

## **Paddle on The Macleay 2015**

*Caroline Webber, Secretary of Port Macquarie Hastings Canoe Club Inc, wrote this report for the club members.*

On the Saturday of the long weekend eight of us enjoyed the Save Our Macleay River's (SOMR) 3rd. annual Paddle on The Macleay from Fishermans Reach to the Yarrahapinni Wetlands, which are adjacent to The Golden Hole, a very significant Aboriginal midden site.

Over 50 paddlers of varying ages paddling crafts of all shapes, sizes, compositions & configurations participated in what was a really informative day & lovely paddle on this beautiful river system.

Everyone launched from the ramp at Fishermans Reach (south of Stuarts Point) & enjoyed a leisurely paddle down river admiring the scenery. Upon arrival at The Golden Hole, we were treated to morning tea & an informative presentation by National Parks & Wildlife Service Ranger Penny Kendall on the background to the rehabilitation of the wetlands.

The restoration project was originally initiated by the Yarrahapinni Wetlands Reserve Trust & eventually came under the umbrella of the NPWS. Ranger Kendall said the wetlands area was drained (a levee was constructed) in the 1970's, but the anticipated good grazing land never eventuated & the resultant acid sulphate soils & 'black water' poisoned land & waters downstream. After much negotiation by the Trust & the NPWS, tidal re-inundation commenced in 2008 via openings in the levee wall. The tidal flow of saltwater led to an immediate reduction in acid sulphate soils & fish stock & birdlife are re-establishing themselves in the wetlands. We were fortunate to see two Jabiru fly overhead.

While this work has been a great success, more work in the surrounding area needs to be undertaken. Both Ranger Kendall & ex chair of the Trust, Rupert Milne Home, pointed out that restoration of other wetlands, such as the Clybucca, were of great importance to maintaining, enhancing & preserving the work done in the Yarrahapinni Wetlands.

After the talk, we prepared to enter the wetlands, which was not as simple as you would think. With the tide still coming in, water was rushing through the breaks in the levee & there were some ominous looking rocks on either side of these openings! Great fun for those with plastic boats....not so for fibreglass ones! After a bit of portaging followed by some quick strokes once in the water, we found ourselves in the flow & into the wetlands.

It was a great feeling & the landscape of the wetlands was eye catching with healthy trees & vegetation forming a wall behind the dead trees whose stark white trunks made for interesting photography. There were plenty of birds in the trees as well as the two Jabiru I mentioned earlier. Everyone just did their own thing, paddling around the wetlands & enjoying the beauty of this place. We had been asked to collect mangrove seeds before entering the wetlands & to contribute to the recovering environment by depositing them inside the levee.

Paddling back was going to be interesting & it was entertaining to watch those in appropriate craft take on the 'rapid' upstream on the way out!! Bill & Terry took on the challenge but thankfully Richard had spied a quiet little spot in the mangroves where we were able to get our kayaks out, portage over the levee & launch back into the main river unscathed!! The breeze had got up by now & we had a good, steady paddle back to Fishermans Reach. Well done to Leon & Kate's granddaughter Rebecca who completed the paddle with us. We packed up & adjourned back to the foreshore park at Stuarts Point for lunch.

Just a quick note on The Golden Hole. It is described as one of the most significant Aboriginal midden sites in eastern Australia & is registered on the National Estate. It runs almost continuously for 14 kms & is renowned for its extensive, diverse & well preserved deposits. It is unique because it contains well preserved shell & bone remains from about 2500 to 3000 years ago. Archaeologists have dated initial Aboriginal occupation at this historic site at about 4000 years ago. This particular site was an important meeting & sharing place for the Gumbaynggirr & Dunghutti people.

We would like to acknowledge the organising work done by SOMR members to put this paddle on & for the information made available in order to understand the importance of both the area & the work being done to rehabilitate it.

Information gleaned from Ranger Kendall, The Macleay Argus, SOMR & the NPWS Management Plan.