

## **Hollyford River to Milford Sound**

*by Max Grant*

By the time I'd finished packing all my gear into the kayak, it was 1.00 p.m. and I was finally ready to set off down the Hollyford River. The day was warm and sunny, the river cold and low with snow down to the river's edge.

The 21 km stretch of river between the end of the road and the confluence with the Pyke River contained many Grade 1 rapids, a few of which were blocked with logs and had to be portaged, and one Grade 4 rapid at Cascade Creek. The Cascade Creek rapid was about 150 metres long and would have been a thrill in my white water kayak, but with my loaded up sea kayak it was a one hour portage. I was thankful at this point that I had opted for the plastic sea kayak as I literally dragged and dropped it over boulders which would have caused major damage to a fibreglass hulled kayak.

I kayaked on for another hour before making camp for the first night on the river bank 6 km from the confluence with Pyke River.

During the night, the expected depression moved into the area and when I awoke in the morning it was snowing lightly. After a good hot breakfast I started down river. I had only been paddling a short time when I came across a family of three red deer drinking at the river edge. The stag, hind and fawn stood their ground as I drifted towards them. At a distance of 20 metres they turned and disappeared into the bush. This was the first time I'd ever seen deer from my kayak and to have been able to get so close was a wonderful experience.

After reaching Pyke River, it was another 9 km to Lake McKerrow and the Lake McKerrow Hut. This part of the river was very similar to the Whanganui River, only the water was crystal clear. After a hot meal, I continued across Lake McKerrow. Although the weather was not the best, I couldn't help notice the beauty of the lake. It is surrounded by dense vegetation right down to the lake's edge and steep snow covered peaks appeared above the mist. With a wind at my back I made good time across the lake and down the last part of the Hollyford River to the sea and the Martin Bay hut - 21.5 kms for the day.

A new hut has been built at Martin Bay, a few hundred metres south of the old hut site on the river bank. This is good for any kayakers as you can land at the hut without having to go over the river bar.

Next morning I was a little disappointed not to see any Fiordland Crested penguins which are known to be on Long Reef Point. Offshore sea conditions were not too good with a one to two metre swell from the north. As the weather forecast was worse for the next day, I decided to make a run for in and headed out for Milford Sound, 46 kms down the coast.

From Martins Bay to Yates Point, I stayed 1 to 2 kms offshore, to avoid a confused sea most of which was caused by several shallow reefs and some large rocky outcrops. The shoreline was steep and covered in bush, but I passed several beaches where a kayak could land with suitable campsites. Once past Yates Point, the sea became calmer and after I rounded Dale Point and entered Milford Sound, the sea became dead flat and as an extra bonus, the sun came out. At the entrance to Milford Sound there are a couple of places where a kayak could land on the southern shore.

About 6.00 p.m. I hit the beach at Milford, quickly got changed and put in my last radio message to the Milford Sound airport control tower. (I carried a low frequency handheld radio with which I was able to talk to any aircraft in the area.) The chap in the tower responded, "Well done canoeist! When will you be back?"

The question took me by surprise, and I had to think quickly before I answered.

"As soon as I can get back. It has been an amazing trip."

**Kayak:** plastic Puffin

**Paddles:** 218 cm medium blade for river & rough sea 230 cm narrow blade for Lake McKerrow & Milford Sound (two splits)

**Equipment:** EPIRB, flares, waterproof handheld 2 way radio, Macpac Minaret tent, six days' food, plenty of warm clothing & a good 'sou-wester' hat.