

Chris Johnson Race Report

## Riverland Paddle Marathon 2022 – [Event Website](#)

**Day 1** – 76km – Martins Bend to Moorook – First Start at 6.45 am

**Day 2** – 69km – Devlins Pound upstream for 20K, then downstream to Waikerie – First Start at 6.45 am

**Day 3** – 63km – Waikerie to Morgan – First start at 6.00 am

Located in South Australia this 3 day paddling event (race) is a must do for any Lane Cove paddlers, there are relay options over the 200km course, or as Tom Simmat (SC Christine), Naomi Johnson + myself (SC Tony + Wade + Team LCRK) elected to do the individual 200 with approx 6 other individual paddlers. Doubles partners Dave Hammond + Anjie Lees also were doing full distance (SC Clayton).

**In 2022 Relay LCRK paddlers were:**

1. **Double Ski Relay Pablos Return** – Keg / Richard / Duncan / Genghis
2. **Single Relay** – Tony + Wade
3. **Supporters & Crew** Carly + Alanna.



**Club Photo – End of Race**

**Flow Rate of the River:** Due to all the rain in Australia the 2022 promised to be a faster than average year (which proved correct).

**Race Goals** – My race goal was just to finish each day and paddle all 3 days, go fast sometimes & enjoy the event.

**Travel to Race:** LCRK Road trip of 4 cars made their way to Waikerie in South Australia Riverland's it is a 13 hour drive from Sydney. Boats on roofs etc – in 2023 we could get a larger LCRK contingent to attend & take the club trailer, maybe some paddlers if time poor could fly there and back - however the road journey is part of the "preparation".

**Which Kayak to Paddle:** Originally I would have paddled my Orange Horizon Flyer (my first proper kayak) light and stable. But 4.5 weeks from the race I happened to locate / purchase a Horizon Rocket (which had been stored for 13 years under a house)– so spent the paddling sessions prior to the race learning the Rockets nuances (it is not very responsive) + getting the set up correct. Tony advised + assisted to install + shaped a Bumfortable seat sculpting set up, also I added heel rest + padding on the pedals etc etc. During the race I had no bum, leg or posture issues at all.

**Check out the Start Line:** On the drive over getting close to Waikerie (our accommodation town) is Berry – which we passed through (Friday afternoon). Tony suggested a recon of the start line, in day light, it's a grassy picnic / public camping area river is wide flows to right to a large bridge. Tony explained what would take place the next morning Saturday, arrive, register, kayak scrutineered, get water bladders set up, race number get on water, quick 8 minute warm up & then start with my wave (which was earlier than Naomi + Wade). We also chatted with Tom + Christine at the start as they were camping there.

**Night before the Race:** In our house we had 4 paddlers Tony + Wade (team) + Naomi + Me (individuals) & Carly + Alanna supporting. We had a massive rental house (thanks Wade) + met the other LCRK paddlers at the local Sports Club each night for dinner – so it was really a club effort and each day we could find out how paddlers were going (code for how fast Pablos Return had gone). Then head back to house layout the clothes and water bladders for the following morning, plus breakfast food, plus snacks. Plus lots of Vaseline on hands allow to set in. In the lead up to the race Naomi + Tony + Alanna's advice was super helpful.

### Day 1 Course Distances

	START	FINISH	DISTANCE (KM)
DAY 1			
Leg 1	Martins Bend	Lock 4	12
Leg 2	Lock 4	Loxton	27
Leg 3	Loxton	New Residence	26
Leg 4	New Residence	Moorook	11

**Race Day 1:** Woke up before alarm – went outside to check how cold (not that cold – no air breath to be seen), got dressed in woollen tops + wool leggings. Each morning Naomi cooked eggs + potatoes to take, then it was in the car for a 35 minute drive to start line. Arrived got kayaks off roof, registered etc and its dark – head torches / not cold at all, boat on water – no skirt day 1 in the Horizon Rocket. The other LCRK paddlers were also around helping out if required. Tony assisted me get into Kayak & bladders went in last, I was a tad circumspect of the river current, did some very minor warm ups. Lined up with the other starters in my wave – then we got sent on the way.

**Start to Martins Bend First Lock – 12 km** In my wave there was about 8 paddlers and this included John Young who was paddling a K1 & he is a recognised paddler. So the wave started & John shot off, I slowly made my way closer to him & kept close for the first 12km to the lock - Heart Rate circa 155 so we were moving. This similar set up is for each day an initial handicapped start time to a lock, all paddlers out, then into the lock then the whole field starts again when lock opens.

At each lock you get out of the kayak (other LCRK paddlers help out as required + Wade), place it on the shore, get a jacket on and wait for all paddlers to finish that section, get a 5 minute warning to all get back in kayaks. Then they put all paddlers into the lock – which is a tad scary. Pretty sure I was the second last paddler into the Lock Day 1, I asked a chap who before me had helped Tom S. To get into his ski to help me, he was “kind enough” to tell me his opinion of the Rocket (did nothing for him) so he sold his Rocket years back. As I “highly jedi trained” LCRK I politely did not listen – never the less all paddlers generally offer to help in the 3 days.



**Martins Bend – Moorook end of Day 1 64km** (ref picture above) Once the lock was opened the Race Director then blows the horn & race recommences with all paddlers paddling out of the lock, seeking non swirling water. The faster Doubles & Relay teams sprint away, followed by Tony + Naomi for wash rides plus a couple of other paddlers and the field stretches out pretty quickly. If you want to do well in the event as a team or individual paddler one needs to know where other paddlers in your category are – so don't let them get too far ahead. Or if you can, get really far ahead so they fall behind. Or you can as an individual (Naomi) hang on a wash ride as long as possible 😊.

**Race Day 1 Tactics Evaluation Race Day** – Out of the lock John Young struggled in the swirling water – Tony had done the “Harold Holt” – plus Pablo's Return was sprinting away (impressive), I was not too sure how much energy to expend to try to keep John & or Naomi in sight (not an easy task). After about 3 hours (maybe less or more) I could see that John was sort of hugging the bank and Naomi (pic below) was no longer on the wash of a double. The 3 of us finished pretty close on Day 1. Good day paddling for LCRKs.



River Navigation is critical to average speed / cutting a corner normally meant swirling water or an inside rip, shorter route and potentially slower. On River U turns one has to be ultra cautious too.

At the dinner that night a couple of the LCRK veterans assured me that Day 2 was much easier than Day 1.

**Day 1 Paddling Top** – Wore LS Wool + Short Sleeve wool T Shirt all Day, got a bit cold at Lock waiting but overall OK (not perfect). Got fresh visor + paddling gloves at lock.

### Day 2 Course Distances

Day 2			
Leg 1	Devlins Pound	Overland Corner	20
Leg 2	Overland Corner	Devlins Pound	23
Leg 3	Devlins Pound	Waikerie	26

**Day 2 - First 20Km to the Lock at Overland Corner** – My Day 1 time officially was not correct in the system (not a major issue) - so Day 2 again I started in a wave ahead of Naomi + John Young & the relay team of Wade +Tony. This meant that I had no other paddler of my “speed” to paddle with to the lock at Overland Corner.

Getting the Horizon Rocket set up on the morning Tony + I managed to dislodge the race number which fell in water – Tony scooted over to race officials grabbed a replacement number installed – this meant I started a minute or so behind my wave. So paddled off a little stressed & was working out how much energy to spend on the 20 km to Overland Corner I decided to go out pretty hard / It was a fast paddle to the Lock at Overland (speeds touching 14.4 km, mostly sitting on 13 km).

Whilst not pushing heart rate into crazy zones - I passed all other paddlers arrived first at the Lock & had no clue where to stop paddling, I paddled to the rescue boat who did not know and then paddled over to the bank near the Lock opening – a chap who had literally just arrived behind a large gum tree said I could stop paddling. Genghis helped me out & Wade was there with all the jackets & gear (great team). Not that I am competitive but I did keep my Garmin running & Naomi finished that section in a similar time / same as Tony.

A highlight on the way to the lock was passing Tom S, at the same time a snake swum under his ski & then my kayak – it’s great to say hi to the other paddlers on the river.

**Day 2 Clothes:** I opted for the Vaikobi grey winter top to the Lock – it was OK perhaps a little cold in the wind / I had borrowed a zip skirt (thanks Tony) – to allow for drink tubes. At the lock I changed into 2 x Wool tops (dry) plus dry visor and dry (but well used) finger less gloves.

**Overland Corner to Waikerie 49Km** – Probably the time was circa 9:15 once we got out the lock. The 49 km was quite challenging the wind on some straights was into paddlers faces – little waves were forming, it was hard work. A suggestion to train for this event would be head to Figtree Bridge, - then paddler past Woolwhich school to the harbour entrance & ensure the wind is howling into your face when you return to Figtree Bridge / repeat that effort twice and then back to the pontoon.

It was relatively hard work to keep the speed on & power + up the heart rate. Wade & I paddled together for a while (then Wade moved ahead), John Young was scooting along the bank, caught up to us then dropped off. Naomi was miles ahead. I did not see Pablos Return after the first hour of

this section. The fingerless gloves I had on were sand papering my left hand fingers (pic below) – no gloves on Day 3 or ever again for me (perhaps). There is also a lake which the course paddles around, it has tall dead gums in the lake on the left, and that also was where the wind was blasting from – however still looked quite scenic.



Whilst paddling into the wind literally I was watching the kilometres tick down, perhaps I lost some focus, did I mention the wind and the wavelets. After Devlins Pound Wade relay swapped with Tony, I must have been tired as I should have put in an effort to get close to Tony (pretty sure my mind was elsewhere) – not that it would be possible to wash ride in the chop – but might have been helpful to keep up. The very next left hand corner we swept around the waves were pretty big and it was howling wind.

On the same left hand corner there was an older paddler struggling to get paddle to the water – Tony asked him how he was / Tony got a curt reply, I then paddled up to same paddler who was now side on to the wind and wave chop & looked about to fall in. I asked him what was up / he looked every chance to take a swim / I then got the attention of the rescue boat & suggested they tell him to return the less than 1 km to Devlins Pound. We did not find out if he tried to continue, hopefully common sense prevailed. I think it was probably around 3 – 5 minutes with that chap – perhaps some mojo escaped too – any ways I did not fancy having to help with a rescue in the chop. Later that evening at the Day 2 / Sunday night traditional Race Dinner we saw Tom had pulled out & got a lift with a rescue boat. But Tom was in good spirits at the dinner ☺ - he stated the rescue boat had found him doing running drills on the river bank to warm up, before recommencing the event.

### Day 3 Course Distances

Day 3			
Leg 1	Waikerie	Lock 2	20
Leg 2	Lock 2	Cadell	31
Leg 3	Cadell	Morgan	12

**Final Day** – got up super early (in our house) – I was very pleased my start time wave allocation was correct and I got to start the day with Wade / Naomi and about 5 other paddlers of similar speed. Plus we were based at Waikerie and it is only a 5 minute drive to the start line, which is a beautiful grassy area (step straight into kayak). Day 3 kayak set up issue was I had “lost” a drink nozzle end of day 2 (yes it was in my kayak only found after the event) – so had only one drink bladder (1<sup>st</sup> world problems).



The first section again was a 20 km paddle to Lock 2 – we started and a pack quickly formed with Naomi / Wade and a surf ski, I was just behind, then I went over to wash ride the leading 2 paddler canoe team (don't try this at home it's like following a snake). After about 3 minutes I decided as it was the last day (what could go wrong going out too hard) to overtake the other paddlers in our wave and just "go for it" to the end of the 20km. Which translated into the 3 LCRK paddlers Naomi / Wade + me finishing within a minute of each other at the end – it was fun out the front. But don't count on being in front at the end of each section. Perhaps it is easier to chase a paddler than try and stay ahead.

### **Overland Corner to Waikerie 43Km**

OK so with one 43km leg to complete the event would be over, BUT first all paddlers had to get back in their kayaks / skis / OCRS etc at Lock 2 and be placed into the lock. Genghis + Wade were super helpful at this stop + Alanna & Carly were there to provide support. BUT one of the 2 person outriggers was not paying attention to the currents and promptly got pushed out against the river markers, that are placed in front of the weir.

It took 38 minutes and two different power boats to drag the OCR off the buoys / steel cable, the two OCR paddlers were pretty scared – luckily they were OK and continued. NOTE – if you intend to do this race NEVER NEVER paddle in front of the safety fence / buoys in front of the weir. It is exceptionally dangerous – always stay to the bank alongside the Lock.

The 38 minutes sitting holding the long grass on the bank in the kayak (whilst the OCR was rescued) – provided plenty of time for legs to start to feel narky & then we all paddled into the lock. Inside the lock you "raft up" with any other boats which look stable e.g. OCR 6 / plus keep any eye on the fast doubles as if you super competitive (who isn't) single paddlers need to chase them down ASAP after the lock.

Once the RD pressed the hooter, after the lock doors had opened, this 3rd lock provided the most swirling & very unstable water – think K1 at Fullers bridge after just turning (or rodeo riding). So I elected to pray to the paddle gods and float down stream until things were easier, relieved to find this worked - normal paddling then resumed. Day 3 the weather was nicer. Little wind, but some of the river corners were tighter, some sun too. The pelicans were out & about too.

I paddled the remainder of the event by myself / not that I wanted to do that but the faster doubles had cleared out / Naomi had disappeared as had Tony. John in the K1 again came up alongside the river bank but he also stopped at the next Checkpoint. The final 12 km to Morgan was nice and sunny, high walls, car ferry which stopped for me (very polite) & then to the finish line – Clayton at the last stop provided lots of support from the Bank too 😊. Across the finish line = Lots of help from Duncan and Tony, Wade + Alanna to get out of the boat, dry clothes on and some food – there is a BBQ at the end of the event and pumpkin soup each day. My overall time is below

**M200 Times for the Riverland Paddling Marathon 2022**

Boat number - 230

Paddling in UR1

Day 1 Interim Time: 06:25:52

Day 2 Interim Time: 06:03:48

Day 3 Interim Time: 05:14:44

**RPM Provisional Time: 17:44:25**

**Picture:** Presented from RD Martin with treasured Orange Cap as fastest individual Male paddler RPM 200.

**For the RPM 2023 some items I will do more / better / different / less [M,B,D,L]**

**M** – Get heaps of other LCRK + NSW paddlers to attend this event as a relay or individual.

**D** – Food got to work on that – the right combination & eat more.

**B** – Technique blade in + out & heaps more consistent leg drive + arms out

**B** – Balance in the Rocket in unstable water (e.g. when a Lock opens)

**D** – Chasing faster boats for 1 – 2 km & sticking to them for very long time periods

**M** – Last 15 km of each Day – have heart rate or speed goals per 5 km.

**L** – Take only the race gear + food you require don't over pack.

**D** – Get a new spray skirt + thicker woollens or Skins Thermals.

**RPM LCRK UPDATE Race End – posted on Club Facebook**

Final day of paddling started in the dark with cool no wind but not cold conditions (no pogies). The Day 3 start was handicap in reverse order. So the Cheezels Richard et al started last and a wave or so before Naomi, Wade and Chris started together for a 20km section to the Lock. Our 3 times for that section of 20 km were circa 1 hour 36 minutes, which speeds on the Garmin hovering between 12 & 13 on per hour. Occasionally touching 14 +. The trick is to read the river aka keep away from inside corners.

The photo above shows lots of happy LCRK paddlers and land crew, it very much is a club effort at the check points special call out to Cheezels and Wade + Tony for making sure the Naomi + I were set up each morning and hauling us out end of each day.

There is another large contingent of paddlers from QLD surf club (?) who also travelled. This race is a great relay event or individual event which LCRKs need to do at least once.

The official results will probably be posted today or this week, the officials wanted to check they were all accurate, etc.

**LCRK results - the first 4 results below were category winners for the race.**

1. **Naomi Johnson** 17 H 11 minutes / will be the new fastest women's time for the course (? As per entry category refer official results amazing) also fastest individual paddler in the race.
2. **Chris Johnson** 17 H 44 minutes
3. **Pablos Return:** Keg, Genghis, Rich Duncan 15 H 51 minutes - just outside a record (?)
4. **Wade + Tony** 16 H 38 minutes (?) think this might also be a record
5. **Anjie + Dave** 21 H 32 minutes a fantastic effort they saw more wind and scenery than most paddlers (below in pic)

