

Billabong Creek

Day One Sunday 2 February 2003

Billabong Creek

Billabong Creek catchment covers an area of approximately 300,000 ha between the Murrumbidgee and Murray River catchments.

Most of the native vegetation in the catchment has been cleared for farming. Average annual rainfall is 400 mm.

An important feature of the catchment is the Wanganella Swamps (actually one swamp divided into two sections by the Cobb Highway). The Wanganella Swamp is a reed swamp.

The water level in the Billabong Creek was just right (pretty low). Only Fred's boat and 166 were the on the water. 148 was left on trailer because it had no gearbox. The Support Crew was larger than the Boat Crew.

On arrival at Boonoke Bridge the Boat Crew signalled to the waiting Support Crew that everything was going OK and continued to Boonoke Weir.

The previous evening and during the morning Fred spent a lot of time on the phone getting permission from the landowners of Boonoke and other Stations for the Support Crew to access the weirs along the Billabong Creek. No one had been allowed onto the properties for several years and their eventual approval was very pleasing for Fred.

All eleven members of the team travelled by road to Conargo in Fred's Landcruiser and Kevin's Patrol. Kim insisted on stopping to buy a Conargo Pub sticker. Keith and Graham had never heard of the place and wondered what was going on. But the delay allowed Barbara to treat the walking wounded to ice creams.



About to depart from Conargo



Fred and Cameron waiting to depart from Conargo

The Boat Crew stopped to check there was sufficient water going over it to make a safe jump.

Conargo

Conargo is a small farming town located in the middle of the Murray Riverina. A major ball is held at Conargo on New Years Eve.

One of the most famous features of Conargo is the Conargo Hotel, which was built in 1853.

Both boats made the jump - about a one meter drop. The first willows were just downriver from the weir. Fred told Ian and Todd, "We go in here" and promptly vanished from view.

"Where the hell did he go".

There was no alternative for Ian and Todd in 166 but to follow Fred and Cameron into the willows.



Todd and Ian jump Boonoke Weir



Fred and Cameron over the small jump at Boonoke

They were negotiated without any problems but not so the next lot about 100 meters downstream.

After fighting through thirty meters of extremely dense willow thickets Fred decided that the way ahead was completely blocked and it would be a lot quicker to carry the boats along the bank for about 10 meters to the end of the thicket. The Boat Crew could not see where

they were going in the thicket. They could not see the banks. The boats had to be dragged over logs and dense thickets of willow limbs. The boats and crew were covered with thick grey mud.



Into the willows downriver from Boonoke

Onward to Piccaninny Weir through a combination of relatively good water, areas choked with logs and limbs, and shallow water that was lots of fun.



The Boonoke willow thickets

Piccaninny Weir has a drop about 1.8 meters. Fred and Cameron jumped the weir, followed by Todd and Ian.



Fred and Cameron over Piccaninny Weir



Todd and Ian shoot Piccaninny Weir



Carrying boat around weir



Graham



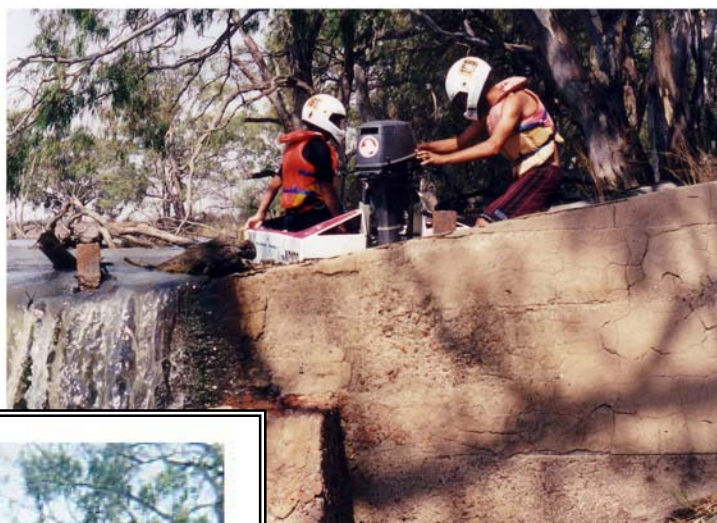
Going for a second jump



Fred and Graham over Piccaninny Weir

Graham was desperate to have a go. Fred offered him a ride but he didn't want to be photographed in a mangled, 20 year old tinny!!

Eventually his sense of adventure prevailed. The tinny was carried to the upriver side of the weir and away they went upriver for a run-up. Beautiful jump.



At Piccaninny Weir



Downriver from Piccaninny Weir

Reed Swamps

The two main types of reed found are cumbungi in wetter areas and common reed in drier areas of the swamp.

Reed swamps form when channels are used to deliver regulated flows, as the reeds rely on extra or regulated water flow. River regulation (such as dams) has decreased the natural flooding of some reed swamps, while others have developed because of increased flows from regulation.

Reed swamps also provide dense habitat for introduced animals, such as pigs. Grazing in reed swamps impacts on wetland flora and fauna. Reeds also provide sheltered habitat and refuge for breeding waterbirds.



Todd and Ian

The Support Crew continued to the site known as "bailey bridge" to await the boats (previously a bailey style bridge spanned the creek – it has now been replaced by a concrete structure). The Boat Crew had to fight through logs and shallow, muddy sections of river.

The run from Piccaninny Weir took longer than expected and Kim decided to pull out at the next weir. After quick drinks the Boat Crew continued to Chinamans Weir.



Todd and Ian approaching the bailey bridge area



Fred and Cameron approaching the bailey/concrete bridge

Cumbungi

Cumbungi are tall, reed-like, aquatic plants that have an extensive creeping root system below the water. The long strap like leaves and seed heads can grow to 2 meters high. Cumbungi is a Declared Noxious Weed in some parts of New South Wales.

Todd broke his second drive shaft about one kilometer from the cleaner water leading up to Chinamans Weir and had to change the foot once again.

The configuration of Chinamans Weir required the boats to clear 10 meters before landing to avoid damage. The Weir is about two meters high with three concrete steps below it.

Fred and Cameron jumped the weir with a safety margin of about one meter.



Fred and Cameron jump Chinamans Weir

Ian vetoed Todd jumping the weir. 166 had a damaged kick strap and Ian did not want to risk further damage. He thought the rig may be damaged and wished to preserve their gear for the remainder of the Riverina Run, and the Renmark Dinghy Derby. The Billabong Creek run was over.



Loading boats at Wanganella



Loading boats at Wanganella

Once the boats were loaded, the convoy headed into Wanganella and then returned to Deni and the campsite by the river.

There was lots of work to do on both 166 and 148.

Late dinner. Still getting used to the late sunset and daylight saving.