

Pack It and Go

Some of you may have read or heard about my initial trial of a packraft in winter in Tasmania in 2019. This is an article describing my set-up, beyond just the raft. I have structured it more around these items, a few photos at the end of a similar fish I did from a cheap boat in Tasmania last January for comparison. It may also be useful for inflatable kayaks.

With an extra duffel to take up my lures, fishing gear, tinnie seat, and camping gear, I decided to throw the raft in and give my bigger system a test if I found some croc-free water on my quick trip to Queensland. I was going to give it a good for the start of the cod season north of Black Mountain Peninsular on my ride home from work, but had a mechanical issue with my bike at New Acton and with the sun dropping headed for the City Interchange for a bus home instead of the water. So, this was my big chance to have decent go without needing a wetsuit like I did in tassie.

Unfortunately, I didn't quite have room for Christmas presents and a multi-piece paddle. Although inexpensive, the national chain store I used in Tasmania no longer stocked those paddles, but I knew both relatives had oars for their tinnies. If needed, I had my inflatable lifejacket, and the rest of the stuff was coming with me anyway. Recalling the old article on Float Tube Barra (I think it was Issue 12 of FlyFisher), I kept an ear out for an opportunity between the tinnie trips on holidays.

The day before I flew out, it was a blustery, rainy overcast day and a good one for a couple of hours wetting some barra lures before I flew back. With Awoonga Dam around 50%, and Boynedale Camp re-opening just before Christmas, we drove to the far side and down to the water to try to wet some lures. With wind lanes and frothy water, I was glad I chose my old \$24 rod as the raft blew over and the tip hit the door of the Prado. This was going to be my first trial of most of my gear for packrafting.



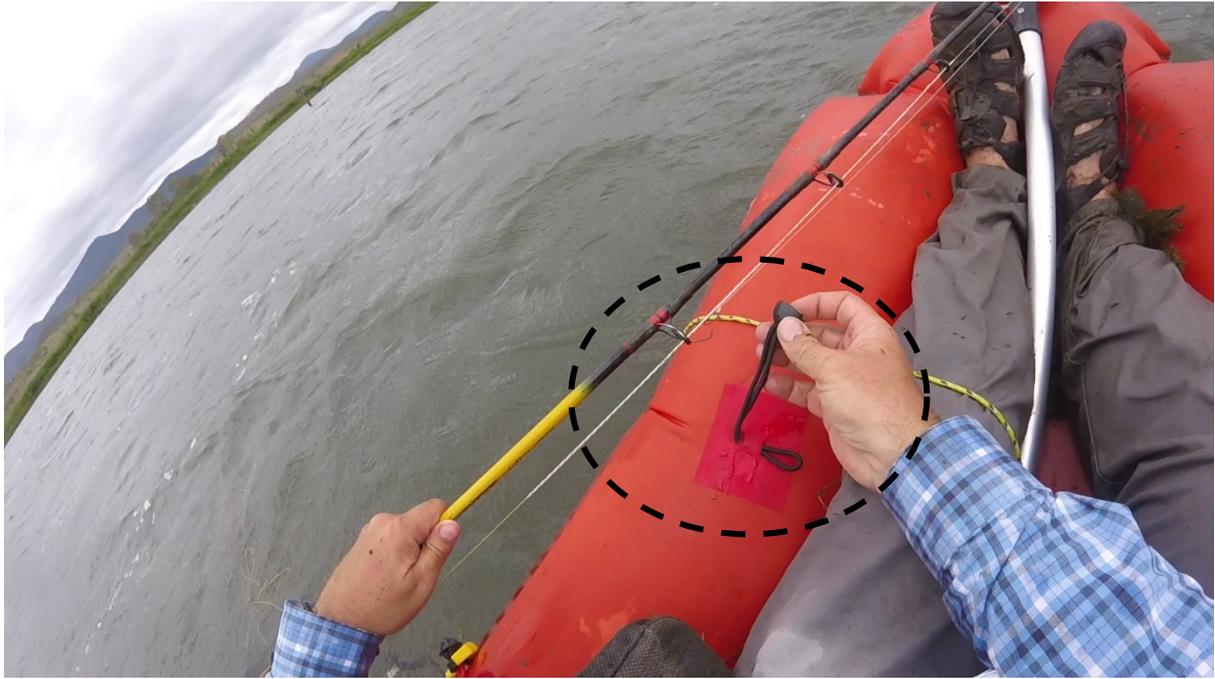
Launching through the thick weeds on shore



Paddling clear of the weeds. The rock is in the red mesh bag between my legs.

My chosen raft is an inexpensive, yet compact and light one – the [Klymit Light Water Dinghy \(LWD\)](#). Although under 1kg, I still prefer to keep trebles away from it where possible, but was more than happy to suffer a puncture from a barra if it needed to. A review I read of it noted minimal scratches from snags from a fisherman who had actively used it for a few years. Using its 30L dry bag for inflation, filling it up downwind wasn't too hard. I recalled a recommendation not to use it fully inflated, and dropped it down a bit. This allows it to contour more, and sits you lower in the water to drift less.

It has a number of tie-off points, which I used to run the anchor line through and back to an easily accessible point. I tied it to the oar at the other end, which worked well. I have contemplated adding a 2-3mm shock cord as a paddle leash, but this yellow rope was fine. I used sail tape and shock cord to make two lashes for my fishing rod. Contemplating a pool noodle float, I opted to chance it with my 20 year old rod and a secondhand baitcaster.



Lashing for the rod in easy reach, and lure clip on the mono leader to the rod eye for quick rigging

My fishing tackle added a wind-on leader, and using a heavy clip I reduce the number of times needing to re-tie lures and make swapping them easier. However, I did find this was fine once anchored or tied-off on a snag. I tried to keep my lures to a minimum and in trays or original packaging (minus staples) to avoid snagging my items or the raft. My canvas satchel was great to hold them, along with plastic lip grippers and floating fishing pliers. It was able to be tucked up when launching or paddling, and didn't get in the way.

For myself, in addition to sunscreen and bug repellent, I opted for long pants and shirt for both sun and bug protection, and sandals for the hiking and weed/mud. I was also preparing in case I got blown down past my exit point and needed to walk back around. I added my neck tube, and ball cap and put my GoPro on the cap. I also took my Jonathon Paul Fitovers and the polarized amber lenses helped straight away with the reflected sunlight. A sunglass strap was added to avoid knocking them off.



Polarised sunglasses, neck tube, with phone bag and tackle satchel able to access in the raft (my hat had the camera on it). Landing area is in the background, along with the new crowd of canoe-ers.

I carry an empty onion net bag for a makeshift anchor, and hiking upwind I found a nice rock. Reaching my launching point, I waded in and launched. Once clear of the weed, it worked pretty well.

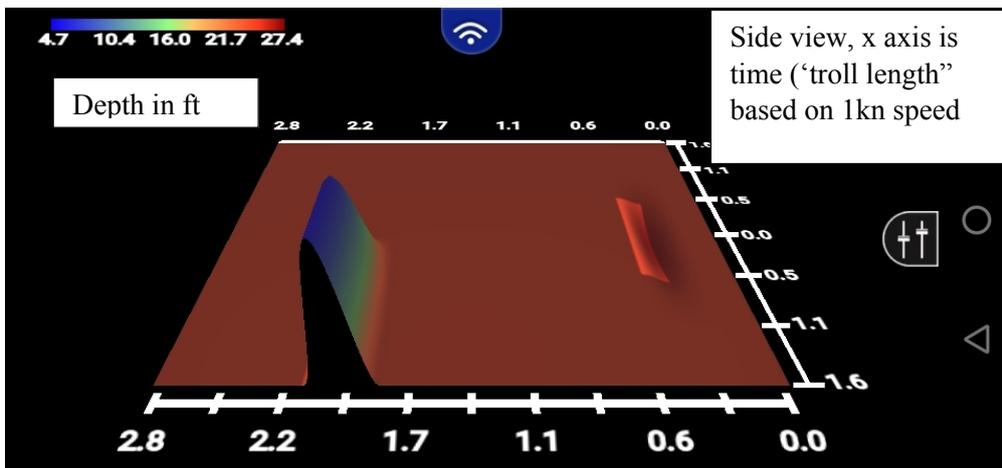
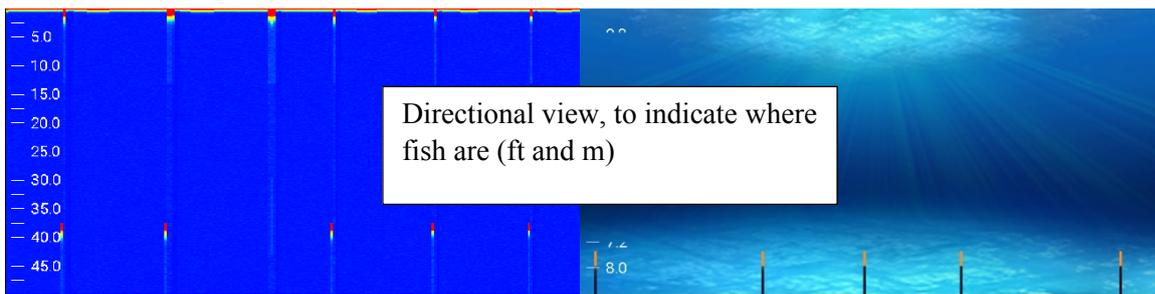


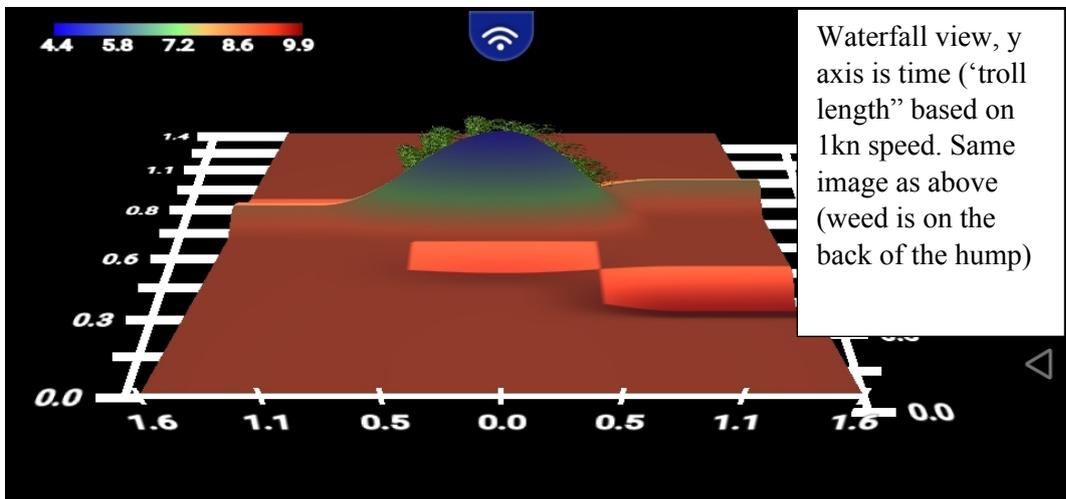
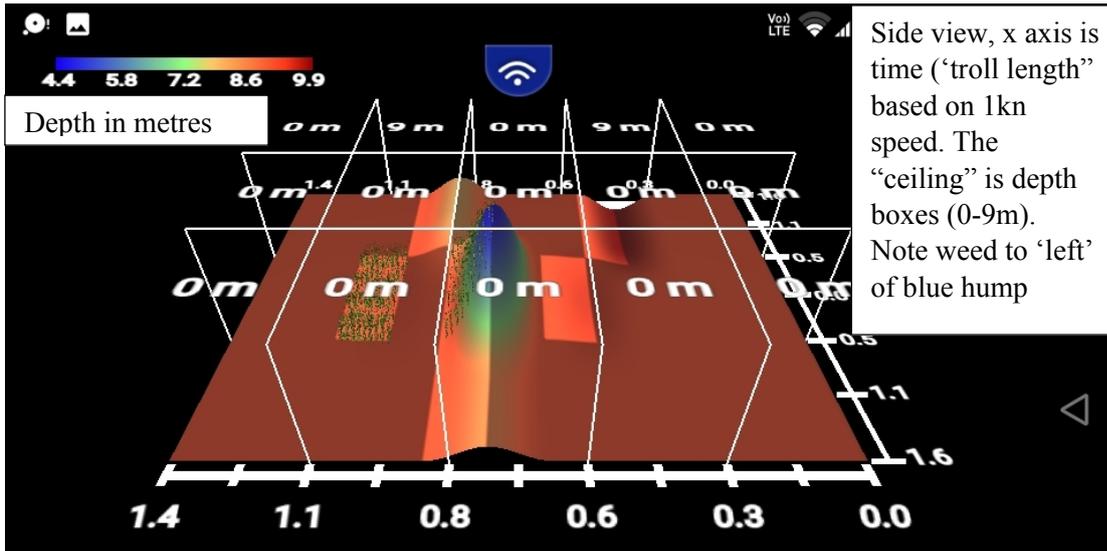
Recovering the anchor (rod lashed in)

I also had another gadget to try – a castable fish finder. I worked well to see the depth, and pick the weedline. I bought a secondhand Lowrance FishHunter3D. It can be used for a directional plot to figure out where to cast, or can also be used for bottom mapping. I noted once beyond the surface weedline that the general depth was 1.7-2.1m. I found that recording in Trolling mode worked well, and stopped automatically after stopping for a bit at anchor or tied off. I used a NSW RMS phone pouch to hold my phone as a display, and control worked well through the plastic cover.

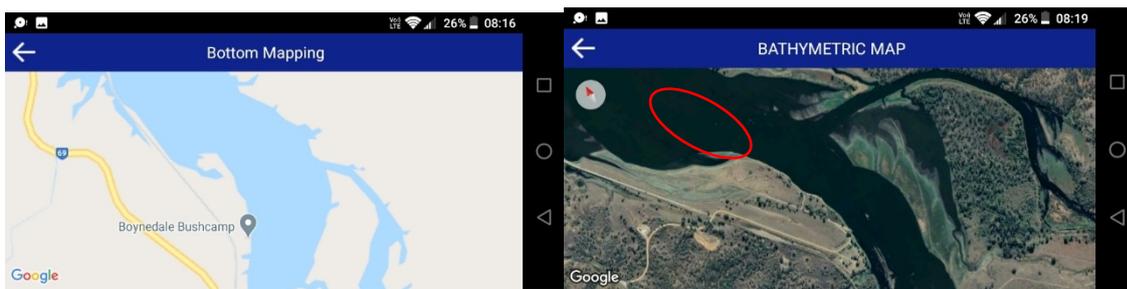


In the foreground is my phone, the display for the fish finder, which also had audible alerts





Screenshot of the fish finder, albeit not too many features in this recorded 1.4 & 2.4m trolls



Boynedale Camp area I fished, albeit with more water in the dam as you could drive to the edge of the red circle



The orange-topped FishHunter 3D drifting around from behind the raft on its short leash

Apart from the rod and the oar, this was my typical pack rafting setup. Paddling out against the wind over the weedbed was a little more difficult as the oar instead of a paddle induces a waddle, but once clear my lower inflation worked well. I managed to navigate near some sunken timber and began working it and the weedline. With the wind and waves, my second anchor spot had a bit of a slow drift, but helped cover ground. I managed to work towards a stump and tie off. I tied off, and worked the stump and the surrounding area whilst watching a few large freshwater turtles with heads bigger than a brown snake. A local canoeing company had some beginners paddle out, and I soon had visitors, and worked my last few spots before landing.



Working the snags, but also able to cast a good distance forwards, back, and into the wind lanes on my left

In the end, I spent a bit over an hour in the inflatable raft. It worked quite well, although with the single oar and lower inflation my back felt it a bit. I was able to move to a more upright position and cross my legs when tied off to the stump, which helped get out of the reclining position I'd developed. When the raft has more air, it bows, not only supporting the back more but giving more of a backpressure to the feet, so I will try a bit more air next time. You may notice it is more inflated at launch than landing, which is due to cooling of the air on the water (& rain), giving a balance to develop due to how air expands and compresses quickly with temperature. My sonar plots logged a temperature of 29-30°C, but by the time we left it had dropped to around 23° with the drizzle.

A quick opening of the deflation valve and untying the gear, and in short time I was packed up with the raft rolled back up and put away. The test worked well, despite the blustery weather. With calmer winds, and reeds or a treeline it would be great for a slow drift or tying off and casting lures or flies. I wouldn't take you best rod (at least not initially), but to get out to the fish it would be great and once there in water deeper than waders you don't need as huge casts on lakes, dams or wide slow rivers. As such, a repaired or scrub rod would work fine. The other option is to use it like my guide used in NZ to work downstream and find good shore fishing spots with less access from the road or paths. Maybe I should put it in at the Diggings on the Jindy outing...

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly given my lack of success at Awoonga in previous years, there were no fish but it was good fun working the water with a few different lure types. I would have been happy if a big barra punctured the hull, but one of the reasons I chose this raft was reviews from anglers who had fish from this raft for years with minimal scrapes, and less than more expensive packrafts, and no holes. Having a few ties-off points each side also helped with anchoring (ashore and on the water), and tethering things to. The DIY rod lashings helped, and if drift trolling through you need to hold you rod, for which I used the anchor rather than the oar to control my drift.



Raft setup at the end of the fishing

The beauty was most of this gear I already had, such as my estuary wading satchel and fishing gear. I took my inflatable lifejacket for Luke on the tinnies, but last time I checked weren't mandatory in QLD freshwater kayaking, but required in other states and ACT alpine waters. I left my CO2 cylinder at home, and bought a fresh one to avoid flying with dangerous goods. The rafting gear was only around 2kg and 2-3L if you include a multi-piece paddle. Although more whitewater packrafts are up around \$2,000, my setup (including FishHunter) cost me less than \$400. It can be done even cheaper with those 2-person rowing inflatable boats (I got one last year for \$5 at a Tasmanian markets/boot sale) but these are a little more bulkier and thinner hulled but have oars you can row more traditionally. Inflatable kayaks are also quite heavy. My observations of these new are around \$75-\$100, including at cheap stores in NZ, so little more for my own raft plus the other tools gives me a permanent grab-and-go alternative for travel or to put in the back of the car instead of strapping a kayak on the roof. I mainly got it for bike packing or hiking in to remote spots, so this set-up should serve me well. Now, I just need some more time off work to go bush....



Luke and I trialing fishing from the markets' \$5 PVC row boat on Lake Kara near Burnie in 2020...was a little cramped but gave us an opportunity to get beyond the bank (and have a rod holder)