

Kayaking the Murray River



Peter Hansen

2160 Kilometers — Paddling the Murray River

Peter Hansen paddled the Murray in March/April 2015 over 53 days. Find here an edited summary from his blog <https://pdhansenhansen.wordpress.com/> — Ed.

A 53 day 2160 kilometer paddle from Richardsons Bend near Albury to the Goolwa saltwater barrage in the Coorong. The Kayak was a 16.8 feet Dagger which became known as the Magnificent Machine.

Why? Firstly, it was a physical challenge. Recently retired and keen to show that old geezers can do stuff was an important message to deliver. Second was the love of Kayaking and the scary part of the trip. This would be a solo effort with all the associated challenges. The third reason was a step to the next challenge, whatever that might be.

So, how do you start thinking

about tackling something like this? Apart from risk assessments and the formal methods the basic categories are: survival, sustenance, kayak integrity and navigation.

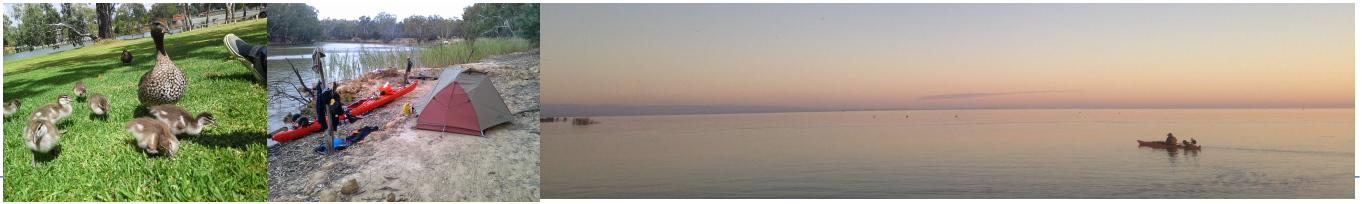
Being solo, survival had a special focus. I could roll, but not consistently at all so I made absolutely certain I could get back up with a paddle float, getting in upside down and rolling up. I practiced this at the local pool over about 3 weeks. The Spot device was the backup and I had some rules and plans arranged with friends and family for various outcomes.

Sustaining myself was somewhat different as I am a vegetarian and was also on the 5/2 diet (fasting two days a week). I agonized over continuing the 5/2 diet but the vegetarian diet was a given. Eventually I decided to continue the 5/2 diet which I continued for the complete trip. In the

packing planning I found that I could carry a maximum of 22 liters of water. In this grouping I would include the electrical setup which was also a difficult decision. I opted out of solar and Lithium Iron batteries and used a supply of AA and AAA batteries. I had a 240volt charger for the SLA bilge battery which I used in caravan parks.

Being solo, getting the kayak to camps and portages involved wheels. The wheels worked with an empty kayak but not loaded. During the trip I evolved a bracket which I have since rebuilt. This meant I could exit the water fully loaded to a camp with everything in the one spot. I had no other problems with the Magnificent Machine.

Navigation was a Garmin GPS, a deck compass, Google maps, Murray River Access Maps and Maureen Wrights Murray River Charts. I



needed all of them at different times. I copied and laminated the paper maps and each time a map became redundant I had a burning ceremony in the fire.

The trip itself was amazing and I never tired of the river. Each section was new and different in its own way. From swamps, fast running streams, dams, locks, towns, villages and massive cliffs. The things that surprised me were the isolation, the generosity of people and the fragility of the river.



Lifting fog — Photo: PH

I came across some special people during the trip but one stands out. Just downstream from Echuca I could see a tent which appeared to be floating on the water. As I got closer it

turned out to be a small sailing skiff with some ply nailed on the gunwales with the tent on the ply. On the bow was a young guy paddling into the wind. The paddle was a modified fishing rod with a table tennis bat tied onto the end. He was making no progress into the wind. We had a long chat. His plans were to mainly drift and the goal was the mouth. He had several packs of instant noodles and some water. I was hugely impressed. Here was a young person having a crack at something that may or may not be possible, working out the problems as he went. How does anybody know what can be possible unless you have a go. I paddled away wishing him every success. Later I learnt from fellow paddlers that he got a long way. From Echuca to the Torrumberry weir and though the lock. With blistered hands, a tired body and some reflection he sold the boat to some kids and returned home to write the story.

I passed through the Torrumberry impoundment on a public holiday which involved negotiating the many wake boats, ski boats and jet skis. After a day of having bad thoughts about things with motors the caravan park manager found me a spot in the middle of a wake boat convention. Next to me was a family from Bendigo who are regular skiers. I

shared a very pleasant evening with them, having my first beer in more than a decade. Great conversation, a great night. They dropped by the next morning to wish me well. Despite the reality that there is an abundance of nice people, the wash is serious and needs to be addressed. In one small town a lady who lived just back from the river has each public holiday up to fifteen boats operate out of the park in front of her house. In recent years 5 meters of the bank has been washed away. In 20 to 30 years her house will be at risk. Canoeing and Kayaking, which the locals enjoy are abandoned on the days the boats operate.



Day 41 ... Photo: PH

