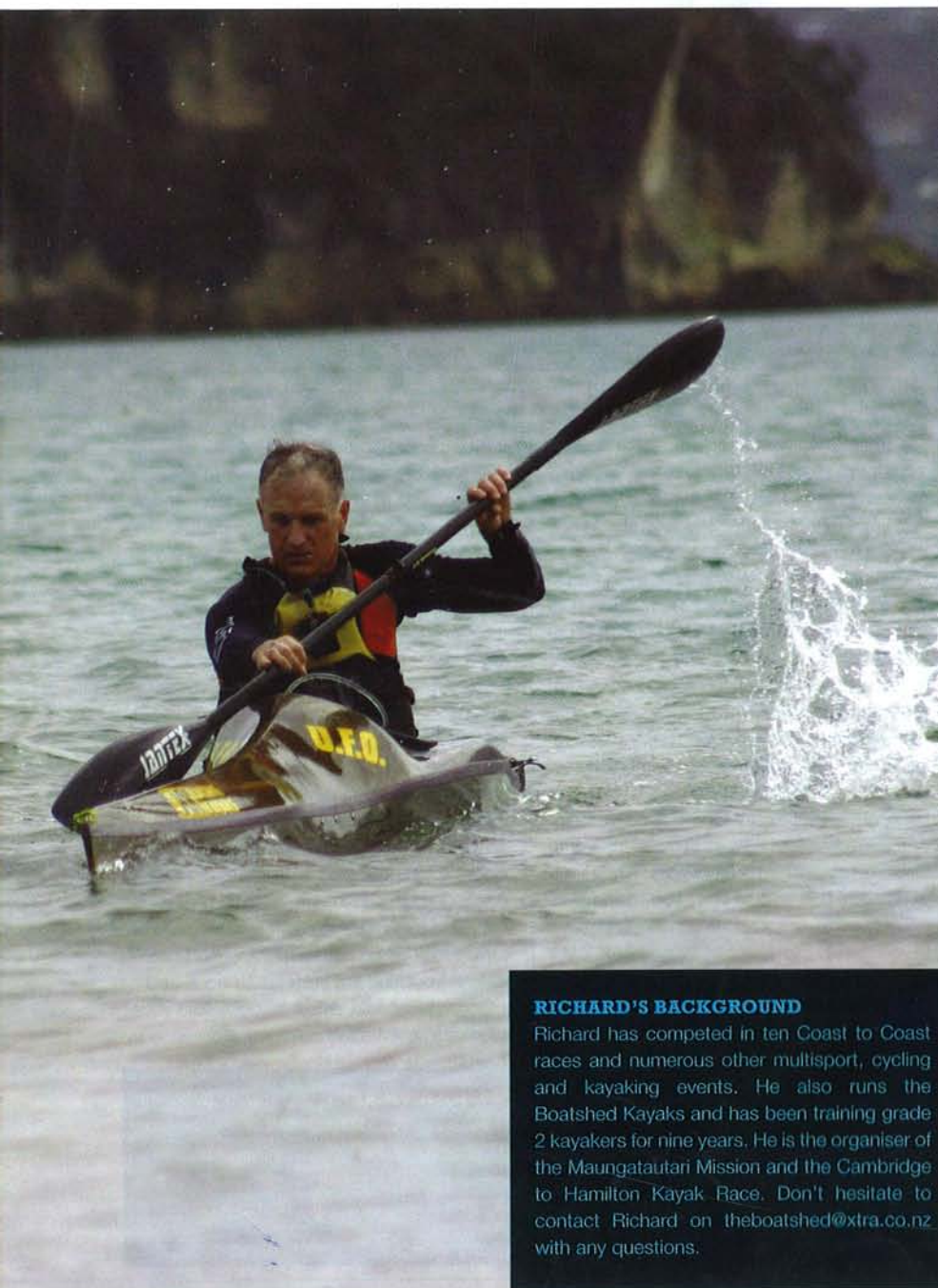


# A Weekend on the River

Words: Richard Clark

*I am writing this month's article having just spent the weekend on the Mohaka river taking a grade 2 assessment weekend. The weather was perfect, the 13 clients and three instructors all camped at Glenfalls reserve at the end of the first grade 2 section of the river. Even though I have taken these trips numerous times over the last 10 years, I still come away full of enthusiasm for river paddling and the outdoor experience. Nothing compares to the feeling of sitting around a camp fire with the background sound of the river after a good session on the water.*



## RICHARD'S BACKGROUND

Richard has competed in ten Coast to Coast races and numerous other multisport, cycling and kayaking events. He also runs the Boatshed Kayaks and has been training grade 2 kayakers for nine years. He is the organiser of the Maungatautari Mission and the Cambridge to Hamilton Kayak Race. Don't hesitate to contact Richard on [theboatshed@xtra.co.nz](mailto:theboatshed@xtra.co.nz) with any questions.

The other highlight of these weekends for me is seeing how the paddlers respond to this new experience; most finish the weekend keen to come back and paddle this section of river again. They now have a new playground that they can test themselves on and as their confidence grows their skills will also improve.

The weekend also reinforced how important confidence is on the water. You can gauge how a person is feeling by the way they paddle and how they approach each rapid. If a paddler is nervous their paddle stroke is usually quite shallow with a high stroke rate. In some cases they even stop paddling altogether which causes them to sit up, raising their centre of gravity and at the same time they no longer have a paddle blade firmly placed in the water to brace off. A swim usually follows and if this confidence issue isn't addressed they can be in for a lot more swimming. As an instructor you are constantly trying to build confidence so that the new paddler approaches each rapid with speed and doesn't hesitate at key points in the rapid. With speed you will be able to steer the boat; as soon as you slow down you lose steerage and you will simply go where the river takes you.

Another important part of the weekend is experiencing swimming through a rapid after falling out of your kayak. After the initial shock it is simply a matter of grabbing your paddle and moving to the front of the boat and swimming to an eddy where you can empty your boat and hop back in. While swimming the rapid you must keep your feet away from the bottom and not attempt to stand until in slow moving water again, this is to avoid getting your feet snagged on the bottom and the force of the water on your body pulling you under.

We also teach our paddlers how to use a throw bag. Rather than just throw the bag around out of the water to practise, we get everyone to actually experience both rescuing someone and also being rescued. This way you get a healthy respect for the power of moving water and are far more comfortable when the actual situation arises. By the end of the weekend the new paddler is no longer worried about the possibility of falling out which allows them to push the boundaries a bit more and consequently improve their paddling.

The new paddler now has the skills and the confidence to paddle a grade 2 river, all that is required is regular moving water paddles to further hone those skills. With the current settled weather more of you will be planning weekends away on the rivers; just remember: don't take risks and look after each other. ●