

MAYBE YARRAWONGA?

JOURNAL OF A 2012-13 HOUSEBOAT VOYAGE ON THE MURRAY RIVER



Orlando at Morgan on day 10

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Extended from a series of articles, originally prepared for the River Murray Boat Owners Association *Rambler* magazine, of which four instalments (upstream to Robinvale) were published. Compiled from a daily spreadsheet log and very scruffy hand-written notes, augmented by memory and input from other participants, particularly Aggie's photos.



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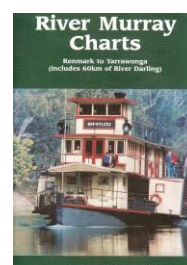
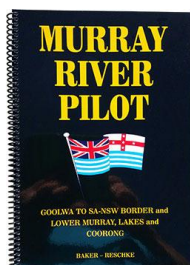
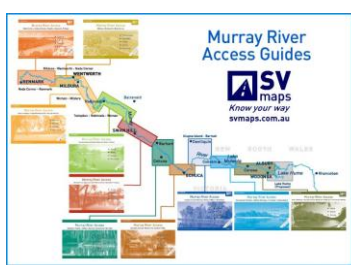
Orlando

Preamble

Orlando is a 16 x 7m, 4-berth, open plan houseboat, built by Geoff Edmond at Wellington, South Australia in 2002-3. Aggie & Ken purchased her in 2006 with an embryonic idea of a big upstream trip 'sometime' but keeping her in hire with Oz Houseboats, based at Murray Bridge in the interim. Ken began winding down his mining industry consultancy after Aggie retired from midwifery at the Adelaide Women's & Children's Hospital in 2010 and the final trigger was the developing SA Inland Waters greywater regulation debacle. Going interstate, where commercial vessels are grandfathered and there is no greywater-specific legislation for private ones, might allow enough time for the dust (mud) to settle on this issue at home. Aggie got her boat licence at the RMBOA-sponsored course on April 1 and our final hire was at Easter 2012. We had made numerous modifications over the intervening six years, with *Orlando* now powered by twin Honda 60 HP (from a single 75 HP) outboards and drawing 0.75m at 18 tonnes, wet and laden.

Following three weeks of myriad preparations such as motor servicing, new mooring ropes, solar panels and more inverter power points, we set out on Saturday 5th May – as far as we can go, for as long as it takes – but in stages to accommodate Aggie's now entrenched charitable activities. I had contemplated going down to Goolwa to start from the beginning (well actually the end). Many thanks to the five RMBOA members who replied to my query on crossing Lake Alexandrina in a pontoon houseboat. Responses varied over the full gamut of 'go for it' to 'most unwise' although all agreed that you need to be prepared to wait a day or two for calm weather at either end, start early, go direct between Pomanda Island and Point Sturt and complete the crossing by midday. Insurer's and Aggie's views regarding pontoon vessels on unprotected waters ultimately ruled this out.

We stocked up on full sets of 1:50k, 100k, 250k and 1,000,000 scale topographic maps for the big picture as well as the Murray River Access booklets, for local ancillary riverside info. However, these are not *charts* with vital navigational detail, which is provided by two hand-drawn chart books, Baker & Reschke's *Murray River Pilot* from the mouth to Renmark in South Australia and from there to Yarrawonga, Maureen Wright's *River Murray Charts* (RMC).



Boating Industry Association distance markers at 2 km intervals, mostly on the right bank, confirm location along the river and are reinforced by remnants of older systems as below:



Kilometres upstream from the Mouth
The mouth to Albury
BIA – current



Miles upstream from the Mouth
Renmark to Wentworth
Liba Liba Houseboats – 1960s



Miles downstream from Albury
Albury to Wentworth
NSW government – 1860s

Orlando

May 2012 – Murray Bridge to Waikerie via Wellington

354 km, avg 5.7 kph/2500 rpm, water 15→12° – 354 km total

We arrived at Long Island Marina, Murray Bridge on the evening of Friday, May 4th to dine on board with Adelaide guests Di and Werner who would accompany us for the first leg. After ferrying a vehicle to Blanchetown next morning, we got underway in the early afternoon, coasting downstream to Tailem Bend with the 55,000 ML/day flow, on one motor – to balance up engine hours that had got out of whack during hires. Everyone enjoyed a hearty roast dinner at the pub that night and a visit to the railway station museum next morning was great, although it's a bit of a worry when everyday stuff from your youth turns up in museums.

The boat's horn wasn't working as the mechanic had unknowingly pulled a dash wire a few days earlier – while replacing motor cables that had been chewed by water rats nesting in the conduit. Had to fix that before continuing past both the Tailem Bend and Wellington ferries to Brinkley Homestead. This is right at the end of the river proper, where it discharges into a broad estuary leading to the full expanse of Lake Alexandrina a little further on, at Pomanda Island. A U-turn was deemed prudent at the second green channel pylon – as shown on the SA Waters Atlas. The first was missing or replaced by a buoy, with several buoys prior to this underwater (due to short chains in high water) and I thought they resembled deep swimming dolphins in the strong flow. Thus, our downstream nadir was 70 km from the river mouth – it looked very choppy out on the lake at 2pm. Back to Tailem Bend for the night. We had anticipated stopping at Fred's Landing but some bank-collapse there left nothing to moor to without running ropes across the car park road, so no! The first fish of the trip was a moderate-size carp to Werner that evening.



A tasting session at Willow Point Winery near Riverglenn late next morning – somewhere in our own backyard that we had never been before – resulted in purchases of Red Sparkz (sparkling) and Jock's Block (dry) reds to fully stock the boat's wine rack. We then picked up a cheap Chinese 2000 W inverter on the way back past Long Island Marina. With the new solar, we were trying to operate the fridge on power rather than gas but the original 500 W inverter couldn't handle it with anything much else running at the same time. However, coming into winter, the 240 W solar (I *will* double it) couldn't keep up the necessary battery power anyway, so even with the big inverter, it's back on gas – but at least we can now do morning toast without the generator!

Postscript: 2015, 480W solar, 2200W inverter 2021, 1100W solar, 3000W inverter 2024, 2400W solar, 4000W inverter

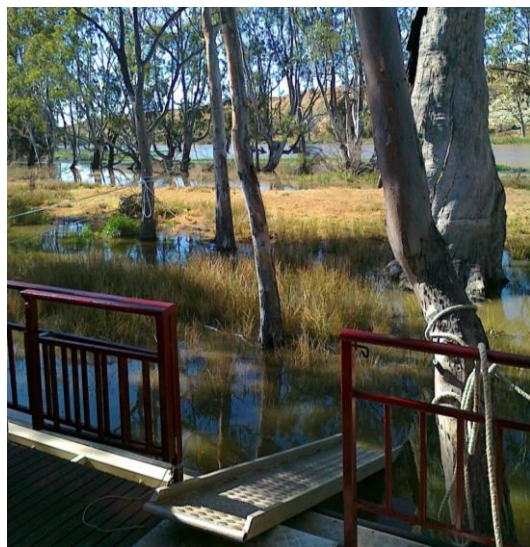
Orlando

The overnight stop was at Avoca Dell, just above Murray Bridge on the east bank. Late afternoon bow-fishing for carp from the canoe in the adjacent 'Everglades' lagoon was unsuccessful – saw a few but didn't get a shot in and Aggie smoked Werner's rod-caught one. We gave a hand to some OZ houseboat hirers on our upstream side who were having a little (sideways) trouble with the strong current on their first solo mooring. Next day was a long 51 km non-stop past Mannum to Younghusband in foul, windy weather. After mooring in the lee of the north bank, Aggie and I took the canoe through a creek into Lake Carlet but soon returned as it was still much too windy out there. Next day, lots of fine bark fragments in the water gave trouble with the almost new, river-water pump. Cleaning the heater filter improved hot water supply and reverting to the integral pressure switch on the 12V Shurflo pump (rather than an external Davey switch) also helped a little but full-flush toilet cistern re-filling issues persisted for weeks – till finally replacing the pump with a bigger Johnson one and all has been sweet since.

Our first campfire was at Scrubby Flat on the east bank next evening, using firewood collected near Curnamont and stacked on the front deck, when we'd contemplated mooring there earlier in the afternoon. Aggie & I canoed the bottom end of Walkers Flat Lagoon opposite but not a carp in sight. It was very foggy in the morning. During a lunch stop, Werner and I fell out of the canoe in a deep *cold* creek at the south end of Pommy John's 'magic' carp lagoon across the river from Wongulla (at the mouth of the Marne River). That evening we did the slightly kitsch but fun Australian 'Big Bend by Night' together with 22 Kiwis from two *Unforgettable* houseboats moored alongside us. Whip cracking and water divining preceded a salted prawn, beer-can chicken and apple pie dinner, with spotlighting for spider eyes to cap off the evening.

The following day was 8 hours non-stop, with turbulent sections near the cliffs above Swan Reach and 3,000 revs after Castle's Landing to make Lock 1 at Blanchetown before closing – lift was only 0.2 m and flow 53,400 ML/d. We overnighted near the caravan park on the east bank beyond the bridges, before our first blackwater pump-out next morning at 95% on the new sight glass and spot-on prediction of a customised RMBOA record sheet. We then moored at nearby Griffen's Marina to make an unscheduled return to Adelaide for Mothers' Day and a funeral on Monday.

Back to Blanchetown late on the Tuesday. After refuelling and a gas cylinder swap next morning, I ferried the vehicle forward to Waikerie returning with new crew, Ling (Aggie's bridesmaid 40 yrs



ago) & her Ken from Mount Martha, Vic. for the next sector. They'd stocked up on groceries in Mildura but lost much of it at the Yamba state border fruit fly inspection – we must remember to warn future interstaters. Following a Houseboat Hirers Association (HHA, of which Ken has been a committee member for several years) EGM at Swan Reach that evening, we set out again Thursday morning. A lunchtime mooring near Irwin Flat, was against trees 10 m out from solid ground and with a strong current at the back. The two Kens tried bowfishing in Wood Flat lagoon (behind in the photo) but only glimpsed one carp, as it was too cold and deep.

A challenging lunchtime mooring (water frigid)

We enjoyed another campfire at Murbko (east bank) that evening but really scratched for timber.

Orlando

Then a late-start/early-finish day to Morgan. We moored above the ferry near the old railway station and topped up drinking water from the station rainwater tank. The Waste Disposal Station was not operating due to high water but luckily, we had no need. The guys then checked out the museum in the old A.H. Landseer building and the historic wharf with *PS Canally* under restoration there. She was historically known as the 'greyhound of the Murray' (Maureen Wright's River Murray Charts, 2002, p.18) due to her 1862, Robert Louis Stevenson & Co., high-pressure, high-speed engine, repurposed from Victorian Railways O-Class steam locomotive No. 57. The ladies shopped, with Aggie declaring it her favourite town thus far.



Late next afternoon, proprietor Christina and her Kiwi friend Brenda, a 'refugee' of the Christchurch earthquake, left a comfortable fireside to open up their new tasting room for us when we pulled on to the partially flooded lawn at Caudo Winery. Having replenished the wine rack, we moored just on dusk a short distance upstream, opposite lots of campers at Hogwash Bend. We had a night campfire and everyone did a bit of canoeing in the morning – in an adjacent small creek and across the river. Lift was only 0.3 m at Lock 2 and flow 50,000 ML/day, immediately after lunch on the easy run to Waikerie by that evening. We pumped out in the morning and then refuelled and rewatered courtesy of Green & Gold Houseboats, prior to scheduled return to Adelaide on Monday afternoon, 17th May. Following a couple of years of low water, it has been fantastic to see the birdlife back, with plenty of pelicans, coots, 'snake birds' (Australian Darters), galahs, sulphur crests, herons, a few swamp hens and not too many infernal squawking corellas. An advantage of the winter start has been no buzzing annoyances (moszies or PWCs) and great reflections in the stillness.

June 2012 – Waikerie...Waikerie to Kingston

58 km, avg 5.7 kph/2550 rpm, water 10° – 412 km total

After just over a week at home we were woken by a morning call from Sonia at OZ Houseboats – a Good Samaritan at Waikerie was trying to get in touch because the river had been dropping like a stone, *Orlando's* bow was high & dry, the rear swim deck totally submerged with the motors about to go under and a front-end loader would be needed to get it off – today! Following a quick phone call to my brother Alan and his wife Lyn, we took off up there with two 4WDs and lots of heavy rope, imagining perhaps getting one vehicle down on the bank to push the boat out, with the other as anchor/retriever up on the road. It turned out to be a little easier than that but no less eleventh hour. The batteries in the front of the engine pod were almost totally immersed but OK to partially raise and then start the motors. With much twisting and turning in both forward and reverse, she moved out of danger fairly quickly but remained stuck on the starboard pontoon, finally coming off under her own power after 45 minutes, including a couple of overheat cut-outs – all done in time for a late lunch (my shout) at the Waikerie Hotel. Many thanks to Samaritan Michael Sharkey of *Great Escape* houseboat for the timely warning and hopefully, we can repay the favour one day.

Orlando

Aggie then came up and we stayed four nights doing a few jobs like permanently attaching the solar panels which had only been temporarily fixed before that. Daily back-off and rope re-adjustment was required as the water level continued to drop at about 150 mm a day. Coincidentally we were moored next to *Jensta*, our first ever houseboat experience when my Mum had hired it for a family Christmas 30 years earlier. Aggie got to like Waikerie (more shops than Morgan) and I started to get worried that she might put in a bid for the adjacent *Murray River Queen* paddleboat that was for sale at the time. We were not able to move on immediately due to commitments in Adelaide, where one minor tweak of the schedule for a social event led to one more and then a medical issue arose meaning that we missed the next 'window' to continue. In view of Lock 9 having closed for three months, this was fine as we were going to have to layover for some time, somewhere.

Nevertheless, it required another three-day trip to Waikerie for mooring adjustments a week later – now both equipped with gum boots to negotiate the expanse of mud between the prior bank and new much lower water's edge. The swim deck was under water on one side only this time. A council notice taped to the front rail was followed up with a personal visit by a council officer querying our intentions but, once assured that we *were* bona-fide travellers and not long-term squatters, our overstay (48 hr casual mooring limit) was kindly overlooked. We took the opportunity for a half-day road reccy to Kingston, Cobdogla and Moorook.

The next river sector was an abbreviated four-day run to Kingston. Aggie and I drove up to Waikerie on the Wednesday evening, arriving at 10 pm after an HHA meeting at Swan Reach. Next day, I took the vehicle forward to Kingston and travelled back with Janet and Ron from Bathurst (& formerly Broken Hill), NSW. We got underway after lunch, with lots of pelicans around Holder Bend, before mooring in light rain (it *had* been torrential) and much mud on the south bank at Maize Island Conservation Park, after only 7 km. Beyond Waikerie was new territory for *Orlando* – we had taken her on a trial run as far as Waikerie and back, in July 2011. Nevertheless, Aggie and I had travelled above Waikerie all those years earlier on *Jensta*. I slept most of the following day, with a stomach upset and severe shivers but the crew just kept going non-stop all day, waking me for mooring duties when we arrived at Akuna Station – a beautiful lawned southern bank, albeit then with a couple of metres of freshly exposed mud below it and an historic ruined timber wharf.



Manicured Akuna

Orlando

I was recovered next morning for the 10 km run to Overland Corner – refer *A history of Overland Corner and its hotel* (G. Woolmer, 1986). Along the way I managed to sneak the boat into the western end of Banrock Creek, maintaining 2m of depth for the first couple of hundred metres until Aggie woke up to what was going on and shooed me back out into the river, despite that we had spent Christmas Day moored at a sandy beach a little further up the creek in *Jensta* in 1983. A leisurely lunch at the OC pub took up half the afternoon, followed by a walk and a bit of fishing. With steadily falling temperatures, we were getting no yabbies, no fish and declining numbers of shrimp. We watched a snake bird on the bank do a python-like act of progressively swallowing a ridiculously large fish and then struggle on to a log over the water with the tail still distorting its neck – it wasn't there next morning so don't know if it fell off and drowned – it certainly could not have flown and doubtful it could even have swum. A 7 lb carp suicided on an overnight line and we also netted an injured (that snakebird?) bony bream from the bank. Overland Corner is the end of the limestone gorge country, with river meanders upstream from here contained within a much wider valley flanked by *sand* cliffs – Wilabalangaloo, Headings, Border, Red and Mallee Cliffs to come.

Aggie reversed the boat out and we proceeded to Lock 3 where the lift was now 2 m and the flow down to 15,300 ML/day – what a change from Lock 2 but it had been a full month. Above the lock, waterbird life exploded, particularly pelicans (to which we fed the bream) and egrets plus the first spoonbills of the trip, in the extensive riverside lagoons with drowned trees. We continued past Kingston township, to moor opposite Thurk Island, immediately south of the mouth of Chambers Creek. With only an upstream tree to tie to, crossed star droppers that we were carrying for this purpose, were used on the downstream side for the first time. Ron and I did a 5 km paddle in Chambers and Nockburra Creeks. Aggie stuffed the morning's carp with herbs and cooked it in foil, supported by scavenged chicken-wire over an open fire – I am not generally keen on (eating) carp but this was the best ever, with not a trace of mud and better than my old man's version of stuffing the belly with onions. Then a quick run the 2 km back to Kingston in the morning where we left the boat in the care of Golden Leisure Houseboats before returning to Adelaide on Monday 25th June.



Above Lock 3 – how many pelicans?

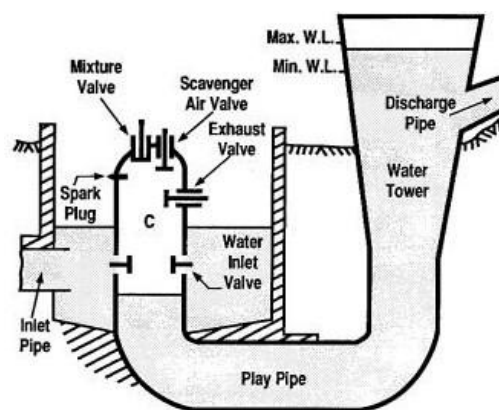
Orlando

July 2012 – Kingston to the Border

204 km, avg 5.2 kph/2400 rpm, water 9° – 616 km total

This stretch included four consecutive lots of guests, all from Adelaide, within a two-and-a-half-week period, which turned out to be the longest continuous interval of the trip. After 10 days at home, we headed back up-river to attend a fabulous Mediterranean (Greek-ish) dinner at Banrock Station Winery on the evening of Friday 6th, with friends Barbara & Dave, versatile singer Mike Kelly and a bunch of very friendly locals.

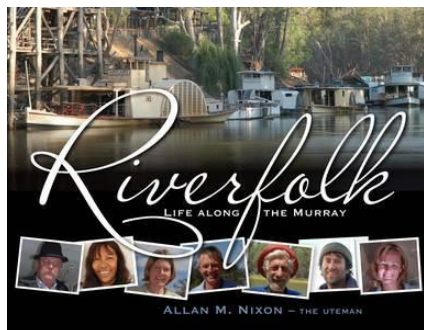
Next morning Dave & I ferried my vehicle to Moorook before following through in the boat the same day. Dave and I, then Aggie and I canoed during a lunch stop at Chambers Creek, before passing under Kingston Bridge and on to Moorook. We drove back to the Cobdogla Irrigation & Steam Museum on Sunday morning for the only-four-times-a-year event of starting up the humungous, producer-gas fuelled, liquid-piston Humphrey Pump en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humphrey_Pump. This was the basis on which I had lured engineer Dave to come just for the weekend. I'd heard there was an issue with the engine because of a gas leak that had caused injury to operators on the prior start-up, so checked with the Barmera Visitor Information Centre on Friday and all OK but you guessed it, when we got there the whole place was shut and we couldn't even get to see it dormant.



The pump we didn't see & how it works - maybe?

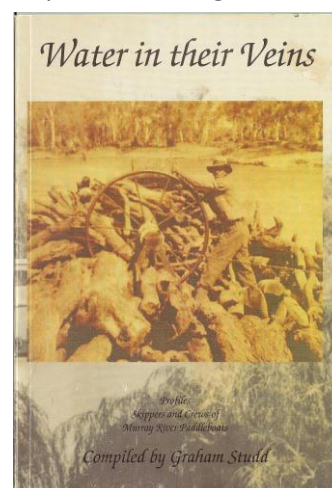
Due to a now condemned building, it is still not operating and possibly never will - it was the last operating one worldwide.

So back to Banrock for the much-feted wetlands 4.2 km (short) walk with bird hide – '10 times the birdlife at our back deck on Yatco Lagoon' observed Dave dryly. On their departure, Barb gifted me



Allan Nixon's book *River Folk*, which I am now reading in sync with our upstream progress. Very pleased that we've met several characters at the downstream end but perhaps not surprising as most are real live people of the river today, in addition to some

historical ones – trust we will meet more as we go – and we did. This book complements a couple of other fascinating ones that I read before the trip – *Slow River* a very impressive 'one man in a tinny' saga by Steve Strevens and Graham Studd's *Water in their Veins*, profiling Murray River skippers and crews'.



Orlando

Andrew & Debbie of Golden Leisure Houseboats came over for dinner that evening. Then followed a fruitless Monday morning trying to exchange a 45kg gas cylinder in Moorook, Kingston and Barmera. A separate afternoon road run to Renmark/Paringa delivering a trial GatorPro greywater unit to Doug at Warriuka Houseboats, before return via Berri and Loxton to get back well after dark.

Next day Aggie & I 'steamed' on alone with more pelicans and egrets than ever before – while neighbours from home, Dorothy and Mal, picked up our vehicle from Moorook and joined us near the 'Tree of Knowledge' at Loxton in the evening. BTW, the vehicle constantly referred to is a 25-year-old, quarter million km, trusty-if-rusty diesel LWB Nissan Patrol (the truck) that is an incredible workhorse, owing us nothing and able to be left in public places where it could easily (please) get nicked. We always organise more secure parking for our guests, with caravan parks being the most common, charging from nix/nada to \$5 a night.

An overdue pumpout in the morning, at 102% theoretical and above the sight glass – but the boat sits down a little at the back (where the glass is) and there was no embarrassment. We lunched underway following a gas cylinder exchange (finally) and obligatory ladies' shopping in Loxton town. The campfire that night was on a very restricted bank with muddy surrounds, opposite Kaesler's Landing. After a foggy morning, Mal and I canoed 500 m down Katarapko Creek to Katfish Reach Weir during the lunch stop – a worry with no warning signs or safety barriers and so easy to be swept over as you simply cannot see it from the top side. A little later at Lock 4, flow was back up to 25,000 ML/day and the lift correspondingly a little lower at 1.3 m. When at upper pool level, we were chatting with onlookers who asked where we were headed for the evening, to which the lockmaster responded "nowhere if I can't get these bloody gates open" – but eventually he did. Above the lock was now new territory for Aggie and I, as well as the boat.

We tied up as normal, front-on to the floating concrete pontoon below the Berri Hotel where it blew up very stormy overnight. Next day Mal & I drove back to Loxton and then ferried the truck forward to Paringa via Stanitski Road on the eastern side of the river, while the ladies shopped of course. I was amazed at the scale of Almondco's orchards and factory along the way, with hull & shell piles resembling mine waste dumps. Dorothy and Mal headed home in the afternoon after visiting the aboriginal totems and mural under the Berri bridge. We then continued checking out more of the town's public art, including the etched glass war memorial and 'Jimmy James Special Place' with its striking river-life engravings on 'Imperial black granite' (norite) boulders from Black Hill near Sedan.



Ken shaking hands with Jimmy - & Aggie reflecting on the scene

Orlando

Dinner at the pub that night was followed by the farmers' market in the morning with packhorse Ken delivering ¼ ton of fruit, veg and baklava back to the boat before Chris(tina) & Colin arrived. The weather blew up really foul again so we stayed put for lunch. With the south westerly wind being stronger than the opposing current for the first time, the crash bar rode up over the pontoon – next time it will be side-on mooring in that situation. The weather cleared and we got away at 3 pm for the 7 km run to a postcard mooring at the Wilabalangaloo coloured-sand cliffs and a sunset walk up to the historic homestead and cliff-top lookout.



It was a leisurely run to Muklemuck Bend next day with a lunch stop opposite the Pike River junction where Colin and I canoed a short creek. Colin piloted the evening mooring as practice for an upcoming family holiday on a hire houseboat. A great campfire was watched over by a resident mopoke (/more pork?) owl and followed by a bridge (cards) session back on board, lubricated with Colin's Belgian beers. Colin and I canoed an adjacent fast-flowing creek in the morning and then Aggie and I a much slower parallel one. A lone kayaker was heading downstream as we got underway. Then on to Lock 5 with flow up a little more to 30,000 ML/day and slightly lesser lift of 1.2 m. After mooring with Riverfun Houseboats below the Paringa Bridge, we ferried Chris and Colin back to their vehicle at Berri and then visited St Agnes winery in Renmark to restock Aggie's Stone's Mac & Green Ginger.

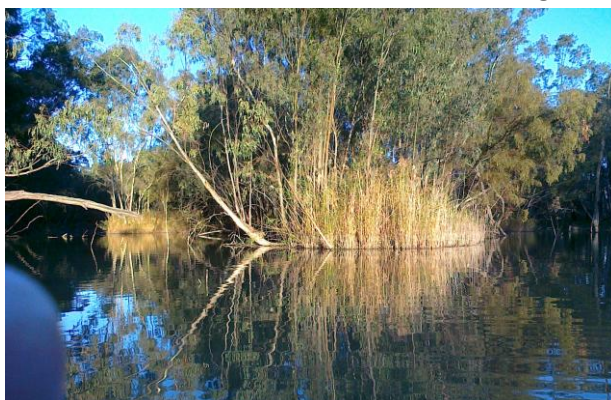
The next day included a visit to Greg at Liba-Liba Houseboat's Jane Eliza Landing and coffee with Pauline & Les aboard *Class Act*, a larger sister boat to *Orlando* that had moved up from Murray Bridge sometime earlier. Then restocking, refuelling and some maintenance followed by our hosts Graeme and Leanne from Riverfun joining us on board for dinner that evening. A touristy morning included visits to Almond Hut and Olivewood, irrigation pioneer Charles Chaffey's Canadian-style log cabin homestead. I drove the truck to Customs House at Border Cliffs in the afternoon and returned with proprietor Paul before travelling to Swan Reach and back with Les for the HHA committee meeting that night. Next crew, Zara (a work colleague of Aggie's) and Hugh, had meanwhile arrived from Adelaide to keep Aggie company for the evening and teach her to play gin rummy.

Orlando

When embarrassingly, we didn't front on time for the following morning's Paringa Bridge opening, operator Doug came down and levered us off the bank to which we seemed firmly glued, with no swinging room to break away. There was a bit of excitement for Zara later, steering us through Whirlpool Corner as her initiation. *Unforgettable 4* out of Mannum was moored at about 587 km on the west bank. We had heard that the owner was doing a similar trip to us, so pulled in for a chat but unfortunately no-one was aboard. We moored overnight just on the upstream side of Hunchee Creek, from where Hugh and I canoed .75 km up it against slight flow. Next morning Aggie and I went 1.5 km up to a weir just below its junction with Ral Ral Creek. An original Liba-Liba stern-wheel houseboat that had overnighted a little upstream of us on the opposite bank headed south and we moved on to 'Wiela'. Local tourism 'pin-up' Headings (sand) Cliffs were impressive if not as high and long as the limestone ones further south.

We had another campfire that night and pumped out at the adjacent Waste Disposal Station first thing in the morning. To go ashore to look for the graves of the 1886 *PS Bunyip* fire victims shown in the *Atlas of SA Waters*, I tried to move the boat forward just a little, while still tied to the WDS – to align the rear starboard side-gate with the landing and avoid climbing over the rail. On slackening the forward rope, the strong current swung the bow sharply out. The motors could not pull it back against the flow and the aft rope tied to the top rail beside the open gate held firm, taut as a steel rod and bending the rail out at 45°. Ultimately, I had to get everyone else inside out of harm's way, crouch low and cut the rope – the recoil was loud and spectacular with the gate shearing its hinges, flying high into the air and disappearing overboard into deep water. After mooring 100 m away, calming down and roping-off the vacant gateway, we went looking fruitlessly for the gravesite. Finally, a local resident told us that the *Atlas* is wrong and the version in Maureen Wright's RMC, placing it on the opposite side of the river nearer Lock 6 is correct but the precise site still unknown.

On to Lock 6 (Murtho) for a 1 m lift. Flow was 30,000 ML/day but with another 5,000 ML going round the Chowilla/Ral Ral Creek System. We moored for the night against the high bank immediately downstream of the Isle of Man, where Aggie and I canoed 1.5 km to a weir on Pipeclay Creek behind the island. The late afternoon reflections were stunning!



There was a severe white-out (fog) early next morning but it then fined up for the run to Customs House, past Slaney Creek at the 397-mile mark on the north bank, the unheralded most northerly point on the Murray. After unloading, we moored out of the way across the river, with proprietor Paul bringing us back in his tinny. We then headed home, stopping at the Wiela WDS to fish for the lost gate with a magnet that Paul had lent us. We made several hookups but they always fell off on lifting – Sun 22nd.

Orlando

August 2012 – No progress

Water 10→11° – 616 km total

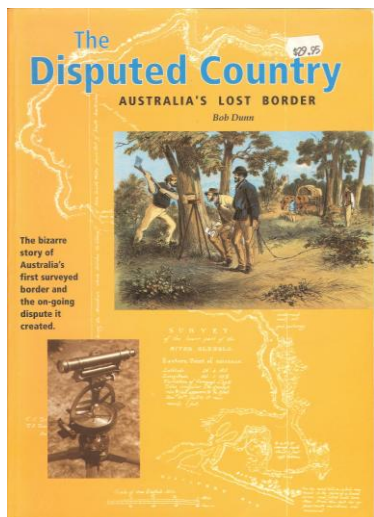
The boat remained at Customs House all month as Lock 9 did not re-open within its 10-12 week schedule and there are no intervening towns or public river access. This 'excuse' apparently placated visiting EPA officers whom Paul reported demanded to know why *Orlando* had not left the State as agreed over the greywater issue – surprised they didn't insist the vacant vessel be moved the < 1 km to the Victorian border while waiting! We made a three-night trip to the boat for maintenance, including re-glueing pumpout fittings, rail painting and installing a high gain antenna for phone and internet reception on the upcoming remote sector. Another 'fishing' effort at Wiela with stronger magnets and a grappling hook yielded two tyres, two large logs, one sacrificial anode, dozens of bolts, welding rods and beer bottle tops – but no gate.

September 2012 – The Border to Wentworth and a little bit of the Darling

281 km, avg 5.4 kph/2550 rpm, water 12→14° – 896 km total

Lock 9 re-opened after 14 weeks suspension and we returned to the boat on Friday 7th, via Murray Bridge and Karoonda, in time to catch welders Harry & Dave from Renmark who were straightening up the bent rail and supplying a new gate that afternoon. I drove 120 km to Wentworth next morning, to meet Carlie & Peter from Brisbane – who we have known from many years earlier in Mount Isa. I thought I'd timed everything perfectly but forgot the half-hour NSW time difference. After parking the truck with Trevor and Kerrol of Murray-Darling Houseboats, we just managed to get back over the Abbotsford Bridge before it closed to road traffic for several hours for the paddleboat flotilla heading to Mildura for *PS Melbourne's* centenary celebrations on September 9th – there were people lining the banks and the bridge in droves. Back to Customs House after a bit of fruit and veg shopping in Renmark as Carlie and Pete couldn't bring stuff they wanted through the Yamba fruit fly control – interstate agricultural product quarantine rules are an absolute pain in this cross-border environment.

The plan had been to get underway that afternoon but there were still a few almost-forgotten things including gas bottle exchange (discarded a leaking connector hose) and NSW fishing licences to purchase from Jill's Customs House store – seniors don't need them for Victoria. We were then ready to embark (next morning) on the longest and remotest stretch thus far. This geography and Peter's keenness would lead to us have campfires most nights with Pete cooking over many of them.



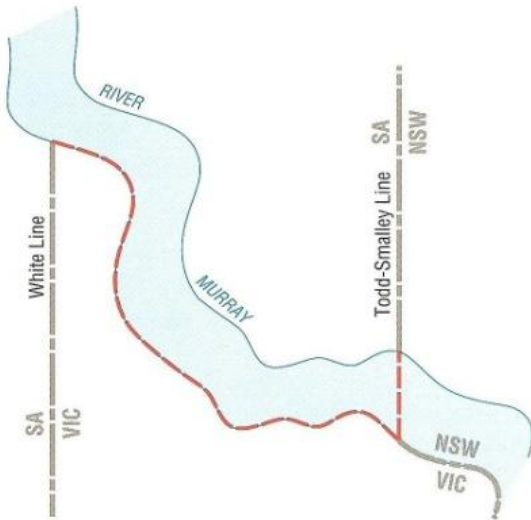
It is well known that the river border between NSW and VIC is at the southern bank – i.e. all of the river between them is in NSW. Combined with misalignment of the north-south straight-line surveyed borders between SA/NSW and SA/VIC, this leads to a lesser-known conundrum. From Customs House, it is only 800 m to the Victorian land border on the south bank but then 13 km of no-man's river until the NSW land border on the northern bank. The diagram overpage, from Bob Dunn's intriguing book, *The Disputed Country, Australia's Lost Border*, shows four tenable river-border scenarios and alludes to further possibilities, including that the river over this section is Commonwealth territory?

[The Disputed Country - Australia's Lost Border - Meridian Maps](#)

There's a Hole in the Border

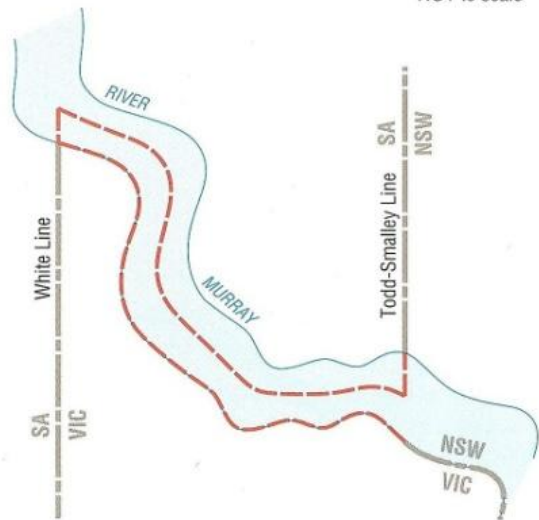


Diagrams are
NOT to scale



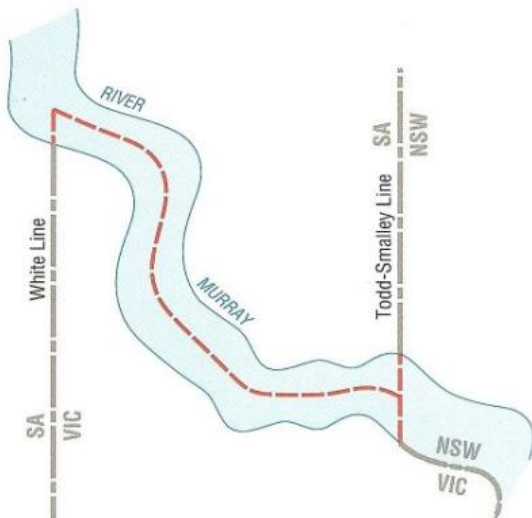
Option 1: South Australia
controls the whole River Murray

- * The Todd-Smalley Line crosses to the south bank
- * Victorian border follows along the south bank



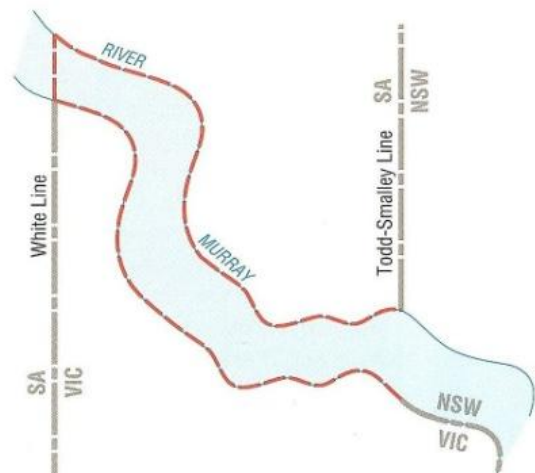
Option 2: South Australia and New
South Wales share the River Murray

- * The Todd-Smalley and White Lines both extend to the centre of the river
- * Victorian border follows along the south bank



Option 3: Victoria and South Australia
share the River Murray

- * The Todd-Smalley Line crosses to the south bank
- * Victorian border jumps to the centre of the river
- * White Line extends to the centre of the river



Option 4: New South Wales
controls the whole River Murray

- * The Todd-Smalley Line stops at the north bank
- * White Line crosses to the north bank

Around mid-day we barely made it through narrow Higgin's Cutting with two opposing right angle bends, against the strong current – Paul says he told me that you are supposed to go round the horseshoe loop at those flows! After passing Riverfun's *Aqua Dreaming* heading downstream, we moored for the night on the south (Victorian) bank just before Pollard's Cutting, again using star droppers on the downstream side. Pollard's was not an issue next morning, despite the *Marion* suffering a major snag hit there in 1951.

Orlando

Next day took us to Little Mullaroo Creek on the Victorian side, where Pete and I canoed in the heavily snagged, very fast and very cold, *outflowing* creek. Coming back we rolled while side-on to the current when slaloming between snags and I lost a Croc sandal – reckon we'll be able to pick it up on the return journey back at Higgins, where this anabranch rejoins the main stream 😊.

At 10 am the following morning we pulled in just below Lock 7 for a chat with the lockies and two other SA Water guys off a barge-crane moored opposite at the Rufus River mouth/Lake Victoria outlet – they'd come from works at the Lake and were headed back to base at Berri. The lock itself was all but flooded (they reckon it 'goes out with a heavy dew') and we proceeded through the adjacent open navigational pass with no worries, although requiring 3,000 revs to make headway against the highly channelled flow.



Flooded Lock 7 with open Navigational Pass to left

Lock 8 is only 29 km further on, these being the closest two weirs on the river and active in managing the Lake Victoria storage. We reached it at 4 pm the same day and moored within a kilometre beyond it on the northern (NSW) bank. Pete and I, then Aggie and I canoed Wangumma Lagoon with its historic (abandoned?) Homestead and Possum's grave (see p. 16) on the east bank – very calm and serene in the windless late afternoon with low sun-angle.

It was another short (37 km) run to Lock 9 by 4 pm next day. Lift was only 0.65 m with flow back up to 41,500 ML/d. The historic Kulnine steam pumping station just above the lock was not open although it had been a week earlier for the paddlesteamer fleet ahead of us. We moored in stormy conditions 2 km further on, just before Wallpolla Creek on the Victorian side. This was our first mooring over the border with road access and couldn't you just tell with all the bottle, can and drink carton litter. Conditions settled with a little rain overnight. A walk along the bank of the creek gave the impression of ideal conditions for carp but there were none visible (don't think they liked the weather either) and bowfishing is not permitted in this jurisdiction anyway.

We tested the Frenchman's Creek entrance to Lake Victoria next day as Lock 7 had said it was navigable to the first regulator. Trying to turn left into a narrow gap with a fallen tree protruding more than halfway from its south bank and strong current from the right, was beyond my capability, so soon gave up that idea – think they probably meant navigable to a tinny! We were disappointed in not spotting the 883-mile tree recorded at this junction. Mooring conditions were blowy again that evening at the 798 km mark adjacent to an un-named NSW creek. The wind settled later for an after-dinner fire. There were a few sheep about but no fish or yabbies.

Orlando

I put in 40 ltr of fuel from two jerry cans first thing in the morning. Although confident that our 450 ltr tank would take us the 210 km to Wentworth (averaging 1.3 ltr/km) we had carried the extra as insurance and it was better off the deck and into the tank, now that there was room. After not seeing another travelling vessel for five days, downstream traffic was suddenly 'thick' – paddleboat *Tamara Rae*, houseboat *She'll Do Us*, then *Coorong Wanderer* plus three lone fishermen in tinnies near the Darling Anabranch junction. Unlike SA, where lockages are on-demand within operating hours, NSW does downstream on the hour and upstream on the half hour. We phoned Lock 10 to book for 4:30 pm but they wanted us by 3:30, which would have been a bit of a rush, so we declined and moored a little above Snaggy Point on the NSW side. River red gums had been extensively logged from a small, flooded inlet in the past and there has also been recent cutting up of some of the old, abandoned timber – for the presently passing steamer fleet? Aggie and I, then Carlie and Peter enjoyed paddling round the swamp, skirting one particular tree trunk with a 2 m goanna. BTW, the much-referenced canoe is a very battered, 20-year-old, green and white 14' fibreglass mould Canadian with proven unsinkability, having been accidentally keel-hauled under a houseboat (*Galaxy*) pontoon in its youth – don't ask but it was my big brother not me. We had considered upgrading it with something lighter prior to the trip but 'if it ain't broke' – well it is partly broke but still works if not looks, fine and there were higher priority expenses.

Lock 10 were replacing timbers and could not put us through at 8:30 am as indicated the previous evening so, after an uncharacteristically early start we had to re-moor for an hour at Thegoa Reserve just below the lock. In anticipation of the upcoming Wentworth Bridge, the opportunity was taken to rake back the two-way antenna (with RMBOA burgee) on top of our fixed mast but maintaining it as the highest point to act as our coal-mine canary – marginally above the next highest, top of the lowerable bimini canopy. Lift though the lock was 1.8 m and flow 40,000 ML/day. Then, passing left of the famous Murray-Darling junction sand spit we entered the white coffee-coloured Darling River.



We cleared the bridge 1 km upstream with 40 cm to spare at 5.5 m on the bridge pylon gauge, to refuel and re-water at Murray Darling Houseboats on the east bank a few hundred metres upstream – then continued another 500 m to the public waste disposal station on the west bank. There were problems here because, contrary to SA where front-on mooring is prohibited, here you are supposed to. However, *Orlando's* outlet is at the port-side back and there was neither room enough to get its full 18+m broadside between the outer poles nor sufficient suction hose length to reach anyway – so ended up angling the boat at ~30° with the stern halfway along the pump pontoon and the bow protruding past the upstream outer pole. That got us emptied albeit extremely slowly and then the rinse hose would not reach the front flush point, so we made do with clear flushes of the three loos.

Orlando



Back below the bridge, we moored near the rowing club opposite the mouth of Tucker's Creek. A life-size bronze statue at the adjacent rebuilt historic timber wharf commemorates pioneering Chinese river-boat captain, John Egge whose story is fascinating.

www.murrayriver.com.au/paddleboats/john-egge

Aggie with Egge

We all walked up to town for food shopping and then a coffee. Riverboat Rod Hobbs' model paddlesteamer display at Shop 29 in Darling Street is a gold coin donation must. He loves to discuss paddleboat history and his role as fireman or stoker (*not* wood-chucker) on Wentworth's resident historic steamer, *Ruby*. There is a myriad of his 1:30 scale (1 cm = 1 foot) models on display including six incarnations of the *Marion* from barge to present day and he continues to maintain/add to the collection from a workshop at the back.



Riverboat Rod's model of his namesake, the *Rodney*

Over the road, the Artback Gallery & Cafe with adjacent bakery add a touch of sophistication to this vibrant town. A \$39 seafood platter (with heaps of yabbies) at the palatial Wentworth Services Club served four for dinner, followed by snooker and a nightcap, diagonally opposite at the Crown Hotel. 2020 postscript: Artback & Club are unfortunately both now closed.

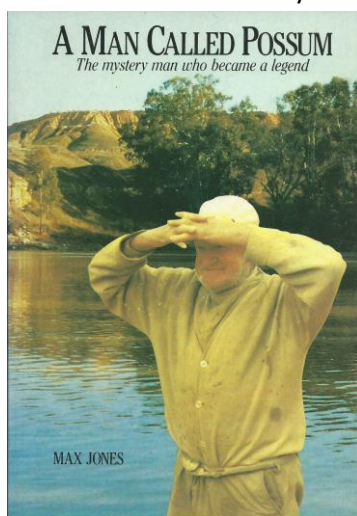
After a sumptuous breakfast at the Artback Café, Aggie had a recurring tooth problem. With no weekend dental in town nor an on-call doctor at the hospital across the river from our mooring, we retrieved the truck from M-D Houseboats and made the 30 km road trip to Mildura for Aggie to attend the Hospital Emergency Department there. Pete and I went shopping for gas fittings but to no avail on a Sunday. We returned to a bloke having a heart attack on the car park lawn. The hospital had provided a wheelchair to his wife but no-one to pick him up and put him in it, so we became impromptu paramedics – heard later in the day that he'd been flown to Adelaide and was OK, let's hope so. With Aggie suitably medicated, we returned to Wentworth at 4:30 pm to find *Orlando* surrounded by paddleboats – *Marion* and *Industry* upstream at the wharf and private boats *Settler*, *Amphibious*, *Flender Himmel*, *James Maiden*, and *Kulkyne* downstream. They were on the return run from the *PS Melbourne* centenary in Mildura. There were people everywhere and we joined in open inspections of the two commercial boats and chatted with their crews & passengers.

Orlando

The truck's brake master cylinder had failed next morning, so it was driven very slowly with handbraking, to a nearby garage before walking back to the boat and heading upstream on the Darling. The river progressively narrowed with overhangs and/or snags locally more than half-way across creating a few slalom situations but, with flow at only 5,000 ML/day (and 5,000 through the Anabran) current was much less than the Murray. We made a lunch stop on the west bank just above and opposite Netherby Homestead, near aboriginal canoe trees either side of the river.

That evening's camp was on the north bank just upstream of fast-flowing Tapio Cutting where river yacht *Nouvelle Fantasii* was moored below a brand new *Nouvelle* homestead. Aggie and I, then Carlie and Peter did a 2 km circumnavigation of Tapio Island by canoe. We had a final evening campfire for Pete once the wind died down. Two wind turbines at the homestead across the river were noisy but OK when inside the boat. As we extended 1/3rd the way across the river and snags opposite restricted space further, nav lights were put on overnight, particularly in view of fishermen in a small craft having passed going upstream in the afternoon. Happily, they didn't return until we were underway again next day, presenting a narrower stream-parallel profile for passing.

Due to the lost Sunday, we had only got 39 km upstream but made remarkably good time back down without a lunch stop and realised that we in fact could have achieved the envisaged 60 km each way in two days – never mind, maybe on the way back? *PS James Maiden* was tied up at about the 23 km point on the east bank, later confirmed as its home mooring. We passed small monohull houseboat *River Wren 5* (featured in recent RMBOA newsletters) out of Riverglen going the other way and I had a brief mid-river chat with David and Lynne, *en passant*. The Darling had been 'different'. The trees seemed to have more character, which we attributed to the number of gnarled examples that had clawed back to life after apparent demise during extended low water but maybe it was simply closeness? We went back down as far as the Murray junction, climbed the viewing tower and retrieved the now repaired truck before again mooring at the rowing club. After a late afternoon visit to the old Wentworth Gaol, we still have to do a tour of *PS Ruby* and check out the adjacent statue of Possum – a remarkable Kiwi shearer who survived off the land from Wentworth to Renmark for 54 years – see *A Man Called Possum* by former Renmark policeman, Max Jones.



(cover picture background is at Devil's Elbow – KB note)

Back under the bridge yet again next morning, to moor with M-D HB till next time. We delivered Carlie and Pete back to their vehicle at Customs House, dropping in at Headings Cliff lookout on the way but not stopping to fish for the lost gate anymore and then headed home – Wednesday 19th.

Orlando

October 2012 – Wentworth...Wentworth to Bruce's Bend

75 km, avg 5.6 kph/2700 rpm, water 18° – 971 km total

Our planned return to Wentworth was derailed by short-notice closure of Lock 11 at Mildura for a week, while the weir was re-instated following departure of the paddleboat flotilla and falling water levels. Again, limited by available windows we did not return for a full month, had to reschedule our next guests and severely curtail the trip's travelling days to three. We drove up via the HHA meeting at Swan Reach (overnight in the pub) and on to Wentworth next morning, Thursday 18th. As Trevor was replanting lawn in front of where the boat was moored, we moved to the town wharf to load. Next day was a road reccy to Merbein, Bruce's Bend, Red Cliffs, Karadoc, Nangiloc and Colignan. I had hoped to get as far as Robinvale but it was stinking hot and the truck aircon wasn't working so after lunch we returned to the boat to cool off – via Mildura to have Aggie's errant iPad sorted at the Telstra shop. Then 2 days of odd jobs including installing rear view cameras and doing touristy stuff such as the Pioneer World Museum. Kerrol & Trevor joined us for dinner on board Sunday evening.



Wooden wheels, iron tyres, Merbein
(the jinker, not Aggie)

I picked up Cathy & Mick (recently of Geelong) from a Mildura motel at 8:30 am Monday – Cathy had accompanied Aggie from Malaysia 45 years earlier and Mick hailed from Broken Hill, where we both first met and married our two ladies.

The truck was dropped at Bruce's Bend Marina, about 10 km upstream of Mildura before return to Wentworth in Mick's vehicle. After unloading, we parked that at MD Houseboats and walked back across the bridge to get underway by 11:15 am. I took the boat a couple of hundred metres into Tucker's Creek as far as its low fixed bridge, before heading back down to the Murray junction to resume upstream progress. We had sufficient clearance not to need the Abbotsford Bridge raised and had thus not given the requisite 24 hr notice but, as we approached it, saw the red light and an operator preparing to open it. Then the penny dropped as a big *All Seasons* 12-berth houseboat that we'd passed pulling out from the bank a short time earlier, lined up behind us – so we duly slowed to just hold way against the current until the span was raised and the operator waved us through, without turning the red light off! Then on to Coomealla Golf Club moorings with free power for the evening. We helped a neighbouring semi-permanent get his very stuck boat off the bank before enjoying a couple of sundowners at the club and a nice win for Mick on the pokies but did not avail ourselves of the free pick-up to and from the 'parent club' restaurant in Dareton town.

Orlando

In the morning, the girls decided to walk the 2 km to town (=shops) while the guys did a few jobs before a walk on the golf course – no-one was playing. We then took the boat up to the landing below the town at the agreed time but, no ladies. Just as well for mobile phones – they had missed the town completely and continued on to a massive pumping station another kilometre or so further upstream and as there was no friendly bank in that vicinity, we had to wait for them to walk back again. Underway at 11:15 am and then 3,000 rpm to get to Lock 11 for our *booked* 3:30 pm upstream 'slot'. However, at 3 pm, *PS Melbourne* rudely did a U-turn a little in front of us to take that spot. This is the first of the smaller upstream locks, built for the largest of steamers or barge *alone*, not steamer *and* smallish houseboat, so we pulled into the wharf below Old Mildura Homestead. The lockmaster *said* he'd do an immediate turnaround and we wouldn't need to wait long – but didn't anticipate the large houseboat coming downstream, which he decided to wait for and it was an hour and a half later before we cleared the lock ourselves. Lift was 2.5 m and flow 22,000 ML/day, the reduction mostly due to lost contributions from both the Darling and its Anabranche. Despite the reduced flow volume, the generally narrower and shallower river ensured that *current* remained just as strong. In view of the only nominal flushing at our prior pumpout, we decided to go again early at the Buronga WDS (public facilities are in NSW, not Vic) rather than wait a couple more days for the private (paying) marina one. The same parallel mooring as at Wentworth was required but this time the flush hose was of the fire reel type and would reach. Current was stronger than in the Darling but within engineer Mick's rope-leveraging skills to hold the bow.

On to Mildura wharf and dinner at Stefano de Pieri's (Gondola on the Murray) Brewery Bistro as, not having booked, we couldn't get into his degustation restaurant. The beer tasting platter was excellent, followed by a walk round the town mall and some essentials + bait shopping at Woolies later. The girls went up town again for 'proper' shopping in the morning while Mick & Ken caught carp off the back deck – best 13 and 8 lb respectively. The girls didn't get lost on this occasion and even returned almost on time. We were underway at 11:15 am yet again but not for long as we ducked under the high concrete George Chaffey Bridge and into *All Seasons* new Dockside Marina for fuel and water. It is very well set up with pontoon-side facilities and the quickest refuelling ever. We continued on to the surprise of NO HOUSEBOAT MOORING at the 'Port of Gol Gol' where we'd anticipated lunch at the yabbie farm. It turned out the farm was closed down anyway so we pulled in at the nearby patrons-only hotel mooring. Mick bought a 6-pack of 'lights' from the bar to legitimise our stay there for a back-deck BBQ lunch. Albeit, we pulled out earlier than planned to make more room for a big hire boat trying to get in – shades of Mannum where there often aren't enough moorings to cater for demand.

Then to Trentham Estate Winery on the NSW side for an hour's tasting before closing at 5 pm. A cheery South Aussie girl talked us through their substantial list and a mixed premium carton plus a couple of cartons of clearance quaffer were bought – perhaps I should have reminded Mick of the rule that no alcohol brought on board the boat may leave in its bottle.



Orlando

After overnighting at the winery mooring, we returned 5 km downstream to Bruce's Bend marina in the morning. All then travelled back to Wentworth to retrieve Mick's vehicle, followed by lunch at the Artback Cafe. Back in Mildura by 2:30 pm for a tour of the original (1891) Chaffey Bros' Psyche Bend (named after a paddlesteamer) steam pumping station. A retired engineer member of the Sunraysia Steam Preservation Society gave us the good oil (pun intended) on everything while being reminded that it isn't good PR to brag to downstream South Australians about the mind-boggling volumes of water pumped, even back then. I returned direct to Bruce's Bend via the 4WD Kings Billabong riverside track (with heaps of happy campers, particularly off-road vans initially) while the girls and Mick went shopping in Mildura, again! I then had a paddle around the marina lagoon and side creek, checking out the hulks of the *Reliance* and A2 barge. Several more carp were/had been caught both that evening and the previous one, so we had it steamed, smoked and curried.



Psyche Bend triple-expansion engine flanked by two coaxial, centrifugal pumps *either* side

Cathy & Mick headed off in the morning, soon after which I went to bed with another dose of the 'shivers'. I had also had an episode in the month at home and saw the quack about it but definitely not Ross River virus or apparently anything else river-related. I recovered quickly this time and, as the scheduled outboard motor servicing that day had been deferred to the following week, we upped stakes mid-afternoon and headed (by car) to Robinvale via the NSW side of the river. After staying overnight in a cabin at Euston Riverfront Caravan Park we proceeded back to Adelaide via Lock 15, Wemen, Boundary Bend, Tooleybuc, Nyah and Swan Hill. This included checking potential boat mooring/car parking sites and measuring bridge clearances above water to compare against that day's river heights, *Orlando's* vital statistics and, relevant river heights when/if we ultimately get there, to arrive home late on Sunday 27th.

Orlando

November 2012 – Bruce's Bend to Robinvale

231 km, avg 5.0 kph/2400 rpm, water 20→21° – 1,184 km total

After only a week at home we drove back up to Mildura on a stinking hot Sunday 4th. I cleaned out the boat's evaporative aircon pump strainers and reservoir first up to get that running efficiently and then topped up fuel with one jerry can, leaving the other in reserve. The outboards and genny had been serviced by the local Honda agent in our absence. At sparrow-fart next morning, I drove the truck to the public boat ramp car park adjacent to the Riverside Caravan Park office in Robinvale, returning by Zaffina's bus service – \$3.60 seniors' ticket for 90 km and then \$19 cab fare 9 km from Mildura TAFE back to Bruce's Bend by 8:30 am. We changed over a gas bottle even though not quite empty, as 45 kg exchange cylinders were *said* to be unavailable in Robinvale (not true) – and fitted a hand-tightening connector from Maxbilt in Adelaide, a big improvement over the spanner version.

We then commenced the first significant (6 day) stretch by ourselves. Flow and water level had been declining steadily (now 17,000 ML/day) and marina owner Wayne suggested that we might be back within a few days! However, advice from Lock 15 at Euston was that we should be OK above 10,000 ML/day and better sooner than later – before it does get down to that. Upstream from Gol Gol, there is a major directional change in the course of river from essentially easterly (over 500 km from Norwest Bend near Morgan) to south easterly for the next 800 km to Echuca – of course the river flows opposite to these directions. We continued past Red Cliffs to the NSW side of Bottle Bend in the Gol Gol State Forest Reserve. Mooring was on a recently flooded low bank, just upstream of a snaggy creek entrance and with campers across the *river* on the Victorian side and caravanners across the *creek* in NSW. We canoed the first 500 m of the creek, which had no flow and no yabbies but fishing from the back deck was OK with 1 catfish and 2 undersize *callop* (sorry, *yellow belly* in this country) all returned to the water, lots of shrimp and NO carp. In view of lack of otherwise edible river yield we had shrimps in the fried rice and next day as pizza topping.

From Bottle Bend to Forest Bend next day, passing the Karadoc mooring area with *PB Kulkyne* that we'd seen down at Wentworth, now at its home base – then to Karadoc Sandbar, both of which constitute potential mooring/crew changeover sites and a visit to Karadoc winery for the return trip? The last *All Season's* hire houseboat was moored (symbolically?) a few metres upstream of the 928 km marker, their designated hire limit. McFarlane's Reef a little beyond this is buoyed and was not a problem. However, it is the first of dozens of such rocky reefs over the next 350 km to the Wakool (pronounced war-cool) Junction and the *only* one that is identified with a navigation mark. And then the next 350 km to Torrumbarry Weir (Lock26) is snags and (very) hard clay bars instead – together with smaller rocky patches. Travel of this 700 km stretch (where thirteen i.e., half of the planned locks were never built) in anything more than a tinny, without local knowledge and/or Maureen's RMC would be impossible. This is reinforced by lockmasters and other river operators who refer to



RMC as 'the bible'.

Appropriately, Aggie selected horses for our two-person Melbourne Cup sweep as we passed Devil's Racecourse – she won, I got 2nd & 3rd, so fair.

Busboat at Karadoc

Orlando

I caught a 5 lb carp and 22 cm yella belly that night – released the latter after poorly removing a swallowed hook (mistake?) as it probably didn't survive. There weren't even shrimps in the adjacent stagnant creek. Again, we had campers opposite and they got wet whilst setting up but luckily the rain eased later and they were able to cook over an open fire.

Quite a few wild? goats were seen on the NSW bank next day. Mallee Cliffs rock shelf which RMC recorded as 1.5 m out of the water was not showing, giving a good indication of how much higher the level was than in February 2002. The Nangiloc moorings/boat ramp at 963 km had a permanent houseboat and paddleboat in residence with an extra small boat between, making it impossible to berth and elsewhere nearby was NBG due to thick small timber – for access to the Nangiloc tavern/store. There is good mooring further on at Police Bend (965 km) but too far to walk back to Nangiloc. We saw our first historic carved *miles from Albury* (796) tree on the opposite (north) bank. Added red paint gave it away and now we know what we are looking for, hopefully we'll spot a few more. We stopped mid-afternoon at 969 km for 10 min on one rope and the motors running, while I checked out the 'Big NSW Red Gum' supposedly one of, if not 'the' biggest anywhere. Buxton's Bend on the Victorian side yielded no fish that night. I installed a sunblind on the rear deck in the morning – now we just need pot plants, to look like a true live-aboard.

Then the most challenging navigational day yet, including our first bottom hit approaching the third Graces Bend reef (981 km) where RMC shows 1 m depth and we thus expected about 2.5 m. It was just a short, sharp thud so probably a log (or clay?) but certainly not sand or rock. A newly fallen tree on the point opposite Colignan and immediately above McGrath's Island will be tricky to get round and then turn sharply right if the current is strong when coming back downstream. There is no store or services at Colignan anymore. I opted for the 'deep' route between the Adelaide Bend/Tapaulin Cutting snags and it was OK. We had contemplated mooring overnight at the symbolic 1,000 km mark just before the cutting – it looked like a nice beach at first but was actually soft mud so we went ~1 km further, on the Victorian side. From here down to Wemen and back up to Euston is known as 90-mile bend (RMC). I did a little painting that evening and the next, with final coats on the new gate and forrard roof facia. There was no phone or internet service and we were to stay out of contact for another night (and most of the next day) although continuing perfect TV reception through a small SD set top box! Lots of shrimps and good bites but only one yabby-bait sized carp.

Another *interesting* day with rocky reefs and the very snaggy Retail Cutting but no dramas. Each of the two big cuttings on successive days save about 8 km compared to the kilometre marks, which go around the now non-navigable longer horseshoes. We moored on the Victorian side, 1.5 km above Ki Bend. In 2002, RMC noted that many of the rocky reefs had small trees growing. These are a god-



send where the reefs are now just under-water, showing as a fence of dead sticks that effectively map the reef and we hope there is one right on the end – but of course there usually isn't.

A 'stick-mapped' underwater rock reef – but where is its right-hand limit?

Orlando

Five people in three kayaks were heading downstream just as we were about to leave next morning – doing the full bit from Corryong to the Mouth. The day produced our second bottom bump, which actually was a fairly rapid scuffing grind to a halt just before the 1056 km mark, coming into Slab Hut Reach. I was trying to keep left of the mapped underwater rocks at this point and ran aground on a NSW side sandbar just downstream of them – at first fearing it was ‘the rocks’, I tried a little further left but that didn’t work so tried a little right and that didn’t work either. We then became aware of a bunch of fishermen (boats on trailers behind 4WDs) on the Victorian bank waving us out toward mid-river, so responded accordingly and inched forward. I finally spotted two little clumps of sticks, passed safely between them and honked recognition to the no-doubt bemused onlookers. Just then, a couple of small craft whistled past downstream at a great rate of knots between us and the NSW bank – local knowledge and minimal draft are a great thing!

Then on to the Victorian hamlet of Wemen where we had arranged to pick up our next crew. Banks are high, steep and snaggy here and the only place we could get in was straddling the narrow public boat ramp, cut down through the clay bank. I walked to the shop just in time to catch it before early Saturday afternoon closing. Phone pre-arranged parking for John’s car was confirmed and I sat out front to wait but noticed a vehicle towing a boat heading for the ramp, so had to go back and move *Orlando*. I then discovered what loose rocks feel like under the flat-bottomed pontoons, as we shifted a couple of boat-widths sideways and ‘roller-skated’ back. Julie & Aggie’s cousin John duly arrived, unloaded and we took their vehicle up to the shop but couldn’t get around the back as the driveway was blocked by a bloke loading portable dunnies on to a trailer with a tractor. We gave him a hand and he turned out to be the lockmaster from Euston, on his day off. I expressed some doubt that we would make it that far in view of our increasing incidents and the river continuing to fall but was re-assured flow would be maintained around 12,000 ML/d over the next few days.

We moored for the night just across the river on the NSW side. After navigating several rock bars in the morning, managing not to hit any, we arrived at one of the ‘big daddies’ – at least to us because it was the first one that we could actually see. Just past Gell’s or Danger Island (1078 km) and in front of *Tammit* Station, a massive rock reef extends diagonally $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way across from the north-eastern bank, up to 1 m out of the water at this river height. It channels the flow through a narrow gap at great speed and there is also a freshly fallen tree (not in the photo) coming off the other bank, blocking part of the available space. On approach, I was not close enough to the Vic side and turned a bit right at the last minute. She then wouldn’t come back quickly enough in the current, so had to do the briefest possible reverse on opposite lock, before powering forward again to make it through, covering the swim deck in leaves and light twigs as our swinging stern just clipped the fallen tree.



Google Earth view of Danger Island & exposed rock reef at low water – upstream to right

Orlando

I was amused a couple of days later when someone said 'you can almost touch the Victorian bank going though there' – well we did, if you count that tree as Victoria. Just around the corner are a bunch more invisible underwater rocks but no nasty current. And then about 2 km further on, we ran aground on sand, trying to keep too far away from rocks 0.5 m underwater in midstream but visible as sticks. Enough excitement for one day so we moored on the NSW side just past Carina Bend at 2 pm to do a bit of fishing (and drinking). Was good with carp, a couple of keeper yellows and several silver perch, including two decent sized ones, which we reluctantly returned to the river.

On to Narrow Bend the next day. There were the now routine rocks every-which-way but nothing too dramatic. Even so, conservatism (cowardice?) showed yet again when I put the port pontoon on a sandbar just past 1102 km, giving a wide berth to rocks which should have been 3 m underwater – and therefore no threat. Going upstream this isn't a problem but backing off sandbars against the current coming downstream, may not be that easy – hopefully forewarned is forearmed and my now rather dog-eared RMC has a little red circle recording each misdemeanour site. I don't understand why nobody wants to share the driving anymore? Another good evening's fishing. It was a magical spot on a little beach with magnificent fringing red gums and adjacent to a fast flowing, unnavigable cutting. Aggie and I canoed about 1 km round the bend in the main river against the current but with a tail wind initially. A real struggle when we came back into the wind *and* current on the other side but then an exhilarating 'free ride' back through the fast flowing cutting to finish.



John's Silver perch (returned to water)

It was a late start next day to be at the lock at 1:30 pm with another fully concealed reef (no sticks) opposite the other end of the cutting but at least its indicative position is reasonably defined by the cutting. Lock 15, the last to be completed (in 1937) was interesting with a freshly fallen tree partially obscuring the approach, only one gate opening at a time to much creaking and, worryingly cracked chamber linings, with only one tether rope available. However, it was our friendly lockmaster, Dean from Wemen – we would not have made it here without his encouragement. Lunch was had underway before docking at the Euston waste disposal station, 5 km further on. We were able to pull in side-on but then, all hooked up only to find that the pump start button is inside a locked cabinet! I was about to ring Dean for advice when Aggie said, 'I'll just walk up to the club' being the Euston Club Resort that we are right in front of, where the receptionist produced the key saying 'no need for a sign, all the *locals* know we hold it'. And then the last 2 km, under the new high concrete bridge to Robinvale.



Orlando

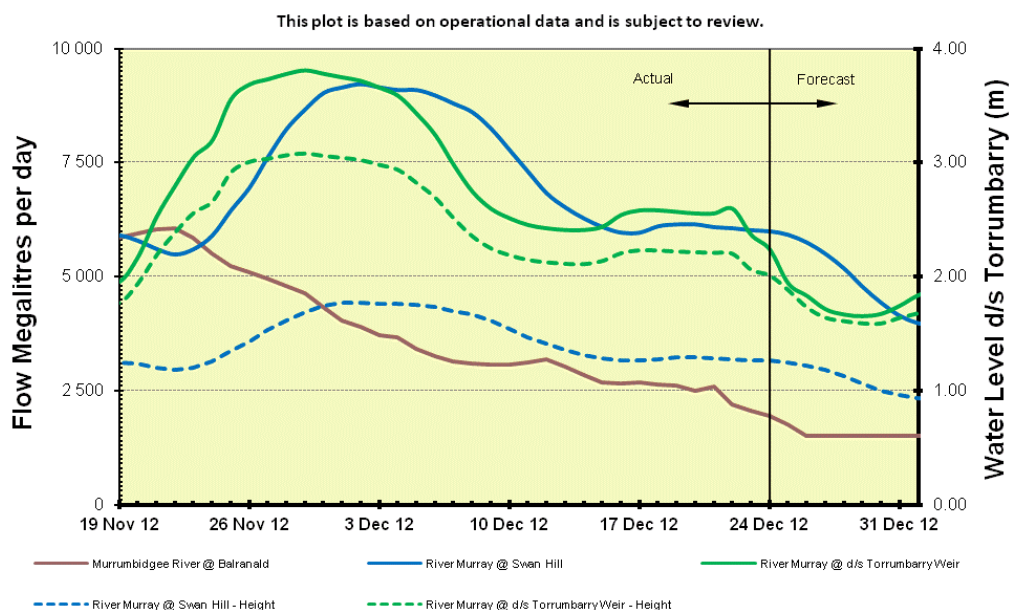
We moored with Geoff and Jenny at the Riverside Caravan Park as previously arranged, next to *Exquisite*, the only houseboat for mobile hire in the 800 km of river between Mildura and Echuca – and understandably so, in a restricted safe zone above Euston Weir. Refuelling by jerry cans (13 over 3 trips) next morning emphasised the lack of houseboating infrastructure in the region. A bunch of school kayakers and their instructors set off downstream to Wemen and we wished them luck. I ferried Julie and John back to their car at Wemen – the almond orchards and processing plant here dwarf the Renmark one. And apparently there are several more between here and Boundary Bend, all recently sold to Singaporean interests. Aggie & I closed up the boat after lunch (Wednesday 14th) and headed north by 4WD for an overnight station stay at ‘Turlee’ with visits to Mungo National Park both at sunset that evening and all of the next morning. The roads were pretty dreadful, even for an old mineral explorer and disappointing that there are no guided tours available on weekdays but interesting and worth the experience. Then out to the (Darling) River Road and on via Pooncarie and Menindie to Broken Hill for Dot Higgs 90th birthday party, before return to Adelaide on Saturday 17th.

December 2012 – Robinvale to Swan Hill

273 km, avg 4.9 kph/2350 rpm, water 26→21° – 1,457 km total

With rapidly falling flows and river level it appeared that we might have to remain at Robinvale for some time. However, MDBA advised an environmental release from Lake Eildon down the Goulburn River to Echuca, providing a 10-day pulse of higher water, which we would be able to ‘ride’ to Swan Hill in early December. Advice was that we needed a minimum flow of about 6,000 ML/day (then minus the Wakool & Murrumbidgee inputs) over Torrumbarry Weir for resultant 1.5 m river height at Swan Hill 5 days later, as illustrated in the MDBA plot below. Thus, after two weeks at home, we returned on Thursday 29th November. It was another real scorcher in the mid-40s but at least the truck aircon had been re-gassed to make it almost comfortable. Continuing from a social function at Blanchetown the previous night, we travelled via the Sturt Highway for possibly the last time, with a lunch stop at Lake Cullulleraine and afternoon food shopping in Robinvale – there is even a Chinese grocery here. Leaving the truck in the boat ramp car park as previously, we got underway by 8:30 next morning as our mooring/access was needed for up to a hundred, by invitation-only, ‘Cod on a Rod’ competition fishers and their craft, starting with next day’s Dec 1st Murray Cod season-opening.

Torrumbarry Weir flow and water level as at 24-Dec-2012



Orlando

Again, just the two of us for the first stretch. After only 1 km is Bumbang Island, which adds 12 km if you go the long, safe way round. Having sought advice from several quarters and looked at it from the land, we (I, against divorce threats) took the shorter route through the cutting over a relatively shallow clay bar alongside snaggy rapids, keeping within 20 m of the south bank as advised and the sounder reported depths of mostly 2 m+. After that, it was an uneventful 30 km upstream in wide, deep, snag and rock-free water, within the influence of Euston Weir. We moored at 1,166 km on the NSW side, with a few sheep amongst the timber and immediately before a small unnamed (now Aggie's) cutting. We canoed though the cutting against strong current and then coasted back 2.5 km round the main channel, assisted by weak ~1 kph flow. A swan with an injured right wing skidded left every time it attempted to take off and then there were lots of flocking pale brown birds that Aggie's bird book later identified as Nankeen night herons.

Having started early the first day, saved the 12 km Bumbang Island circuit and hearing that our next crew were to arrive at Boundary Bend on the Sunday night rather than Monday mid-day, we decided to try to keep up 30 (rather than normal 25) km/day average to also arrive on the Sunday evening. Our injured lone swan had made it 4 km upstream (paddling – it still could not get airborne) when we again passed it next morning. An easy start but then the benign river was over, with Cod's Head Reef and Boundary Rocks in quick succession from 1,187 km. Fishermen had been out in force since first thing this morning (Dec 1st) and a bunch were camped on the point opposite Boundary Rocks with tinnies, half cabs and pontoon boats. We overnighted at Box Flat on the Victorian side just a little further on than planned, as the initial target spot was also occupied by fishers/campers.

More excitement next day with Victoria Reef, a bar across the fell river width at 1215.5km but deep enough to nervously pass over and then another of the 'big daddies', Tala Rocks at 1217 km. This was just underwater, its presence revealed by sticks, a real torrent to push through on the right side and then immediately into a 170° right-hander, the bow taking much too long for comfort, to come around. Then plain sailing to Boundary Bend, a km before which a bloke in a tinny warned us of the mid-river underwater sandbar and then escorted us to 'town'. His name was 'Rattler', I think, and he lives aboard a houseboat that was moored opposite the sandbar. He'd had to move there during recent high water from his registered mooring, which he now kindly guided us into for the night. It was right in 'the' Bend below a totem pole depicting legendary paddleboat skipper, Captain Arch Conner of this locale. This was much better than the adjacent rocky boat ramp area I'd anticipated using and of course, that was pretty busy on this balmy first Sunday arvo of the cod season. A little tricky mooring though, as close-in, there's an eddy (locals call it a backwater) reversing the current.



From our back deck at Boundary Bend

Orlando

Soon after, Kaye & Peter arrived from Cowra NSW (on the Lachlan) and immediately we had them unloaded, Pete and I took off in his vehicle to retrieve my truck from Robinvale. The fishing competition had finished with everything *but* cod caught. Individual takeaways from the Boundary Bend roadhouse for the evening meal varied from fish and chips to lamb yiros, consumed in idyllic conditions with added wine – see back deck photo. It seemed like a shore-based whirring pump was going to be an annoyance overnight but just on dusk someone came to turn it off, which was great.

We scored two small yabbies in the morning – finally! Pete & I ferried my vehicle forward to Murray Downs marina across the river from Swan Hill and got back to be underway after an early lunch. The eddy required reversing out *upstream* and then doing a 180°. Boundary Bend to Passage Camp was the most difficult section yet, with six lots of concealed rocks in 4 km but incident free – apart from the shot nerves. We moored immediately upstream of the Murrumbidgee junction on the NSW side with plenty of campers a bit further on at the first beach opposite in Victoria. One more small yabby.

In the morning, Aggie & I canoed half a kilometre up the 'Bidgee, which hardly seemed more than a large snaggy creek and, coming back down I recited the passage from Sturt's 'discovery' journal – 'At 3pm Hopkinson called out that we were approaching a junction and in less than a minute afterwards we were hurried into a broad and noble river'. We then crossed to the Victorian bank for a photo vantage.



Orlando at the Murrumbidgee junction

Next day was incident-free, although at 1 pm, we passed fast catamaran *Spirit II* with a good number of passengers aboard coming downstream (Tooleybuc to Boundary Bend?) at great pace, right on the bend below 1,260 km – quite dangerous really, eliciting a crash to reverse from me with both vessels necessarily mid-river in this snaggy and rocky section. We moored up against saplings at the water's edge on the NSW side just as the farmer passed by, grading his track along the (high) bank. The girls went walking and met the farmer's wife who identified the property as 'Junction Park' and gave the OK for us to stay overnight as long as we had no pets – presumably spouses didn't count. It was the most productive callop fishing yet with three 40 cm keepers. Passing fishermen said they were also getting yellows but no cod.

Orlando

Late next morning at 1,280 km, I was delighted to chat briefly to small houseboat *Avondale* out of Mannum, moored on the Vic bank. The couple said they were doing alternate stints with another couple. They had turned back only a short distance ahead at 1,302 km, just before the infamous Bitch and Pups 'rapids' on advice that their vessel was *too wide* and underpowered to negotiate it. I was confident we had the engine power *but*, we were half as wide again – I didn't share this 'intelligence' with my companions at the time. We stopped for lunch soon after on the sandy point between the Wakool and Murray Rivers at their junction. There were campers on the Victorian bank and several tinnies headed up the Wakool during our short stay. Easy to see how both Cadell and Randell mistakenly continued up the Wakool during the first pioneering paddlesteamer race. Even after mention of that history, my mutinous crew reckoned I was headed the wrong way after lunch – that's left in the following picture. The Murray is certainly the lesser looking of the two rivers at this point, appearing to be a side tributary, with a recent snag partially obscuring its 'mouth' whereas the open Wakool, streams in from straight ahead. This is because this 'Little River' section of the Murray is in fact the historic, smaller Goulburn River channel, as further discussed in the map/discussion/video link on the Cadell Fault on p.38.



Wakool Junction

Later that afternoon, Kaye spotted the 566-mile tree on the Victorian side. We moored 1 km above Gundagai Bend on a small NSW side sand bank opposite an underwater rock shelf. Several carp and one put-back callop were caught.

Pete and I lowered the canopy, all antennae and flags before departure next morning in case of overhangs at the upcoming Bitch & Pups. Two mild mid-river bottom hits in quick succession at 1,296.5 km are assumed to have been an unmarked snag. We saw a couple of joe blakes, both swimming to the NSW bank, first a 2 m black (no red belly?) and then a half metre brown a few km further on – the only ones so far. The much-hyped 'B&P' turned out OK both depth & width-wise. However, again being overly cautious (too far left), I scraped the outer side of the port pontoon against a snag at 1,304 and we did need 2,900 rpm to counter current at the top end of the stretch. So, we had beaten the 'Bitch' but thereafter followed a demanding afternoon, dodging snags all the way to Tooleybuc. A local bloke riding a push bike, who stopped to give us a hand to moor (just below the boat ramp) said that he hadn't seen a boat this big up here for years – we know why! We enjoyed a short walk to the Sporting Club for evening drinks, where I was surprised to hear the barman say that section of the river had been entirely carp-free before the recent floods. Not any more though, as we headed back to the boat for the same fishing score as the prior night.

Orlando

First up next morning we had a good 2 m of clearance under the Tooleybuc Bridge. When pulling in for lunch just before Murphy's Cutting, I approached the right bank fast at an acute angle due to the very strong current and suffered our strongest hit yet under the starboard pontoon – but bounced over it, presumably



a log. I went for a walk to look at the very snaggy cutting and was surprised to see how close we were to developed vineyards and the highway, none of which are visible from the water. In view of our arrival problem, we made sure the boat was perpendicular to the bank and reversed out quickly (so as not to drift sideways), without incident. The cutting is not navigable and thus the passage remains around Murphy's Island but, with severely reduced flow is becoming quite shallow and snagged. At about 1332.5 km recent (dead leaf) snags from each side have only a narrow dog-legged, pathway between them. *Orlando* simply cannot turn 90 deg in a boat-width and we clipped some light higher stuff along the starboard side but the canopy was still down and the only casualty was a cod lure, plucked from a line left on a rod-holder at the back. Shortly afterward, a lady came down to say hello as we passed Tooley Landing with its old timber wagon and she mentioned that this had been a stopover point in the paddleboat days. We saw no tinnies all day and only carp were caught that evening at 1,346 km on the Victorian bank, along a rather nondescript stretch with Green Swamp behind it.

Late next morning we arrived at the Nyah Bridge and although calculations based on the morning's river level at Swan Hill suggested that we should be OK to clear it, there is no height gauge so we stopped to check. I walked up to dangle an 8 m steel tape down from the lift span and, with the kind assistance of a ski boat to hold the bottom in the breezy conditions, confirmed that we had 0.5 m to spare. Although the bridge is liftable it didn't fit our timing with 24 hr notice required and no weekend (it was Saturday) operation. Once past the bridge, I phoned ahead to the Speewa Ferry within the recommended time slot but was repeatedly answered by a fax squeal, so pushed on. We arrived at the ferry at 3:15 pm and stopped to enquire about cable clearance but the operator was new and had no idea. So we waited about 15 minutes for the boss to turn up, during which time there was a surprising amount of road traffic, with the ferry going back and forth a number of times. Boss reckoned we *should* be OK and to take it quietly down the centre with the ferry on the NSW bank. That we did and just scraped the rear quarter of the port pontoon on the second cable – quickly lifting the motors a bit. The river is very narrow here, with the small (2 car) ferry taking up perhaps 20% of the width and we thus should probably have been a bit further right but *ce la vie* and no damage to either of us. We moored 2 km further on to just before the Little Murray junction. It had been a very hot day, so everyone went for a dip and while in the water I did a foot-feel inspection of the pontoons. There was only a small crease about a third the way along the starboard one, due to the previous day's lunchtime bingle. Some local lads out for an evening's fishing stopped for a chat and were incredulous to hear where we had come from. They went up the main channel and back in their speedboat but like us, got only carp and said that they knew of no cod caught since the big 'blackwater' event last March.

Orlando

We continued via the Little Murray shortcut which is the normal navigational channel and about 6 km shorter than the 'main' river that the lads had told us the previous evening would be too shallow for us anyway. I had already phoned the Beveridge Island punt (private ferry) owner who said his cables were lowered so we would have no problem but following the previous day's experience, I remained a little sceptical. No-one was present as we passed and the area was a disgrace, with the half sunken punt on the southern bank (both sides are Victoria), cables still across the river and the surrounds looking like a wrecker's yard but we did make it through without incident – very slowly. A lunch stop at 1,402 km and then on toward Swan Hill. Following a number of zigzags back and forth between clay bars there is a short wide reach, which has no deep channel. Moving slowly, we kept close to the west (right) bank as indicated in RMC but ran aground several times – softly on sand so no problem, just kept backing off and going a bit more left each time till we got through. Past the abattoir with a little more slalomming and then, within sight of the Swan Hill Bridge was a massive unmarked red gum root /base sitting high out of the water in the middle of the river, reportedly a product of the recent floods.



Round the super-snag, then under the bridge without even needing to look at height, although it's a bit narrow with willows on the approach. There were quite a few people and boats on the other side, in particular a small paddleboat *Iron Dry* laden with Sunday afternoon passengers, just where I wanted to go. Once he pulled into the town park bank on our right, we zig-zagged across the river and back as per RMC and then down the right side of Goat Island. It was quite disconcerting to have kids wading across the river in front of us! Just at the end of the island we came to an abrupt stop with the left bow markedly elevated. After backing off, we went slightly right and no probs, on past the Marraboor River mouth to our right. Some signage here would help. I kept left because 'that's what Maureen says' but it would have been so easy to succumb to crew pressure and go the obvious way to the right. While all this was going on, Gary our upcoming host at the NSW side marina just ahead spoke with Aggie on the phone. He wanted to talk to me but I was pre-occupied and having none of it. Turns out that Gary was following in that paddleboat and they bumped the same clay bar, which I'd thought was a log – later to hear that it is gleefully known as 'the crocodile' providing regular entertainment at the adjacent caravan park. We received riverside mooring instructions for the night as Gary still had to make room for us in his marina (didn't think we'd make it?) and not to go on and pumpout as the wind was too strong.

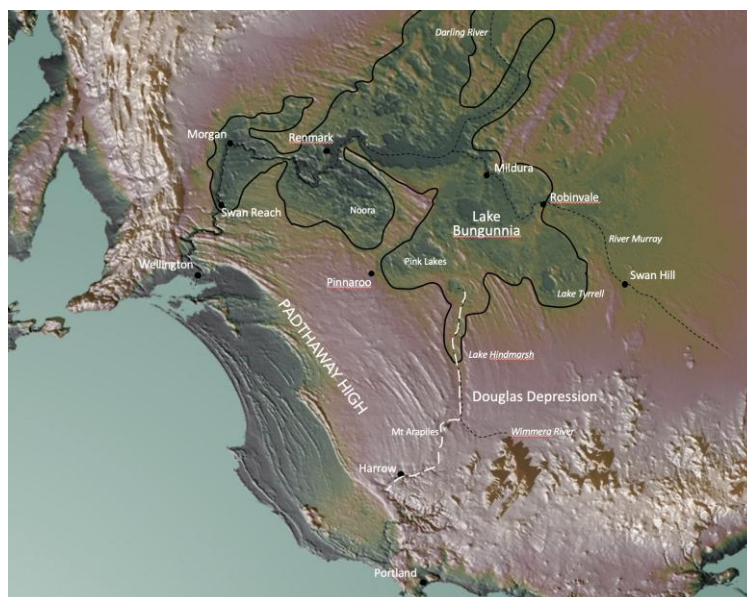
Orlando

Next morning, we headed 1.5 km upstream to the pumpout, which is only marked as a wharf in RMC. Side-on mooring is possible although tight for us and tricky in the strong current. Not being a floating facility, it was an experience to have the equipment 2 m overhead but suction was sufficient and it all worked. We returned to refuel with 14 jerry cans and a new jiggle syphon hose – 3 trips to town in the truck after changing a flat tyre. We then moved into the marina and re-erected the canopy, installing new larger coach bolts on the pivot plates which anchor into fibreglass-coated ply, as some of them had stripped. Then a quick lunch before taking Kaye and Pete back to their vehicle at Boundary Bend and returning to Adelaide via Hattah and Ouyen on Monday 10th December – in time to leave for New Zealand on the 13th, to spend Christmas with our son and Kiwi partner.

Multiple new irrigation pump installations (up to 13 parallel pumps with floating pickups) had been evident on the Victorian side since Mildura but tapered off after the Wakool junction. Above this they are largely replaced by much less water-efficient but cheaper gravity driven systems, in particular the 7,000 ML/day National Channel, which delivers water more than 100 km downstream from Torrumbarry through Cohuna to the Kerang district in massive, unlined, open channels. Apparently, that is where all the yabbies are as well!



At the macro scale, this coincides with the upstream limit of the ancient mega Lake Bungunnia that stretched from Nildottie in South Australia between 3 & 1 million years ago – created when uplift of the Padthaway High, to the west of Victoria's Grampians, blocked the river's path to its former outlet near Portland, via the now Lowan Salt Valley & largely infilled Douglas Depression (eassoc.com.au).



January & February 2013 – No progress

Water 22° – 1465 km total

We returned from NZ for New Year, intending to head back to the river on the 4th as Aggie had January free but it was not to be. Lockmaster Terry at Torrumbarry Weir advised that although we might get there, they could not put us through the lock at flows below about 7,000 ML/day due to a 'lip' at the bottom. Flow of around 5,000 ML/day was unlikely to rise sufficiently over the peak summer irrigation period, so no-go *for the foreseeable future* – until winter rain or an environmental release. Aggie and I did a run to Swan Hill from Jan 29 - Feb 3 for maintenance and reconnaissance. At a little over 500 km it was now a 6.5 hr road trip each way. Water level had dropped half a metre over our 7-week absence but ropes had been slackened accordingly and fenders moved to the front, now that previously submerged timber edging was exposed around the marina. Spiders/webs were the worst ever experienced and mud larks (Murray magpies) and native water rats (*hydromus chrysogaster*) had made a mess at the back, so many hours of cleaning but otherwise OK. Plenty of shrimps and one small (bait) carp were caught. I made some mods to the stern/anchor lights and phone antenna mount, installed a new inside shelf, re-glued the steering wheel which was becoming rickety and topped up steering hydraulic fluid – a missed warning of a problem to come. We met a few of our neighbours and checked out some of their vessels. Small pontoon boats and paddleboats dominate here, although there are a few private houseboats and a single commercial one for static hire only. A large private paddleboat *Temeraire* was dry-docked in the levee-ed off end of the marina, for rudder replacement.

We road reconnoitred as far as Echuca, travelling up the NSW side with some dirt roads. There was much irrigated dairy pasture and rice paddies, with more herons and egrets than on the river itself. First stop was at Gonn Crossing Bridge, the earliest all-steel lift-span bridge, built on the Murray in 1928. We measured its clearance, which is similar to Nyah Bridge and thus, unless the river rises very significantly, we will be able to pass under without it being lifted – with our bimini down which is advisable anyway in view of overhangs in this narrow, snaggy part of the river. Then through Murrabit village (Victoria) and, after a sandwich lunch riverside, on to Barham and Koondrook where we did the interesting self-guided tour of Arbuthnot's red gum sawmill. On to Torrumbarry via Cohuna, with ever increasing size and number of irrigation channels but surprisingly little impression of water use. The area is now mostly dairy with only



Orlando

remnants of citrus – pasture using lots of water without the visual impact of orchards.

We met lockmaster Terry at Torrumbarry and checked out the facility. It has very impressive surrounds and an interpretive centre plus the weir itself, which was rebuilt in 1997, with six hydraulically operated radial gates replacing the old trestle style, as still at Mildura. The lock is unique in having a raiseable vehicular bridge across it – but only for operational rather than public use. The ‘lip’ on the lock is a concrete approach apron about 1.6 m above river base below the weir. Twenty cormorants sitting around the entrance to the fish ladder clearly indicates that they have learned what happens here.



Fish Ladder



Radial Gates

We made a brief stop at the historic Echuca port precinct, to which access was severely restricted for reconstruction work. Then across the (high) bridge to Moama and 18 km back downstream on the NSW side to Deep Creek Marina. Moorings here are privately owned but we may be able to sub-lease one for a short time, depending on when we get there. As the marina hotel does not provide accommodation, we drove back to Swan Hill, arriving at 9 pm. On the way near Bunnaloo, the road traverses Green Gully, the now dry course of the Murray before it was diverted by the Cadell Fault (see p. 38) between Echuca and Deniliquin. Further on, at a couple of crossings of the Wakool River it was much too snaggy for even a canoe to negotiate.

March & April 2013 – No progress

Water 15° – 1465 km total

I phoned MDBA River Operations in Canberra in response to forecast rising flows/level below Torrumbarry in the last week of February, due to a small environmental release down the Goulburn River but was categorically advised that they would *not allow* flow to exceed 6,000ML/day (our threshold for passage being 7,000). But then it rained and, on March 5th, flow touched 8,000 with Torrumbarry Weir confirming they *could* have put us through ‘if we were there’ but it was only a four day window and we’d missed it! There was no chance of going anywhere but we headed back to Swan Hill via Ouyen and Sea Lake, on Friday April 12th, just to check on the boat and carry out the inevitable cleaning/maintenance – 10 weeks is the longest it has been unoccupied in its 10-year life.

Spiders were tolerable, there was no mud and camphor packs seemed to have kept water rats out of the motor pod this time but bird crap on the swim deck was gross – gernied it off, re-stained the timber and also did some touch up painting round the eaves and top rails. The telly which we hadn’t used since before Boundary Bend also got re-tuned to local stations. The pontoons were touching bottom at the front and (when down) the swim ladder drew 75mm of soft mud at the stern, indicating

Orlando

750-800 mm depth. Unfortunately, we'd missed Maureen & Barry Wright who had passed through Swan Hill the prior Sunday, mapping downstream for the 8th edition of River Murray Charts.

Temeraire was still dry-docked and now being re-painted. A Monday arvo cruise to town and back with Ted & his son Andrew on *Iron Dry* was educational – cutting a channel through the partially sloughed-in marina entrance with the paddles and then, my first experience driving a paddleboat with a 7-speed plus reverse, in-line gearbox and a wheel nearly as tall as myself. Over the four days there were plenty of shrimp, and a few small bait carp, yielding 1 yabby. For dinner on Tuesday evening, Trevor from neighbouring local houseboat *KRML* kindly supplied us with a freshly caught yella from the other side of the river just outside the marina. We headed home on Wednesday 17th via Piangil, checking out Australia's first rice growing site, Buller's (fortifieds) and Andrew Peace Wines and then via Ouyen, Pinnaroo, Loxton to Swan Reach for an HHA monthly meeting.

May & June 2013 – No progress

Water 9→8° – 1465 km total

I again phoned MDBA River Ops, in response to rain and rising flow in early June. However, I was advised that a previously planned environmental release had been cancelled so as not to disrupt weir/lock works at Euston and Mildura and flows/levels below Torrumbarry would not rise much above 5,000 ML/d – 2 m. This time they were almost spot on, peaking at 5,670/2.01 m on June 16th. We headed back to Swan Hill via Ouyen, Manangatang and Chinkapook, on Saturday June 15th, to again check the boat and do cleaning/maintenance. All was OK except for a malfunctioning smoke alarm and water leak on to the lounge carpet from round the aircon register – fixed both. Water level was about 0.5 m higher than two months prior. It was too cold even for shrimp and only one carp was caught. We did a 10 km upstream run on the diesel-powered paddleboat *Black Shag* with new owners Brian and Heather and discussed a potential 'flotilla' to go to Echuca when water level permits. *Black Shag* plans to relocate there and Trevor & Carmel would like to do the return trip in 14 x 6 m houseboat *KRML*. Ted & Yvonne of PB *Iron Dry* are also possible participants. We headed home on Wednesday 19th via Lameroo and Karoonda, to Swan Reach for an HHA SGM.

Orlando



Orlando at Murray Downs Marina near Swan Hill – home for nearly 8 months

July 2013 – Swan Hill to Deep Creek

247 km, avg 6.4 kph/3000 rpm, water 8→9° – 1,705 km total

Good mid-July rains finally did the trick, with a peak flow of 32,000 ML/day down the Ovens River into Lake Mulwala on July 22, which the MDBA *cannot* stop. This translated into a peak of 29,000 ML/day over Yarrowonga Weir five days later and 9,500 over Torrumbarry a week after that. Diversion into the Edward River (Barmah Choke by-pass), National Channel and environmental water to the Perricoota Forest accounted for most of the difference. River Operations advised that we could not depend on flow above 7,000 ML/day at Torrumbarry beyond August 10 and, in view of Aggie's August 7 commitments we headed to Swan Hill on Friday 26th July. We were unable to get underway as hoped on the Saturday as the water had not yet reached there and the marina entrance was significantly silted. From the canoe, we measured entrance depth at 800 mm in the centre but rapidly shallowing to ~600 at pontoon width & then less. We cooled our heels for a couple of days with gas cylinder exchange, bimini lowering again in anticipation of overhangs and ferrying the truck forward to Deep Creek Marina, above Torrumbarry. Final starters around midday on Monday were *Black Shag* and *Orlando*, with Ted from *Iron Dry* and white terrier Mack, along as crew on the *Shag*. Unfortunately, the timing just didn't work for *KRML*.

Following a sleepless night for Aggie, stressing over our marina exit, it was achieved without incident – just a few extra revs to push past the very soft bounding silt edges. Ted joined us for the first 1.5 km to assist at the pumpout station. Shallow water meant we couldn't pull in close enough to get ashore to access hoses but Brian moored *Shag* a little upstream and walked back to attend to that. Despite 3,000 rpm, compared to our usual 2,500 we couldn't keep up with *Shag* for the rest of the day and moored an hour after them, having done an average day's distance in the afternoon. They had not left us any approach space against a strong current and protruding scrub demolished an old (original) metal flyscreen on the kitchen window.

Orlando



Chasing the *Shag*

Next day *Black Shag* throttled back a little and we just kept up at 3,000 rpm but it was a long (8 hr) day without a lunch stop, to achieve 49 km against current in snaggy conditions. The 1474 km mark which RMC shows as missing was visible but on the ground. We made it to the boat ramp just below Gonn Crossing Bridge and this time the *Shag* let us take the good mooring spot while they battled the bush. I learned a new trick of tying a spare rope from the front rail up to a tree directly in front as a handrail alongside the gangplank to get up the steep bank. We met local schoolteacher Neil who was out walking his dog and after dark, Ted came off second best inadvertently trying to move a very solid tree stump with his shin but nurse Aggie patched him up OK.

Next morning, I measured bridge clearance at 4.6 m which was sufficient for us but nevertheless, we followed the 5.5 m high *Shag* through when it was raised as booked by them at 9:15 am. It became narrower and snaggy after the Little Murray (another one) junction at 1488.5 km. Ted and Brian pruned a Campbell Island (NSW) side recent overhang with a saw at 1490.25 and we experienced a couple of hits on underwater snags before lunch at 1503.5. A NSW fisheries patrol boat passed in both directions without bothering us. *Black Shag* with only 500 mm draw cleared a very large submerged springy log at 1504 km. However, with simply nowhere else to go, both our pontoons dragged over it, squealing loudly for their full length. I tried partially raising the motors so as not to catch them as we dropped off the log on the far side but then there was insufficient power, so put them back down and pushed with fingers crossed – luckily being on slight diagonal we came off, one pontoon at a time without hooking anything. Mooring that evening was just below Barham Bridge on the Koondrook (Vic) township side. Again, it had been 3,000 rpm all day to match the *Shag's* pace but only 38 km due to current, late start for the bridge and a lunch stop. Ted, Aggie and I dined at the Barham Club that evening, Brian and Heather declining because of Mack.

Orlando



Gonn Crossing (all steel) Bridge

Barham Bridge clearance was 4.9 m and we led the *Shag* through at 9:30 am to an audience of more than 100 happy snappers on the banks. Yvonne arrived by car to take Ted home from the Five Sleeper Track boat ramp (1552 km) and we all had afternoon tea on the back deck of *Black Shag*.



Spotting a characteristic white Murray Crayfish claw amongst old fireplace ashes when mooring that evening, I put out a hoop net and within an hour had one. It was the first we'd ever seen, with classic white claws and tail spikes but only 8 cm carapace (legal 10-12) so let it go – the claw in the ashes was no bigger! The season for these is opposite to that for yabbies – i.e. winter rather than summer.

Iconic Murray Cray (released) & leather gloved finger

Next day was another long but relatively uneventful one at slightly reduced revs (2,900) for 38 km, successfully avoiding underwater rocks first thing. Rapidly falling water (~400 mm) evident as a 'tide mark' on the banks suggested that we were not going to make it through Torrumbarry. We dined aboard the *Shag* that evening. There was a mild rise in water overnight, then strongly through the morning to have 1 m over the Torrumbarry 'sill' or 250 mm clearance for us at 1:30 pm. Both vessels were put through the lock together for 5 m lift, flow 7,800 ML/d and Alan (*River Folk* carp catcher) operating. We moored just above the lock at 2:30 pm and shortly after the owners of Echuca based *PB Billy Tea* arrived by car to visit *Black Shag*. Later, Heather, Brian (& Mack) came over for dinner.



Coming in to join the *Shag* in Torrumbarry Lock – it's *big* & note the raised road bridge

When our steering died at mid-morning next day, I just managed to get into the Victorian bank a little before the National Channel headworks and top up (essentially empty) hydraulic fluid to temporarily remedy the situation. Luckily this had happened in a low-current environment above the weir and it wasn't windy either. We didn't see *Black Shag* again after that despite 3,500 rpm trying to catch up – they continued on to meet *Billy Tea* closer to Echuca. We moored at Deep Creek at 1:30 pm between local houseboats *Toodle Pips* and *Baldrick's Barge*. A borrowed ladder was needed to connect to power on poles above flood level. Later in the bar, publican Brod introduced us to the locals with the story of our 7+ month wait in Swan Hill. This was interrupted by NSW Maritime officer Big Steve (*River Folk*) wanting to book us for being in NSW waters for more than 3 months in an SA registered vessel. I countered that we carry dual commercial/private registration and, as the former had gone national from July 1, we were in fact covered. After reluctantly accepting this he revealed that when we had passed through Torrumbarry Lock (and Mildura) the permitted 3-month period in NSW was reset. This arises because these locks are through artificial cuttings *in Victoria*, with the border still going around the natural river loop in each case. And, you could achieve the same result virtually any time by going just a boat length into the Campaspe or Goulburn Rivers either side of Echuca, the Marraboor at Swan Hill and a myriad of Victorian creeks/lagoons in between, so maybe he had just been trying a bit of joking one-up-manship but it did *not* go down well as a welcoming gambit.

With fuel no longer available at Deep Creek due to the marina supermarket being closed, next day we drove the truck to Merool (45 km upstream just before Moama) to arrange on-water fuel there. Then went on to check out the Old Moama Wharf/Horseshoe Lagoon precinct. Later in the day Brad & Mark from Boats & More, Echuca came out to take away the steering bullhorn to replace a leaking seal and I topped up fuel with only 2.5 jerries, enough to get to Merool. We headed home on Tue 6th Aug via Echuca, Boort, lunch at Charlton, Dimboola and then the Duke's Highway – 720 km in 8.5 hr.

August 2013 – Deep Creek to Cape Horn

78 km, avg 5.5 kph/2650 rpm, water 9→10° – 1,782 km total

On Friday 23rd we drove from Swan Reach, after the HHA AGM there the prior evening, travelling via Swan Hill, Pental Island, Benjeroop (where a restored historic gas suction pump operates at mid-day on the first Saturday of each month) Murrabit and Barham. Hydraulic fluid had leaked from the overfilled helm but was operating OK and the bullhorn had been fixed and reinstalled. It was a late start next morning with just the two of us heading to Casey Bend, a very quiet, cold and windy day with late showers and only two other boats seen.

Orlando

There were lots of floating bottles and log debris the next day and perhaps ten hire houseboats on the water – overcast but not so windy. A NSW Maritime launch (Big Steve?) headed downstream at high speed, with disruptive wake. With just a single boat width between moored craft plus on-river current, access to the pontoon fuel bowser at Merool was necessarily ‘scratchy’ between railings & gunwales – glad we’re not the owner of the immediately down-stream vessel, who the locals say is used to it! We were refuelled by Ian with, in his words, a bit of the old Jack Dancer in a kidney – I hope the surgery went well. It was the most expensive fuel of the trip (premium unleaded only) and available 10 am–4 pm daily. I spoke briefly with marina owner Paul who is involved in bringing the two-storey glass-clad *Boatel* up from Mannum – it’s presently at Gol Gol.

After Ted from Swan Hill joined us at 4 pm in Echuca, the truck was retrieved from Deep Creek, we renewed NSW fishing licences at the Visitor Information Centre and pumped out at the Moama WDS – it took considerable persistence (encouraged by a full poo tank) to convince weekend Information Centre staff that they *do* hold a key for visiting vessels to do this. Over dinner at Nik’s Greek Taverna, Ted introduced us to Gary Byford (*River Folk*), who restored *PS Hero* after 40 yr sunk (redgum doesn’t rot under water) at Boundary Bend.



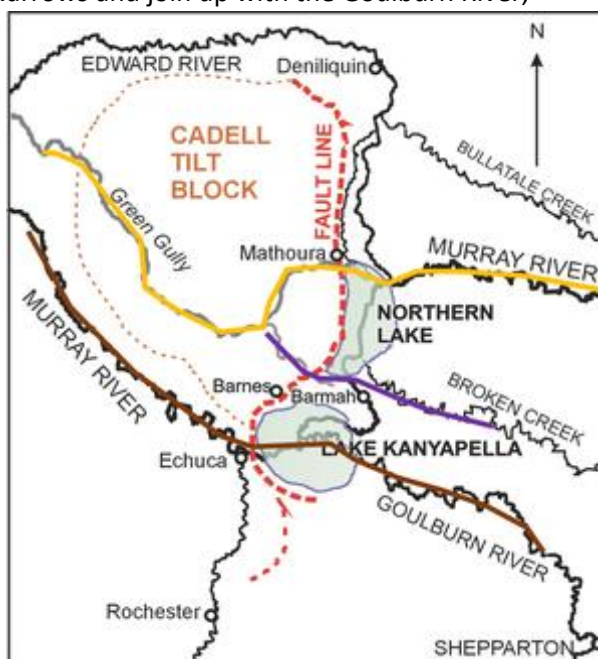
Paddle Steamers Pevensy and Adelaide at Echuca wharf

We ferried the truck to Cape Horn Winery next morning with the last 6 km from Stewarts Bridge over the Goulburn being a good dirt road and then, followed up by river. *PS Alexander Arbuthnot* was in a ‘mid-river queue’ waiting for the WDS and I came fairly close alongside so Ted could speak with a mate who was wood-chucking on the steamer for the day – to be waved away by the skipper, the paddleboats understandably being wary of novice houseboat hirers. The most southerly point on the navigable river is at ‘Abattoir Bend’ just 4 km upstream and a little later, water temperature abruptly increased 1° immediately above the Goulburn junction, spewing (clearly very cold) dark chocolate coloured water. *Black Shag* joined us at Cape Horn and, as the current was very strong in front of the winery, we both moored parallel to the bank, around a bend 200 m upstream. Next morning, all five of us travelled the 60 km to Broken Creek just north of Barmah via the mostly dirt, river road in my truck for *Kingfisher Cruises’* two-hour tour through The Narrows. The Narrows, or Barmah ‘Choke’ in River Operations parlance, is the narrowest and normally fastest flowing, snaggy section of the river, located between Barmah and Moira Lakes. It is thus a significant impediment to large vessel navigation – hence our trip to see it in advance and get the advice of someone who traverses it almost daily. The launch *Kingfisher* drew only 100 mm with six aboard and we didn’t have a touch. River height at Barmah was 3.8 m and rising, compared to lows of 0.8 m when skipper/owner, Benita Cox (*Water in Their Veins* and *River Folk*) said she has 40 hits in a day! She

Orlando

reckoned our timing was perfect (I had to confess it wasn't of our choosing) and gave us strong encouragement to continue upstream. Benita pointed out the extremely difficult to see 264 M tree.

At only 8,000 (550?) years old, The Narrows is the newest section of the river, formed within aboriginal cultural memory. It owes its existence to the Cadell Fault, evident as a 15 m escarpment from Deniliquin to Echuca, in an otherwise flat landscape. This uplift occurred about 25,000 years ago, damming the original Murray that continued westward from Picnic Point and can still be seen as the dry Green Gully (p.32) between Mathoura and Thule Lagoon, beyond which it is today occupied by the Wakool River. The damming created a much larger *Old* Barmah (Northern) Lake and diverted the Murray north via what is now the Edward River. In time, with possible aboriginal assistance, the south rim of the lake was breached to form The Narrows and join up with the Goulburn River, creating the present-day geometry. This constriction can accommodate a little less than half the 'normal' 8,500 ML/d flow of the river without overflowing into the bounding lakes and Barmah-Millewa red gum forest. The other half goes via the Edward/Wakool Rivers 'anabranched'. Because of this, water rights have not been permitted to be sold from above the Choke to below it and there are now issues getting water downstream under the recent Basin plan. Thus, more is being delivered via the Goulburn and Murrumbidgee Rivers, as irrigation in the Echuca-Swan Hill region consumes all that can be delivered via the Choke without causing unseasonal forest flooding and 'blackwater'.



By David Joss for the Mathoura Visitor Information & Business Centre



The Cadell
Fault4.wmv

After lunch on *Orlando* back at Cape Horn (unfortunately the winery doesn't open Mondays) Ted returned to Echuca with Heather and Brian aboard *Black Shag*. We drove back to Adelaide next day, Tuesday 26th leaving the boat under the watchful eye of winery owner, Ian. We stopped for morning tea with Ted and Yvonne at home in Swan Hill – all up 690 km over 9 hr. Not a fish of any description the entire trip, despite a yabby and lure out overnight right through – they reckon Barmah is the place for cod with cheese or better still, bardi grubs for bait but the season is over at month end.

September 2013 – Cape Horn to Deep Creek (via YES! Yarrawonga)

565 km, avg 7.7 kph/2600 rpm, water 15→11→13° – 2,347 km total

We drove up from Adelaide on federal election day, Saturday 7th September, after voting the night before. Tried a bit of variety, turning off the Mallee Highway at Walpeup and travelling through Patchewollock, Lascelles, Woomelang, Birchip, Wycheproof and Boort to Echuca. Here we met up with Kaye and Pete from Cowra, NSW for their second run with us and then proceeded to Cape Horn where the boat was 1 m higher, with slack ropes and hung on the inner pontoon with the level falling again. Next morning, Pete and I ferried his vehicle forward to the Cobram RACV Park, stop-

Orlando

ping to measure clearance under the old Tocumwal and Cobram bridges, which are no longer raised. Then a pizza lunch, wine tasting and purchasing back at Cape Horn, before resuming progress. After clipping an underwater mid-river snag on the starboard side at 1750 km we stopped for the night on the Victorian side at about 1752 km, 10 km short of our nominal target, Barmah – evening campfire.



Flooded Barmah Forest

Current was swift under the Barmah Bridge and I would have liked to take the left span but it was partially obscured by logs, so took the central one and then had to go sharp left round a fallen tree. Beyond the bridge, the forest on both sides was virtually continuously flooded. We saw *Kingfisher* disappear into Broken Creek ahead of us at 12:25 pm (end of a tour) and tried to say hello on the CB radio but to no avail. We slowed to a crawl through The Narrows but, with the water another metre higher than in *Kingfisher* two weeks earlier, there was minimal current and our passage was incident free but it did get trickier just above The Narrows proper. A little past Swifts Creek and before War Creek, we pruned some unmarked, converging, 75 mm snags (horizontal branches at the surface) taking ~1 m off the right one with a saw and 2 m off the left one with the back end of the boat – and another flyscreen. It was still fairly snaggy to Picnic Point and the stretch immediately above Toni's Bend is spectacular – you can even see the out-of-water snags on Google Earth but there is a good channel between them and the willow-lined NSW bank. We got stuck on shallow sand when trying to moor right on Picnic Point at 1790 km, finally tying up round the corner, just above the boat ramp. Yellow (sodium-vapour?) night lighting of the river, reflecting off the trees opposite was impressive.

A 20 ltr jerry can of fuel from the caravan park store was added before departure in the morning. Bank height increased slightly over the day from Picnic Point and it appears that there can be relatively little variation in river height here – effectively regulated by the Narrows and flanking lakes. We had four unseen minor snag hits to Honeymoon Bend before mooring a little further on at a pleasant spot called 'The Gulf'. Here we met fisherwomen Kay & Rochelle from the adjacent Yorta Yorta property *Yielema* (former Newman's homestead) within the Barmah National Park. They were disappointed to only be catching Trout Cod (permitted for indigenes) when they preferred Murray Cod and Aggie supplied some cheese as they were almost out of bait. Pete got a baby Murray Cod that was quickly returned to the water when fishing from the bank adjacent to our fire that evening.

Orlando

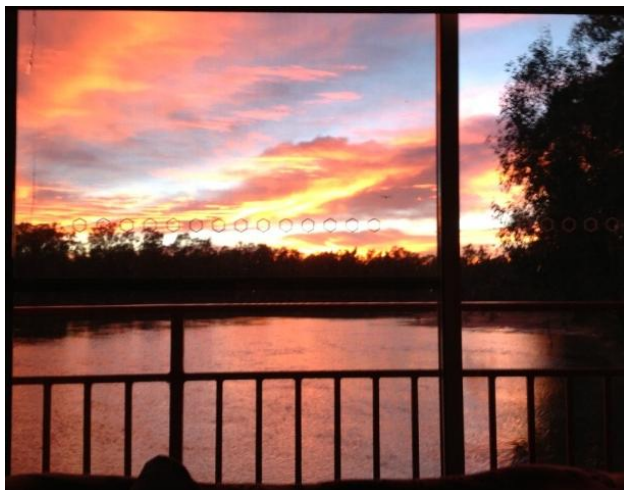
Next day was virtually snag free along a wide, scenic river to Ulupna Creek Junction with numerous 'Camps' and 'Landings' – often with logs set horizontally into the bank. We moored a bit further upstream on the NSW side, immediately before Paddy Henessy Cutting, where a very muddy (recently emerged) bank mitigated against a fire. Aggie and I canoed an old horseshoe on the Victorian side and I caught and released a 500 mm cod (first ever, look at that grin) after dark.



We successfully navigated the snaggy main channel, NSW side horseshoe first thing next morning, narrowly avoiding an unmarked underwater one half-way round. A bunch of canoeists took the fast, even snaggier, shortcut through the cutting as we returned to the main river. This is the start of the wide and shallow 'beach' country that continues to Yarrawonga, a truly beautiful, if challenging sector of the river. We took the outside path option through the snagfield at Point Beach without incident. The first houseboat in 120 km from Barmah was moored in a creek in front of Aquana homestead.

Shortly after lunch, we stopped to measure the Tocumwal rail bridge, which has impressive white granite piers that seem rather incongruous with its rusty red steel trusses. Brief mooring against the high, vertical, Victorian dirt bank was tricky and our depth transducer dislodged on departure. The lead remained attached, so it continued to work at low speed but not at normal cruising. Clearance was 4.5 m, giving *Orlando* 350 mm to spare with the canopy and all antennae down. The new fixed, concrete road bridge, less than 0.5 km upstream has a clearance gauge and is 1 m higher. Tocumwal town has attractive mooring areas, including a large new (vacant) multi-berth, floating pontoon for small craft but we continued on to just above Riversdale Homestead and immediately below Weiss Beach on the Victorian bank. We heavily flagged one of our mooring ropes that crossed a bush track, as motorbike activity could be heard not too far away. Another good campfire but fishing is totally banned above the Toc (pronounced toke) road bridge from September 1 to November 30.

A shepherds' warning sunrise delivered a showery morning and it remained overcast all day but, onward to Cobram. We spoke briefly with Graham on the Pt Adelaide registered paddleboat *Julie Fay*, which was moored to a snag near the Victorian bank. Their home mooring is above Cobram but, with a high wheelhouse she is marooned between the Toc & Cobram bridges, awaiting lower water.



That sunrise – from bed

Orlando

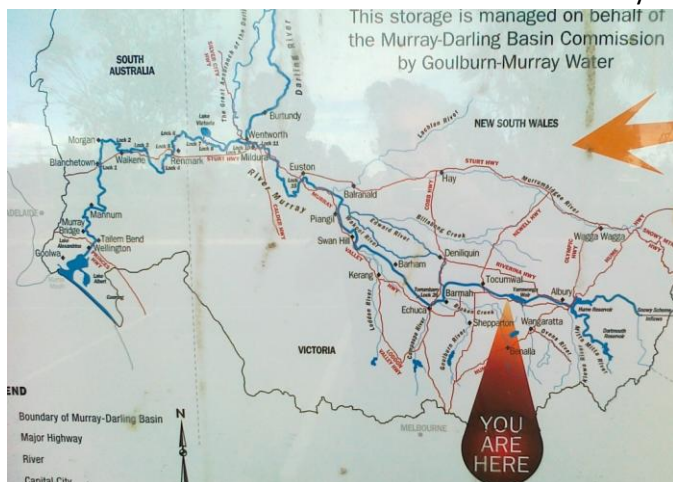
At Cobram, Zito's pre-booked fuel truck was delayed, so Kaye and Pete walked back to Thompson's Beach to get us takeaway pizzas for lunch, leaving Aggie and I to chat with a couple of local ladies and Danny Dunn of Cobram-Barooga Boat Hire, at the houseboat mooring area. When it did arrive, the tanker couldn't get close enough on the muddy track between trees, so we returned 1 km back under the bridges to better truck access at the Thompson's Beach boat ramp. On advice from the restaurant staff we took on some crap 'fresh' water from the outside taps there. Pity we hadn't accepted an earlier offer of tank water from Debbie, who lived across the road at the houseboat moorings. With three hours taken up in re-fuelling, we only made it a few more kilometres upstream to Paradise Beach for the night.

Danny's beautiful (lots of stainless) new paddleboat *Cobba* was passed at the mouth of Bullaginya Lagoon first up next morning. We then stopped at Seppelts *Tarn Pirr* on the NSW bank to sample their wares but it has apparently always been a vineyard only, without winery or sales outlet. The grapes are processed at Lindeman's Karadoc site, both now being part of Treasury Wine Estates. Then a good run with lots of beaches and snags but no incidents, past the stately 'Cobram Estate' homestead on the south bank, to Nevin West Beach. Aggie & I canoed 1.5 km round trip through a cutting on the opposite side of the river, to Yarramundee Homestead and back. However, this is *not* recommended due to *severe* adverse current on the return and it would have been 3 km more, still against current via the river. We had a good evening fire after a very long time scavenging wood.

The 'final' day commenced with mixed emotions – anticipation, plus trepidation concerning the upcoming Zanetti Beach 'fence of snags' right across the river. As usual, the 'hyped' hazard turned out pretty OK but prefer it that way. We seemed to make exceptional time for the day until it was realised that 6 km are saved with respect to the markers, by-passing three horseshoe lagoons. We moored front-on against rock fill above the public boat ramp on arrival, followed by a champagne toast, with Yarrawonga Weir as backdrop.

While the others walked into town for shopping, I checked out the dam with its 10 MW AGL hydro-power station at the Victorian bank and the nearby entrance to the massive concrete 8,000 ML/day capacity Yarrawonga Main Channel (that's the same as the average flow to SA). In addition, the slightly *larger* 2,900 km network Mulwala Canal on the NSW side has its own 2.5 MW power turbine operated by Pacific Hydro further down-channel near Finley. Thus, a combined annual average of 1,900 GL or 17% of the river's total flow is diverted at this first major upstream offtake point. We took on 100 ltr of good drinking water from the caravan park BBQ area before moving the boat to side-on mooring against trees, just below the boat ramp. Later, a courtesy bus delivered us to Mulwala RSL Club and return for a celebratory dinner.

As far as you can go



Orlando

And then back to it – a sewer pumpout by Yarrawonga Liquid Waste truck in light rain at 8 am next morning, before turning homeward. Owner Steve was very chatty and helpful but could afford to be for \$230! We began absolutely flying downstream with the current, at 2,600 rpm that had become a virtual minimum going upstream. That was far too fast for comfort and soon cut back to 2,300 revs. I had anticipated doing 45 km/day downstream but, in view of the rapid progress and rising water levels – we needed to get back under those non-lifting bridges, kept going all the way to Thompson's Beach at Cobram for a record 67 km and average 9.9 kph day. We did nick a couple of snags, including one just below Zanetti's due to inattention/unfamiliar speed but nothing serious.

After Kaye & Pete walked the 3 km to retrieve their vehicle from the RACV park and headed home, we sat out the following morning waiting for Cathy and Mick (also second timers) to arrive from Geelong. There were lots of dog-walkers and others about, interested in our boat and trip – foreign vessels are not common in these parts and, although Danny has a couple of hire boats, they are no more than half our size and restricted in range to about half-way to either Yarrawonga or Tocumwal.



The 150 cc Piaggio we have been carrying on the front deck as back-up transport finally got other than token recreational use in ferrying Mick's vehicle to the RACV park. We then headed for the Toc bridges at 2,100 rpm but still averaging 10 kph, in even stronger current. We cleared the rail bridge with 150 mm to spare according to the gauge on the road bridge – next-day internet readings said it was actually 250, so maybe there was 100 mm of swirl build-up on the upstream side of the gauge? Whatever, it was close and, as I hadn't wanted to let any air out of the tyres and there was no available rent-a-crowd to weigh us down, Aggie had begun to fill the 400 ltr spa bath with river water. Either way, within two days we would not have made it but then by week's end, the big scare of 'rising water till Christmas' was forgotten and levels have been falling ever since – will *Julie Faye* escape?

2020 Note: Must have eventually, as she is now a moored BnB near Renmark.

Overnight at Groutches Beach on the NSW side, we were now allowed to fish again but not a nibble. Another 60 km day to Nine Panel Bend with a 3.5 hr stretch at 2,500 rpm (10.6 kph) in the 'safe' section from Henessy Cutting to The Gulf. A foul rain squall late in the day had Aggie acting as a human windscreen wiper, outside in her raincoat for a while. We should really have moored earlier when westerly progress into the sun was giving reflection problems. However, it cleared up after mooring. We were back in the very low bank 'Landing' country again. Mick caught and released a 400 mm, supposedly very rare Trout Cod, although the locals say they are actually common around here – overhanging top jaw and a dark strip either side of the eye distinguish it from Murray Cod.



Mick's trout cod (returned to the river)

Orlando

As a gas bottle had run out overnight, we called in at Picnic Point for an 'easy' swap. Physically maybe – a 300 m trundle of the sack truck on a flat bitumen road but took an hour of phone calls to sort out the cylinder exchange red tape. Also put in 40 ltr of fuel just in case the downstream travel didn't turn out as economical as expected. We brushed a couple of light snags with our drifting tail, coming into the top end of The Narrows but then the current dropped to almost zero which was nice. It can actually flow in reverse from the Goulburn to the Edward with a roughly 20 yr flood cycle. We didn't spot the 264-mile tree again travelling either way by ourselves but was likely underwater. I wound up speed again after Snake Island for an 8+ hour day back to Cape Horn – featuring an entertaining bare-bum wiggle from a dirt biker sprung doing his ablutions in the river. I'd been concerned about potential side drift (into a pylon) turning under the Barmah Bridge but was not a problem as I now had confidence to pour on power for greater downstream steering response.

The truck had remained at Cape Horn for the thirteen-day sortie to Yarrawonga (8 up and 5 back), so next morning Mick and I were able to drive to Cobram to retrieve his vehicle and ferry it direct to Deep Creek below Echuca/Moama. We then re-joined the girls for a wood-fired oven pizza lunch by Ian, back at Cape Horn Winery. A bit of restocking of the wine rack with local fare and then an easy afternoon run to Echuca, passing a bunch of seven travelling canoes on the way. Then for possibly the last time, we caught up with Heather and Brian on *Black Shag*, right at the upstream end of Echuca Wharf. They had in fact been *sort of* accompanying us for the last week. They departed Echuca two days after us and got to just below Tocumwal OK but, being 5.5 m high had no chance of getting under the bridges. We had anticipated joining them there on the return run but after a day of catching only carp, they had got underway again and kept a day ahead of us going downstream.

Mick, Cathy and Aggie checked out the Echuca farmers' market next morning while I did a few boat chores and organised Boats & More to service the motors during our upcoming layover at Deep Creek marina. We then headed down to Merool to refuel, getting a friendly good-bye from the skipper on *PS Alexander Arbuthnot* as we passed the wharf. And there was the *Boatel*, moored at Merool. We spoke again with Paul and he said they had numerous difficulties, running out of fuel a couple of times, hitting lots of snags and problems getting into the bank because of the boat's superstructure. Water had been 2m higher for them than us on the stretch from Swan Hill – while



we were benefitting from the corresponding 1m higher further upstream. Nevertheless, they had done it in a *much* bigger boat, without obvious major damage and in particular, no broken glass so congrats. It will be interesting to see if they put it into hire in that environment.

PS: They didn't - it's back in Mildura.

Our fuel consumption was lower compared to prior sectors but, with 20% of the distance since the last fill at Cobram still being in the upstream direction, we needed to wait till next time to accurately quantify downstream-only performance. We continued downstream at 2,500 rpm in safe water to make Deep Creek by 3:30 pm. The sudden re-appearance of lots of floating logs and bottles, similar to upstream on this stretch suggested the source to be the Campaspe River, as it wanders through Echuca's suburbs. Mick and I retrieved my truck from Cape Horn and we all had dinner at the Deep Creek pub before respective departures for Geelong and Adelaide next morning, Sunday September 22nd – pity about 'poor' Geelong in the AFL grand-final, having robbed the Power a week earlier.

Orlando

October 2013 – Deep Creek to Swan Hill

247 km, avg 8.3 kph/2200 rpm, water 14→16° – 2,595 km total

We picked up Yvonne and Ted (of *Iron Dry*) from their home in Swan Hill and arrived back at Deep Creek on the evening of Saturday October 26th. Two star-droppers that I had planted to stop the boat riding over the bank in rising water two weeks earlier were buckled and twisted from doing their job in a big storm. We had also lost a brand-new Lower Murray flag and, over the coming week would see literally dozens of trees down – a whole new generation of river snags. A last dinner at the pub with farewells to owners Brod and Janette before a late start next morning. Alan was on duty at Torrumbarry again, putting us back through this first lock of our downstream run at 3:30 pm. A stiff westerly had sprung up and was causing problems getting the boat against the lock wall on that side, so we simply let it do what it wanted and went to the other side. Interesting that Alan, later supported by others, described *Boatel* as the ugliest thing he'd seen in 25 years on the river. It has certainly made an impression including being cursed by truckies for the Barham Bridge getting stuck in the up position when raised unnecessarily high for it. We continued for about an hour downstream to moor on the NSW side at Dalley Bend. Having changed bait and reduced to smaller hooks we nevertheless caught and released two smallish cod (and a few shrimp) but nothing else that evening or next morning.

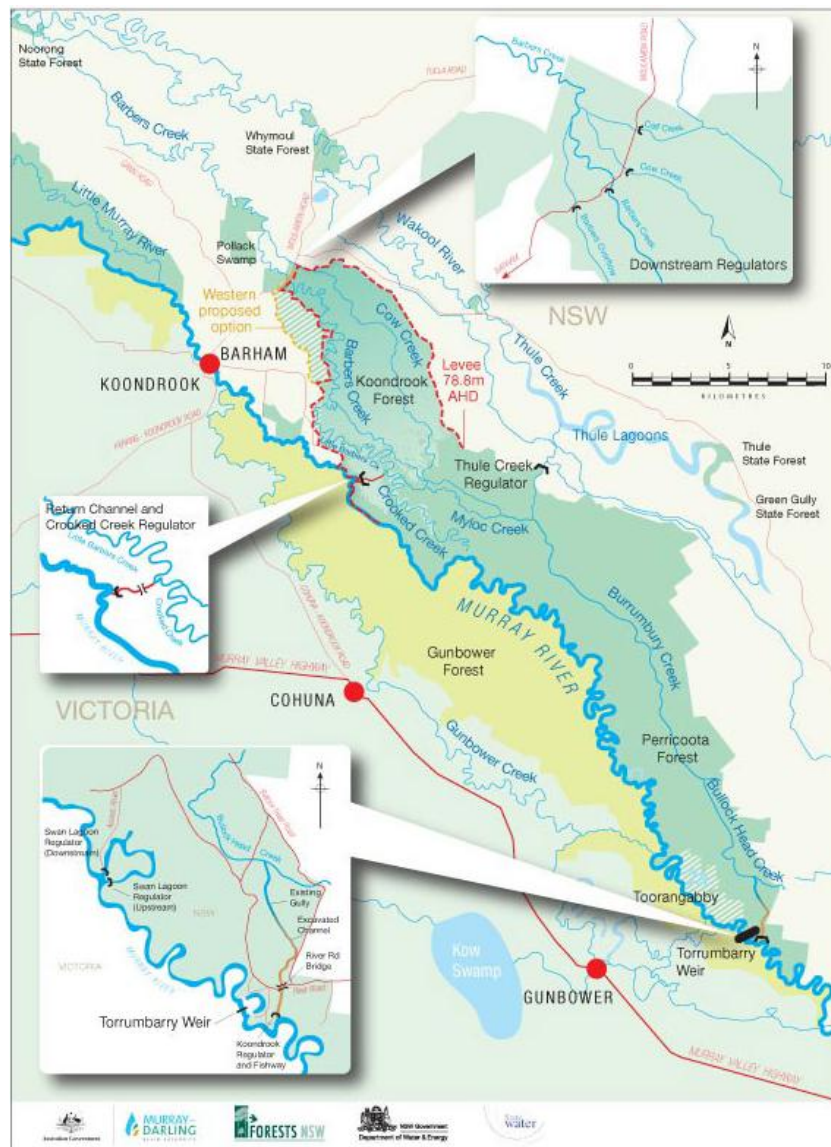
Then it was almost a 50 km day to below Thule Creek/Nursery Bend No.3 at a constant 2,100 rpm without a lunch stop. We had a port side snag hit at 1597 km near Halfway Bend but it is not clear half-way with respect to what – Gunbower Island/Forest? We also saw our third swimming snake of the trip, a 2 ft brown and had to throttle back so as not to skittle it. That evening we were joined by lone sailor Brett from Goolwa, coming back downstream in the effectively open wooden whaleboat *Argyle*. He had recently resurrected it at Swan Hill after 30 years out of the water (at Bairnsdale, Vic) and set out for Yarrawonga a week earlier but had turned back after being talked out of continuing, at Echuca. Pity his timing had not been a month earlier or we hadn't met to compare notes/advice. We'd prepared a small campfire just after mooring but left it as the mozzies were horrendous. Just the three blokes lit it later, when either the mozzies had gone or we had drunk enough not to notice.



Argyle in the early morning – with Brett asleep in his swag on the 'altar' (engine cover), forrard of his genuine pulpit helm

Orlando

Before 9 am next morning (Tuesday) I was very pleased to receive a call from Wakool Shire re lifting the Barham and Gonn Crossing bridges for us. I'd rung them from home four days earlier to give the required 24 hrs notice but got only a message bank, the council having declared an RDO on Friday, then the weekend and Monday Labour Day public holiday in NSW. On his way upstream, Brett had tried to get Barham lifted on the Thursday, only to be told that Tuesday afternoon was the earliest possible, so I wasn't optimistic that ringing at nine was going to get results for first thing Wednesday. But they had taken my answering machine message as the required notice and all was hunky dory. BTW, Brett solved his problem by buying a hand saw and cutting off his four pine canopy supports. He then didn't need the bridge lifted and later reattached the canopy with easily removable screwed angle brackets. Ted deserted us for a day on *Argyle* and we shadowed them all the way to Barham, with lunch stop at Twin Lagoons. This was adjacent to the Crooked Creek channel of the Koondrook-Perricoota Forest Flood Enhancement Works Project, where a bloke was welding barriers round the concrete spillway to stop joy-rider vehicles going up and down its sides. Later, Brett stopped at the Koondrook sawmill to collect redgum sawdust as caulking to reduce his bilge pumping requirement, which was almost continuous, albeit solar-panel-supported. We moored just below the beach and boat ramp at Barham and had after-dinner coffee at the Club with a little pokie flutter for Aggie.



Koondrook-Perricoota Forest Flood Enhancement (environmental watering) Works

Orlando

The bridge opened on schedule at 9:30 next morning, giving us an easy 38 km run to Gonn Crossing for the day. I did not want to push it through our most difficult upstream stretch for a 2 pm bridge opening that same afternoon. Not needing the bridge lifted, Brett had motored ahead by himself, planning to get to Swan Hill within two days compared to our three. We experienced surprise mid-river snag hits just a kilometre below the Barham Bridge and 500 m before the Little Murray Junction but then traversed the narrower, snaggy, Campbell Island section virtually without incident, to stop for lunch at the 1495 km mulberry tree (RMC) on the NSW side. This stretch in particular but indeed, the whole distance from Torrumbarry to Swan Hill looked like a different river to the one travelled in the opposite direction two months earlier, with a 2 m lower water level. A slight acrid smell during lunch manifested as increasingly heavy smoke soon after, originating from a significant bushfire on the NSW side to the north of the 1488 km bend, just below where the Little Murray rejoins the main river. We negotiated the snag where Ted & Brian had done the pruning job on the way up but then dragged scratchy bits down the starboard railing at the almost immediately following 1490 km mark. Briefly, the smoke became dense enough to severely limit visibility and make proceeding hazardous. We were also thinking that with the limitation of the bridge we might have to turn back as we would not have been able to tolerate a night in such smoke. Fortunately, it cleared as we turned into the next reach toward Northey's Bend and with consent, we were able to moor right in front of the 1486 km mark on the fence of the farmhouse on the NSW side, within 100 m of the bridge. The evening's meal was supplemented with fresh wild asparagus collected from the bank down to the bridge.

The bridge was raised for us at 9:15 next morning and we then made 43 km for the day to a few km below Funnel Bend where it took quite a while to find a Pental Island (Vic side) mooring along this snaggy, fast flowing section with numerous overhangs. Some spoonbills were a highlight of the day, not having seen any since Kingston, SA. This left an easy 31 km to Murray Downs marina, Swan Hill by 1:15 next day, following an early lunch on the move and stopping to pumpout at 'perfume point' as the locals call their WDS. Ted then drove me back to Deep Creek to retrieve the truck. All dined in town at Korean/Japanese Cafe Niko Niko, together with Carmel & Trevor of *KRML* before Aggie & I headed home to Adelaide next day, Saturday 12th October.

November 2013 – Swan Hill to Wentworth

568 km, avg 9.0 kph/2400 rpm, water 17→19+° – 3162 km total

We returned to Swan Hill on Saturday 26th October, travelling via Ouyen and Sea Lake to Lake Boga, as this would be our last chance to visit the WW2 flying-boat museum there. It was well worth the detour with a complete Catalina, many other partial relics and a theatrette showing an historic movie of the base – in a magnificent new building plus the original communications bunker. John and Julie, our third set of second-time crew arrived from Adelaide in time for dinner on board.

After drinking-water and fuel top-up by jerry can, John and I ferried his vehicle to Robinvale Caravan Park next morning. A final farewell to now very good friends Ted & Yvonne, followed by a late lunch and both *Orlando* and *KRML* with Trevor & Carmel aboard, headed downstream. Water level had fallen nearly a metre during our two weeks at home and both vessels could just pass under the Swan Hill Bridge without it being lifted, although I did need to drop our antennae again and *KRML* doesn't have any top canopy/railings. We made 13 km in an hour and a half, to moor at about 1399 km on the NSW side. There was no trouble with the shallow section below Swan Hill Abattoir this time as the level was still 36 cm higher than when coming upstream. It was too windy for a campfire.

Orlando



Julie with Swan Hill's Murray Cod

Next morning, Trevor took John cod fishing in his tinny for a couple of hours but the wind steadily built and no luck. *KRML* then headed back to Swan Hill and *Orlando* continued downstream. There was no rush as, although we were concerned about falling water levels further on, the Nyah Bridge would not open for us that day (Monday) due to yet *another* (same council) RDO. The previously half sunk Beveridge Island Punt had been pulled from the water and cables removed, so no issues there and the site looked much tidier. The Speewa Ferry still gave a fax tone to the dialled number so we pulled in to speak with the ferryman, on the NSW side where he was – and then a car turned up, which naturally he took to the other side but then disappeared into his cabin and it required some yelling and waving to get him to come back across to talk to us. It was a different bloke to last time and he was equally uncertain of depths. When I told him we'd touched one of the cables heading upstream almost a year ago, he said that he had to lower them shortly anyway due to falling water levels, so would do it now – only took ten minutes and *Orlando* proceeded without incident.

We moored early on the NSW side above the Nyah Bridge. There was another houseboat moored just below the bridge, so I walked over to say hello. The previous day, Sean at Robinvale Caravan Park had asked if we'd passed a lone gentleman houseboater with an eye patch, travelling upstream and of course this turned out to be 'Gunbower Bill' in the fibreglass-pontooned *Gunbower*, a somewhat smaller and older boat than us. He invited me aboard and we chatted for two hours, comparing notes on various parts on the river. I was amused to hear him describe what I called 'snagfields' in the Tocumwal-Cobram area as 'woodyards' – justified with sobering photos of them at low water. He also warned of a couple of tricky spots further on particularly around Murphy's Island.

Aggie wasn't amused with the suggestion that we just exchange boats and each get on our way without waiting for the bridge, so Bill came over for a BBQ dinner, dressed in bow tie and bowler. He has lived aboard for 13 years, the last several at Lyrup in SA. He was raised at Gunbower, his dad having been the first lockmaster at Torrumbarry and was travelling back to Echuca for a visit. I put him in touch with Ted at Swan Hill to help out with a bus trip he had to make from there at the weekend. It was evident that his sight is quite compromised and he was having a few other health issues, so let's hope he kept doing alright.

PS December: Ted says Bill's made it to Barham OK.

Sept 2014: I've just caught up with Bill and boat again back in Wentworth.

Orlando

Sure enough, at midday next day we tangled with 'foliage' at 1332.5 km round the back of Murphy's Island. To date, coming downstream we hadn't hit a single snag that we did on the way up – i.e. we'd learnt from our (my) mistakes but not entirely from the successes, as we'd 'found' about half as many new ones. This was the first of only two places that we would score in both directions. The required slalom close to the island is just too tight for a vessel our size. We had clipped a bit of high foliage going up and lost a lure off a rod – this time the rods were down in anticipation. Luckily with very strong flow though the cutting, current is not so strong around the island but nevertheless, enough to make the exercise a bit more difficult than it had been going upstream.

I ended up stopping against a newly fallen, relatively light, leafy green bough across the full width of the boat, immediately in front of us. Ideally, we would have lopped this at the left-hand side with a saw. However, the cutting gear was stowed away and as I was the only one who was going to man the helm in the situation with current pushing us from behind, I just pushed slowly over it. While earlier engaging reverse to pull up in front of the branch, it was impossible to hold the boat straight and the back end had drifted into the trees on the island. Pulling out from these and over the fallen bough at the same time, meant directional control (that's technical for steering) was a bit limited. Once clear, we moored on the opposite bank to inspect the situation. There were leaves and twigs from A to Breakfast upstairs and out the back, with a 3" branch decorating the corner barbie and there were some scratches on the PVC house-cladding but the only damage a couple of tears in the rear bedroom flyscreen and a broken plastic air vent cover. Perhaps in compensation, John caught a nice yella while we stayed for lunch. Back in the main river shortly after, a large goanna swam to the Victorian bank. It was another early finish as we pulled in at Tooleybuc at 3:45 so I could get some Fisherman's Friends for a developing ticklish throat. Only carp caught – should have stayed the night at Murphy's Island.



The 'decorated' back deck at Murphy's Island

Orlando

Proceeding through the Bitch & Pups next morning was a complete non-event at this water level – 2.08 m at Swan Hill, where there had actually been a marginal 9 cm rise since our departure due to a small environmental release down the Goulburn. Again, this was about 30 cm more than on our upstream run. Another lunch on the sandbar at the Wakool Junction, again with Victorian side campers who were catching fish but we didn't. Then a long afternoon run at higher speed now that we were out of the 'Little River' above Wakool Junction, making it a 58 km day to Narrung Cutting.

Just after showering next morning, I slipped down a steep muddy bank while trying to retrieve a snagged fishing line, ending up submerged to the waist and having to be thrown a mooring rope to get back up – followed by another shower. As the current wasn't too strong, I was able to back out upstream from our mooring but, with bad mid-river snags Gunbower Bill had warned of, I didn't go far enough and kept running aground on sand with the starboard pontoon but no harm done. Then a 46 km run to a little below Tala Rocks, including a fish-less lunch stop at the Murrumbidgee Junction, where we tied up below the 596-mile tree right on the downstream point between the two rivers. It is now virtually impossible to decipher – no wonder we hadn't recognised it on the way up. The rocks above Boundary Bend did not seem as intimidating as they had been when going upstream but experience and again the extra water helped. With minimal Wakool and 'Bidgee flows, heights in this area had been dropping at 10 cm/day and we were anticipating exactly the same level as on our upstream trip but the falls arrested three days before we got there, to still give us that extra foot/30cm. Good fishing with 4 carp, 3 yellows and John catching/releasing (his only) small cod – unknown at the time but below here would be back to carp only.



The last succulent 'yella' – that's steam, not bad focus

53 km next day got us to Bovaricall Creek where we moored against a low muddy bank. Julie and I tried canoeing the creek but its swampy entrance was blocked with snags and a wire fence. We didn't last long in the main river either as the current was strong but finished up with a nice swim off the back of the boat as it had been a 30+° day – water temp 19°. John was busy catching carp.

Orlando



Clouds, vapour trails and reflections at Bovaricall Creek

As we pulled out next morning, the long-time-loose depth transducer came off in the mud and we have thus had no depth/temperature measurement since. Prospective next crew (Janet & Ron would have been the fourth couple to come back for more) were due to commence in Robinvale on Sunday but had to cancel due to illness so John and Julie offered to stay on a few more days. With the good progress being made, I decided to push things to save a day for Julie's disrupted schedule. We tore around Bumbang Island at 3,000 rpm to make it to Robinvale by 1 pm, seeing the 662-mile tree and then Tyack's Mooring at the top of the island. It looked like they offered plenty of potential longer-term berths. We pulled in next to the boat ramp immediately upstream of the caravan park at Robinvale and after a 10-jerry refuelling, John and I headed by road to Swan Hill to retrieve the truck, dropping the ladies off in town to re-stock the pantry. It was a 4 hr round trip, including dropping John's vehicle ahead to the Wemen general store. We then immediately cast off for the Euston WDS, under the bridge and 3 km downstream. This time the box with the start button wasn't locked and we had pumped out and were away in 40 minutes, moving just 1 km downstream to moor at about 1120 km (marker missing) on the Victorian side at 7:15 pm. There was a bit of local houseboating activity across the river around midnight??

The boat and gear trailer of the twin high-speed skiers we'd seen practising most of the day had been parked at the Euston Club adjacent to the WDS. They were in action again early next morning with their bum belts (Aunty Jack would have 'ripped their bloody arms off'), helmets and distinctive fluorescent green & orange outfits – the boat makes very little wake as it barely touches the water. It was an earlyish 8:50 start to be at Lock 15 by 9 am. Dean was on duty again and we gave him a bit of stick about not having fixed the cracks in his lock walls or the creaky gates. Again, we had a good chat and received considered advice but as previously, Aggie's proffering of choccy biscuits was gracefully declined. However, we had heard certain whispers in Swan Hill and some red-coloured Langhorne Creek produce was discretely left beside a bollard.

Orlando

Our most productive fishing spot at Narrow Bend on the upstream journey was occupied by campers, so we did not intrude on them but did pull up for lunch below Success Reef – without success. Being Sunday, there were plenty out in tinnies but most of them weren't doing well either. We overnighted on the Victorian bank at Carina Bend (1,084 km, mark missing), having also passed another 'fishy' NSW side upstream spot at 1,085 km without recognising it and alas, John had a non-productive last night.

It was a fairly short run to Wemen by midday next day – don't remember Gells/Danger Island reef. Again mooring across the boat ramp for unloading, we had a final on-board BBQ lunch with John and Julie before they headed to Renmark and the Rose Festival. Aggie and I continued another 20 km in the afternoon, to just below the third consecutive rock bar (1,046 km, marker missing) after Spark's Reef. I again blotted the copy book by running on to sand in the same spot as previously at the bottom end of Slab Hut Reach but bumped on over it on this occasion.

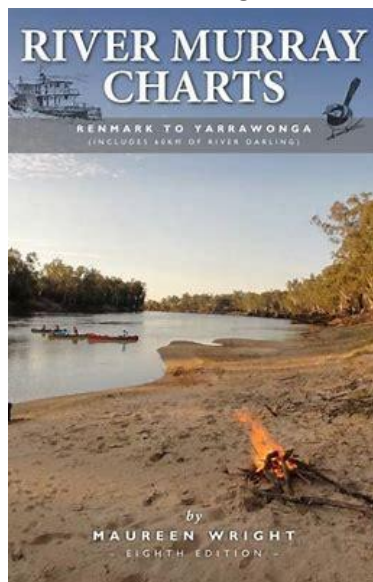
No sweat through Retail Cutting next morning although I did touch a bit of sand with the starboard pontoon, keeping too far right of rocks just below 1,026 km. It was Melbourne Cup day and we made it 32 km to the 1,000 km point (mark missing) for lunch. A quick paddle in Tapaulin Horseshoe (with pelicans) and then the Cup by radio - we'd lost the old cracked and rusty TV antenna overboard in those high winds the first night out of Swan Hill but not actually missed it till now. This time our two-person sweep was definitely rigged, with Aggie taking first, second *and* third – I did get fourth but of course, no money. We finished the day with an 11 km run to Le Brun's Bend, opposite the two derelict historic barges, one sunken and the other broadside on a multi-dolly slip, plus private paddleboats *Lilian* and *Impulse* (of recent sinking/refloating infamy) at the Colignan Mooring Area.



It was a relaxed run to opposite the upstream end of Towrie Creek next day, with a lunch stop at Iraak Bend Flora Reserve. A small private houseboat passed going downstream after we'd moored, the first moving one seen since Euston. Unfortunately, we hooked a large tortoise on an overnight line – kicked up a hell of a racket at about 3 am, flapping against the pontoon. Shell size was about 30 x 20 cm and it was incredibly strong with very large claws. It had swallowed the hook, which was protruding through the neck from the inside. Naturally it wasn't too happy about this and the two of us took quite a while to pin it on its back and extract the hook through the side of the neck after cutting the line. Took off happily enough once freed, so hope it can tolerate the neck puncture.

Orlando

The first of the sand cliffs re-appeared within a couple of kilometres next morning and occur sporadically from here (Mallee Cliffs) to Merbein. We spotted the 793-mile tree and from Red Cliffs, began to encounter hire houseboats out of Mildura. Trentham Estate winery was revisited in the afternoon where we were pleased to see the brand new 8th edition of RMC on display. After mooring just downstream of Bruce's Bend that evening, I ordered a copy online.



I was subsequently privileged to support Maureen's nomination as AOM *for services to cartography and to the community* – and she personally signed the copy on board *Orlando* when She & Barry hired it some years later.

High-speed skiers were practicing here also, plus some more disruptive conventional skiers and jet-skis. After an elapsed year of relative isolation, it was quite a culture shock to be back in a populated part of the river in summery conditions. It was only an 8 km run to Mildura in the morning with refuelling (ah! the joy of a bowser) and \$20 pumpout/fresh water at Dockside, before taking Zaffina's late afternoon bus back to Robinvale to collect the truck. There were flowering water lilies adjacent to a drain outlet (nutrients) where we moored at Mildura Wharf. Aggie fed *smoked* (no accounting for taste) carp to pelicans off the back of the swim deck.

Next morning we were woken by a loud-hailer calling staged starts of a large bicycle event from the adjacent carpark. Then a real shock to the system with a record early 7:50 cast-off to be at Lock 11 by 8 am. Drop was 3.1 m and we were through in 20 minutes. After that we just kept going, arriving at Wentworth Wharf by 2:30 pm to effectively finish our trip with a 57 km day. I then rode the scooter back to Mildura via the south side of the river and, after having a lad help me get the scooter up on the rack at the back of the truck, made the return trip via the north side of the river.

We had elected not to take the boat back to South Australia at that time. There were many inputs to this, not the least being the still unresolved greywater issue. The new National System for domestic Commercial Vessels (NSCV) allowed us to put the boat back into hire with Murray Darling Houseboats, operating from Wentworth. I will be able to address a health issue I've been delaying for too long and we can catch up on some family stuff. There was much cleaning up/emptying out to do the following day before delivering the boat to MDHB on Monday morning and heading home via the mostly dirt, Old Wentworth-Renmark road (horribly corrugated over SA half) on the north side of the river – Remembrance Day, November 11th. We will be back up for heaps of maintenance and a Christmas cruise 50 km up the Darling to Avoca, prior to *Orlando* going out on hire for New Year.

Orlando

Some Logistical Statistics and Comment

Upstream

We arrived at Yarrawonga 500 days after first leaving home but, with the boat moored at Swan Hill from mid-December 2012 to late July 2013, awaiting sufficient water to pass Lock 26 at Torrumbarry – 231 days, or almost half of the total time.

Over the period, we were away from home for 141 days

– i.e. home (or elsewhere) for 359 days or 72% of the time.

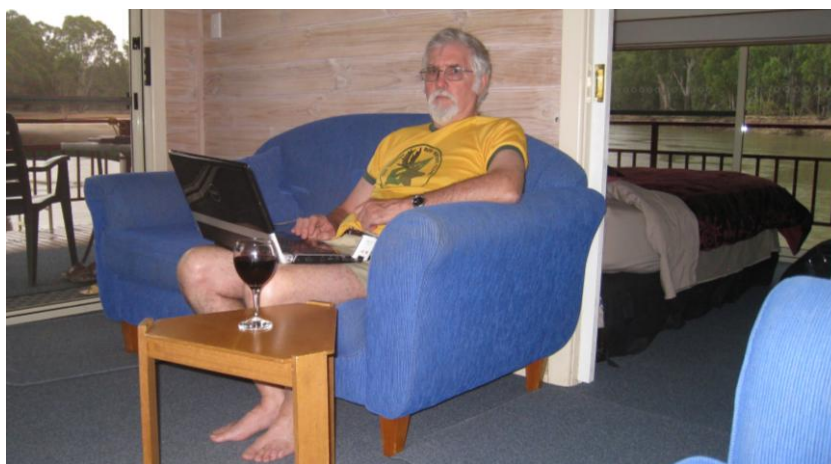
We made 17 separate trips, of which three, at approximately two-month intervals, were during the Swan Hill sojourn and one each during shorter layovers at Waikerie and Customs House

– leaving 12 travelling trips.

Driving to and from the boat consumed 34 days and a further 31 days were devoted to vehicle ferrying, maintenance and sightseeing

– leaving 76 river travel days, amounting to only 15% of the total or just over half of away-time.

Although Yarrawonga is 1,987 km from the mouth according to the river marks, it is only 1,952 after subtracting 35 km due to present day short-cutting of nine horseshoe bends and Beveridge Island, which the river km marks (and NSW/Vic border) go around – to the source is 2,508 km (Geoscience Australia, 2008). Because we also saved another 12 km through Bumbang Cutting at Robinvale and 'began' 70km from the mouth we traversed 1,870km of the Murray from the top of Lake Alexandrina to Yarrawonga. However, our total travelled distance was 2,025 km, including 40 km downstream at the beginning, 80 return km on the Darling and a further 35 km in other minor double backs.



Keeping up with the stats after 5

Downstream

Timewise, the downstream run was highly telescoped compared to upstream. Firstly, particularly further up where the current is stronger, you tend to go much faster, ~ 60% in our case. Together with average 20 minute longer travel days, more distance was covered in our fixed time windows, thus needing fewer of them and proportionally less road commuting. Secondly, we now understood how transient the enabling high water can be and thus used more of the available time with no double-backs or side excursions. Also, there were no forced layovers from lack of water or lock closures – rather, higher water caused a couple of minor delays for bridge lifts.

Nor did Christmas/Easter periods compete for our time and we only returned as far as Wentworth or ~60% of the way. Thus, elapsed time was 55 days over three trips. 34 days away from home (62% compared to 28% when going upstream) included 5 commuting and only a single maintenance day, leaving 28 river travel days, being 82% of away-time and 51% of downstream elapsed-time.

Orlando

Combined

We were joined by 12 other couples for varying periods of between two and ten nights, including three couples twice and four couples in different sectors of the single longest time stretch, being 17 days. A big thank you to those 24 others who shared parts of the experience *and helped make it possible*. We also did five sectors of from one to six travelling days (36-236 km) on our own. Pure coincidence that the Wemen-Mildura stretch was just the two of us in both directions and included the Melbourne Cup which the second time, even stopped us – along with the rest of the nation.

Using both motors essentially the whole time, we travelled at/for, or achieved averages of:

	motor rpm	travel time		distances		speed	fuel consumption	
		hr/day	days	km/day	total km	kph	ltr/hr	ltr/km
Upstream	2,550	4.6	76	26	2,026	5.4	6.4	1.4
Downstream	2,400	4.9	28	44	1,136	8.9	6.6	0.85
Both	2,500	4.7	104	30	3,162	6.3	6.5	1.1

Surprisingly, fuel consumption *per hour* was apparently marginally higher going downstream than up. This was despite *overall* average downstream revs being lower and is attributed to several sustained high rpm downstream legs. Nevertheless, as expected, consumption on a per km basis was significantly (60%) less than that going upstream. Total *travel* time was 506 hr compared to 559 motor hours, the extra 10% being mooring/casting-off time, including getting free from being stuck on banks and 16 lockages. Total generator time was 149 hr or about 1.25 hr/operating day, down from 2 hr/ day before the solar panels. Motors and genset were serviced at the start and twice during the trip.

45 kilo gas cylinders were exchanged six times, with this becoming progressively more difficult (and expensive) upstream. We did 14 major refuellings of 100-400 ltr, four by tanker and six by up to 16 jerry cans (after the first, a jiggle syphon was a blessing) with a number of 20-40 ltr top-ups as well. We also did 14 sewer pumpouts, not always coinciding with the refuelling. Notably, the Wentworth and Buronga WDS cater for front-on rather than parallel mooring. Also, Deep Creek and Moama are accessed by swipe card, paid for with a local mooring licence but travelling vessels can borrow a card free from the Echuca Visitor Information Centre – if you are persistent. There are currently no pumpout facilities upstream of Moama, although Cobram-Barooga Boat Hire was hoping to install one by year end – PS, they did. We paid for pump out by truck only once (Yarrawonga) but at more than twice the going rate of anywhere else.

Other than at paid, off-river marinas, opportunities to top up drinking water are limited, as not many public places have quality tap water and was often supplemented with 10 ltr spring water packs. We cadged some rainwater from houseboat operators and riverside caravan parks were usually helpful.

On the way upstream, we crossed 10 ferries and passed under 23 different bridges at 18 locations, there being five twins. Paringa was the only bridge we needed lifted, albeit that above the Wakool junction our canopy and all antennae were lowered, reducing height from 5.4 to 4.2 m above the water. Coming back, it was only one ferry and 12 bridges (9 locations) but due to higher river levels, we needed Barham, Gonn Crossing and Nyah to be raised, even with our topside gear down. We ran aground on sand/clay perhaps 10 times and glanced off/over about three dozen snags but hit no rocks or infrastructure. We also tangled with a few overhangs for some scratches and flyscreen damage but virtually nothing else – mind you, we haven't seen the bottoms of the pontoons yet.

Orlando

On the more recreational side, we visited eight wineries, three with direct river access – Caudo (SA), Trentham (NSW) and Cape Horn (Victoria). We caught every type but tasted few of the river fish listed in RMC. Only out-of-season cod were caught/released upstream of Swan Hill, well justifying the complete fishing ban above Tocumwal for that Sept-November cod-breeding period. In-season cod were caught (7 off 8 bardi grubs), along with other species back down to Tala Rocks on the return. We caught no redfin (vermin, but best eating) although we had been getting them at Long Island before starting.

There are a steadily increasing number of missing kilometre marks going upstream – as confirmed with RMC's 'not found' status and we missed even more, with many inundated in recent high water, becoming mud-caked and hard to see. However, we did sight five depicted as not found in RMC's 8th edition – 1474 on the ground, 1534 at the pump houses, 1790 (re-erected?) right on Picnic Point, 1922 and 1948 (re-erected? 0.5km downstream). We saw nine of the historic trees blazed with the number of miles downstream from Albury – viz: 793, 768, 662, 596, 566, 392, 295, 264 and 258.

Would we do it again? Aggie, no! and me, yes! but in a smaller (narrower, lower and, most of all, lesser draft) craft. We were befriended by several 'more historically pure' paddleboat folk and maybe that is a future option with a different flavour. Beyond the influence of the weirs, the river is not for the overly faint-hearted but clearly can still be navigated with determination and patience. Gunbower Bill, a few paddleboats and the massive two storey glass-skinned *Boatel* have also made it to Echuca recently. That said, passage for large vessels is impossible in low water and challenging during relatively brief high-water periods, compounded by lack of navigational aids in NSW, even on most bridges, non-opening or restrictive lifting times and conditions, artificial re-snagging (as if there isn't a natural plethora) and general lack of support facilities – as paraphrased to me by one frustrated Yarrawonga local, 'to most of the powers that be, it's just a big irrigation ditch!'

Timely information and advice are often not easy to come by. The internet is invaluable and I found the most useful web page for river height and flow data at MDBA gauges from Wentworth to Picnic Point, to be www.mdba.gov.au/river-data/current-information-forecasts/river-flows. Graphs of the last month's figures together with a one-week forward estimate, are updated each Tuesday but usually not available online till Wednesday. I then often phoned MDBA River Operations in Canberra (02 6279 0168) to ask what happens the week after that – and they were always helpful, if cautious. They *must* meet predicted irrigation demand, which may not always be availed of due to say, unexpected rain and therefore, flow forecasts *tend* to be *slightly* conservative.

Nevertheless, they are still much more precise and reliable than the all-too-common arm-waving advice, caricatured as 'it's gonna be bigger than '56, cos the crows are sitting on the 3rd row of the barbed wire fence'. Another (less intuitive/friendly) source of daily river heights at intermediate localities such as for bridges is www.bom.gov.au/vic/flood – select a sub-area and River Conditions. Perhaps ironically, our enforced layovers yielded immense benefit in meeting local people with their wealth of local knowledge. Nevertheless, opinions differ and sometimes, well-intentioned but not necessarily well-informed nay-sayers can be persuasive – the much smaller *Avondale* and *Argyle* were each talked out of proceeding to Swan Hill and Yarrawonga respectively, at exactly the same times that we did it. However, a gung-ho, ill-considered, 'go for it' is not helpful either, so thank you particularly to those truly experienced people who gave measured, insightful encouragement – most notably, Maureen Wright of River Murray Charts, Lockmaster Dean at Euston, Gary Jeans and Ted Ward at Swan Hill, Benita Cox of *Kingfisher* Cruises, Barmah & Danny at Cobram-Barooga Boat Hire.

Orlando



INLAND RIVERS NATIONAL MARATHON REGISTER

(ESTABLISHED 1955)



**THE NATIONAL TRUST OF S.A.
(GOOLWA BRANCH)**



*IN ASSOCIATION WITH
REGION 6, MURRAY DARLING ASSOCIATION Inc. AND
OTHER CO-OPERATING INSTITUTIONS PROMOTING
RESPONSIBLE SPORTING AND RECREATIONAL USE
OF RIVERS OF THE MURRAY DARLING SYSTEM -
DO HEREBY DECLARE THAT:*

KEN & AGGIE BAMPTON

*HAS BEEN ISSUED WITH THIS CERTIFICATE AS A RECORD OF ENTRY
INTO THE INLAND RIVERS NATIONAL MARATHON REGISTER AND HAS
BEEN DULY AFFIXED WITH THE SEAL
AND SIGNATURE OF THE REGISTRAR.*

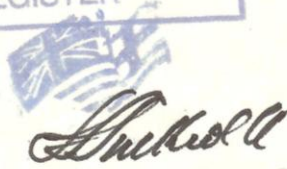
REGISTER NO. **260 (13/10)**
DATE OF ENTRY
DEPARTURE POINT **WELLINGTON** DATE **MAY 2012**
ARRIVAL POINT **YARRAWONGA** DATE **2012**
CLASSIFICATION **RECREATION** CRAFT **HOUSE BOAT**
ELAPSED TIME **2012-13** **"ORLANDO"**

REGISTRAR:
FRANK TUCKWELL
7 SUMNER STREET
GOOLWA SA 5214
Ph (08) 85552991
Frank.tuckwell@alexandrina.sa.gov.au

REGISTER SEAL



PATRON:
HIS WORSHIP, KYM McHUGH
MAYOR, ALEXANDRINA COUNCIL


(REGISTRAR)

ADDENDUM

January 2016 – Wentworth to Renmark (Paringa)

270 km, avg 7.0 kph/2400 rpm, water 22-24° – 3432 km total

Orlando was in hire with Murray Darling Houseboats at Wentworth NSW for two years. We became HHA's first of only two ever interstate members. Over the period we made no recreational trips but numerous maintenance visits – and there were two hip replacements (18 months apart) for me. During an early January 2016 visit, with a complete vacuum of forward hires, we took a snap decision to bring the boat home to SA. Again, there were multiple inputs the most salient being that we were now 'allowed to'.

I remember having been greeted by a South Australian EPA officer at Murray Bridge in 2013 with, 'I thought you were supposed to have left the State' – I responded that I had only undertaken to remove my vessel interstate, not realising that EPA had deportation powers and I had been personally banished! However, in December 2015, EPA finally agreed to accept the split-stream approach to houseboat greywater management that we had been trialling, with HHA support, whilst based in NSW. During a January 2014 slipping in Mildura (apart from that one crease, the pontoons were fine) *Orlando's* 9/6 ltr flush domestic toilets were replaced with 0.5 ltr flush marine ones and galley output was plumbed to the now oversize 1,100 ltr blackwater storage. Stored, undiluted galley waste can putrefy quite quickly but the fats are broken down by the septic action in the blackwater tank. Bathroom water was then directed through a 60 ltr black poly 'Matala' Biosteps10 pond filter box – identical to their Aqua2Use greywater diversion device (GWDD) but cheaper. Chlorine tablets in a floating Hy-clor domestic spa dispenser then add disinfection, prior to the filtered water being returned to the river. To satisfy EPA's insistence on something small enough for small non-houseboat private vessels, this was subsequently replaced by self-designed and built 10 and 20 ltr PVC 'Grey Tubes' using similar filters and BCDMH (bromine) disinfection. All units met EPA



20 ltr GreyTube

More recently, a 70 ltr 'GreyTub' has also been developed, similar to the original Matala unit but again, lower profile.



Code of Practice discharge criteria when tested in real life operation – with sampling protocols and analyses by the Adelaide Australian Water Quality Centre. Also, first known actual data (rather than theoretical constructs) were produced on contaminant levels in houseboat bathroom greywater. Apart from much lower profile (to more easily fit below deck) the tube has the advantage of being completely sealed, eliminating any possibility of overflow or odour escape. However, it has been found to become fairly putrid inside and pumpout for settled solids was added later.



GreyTub

Perhaps the ultimate irony of this whole sorry and often bitter greywater saga was my receiving EPA/BIA SA's boating industry environment award for 2016, in recognition of this work.

Even so, it took until early 2019 for a revised EPA Code of Practice to formally adopt the 'reasonable and practical' generic Split Stream greywater solution for vessels on Inland Waters in South Australia – and although not enforced, corresponding Dept for Environment & Water regulations have yet (2024) to be similarly amended.

Orlando

We chose to go back as far as Renmark and look to join a hire fleet in that area. Thus, following a phone check re river passability below Lock 7, on Monday 11 January, friend Colin (of the Berri-Renmark upstream leg) drove up from Adelaide to Paringa and I drove down from Wentworth to pick him up and return to stay on board overnight at the Wentworth public wharf. After numerous goodbyes around town but regrettably missing a few, we got underway at 9:30 next morning for the 10 am slot at Lock 10, just over 1 km downstream and immediately below the Murray-Darling junction at 832 km. A large *Sunraysia* houseboat out on hire, passed through the lock with us and then shadowed us downstream to join up with a sister-boat moored at the 814 km beach. Their skiers kept us company for a few kilometres further. My navigational rustiness showed when I almost directed Colin into the impassable cutting at Snaggy Point.

Figuring that there might be a chance for Murray Cod around the Darling Anabranch junction at 807 km, we made an hour and a half lunch stop there, between big snags immediately on the upstream side. However, we weren't really prepared with no suitably large hooks (apart from a frog lure) and no bardi grubs, although we did have cheese and yabbies caught over prior nights in Wentworth – but no luck so we all enjoyed a swim as it was stinking hot in the low 40s. The current off the swim deck was surprisingly strong and Aggie was not keen to let go of the ladder. It was then an uneventful afternoon run to moor at a creek entrance on the northern (NSW) bank near the old Moorna Mail Exchange site at about 789 km, by 5:10 pm. Colin and I tried canoeing the creek into a lagoon behind but it was blocked with fallen logs after about only 100 m.

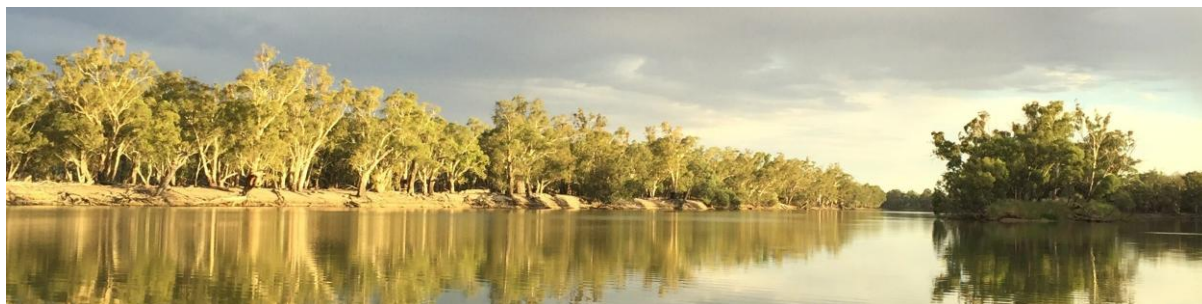
Starting at 8:30 next morning, we passed the skeletal wreck of the *Emerald* barge and Moorna Station homestead, both on the NSW side, before coming to the Frenchman's Creek entrance to Lake Victoria. With a now practiced eye from upstream, we were this time able to spot the leading eight of the 883-mile tree (from the river) and pulled in to check it out – pretty obscure, wrapped halfway round the trunk with the middle 8 all but healed over but nevertheless still there, as below.



Revs were then poured on to make Lock 9 by 11 am and not be held up for the lunch break from 11:30. We were surprised not to be able to raise the lock on the phone until actually in sight, less than a km away – there had been no issue on the way up. It was a smooth lockage as, despite a fair breeze, this was across the lock from the north and we were relatively protected in the chamber. Flow was certainly a huge contrast to when we had come upstream 3 years earlier in high water – now only 2,500 ML/d compared to over 40,000 then. The consequently lower water and lowered pool level was evident just downstream, with the normally submerged Crozier Rock just showing.

Orlando

The lockmaster also advised us to go more to the centre than shown on RMC, soon after exiting the lock, as sand had shifted and it was now shallower near to the left bank. We were through by 11:25 am and pulled in for lunch at midday about 5 km downstream at 765 km, a spot we designated Colin's Camp because Colin unearthed a few rusted camping artefacts there – perhaps a Possum site? The afternoon run was cut short by a rapidly building westerly blow. Carrs Creek looked interesting (navigable?) but no time to be investigating it, even by canoe. We pulled into the lee of the Victorian bank at a dry creek entrance at 748.5 km, just downstream of Wombeloo Island (right side of pic below) at 3:45 pm. Nevertheless, we'd got in our nominal 40 km for the day and were happy not to be driving in the wild rain that followed, which was a welcome relief from the heat. It then calmed to almost glass (below) and Colin cooked us a back-deck BBQ before dark.



It was a late start at 9:50 am next day but that was after Colin and I had canoed about a kilometre down the inside (west) of Wombeloo Island and back round the open river side where a dozen spoonbills were roosting in a large dead gum at the north end. Then on past Big and Little Rigamy Creeks to Lock 8. I had hoped to check out Possum's grave site at Wangumma Homestead on the lagoon that we had canoed going upstream. However, on mooring in the same spot, the entrance was impassable to the canoe due to the low water and the portage far too long, so gave up and lunched before heading to almost adjacent Lock 8 at 1:05 pm. This time we couldn't raise the lock by phone till within 500 m but were lucky enough to coincide with a small craft coming out from the lock heading upstream, so (with a green light) we sailed straight in. It seems the lockie had just had an impromptu visit from his boss. We'd seen the same boat heading downstream earlier & thought the occupants looked a bit official in their pristine high-vis gear but saw no markings on the vessel.

Again, the lockmaster advised that on exit from the chamber, after *please* just missing the back of his own small houseboat moored on the right bank, to go more centre than left as indicated in RMC, things having sanded up a bit over there. Well, I went pretty well dead centre and slowly ground to a halt on sand within 200 m of the lock gate. I considered trying to push over it using more power but, with a fair current behind decided that wasn't smart if it didn't work so tried to back off instead. Already that didn't work, so Col and Aggie went to the back and bounced – still no joy and then the port motor cut out on overheat – *as hirer instructions say*, do NOT exceed 3,400 rpm in reverse! So I let it cool down for a bit and then did the old 'stuck on bank routine' of alternate left and right lock under mild forward revs to widen out a release wedge. That *did* work and we were free but now, to go left or right? I looked back to the Lock hoping to see him waving madly in one direction or the other but he was clearly oblivious of my embarrassment and, following that stressful ambush by his boss had possibly gone back to bed. Against nagging thoughts (and advice) of 'no, go left' I went right and we sailed on as if nothing had occurred. This probably took all of ten minutes but seemed longer – ah, apart from surgeons sawing off the tops of my legs, I haven't had such stimulus for over two years! And so on to ~711 km, early in the 5 km Rufus Reach by 4:30 pm for a 38 km day.

Orlando

Colin had been enjoying an early morning swim each day and this morning went right across the river and back. Following an 8:40 am start, through Lock 7 for the first time (upstream it had been the nav pass) we made the beautiful Devil's Elbow beach for lunch by 1:00 pm. A

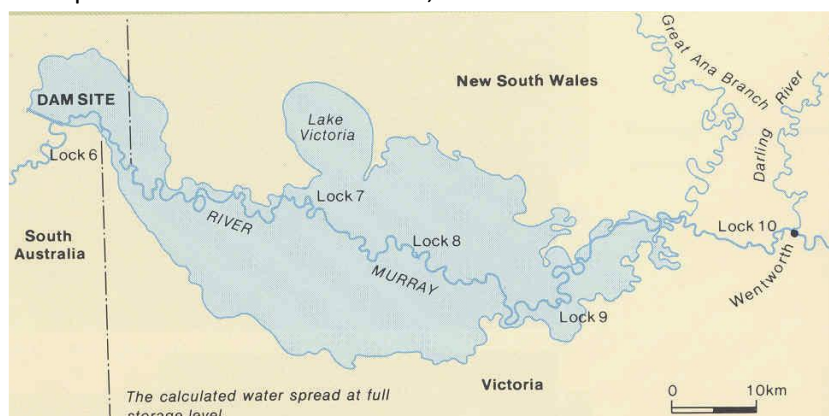


Customs House branded tinnie going upstream and later back down was the first non-lock related human activity we had seen for three days. After lunch and across the river, Colin and Aggie climbed up the much-maligned new fence line that comes down to the river near the eastern end of the spectacular horizontally banded clay cliffs here – for the view.

Then, on past the Warakoo groyne markers to where we had been told to 'hug the willows on the south bank' due to extremely shallow water. This we did but noticed a large dead trunk running down into the water off the bank between the first two willows and sure enough, BAANG we hit, possibly with both pontoons but then it was done with no more fuss, other than from the slightly spooked crew. After Pollard's Cutting and coming towards Kulcurna homestead, water skiers appeared from nowhere, their source turning out to be a couple of big *Customs House* houseboats moored on the point-beach opposite Lindsay Cliffs – a premium spot. By 5 pm we had made 50 km for the day and moored at around 658 km, a little below Wompinni homestead, adjacent to a large creek on the outer side of the curve amongst large snags, a textbook last chance for cod? And it was – I got a terrific bite but it wrapped the line round one of the snags. Getting out in the canoe to pull every which way didn't help and eventually the line snapped – who dares say carp do exactly the same thing? Colin managed a keeper yellow belly.

After only a couple of kms next morning, Higgins Cutting was not an issue in negligible current – and no croc sandal (remember page 13?). It was now Saturday 16th January for our homecoming to South Australia, 1,223 days or 40 months after departure. Another *Customs House* houseboat was moored right in front of the SA/NSW border sign on the north bank. A surprising number of private houseboats (that we hadn't noticed on the way up) were based at Millewa Homestead a little further down on the south bank and just in Victoria, although accessed from SA.

We made a lunch stop on the west bank at 627 km, the site for the 1960's Chowilla Dam proposal.



Orlando

A 12m high, 5km earth embankment would have flooded nearly 1,400 km² to 17 m maximum depth, up to 30 km wide (at Lake Victoria) and 90 km long (to the Darling Anabranch). It was abandoned in 1970 *after* construction had commenced, including a railway line to the stie. With silting and high evaporation losses, the outcome would certainly not have been environmentally benign – but cleaning up Adelaide drinking water would have been easier. And has its substitute, the Victorian Dartmouth Dam on the Mitta Mitta River above Hume Dam, been better? Certainly economically, for upstream river-water-consuming communities but not necessarily for South Australia and its environment. Would the disasters of mouth closure and isolated Lakes Bonney and Albert have happened under the Chowilla scenario – in drought, rivers should dry out from the top down, not the bottom up. However, as the final plans deleted a lock to save on rapidly escalating costs, it was definitely a bad idea, as we never could have made this trip!

At Lock 6, a little after lunch we dragged the lockie back from working on the other side of the river but I guess it goes with his job. Interestingly, we had seen only Customs House (hire) boats above Lock 6 and were to see only Renmark-based ones below it – a boundary rivalling Chowilla Dam? We moored for the night on the boggy (with evidence of wild pig activity) downstream point of the Chowilla Creek junction, opposite the 612 km mark. Caught a few carp – clearly, we were back in SA. Colin landed a good size one which Aggie curried, apparently beautifully but I only had the previous night's yella. Evidence of our return to 'civilization' included caravanners with dog, jet skiers, water skiers with ghetto blasters and tourist-packed tinnies coming down the Creek. We made an early start next day, to head a kilometre up Chowilla Creek. This had been closed to navigation for construction of a regulator during our upstream run. The 'regulator' turned out to be a pretty decent sized weir as the creek here is bigger than the 'Little River' between Wakool Junction and Picnic Point. There is no lock but small craft (not us) can go through open gates at most times.



With that curiosity satisfied, we returned to the main stream and headed down to the Wilkadene Woolshed Craft Brewery (603 km) for an early lunch – sharing a couple of tasting paddles between the three of us. Aggie's 8% 'hard' lemonade was the strongest. The *Cherax Destructor* (yabby) pale



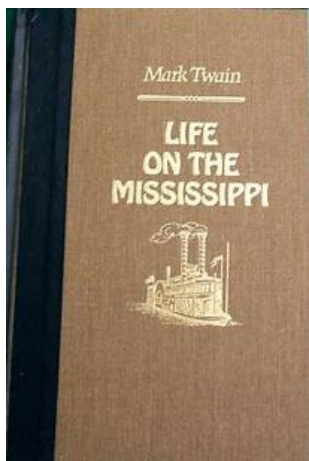
ale was my favourite and Colin's the coffee stout. It was still a solid 5 hour run down to the new 'super-sucker' effluent station a little below Renmark town and, after pumping out, we moored across the river for our last evening. From there it was only 1 km to the Paringa Bridge for its 9:30 opening next morning and then tie up as a guest at *Riverfun Houseboats*, 500 m further on – until making permanent arrangements.

Following survey and having its bum scrubbed at *Liba Liba's* Jane Eliza slip in February, *Orlando* is now back in hire under management by Rob & Jenna Hughes of *River Murray Houseboats*, Lock 5 Road, Paringa – where we visit about once a month to attend to those Mum and Dad type jobs that otherwise just don't happen on a commercial houseboat.

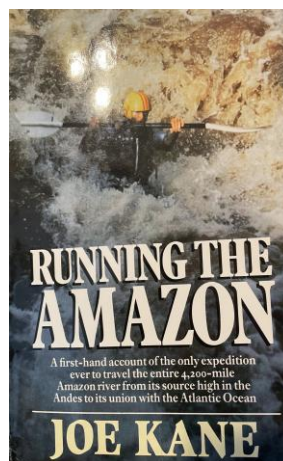
Orlando

2025 Footnote

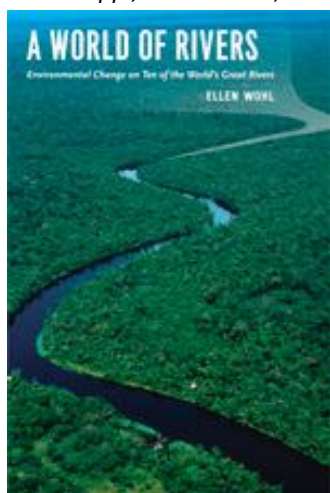
Aggie and I had done a couple of tourist river trips in the past (the Nile, Egypt in 1999 and Douro, Portugal in 2010) but the Yarrawonga experience ignited a passion(/obsession) in me. I have since devoted significant retirement time to learning about world rivers, consuming material from over 80 sources, including hardcopy, digital and audio books but also some websites, TV series and movies. Half constitute my own library with more than twenty relating to the Murray. They cover history, adventure, fiction, geography, philosophy, war, politics, ecology and more, old and new – e.g:



Life on the Mississippi, Mark Twain, memoir (1883)



Running the Amazon, Joe Kane, adventure (1989)



A World of Rivers, Ellen Wohl, ecology (2011)



The Codfather, Stuart Rowland, autobiography (2020)

We have now travelled over 16,000 km on sixteen world river systems, including at least one on each of six continents – i.e. excluding only Antarctica which doesn't really have rivers unless you include glaciers but they are a bit slow, even for us. Approximately a quarter (4,000 km) has been self-driven, with Yarrawonga constituting by far the majority of that. Although much shorter, other self-driving has been more varied including:

- 100 km return from Windsor to Reading in a Dutch Veho35 cabin cruiser on the Thames, UK (2008),
- 50 km in a locally built Silsden narrowboat on the Leeds-Liverpool Canal/River Aire, UK (2016) and,
- 200 km in a Canadian-built Twin Anchors Marine houseboat on Lake Powell, part of the Colorado River impounded by Glen Canyon Dam, upstream from the Grand Canyon, USA (2018).

This *excludes* another 4,000 km repeat runs on the Murray, mostly in *Orlando* but including 1,000 km in six other houseboats – covering all the South Australian Murray above Wellington and to Mildura VIC (800 km), at least twice in both directions.

Orlando

As passengers, we have travelled 2,800 km of the Mississippi (Minneapolis to New Orleans) on the *American Queen*, a modern oil-fired, sternwheel paddlesteamer in 2018.

In early 2019, it was 2,600 km on the Yangtze from Chongqing to Shanghai (via Wuhan) on the *Century Sky*, a multi(6)-deck, 300 passenger version of European-style river cruise boats.

And at year end, 1,600 km on the most awesome of them all, the Amazon from the Leticia-Tabatinga triple point border between Peru, Colombia and Brazil, to Manaus, Brazil. This was on the new, twin-hull *La Jangada (The Raft)*, named for Jules Verne's classic gripping novel of the same name. I surprised myself with the return of enough Portuguese language (from 9 months working in non-Amazonian Brazil 40 years earlier) to more-or-less converse with a non-English speaking native guide who accompanied us – and piranhas are delicious aphrodisiacs!

COVID of course brought everything to an abrupt halt at the end of 2019, including plans for Russia's Volga from St Petersburg to Volgograd. It is the only *longest* river of a continent that we have not yet travelled but will now likely remain so, due to Putin's Ukraine war and so the *second-longest* Danube may have to suffice for Europe. A break of a little over 3 years seemed like an eternity and with apologies to Slim Dusty, I was seriously considering *Going Back Again to Yarrowonga!*

However, we resumed in early 2023, with 1,500 km combined on the Red River of northern Vietnam and the Laos Mekong above Vientiane, both with Pandaw Cruises on their smaller K-Class boats.

And in mid-2024 it was a combined 3,000 km on the Rhine, Main and Danube Rivers from Amsterdam in the Netherlands, through eight other countries (and 65 locks), to Giurgiu in Romania. No prize for which was the better Danubian fish delicacy – sturgeon or pan-fried (tasty, peppered skin but still *bony*) carp?

In mid-2025 it was a combined 800 km on three French waterways, none of which are major by world standards but iconic, nevertheless.

- 130 km return from Bordeaux to Paulliac on the Garonne/Gironde estuary and to Liborne on the tributary Dordogne
- 280 km return from Paris to Caudebec-en-Caux on the Seine and,
- 140 km return from Lyon to Macon on the lower Saone and then 280 km one way from Lyon to Arles on the Rhone – with 8 km self-paddling a kayak on the Gardon River beneath the 2,000 yr old Roman *Pont du Gard* aqueduct.

Pictured below are the other fourteen vessels in our trip order, from the largest *Century Sky* in China, undoubtedly grandest but unfortunately recently idled *American Queen*, to the humblest most intimate (even more than *Orlando*) *Drummer Girl* narrowboat. Most were highly varied except for the most recent four (two trips a year apart), all with the Uniworld river cruise line in Europe. Other than the first on the Nile, I have managed to get into the wheelhouse of each of them, plus most engine rooms and even to drive *La Jangada*, just a little.

Orlando



Nile Rex, River Nile, Egypt 1999



Lanna Lady, River Thames, UK 2008 - self drive



Douro Queen, Douro River, Portugal 2010



Drummer Girl, Leeds-Liverpool Canal, UK 2016 - self drive



American Queen, Mississippi River, USA 2018



46' Expedition, Colorado R. (L. Powell), USA 2018 - self drive



Century Sky, Yangtze Jiang, China 2019



La Jangada, Rio Solimoes, Brazil 2019



Angkor Pandaw, Red River Delta, Vietnam 2023



Laos Pandaw, Mekong River, Laos 2023

Orlando



Beatrice, Rhine, Main, Danube Rivers – Netherlands to Romania, 2024



Bon Voyage, Garonne, Dordogne Rivers – Bordeaux Region, France 2025



Joie de Vivre, Seine River – Paris & Normandy, France, 2025



Catherine, Saone, Rhone Rivers – Burgundy & Provence, France 2025

For late 2026 we have booked 'Further and Deeper on the Mekong River' with Pandaw – about 1,000 km on their larger, older (refurbished) *Mekong Pandaw* from Siem Reap (Angkor Wat) on Tonle Lake in Cambodia, down the Tonle Sap river to Phnom Penh, then up the lower Mekong to the Dolphin Grounds near Kratie and back down to the Delta in Vietnam, to end in central Ho Chi Minh City via the Cho Gao Canal and Saigon River.

Of the remaining big ones, the Congo in central Africa would likely be 'a river too far' for we now seventy somethings but plenty of possibilities remain in the Ganges/Brahmaputra in India, North America's Great Lakes/Saint Lawrence and, Myanmar's Irrawaddy.