

35 people and 20 kayaks in the Murray River National Park is a recipe for a splendid two-night trip of relaxing, paddling and plenty of fun.

The initial plan was to paddle through Eckert Creek and The Splash, located in the upper reaches of the Katarapko section of the Murray River National Park. However, recent construction works meant that some of those waterways were bone dry and therefore missing one of the fundamental requirements of kayaking.

Instead, we chose to explore Katarapko Creek to the south, launching at Lock 4 and travelling downstream to finish at Milich's Landing near Loxton.

We unloaded and set up the kayaks on the spacious lawn area at Lock 4.

Day 1

The trip commenced upstream from Lock 4 where we unloaded boats from the trailers onto the grassed area next to the carpark and set about packing all our food, water and sleeping gear. Those with previous kayaking experience finished packing far quicker than the first-timers, who desperately crammed in their gear, meanwhile discovering how precise you have to be to properly pack a kayak.

The lockmaster had scheduled a time for us to pass through, so with a few minutes to spare we managed to get the twenty kayaks launched and into the lock. Everyone rafted together as the water drained out to the downstream level, and it felt exciting to embark as the lock gates opened, giving a glimpse of the Murray River ahead. The weather was cool with a few clouds in the sky - a perfect day for cruising.

The first leg of the journey after passing through Lock 4. Bright sunny weather followed us for the whole trip (almost).

Reaching the intersection of the Murray and Katarapko Creek

We soon reached the intersection of the Murray and Katarapko Creek, about three kilometres downstream of Lock 4, where we branched off onto the smaller waterway. The first kilometres of any trip always involve little adjustments to get comfortable with your chosen mode of transport: boots and rucksack when hiking, or the car seat and radio when driving. Kayaking was no different, and shouts and splashes came from all directions as people attempted to adjust their kayaks while still on the water, which is a recipe for getting drenched or capsizing. The safer option was to put up with some discomfort until we made our first stop, where the rudder pedals and seats could be adjusted.

The sandy beach made a great lunch spot on Day 1, after clearing Stone Weir, the Katarapko regulator. This is a few of the twenty or so kayaks on the trip.

Stopping for lunch

After porting the kayaks around Stone Weir, we found a sandy beach with a large shallow bank to land the kayaks and eat lunch. Out came a variety of camping staples – the usual sandwiches and wraps – as well as some finer delicacies like fresh salad greens and even a small filtered coffee machine. I had forgotten that heavier foods are as readily carried as lighter foods in a kayak, especially on a short trip, and was envious of all the gourmards among the group as I tucked into my 2-minute chicken noodles.

The bright sunshine warmed the air and most of us felt like an afternoon snooze after the morning's exertions, but eventually, everyone hustled to hop back into the boats and get going to find our campsite for the night.



Look out for snags! Not the BBQ kind – there are plenty of fallen trees waiting to upturn an unsuspecting kayaker.

Camping for the night

Finding a campsite big enough for twenty or so tents wasn't as challenging as expected, and we made a fire to ward off the cold while the sun disappeared behind the scrub and the chill moved through the air. Some of us wanted to refresh by swimming in the creek, which was very fresh indeed, and we were thankful for the fire to warm back up afterwards.

The night was peaceful, with occasional noise from cars passing along the highway in the distance, and the Milky Way had incredible clarity among the stars.



With no cloud cover, the first night was chilly, without a breath of wind.

Day 2

In the morning we breakfasted, broke camp and re-packed the kayaks, all with surprising efficiency for such a large group. Once on the water, the sun came out and presented a glorious early-morning Murray River scene, with prolific birdlife amongst the tall gums standing along the banks.



Our camp setup for the first night, inside the Murray River National Park

There's not really much to say about paddling down this slow-flowing creek – therein lies the beauty of kayaking as a chance to relax and reconnect. Apart from passing comments on the weather or asking whether your boat was full of water yet, most of the group enjoyed the solitude and meditated on the motion of paddling.



Kayaking is a chance to enjoy the solitude of the beautiful Murray, and meditate on the movements of paddling.

Using the facilities provided by NPWS SA

At lunch, we met up with our support car and made use of the facilities provided by NPWS SA


at the Katarapko camping grounds. There was an old rope swing hanging from a tree nearby the campsite, so those who braved the cold water provided an entertaining spectacle for the rest of us. The weather had become overcast and quite humid. We set off again after an extended lunch break.

One young lad decided to launch straight off the steep bank and became a submarine for a short time before reappearing back on the surface with a small fish in his kayak. Fortunately, a bilge pump was at hand, supplied by one of the experienced mentors on the trip whose advice and helpful hints we were grateful for over the weekend.


The armada takes to the water after lunch on the second day of paddling.

Arriving at the campsite for the evening

We cruised past the many vehicle-based campers in the Katarapko section who must have thought an armada was going down the river, as we waved at them from our 20 bright orange boats. Our group leader had told us there was only a short distance to cover after lunch, but none of us had realised quite how short. We launched the boats, paddled downstream for what felt like a few minutes and arrived at the campsite for the night. Some others and I chose to continue exploring some side-branches of the creek further downstream before returning to camp. The air was still with not a hint of wind, and it looked like the bows of our kayaks were cutting through a mirrored glass surface. Back at camp, the others had already started a campfire to cook dinner on, and sleeping that night was a lot warmer due to the dense cloud cover overhead.


Camped for the second night in Murray River National Park. We greeted several vehicle-based campers as we passed them by before reaching our booked camping spot.

Day 3

The next day we packed up leisurely and continued downstream through the southern section of Katarapko. We passed a couple of small islands in the middle of the river that were densely vegetated with reeds and gums.


We had a relaxing weekend of paddling in Murray River National Park.

Reaching the end of Katarapko Creek

At the end of Katarapko Creek, reaching our destination of Milich's Landing necessitated crossing a wide and exposed section of the Murray, which the wind had whipped up to be quite choppy.

It was the only challenging bit of paddling of the whole trip. Everyone arrived at the Landing slightly damp and windblown, yet satisfied with a relaxing and peaceful weekend getaway on the river.

What's your favourite local waterway to paddle?