

# RAPID RIDING

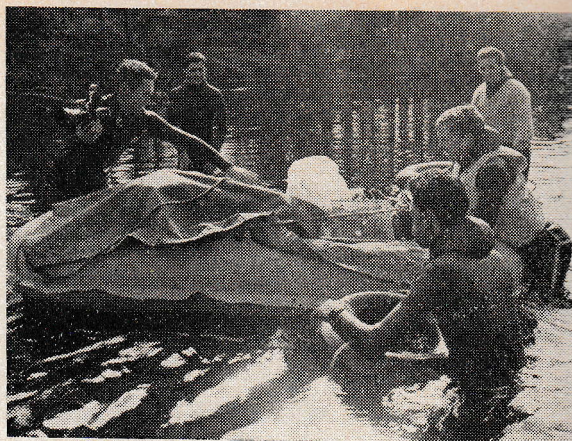
*With Thomas W. Byron*

I must admit that, when at first the idea of rapid riding was suggested to me by a group of divers from the South Pacific Club, I had grave misgivings about the whole affair. The plan, in its entirety, was explained to me and after some time I decided to go along for the ride.

Taking part in this most unusual venture were Denis Robinson, John Allen, Bob Smith, Peter Newton and John Luton. Quite a considerable amount of planning and preparation had gone into the idea. First of all, and most important, was the rubber raft that would carry our food supplies, dry clothing, camping equipment and cameras, etc. The raft was made watertight as much as possible. Secondly, all food, clothing, cameras, and other items of value, were sealed in plastic bags. Thirdly, each of us was equipped with an inner tube for extra support in the water on the long swim that lay ahead, and in addition, the tube would make rapid riding easier for the diver.

Pushing off from a sandy river bank beneath the Kangaroo Valley Bridge, we started our first four miles swim south along the Kangaroo River that weaves and curves through lush scenic bushlands, mountains and valleys towards Morton National Park and then further on, flows into the Shoalhaven River. Progress at first was slow, swimming at a speed of one mile per hour we took until late in the afternoon to reach our first scheduled overnight stop.

During the four mile swim we were swept over a total of five boulder-strewn rapids at speeds of up to 20 m.p.h. with water, in places, only one foot in depth.



*The handling and safety of the supply raft was left to Denis Robinson.*

*Photo by Bob Smith.*

*Tyre inner tubes were used for added support on the long swim.*

*Photo by Tom Byron.*



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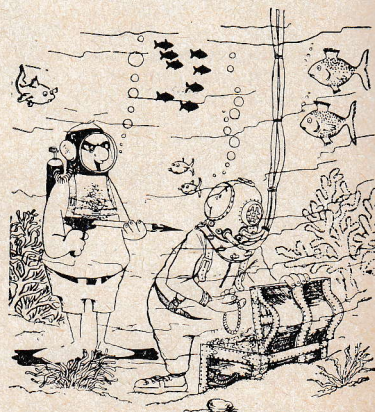
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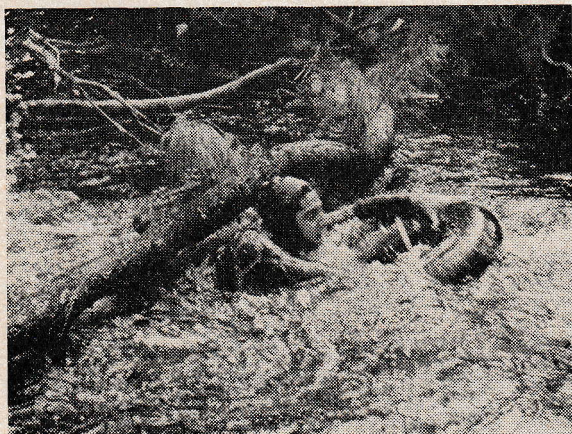


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Using flippers, John Luton and Bob Smith guide themselves over white water rapids. Photo Peter Newton.  
A fallen tree branch — just one of the many hazards to be overcome. Photo Peter Newton.



Our rubber tubes and wet suits took quite a pounding.

Nearing the end of the afternoon's swim John Allen developed severe chaffing behind both knees, caused by the wet suit he was wearing. I suffered minor cramps in my right leg muscle.

Away from the noise of the swirling and tumbling waters, on the calmer edges of the river bank we noticed here and there, numbers of swimming frilled-neck lizards. Catching sight of us they would plunge head first under the water and swim, completely submerged, to the opposite bank, leaving a trail of small bubbles behind them.

Leaving camp early next morning we continued down stream. Momentum of the water had increased and with it the dangers, as the river wound its way through the steep mountain valleys, on the long journey to the sea.

Rapids were frequent now and added precaution had to be adopted. Two of our team were sent on ahead to negotiate a safe passage as each rapid was approached. The river was extremely narrow in sections. Tree trunks and branches that had fallen across made it difficult to guide the raft safely through the hazards that we encountered.

Over the roar of cascading water the remainder of us guided by hand signals from the two forward divers, were swept over rapids in single file, about six feet apart, with the raft following last of all. In this way we maintained the maximum of safety.

During the two days of this unusual adventure we swam a total distance of 10 miles in water temperature of 60 degrees. Plunged over 22 rapids of estimated speeds of up to 20 m.p.h. Narrowly missed a barbed-wire fence that lay at water level. Developed cramps, chaffed legs, bruised knees on rocks, punctured one tube, and shot 400ft. of 16m.m. film for News Magazine on Channel 7.

For a weekend away from spearfishing or SCUBA diving, rapid riding can be a most exciting and rewarding experience as the diver matches his skill against the elements of nature on any one of the fast flowing inland rivers.

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