

# Murchison River Guide

## 8th-12th January 2025



Information contained in this booklet is a general guide to rivers around Murchison that we may run at PRANZ25. Grades are indicative of a summer flow on the Longford gauge below 35cm<sup>3</sup>

For runs upstream of Murchison a maximum flow for packrafters is around 80cm<sup>3</sup>. For Matakītaki a maximum flow is around 60cm<sup>3</sup> (@ Horse Terrace). Below Murchison the flow increases dramatically as the Matiri, Matakītaki and Maruia all join, so flows can be variable.

Please consult [packraftingtrips.co.nz](http://packraftingtrips.co.nz), NZ Whitewater guide book and experienced paddlers for more information.

# Welcome to PRANZ 2025

**Here are a few tips to help things go smoothly off the water:**

1. Be on time for morning briefings
2. Keep all your gear organised... don't be the person that keeps everyone waiting or the person that leaves essential gear behind.
3. Choose your trip based on your abilities. Put your name on the sign up sheet. Before the trip leaves check in, plan shuttles and check there are at least two strong/capable paddlers in each group. Each trip should have a designated person responsible for checking out at the end of the trip
4. Drivers please park considerately, squeeze up where possible. Don't block accessways. We are not the only river users.
5. Be respectful of locals. When crossing land, respect farmers, stock and property. Leave gates as you find them.
6. Be social and have fun, meet new people to go on other adventures with.

## **Some tips for on the water:**

1. Stay with your group and communicate with each other. Be honest about your skills and limitations (including self rescue abilities).
2. Wear your helmet and PFD, buddy check each other and respectfully call out unsafe practises.
3. The rivers around here have farmland above where we paddle, whilst possibly okay to drink we recommend taking a drink bottle.
4. Take your lunch/snacks and reapply sunscreen
5. Dress for the swim, the water is reasonably warm but think about a long swim or entrapment. Getting cold from wind chill can wreck a paddling trip
6. Look out for each other, look over your shoulder and position yourselves so that you can help.
7. If you swim, help yourself. Hold onto your gear and attempt to self rescue. If in a rapid adopt a white water float position, keep your feet up.
8. When someone swims call it out and move to assist the person in trouble. Remember we are all between swims

## **Rotoiti Outlet to Road Bridge - Grade 3**

**Put in:** Drive down Mt Robert Rd and park at the bridge over the top of the Buller River, follow fishing track to Lake Rotoiti and put in on the lake. From Riverside Camp ~ 48mins (58km)

**Take out:** River right immediately after the SH63 road bridge - Only a small eddy here which can be a challenge for a large group

This is a short sweet run. At only 1.8km long it hardly seems worth it but this wee gem presents is a short boisterous run that can be run multiple times. A slightly steeper gradient means that eddies are tight and the run can be quite challenging for beginners and swimmers. A track runs down river right and can be used to walk back to the top of the run.

Can be done in as little as 20 mins with a small fast group. However there are quite a few spots to play and a second run is always on the cards. Allow at least an hour per run.

Alternative take out - Teetotal Creek river right (adds 3km of mostly Gr2)

## **SH63 Road bridge to Howard River (Gr2+)**

**Put in:** Park in layby on river right of SH63 road bridge - 40mins (55km) from riverside camp

**Take out:** Just down stream of the Howard River Confluence where the river meets the road for the first time

The first 3km to Teetotal Creek is mostly single channel grade 2 paddling. The river then becomes more braided with a shallower gradient. There are a number of hazardous willows that the flow may push inexperienced paddlers straight into. Depending on which braid is taken the entire channel may be blocked by river wide strainers.

## **Howard River to Harleys/Higgins (Grade 2+)**

**Put in:** About 80m before the SH63 road bridge over the Howard park up and walk down the farm track

**Take out:** Grassy area just past the next highway bridge on river left.

The river continues with several braids and alternates between open river bed and small channels. About half way down in the rightmost braid there is a particularly hazardous willow that has caught a few paddlers, The trunk grows out at river level and blocks 90% of the flow.

## **Harleys/Higgins to Gowan Bridge (Gr2)**

**Put in:** Head north from Murch and remember to turn right at Kawatiri Junction, 3.8km further the road crosses to the right bank of the Buller, park up and cross the style on the downstream side of the bridge. 30mins  
38km from Camp

**Take out:** On river right immediately after the road bridge (750m past the confluence of the Gowan)

From Harley's down is where the Buller starts giving some consistently great paddling. The first half of this run still has a number of braids but navigation tends to make sense. The willow/manuka hazards are still present and requires some active paddling to avoid. As you near Kawatiri it is worth keeping left, there is a nasty willow log in the right channel that is quite difficult to avoid as it blocks 90% of the flow. Keep your eyes peeled. Float past some old bridge remains and head on down to the Gowan Bridge.

## **Gowan Bridge to Owens Gr.3 - Granity Run**

**Put in:** Turn up Gowan Valley Rd, cross the bridge, park up and head down the track. 22 mins/28km from camp

**Take out:** River right at Owen River campground. Just as the river converges there is a few poplars and conifers on the bank.

The first 2.5km to Granity Creek has numerous big rocks creating mid stream eddies to play in, check your paddling group's skills and confidence here. When the river widens slightly and there is a light coloured clay bank ahead all packrafters should get out on river right and scout/portage Granity Creek Rapid (Gr.3/3+).

Below Granity there are a couple of Gr2+ boulder gardens and then it settles down until 2 Mile Island. There are some powerful eddy lines here and there are often logs pinned against the first island that can be hazardous. Heading to river left allows you to take the chute behind island (check for strainers). The island at two mile has a large powerful eddy on the left that narrows into a short chute behind the island, generally the right side is cleaner. Some may swim here due to the eddy lines and converging flows. After Rait's Rd bridge the river diverges into three navigable branches, all have willow hazards. The left branch tends to be the easiest, mid can be nasty, right generally runnable.

## **Owens to Doctors Creek (Grade 2+)**

**Put in:** Cross the Owen river and pull into the pub. There is a closed gate between the pub and the chalets, please close the gate to keep the lawnmowers in. Down the hill and across the grass to the river. 13mins/18km from camp

**Take out:** The takeout can be hard to spot from the river if you don't know it. We suggest you take a flag and mark your takeout if unfamiliar. Park in the layby on the river side of the road 50m north of Doctors creek bridge, access through track at bridge end of layby

This run is a fun action with plenty of room for easy lines for beginners but still has good features to play with. It's a classic bit of the Buller that everyone should run. This passes the Claybank access on the right. Just after the fancy house with the big lawn.

There are a couple of excellent eddies to practise some assisted rescues or other safety skills



## **Doctors to Campground (Gr2+)**

**Put in:** Drive north approx 8.5km, 50m after you get to Doctors Creek. Pull in to a layby on the right side. Please park considerately as this will be a busy put in. Access track is through trees at the bridge end of the layby. If busy you can park on south side of bridge but there is no access across paddocks. 7mins/8.5km from camp

**Take out:** Right here at the campground at big eddy.

This is possibly the most frequently run section of the Buller. It has a bit of everything. Plenty of spots to play and enough features to keep things interesting.

There is one significant hazard on this section. About 1 km below the bridge that crosses the Buller on river left immediately before the Mangles confluence there is a large rock with a log pinned on it. The rock has injured a few paddlers by itself but the log that is currently jammed there makes it worse. A centre or right line will be safe.

The Mangles confluence has some water that moves in mysterious ways that can result in a swim or two. When the river opens up and swings to the left there are a couple of willows of note before the last 1km of flat open water before the campground.

## Campground to O'Sullivan's (Gr. 2)

**Put in:** Right here at the campground

**Take out:** Either at the gravel pit 2km past the containers at Dellows Bluff, pull off the highway and down into a layby loop. Make your way across the gravel. Or take out at O'Sullivan's put in, check takeout when leaving a shuttle vehicle.

This is a fairly simple run, the Buller widens and the gradient softens. There are still a few easy wave trains and other features. The river has a few braids, take the left one at the first split, follow the bulk of the water and navigation is easy. There is a notable willow hazard on river right after the confluence with the Matiri, be sure your group has the skills to paddle past it safely.

Headwinds can be an issue so the run is normally better in the morning. Watch out for willows and remember to get out before O'Sullivan's rapid (grade 3)



## **O'Sullivan's to Ariki (Gr.3)**

**Groups MUST check with Safety team first**

**Put in:** Drive 10 mins/10.8km south, pull into a layby after the powerlines if you reach the Westport turnoff turn around and come back 500m or park and walk.

**Take out:** Immediately above Ariki falls, the rock turns red and drops into 5m wide channel, take out river right.

A punchy start down O'Sullivan's rapid (Gr.3), leads to a mellow flat water section before the Maruia River joins. A big boily section can be challenging if not used to big water. Whale Creek Rapid (Gr.3 scout from left) can be portaged high on the left bank, but is generally run down the centre or right side, left side is normally nasty.

A few smaller rapids before reaching Jet Boat (Gr.3, scout from river right). A rock divides the flow, the main flow goes left, the far left side can result in a swim into the eddy of doom, a nasty retentive corner, do not go there. The right side of the left channel is normally good, however the right channel is normally best option.

The run continues with big swirlies and a few more rapids before take out on river right above Ariki Falls.

**Ariki Falls is off limits**

**It must not be run by any packrafters at PRANZ**

## **Ariki to O'Rourke's (Newtons) Gr. 2+**

**Put In:** A gravel patch with switch back road leads down to Ariki Falls. Drive down and park up where the track splits, don't block the driveway. Walk to river and inflate on gravel well above Ariki Falls, ferry across to left bank to portage (40m) the falls and put in down the second chute after the falls. 15min/15.4km (plus 6km shuttle)

**Take out:** Drive approx 6km and park up immediately after crossing O'Rourke's Creek. Walk back to the road barrier and follow track down to river. Mark the take out.

### **Ariki Falls is off limits**

**It must not be run by any packrafters at PRANZ**

This starts with a challenge to ferry across above and portage of Ariki falls. Do not allow any paddlers who cannot comfortably achieve this on the trip. Be careful moving across the eddy line below the falls.

There are some powerful eddies and boils in this section along with a few complex flows. This is also the best section of the Buller for stopping and jumping off rocks.

The takeout can be a bit tricky and needs to be managed well, take care climbing up the rocks.

## **O'Rourke's to Harry's Track (Gr2+ easing to flat)**

**Put in:** Park up immediately after crossing O'Rourke's Creek, inflate roadside. Walk back to the road barrier and look for the track down to river, a steep access leads to a small eddy. 19mins/21.4 km from camp

**Take Out:** 6.4km past O'Rourke's there is a rough 2WD track that lets you drive down to a big gravel pit by the river. It's sometimes hard to spot but is marked on the topo map. If you reach the Brunner memorial you've gone too far, turn around and keep you eyes peeled.

The start of this run can be a little awkward but once you get going the river quickly mellows into a flat water scenic paddle. This section was created by the 1968 earthquake damming the Buller.

Headwinds can be an issue on the flatwater part of the paddle, but the scenery makes it worth it.



## **Harry's to Iron Bridge (Buller Earthquake) Gr.3**

### **Groups MUST check with Safety team first**

**Put In:** Harry's Track, on a right hand bend. Watch the map and drive slowly so you don't miss it. Drive down to river unless it's wet or you are in a low clearance  
2WD25mins, 27.8km

**Take Out:** River right on the gravel, after the Iron Bridge. Drive shuttle vehicles 10 min/9.8km past put in, to Iron Bridge and turn right down New Creek Road, park on the flat at the bottom of the hill.

This is a significant grade 3 undertaking and in some conditions it falls solidly into Grade 4. All participants must be capable on grade 3 and have appropriate river and rescue skills to run this section. Any group must be approved by PRANZ Safety team.

There are several named rapids on this run including Whopper Stopper, Rodeo Rapid and Slide Rapid before hitting Gunslinger which can be run in lower flows by packrafters. Scouting, teamwork and setting safety are a must. A few packrafters have taken long uncomfortable swims down here.

## **Middle Matakitaiki 2+**

**Put in:** Drive into town and turn left at the pub, follow Matakitaiki Road up and just after Mint Creek park up and head down the farm track (signposted 1880), 35min, 20.7km from camp

**Take out:** Drop a shuttle car on your way up, Just past the end of the gravel road hang a right past a big shed and drive down the hill to a park at the bottom. From the river you will notice the gorge opens up, head across the river flats to your car (not visible from river).

This is the sweet spot. The middle Matakitaiki is a great, scenic run with plenty of features to play with. There are some good eddy lines to practise your skills and opportunities to practise other skills like swimming or throw bagging. Don't be shy of taking a second run down here as its worth it.

There is a higher put in if you want to make a full day of it. Park at the stock yard on the right around 500m before the Horse Terrace bridge this increases the length of this run by around 8km of mostly Gr2. Take lunch, practise some skills and get a full day on the water.

## **Lower Maruia Gr.2**

**Put In:** Park in the Maruia Falls carpark (21 mins, 23.1km) and follow the track down to the pool directly below Maruia Falls.

**Take out:** Drive 1.7km past the Westport turnoff. Just after a straight opposite a digger turn right into a layby below the road level. From the river keep an eye out for an old bridge foundation with 3 big concrete blocks on river right, 15m past this there is an angled ledge which leads to a track.

This is a rarely paddled section of water and I don't understand it, there are some beautiful gorge bits and some gentle features that keep things interesting without getting crazy. There are a few willows that may cause concern for a swimmer but these are easily avoidable

**Maruia Falls is not permitted on PRANZ Trips.** If you are wondering, yes, it has been done in a packraft.

Do not approach the falls directly as there are strong currents and recirculations, it is however a great spot for a picture.



## **Maruia - Shenandoah - Gr.2+ with portagable Gr.3**

**Put in:** Drive to the end of Creightons Rd (47min/58km), park at the wide area just before the creek. Either walk down access track to the left or paddle down the creek if levels are high.

**Take out:** At the confluence with Ruffe Creek, on river right. There is a large gravel bank and it's where the river comes back next to the highway for the first time. The track is steep and can be awkward with inflated boats. Parking is in a small layby on south side of the one way bridge, be very careful pulling onto the road when leaving.

A fantastic trip as a longish day or great overnighter (camping between Shag and Deer Creek for a big group). A wilderness feel and plenty of river features means this is a top trip for paddlers moving into Grade 3

The river has several feature rapids that are worth scouting if you are unfamiliar with them. There are a couple that may hold timber (especially 90 deg. right bend directly west of Mt Rutland, before Gravity Cr). The crux rapid is at Stags Head Creek (Gr.3, portageable), runs differently depending on flow, scout, plan your line and set safety to protect the hazards.

## Other Runs

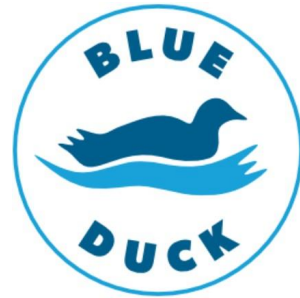
Murchison is close to a number of other runs that might be suitable depending on flow. Please talk to the safety team to get approval if you are considering these runs.

- **Matakitaki above Horse Terrace** - Walk in from the end of Brooks road to the bottom of the braided section, this does cross private land but has some paper road access gr.2+ down to a nasty rapid under the Horse Terrace road bridge (gr.3) with dangerous undercuts and then joins Gr.2 run.
- **Glenroy** - Gr.3-Gr.4 - Needs a little rain to make it runnable but too much quickly pushes it to Gr.4 a short committing gorge without room for errors.
- **Matakitaki Lowers (Earthquake)** - (Gr.3/4?) - A short run accessed from West Bank Rd, take out is private land. Can be very hazardous at wrong flows.
- **Mangles - Blackwater to the Buller Confluence** Gr.2+/3 - If flows are favourable then a brilliant run.
- **Matiri** (Gr2+/Gr.3/Gr.4) Suitable for packrafts in lower flows - a great run if it's on. The crux rapid is after the road bridge near the take out. Requires careful scouting (can be Gr.4) with syphons and strainer hazards.

A massive thank you to our supporters



NEW ZEALAND  
**KAYAK**  
SCHOOL  
MURCHISON



**b.effect**  
BREWING CO. WĀNAKA



**Lamington™**



goodbye **OFF-PISTE**  
PROVISIONS



GIN  
**CRO**  
SITY



...and the awesome team from  
**Reefton Community Kitchen**