


WHAT NEXT?

An adventurer's dilemma



In December this year Richard Barnes is planning to paddle his purpose-built kayak, Blue Moon, out of Sydney Harbour across the Tasman Sea to New Zealand. His goal is to be the first person to complete the journey solo and unsupported, and without making landfall on the way. Early in August Richard took the time out between his job and his expedition preparation to answer some questions put to him by your editor about his quest.

(pic: Andrew Robertson)

Salt: Richard, can we ask you to tell us a little bit about yourself and your paddling experience?

Richard: Well, I'm coming up to 60 years old. If all goes according to plan I'll have my 60th birthday alone in the middle of the Tasman Sea. I am a civil engineer by profession.

I got introduced to paddling through Venturers within the Scouting movement. I started paddling white water, then tried canoe polo and then got serious about marathons and did my first Hawkesbury Classic in 1981. I'm down to do my 40th HCC this year. In 2014 I did the Yukon 1,000, paddling a double with the legendary Buzz Powell. I'm a member of the Sydney University Canoe Club and we've done white water paddling in New Zealand, Nepal, Ecuador and Chile. Sea kayaking came later – a little at first then a sampling in Patagonia and the Antarctic. In 2007. I paddled a Mirage 580 around Tasmania with my very good friend Phil Newman paddling his Greenland kayak.

The 5-day Murray Marathon has featured a fair bit in my

paddling career. I've got a score of them behind me – the last five partnering my sister, Linden, in a double.

Starting somewhere in the mid 1980s, I've long enjoyed competing in endurance races across various disciplines other than paddling. The ten-day non-stop XPD Adventure races have probably been the most gruelling – I've been in 11 of them.

How long has the idea of paddling from Australia to New Zealand been on your mind?

About three-and-a-half years ago, I was away with the Venturers on an end-of-year activity and we were talking about New Year's resolutions and that was when I actually went public with my plan. And once you say it you commit.

What influenced you to take on such a challenge?

The history. The incredible achievements of those who have gone before me. Andrew McAuley [*Solo*, 2007], James Catrission and Justin Jones [*Crossing the Ditch*, 2007-08], and Scott Donaldson [*Double Ditch*, 2014 and 2018], have inspired me. I didn't think I'd do

something so crazy but then you mull away and the question you ask of yourself is "what next?" The idea continued to grow on me and it just seems like such an exciting thing to get out there and have two months holiday on the water.

I've been inspired by others as well. Pete Bray was the first to kayak across the Atlantic from the west to the east – from Newfoundland to Ireland – and the first to do so in either direction without the assistance of a sail, in 2001 [*Kayak Across the Atlantic*]. Also, Michelle Lee, the first Aussie woman to row solo across the Atlantic. I read Paul Caffyn's account [*The Dreamtime Voyage*] of his circumnavigation around Australia – an inspiring story. Having had a couple of attempts to paddle across the Tasman, he had some really interesting ideas on how quickly you'd be able to do it.

Have you been able to speak to these people about your quest?

Everyone is just so enthusiastic to share their knowledge – Paul Hewitson in Andrew's place – if they don't think you're a fake. Scott has talked to me a lot and James

and Justin are good friends so I've also talked with them a lot. There's also been many emails between Pete Bray and myself – his story is just amazing. I didn't know Andrew all that well but have spoken quite a bit to Paul Hewitson. I saw Vicki and Finlay paddling a leg in last year's Murray Marathon. I have also had an informative session with Shaan Gresser whose expedition paddling achievements would be well known to your readers.

Please tell us about Blue Moon – where did the name come from?

I put it out on Facebook that I was looking for a name and it was my aunt who came up with it – as in once in a blue moon. I like this idea. As an eight year old I was excited when the first landing on the moon took place so there is that association as well.

Blue Moon is my second iteration at a kayak design to paddle across the Tasman. My first prototype had the accommodation pod forward of the cockpit – similar to the kayak Scott Donaldson completed his crossing in. I paddled it across Bass Strait a couple of years ago with a couple of members of your Club, Kevin Kelly and Nicole Bartels. It was really hard work keeping the boat on course – weather cocking was the big problem with it.

I started building *Blue Moon* in September 2018. She's 10 metres long and 850mm wide. The length was determined to a large degree by the pod which I'll be in when I'm not paddling. The shell I'm guessing is close to 180kgs plus 40kgs for batteries. The hull is basically a Mirage Double which has been opened up both lengthways and sideways. The hull and deck are made of foam-sandwiched fibreglass and are approximately 10mm thick. Apart from the cockpit, she has six chambers separated by watertight bulkheads.

There are two rudders – an inline Mirage-style rudder at the rear but much deeper and an under-

stern rudder which is deeper again. There is also a 100mm keel strip running along most of the hull from the bow to just forward of the main rudder. Without using the rudders she's not the easiest of boats to turn – it takes close to 100 strokes to get her around a 360 degrees loop but given the objective is to keep her going straight as much as possible this isn't likely to be too much of a concern.

The deck section incorporates the pod immediately aft of the cockpit. It is broken into two compartments – each approximately 2.2 metres long. The forward of these I refer to as the vestibule and it is here that I'll carry out tasks such as preparing meals, desalinating water, etc. The aft portion is where I will sleep and where the batteries are stored. There is a sealable door between the two sections in the pod so the theory is that I should be able to keep the aft section dry all the time. Separating the two sections was the idea of Bob Kenderes, a canoe polo mate and a fellow engineer. The door in effect serves as a bulkhead between the vestibule and the sleeping area. The pod has one main entry hatch just aft of the cockpit which can be sealed so should keep water out if and when the boat is rolled. When I am inside the sealed pod I will get my fresh air through two one-way vents on the roof of the

pod. Inside the vestibule there is a built-in watertight locker in which I will be able to store kit and food.

My electric power will be generated from six solar panels on the deck and on the pod. Between them they will generate 100 watts of power which will be fed into two 50 amp hour batteries. I expect the main drain on the power could be the bilge pump. Hopefully I'll have little need to use it. The other things I'll be running off the batteries are the navigation and cabin lights. I will also need power to recharge things like my camera batteries, Gopro, satellite phone, iPod, iPhone, etc.

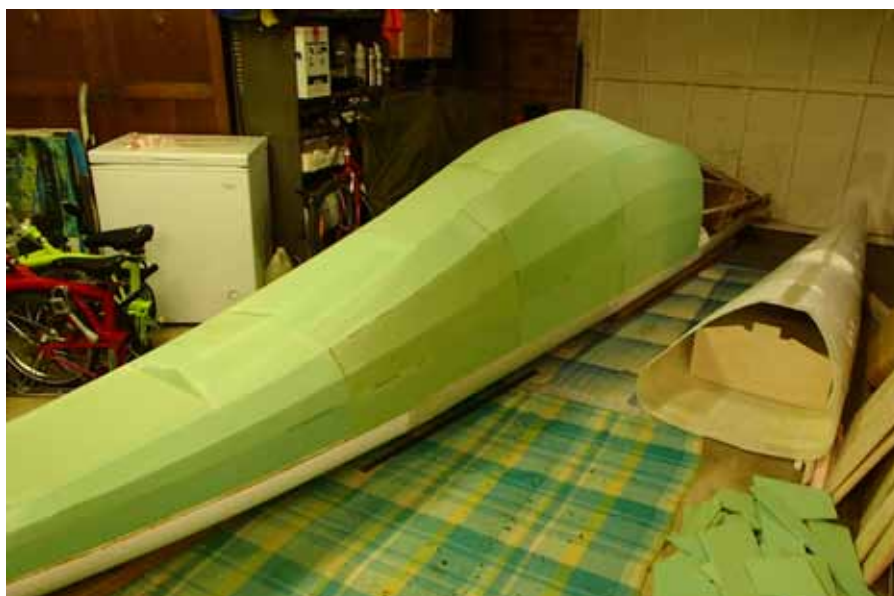
Bilge plumbing is set up so that each chamber can be pumped out independently of the others. Plumbing taps can be operated from two locations, inside the cockpit and inside the vestibule. There are two hand pumps, operated either in the vestibule or the cockpit, plus one electric pump. Any pump can empty any chamber.

Where was Blue Moon built?

In my garage at home. We had to make extensions to accommodate her.

Hull with bulkheads and battery housing box fitted. Hoses amidships are part of the bilge pump-out system. Door in pod separating the vestibule and sleeping quarters also serves as a bulkhead (pic: Richard Barnes)





I see from the photographs of Blue Moon that she's got four hatch covers – two each bow and stern. Why so many?

Each of them covers a separate storage hatch so the related bulkheads add strength to the construction. The additional bulkheads create smaller chambers which mean less volume of water to pump out should one of the chambers get holed or develop a leak.

What will be your means of keeping in contact with the outside world?

Well, I've got all of the gizmos. There's a satellite receiver on the top of the pod; I'll have a sat phone, VHF radio and WiFi for my tablet. I'm also taking SPOT so those who are interested can follow my progress on line. The related link will be on the Blue Moon Facebook page. Oh, I'll have flares and an EPIRB just in case a SAR operation is underway.

...and navigation aids?

Well, all I have to do is point *Blue Moon* to the south east, start paddling and I reckon I'll hit New Zealand. I've got a deck-mounted compass to help me do this. Seriously though, of course I'll be using GPS, not only for ensuring I'm on course but for measuring the direction and distance of the drift that occurs when I'm not paddling. I'll need a chart or two for when I get close to the Zealand coast.

What do you see as your needs for fresh water and how will you satisfy them?

I reckon on using about seven litres a day: two for drinking, two



*Top: Aft section of deck with foam shaped around formwork prior to fibreglassing. Bow section at right
Centre: Glassed deck (left) and hull (suspended) ready to come together. Note keel strip on hull
Bottom: Main rudder – inline rudder at stern yet to be fitted (pics: Richard Barnes)*

for cooking, two for washing and one spare. I estimate it will take a little over an hour's pumping through the main desal unit (I'll also have a back-up unit) to service this usage. Phil Newman is helping me convert the standard Katadyn Survivor 35 unit so that it can be pumped by foot rather than by hand.

What will your diet be?

Three meals a day. Breakfast will be Weet-Bix and powdered milk, oats and muesli. Lunches mostly flatbread – it has an amazingly long lifespan – with tinned sardines, salmon, that sort of thing. Dinners will be hot soup and a dehydrated meal of which I've got 90 servings spread over ten varieties. They come from DST Tasmania who supply the SAS. I've used them before, they're fabulous. I'll use a Jetboil for heating the water I need to rehydrate my dinners and for my cups of tea and soup. Satisfying my stomach is an important psychological issue.

Any special treats?

I'm such a bread and cake person so that's a dilemma. One of the nice stories from Pete Bray, the guy I mentioned earlier who was the first to paddle across the Atlantic: he had four snacks that he took. One was, I think, chocolate, another one was fruit cake, I forget what one of the others was – sweets of some sort – and then the fourth one was nothing. And, he just randomly put them into his food packs and each time a nothing popped up, he was reminded of just how nice it was to have the something. I don't think I'm going to be that draconian.

How long will you provision yourself for?

90 days, so given that I expect to complete the crossing in 60 days I'll have a 30-day reserve.

What are you doing to prepare yourself physically for the trip?

I paddle the Lane Cove River Kayakers' weekly time trial –



Tap control panel – one tap per chamber. This array is duplicated in the vestibule of the pod (pic: Richard Barnes)

often in a double Mirage either with or without a partner. COVID put the kybosh on the PaddleNSW marathon series so that opportunity has been lost. Fingers crossed that the HCC will go ahead. I intended doing a four-day crossing of Bass Strait in July without landing anywhere along the way but COVID also ruined that plan. My experience in the Yukon 1000 where we paddled up to 17 hours a day over eight days gives me a hint that my body may be up to the physical challenge.

...and your mental preparation?

Well, that's much trickier, and I think that's where there should be more practice because I think that's the bigger unknown. I've never been alone that long. I've never been out there for so long. A real unknown. I don't know how to train up for that, really.

So when you have troubling times how will you deal with them?

What I do depends on the situation I'm faced with. My routine includes a mandatory daily phone call to my family to report on progress. If I'm feeling a bit down hopefully they'll find a way to provide the emotional support to lift my spirits. I'll have other resources to help maintain a positive mental state or lift it when

required. Michelle Lee, the Atlantic rower I mentioned earlier, has given me some tips on how she handled this aspect of her adventure.

I'll have other forms of diversion to keep the miseries at bay. Podcasts, eBooks and a few cryptic crosswords – but not any of David Astle's.

If it's a safety issue arising from problems with the conditions, *Blue Moon* or myself then Chris Stanley, an old friend through Venturers and regular paddling mate, will be my fixer. He's absolutely brilliant at making sensible, logical decisions. He's going to press the rescue button if it ever needs to be pressed. He's on strict guidelines of what's an allowable rescue situation. So contact with Chris will be for serious situations needing clear thinking and project managing.

Please tell us a little about the journey

COVID-19 permitting, I plan to paddle out of Sydney Harbour on 5 December and make landfall possibly on Taranaki which is the bump on the western side of New Zealand's North Island. The distance, in a straight line is about 2,100



kilometres. If I paddle for 12 hours each day at an average speed of 3 kilometres an hour then it will take me 60 days to complete the journey. However, it won't be a straight line as I expect to be caught up in the same circular current that beset James and Justin, and Scott Donaldson's crossings, too. So some days I might have to paddle more than the 12 hours or hope for wind and current assistance.

Will you have a sail?

No. I thought about it, particularly as a safety aid but dismissed the idea so as to eliminate any temptation to use it. My personal moral rules don't allow sails.

...and what sort of paddle do you intend using?

I'll have a couple of paddles. What type they'll be is something I'm still experimenting with. Most of the time I favour a flat blade – even when I'm in competitive flatwater events. Brett Greenwood has lent me a lightweight paddle with small wing blades which I'm currently testing in the sea trials I've been doing with *Blue Moon*.

Will you need to get out of the boat while at sea?

Yes, from time to time. I'll need to retrieve food from either the forward or aft hatches. I'll probably



dunk myself in the Tasman on occasions to rinse off the dried salt I expect will build up on my body. Also, there may be a need to scrape off some barnacles from the hull. I'll be tethered to *Blue Moon* whenever I'm out of the boat.

... and tethering yourself when in the boat?

Yes, in rough conditions most definitely. I'll also probably need to have restraints when trying to sleep in rough conditions. Both Andrew and Scott experienced capsize during their crossings. In one of his sat phone reports to his wife Vicki,

*Top: Ready for launch and inversion test
Bottom: Checking for leaks following inversion (pics: Adrian Clayton)*

Andrew said that he felt he'd just been through a tumble dryer and Pete Bray used similar descriptions so I'm giving some thought to padding the interior of the vestibule and sleeping quarters.

Can you tell us of your plans for sea trials before you head off for the crossing?

I've started them already and I expect they will be ongoing until I'm confident that both *Blue Moon* and I are up for the task. The early trials

were one-day exercises in enclosed waters. We've had her upside down – getting her there required four of us – to test for leaks and her self-righting capabilities. Only a few drops came through one of the air vents and she righted herself in a flash.

To this point I've done only one ocean paddle which involved spending a couple of nights at sea where I ended up around 50 kilometres from the coast off Palm Beach. I came back from this trial with a long "to do" list. I used this trial to test the drogues [sea anchors] I'm taking with me – I have two. I used the smaller one – about 500mm diameter – for the first night and recorded a 16km drift over a 12-hour period. I used the larger 1.8 metre Coppins Sea Anchor on the second night which reduced the drift factor by half even though the wind was blowing stronger.

It looks as though Blue Moon has plenty of surfaces for sponsor decals, have you got any sponsorship deals happening?

No. Having sponsors brings a responsibility which I don't want to be saddled with. If, for any reason, I want to bail out then at least sponsors won't need to be appeased.



So you're self-funding the whole project?

Yes.

...and what support are you getting from your employer?

My boss is being very supportive and is taking a keen interest in what I'm doing. He's happy to give me as much leave of absence as I wish for.

What are you hoping the crossing will achieve?

Various things. First perhaps, chasing and achieving a dream. I hope it will inspire others to challenge themselves and if they have a dream embrace the Nike motto and "just do it". Society is the richer for the inspiration that our great adventurers provide.

Do you foresee anything that will delay your planned starting date?

I'm hoping weather conditions will not influence whether I start on the

intended date. Travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving Australia or entering New Zealand, are looking more likely to delay my start – even though I'll be going through extended self-isolation in completing the journey. However, my father, Eric, and my sister, Linden, want to be in New Zealand when I arrive and I want them to be there too, so if they are prevented from travelling, we'll delay the start until they can make the journey.

Richard, you have been very generous taking the time out of your busy schedule to give us this interview. Thank you. We wish you every success with your venture and look forward to keeping track of your progress.

*Top: Stable as... (pic: Andrew Robertson)
Bottom: Blue Moon approaching Lion Island on her way for the first of her overnight sea trials (pic: Adrian Clayton).*

