

THE KATHERINE STORY 2000

The annual migration to Katherine was afoot. The weather had turned nasty in Mt Isa before the official date of winter, June 1. It was definitely time to head north, but only seemed mildly warmer and not the Katherine we knew from previous trips.

Ivy arrived by plane from the US at lunch time on the Wednesday and was immediately carted off to Katherine still suffering jet lag. At least she wouldn't need to paddle, but support crewing takes a bit out of a person. Brett and Mandy left at the same time. The Camerons followed all to join up at the Barkly Homestead for the night.

Brett and Richard got in a bit of extra training in the TK2 immediately they arrived as they would need all the extra training they could fit in since they would be pitted against Marilyn and Steve where age and treachery were rampant. Clashes on the dam in the previous week and a half were a sure sign there was no love lost between the crews. The Carey-David TK2 joined the tustles on the dam. The adrenaline pumped, the plaque was flushed from the arteries, paddles clashed and water was dumped on wastriding kayaks and not an inch was given between crews.

Steve and I set out at 3:30 on the Thursday afternoon and drove all night with intermittent showers for most of the way. Lobbed into Katherine at 4 a.m. Mt Isa time and decided a rumbo was well earned before crashing at the Knotts Crossing cabins (the Low Level was booked out for Thursday night).

Going across I gave a kangaroo a mighty big nudge. It appeared so quickly there was no need even to apply the brakes as the roo was history before it slammed. One positive out of the ordeal, the bull bar can take it. The bits of roo stuck to the radiator were being aged as we travelled and smelt the next morning. The blow flies got a buzz out of it.

Overcast skies allowed us to sleep longer, but after a late breakfast headed to the supermarket to stock up and met the rest of the crew there. Moved into the Low Level cabins. We all must be getting older as once there would never have been a thought of cabins as it was camping all the way. How things have changed? Sorry, not all of the Mt Isa team are soft. Gottfried and the boys camped at Springvale. After lunch headed to the weir for practice and photos. With the flow over the weir at at least 25 cm jumping was not a question but a certainty. With cameras poised the two TK2s made successful crossings.

With Mt Isa lodging in 4 of the 7 cabins located in a semi circle, drinks and nibbles under the fig were easily arranged being an equidistance from all 4. With the formalities of nominations over, each cabin ajourned for some serious stoking of the furnaces and liquids and preparations for the next morning.

On race morning Al was away first and the TK2s last. Brett and Richard being heavier portaged the weir, while Steve and Marilyn paddled over after the twosome had paddled together from the start, a distance of 3.5 km. We gained about a minute, but the lads had to work to make up the ground, which they eventually did a long way down the race. From there worked together till the reed patch after Galloping Jacks. Knew the nasty hidden waters behind the reeds and we cut across, but the lads were sucked in and went leg up. In their rush to make up lost ground capsized again.

Fruit Cake, a nasty piece of work about 15 mins from the end, nearly ended the McLay-Drynan assault on the fastest race time. The extra volume and the longer kayak made manoeuvring difficult. We crashed nose first and then broadsided

the very same rock. Steve managed to brace against the rock and pull the boat free amidst many a groan and creak. Floated downstream about 75 m to re-establish ourselves and then the pursuers appeared and thank goodness a catastrophe with another leg up in Fruit Cake for Brett and Richard. That saved us. In the final run to the line we were nearly 2 mins ahead and "Oh no!" was heard distinctly on the video playback as Ivy had big vested interests in the next TK2. Mark and Al arrived safely.

The boats went back to town for repairs as usual. Grinders and repairs kits came out along with the liquid merely for medicinal purposes, of course. We escaped with very little damage considering the position we were in and Steve will tell you all the damage, cracked seams and a small slit in the decking, were all in the rear half of the boat. Another one to me.

Day 2 and the battle was on again. A short distance down the rapids section, we caught the K2 and a short distance further on in a sandy section, the heavier weighted Brett and Richard bogged down and dropped off. We stayed with the K2 taking a few leads when the pace slackened. The K2 stopped at the turn and we continued only to be caught much further on as we had hoped by Brett-Richard. Paddled on together till the first of the rapids. Knew both Brett and Steve were suffering and suggested running up the white flag and walk the first rapid. Just as well a thunder bolt didn't strike as I know Brett was suffering big time, but he said he felt absolutely fine. We walked and my partner got some feeling back in that skinny butt of his. We caught the other pair up quickly and then we continued on together till a couple of rapids later when they were on our tail. Crossed to the left hand chute. After we nosed out from behind a rock our boat nosed further across and as they got into the current hit the tail end of our boat and we straightened up but my paddle was wedged in hidden submerged pandanas and couldn't paddle when my partner was calling for me to paddle. Got in a little bit of a paddle before the rocks stopped me. In the mean time, Brett-Richard were swept the other side of the pandanas and couldn't escape but to back paddle and come up the same way we had. They lost valuable minutes which we took advantage of to the utmost. We used every eddy and trick in the book to stay ahead. We didn't look pretty but we kept forging ahead. We portaged the final rapid and it was the gallop up further very fast flowing water, but the smell of home was very strong with a 100m to go. We made it and Ivy contained herself. We were not quite another two minutes ahead.

AGE AND TREACHERY BEATS ^{Youth} AND STRENGTH. Not a truer word said than from the master, Jeff Wilkinson.

Mark had been 10 mins under the record on day 1 and was hoping for the record but limped home with a broken rudder wire and 5 mins outside the record for the race.

Al appeared home some time later to capture a third place.

Celebrations were held under the fig tree when the call came through from Jeff who couldn't wait a minute longer as the suspense was killing him as to the results of the race. He was told the sad tale of his and Snowy's record being blitzed. Jeff had retired yet once again, but is off the stir Snowy into action for some secret training to recapture the record. This is where the masters of AGE AND TREACHERY will come to the fore. Watch it Brett and Richard as you are doomed men once again.