

“A Little Dream Time”

By Terry Barry

January 2006 I sat in my lounge chair reading “The Dream Time Voyage” by Paul Caffyn, it is an account of his remarkable circumnavigation of Australia by sea kayak. I quietly dreamed to myself of how awesome it would be to be able to undertake such an adventure. Given my commitments to family and all other things in life I didn't need telling that this was a dream as even if I could get a year off, how could I justify leaving the family and even if I got over this hurdle I would be kidding myself if I thought I was up to it physically, mentally or technically.

But then I thought why not use the summer holidays and just take off from Port Phillip and head up the coast and see how far I get in 3-4 weeks. This thought revolved around in my head for a few weeks, and I thought of all the times I had holidayed on the NSW coast during the summer and how nearly every afternoon there seemed to be a north east sea breeze. Re reading Paul Caffyn's account of his voyage confirmed head winds for a lot of the first part of his trip. Then I thought why not go the other way? Thus I thought Sydney would be as good a place as any to start, lets see how far I can go in 4 weeks! Then came approval for disappearing for 4 weeks from the family, how lucky I am that this was not an issue for my trusting and understanding wife Deb.

Thus a dream was borne, my “little dream time”. I wanted a trip that had a definite start place and date, an end date but leaving the end place and what happens in the middle to evolve as the adventure unfolded. An adventure is a journey where the outcome is uncertain or unknown and this was going to be adventure! Such exciting thoughts are hard for me to contain and Dana Halsvik on hearing my rough plan was keen to be a part of it. I was conscious of keeping the trip a small affair, only 2-3 people and importantly all of like minds in regards to the aim and philosophy of the trip, which Dana was. Thus it was agreed just the two of us.

Somewhere along the way Melbourne came up as logical place to try to end the trip, later on Queenscliff where Paul Caffyn started and ended his trip became the goal. So planning became for a Sydney to Queenscliff paddle roughly 1100 km and with Christmas and work commitments we had exactly 32 days to do it in. This was getting away from my original concept- definite start & finish date, end place and in between unknown, but Queenscliff remained as a nice goal but we weren't going to worry if we didn't get there.

Members of the NSW Sea Kayak Club were more than happy to provide local information on the NSW coast. Camp sites, places to land, things to be aware of and we had many offers to accompany us on sections of the trip, both in NSW and Vic. This I rejected as I wanted us to discover the coast for ourselves.

After an initial burst not much happened in the way of planning until a couple of months before the start, we had a rough itinerary of daily destinations and camp sites & where we could resupply with fresh food. We decided to post a food drop to ourselves at Mallacoota and went about drying food and deciding on food quantities in earnest. This was the hardest part of the planning, what food to carry, what to buy, quantities etc.

We decided not to carry flares as they are quite heavy and there might be know one around to see them, no EPIRB we- were hugging the coast, but decided a sat phone, SW radio receiver, CDMA mobile would provide us with communication for the entire journey and allow us to get weather reports every day. Dana's GPS had all the charts for the coast and I laminated road maps and some charts so I could follow progress along the way (and I didn't trust GPS's not to crash or run out of batteries).

We also had a flexible solar panel to recharge batteries and phones and a digital camera each. We decided to share all meals and take 1 Trangia between us. A tent each and the usual camping gear, enough capacity to carry 3 days water, first aid kit, repair kit and that's about it.

December 26th we met at Dana's place and headed to Sydney, Deb and Phillip were with us and would spend a week coming home along the coast after they dropped us off. Dana was not well, which was of concern to both of us but we hoped that once underway he would improve. We stopped for the night at Goulbourn en route and it was apparent that Dana was not getting better and was not fit to paddle. We made an appointment with a doctor in Goulbourn before continuing in the morning. The verdict was in, Dana could not paddle.

This took a bit of processing for me, should I delay and wait for Dana to recover? Cancel the trip? Go solo? Whatever happened Deb & Phillip were booked into a Sydney motel for the night and we were going to Sydney. This gave me some thinking time along the way and I decided (with a big deep breath) I would continue on my own. We dropped Dana at the airport a couple of hours later and on the side of the road transferred some gear Dana had to me, wished Dana a quick recovery so he could join me later on and headed off to find the motel. I had decided to spend the night in Sydney as it was a bit late to start by now and I still need to get my head around what I was doing.

7 am the next morning we left the motel and drove to Vaucluse just inside Sydney Harbour (Port Jackson), I gave up the idea of starting near the harbour bridge to make up for loosing the day before.

Took an age to pack the kayak and I wasn't sure all the stuff would fit in but with a few adjustments in it all went. I have never had such a heavy kayak! And so, with more than one butterfly in the stomach, another big breath off I went into the great unknown. I was unable to look back at Deb and Phillip as I paddled away, I was full of emotion and didn't want to show how concerned I really was. A 1100km blue water paddle, not much in the way of safety gear, 1:385000 road maps to navigate the first half with, and SOLO! I was also full of a feeling of a great adventure beginning, this is the real thing I thought to myself.

It took a couple of hours to reach Bondi Beach, I made a perfectly timed entry through the surf to the crowded beach, pulled the boat clear of the water, and proudly walked up the beach for a cold coke, The day was sunny, calm sea, little wind and by now the butterflies had settled down. I was feeling like this was the start of something good, it was 10.30 in the morning and I had a long way to go..

I spent the next 19 days paddling solo (plus one day with Greg Murray) approximately 620km along the coast toward Melbourne. The experiences were varied, some thrilling, some mundane, some scary but it was an adventure of a lifetime for me and it was all absolutely fantastic. In the end I finished 12 days earlier than I had planned and a long way from Queenscliff. It was a trip full of decision making and know one else to make or discuss decisions with, the decision to end the trip came easy. The 'lemons' were beginning to stack up against me, and one thing that became crystal clear along my journey was the importance my family is to me. It was easy to decide to finish and spend some time with them after reaching Cape Conran.

Dana's illness never came good in time to join me and as I write this he is still having tests, he was a great support to me throughout, SMSing me a weather report every evening, every day. He offered the use of his GPS but I declined, a decision I have

mixed feelings about even now. I am equally indebted to the many club members who followed my progress, offered encouragement, sent messages, called and displayed interest and support throughout. I have been astonished and embarrassed at the interest I attracted.

I had my little dream time, and it was all and a lot more than I had dreamed of, I shall fill in a few details of the trip in another article. In the meantime I'll keep dreaming and see what happens next.