

West Kunderang Recreational Retreat



Canoeing the Apsley & Macleay Rivers



INTRODUCTION

The Macleay and Apsley Rivers offer excellent opportunities for canoeists, through spectacular gorge wilderness country of the Great Escarpment on the eastern edge of the New England Tablelands of northern New South Wales. The best sections of these river systems are found below Halls Peak Road on the Chandler River, (which flows into the Macleay), and below Riverside on the Apsley River.

While these sections are mostly within Oxley Wild Rivers National Park, there is some private land along the Apsley River, and through West Kunderang on the Macleay. Canoeists are requested to contact the NPWS and private landholders where applicable, with basic details of their trip prior to departure.

For the Macleay best water levels at the Georges Creek Junction gauge for a canoe party of average overall competency are a minimum of 0.6m, and maximum of about 1.4m. For the Apsley at the Riverside gauge, the average yearly minimum and maximum levels are 0.43m and 1.41m respectively, no recommendations as to best levels are presently available.

PLANNING

Canoe trips are potentially challenging and all involve an inherent risk. Trips need to be carefully planned, with the aim of maximising safety, enjoyment and achievement, bearing in mind the following details:

- Itinerary for the entire trip, including vehicle drop-offs and pick-ups.
- Current water levels, with particular respect to water safety.
- Thorough assessment of route, distances, features, stages, timing, and alternate access/egress in case of emergencies.
- Equipment needs, including life jackets, helmets, first aid kits, maps, food, and boat repair kits.
- Weather forecasts, valid for the whole trip.
- Competency levels for each member of the party.

WEST KUNDERANG RECREATIONAL RETREAT TO GEORGES JUNCTION (28.3KM)

For a long day, or easy two day canoe trip, this is the most worthwhile of the entire river system. Easy access, wonderful scenery, and a mix of long quiet waters and several challenging grade 1 and 2 rapids (which quickly go higher with a rise in water levels), greet canoeists on this section.

Access to the Macleay at West Kunderang is along Raspberry Road for 37km from the junction with the Armidale - Kempsey Road, through a locked gate onto the private property, and a further 6km down to the river (Allow 2.5 hours by car from Armidale). Bookings are essential (and an information package for West Kunderang Recreational Retreat is also available) by contacting Cindy McRae on 02 6778 1264.

For most of the trip, the river is wide and slow, passing through the spectacular gorges of West Kunderang, once part of the mighty Kunderang cattle station. Rapids at Kunderang Brook, (10.5km from West Kunderang), and between there and East Kunderang, make this section enjoyable and exciting.

There is a tricky rapid just before East Kunderang Homestead at the end of a long still section, and it is difficult whether the water level is low, when a steep rocky 'step' is encountered, or high, when there is the danger of getting caught in the strong horizontal tree branches on the east bank. East Kunderang Homestead is 18.8km from West Kunderang; allow 4 to 5 hours.

The homestead at East Kunderang is occupied by paying guests most of the time and should be avoided, although the phone is available in emergencies, and camping is permitted anywhere along the river banks.

The section from East Kunderang Homestead to Georges Junction is 9.5km, and takes 2 to 3 hours, depending on river levels. Low levels result in smooth gravel races being exposed, requiring exit from the boats and pulling across to deeper water, while high levels make the three rapids on this section very interesting. Near Flaggy Rock Crossing there is a right-angle rapid to the left (west), and further down river a series of large boulders which have to be negotiated. 1km before the Junction is the biggest rapid of the trip (grade 2 to 4, depending on water levels). Sweeping around a long bend in the river, it rushes over and around large boulders, to end in the long pool which runs up to Georges Creek.

HALLS PEAK ROAD TO WEST KUNDERANG RECREATIONAL RETREAT (32.1KM)

Halls Peak Road leaves Raspberry Road 30km south-west of the Armidale - Kempsey Road junction. Access to Halls Peak is through a locked gate & bookings must be made with the Armidale NPWS Office (02) 6738 9100. The track down to the Chandler River is very steep and narrow and requires a 4WD vehicle and an experienced driver.



The Chandler River descends a mere 50 metres in 14.5 km to its junction with the Macleay. Rapids are mostly of grade 2 standard along this section of river.

Compared with the Macleay, it is narrow, winding and shallow, with few interesting rapids but many irritating ones. However, it offers beautiful and remote wilderness canoeing, with only a 700 metre high walk out along a ridge in an emergency. Allow 5 to 7 hours, depending on competency of crews and river levels (inexperienced canoeists will find the constant small rapids and sharp bends a challenge). A tricky rapid is found amongst the trees just before the Macleay Junction.

From the Chandler - Macleay junction, it is 14.5 km to the junction with the Apsley River, and a further 3.1 km to West Kunderang Homestead. Good camp sites can be found along this stretch of river. Please note, camping on West Kunderang station is limited to designated areas only (bookings are essential).

Care is needed for one rapid in particular along this section, a few kms from the Apsley Junction, which involves a narrow boulder 'shute' in amongst the trees. At low levels it is exciting; at high levels it needs portage around the first section.

RIVERSIDE TO WEST KUNDERANG RECREATIONAL RETREAT (28.2KM)

This is a very scenic section of the river through the Apsley Valley, but involves long drop-off and pick-up routes. Access to Riverside is through a locked gate and bookings must be made with the NPWS Armidale District Office (see leaflet). Please contact West Kunderang Recreational Retreat if you intend canoeing along this section of river or existing via their access.

Due to the Apsley having a smaller catchment than the Macleay, water levels along this section of river are sometimes quite low. The river is generally narrower and shallower than the Macleay, with frequent gravel races and boulders. It is 25.1 km from West Kunderang Homestead. Allow anything from 1 to 2 days, depending on river levels and ability of participants.

MINIMUM IMPACT CANOE-CAMPING

Any visitor to natural places should be aware of the need to care for the environment, and in particular the principles of minimal impact. Most of us however, leave more evidence of our visit than we intend, and it is this impact can be reduced by implementing the following practical procedures.

Packing

- Reduce the packaging that comes with your camp food.
- Pack both food and non-food supplies in containers that are re-usable not disposable (eg. Plastic jars).
- Eliminate all unnecessary equipment packaging and avoid carrying potential rubbish such as bottles and cans.

Rubbish

- All rubbish, including food scraps and regardless of size, should be carried out for disposal. After all, you managed to carry it in.
- Don't 'bash, burn & bury'. This was the ethic of years gone by and is now not appropriate.
- Where possible, carry out other peoples rubbish - the next person along will appreciate it.

Campsites

- Use existing campsites rather than creating new ones. At the same time try to avoid overused sites, thereby giving them the chance to revegetate.
- Camp at least 30m from areas such as river banks.
- In untracked areas, take a different route to water every trip in an effort to reduce erosion.
- Wash at least 50m from watercourses using only pure biodegradable soaps.
- When cleaning cooking and eating utensils use sand and not detergent, again 50m from watercourses. Scatter used washing water across the ground when finished.
- Camp only one or two nights in the one place.
- Try to leave campsites in a better state than you found them.

Campfires

- Take care with all campfires as the potential for environmental damage due to bushfires is enormous.
- Choose to use fuel stoves where possible.
- Observe fire bans. A total fire ban includes fuel stoves.
- When fires are used, use existing fireplaces wherever possible.
- If there are no existing fireplaces, remove a layer of ground-cover and dig a small depression for the fire. When finished, extinguish and flatten the fire and cover it with the ground-cover.

- Do not use stones to ring the fire, river stones shatter when hot.
- Keep fires as small as possible and sparingly use only dead fallen wood. Scatter unused firewood when you leave the campsite.
- Keep all rubbish out of fireplaces (tins, bottles and foil etc).
- Do not burn plastics or anything that contains foil (eg. Juice boxes and wrappers).

Toileting

- Choose a spot at least 100m from campsites and watercourses, dig a hole 15cm deep and bury all faecal waste and toilet paper.
- Carry a small trowel for digging and use un-bleached, cream coloured toilet paper.
- All feminine hygiene products should be packed out as they are slow to decompose, and may be exposed by foraging animals.

OTHER ISSUES

- Fishing is allowed, however NSW Fisheries' legal sizes, seasons and bag limits must be observed.

	Min. Length cm	Bag Limit per day	In Possession
Eel-tailed catfish	30	2	4
Trout	25	10	20
Australian bass	-	2	4
			(1 over 35cm)

The Australian Bass Season runs between 1 September to 31 May each year.

Clear, cold water in a remote area is no longer a guarantee that it is safe to drink. Filtering drinking water has become a canoe-camping necessity.

RELEVANT MAPS

Carrair 9336 1:100 000; Big Hill 9336-3-N 1:25 000; Carrai 9336-3-N 1:25 000; Kunderang 9336-2-S 1:25 000; Rowleys Creek 9236-2-S 1:25 000.

RELEVANT INFORMATION LEAFLETS

West Kunderang Recreational Retreat; East Kunderang Homestead; National Parks of the Waterfall Way - Armidale; National Parks of the Oxley Hwy - Walcha; Riverside Wilderness Access; NSW Freshwater Fishing Guide (NSW Dept. Primary Industries www.dpi.nsw.gov.au).

FURTHER INFORMATION

West Kunderang Recreational Retreat
"Biston Park"
Wollomombi NSW 2350
Ph: (02) 6778 1264

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Armidale NSW 2350
Ph: (02) 6738 9100 • Fax: (02) 6738 9140

This leaflet is not a recommendation to proceed with a canoe trip along any of the watercourse within Oxley Wild Rivers National Park or West Kunderang. All water sports involve an inherent risk and people using the river must be experienced, make all the necessary safety arrangements and go fully prepared.

Leaflet produced with the assistance of NSW NPWS.