

Picnic Point to Deniliquin

Day One Sunday 2 February 2003

The boats were loaded onto Fred's boat trailer. The boat trailer is ancient – it had been used as a dog kennel for three years – the Irish setter was not amused at being shifted. The spare tyre was located on another of Fred's many trailers, the spiders were removed and it was ready to go.

Deniliquin

Deniliquin is known as the "Ute capital of the World".

Deniliquin lies at the centre of four irrigation districts that cover 725 000 hectares, the largest area under irrigation in Australia. It produces rice, wool, dairy products, wheat, barley, fat lambs, vegetables and fruit, timber and cattle. Local industry includes rice and timber mills, dairy, cordial and seed-processing factories, an abattoir and a fibrous plaster works. To the north are several famous Merino studs – Boonoke, Wanganella, Peppinella.

The area was inhabited by the Barapa Baraba Aborigines before European settlement. Seeking to extend his pastoral holdings inland Benjamin Boyd established the head station of a run known as 'Deniliquin' 6.5 km upstream of the present township (opposite where we camped) around 1842. The name is said to derive from a local Aboriginal chief known as Denilakoon who was noted for his size, strength and, it is said, his wrestling. A rush for land was started that year by the reports of pastoralist Augustus Morris who traced the Edward to its junction with the Wakool River.

By 1850 the townsite had become an important river crossing for stock as it was situated at the convergence of three major stock routes from Queensland and NSW to Victoria.

The convoy started for Picnic Point. The road into Picnic Point follows the Gulpa Creek for some of its length and it was a revelation – as large as some rivers in Western Australia. At the Picnic Point boat ramp the boats were off loaded, motors were bolted on, fuel tanks were filled, equipment was stowed, wetsuits were donned and finally everything was ready for departure. Fred had not started his motor for a few months and it was refusing to start now, causing not a little consternation. Fred said, "She'll be right". Removed plugs, proved spark, got fuel into the cylinders and it was away in a cloud of blue smoke.

With minimal fanfare the Riverina Run started.

Todd was driving 166 with Ian up the front. Graham was driving Keith in 148, and Fred and Cameron were in an aluminium punt.

Shortly after the Boat Crew set off the Support Crew distinctly heard the motors stop at the weir just downriver from where the Edward leaves the Murray.



The delay in re-starting was longer than expected so Kevin and Kim walked down to the weir to see what was wrong.

The Boat Crew was on the opposite bank and not in any difficulty – they were in fact discovering just how heavy boats 148 and 116 really were. The three boats had to be hauled 75 meters over rough ground.



Logs were used to construct a makeshift slide over rocks to relaunch the boats downstream of the weir. This was to be the first of many curses about the weight of glass boats and the merits of light aluminium punts!

Eventually they headed off on the big adventure.

Kim and Kevin returned to the vehicles and headed to the first checkpoint. Leah and Kim were with Barb and navigated to the bridge on the Tocumwal Road. After checking that everything was OK with the boats they moved on to the next checkpoint, Taylor Bridge.

Keith's motor was cavitating badly. The lack of connecting bolts on the trunk strengthening plate caused the gearbox/trunk boltholes to flog out. This allowed the gearbox to move.

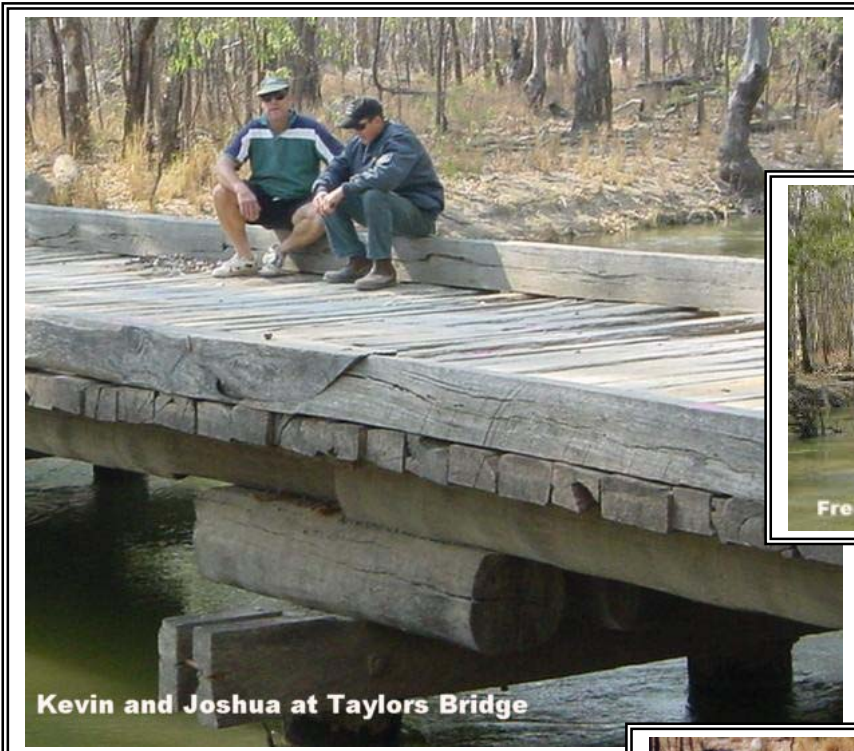
Mathoura Forest

The Riverina Run started close to the town of Mathoura - gateway to the world's largest red gum forest. Large stumps can still be found in the forest – left behind by tree fellers. Red gum tends to be hollow at the base and so the timber-getters inserted a board in the base of the tree and stood on it while cutting through the tree up to 3 meters above the ground.



The motor was replaced with Fred's spare and the expedition was underway again – but not before Keith made an undignified slide down the bank into the stern of his boat and injured his shin.

Graham hauled his poor old dad into the dinghy with a look that only 14 year olds can give their fathers.



Kevin and Joshua at Taylors Bridge



Fred and Cameron arriving at Taylors Bridge



Leah and Todd



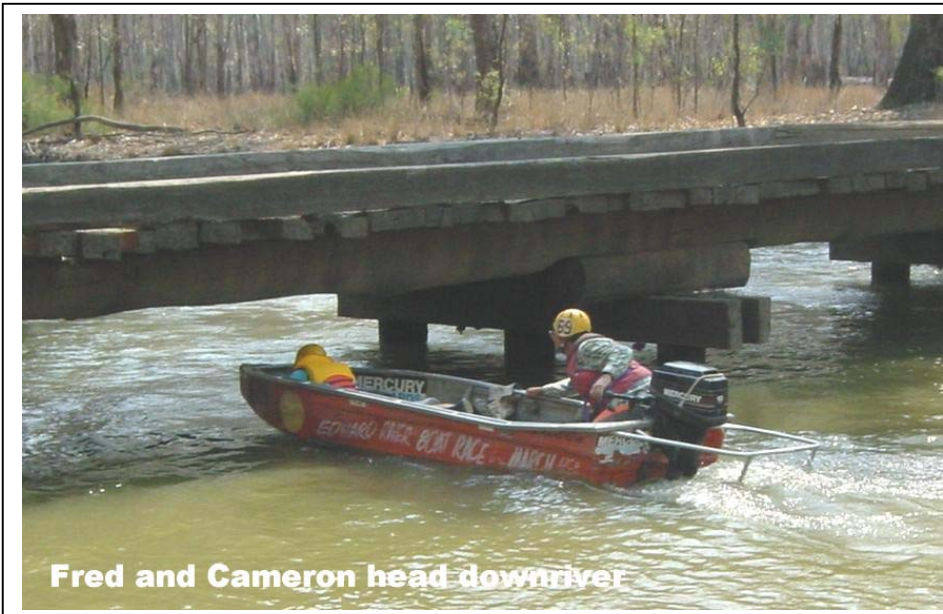
Working on Keith's motor



It was pretty intense for a while

The Support Crew was able to check on the boats at the Gulpa Creek junction with the Edward (near Hazelwood) before heading back to the Cobb Highway and Deniliquin.

Todd and Ian broke a driveshaft just upriver from Deni. Fortunately, they had a complete spare box in their boat. They changed gearboxes and continued towards Deni.



Fred and Cameron head downriver

On arrival at camp they fitted a new shaft to the damaged box and then had two good boxes.

After Kim prepared lunch by the riverside, the boats were loaded onto the trailer for the trip to Conargo.

The flogged-out boltholes on Keith's motor needed attention. Barb knew a bloke who had a motorbike shop.

She telephoned him after hours and he was glad to help but on arrival at his shop he was unable to locate the thread tap required for the job. He advised that he usually got his supplies from a local farm tool supply store. Fred rang the owner. His wife answered the phone and willingly drove into town from eight kilometers out, opened up the store and got the bits required. The motor was fixed Sunday night on the beach.