

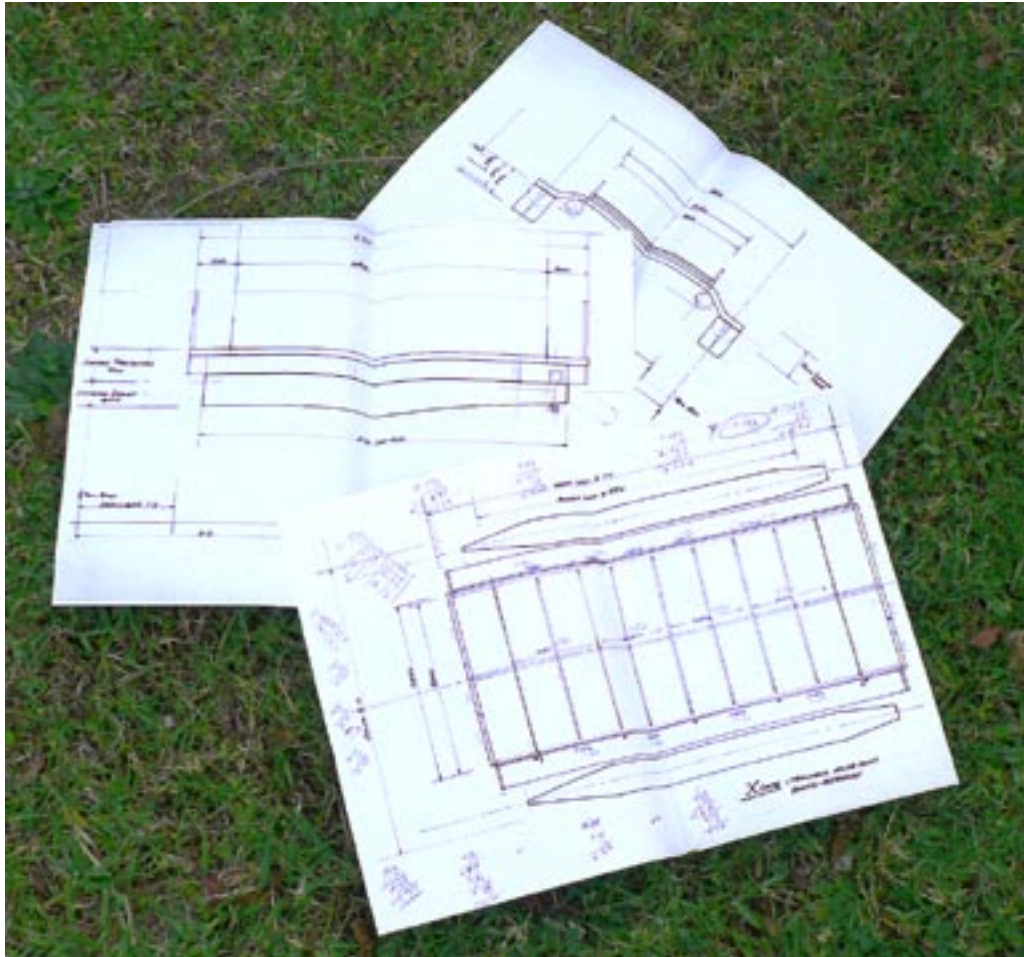
MAKING IT

Arriving back at Cooranbong we were all hyped up by the recce trip. We'd established that the catamaran looked like it was a goer, and we'd satisfied ourselves from our land-based research that there didn't appear to be any serious obstacles as far as the river itself was concerned, so we set about getting on with whatever we could to further the raft project. This entailed a good deal of Net and Yellow Pages research into things like clear plastic for the windows, where to get Velcro and zippers in bulk, who's offering the best deal on Liquid-Nails – lots of stuff like that.



We bought hundreds of dollars worth of 25mm square section aluminium tube with all sorts of Qubelock fittings, and I set about making the frame for the main shelter. Didn't take all that long, really, to get it to the skeletal stage. With the Qubelock joiners it was like playing with Lego. But once I'd completed the framework I couldn't go any further till we had the subframe to mount it on. At the same time Lorraine was thinking through the practical details of how she would sew the upper sides of the tent, how to incorporate flyscreen and zip-down flexible plastic windows, how much stuff she'd need and where best to buy it. When you get down to it, there's quite a lot of basic research that has to be done before you can get very far down the construction track.

Meanwhile Kent drew up detailed plans for a welded aluminium subfloor framework, and it was when we reached this stage that the technical complexities began to creep in. It's one thing to build a structure on terra firma where things don't move around much, and where you can overbuild if in doubt because extra weight isn't usually a problem; it's quite different to build a structure that has to be as light as possible, and strong, in the face of all sorts of stresses and strains, most of which I probably wouldn't even be aware of. Right from the outset, Kent took very seriously what he saw as his responsibility to make sure that whatever we ended up with was sturdy and safe and practical. When I think of what sort of jury-rigged shambles I probably would have come up with had I been doing it on my own, I'm glad he took the approach that he did. Not only has his knowledge and experience been invaluable in working out structural details and mechanical matters, but his enthusiasm for the project has resulted



in some inspired and very creative solutions to various problems.

One among many of Kent's contributions was to spot a long double-bogey boat trailer on his way to work that was obviously being neglected, and he managed to convince its owner that he'd be doing himself a favour if he let Kent take



the trailer off his hands in return for a case of stubbies. The back half of it was pretty rusty, and the brakes and over-ride braking system were shot, but it only needed minor modifications to make it suitable for towing the raft. Kent (triumphantly) backed the trailer into Lo's backyard just about the same time as I'd gone as far as I could with the tent frame, so I was able to get on with refurbishing the trailer pretty well straightaway.

By this time it was getting close to when Lo and I were due to take off on a trip to Western Australia that we had been planning for some time. After driving/camping the Centre, the Kimberley, and Corner Country with Lo I'd become quite hooked on this way of seeing Oz, and I was keen to do the Nullabor before we packed our maps away. Lo has a daughter and a couple of grandchildren living in Perth, and that was another stimulus for us to go west.

The timing was just right. Before we took off for the West Kent was able to buy all the aluminium necessary for the subfloor frame and hull mountings, the trailer was off having its brakes refurbished, and Kent's mate Steve Carruthers in Newcastle was all lined up to weld up the subfloor frame to Kent's specifications. If we hadn't had the Nullabor to cross I think we would have been a bit impatient during the several weeks it took for the frame to arrive.

One of the things that kept drawing itself to our attention as we built the raft was the apparent inability of most people to comprehend that we didn't want, or need, to power the raft everywhere flat chat. Time and again, after we described it to someone, they'd say something like: "And what'll you power it with? A couple of 30hp Evinrudes?" Patiently we'd explain to them that conventional outboards would require us to carry heaps of fuel (and keeping the weight to a minimum is a constant preoccupation for us), and that anyway, we'd be drifting, not zooming. There seemed to be an automatic assumption that we'd want to go everywhere fast. But we didn't want to go everywhere as fast as possible, we preferred to amble than run.

After much agonising, and flying in the face of Lorraine's brother-in-law Max's expert advice, we decided to go for an electric outboard as our means of propulsion. (The old "hear what you want to hear and disregard the rest" syndrome again). I had a couple of spare 58w solar panels on my roof at my place, and it seemed a shame not to use them. Our research into electric outboards suggests that we should be able to dawdle down the river at minimal revs (thereby keeping a flow of water past the rudders and giving us steering control) for eight hours or more and still be able to run the fridge and not drain the batteries too low. And there'd be power to spare for short bursts of reasonably fast going when we were manoeuvring into a wharf or turning upstream into the current to make a mooring. How much we'd drain out of the batteries would depend on how much sun we got on the panels in a given day. There's quite a bit of sun along the Murray (Mildura has more hours of sunshine than any other town in Australia, according to Lo's researches) and we'd have a battery charger hooked up as well for any times when we had access to 240v for overnight charging. That was the theory, anyway.

So we did the WA trip, and soon after we got back Kent took the trailer to be registered and drove it back with the aluminium subframe on it which had been finished while we were away. Now things really started to go ahead.

The car was moved out of the carport, which was converted into a temporary work area. After we cut the aluminium frame lengths, Bill was working on them

in the shed, while I put umpteen layers of dilute Bondcrete on the ply flooring. Apparently this would help its waterproofing qualities. It was a lot of work, painting one side, putting it aside to dry while I did the next, and then doing the back sides of each. That finished, then I had to start on the ply sheets which were the lower part of the walls, and then the front deck and side walkways. (My back has never been the same since).

Then I began the interesting task of sewing the walls – clear plastic which zippered up, with fly screen behind it. Trouble was, it was getting into summer, and the carport faces west, so I could only work in the mornings, as the sun streaming in made the plastic windows go soft and stick to themselves. In the evenings I worked on crocheting a rug/bedspread in appropriate Murray River colours.



People we told about our Raft Venture seemed to be taken with the idea. Keith-next-door gave us an old gas camping stove he'd had in his shed and Lo was pleased because it had a little griller under it which would give her more cooking options while we were afloat. Mark Crosdale gave us an industrial sewing machine on indefinite loan which was a boon for Lo when she was sewing up the flyscreened windows. Lo's father gave us a home-made voltmeter so we could have a rough idea how much juice was in the batteries. My Mum shouted us a lightweight floating boat hook. Alan Key drove to Yarrawonga from Albury to photograph and send a movie of a boat being launched on the Yarrawonga launching ramp so we'd know how steep it was... and so it went.



By November (2002) we had the ply floor on the subframe, the tent frame up and clad, the roof on, and the side windows/flyscreens press studded into position. And it was about this time that we noticed we seemed to be beginning to collect mishaps. For instance, one day around this time our aches and pains had got us up early, and I was down at the shipyard part of Lo's back lawn with a candle, sealing off the ends of the polypropylene cords that held the roof taut. I'd just melted/globbered up the last bit of cord-end when Lo called out that Dave Gibb was on the phone. I creaked up the yard to talk to him, taking the call on the "West Wing Office" phone, from which the raft was clearly visible. As we were chatting I was looking down the yard, admiring our handiwork, when I noticed a coil of smoke rising from one edge of the roof. One of the cords had apparently continued to smoulder, and as I hurtled down the yard small flames were just beginning to lick at one edge of the polytarp roof. Luckily I was able to beat it out, but it had eaten/melted a jagged bite out of the edge of the roof. (I find it interesting that at no stage was I aware of any aches and pains during the emergency. I noticed this to be the case in most of the other emergencies associated with this whole project - the heat of the moment seems to anaesthetise you to any pain. But you end up paying for it later in the day, of course.) So we had to take the roof off again for Lo to repair it with a patch. It could have been much worse, and the whole little drama made us think more seriously about insuring the whole unit, but that line of thought didn't get too far because when I rang around the insurance companies and described the craft no-one would insure us, not even the marine insurers – we were too far out in left field.

Not long after setting fire to the roof we had another mishap – again to do with the roof. Lorraine was the main player in this one:

It was Christmas. All my family had gathered at my place for a big family get together, and the house was bursting at the seams, with 13 extra people staying for the week, plus additional day visitors. Bill had wisely retreated to his place in the bush. And naturally it rained, constantly, as it does when you have 8 energetic young kids in the house. But one evening it really bucketed down. We stood and looked out the back at the lightning, the overflowing gutters, and the downpour. At one stage amidst it all there was a strange noise outside – a crunching sort of noise – which only lasted a few seconds. We all wondered what it was, but nothing drastic seemed to have happened that we could see, so we busied ourselves with other things.

Next morning one of the guests went for a walk down the yard, and returned, suggesting I should go and see what had happened to the raft. The main centre beam of the roof had buckled and collapsed, and several cross members had bent or come adrift from their Qubelock joiners. That was the crunching noise we'd heard! The semi-collapsed polytarp roof had a huge belly in it, filled with water. Oh dear! And no easy obvious way to get the water out. I left the guests to their own devices, found a length of hose, and began slowly siphoning the water out of the bulge in the roof. It seemed to take most of the morning. Then at last I could get inside and heave the roof up to remove the remaining gallons of water. And inspect the damage.

We had to do a complete re-think on the roof construction. When I explained to Bill on the phone what had happened, his spirits were considerably dampened, but a new, improved wall and roof structure was already gestating in my head. A beam, made solid with the infill of the lightest material we could get (polystyrene foam, with a couple of timber struts), and cross stays to make the roof and walls

stronger. Then I had the additional idea – instead of dismantling each upper wall by removing the aluminium uprights piece by piece when we had to lower the roof into travelling mode, why not make each side section as a complete unit, and hinge it to the roof. Then all we had to do was fold the sides up against the roof when we lowered it. A lot easier than hammering each piece of aluminium upright onto its respective Qubelock, one at a time.

So what was initially a disaster turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as it meant we had a simpler, stronger, easier to assemble unit. And it worked a treat.

We also had quite a bit to do to the catamaran hulls to make them suitable for use. Potential cracks were filled, strengthening timbers placed along the top so we could walk on the hulls if we needed to, and a coat of non-skid paint applied to the tops. There were so many little jobs to do all round, but one by one we crossed them off the list.

SEA TRIALS ...

On Sunday Jan 19 we put the raft into the water for the first time. To do this, we removed the top part of the tent structure and carried the outriggers with hulls etc on top of the bottom walls, held in place with a couple of webbing straps. It was all pretty makeshift, but it was only about 10kms to the launching ramp at the mouth of Dora Creek. Kent, his wife Gill, their two kids and a friend of their daughter Julia all came too and helped us lift the cumbersome flotation outriggers into place and refit them at the launching ramp.



We slid it into the creek and it floated well out of the water unladen, and with all seven of us aboard there was about 2" of freeboard on the cat hulls. (Despite the fact that we had concluded that the hulls would provide enough bouyancy, we had added a couple of 200mm capped plastic drain pipes to be on the safe side. The raft was extremely stable laterally, but less so fore and aft, but not enough to worry about. (Or so we thought at the time. Subsequent events were to prove us wrong). The electric outboard (which Kent had immediately dubbed "the Ba-Mix") pushed the raft along at a bit better than walking pace when flat out, and still provided some way at 25% - but only just. (We were still determined to go solar come hell or high water – to use a maritime allusion). Steering

by the motor was fine at around 80% to 100% of full thrust, adequate at 50%, and OK for general drifting at 25-30%. Any manoeuvring required the upper levels of thrust, which had to be avoided as much as possible to avoid draining the battery too quickly. Progress through the water could best be described as “sedate”, but was satisfactory for our needs. (Again, or so we thought at the time - and again, subsequent events were to prove us wrong). A bit of a wind sprang up while we were out on the river, but the motor made headway (just) against it, and we were yet again reassured that the electric motor was a goer. (Of course at this stage we didn’t have the slightest idea of the sorts of winds the Murray had up its sleeve to throw at us).

What impresses me in retrospect about these sea trials was the way we managed to find what we wanted to find in the way the raft performed. The three of us would consider ourselves, I think, to be pretty rational people, yet we still managed somehow to read the data inputs selectively so that we saw what we wanted to see. We felt that it should do the job, and after all, we hadn’t expected it to be perfect. And it was a helluva lot better than Huck Finn’s.

We towed it home again to put on the finishing touches.

The first sea trials decided us that it would be better if we could steer from the front, as visibility was much better that way. Kent reckoned we could move the controls forward without too much trouble and went away and spent a lot of time coming up with a way to do it. He made a binnacle with a steering wheel on it and a throttle control mounted on the side. At first he thought we’d be able to extend the electrical wires from the motor up to the front and mount the twist-grip control up there somewhere, but then he realised that there’d be too much voltage drop in such a set-up for it to work. So the steering and throttle mechanisms had to be mechanical, (which was to prove to be an important factor in the shaping of subsequent events). After a fair bit of fine-tuning we got it all to work, and it looked great – businesslike but idiosyncratic. Then it only remained for Lo and me to finish fitting it out inside and get the solar panels hooked up and we were ready to put her back in the water for her final, extended and thorough sea trials.



Although we gave it a lot of thought, we couldn't seem to come up with a name for the raft that felt really right. On the water I reminded me of one of those water boatmen - those little spidery bugs that skitter around on the water using the surface tension to their advantage. But "Water Boatman" didn't feel right to write on the side. We brainstormed names many times, coming up with all sorts of weird stuff like Off Road Towable Recreational Vehicle or The Floating Pavilion. At one stage we nearly plumped for Dragonfly, but it was destined to remain anonymous and in the end we continued to refer to it as, simply, The Raft.



Apart from the sheer ingeniousness of the forward steering and throttle mechanisms, one of the more flamboyant and conspicuous example of Kent's creativity is the system he devised to mount the catamaran hulls on the subfloor frame. To fully appreciate the ingeniousness of this solution you need a bit of background to the problem. The main considerations were these:

1. Maximum legal towing width is 2.5m.
2. Ideally the hulls should be positioned outside the side walls of the tent part, both for stability, and so you can also get along the sides.
3. If you put the hulls 2.5m apart, this means you lose half a metre in the width of the tent.

Kent's solution: Make the tent width the full 2.5m. When floating, the hulls sit outboard of a line down the tent sides. Fasten the hulls to the subframe in such a way that you can detach them and, by means of two pivoted arms, swing them up and over to be securely stowed on top of the (collapsed for towing) tent when the whole rig is in "transportation mode".





Now I must be honest at this stage and admit that while I could understand in broad terms how this idea might work, I was very keen to see it in the flesh, as it were, to see how Kent sorted out the detail. Poor bugger tried often enough to explain to me exactly how it all would work, but I just couldn't seem to get my head around it satisfactorily. I had to wait to see it before I could understand how it would work. Hopefully you'll get an idea from the foregoing pictures.

The raft was basically completed and ready to go back into the creek in October 2003. It was launched without incident and we made our way up the creek and moored it at the jetty on the public reserve at the bottom of Lo's back yard. Over the next three months we explored as far up each of the local creeks as we could go, and had numerous excursions and lunches on board with batches of friends. Lo and I stayed on it overnight a few times to try out all the facilities and saw some awe-inspiring sunsets and dawns on various parts of the creek system.



...AND TRIBULATIONS

Towards the end of the 2nd trials in the creek I experimented with an old oar, using it lashed on at the back as a sweep, and found that it gave us much quicker steering response than we got just from the motor. The wooden oar was a bit short, so I bought a telescopic aluminium swimming pool scoop handle and fastened an oar blade on the end. Just the job. Or so it seemed then.

Just before Christmas we prepared to take it out of the water again, with a view to doing any final fine-tuning and with the intention to take it down to the Murray for our first leg in the autumn. The idea was that Lo and I would start off down-creek on the Sunday afternoon and stay overnight on the raft just upstream of Dora Creek village, then carry on down to the launching ramp at the mouth of the creek where we'd meet Kent with the trailer on the Monday morning. We agreed on a 9:30 am rendezvous.

It was a hot day that Sunday. We loaded up the raft with our overnight needs and Lo took the helm while I cast us off. "OK. Here we go," she said, and shifted the throttle lever. Kent had made many of the parts of this lever mechanism from clear acrylic, and it rather reminded me of a small high-tech sculpture. In order for it to work, he'd had to attach a stiff spring to it, and in all our travels on the creek system it had worked like a charm. But this time, as Lorraine moved the lever the stalk simply broke off in her hand. This meant that the stiff spring pulled the throttle mechanism hard back into flat-out reverse, and the raft took off backwards across the creek as fast as the battery could send it. And with the lever gone we had no way to move it to any other position.

"Holy Hell! What's going on?" It took me a moment to work out what had happened, then I grabbed the boathook and hared out onto the rear deck to fend us off the opposite shore. The motor was still revving flat-strap backwards and I had to keep us out of the various snags and overhanging branches. Lorraine joined me at the stern and took over the fending off while I went back inside to try to get one of the leads off the battery. The battery and the motor were both located under the bed at that stage and weren't all that easy to access. After flinging the mattress aside I'm there with a wrench trying to undo the nearest battery terminal and there were sparks going everywhere. After what seemed a long time but probably wasn't I was relieved to prise one of the terminal connectors off and stop the propeller turning. I, of course, didn't take this setback at all well, and the air was pretty blue after we'd paddled back across the creek and tied up again.

"I suppose I'd better go up to the house and ring Kent and tell him not to come in the morning." I muttered dejectedly.

"Well, I dunno. Let's open that bottle of champers and have a drink or two while we think about what we should do next." was Lo's eminently practical reply, and while I was applying myself to this task she said: "If we uncouple the steering mechanism from the motor we could move the mattress out of the way and steer with the motor itself – the way we did on the very first sea trials. Don't ring Kent. We can still get down there to meet him in the morning."

We talked about this for a bit and it seemed like a good idea, so off we went again with the steering wheel decommissioned and steering from the stern, albeit somewhat uncomfortably.



We had on board our brand-new, deep-cycle, unspillable and therefore expensive battery, and another old one as a stand-by. I'd charged them up in the days before we took off on this last run, and as far as our instruments told us they were both chockers with charge. According to our calculations we should get down to the mouth of the creek just on the new you-beaut battery alone.

We stopped overnight about a kilometre before Dora Creek township and a very pleasant night it was. Good red, good food, good scenery and good moods generally all round. In the morning I did a quick check on the bat-

tery and was somewhat surprised to see how low the reading was. Oh well, we had the stand-by.

It was superb just moving noiselessly down the creek in the hours just after sun-up. We were so pleased we'd gone electric. The peacefulness while travelling compared to a noisy motor was worth not being able to go fast. Quiet is better than fast was our motto. We were about half a km past Dora Creek wharf when we noticed that we didn't seem to be making much way, even if we opened the throttle. We'd been opposite the same shed on the far shore for quite some time. I took another battery reading: bloody near empty! We couldn't work out how we could have used that much energy in so short a time at such a leisurely pace. I hooked up the stand-by battery and away we went again – until we got to within about two and a half kms from the launching ramp, when once again we could no longer convince ourselves that we were going forward. I took a reading from the standby battery to find that it, too, showed virtually empty. The launching ramp was still quite a ways down the creek, out of sight round a bend at the end of the straight of about two ks that we now found ourselves on. Lorraine reached down and took hold of the old wooden oar we'd left on board for emergency use and went out onto the foredeck and began laboriously paddling – with me at the tiller at the rear trying to keep us on some sort of course. Every fifteen minutes or so we'd swap tasks, but paddling the remaining distance seemed to take forever, and we still hadn't reached the bend in the river by 9:30. An eternity later we rounded the bend and we could just make out Kent on the ramp in the distance. It still took a long time to paddle ourselves the remaining several hundred metres to the ramp and explain to him all that had been happening. And of course by the time we got there we were both comprehensively stuffed.

The only way we could explain the early flattening of the batteries was that my old battery charger had read Full when they were anything but, and our progress through the water drew more current because of the amount of marine

growth that we'd picked up on the hulls over the couple of months the raft had been in the water.

The raft came out of the water uneventfully, the roof disassembled and stowed easily, and with the help of a couple of bystanders we got the outriggers off the raft and onto their carrying arms. They pulled up into towing position at either side of the roof according to plan and off we went back to Lo's place.

The problems that had become evident on this last trip down the creek were pretty serious, and it took us quite some time to work out what to do. The recent happenings took the wind right out of our sails, you might say. We could no longer delude ourselves that the electric motor was going to meet our needs and steering from the front appeared to be no longer an option. We had a lot of re-thinking to do.

After a lot of discussion we decided not to try to do the first leg down the Murray in the coming autumn, but to put it off till the next spring, giving us time to re-jig the raft in the light of our recent experiences. But we weren't keen on the idea of leaving the raft in Lo's backyard for all that time and decided to take it up to my place at Wirrimbirra where we could store it all under shelter for the winter.

It's a bit over fifty ks to my place from Lo's when you go the long way around as we had to do towing the raft. Prior to this we'd only driven the raft/hulls combination down to the launching ramp, along the flat all the way. To get to *Wirrimbirra* involved driving on the expressway, then a major secondary road, then a dirt road, then a narrow bush track. Once we got underway we quickly found out what a precarious beast it was to tow. If we went one km over 80 it would get a fearsome sway up. The weight of the outriggers and hulls over the raft roof gave it a very high centre of gravity, and going downhill felt like riding shotgun on a stampeding juggernaut. By the time we got it to my place the strain of perpetual concentration had made us both almost as ashen-faced as Phillip Ruddock. Granted, we got it there, and without mishap, but the thought of driving the whole cumbersome rig to the other side of Albury was a pretty daunting prospect.



We got the outriggers and hulls down from their towing position with the help of my neighbours the Aliottis. Then we put the main part of the raft on the big trailer in my big shed, (it fitted in under the main roof beam by literally one millimetre), and stored the outriggers and hulls in the carport I'd built for Lo's car some time before. By this I was feeling pretty jaundiced towards the whole enterprise. We had major propulsion problems to overcome, and I just couldn't come at the thought of trying to get it all the way down to Yarrawonga. We'd got so far with it all, and spent all that money, and now the whole affair looked like it was a fiasco. Put it this way – after all that had happened I wasn't feeling particularly optimistic about where it was all going. Lorraine was fairly subdued as well, but during the time it was stored at Wirrimbirra she managed to pluck up enough enthusiasm to scrape all the marine growth off the hulls and plastic pipes that had accumulated on them during its eleven-plus weeks in the water. I couldn't whip up enough motivation to help her beyond a few token efforts. Every time I thought about the raft it seemed more and more like a white elephant.

All through autumn and winter Bill didn't even seem to want to think about what we might do with the raft. He was just ignoring its existence and getting on with other things. But when it got towards the end of winter we had to make up our minds what we were going to do if we were to embark on the first Murray leg before the coming Christmas. I had cleaned and polished the catamaran hulls during the winter. Bill eventually agreed that if we were going to take the raft to the Murray, then we would need a reliable outboard motor. Not a pair of twin 60 hp Evinrudes, like so many people seemed to think was necessary, but a small 4 stroke motor. Four stroke motors were reputed to be quieter and easier to start than 2 strokes. I pushed the concept of one that started with a battery, as my shoulders do not take readily to starting motors with a rope pull. But when he found out how much extra the push-button start cost, Bill was keen to assure me he would be there to start the motor so, after looking at several second hand options we settled for a new Suzuki 6 hp job. We figured that it would be worth paying for a new one since it was our only means of propulsion and we wanted it to be as reliable as possible.

We decided we wouldn't try to tow the raft down to Yarrawonga with the outriggers on top the way Kent had so cleverly engineered them to travel because neither of us relished towing such a cumbersome load all that way. Instead we could borrow Keith-next-door's boat trailer so Kent made a couple of brackets to fit on it to hold the outriggers in place, and we were ready to head off for the Murray. When Kent had a few days leave, we would tow the raft and he would follow us down towing the outriggers behind his Range Rover. Kent was keen to see us launched and safely on our way, and he was going to come with us the first few days of our trip and then bring the boat trailer back with him to return to Keith-next-door.

We had set the departure date for the end of October. I wanted to be around for my Dad's 90th birthday on October 23, and Kent had holidays starting 30th October. About a month before we were due to leave, Bill went for a regular medical checkup. He had a high PSA reading, indicating prostate problems, and the GP suggested he get the reading done again in a couple of weeks. This time they were sky high. A biopsy was called for. A week before we were due to leave, the doctor phoned Bill to tell him he had prostate cancer. Not just your average everyday prostate cancer that a lot of mature men seem to get,

one that progresses very slowly, and that they die with rather than of. Rather, it was aggressive and very active, although at this stage probably still contained within his prostate.

Obviously we could not head off down the Murray after that news. It was agreed all round that he needed treatment, and as soon as possible. The GP undertook to make arrangements. But he phoned back the next day to say the first appointment he could get for Bill with a suitable specialist was for December 10. He suggested we might as well go away on our trip, as it would be the best way to distract ourselves from the big cloud that was hanging over us. We ummed and aahed, especially as Bill had developed an infection after his prostate biopsy, and was feeling unwell, peeing red, and was extremely (and unusually) agitated. But in the end we decided to see how far we could go on the first leg down the river anyway, and come back for his appointment in early December.

So on October 30 we headed south, with the raft on the trailer behind us, leaving home at 5 am to get through Sydney while the Sydneysiders were all still nicely tucked up in bed reading their Sunday papers. Kent would follow the next morning after he had finished his shift.

