value as they have no wairua. Pounamu is a gift and should only be received as a gift.

Arahura can literally be translated as 'path of discovery' but the name is said to have come from ancient Hawaiki and means 'pathway to the sun'. The lower river flows west and late in the day when the sun transforms the water into a golden pathway fringed with toi-toi and towering rimu and matai, it is easy to imagine other travellers on their 'mokihi' and 'waka' centuries before. We have a long way to go to develop this one-ness with our land but for me at least this journey provided a link, however tenuous, between the present and the past.

#### RIVER GUIDE FOR CANOE AND RAFT TRIPS ON THE ARAHURA RIVER.

Access is by helicopter or, if you wish, by the wide easy track as shown on the topographical maps. Local Maori landowners should be asked permission before venturing upriver. Prior permission may be sought by contacting Mr Stephen O'Regan telephone Wellington (04) 847 352.

**THIRD GORGE:** May be uncanoeable. Huge boulders jam the whole gorge and it is a gloomy place with trees overhanging most of the river.

**UNKNOWN GORGE:** Starts at Olderog Creek and lasts for about 1 km. The river bed narrows and the banks are solid rock of up to 20m in height. The river bed is completely covered in boulders creating at least grade III water at low flow rising to grade IV with higher flows.

**BOTTOM OF UNKNOWN GORGE TO SECOND GORGE:** Bouldery graveyard rapids of high gradient. Grade II at low flow - grade III at normal flow. Very powerful water at high flow.

**SECOND GORGE:** Only the first rapid can be inspected from the bank. There are two other known rapids in this gorge - reported to be severe. Once you have entered this gorge you will be unable to portage the rapids and as they follow in quick succession, the successful run of the first drop of the first rapid is critical, and most difficult.

At normal flow levels the first drop can be run on the extreme left as the entire river forms a foaming slot with a 2-3m drop. This flow then goes into a narrow slot between two massive boulders and then pours over and through a 50m boulder-studded section. Right at the extreme limit of vision the river drops over a chockstone into 20m of bouldery cascades. A log-jam was reported here in the summer of 1985/6. A further 20m takes the river traveller into the final rapid which is created by an outcrop of rock on the right directing the flow into a mid-stream boulder. Two substantial stopper waves are created here as the flow increases. This is followed by a flat section of 100m before the river opens out again. Grade IV - V in high flow.

**BELOW THE SECOND GORGE:** Open bouldery rapids creating chutes and holes as the flow rises. This section, on a long right-hand bend leads to the 'Cesspool' where a wire-span bridge crosses the river. The Cesspool rapid occurs as the river kinks to the left creating backlash off the bluff and foaming whitewater for 50m culminating in large haystack waves where the river enters the pool itself. From the Cesspool the river turns to the right and flows over smaller boulders, gradually easing as you approach the road bridge.

The Arahura River was ceded to the Mawhera Incorporation in 1979 but they do not place any restraints on navigation, however river travellers should seek permission before going upriver. The river is a traditional source of pounamu and has a long history, being the subject of a number of creation myths and legends as well as later pakeha pioneering history. The river is considered to be the most important river in the country in terms of Maori values. This value should be respected by all river users.

As with all Westland alpine rivers, the flow can vary considerably and can make or break a canoe or raft trip. All parties must be well equipped. Polyethylene kayaks are to be preferred and even then, be prepared to walk out. This river, like others in the region, can rise a metre an hour with rain on the main divide.



## PUBLICATIONS

### River Guides

WANGANUI RIVER GUIDE - The rapid by rapid description	\$4.00
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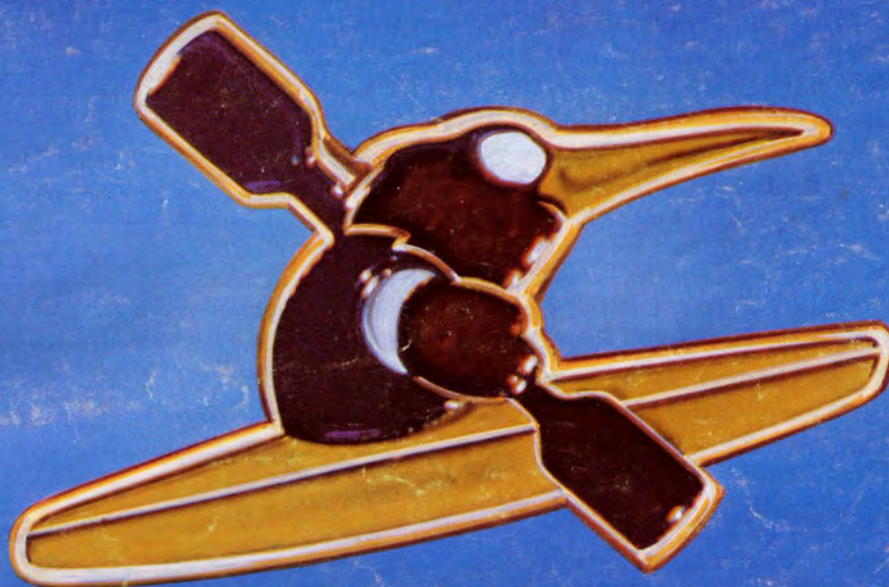
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