

## The Inaugural CMW Packrafting Trip

Jeff Howard



First launch at Sand Point at Palm Beach.

[Photos by Jeff, and probably the one of himself taken by Sara].

About 7 months ago something caught my eye in the Social Program of a freshly printed May 2011 edition of *Into The Blue*. Next to June 8 – Quarterly General Meeting (with the added bonus of it being a Special Resolution General Meeting !), there was this little note:

*...Duncan Cross will also present a brief look at ‘Pack Rafting and the freedom it brings...’.*

I had never heard of Pack Rafting as such – but a quick Google search revealed this web site:

**Alpacka Raft LLC – The World’s Finest Packrafts**  
[www.alpackaraft.com](http://www.alpackaraft.com)

Some months prior to this General Meeting, Duncan had noticed that inflatable boat technology had moved on from the rather heavy items you could fit into a car boot, to something that weighed less than a lilo and pack down to the size of a two-person tent. Being a gadget man, he was moved to purchase the 2.4 kg *Alpacka Denali Llama*. This was the larger model of the *Alpacka* white water raft range. Duncan said that the sales people at *Alpacka* were very helpful with advice on picking the right size boat with suitable paddles and accessories such as a spray

deck, PFD, boat repair kit and a remarkable tie-down mechanism to attach your pack.

After we passed our Special Resolution on June 8, Duncan strode up the front with his overnight pack and proceeded (in about 10 minutes, ably assisted by Barbara Wright) to lay out and inflate his *Denali Llama* – and lecture at the same time. I was impressed enough to think about buying one of these, and so was at least one other person at the meeting – Prospective Member Rob Jung.

As it turned out, Rob had his *Denali Llama* delivered some weeks later and thought deeply about what to do with it (in between other projects). Meanwhile, after a house call over to Duncan’s place to see his *Llama* in action in his pool, Sara and I took delivery of our boats well in time for the Silly Season. After sitting in Duncan’s boat and checking the website guidelines, Sara chose the more compact 2.2 kg *Alpacka Alpaca*, while I found that the *Llama* suited me best.

The weekend after we took delivery, Sara and I walked down the Canon Bicentennial Track to Buffalo Park (from Ryde) and successfully tried the craft out on the Lane Cove River. A week later we walked from Heathcote Station to Kangaroo Creek and paddled down to Audley (for morning tea at the café) and thence down the Hacking River to exit at Grays Point and walked out to Gynea Station before the rain set in.

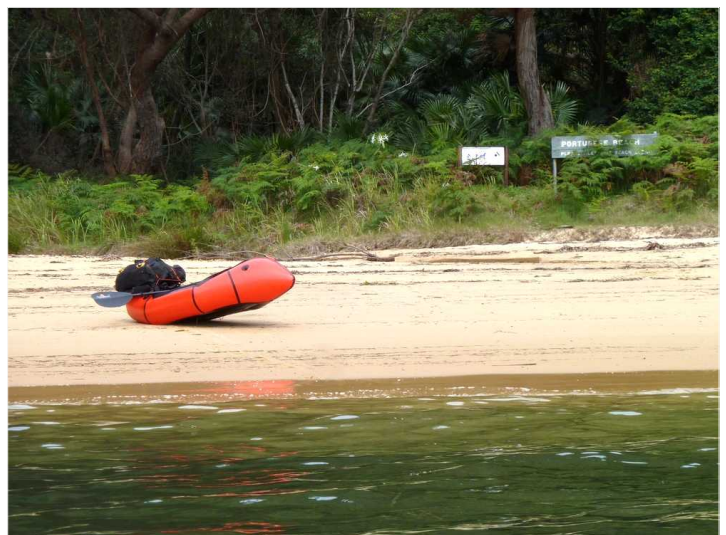
A few days after that, I had a think about “Pack Rafting and the freedom it brings . . .”, and sent this trip notice email to Hester:

**Dec 18 (Sun) COWAN TO PALM BEACH**

*The inaugural CMW Packrafting Trip. Cowan Station, Jerusalem Bay, Cowan Creek, America Bay, America Bay Track, West Head Road, Bairne Track, Portuguese Beach (short off track section), Pittwater, Palm Beach. Several alternative plans if weather conditions not optimal. Packraft, paddles, PFD essential. For more information see [www.alpackaraft.com](http://www.alpackaraft.com). DISTANCE: MEDIUM. TRIP GRADE: MEDIUM/PACKRAFTING. MAPS: KU-RING-GAI CHASE NP TOURIST. LEADER: JEFF HOWARD 9647 9199 (W) 9807 3649 (H) [jeff.howard@lionco.com](mailto:jeff.howard@lionco.com). TRANSPORT: TRAIN & BUS.*



Sara about to set off on Pittwater.



Portuguese Beach (the NP&WS can’t spell, and where’s Sara!).

## The Inaugural CMW Packrafting Trip (Continued)

Jeff Howard



America Bay and Cowan Creek (that's Jeff under that hat!).

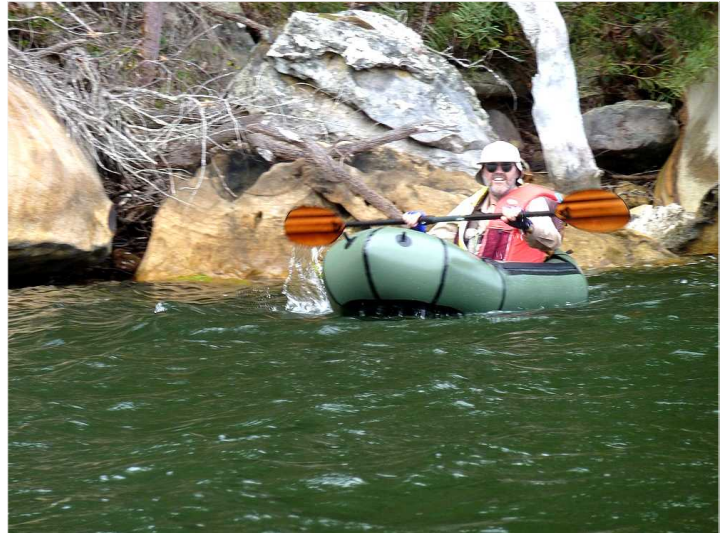
Within a few days both Duncan and Rob had booked onto this trip. As the 18th December drew near, Duncan had advised that with NE to NNE winds forecast that day it would be easier to do the trip in reverse – and that is what we did.

At around 7.15am we all meet at Stand A Carrington Street (Wynyard) for a 7.30am departure on the 190 Palm Beach Bus. I thought we would have the bus to ourselves, but there was standing room only due to a large number of (returning) Northern Beaches late night revellers and a sizable number of people who work at Warringah Mall. Next time we will catch this bus at Railway Square. Arrival time at Sand Point on the Pittwater was 9.03am. After taking about 20 minutes to inflate the pack rafts and organise ourselves (this was Rob's first trip with his boat), we paddled off to Portuguese Beach on the other side of Pittwater, which is in Ku-ring-gai Chase NP. So far so good – we just got across before the bay was crowded with racing sail boats of all sizes. After a leisurely morning tea, we packed up the now dry boats and climbed the ridge leading to the Bairne Track.

I had never walked much in this West Head area of Ku-ring-gai Chase, and found it very enjoyable. Lots of Christmas Bells and other flowers still in profusion, pretty well all the way to the West Head Road. A number of cyclists were encountered here, heading out of the Park after their early morning ride – no doubt not stopping until they reached the first coffee shop. It was getting hot, so we quickly walked to the start of the America Bay track and arrived (for an early lunch) at the impressive waterfall overlooking America Bay and Cowan Creek.

A couple of large cruisers were moored in America Bay. While climbing down the cliffline we encountered an energetic family climbing up (kids first) – the dominant male suggested to us that we were lost heading down to the obvious dead-end (for walkers) that was America Bay. He was immediately impressed when we told him that we were equipped with pack rafts and travelling from Palm Beach to Cowan.

Due to the increasing windy conditions, we decided to



Rob in Jerusalem Bay.

paddle to the head of Jerusalem Bay after first making land fall at Fishermans Beach (for a rest) on the other side of Cowan Creek. This section was quite choppy with a combination of large boat wash and uninterrupted northerly swells from Lion Island in Broken Bay. The packrafts handled these conditions well, and once we got round the point into Jerusalem Bay, the wind and swells were to our sterns and we made good progress towards the Great North Walk track at the head of the Bay.

After again packing away the boats, we walked up the final 2.5 kms beside an attractive flowing creek to Cowan Railway Station and waited for the next train, which well within the hour took us swiftly to our respective destinations of Eastwood and Strathfield. All agreed that this was a very enjoyable and unusual trip, displaying the versatility of walking and packrafting. We commend this activity to the Club.



On the Jerusalem Bay Track.

"We must leave exactly on time . . . From now on everything must function to perfection."  
**Benito Mussolini (1883-1945).**

"Nae man can tether time or tide."  
**Robert Burns (1759-1796).**

