

The Training Run

It was time to do a real training run and see how the body would take it. Six months ago I was a bit of a mess in an Alice Springs hospital having cartwheeled my motorbike in soft sand on the Plenty Highway. In May I am due to set out on a paddle from Brisbane to Adelaide. So there was no time like the present to see whether the I was up to a 50km paddle.

It was a great day, fine weather and perfect water. I put in just under the spillway at Wivenhoe and headed downstream to find a place to camp. Twenty minutes later and I was rewarded with a flat bit of bank, nice grass and plenty of easy firewood. The sun



was setting behind me and there were some pretty big fish just near the bank. I put the tent up and gathered some firewood. Now, where to light the fire? In the end I decided that the wind was moving through 360 degrees so it didn't really matter. Wherever I put it the smoke would be bound to follow me. So, decision made I lit the fire. Out came the cashews and tonic and it was perfect. I even found a comfortable sapling to lean against.

How do you get twenty mosquitoes in a tent when all the screens are zipped up? One of the mysteries of life I guess. At first light it was time to get up and get going. The birds on tree in the river were still asleep but I presumed they must have had a late night. Anyway, it was going to be a big day so there was no time to waste. Everything was packed up and I was on the river by 5.45am. Only 51km and I would be at Kholo.



I'm sure I saw a platypus. It was just the bill but it watched me for a few seconds and slowly dipped under the water. This was his river, not mine. Maybe that was the sound I heard last night in the water. Anyway whatever life worries I had about anything were all far away. With the mist on the water and the sun starting to peep over the bank I stroked firmly towards Lowood.

A few minutes later I heard a car drive up to near the top of the bank. The pump on the bank started up. The tranquility was gone. It didn't matter though, because the next three pumps down the river were all humming away. This is interesting I thought. There is no sign of any metering but all of the water going down the river is



allocated. Every drop is pulled out by the time it gets to Mt Crosby where the big Brisbane water treatment plants are. Nothing is allowed over the Mt Crosby weir these days. So every bit of water that these pumps suck up is really Brisbane water? Well not really, but it is all from the same source so if it is used here it is not available for Brisbane and with supply tumbling towards 20% then things are not looking too great. Is it right that significant amounts of water can be pumped out of Brisbane's water supply without monitoring and just

relying on an honesty system? That is not for me to judge but I must say I am a bit uncomfortable with it. I know the water is used to provide food but just about everyone else is accountable for whatever they use. And, they have to pay for it.

Aha, here comes the log jam that I was warned about. Do I go through the narrow section or portage across an open paddock? It is not that long since there was a kayak race down the river so logic would suggest that it was cleared then. And, there certainly hasn't been any flooding since. So into the narrow section it was. The water was moving along quite well and it was fun dodging the fallen trees. Only once did I make a mistake and get stuck on a log but a bit of judicious thrusting and bouncing with the bum soon extricated the kayak.



The land animals were all well and truly up by now. A huge bull thought he had more right to the river than I did and I wasn't prepared to argue the matter. Up ahead was something much smaller. There was a family of goats wondering what this funny thing coming down the river was. It looked like they must spend a bit of time in the one spot as there wasn't any grass on that section of the river bank.

As the river opened out I could enjoy the view towards Lowood. You can't really get the true picture on camera. The sound of the birds and the smells somehow don't come out in a picture. The picture isn't half bad though and I spotted some pretty well positioned houses. Out here I doubt that they would cost an arm and a leg either.



The river was still flowing noticeably even in the deep wide section. My guess was about 2m per minute which was quite a surprise. The off-take for the Lowood water supply was coming up. It is amazing the number of people who do not know that



when they drink town water they are drinking a product manufactured by the local council. The number of chemicals that can go into potable water is a huge. In most places it's less than ten that are in use though. In this case with the animals along the river, including the carcass of what looked like a cow, had I been a local I would have been well pleased with the chlorine that would be added. The bones were pretty well bleached so there wasn't much left for the water dragon that seemed to claim them as his.

It was easy to picture the rotting flesh prior to this stage though. Not something I would normally be keen on drinking beside.

I had only gone an hour and already it was time for breakfast under a tree at Lowood. This is a doddle I thought. With a bit of luck I will be finished by lunch time. So, a

quick cup of coffee from the thermos, a sausage sandwich, and application of sunscreen and it was off and away again.

The fact that the river level had not been high in ages was becoming evident. Small trees had started to latch onto branches in the water. The tenacity of these things is amazing. How do they start? Maybe a seed lodges in the branch but I did see a couple wrapped onto some pretty smooth exposed roots. With nothing to wash them off presumably they just stay there and get bigger. Is this how the ecosystem is supposed to work? Do the grow out there in the river eventually die and contribute to raising the river bed? That's too hard for me but if you have read "Back from the Brink" by Peter Andrews, then you can't help thinking along those lines. He reckons all the Australian river beds used to be higher than the surrounding land.



This river is highly regulated though even if only for a relatively short time. There are two dams on it and in the main there has been a constant flow down to the Mt Crosby water treatment plant with enough for consumption on the way and some left over for environmental flows over the Mt Crosby weir. You can see the "tide" marks on some of the trees and rocks. This is caused by the reduced throughput at the treatment plant and the cessation of environmental flows.

More cows on the bank and my mind was back to water quality. With so much cow pooping going on I wondered what the nutrient levels were. It can't be too bad I thought. There has not really been a lot of water hyacinth. Whenever I tried to land where cows came to drink was different. Their heavy body weight and hard hooves stirred up the mud. With cow poop in the hoof marks it was always advisable to look for a better place to hop out of the kayak.



Perhaps I spoke too soon and tempted fate. Perhaps I had just been lucky. But it was only about 5km downstream of this popular cattle drinking spot that I ran into a hyacinth block. It was right across the river but I found a thin bit, only about 20m to get through. You can't paddle through the stuff and you can't reach forward and move it. The bow is about



3m in front of your hands. So, the only means at your disposal involve brute force. What you do is back off about 30m and then charge flat out into the stuff. That will



take you in about 5m. Then you push it away with the paddle and gradually work backwards so that you can repeat the process. It works but it is tiring. And it's not a lot of fun really. I was sure glad to be through that lot and away again.

Another 5km or so and there was another patch. By now it was hot, something over 30 degrees. I couldn't see the other side of this

one so I opted out. Out of the water and off for a walk. It was only a few hundred metres but I didn't put my shoes on. So, like an idiot I burnt my feet on the grass, trod on something like a squillion prickles and fell down the hot gravel on the bank grazing my arm. Now I felt like I was really training. I can't say it was the most pleasurable of experiences but I knew for sure that it beat working. My poor workmates. It was a fleeting thought though. I still had a long way to go and they may be happier where they are anyway.



I had given a fair amount of thought to water quality but I had forgotten about human discharges. Obviously the sewage treatment plant at Lowood must discharge somewhere but it hadn't occurred to me. Much of my working life has been in equipment for sewage treatment plants and I have designed and sold my share of package plants in my life. So, what I saw through the trees near Fernvale was quite familiar. An old package plant I thought. Water quality out of something like this would be three star quality. Councils manufacture water to five star quality for drinking and we are voting on whether to put six star quality(which is good enough for dialysis machines) in Wivenhoe dam way upstream to Billyo. Now there was something to think about.



Still, there was a long way to go. This was starting to drag on. It was hot, I didn't have enough water and I was starting to feel like I may have been just that tiny bit overconfident. So it was out for a spell under a tree at the Readymix bend. By my reckoning I had another 15km to go.

I flopped down on my back and shut my eyes. That was an issue because I was immediately very dizzy. It is something left over from the accident and not unusual if you whack your head on the ground at 100km per hour apparently. Fifteen minutes and I was ready to go again. Could that be rigamortise in my shoulder I thought? It's bloody sore. But as I said to myself, what's pain? Get on with it.

Just then the phone rang. It was a call about the kayak4earth trip. Luckily for me it took about 45 minutes to sort out. I was still puffing and blowing at the start of the call but by the end I was fine. The bandaids I had just applied to my blisters fell off but my shoulder started working again. Life was all good again.

About 3km futher down is where the creek comes in from Lake Manchester. There is some problem with mussels dying as the water level drops but I don't know the extent of it. Where the creek comes in the rocks on the bottom are pink and the water smells. Whether this is all related, again I am uncertain. It does add to the interest for the trip though. Any interest was good as I was continually extending my estimated arrival time and I needed something to keep me going.



This area is really quite close to Brisbane. You can get there via Mt Crosby or you can come in the Kholo Road which is just near Ipswich. I knew this bit but being tired didn't help. It was still more than 10km to go and I was fast running out of water. I would have to be bloody desperate to drink out of the river though, I decided.

How come some farmers make the land look great and some make it look shell shocked? I had seen it in the drought down near Dubbo. Although not great you could see some farms weathering the problems quite well whereas others had massive gullies and bare dirt. One side of the river here had lots of trees on the hill, including what looked like Bunya pines, and plenty of grass. The other side had thinned out gum trees and hardly any grass at all. There was certainly not enough to run cattle. One could ponder this all afternoon I thought. Is it the attitude of the farmer? I can't imagine a farmer deliberately pushing his land to the brink. Is it different schools of thought about the purpose of trees? Do people understand the importance of carbon in the soil? Enough. Head down, paddle hard and get on with it. Funny how that tonic that tasted so good last night, but now at the temperature of a cup of tea it gives me indigestion. Roll on Kholo.



Just before Kholo there is a large pump offtake. I had previously not been able to work this out as there is no water treatment plant at Ipswich. This time I saw the sign – CSE. E is for energy I thought. This must be where Swanbank gets its water. So I was still thinking and there were only a few hundred metres to go. And there was the bridge. What bliss. The sign says you can't

go down the river past the bridge because of water quality issues. I wondered briefly if the cows down there somehow didn't poop but I was too tired to think for long. Luckily Carol was there to help me because I wasn't in much of a state to help myself. Next time I can only get better!