

## AT TOCUMWAL

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By Wednesday afternoon we were approaching Tocumwal. It was quite windy again, even though the day was quite sunny, and we had to keep the motor on about a third throttle to make headway down many of the reaches. Lo's still doing most of the skipping. She enjoys it, and does it much better than I could do – (though I still catch myself telling her how to do stuff. Ah, the arrogance!). We might have mentioned before that by around 4 o'clock the sun is low enough in the sky that when you're going down a reach west-ish it flares on the top of the water and makes it pretty well impossible to see what might be in front of you. Smallish snags suddenly appear as if out of nowhere when you get close enough for the overall glare to no longer obscure them - they would just sort of manifest themselves in silhouette out of the general dazzle. We were glad to see Tocumwal appear round a bend about 4:30.

The riverfront at Tocumwal is particularly picturesque. The banks are lined on both sides with great clumps of Granny Smith-green willows that are home to all sorts of avian, aquatic and amphibian life, and where the river passes the kempt local park the town has spent quite a few bob shoring up the banks with heavy turpentine poles and planks. There were bits to tie up to, and steps like swimming pool steps every so often (for when the river is lower). We picked out where along this quite long wall we wanted to tie up, and I went up to the bow with the boathook to ease us in for the last few yards and then make us fast. Lo was getting ready to swing us side-on to the wall as we glided in for the last little bit, and when we got to about twenty metres from the wall she throttled back the motor, and we're pootling in nicely. Suddenly we lurch forward as the motor roars, and we're going head-on for the wooden wall, and much too fast. Lo's head appears at the bottom of the back window looking a tad dishevelled, and the roar of the motor dies again.

"What the fuck are you doing?" I yelled (in my best caring and concerned voice, of course). "Whack it in reverse, for Chrissake!" (There I go again. But we were about to severely test the strength and durability ratings of seasoned Australian hardwood, and my aluminium boathook was beginning to look decidedly flimsy). I was bracing myself to try some futile fending-off with the boathook when I heard the motor roar again, and we gracefully slowed rapidly and I was able to reach out and hold onto the wall, then clamber out and tie-up. Didn't need the boathook at all.

"Did you mean to do that?" I snapped querulously at Lo as she tossed me the line to tie up the back end (sorry, the stern).

*As I had been bringing it in, trying to obey the instructions of the "foredeck driver" and also place the raft where he wanted me to (those two outcomes were often mutually exclusive, but more about that later) I was seated, beside the motor, as usual, on the camping/toilet-seat stool. About 20 feet out from the bank the seat collapsed. Just went splat, flat on the deck, with me on top of it! And as I fell, naturally the throttle of the motor twisted in my hand, revving it up. I am surprised at how quickly I managed to get myself back up and in control, ignoring all the bumps and bruises, and swing us back out into the stream, circle around again, and bring the raft in to the place where Bill had indicated he wanted to tie up. He was oblivious to all of this, and was just yelling instructions which I was in no position to follow, as I had been ignominiously dumped on*

*my backside! Of course, once he found out what had happened he was full of concern for my coccyx and apologetic about the abuse he had yelled, and we both realised how lucky we were that I hadn't been hurt, or gone overboard.*

*To this stage, since we had waved goodbye to Kent and lurched out into the snags back at Zanettis Beach a week earlier, Bill had not touched the motor except to refill it with petrol. He was still exceptionally (and uncharacteristically) tense and anxious, so I had taken over the control of the raft. Trouble was, Bill still seemed to think it helped to give me complex, elaborate instructions when we were trying to make landfall. Instead of saying "Let's tie up to that tree over there", he would try to get me to follow some preconceived notion he had of how it could be done. But he had not yet learned about how one had to work with the current and the wind, and the river in general. And from the front of the raft, where he was waiting with the rope ready to tie us up, he had not yet accepted that we could come in and tie up to a particular tree or place when we might not actually be facing it until the last minute.*

We spent two disturbed nights at Tocumwal because the weather was so unpleasant the next day, and we decided to slum it in Tocumwal till things were a bit more clement meteorologically. There was a party of young people (Shit! Doesn't saying that make you seem old!) across the river the first night, and you could almost make out every word of what they were saying – or yelling. We were re-



lieved when it began to rain heavily again just after midnight and the noise level dropped. The next night we were kept awake by a couple of possums in the tree we'd tied up under, and once again, not long after midnight another huge storm replaced the possum noise with its own clattering cacophony and this time it was close to two in the morning before things

began to quieten down. We were certainly getting a tad more in the way of violent rainstorms that we'd expected when we set out. Since leaving Yarrowonga I don't think we'd had 24 hours when it hadn't rained at some stage – usually spectacularly, and accompanied by really strong winds.

*Tocumwal was a nice little town - just as friendly as Cobram. The butcher kept the meat in his freezer for us until we were ready to leave. The helpful ladies at the computer technology centre did their best to try and get the computer going, but were not successful. People generally did that little bit more than they had to. We had a pub lunch in town, and were entertained by a group of 8 or so people at the table next to us – probably our age to 15 years older or so – 3 men and 5 women I think. All confidently and loudly airing their political and philosophical views of the world. They were strong John Howard supporters, but they didn't like "that Tony Abbot" and Julia Gillard "that red-headed women in the labor party – a red-ragger". It was interesting to hear some of the outdated terminology they used.*

*When we woke up the first morning, there was another houseboat in the water near the launching ramp just up from us. A strange looking homemade job,*

*with solid, filled-in side walls. There was a tractor and a trailer there as well, so presumably that was how it had come down. A bit later a car came along and picked up the trailer and disappeared, and then returned later on, and the car went and the tractor came back. All very strange. Then the bloke noticed us, and wandered over for a chat. He had built the craft himself and was going to do the "Down the Murray" bit some time soon. He planned to go down to Echuca with the current for a trial run, get someone to take the trailer down there and he would come back by road. The reason he had the houseboat in the water but wasn't going anywhere was because he had to take the trailer for a rego inspection. Then the strange comings and goings all made sense. But talk about a small world – he was the bloke who used to own the Matilda, the cruise boat back in Cobram, and he sold it to Ashley and Linda, Big Ben's relations who gave me a lift up town to do my shopping.*

*One thing we did manage to get in Tocumwal was a length of plastic pipe – about 20 inches long and 2 inches in diameter. After I wound a bit of towelling grip around the handle of the motor (a remnant from the days in a previous life when I used to make towelling grips for squash racquets - always handy to have a bit around...) the pipe fitted neatly over the handle, making the handle long enough to reach comfortably while standing, and to reach easily from the seat without having to bend. It meant that without bending I was able to enjoy a better view through the raft, to look for snags and things. The pipe also fitted snugly enough to be able to twist the tiller to control the speed of the motor, as well as the direction. The only time I had to bend now was to start the motor, and to change gears. And as it turned out, the camping stool/toilet seat which had collapsed under me was not actually broken, and we surmised (wrongly as it later turned out) that we mustn't have had the tube wedged firmly enough in the slots in the plastic seat.*

*So off we went again, with me comfortably back on my seat, and with an extension handle on the motor, making life a lot more easy and comfortable.*

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## TOCUMWAL TO HENNESSY'S CUTTING

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We estimated that after we left Tocumwal it would take us more than a week to reach the next town, which was Barmah. To get there we had to negotiate the dreaded Barmah Choke (otherwise known as The Narrows) that the houseboat owner had mentioned at Cobram. Other people we'd spoken to had mentioned the Choke too, and it had begun to assume the status of a hazardous challenge to be overcome. We cast off from the neat wooden walling and set off downriver, passing under the rail bridge and the road bridge. During our recce trip we'd looked down on the river here from the road bridge and imagined ourselves making our way down the river, and now here we were actually doing it. It was a tranquil and sunny morning with only a bit of a breeze.



We'd gone about 500 metres past the bridges when Lorraine asked: "Shouldn't there be water coming out of that little hole under the motor?"

"The tell-tale?"

"I dunno what it's called, but there's nothing coming out of it now and there was before."

Here we go again, I thought. By now I was ready for everything to turn into a problem. "OK. Let's tie-up at the first available opportunity and get this thing sorted. Another kilometre and we'll be out of mobile phone range again, so we'd better stop right away while we still have the chance to ring for help if this turns out to be a real problem." Lo concurred, so we tied up to an overhanging branch and made a cup of coffee. I got on the mobile to the people at Morisset we'd bought the motor from, and they told us to keep poking something up the hole to keep it clear whenever we noticed that it wasn't running water out of it. They blamed the problem on the muddiness of the Murray and said that it happened all the time in muddy water. The river certainly was opaque café au lait.

The blocking up of the tell-tale was only a minor irritant, but for the rest of the trip we were stuffing a bit of wire up it about four or five times a day. It was a bit of a nuisance to have to be paranoidly leaning out over the back to make sure it was working all the time.

*We had a small piece of wire from the tool kit, and found a suitable place to hang it just inside, where it wouldn't get knocked, but would be easy to grab whenever we saw that the tell-tale wasn't spurting. We developed quite a routine: while one of us kept the steering as straight as possible (not easy if we were in a snaggy part of the river) the other person would lie on the deck and hang their head and shoulders out over the back, and try and feel under the motor for the little hole to poke the wire into. Trouble is, there are several small holes, for screws and things, so there was often a bit of fiddling to find the right hole. And suddenly the water would come spurting out again. Then came the job of swinging head and shoulders back on to the deck and trying to get up again off the floor. Until recently that would not have been a problem, but with the joint and muscle stiffness we both have, nimbleness and flexibility are features we have long lost, and getting up off the floor is never easy, let alone when you only have a 2 foot wide deck to manoeuvre on and someone right next to you trying to steer the raft between snags or around bends.*

We'd been underway again for about an hour, I suppose. Lo was steering again, and the plastic pipe extension we'd bought in Tocumwal seemed to be making a much easier job of it. She was back on the dunny seat, and as long as she didn't have to stand up to navigate snaggy stretches it was all much more comfortable because the motor controls were now within easy reach. I was out on the front deck soaking up some sun and generally taking it easy when I heard a yell and a thud from aft. I looked around to see the soles of Lorraine's feet sticking up above the back railing, and one hand grasping frantically at the railing from underneath. This time the dunny seat had given away completely, and Lo had been extremely quick in the reflexes department and lucky to save herself from falling into the water off the stern. I raced down to give her a hand back up as she was hanging so far out the back she couldn't pull herself back in. Red-faced and flustered she ruefully confirmed that the dunny seat was beyond repair. Talk about laugh! (Well, I did more than she did, I suppose).

*This time the seat had collapsed differently – or perhaps I was leaning further back against the back rail. So when it collapsed, my head and body fell out the back of the raft, leaving only my legs on the deck. The greater part of my body was overboard! As I went down I managed to reach up and grab the rail, but I was only just able to hold myself there. I wasn't in a position where I could easily pull myself back up, but fortunately Bill had seen me disappearing over the back deck, and came rushing up to help me. I must admit there were quite a few bruises this time, but luckily no serious damage. If I hadn't been able to grab the rail as I went down, I would certainly have been overboard.*

*Not long after we had passed under the bridges out of Tocumwal Bill came and relieved me at the helm for a while. At first he was a bit frustrated as he tried to make the raft do exactly what he wanted, assuming he could point it to where you wanted to go, and it would obey. I had got used to the way the raft handled in the current and wind over the past week, and found it quite easy to go with the flow, but Bill had to learn these things anew. After that we began taking turns at the steering – an hour on and an hour off. It made it a lot easier. But when it came to mooring, or to negotiating really snaggy sections, we reverted to our roles of me in charge of the motor and Bill as front deckhand. He was the one who had to leap ashore and tie the rope around a tree or whatever when we wanted to moor the boat.*



*We ambled 20 km downstream enjoying nice countryside and beautiful beaches, with a few quite snaggy bits to keep us on our toes. We actually did graze a snag, for the first time in over a week, but it wasn't a problem, not with the new hulls. Some fishermen in a boat chatted to us at one stage, and asked where we had come from. They had assumed we were relatively local because he had recognised the local brand on the polypipe hulls, so we had to explain how they came to be there, even though we were from Lake Macquarie.*



*At one stage, over and above the gurgle of the motor, I heard a bit of a kerfuffle and animal noises on the shore, and saw a koala getting down out of a tree. Shortly after we found a lovely sandy beach, just past the 1866 km sign, and we moored for the evening. A little later some young blokes came over and were looking up a nearby tree, saying "did you see the koala?" I assumed they were from a camp we saw well back around the bend, and must be talking about the koala I had seen a km or two back. But we went ashore for a brief walk, and we spotted another one up a tree.*

*Then a bit later when I was hanging the washing out on a line stretched between a couple of trees I saw some droppings under the trees and I realized they were koala droppings, not possum droppings. Bill thought I was having him on when I identified them, but koala droppings have a very strong eucalyptus smell and are a slightly different shape to possum droppings. From the look of things there were a lot of koalas around here.*

That night we were in bed by about 9. The forecast was for another wild storm, but as we went to bed everything was calm and the river was like glass except for the occasional roiling whorl which was a familiar artefact of the river's flow. I suppose we'd been asleep for about half an hour when we were both startled awake by the sound of gunshots quite close by. I got up onto one elbow and looked towards the near shore and was taken aback to see muzzle flashes about twenty metres away coming from under the trees where the bush began, and pointed in our direction. Holy shit! What's going on? It was like a scene from *Deliverance*. Lo reached up and turned on the light. "Turn the bloody light off, for Chrissake! We'll be sitting bloody ducks! Keep down!" I barked, wondering the while why anyone would want to shoot at us. That sort of thing only happens in the movies. The flashes and explosions continued and I was expecting to hear bullets ripping through the flimsy ply walls of the raft any second. Jesus! I'd never been shot at before, and I can't say that I found it at all enjoyable. I can remember thinking to myself in the midst of all the commotion: "So this is what it's like to be under fire. Well, at least I haven't shat myself (yet)" The barrage seemed to go on for some time, but it was probably only for a matter of seconds. I'd been wrenched out of quite a deep sleep, and for an instant I thought I must be having a particularly vivid dream. We both gingerly lifted our heads to peer over the sill of the window. If they were shooting at us they weren't very good shots, because so far no bullets had hit the raft.

"It's bloody kids!" said Lorraine suddenly, and indignantly, "They're throwing bangers at us!" And before I could say anything she'd leapt out of bed and rushed out onto the aft deck. "Get to buggery you silly little bastards!" she yelled. "Piss off!" I grabbed the torch and shone it in the direction of the explosions, and we caught a glimpse of about half a dozen kids running off into the bush. A torrent of invective from Lo that would do justice to the proverbial fishwife followed them. It was quite dark, and as they shot through we could see the bush lit up at intervals by a powerful torch. They must have known their way around though, because in no time they were gone, and we could see the trees lit up eerily as they ran off down river. They let off a couple more bangers further downstream, then everything was eerily quiet. As Lo said afterwards, we didn't need crackers landing on the plastic roof (we already knew how nicely it burned). And the fly-screens were only plastic, as were the windows – not to mention having petrol on board. And not to mention the bloody big fright it gave both of us. Three kids who we presumed were from a semi-permanent camp right up the other end of the long curving beach we'd stopped at had come past on bicycles during the afternoon, but they only looked to be about twelve. We figured it was most probably them plus some mates. But what were their parents doing, letting them roam about the bush at night with an arsenal of bangers?

It wasn't easy to get back to sleep after all that. If we were correct in our suspicion that they came from the camp upriver, then they'd have to come past us again on their way back from wherever they'd gone downstream. That realisation wasn't exactly conducive to a sound, restful sleep. We both had visions of them thinking it would be super-funny to undo our mooring lines – a possibility which was no more unlikely than having bangers chucked at us in the middle of the night.

So we're lying there uneasily, and then there's a huge explosion from what felt like about a kilometre away downstream. Surely it couldn't have been the kids – it was too big an explosion for kids their age to be able to manage. The questions crowded in. What could it have been? At eleven o'clock at night? In the middle of the redgum forest? Then about ten minutes later there's another one – just as big, and from the same quarter. We couldn't work out a plausible ex-

planation, try as we may. So we tried to get back to sleep and look on it as just one of those insoluble mysteries (which is what it turned out to be. We never found out what they were).

We were both a bit on edge, lying there. It was all pretty tense, and sleep seemed a long way away. Next thing we know there are headlights sweeping the roof of the raft. Up on our elbows again, this time to find that it's a car towing a camper trailer that has decided to pull up right next to where we were, presumably to make camp. "There are untold beautiful places to camp all along the Murray, and they have to pick right next to us." muttered Lorraine. She reached up and switched on the light and got up and bustled about. The people with the camper trailer took the hint and moved off further downstream. We could follow their lights through the bush, and they eventually made camp about 500m further down.

A little later yet another car arrived – we could see it's headlights shining on the trees as it swung around, but it chose to pitch camp a couple of hundred metres upstream from us. Apart from a couple of semi-permanent camps we'd seen on our way down that day, as far as we knew we were miles from anywhere, where you wouldn't expect to feel as though you were early arrivals at some sort of jamboree. We were quite unprepared for all this activity – especially at such a late hour. Then it dawned on us that it was Friday, and that lots of wage plugs and other urban prisoners thought nothing of heading out of town to set up their bush camp late on a Friday night so they could get an early start to the weekend when they got up on Saturday morning. And after all, it was quite a big cleared area behind the long sweeping beach, and there were dunnies as well. So it was obviously a popular spot, and we should have woken up to this earlier. But we had to admit that it had been an eventful night so far. But wait! There was more:

Just as we got back to dozing we heard a sporadic noise that sounded like someone was throwing small pieces of gravel on the roof. "Sounds like those fucking kids are back" I growled, but we could see no sign of them outside. Lorraine was trying to remember when she'd heard such sounds before, then announced triumphantly: "No, it's not the kids, it's koalas in the tree above, crapping on the roof." Which, of course, it was. They were in the tree directly overhead. We'd just got back to dozing off again, when the koalas started again, but this time they were making rutting noises. And boy did they make a noise! It sounded a bit like a bird, in a funny sort of a way – something like a screeching owl. It is a bloodcurdling noise – much worse than the throat-clearing phlegminess of possums. What with people throwing crackers at us, and the locals shitting on us from a great height and making nasty noises, we began to feel a tad unwelcome.

Remember the stormy change that had been forecast? Well, that was the next item on the programme of the evening's entertainment. The change hit about 1am - and I mean hit. We could hear it in the distance as it approached, a muffled roaring in the treetops. It was coming from the southwest, which just happened to be the orientation of the reach that we were on. It came whooshing up the reach and buffeted the bejesus out of the raft shelter – it was a bit like being blatted by a huge open palm. (At least it shut the koalas up. No animal would still be after nookie in this sort of weather.) The wind was coming in gusts now, and as one gust passed you could hear the next one coming. It was scary to hear the gusts approaching. When one hit us, the wind would find its way inside and the entire upper half of the raft would inflate like a balloon. The roof was stretched taut outwards, as were all the windows, and they stayed like that till the gust had passed, sometimes minutes later. It was truly awesome -- I was

awed, anyway – and I lay there waiting for something to give. We'd built the raft with weight being the decisive factor, not sturdiness, and all I could think of was how fragile the aluminium frame was. The Qubeloc plastic joiners that held most of it together worked terrific for bookshelves, but it was a bit much to ask them to handle the sort of stresses that were being put on them now. I had visions of us with the roof gone, or the windows ripped down their zips – it didn't bear thinking about. But of course I did. Constantly.

There was enough ambient light outside – there must have been a moon above the scudding clouds or something – that as we lay nervously on the bed we could make out the silhouette of the tops of the trees that we were tied up to. In my vivid imagination I still hadn't ruled out the possibility of those little bungler bastards letting the lines go, even though it was pushing 2am by this and they surely wouldn't still have been roaming about the place. I was trying to sleep with one eye on the silhouette of the trees on the bank. But you couldn't sleep through what was going on. You'd have to OD to sleep through it. In my experience of storms it was pretty exceptional. (Listening to the news in days to come we heard that this particular storm caused considerable damage in a swathe across the state as it made its way east).

I looked skywards for the umpteenth time to check that the trees were still where they should be, only to be startled to realise that they weren't. Up on our elbows again we went and I shone the torch outside. When we arrived earlier in the afternoon we'd tied up to a tree, but because there wasn't another tree handy to the stern we'd just tossed the sand anchor high up on the shore to hold the raft parallel to the beach. The wind gusts had been so powerful that they had blown the stern out into the river, dragging the anchor in the sand, and we were sitting there nose-in to the shore, but still tied on at the bow. The wind was so strong that it was holding us there - against the flow of the river.

We got up. Lo went ashore to retrieve the sand anchor but it had been dragged too far into the water to reach. I retrieved it from the rear deck and hurled it as far as I could onto the shore. Lo grabbed it, and in between gusts managed to haul the stern of the raft back parallel with the shore. But it was no use putting the anchor back in the sand. We knew now that it wouldn't hold against a wind like this, which must have already blown several proverbial black dogs off their leads on its way to wreak havoc with us. So I tied another longer length of rope to the bow and took it ashore. By wrapping it around my waist and straining to edge backwards, and with Lo helping and with the aid of the wind, we managed to skulldrag the raft upstream against the current till we could reach another tree further up the beach to tie up to, thus enabling us to secure the back line to the tree we'd originally used for the bow line. As I was checking the knots and making double-sure everything was now secure, the wind was joined by rain. Very heavy rain. Big drops not very far apart. We clambered back inside before we got too wet, and the rain began to drum so loudly on the roof we could no longer hear the wind gusts approaching down the reach. As we climbed back into bed I remarked ruefully to Lo that when I was looking forward to this trip I certainly hadn't imagined nights quite like this one. We both agreed that it had been a doozie. We eventually dozed off around 3 am, only to be awakened by the sound of another car approaching at piccaninny dawn. "It's like bloody Grand Central Station around here." I grumbled. The car drove on past, but further sleep was impossible. The day dawned grey and miserable. It was still raining steadily, but the wind had dropped to a mere gale. I got up and made us both a coffee and declared the day begun.

*As I lay back in bed, drinking my early morning coffee, I could see a koala in a tree nearby. After the night we had experienced I thought it was pretty good that Mother Nature was showing us her gentler side, letting me lie in bed watching a koala having his breakfast. Then when I got up, I saw a mother and baby in the tree overhead – that must have been who had been making the plunking noises on our roof during the night. It was still very windy, and she was sitting there with her arms around the baby. There were also a couple of other koalas nearby. Since we had decided we were not going anywhere that day because of the strength of the wind, I was happy to sit and watch the koalas.*



*By mid afternoon mum and baby koala had moved to the tree in front of us, where I had watched the other one having his breakfast. It was not a huge tree, and they were about 2/3 of the way up it and it was swaying around in the wind. Mum must have decided it was time for baby to practice her climbing, as she let the baby go, and it climbed up a little further and sat there, looking back at mum. Then it climbed up a bit further, into the thinner branches, which were waving quite strongly in the wind. Mum koala made some noises, but baby took no notice. So mum moved up a bit higher to try and get baby. Baby thought this was a good game, and moved further into the thin branches. Mum got almost to her and the branch bent down so much, Mum almost fell off. Mum had to retreat. Baby sat there out on its thin, fragile, waving limb. You could see Mum was getting a bit worried, as she tried different ways to get to baby, and she made noises to try and encourage it back to her.*

*Next thing there is a big loud bellowing, as another larger koala came charging along the beach toward the tree where this was all happening. He stopped at the bottom of the tree and looked up - we called him "he" and made an assumption that this was Dad, but we are not really across koala social /familial patterns. He bellowed again, and you could see baby looking down at him. Then he started to climb the tree – baby saw this and scampered back to Mum in no time! He only had to go up about a metre, and baby was safely back in its mother's arms. Kids will be kids.*

*I must admit I enjoyed spending the afternoon quietly sitting in the raft, in the misting rain, watching the koalas, and then each time the rain eased off we would head off to wander along another track – hoping that at some stage we might find the cause or location of the big explosions we'd heard during the night.*

The weather didn't improve, and we had to stay over at that mooring for another night. We spent the day exploring the myriad tracks through the redgums and generally taking it easy. There were a few strong gusts of wind through the second night there, but by the time we'd finished breakfast the next day the weather had settled down, though it remained overcast for the rest of the day.

Despite being overcast it was nevertheless a nice day, and it was pretty much like I had thought every day was going to be. Just gently drifting down the river, a few little challenges and snag avoidances here and there. By and large it all went nicely and each time we stopped it was at a pleasant place and we didn't have any undue mishaps. We did 28 leisurely Ks that day and stopped about 4pm. Lorraine remarked that if things kept going smoothly like this it might risk getting a bit boring!



*It is surprising how few boats come and go along the river. We saw three boats at different times during the day. There was one first thing in the morning on the water, where we were camped, and then there was another boat with a couple of women in it, and then there was another one we saw being launched a bit downriver from Morgans Beach where we'd stopped for lunch. All tinnies. All going fishing. All in all there has been little or no river traffic for most of the trip. It's certainly no riverine superhighway. Also, the river is quite high, and in some stretches the trees are actually in the water – the willows are almost always hanging into the water, and some of the other trees have water around their trunks, and in quite a few places there have been trees lying in the water, still with green foliage. We guessed that they'd been blown down by the strong winds we'd had. Presumably they had very wet roots and had just slowly keeled over. Snags in the making.*

*One of the challenges that day was going through Paddy Hennessy cutting, a place where the river has carved out a huge horseshoe. At some stage in the*



*past the river had done a big swing to the left, and the 1860km marker is on that horseshoe bend. Then later it had cut through the middle, which is probably only a distance of a couple of hundred yards. But now the river takes a big swing to the right, and the new horseshoe is about 1½ to 2 km longer than the old one used to be. The river was the narrowest we have seen it. There wasn't much room to move, and lots of snags. Bill had to keep watch out the front and give me pointers as to where the snags were. You had to be pointed in the right direction as you went past one snag to be ready to swerve around and miss the next one. So there was a fair bit of gunning the motor to get the boat to swing the tail into the right position to get past the next snag. But that was the only challenging bit. It wasn't too hairy, you just had to concentrate. Certainly we had become considerably more adept at handling the craft, but if the first thing we had hit was Paddy Hennessy's cutting we might have been pretty nervous about undertaking the trip. The snags back at Zanettis Beach, where we had left Kent a couple of weeks earlier, and where we had bounced alarmingly from snag to snag were nowhere near as prolific as the ones at Paddy Hennessy Cutting. With the experience we now had under our belt Zanetti's would have been a cinch. Mind you we still had the infamous Narrows to tackle!*

*When we got to the junction where the neck of the original line went straight ahead before it looped itself out to form Paddy Hennessy's Cutting, there was a strong flow of water coming through the original line. It was far from navigable, but the water was able to flow through. And where you have a largish creek or junction entering the main river like this, you get different currents and eddies as it enters, and the raft behaves unexpectedly. Just another variable to add to the equation.*

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