

## **Canoeing in East Gippsland 2 – 8 March 2008**

by Chris Bellamy

In the first week of March, 8 Shoalhaven Bushwalkers and a Canberra visitor, took their kayaks to East Gippsland in the quest to paddle 7 estuaries in 7 days. This we did in beautiful weather and everything went to plan.

If you have never spent time in East Gippsland as opposed to racing along the Princes Highway heading for Melbourne, you will have found it to be a beautiful unspoilt uncrowded paradise. It lies half way between Sydney and Melbourne, traveling on the Princes highway. It features superb temperate rainforests, mountain ranges, many rivers and national parks. Its coastline features secluded picnic and camping spots, which fringe magnificent ocean beaches, inlets and freshwater lakes, backed by huge dune systems. The heathlands and coastal forests are a riot of colour when the spring wildflowers bloom.

### **The beginning**

The week's canoeing started on Lake Tyers, at Nowa Nowa (pop 200), which is just short of Lakes Entrance on the Princes Highway. In the morning we paddled across a myriad of reflections on still waters of the longest arm of Lake Tyers to the entrance to Bass Strait which was closed off to the sea, where we had lunch . We then paddled up the western arm with a stiff onshore wind behind us to meet our cars at Burnt Bridge. Lake levels were very high due to the wet summer. Lake Tyers is a lovely place to paddle as it is surrounded by superb forest situated on Aboriginal land which is why it has been conserved for a century or more. Most of it is now surrounded by a national park.

### **Bemm River Monday 3 March**

For our next estuary we drove to Bemm River, a tiny hamlet on the shores of Sydenham Inlet. This estuary is just on the western edge of Croajingolong NP and there we stayed at the Bemm River Caravan Park. There we could have paddled on the Bemm River, Sydenham Inlet, Swan Lake and more . We only had time to paddle around Sydenham Inlet and out along the impressive entrance channel to the sea. At the entrance, we had our first Bass Strait beach vista which was stunning and of course windy. We finished the day with drinks at the Bemm River Hotel which looks very new.

### **Thurra River Tuesday 4 & Weds 5 March**

Next we camped at Thurra River. This campsite is due south of Cann River township and is reached by traveling on a long gravel road. It is a large and lovely campsite in Croajingolong NP with basic camping facilities. From here we can paddle on the lovely Mueller River , Tamboon Inlet and up the Cann River. The Mueller, named after the Baron of botany fame, is one of those rare rivers in South Eastern Australia which remains totally undisturbed by European settlement and is in pristine condition, with temperate rainforest coming right up to the waters edge. We paddled across the exposed waters of Tamboon Inlet next morning in the still of the day before the inevitable NE wind built up. The Bar across the entrance to the sea was signed as being very prone to collapse under pressure so we had our morning tea at one end, remaining on the lookout for landslips. In the afternoon we sought to paddle up the Cann River going north and found it to be much higher and deeper than I had seen it before. We finished our second day there with drinks on the rocks in front of the Pt Hicks lighthouse while we watched the sun set over Bass Strait.

### **Wingan Inlet Thurs 6 March**

This campsite is between Mallacoota and Thurra River and is accessed by a rough gravel road. There was good camping at Wingan Inlet with a lovely spring from which to draw water. The sand flies are very friendly here too. In the afternoon, we explored the Wingan Inlet in our kayaks and then paddled out to the Skerries, just off shore in Bass Strait, in order to look at the seal colony that lives on these islands. We were all delighted by the sight of hundreds of seals leaping into the water to come and swim around us, leaping and barking as they came.

### **Mallacoota Inlet Friday 7 & Sat 8 March**

Mallacoota was the most easterly of the estuaries we visited and the largest of all. It is accessible by good sealed road and has a nice small shopping centre. We camped at the large town camping ground which is 3 minutes walk from the town centre and the waters edge. From here we explored both Top and Bottom Lakes (Friday 7 March) and then the Wallagaraugh River from Gypsy Point (Sat 8 Mar). Around the Lakes' edges we stopped by small jetties with picnic tables and gas BBQs set up exclusively for boat users and had lunch at one of them. It is all very unspoiled and uncrowded. On the paddle up the Wallagaraugh River on the Saturday, we enjoyed morning tea on a lovely beach where we celebrated Fiona Wilmot's birthday with a birthday cake and candles. We were joined by the local emu who must have been to birthday parties before as it was very keen on sharing some of the birthday cake. Frustrated at our refusal to share some cake with it, it turned to pecking the balloons decorating the rear of Fiona's kayak with predictable results. When we tried to say farewell as we paddled up the river, it swam out to join us but we were too fast for it. We then found a lovely spot for lunch by a waterfall at the top end of the river. That night we celebrated the end of our weeks paddling at a lovely restaurant, 'The Tides' overlooking Bottom Lake, in style with much wine and streamers.

The next day, Sunday we all headed off home all suntanned and with many happy memories on what was yet another glorious day.

### **Maps & Information on East Gippsland**

An easy map to get is the NRMA 'Canberra and South East NSW' which has enough detail to cover the whole trip. You can also try Parks Victoria on 131963 and Mallacoota Tourist Bureau 03 51580800. The Orbost Tourist Information Centre at 39 Nicholson St can be phoned at 03 5154 2424. Vicmap put out lovely maps entitled 'Lake Tyers' and 'Mallacoota' at 1:25 000 scale. Mapland in Melbourne have these and other relevant 1:50 000 maps tel 03 9670 4383. A good book is Grant Da Costa's 'East Gippsland' and it describes a wide range of recommended walks, paddles, 4WD trips etc. The Mallacoota Tourist Bureau and Parks Victoria's Cann River Office can supply material on Croajingolong National Park. The Parks Victoria Website has lots of notes on Croajingolong NP.

**See images section of the Shoalhaven Bushwalkers website for photos from this trip.**