

Nadgee Coast
Bitangabee to Mallacoota
December 27-30 2006

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Arriving at Mallacoota on Boxing Day, we set up camp in the caravan park and made a final weather check at the internet café. With a strong SW change forecast for our second day we reconsidered our starting point, so as to (hopefully) ensure passage around Green Cape before the change came in. We decided to start at Bitangabee – if we started from Eden as originally planned there was the possibility of have to spend an extra day in a NP campsite (booked out no doubt) with no permit for that day, so we decided to take Green Cape on the first day and shortened the trip.

Deb drove us all up in the Barry car – testing the suspension! Bitangabee Bay is very sheltered – and we launched into a flat sea. Exploring close in to the rocky coast we investigated a couple of rocky little 'beaches' both before and after Green Cape but alternate camping possibilities seem limited there. Green Cape, with its white lighthouse and historic buildings was soon past. Entering Disaster Bay we saw quite a lot of people on the cliff, fishing in the sea rather far below. The Police launch was cruising around and appeared to be looking us over at one stage, but after we went to shore and I decide to have a swim they went away...

A NE wind sprung up as we launched again to cross Disaster Bay so sails up and we absolutely flew across to Merica River (~14km in an hour). We aimed at where the river came out then pulled the kayaks upriver to the campsite. After lunch we explored upstream on the dark still, quiet river (marred only by the crunching of plastic brushing past oyster shells).

Rising at first light the next morning we packed quickly to get on the water before the change came through. With the tide in, we paddled down the river and out onto the sea – an unexpectedly easy departure. With the swell still small we were able to paddle close in to the cliffs and peer into sea caves. After a stretch of cliffs we arrived at Jane Spiers beach, which looked quite interesting and had what could have been a little creek – quite tantalizing despite the beach being quite steep at high tide and a shore dump. "Let's have a look!" declared Terry and as the person closest to the shore I indicated I would go first – looked not too hard I thought – just paddle in on the back of a wave, then jump out and pull the kayak up before the next wave. Yeah sure! I had it all visualized, but things went sadly wrong – not enough time between waves – as I followed my wave in, the next one snuck up behind me, sucked me back then fell on me. Smacked down in the sand, I struggled up and tried to drag my kayak clear but it turned into a tug of war with the sea, with my boat filling up with sand & water becoming increasingly hard to drag clear. The guys out the back were wondering why I wasn't getting up the beach. Neil came in and suffered the same fate, but at least between the two of us we got the boats up the beach. Terry thought he'd show us how it was done, but got wiped out too (though initially he thought we were too busy to notice this!). Needless to say the creek was dry and it wouldn't really have been that great a camp site!

Getting back out was interesting – Neil & I with a handy push shot through the break but Terry had to battle it out by himself. This took some time and I needed it to unclog my rudder slides from all the sand - I'd shoveled most out on the beach but enough remained to jam up the rudder. Once reunited and with functional rudder we set off again. The breeze picked up a bit and we raised sail – the swell was increasing and the sky was becoming overcast. Passing a break in the cliffs, a gentle waft of warm land breeze came out – possibly a forerunner of the southwesterly change, but it carried with it a strong aroma of the bush. It was a rich flowery scent – I called it a 'purple' scent, but neither Neil nor Terry noticed it. I smelled it again in camp at Nadgee beach but it dissipated after the SW wind came through.

Next to the cliffs approaching Nadgee Beach, a fin suddenly appeared, then another – a pair of dolphins feeding along the cliff line just before we reached Nadgee beach. The bushwalkers on the cliffs observing us land later said the dolphins were playing in the surf – a lot more gracefully than Neil & I. Terry went first – to show us how it was done and to ensure he had the camera ready to record our poor efforts. He took a good sequence of Neil demonstrating what happens when you brace on the wrong side. I came in well on a small wave, but came off it too soon and tried to turn to face the beach (as I had broached left and didn't want to drag my boat the extra distance) - bad idea. Spitting sand second time in one day.

It was still only 10.30am when we arrived – 18km before morning tea time. We set up camp and got to know our neighbors – a couple of experienced bushwalker/travelers from Vancouver. We were soon joined by a solo bushwalker, who we later found out was having navigational issues, in part caused by reliance on a compass that pointed south (the wrong end of the needle had been painted as north). He later set off again for a camp further north only to reappear later that afternoon having walked in a big circle. Terry's wilderness first aid kit came in handy as the bushwalker had also gained a couple of ticks in his journey, which Terry kindly removed. I can recommend that members carry a small mirror in their kits for times like this when ticks may become attached in personal but hard to see places.



Having decided to set aside an extra day to explore the Nadgee area, we settled in for some serious relaxation – the clouds rolled away, a breeze blew and it was a lovely day. The next morning we explored up both branches of the river, as far as we could go before fallen timber blocked off the way. Good manouevering practice with some 'limboing' under logs. The banks of the river closed in and the bush had a close, almost primeval feel.

After lunch something more energetic – a walk to Nadgee Lake. The track was well marked, if a bit prickly and the coastal heath still had some flowers visible. Quite a warm afternoon and we were glad of a swim when we reached there – and another in the river when we got back. Our fellow campers had all departed, and despite seeing a number of other walkers no-one stayed to camp.



Departing at sunrise the next morning, the swell was not too big, but when the waves are breaking close to the beach it is difficult to build up much momentum on your own and when you are sitting down it is hard to see what big waves are coming in from the distance. I sat in the white stuff for a while before I took a run at it. Again, last one off the beach has a disadvantage – Terry almost got through the first crest but was carried backwards, rolled and was washed upright high on the beach. It was another glorious day, with a convenient NE wind so once we were all together the sails were up again. The swell was a bit larger than the previous days and there was a bit of bounce off the cliffs so we didn't travel as close in as previously. The beach at the north end of Bunyip Hole, just north of Cape Howe, looked like it could be a good alternate camp site, but we decided to hang back and observe from behind the breakers this time!

Cape Howe on the NSW/Vic border, is an area of active looking dunes, consuming the bush to the north and sloping down onto the rocks just above the water. The border itself is marked by a rather unremarkable, plain wooden post. As we approached the cape we could see a lot of splashing offshore – a herd of seals, many floating with their fins in the air.



Rounding Cape Howe, Gabo Island and its pink granite lighthouse appeared in the distance. Our feeling of being in the wilderness began to dissipate with the appearance of fishing boats and noisy motorboats. We rounded the southern end of Gabo to get a good look at the lighthouse, and did the gauntlet called Drakes Passage, then paddled up the western side to the small sheltered beach. When we arrived there were two speed boats of people standing around on the beach drinking champagne and eating strawberries! Clearly we had left the wilderness behind! It was too hot to consider exploring Gabo on foot, so we stretched our legs, had a swim and continued on to Tullaberga Island for lunch - there is a little beach on the side facing Mallacoota - I had a quick snorkel & it was the best snorkelling spot of the trip, but I couldn't stay long as the guys were frying in the sun!

Returning to Mallacoota, we landed at Bastion Point to the bustle of the boat ramp - the waves were small on the bar but at low tide we probably would have had to walk our boats up the river. A wonderful trip in perfect conditions!