

November 2017 404km Massive Murray Marathon, Australia

The 404km Massive Murray Marathon race had been on the radar for a few years but as it was on the other side of the world it seemed like it was destined to remain on the wish list..... Until a chance comment to the UK manager of Royal Brunei Airlines resulted in the offer of 2 free flights..... with 5 weeks to go before the start it was on!!



Around the same time we had been chatting with the guys at RedPaddle about their new Voyager Tandem and we were looking to get hold of one for an as yet undecided adventure – it was all falling into place

The board arrived with a few weeks to go but work & weather prevented us from getting on the water meaning that we only had 15km under our belts on the tandem before heading down under

This was the 49th running of the Massive Murray Paddle so everything was very slick – river maps & safety videos (on all subjects from flooding & fires to snake bites) were sent out well in advance. The safety brief at registration was brief, to the point and along the lines of “look out for each other & if it bites you assume it will kill you!!”

The Starts were early, awake by 4am, up not long after bladders filled food for the days paddling chopped and into bags, breakfast, tent down and packed!! We had to be at the start ready to be on the water at 0630. Start was 7am sharp.

Due to the number of craft & the differences in speed there were three start times, - the SUP's (all three of us) started in the first one at 0700 and this is how the 5 days on the river unfolded.....



Day1. Yarrawonga to Tocumwal 93km

Nerves not as bad as they should have been! We got on the water by the campsite reception & paddled down to the start, which helped find our feet & relax into it a bit. We decided on a 2nd row start to ease us in, no point going out too hard as it's going to be a long week!

Day one was hot and long and amazing because I (Alison) paddled way more than I had ever paddled In a day before and we were in Australia and it was so exciting and everything hurt but it didn't matter

Not knowing how we were going to cope with the distance & heat we decided to take it easy but keep an eye on the average speed to make sure we made the checkpoints & the finish before the river closed which we did.

We were held up at checkpoint 1 by the media team wanting to interview us but were conscious of the need to get some air time for Royal Brunei Airlines.

The sun was relentless, a lovely 25 degrees first thing in the morning but reaching 30 by 10am and rising to 37+ mid-afternoon. Cooling down was a welcomed regular dip in the river.

93km, 10+ hours & 20108 paddle strokes each later we crossed the finish line.

[Link to Garmin track & stats for the day](#)

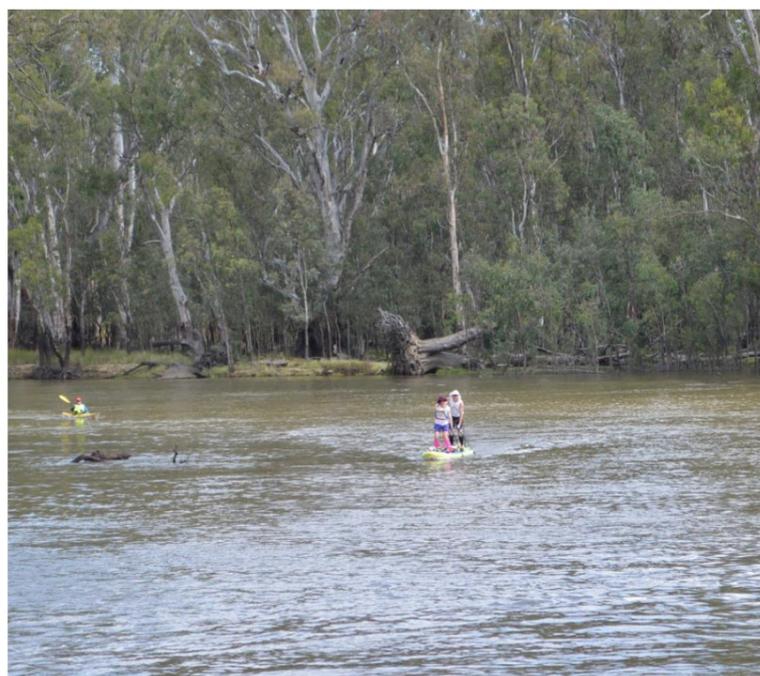


Day 2 Tocumwal to Picnic Point 94km

After a night camping under the stars we were up bright and early before the birds to make the 0630 call onto the water. A little stiff but not aching like we should be! Not quite sure how we will manage another 93k paddle!!

Alison - I didn't really think I would manage day 1 so making the distance and starting day 2 was still exciting and I was still nervous, but not as bad as I have been in the past.

Set off in good spirits, set a good pace but even before reaching checkpoint 1 we were called on to rescue and recover a capsized K2 and its 2 crew who were stuck in fast flowing water and could not reach the riverside. After towing them and their boat against the current to reach shallow water we continued 20mins behind schedule but still in high spirits & confident that we would make the checkpoints & finish before cut off.



Half way into the paddle we came into the forest but there was still no shade from the scorching sun which felt like it was ripping the skin from our arms! Time to cover up completely as sunblock was not enough.

Coming into checkpoint C in what we thought was plenty of time we were amazed to be told to come off the water as we had missed the cut off time of 3pm. A quick check confirmed that it was in fact 2mins to 3 and a single kayak that had come in after us was allowed to go on we argued our case (the actual checkpoint cut off had been advertised as 15:15) to no avail we lifter the board out of the water, stripped off all the kit and Sally our support crew went for the car!

Sally returned only to find that the events head of safety had told us to "get back on the water & paddle hard for the finish" Despite all the hold ups & delays we made the finish before the cut off time doing the final 25km without food, water or maps as it had all been left behind at CP3

[Link to Garmin track & stats for the day \(part 1\)](#)

[Link to Garmin track & stats for the day \(part 2\)](#)



Day 3 Picnic Point to Echuca 78km

Another early start – getting into the routine now of breaking down camp, have breakfast, prep food & hydration for the day & be on the water for 0630.....

Day 3 was 'only' 78 km, I never thought I would think that would be an easier day! Turned out to be very hot and with no shade on the river we used an empty water bottle to pour river water over us to keep cool...think there may be a new eco system in our hair

It was lovely countryside & we paddled well. It was hot but it was good and we finished with one of Echuca's iconic paddle steamers coming in behind us and the sound of Team Dungulayin Mileka singing us in to the finish, these kids are amazing.



[Link to Garmin track & stats for the day](#)

Day 4 Echuca to Torumbarry

Day 4 was brutal!! The hardest paddle we have ever had to do! So much against the wind when you think you can't take anymore & you turn a bend into more strong wind you have to find a new strength you never knew you had.

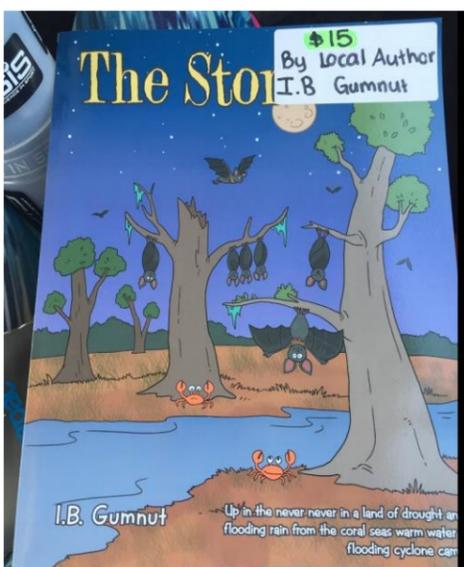
The Australian sun is hot! In fact it's very hot, it feels like it really is burning the skin from your arms! But it wasn't the sun that nearly got me....it was the wind!

Now being a pair of pasty northerners, coming from Cumbria where the wind has blown hard all year you'd think that we would be used to it but, as I have been told, there is such a thing as a lazy breeze which is basically the northerly wind blows down the Murray (and up the Murray and can defy any laws that says the wind only blows in one direction) Day 4 of the Massive Murray marathon was that day. The wind blew and I cried.

Day 4 was a hard day, ay 4 was 60.5km & 7.56hrs of hell! Day 4 was torture!!



Due to the remoteness of the region & access the next day's start was further down the river – we got a lift to Murrabit with an awesome character who lives feral in the bush, is an author of fantastic children's books & has 250 acres of land on the Murray..... This trip gets better every day!



[Link to Garmin track & stats for the day](#)

Day 5 Murrabit to Swan Hill 78km

Last day today - feeling tired in the morning how on earth were we got to manage a 78km paddle! But soon you are caught up in filling bladders, chopping chicken breasts & salamis for paddling fuel, making it to the start in time, getting the boards loaded up and before you know it you are on the water 5 mins to go! No time to even get nervous!

We decided on a one stop strategy for today, stopped time is wasted time – Another 78km today but this time we had to be finished by 1645!!

We could not believe it.....looking like an amazing start, board hitting the line at speed and it happens again! A double kayak cuts us off going the wrong way - but not only that, the single kayak next to us gets lodged on top of the double! We have to stop and paddle back against the flow to get round them!!

The first few hours are the nicest, the sun hasn't risen high yet so there is a bit of shade and the temperature is lovely and the river is beautiful. We always start without music the river, the trees and the birds supply you with all you need but as the miles pass and the shoulders start to ache music can definitely help to keep you going!

Unfortunately the sun had other ideas and our MP3 player overheated!!

As on every other day there was a steady stream of faster boats passing us on the river – we were definitely on a board for cruising rather than racing and this was after all an adventure but after paddling 404km we still had enough in us to sprint for the finish line being chased down by a K1

[Link to Garmin track & stats for the day](#)



Now we haven't mentioned Sally much. Sally is my brothers ex mother in law and was our support. Sally had never been support before, in fact Sally had never been to a SUP race before, and we could not have done this without her!

She was amazing, every morning after we paddled off she would come back to camp and pack all our stuff into the car, take our spare bladders on to the checkpoints, set up camp and cook for us. But we had a little bit of a logistical pain, we had to travel from the end of day 4 about 100km to the campsite for the night and the start of day 5.

But with only one car and a car full of camping stuff there wasn't enough room for 3 of us, a tandem and a race board (we had Jo with us) Sally organised lifts for us and our boards and we arrived at Murrabit football club for a delicious meal and a catch up with all the other paddlers and support.

Did we enjoy it? Would we do it again? Would we recommend it to other SUPers? YES, YES & YES – our flights are booked for the 50th anniversary even in November 2018, entries in & fundraising started (all teams must fundraise for a local charity – ours is the Great North Air Ambulance)

