

PABLO'S REGRET

RPM 2021



Following a year of cancelled races and disappointed faces the paddling Gods smiled on everyone except Victoria and granted us the opportunity to visit sunny SA for what is billed the coolest marathon race in Australia.

It was my fourth start, so I considered myself an old hand. As such I felt qualified to dish out unsolicited advice to the folks coming down for the first time. Namely, its cold, very cold, scratch ice off your boat cold, spanner weather¹ that worries brass monkeys.

As a result Pro Kayaks had a run on paddling longs and pogies, Aldi had a run on beanies and Bunnings had a run on gas heaters and firewood.

Prior to this year I have been a FIFO paddler with Craig conveniently stationed in Adelaide with a boat. However, selfishly he decided to return to Sydney leaving us without local digs. You know what that means.....ROAD TRIP! Permissions were sought, plans were hatched and Team 'Pablo's Regret' was born.

With the assistance of Keg's dad (steel fabricator to the stars) Craig modified his trailer to make it the envy of the paddling fraternity. Mods included running lights, fold down side arms for boat prep, a strap on gas heater, tool box for paddles, life jackets, esky for drinks and a large box for 2 minute noodles and cheezels.



The Rig

¹ Tightens the nuts..

The weapons of choice for us were the reliable V10 Double, black tip and red tip. Alanna let us use her boat on the condition that we cleaned it and didn't bludge too much on the K4 wash.

It's a 13 hour drive to Waikerie. It's a long way, but it's a beautiful country and lots to look at and enjoy along the way. The Hay Plain is something to experience at least once in your life. Blasting down that road in a V8 passing trucks is such a 70's Australian thing to do. (Next time I'm wearing a blue singlet).

We stopped every couple of hours for 30 litres of Diesel and a pie. The border crossing into Vic was a non event. Entry into SA was a bit different. 4 Blokes claiming that the locked boxes on the trailer were full of 'cheezels' evidently didn't pass the pub test so a thorough search was called for. Luckily not a piece of fruit anywhere in the vicinity saw us let into the State. No rubber gloves were needed, Hooray!

We broke with tradition this year and booked a house on the River at place called Lowbank, about 10 minutes out of Waikerie. Entry into the property was via the church and adjacent graveyard. In the dark after 13 hours in the car this was a bit of a leap of faith.

The fears of dodgy rural locals were unfounded though as we came upon our digs. A 4 bedroom farmhouse on the bank of the Mighty Murray. Ample parking for our rig and big pantry and lots of heaters.



Our Digs

Friday saw us relax into the place and we took the opportunity to polish the boats, fix seats and go for a paddle from our front yard.



Our Front Yard

We signposted the dirt track off the highway for Wade and Matt who joined us later in the day after their 2 day drive down.

The start of the race is at Berri which is about 45 minutes drive from Waikerie. It's a start in the dark so the alarm goes off at 4:30 to get you there in time.

The race is hosted by The Marathon Canoe Club of South Australia. The atmosphere is relaxed and friendly, with the race director, Martin Finn somehow managing to start 3 different races each day in different places at coordinated times and still having the brain space to sledge us northerners, particularly Keg about his Pie consumption. Who ate all the Pies? There are plenty of club members and volunteers making the more than 3 day effort to get the race on the water. Thank you all.

It was great to see some familiar paddling faces from previous years. The K4 was an impressive sight all decked out with drink bottles, skirts, pogies and the like. All the night paddling we do at LCRK makes us feel at home for the start and before we knew it Keg and I were off. The first leg a quick TT down to the first lock.



Not Too cold at the Start apparently

Full of energy and excitement this leg was a breeze. Being in a relay is mentally a lot easier because you know you are getting a rest after each leg. Yes you paddle at a greater intensity but you don't have 6 hours ahead of you from the get go. This allowed us to take in the sights. The first leg saw us go under 1 of the two bridges for the race. It also served up multiple Eagle nests in the trees along the bank.



Day 2 Start

Craig and Dunc swapped in at the lock to paddle the next 26km. The boats formed a fibreglass island in the lock with everyone attached except for the quad scull and Tom Simmat. Tom likes to be up front of the lock holding onto the ladder as the water drops. The whole procedure was watched intently by one of the local eagles atop the lock gate mast. I thought it looked hungry and was alarmed when the bird took flight after the gates opened. Luckily for the cox of the quad scull, the bird was interested in the fish next to their boat, not her.



Rafting Up in the Lock



Loxton's Finest

So with nothing to do for a couple of hours Keg, Wade and I made a bee line for the compulsory stop at Loxton Pie Shop. What can I say about this place? Heaven in a high crust! We ordered one of everything, ate what we could and bought the rest down to feed some hungry paddlers at the next checkpoint.

First boat of the 200 squad to the checkpoint was the K1 relay. Mark was a couple of km ahead of the fleet, what a paddle! The K4 was next and then Craig and Duncan. A flying change then off again for me and Keg. Another advantage of the relay is that it enables you to landcrew yourself. So you leapfrog down the river, prepare your boat then boil up some 2 minute noodles for the weary paddlers about to finish their leg. You pass one another out on the river (like the BG 24hr) they go in and warm up, you paddle on down the river burping up the delicacies of the Loxton pie shop you had an hour or so ago.



Relay Change Over

Keg and I didn't catch the K1 in the next 27km but we passed the K4 as they stopped for a cheeky wee in the bushes just before the last straight. Craig and Duncan took over. The wind came up, making it a bit more difficult for the race leading K1 team. Duncan and Craig the first 200 boat home! Get in!

Cheezels were duly consumed. War stories swapped then a pack up and home for a shower and dinner at the Waikerie Hotel. Fuelled by the local Coopers and some seriously good lamb shanks the war stories were exaggerated until it was time to head home.

Day 2 and day 3 were rinse and repeats. We changed partnerships with Craig and I taking the second and last legs. Every boat comes out of the lock at the same time so it's a great opportunity for wash rides. As such we kept alongside the K4 for company. The K4 doesn't put out a great wash but the V10 double alongside it seems to sit a lot better than behind it. It also meant we had a great chat with the K4 crew. Chat/sledge.....whatever.

The breakup of the day 2 into 4 legs means a mad dash in the car for the second last leg. Its 14 km on the river. Google maps says its 55 minutes in the car and you have to catch a ferry. Our car and trailer filled half the ferry so we were lucky to get on board and make it to the checkpoint which coincidentally was 500m from our river front house. I'll overlook the fact that we left the trailer parked in thorny brambles that promptly ensnared (and enraged) Keg. honestly, we are still hearing about it.



Keg and Dunc at the finish



Craig and Duncan discussing tactics

So the last leg of the day saw us into Waikerie. The sandy cliffs leading into the town are simply amazing. We were caught by the K1 relay again but held on grimly to his tail and had a sprint finish after 60 odd km to finish 1 second behind.



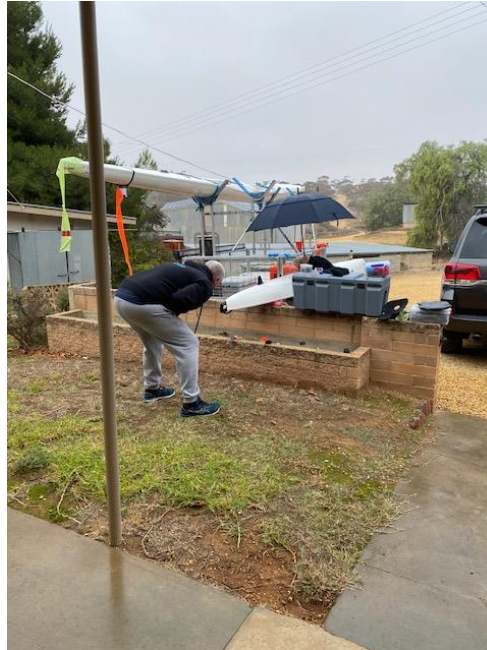
Day 2 Finish

Dinner that night was at the Waikerie Club and was the official race dinner. A low key affair with plenty of tired paddlers eating their body weight in Schnitzel.

We had lit a campfire before the dinner on the riverbank at sunset. We enjoyed a beer in the serenity until we were joined by a Winnebago full of Griswolds. Camping on the riverbank (well the first 50m of it) is legal along the river despite private land ownership. They were good company and enjoyed a beer with us and our Stayz hosts who joined us for a drink. (We had already corrupted their dog Rosco who had taken liking to Matt Swann who was training Rosco, rewarding commands of 'sit' and 'roll over' with Cheezels and Biltong.



Craig resistance training with Rosco



Craig inspecting the rig



Fire by the River in our Front Yard



Riverfront Sofa at midnight

Day 3 was an early start in the dark. We were all a bit dozy, Duncan in particular had zoned out forgetting to join his paddle and spending 5 minutes looking for his hat (twas on his head). Eager to

motivate him, Keg did an amazing impression of Drill Sergeant Hulka (Stripes, Columbia Pictures 1981), slapping him around until he woke up and paddled away in fright. We watched them paddle off into the dawn alongside the K4 before realising we were holding their bag of supplies. Whoops.

The middle leg with Keg was a 31km slog. It was the only time I felt cold on the water as it was a bit windy with some light rain. I was reminded why I enjoy marathons in a double as my ups coincided with Kegs downs and vice versa. The big discovery for me was the overall negative effect on your psyche and wellbeing that a full full bladder has. Who knew?

Craig and Duncan took over for the last leg. Keg and I were just too exhausted to clear up and meet them at the finish in time so we sat in the boat and watched the others come in.



End of the line at Cadell

Wade had done a splendid job of holding on to the K4 wash so Matt was taken by surprise by his sudden arrival 15 minutes ahead of schedule. Poor Matt was elbow deep in dogshit at the time having trodden in one of Roscoes cousins indiscretions in the carpark. Fun to watch someone hopping in one ugg boot, holding the other at arm's length poking its sole with a stick and swearing.

The finish sees the whole fleet arrive in the space of an hour and a half (the 200, the 100 the 50 and the mini). Presentations are made, congratulations offered, Orange hats handed out and promises for next year are made.



Pablo's Regret



Most of LCRK squad

It was then a case of head for our riverfront digs, have a shower and hit the road, and luckily not a kangaroo. Others spent the night locally before heading home the next day which in retrospect was a better idea. We will do that next year. Will you?

<https://riverlandpaddlingmarathon.com/>

Good Vibes at the RPM

From Wade Rowston

LCRKRers have been travelling to South Australia for many years now to compete in the Riverland Paddling Marathon (RPM) on the Murray River over the June long weekend. It is a 200km paddle from Berri to Morgan. Duncan, Anjie, Rich Yates, Keg, Craig Ellis, Tony H, Alanna, Dave Hammond, Tom Simmat and others have made the journey many times and always returned with glowing reports. Their predominant advice to me, as a first timer, was that it is cold. There was lots of other great advice and I was well prepared.

It can be done as 200km or 100km over the 3 days of the long weekend, in an individual boat (single, double, K4) or as a relay. The competitors in the 100km start about half way along the daily 200km competitors course, just as many of the 200km paddlers have passed through that point.

I had been wanting to give it a go for years. I teamed up with Matt Swann in a single relay and competed in the 200km event with the main aim of just enjoying the paddle down the Murray without it getting too physically draining, and just learning about the river and the whole event. As a relay team we were able to landcrew for each other and paddled alternate legs of the four legs on Day 1 and Day 2. On Day 3, the km share worked better with Matt paddling the first and last legs and me paddling the middle 2 legs.

As it turned out the conditions were extremely friendly this year. A bit cool at the early morning starts (approx. 8C) but then very pleasant during the day with only a steady breeze on Day 3. Race days are busy because of the early starts and the preparation of gear and food for the day then the clean up and washing at the end of the day. All worth the effort though.



Tom at the finish of Day 2

What I didn't realise is just what a beautiful course this is. The river is magnificent and remote and peaceful. The birdlife was ever present with Pelicans cruising down the river just a few metres above, falcons and hawks circling then diving for fish just ahead, flocks of galahs taking flight on shore and other large flocks high above. Lots of eagles nests along the way too.

The river scenery was magnificent at times with high cliffs on the outside of corners becoming increasing regular as the race progressed. Because of the remoteness of some sections of the river and the lack of wind, it was so quite at times the sound of paddling seemed noisy and chatting paddlers could be heard even when a hundred meters away. The serenity! Apart from the safety boats I think I saw only one other motor boat hooning along, and a couple of house boats barely moving.

The RPM event organisers were simply great. They were friendly, always up for a chat and happy to accommodate paddlers request on start times and tracked all paddlers progress along the river. First aid were very attentive and helpful. There was a lead safety boat clearing the river of any motor boats and establishing a 4 knot zone and a trailing boat tracking the last paddler on course. I think there was also one mid fleet. Generally a very well organised but relaxed vibe.

As a first timer my advice is to allow at least 2 days to drive the 14 hours each way, either side of the long weekend. Ideally take a few extra days and enjoy a holiday in the region before heading back or come back via an alternate route. Most competitors stayed in and around Waikerie which is the most significant town on that part of the river, and the starting point on Day 3. If you are paddling in a relay then have a fresh set of paddling gear for each leg. Study the maps provided for driving part of each day, not just the river. I would paddle into a checkpoint, Matt would take off on his paddling leg, then I would initially have no idea where I was on the land until I checked out the map. A couple of times I was fortunate to be able to follow someone else to the next checkpoint.



Day 3 paddling with Brodie *[at the winery checkpoint (we did not stop) just before I hitched a stealth ride on the back of the K4 for about 12kms. Photo by Carolyn J Cooper.]*

Congratulations to all 13 LCRKers who participated this year. Great effort in particular by Tom Simmat who was the only LCRKer to paddle the full 200km in a single. It was awesome to see

Naomi, Pauline, Alanna and Tony powering along in the K4, and Anjie and Dave cruising along at a good clip and still looking fresh at the end of each day. Well done to the doubles relay team (Rich, Craig, Keg, and Duncan) who flew along and took out the fastest time for the 200km. Thanks to team mate Matt who did very well with little training preparation. Special mention to landcrews Christine, Clay, and Dave (and Drew, Brodie Cambourne from the south coast landcrew) for their great support. It was great fun and a great experience to see that part of the country in detail. I will be back!



Anjie and Dave at the start of Day 2



Matt at the start of Day 2