

SUMMER CANOEING? DAMMED GOOD!

Many rivers in the south-west of Western Australia flow through State forest, and one way of experiencing the forest environment is to canoe along navigable water courses, such as the Blackwood, Murray, Warren, Frankland, Avon and Swan Rivers to name a few. Although canoeing is most enjoyable during warm weather, most canoeing in Western Australia is done in our winter months from May to October because the rivers usually dry up during the harsh Western Australian summers.

Some rivers are perennial and these are all in forested, high rainfall areas. The Blackwood, Murray, Warren and Frankland Rivers for example do flow throughout the summer, but are so restricted that canoeing becomes a portaging exercise, bumping and scraping over rocks and scrub which in winter are covered by high waters.

Under unusual conditions created by cyclonic activity in the north of the state, heavy inundation may occur along the rivers in the south-west. This happened in January of this year. River sports are not usually practised in these fluke conditions as the waters are extremely dangerous.

So the sort of canoeing available in summer is mainly touring on the flat open waters of estuaries and river mouths. However, many people in Western Australia belong to canoe clubs or groups who encourage slalom expertise and who gear their main activities to white-water canoeing. In winter, many of our rivers offer a variety of white-water canoeing in rapids that range over varying degrees of difficulty. Under normal summer

conditions white-water canoeing is just about impossible on our free-flowing rivers.

The Harvey River and the Collie River are not free-flowing, however, surprisingly it is these two rivers that offer the only reliable white-water courses for advanced canoeing during the summer months. They are dammed by the Stirling and Wellington Dams respectively, and are used for irrigation.

When the gates of the dams are open to release water to the holding weirs downstream, short water courses are created that offer exciting white-water canoeing. The hotter the weather, the greater the volume of water needed for irrigation, and the better the canoeing.

The Amateur Canoe Association of Western Australia has taken full advantage of the irrigation procedure on the Harvey River. Each summer the State Canoeing Championships are held on the irrigation waters of the Stirling Dam. Where the Harvey once flowed there is now a dry river bed for most of the year. On this bed boulders, rocks and logs have been strategically positioned to



The Wellington Dam and Collie River ▲ bed before irrigation waters are released. (H. Bradbury)

provide a demanding competition slalom course. In summer, the taps are turned on, the gates are opened and the water comes cascading out of the dam, which creates one of the "best" slalom courses in Australia.

The Australian Championships have been held on this same course, which was in fact created for that event in 1978.

With the approach of winter the dams remain closed to re-fill. The free-flowing rivers in the south-west rise and the conventional white-water canoeing season starts. So, those who wish to continue slalom canoeing next summer, try the Harvey or the Collie Rivers. They may not be free-flowing, but the canoeing is dammed good!

Helen Bradbury



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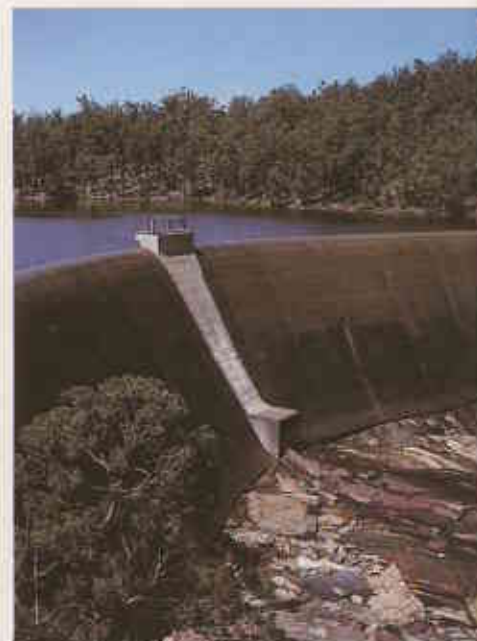
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▲ Negotiating a chute on one of the rapids on the Collie River. (L. Harman)



▲ Canoeing on the water courses made by the irrigation waters from the Wellington Dam. Note the safety helmets and life-jackets worn by all canoeists. (L. Harman)

▼ A view upstream of the Harvey River slalom course, set in the picturesque jarrah forest. Spectators have a good view of the competition from the banks or from the footbridge in the distance. (L. Harman)

▼ The view downstream of the Harvey River as one of the doubles in a Canadian canoe successfully negotiates a competition gate. Points are awarded for the number of gates negotiated on the whole length of the course. (L. Harman)

