

Murchison River Guide

7th-11th January 2026



Information contained in this booklet is a general guide to rivers around Murchison that we may run at PRANZ26. Grades are indicative of a low summer flow on the Longford gauge below 35m3/s This year water levels will be higher.

For runs upstream of Murchison a maximum flow for packrafters is around 100m3/s. For Matakitaki a maximum flow is around 70m3/s (@ Horse Terrace). Below Murchison the flow increases dramatically as the Matiri, Matakitaki and Maruia all join, so flows can be variable.

Please consult packraftingtrips.co.nz, NZ Whitewater guide book and experienced paddlers for more information.

Welcome to PRANZ 2026

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, and if you're paddling G3 water you must check your plan with the organising crew.
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. Only use legitimate access points. 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 practices.
3. The rivers around here have farmland above where we paddle, whilst possibly okay to drink we recommend taking a drink bottle.
4. Take 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 immediately and move to assist the person in trouble. Remember we are all between swims

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Grade 2 Runs

Buller: [G2 runs from Owens to Campground](#)

- Owens to Claybank approx. 7km 2hrs
- Claybank to Doctors Creek approx. 4km 1hr
- Doctors Creek to Buller Bridge approx. 4km 1.5hrs
- Buller Bridge to Matiri Street approx. 3km 1hr (see note on Mangles hazard)
- Matiri Street to Campground approx. 3km 1hr

The above sections have times that allow for taking time practicing on features and eddylines. They can be combined into longer runs. Owens to Doctors Creek, and Doctors Creek to Matiri St are popular combinations. Doctor's Creek downstream 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.

If you are unfamiliar with a takeout spot, we suggest scouting it first and tying something brightly coloured to a tree that will be visible when coming downstream.

Owen access: Pull into the Owen River Tavern. 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 at the Owen River reserve to the river. 13mins drive/18km from camp.

[Google Maps](#)

Claybank access: Drive 16km along SH6, and pull off into the layby on the right, before the fancy house with the big lawn. Please be cautious to avoid parking on the private property or blocking the drive; if in doubt, talk to someone who knows this access point.

[Google Maps](#)

Doctors access: Park in the layby on the river side of the road 50m north of Doctors creek bridge. Please park considerately as this will be a busy put in. If full, you can park 70m south of the bridge near the quarry. Do not cut directly across the farmland. Access track is through trees at the bridge end of the layby.

[Google Maps](#)

Longford Bridge access: This is the first bridge across the Buller River on SH6 approx 5km from Riverside. Cross the bridge and park at Matiri Valley Rd junction. Being cautious of cars, cross the main road and access the river via a farm gate then an electric fence.

[Google Maps](#)

Matiri Street access: 1.7km down Matiri Valley Rd is a layby on your left, a track leads down to the river. Check the takeout, can be easy to miss from the water.

[Google Maps](#)

Campground access: the big eddy at Riverside.

[Google Maps](#)

Hazard on the Buller above Mangles confluence:

About 1 km below the Longford bridge on river left immediately before the Mangles confluence there is a large rock that has injured a few paddlers. It forms a decent hole at higher flow and sometimes has a log jammed across the upstream face, slightly submerged. A centre or right line will avoid this, 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.

Maruia: Lower section below the falls (Gr2)

Put In: Park in the Maruia Falls carpark (21 mins, 23.1km) and follow the track down to the pool directly below Maruia Falls. Do not get too close to the falls.

[Google Maps](#)

Take out: Drive 1.7km past the Westport turnoff. Just at the [end of a straight](#) turn right into a layby below the road level. Takeout track is 50m upstream, by third road reflector (note change from last year). From the river keep an eye out for an old bridge foundation with 3 big concrete blocks on river right, take out just before this, head up behind the bridge pylon and follow the flagged track up to the road.

This is a rarely paddled section of water and we 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.

Buller: Campground to O'Sullivan's (Gr2)

Put in: Right here at the campground

Take out: Either at the [gravel pit](#) 2km past the containers at Dellow's 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)

Buller: 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 require 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.

Grade 2+ Runs

Matakitaki: Middle section (Gr2+ avoidable G3)

This is the sweet spot. The middle Matakitaki 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.

The section from the 1880 Matakitaki Rd put in down is approx. 11km and takes ~3hrs.

Since 2025 flooding there is one new G3 rapid on river right, consisting of a drop which spans the righthand 3/4s of the river, followed by a large hazardous boulder. This is easily avoided when coming from upstream by remaining hard left.

Note: there are two put-ins commonly used for the Middle Matakitaki run. The 1880 Matakitaki Rd put in is higher upstream and assists in avoiding the new G3 hazard. The other Middle Matakitaki put in via the paper road approx. 5km up Matakitaki Rd from the take out has changed after 2025 flooding, and there is now a G3 rapid with a hazardous boulder right at the put in. NZ Kayak School has negotiated access across private land to put in above the G3 rapid but this access does not extend to recreational boaters; if you have done a NZKS

course recently, please do not cross the farm property as they do. If you are unsure about access for this run, please talk to us.

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

[Google Maps](#)

Take out: Drop a shuttle car on your way up Matakitaki Rd. From the Six Mile walking track on the left, go 850m to a closed gate and farm road on the right (916 Matakitaki Rd). Head down the farm road and turn right past a big shed, driving down the hill to a park at an informal carpark the bottom. There is a fairly long walk across farm paddocks to access the river, please close gates behind you. This access point is where the gorge opens up to gravel, it is worth leaving a marker flag if you're unfamiliar.

[Google Maps](#)

There is a higher put in (Horse Terrace / Lappers) 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 (full run ~19km and 4hrs). Take lunch, practise some skills and get a full day on the water.

[Google Maps](#)

Maruia: Shenandoah – (Gr2+ with portagable Gr3)

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 Granite 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.

Buller: Ariki to O'Rourke's (Newtons) (Gr2+)

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. Alternatively 350m past the swingbridge carpark pull into the layby and walk 100m back to a steep track. 15min/15.4km (plus 6km shuttle)

Take out: Drive approx 6km and park up immediately after crossing O'Rouke'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 also be a bit tricky and needs to be managed well, take care climbing up the rocks.

Buller: O'Rourke's to Harry's Track (Gr2+)

Put in: Park up immediately after crossing O'Rouke'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'Rouke'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 your 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.

Buller: 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 eases and 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 chosen the entire channel may be blocked by river wide strainers.

Buller: Howard River to Harleys/Higgins (Gr2+)

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.

Grade 3/3+ Runs

Buller: Outlet to Road Bridge – (Gr3)

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 a short boisterous run that can be run multiple times. A steeper gradient means that eddies are tight and the run can be quite challenging for beginners and makes assisting swimmers difficult. A walking 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 12 mins at higher flow (100m3/s) 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)

Buller: Gowan Bridge to Owens -Granity (Gr3)

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 are a few poplars and conifers on the bank. Alternately, at a large layby 5km down from Gowan turnoff, known as the gravel pit.

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 until 2 Mile Island. There are powerful eddy lines here and there are often logs pinned against the first island that can be very hazardous. 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 will likely 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.

Buller: O'Sullivan's to Ariki (Gr3)

Groups MUST check with Organising 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**

Buller: Harry's to Iron Bridge (Earthquake) (Gr3)

Groups MUST check with Organiser 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. Alternate takeout at Lyell Creek

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.

Other Runs

Murchison is close to a number of other runs that might be suitable depending on flow. Some of these are not regularly done as PRANZ trips due to the traveling distance and walk in times as they may result in full day trips.

Please talk to the safety team to get approval if you are considering these runs.

- **Matakitaki: Downies** - Drive into Matakitaki Station and walk up the DOC track alongside the Matakitaki river, Downies hut is about a 5 hour walk. Followed by a pleasant 3 hour grade 2 down a braided river. There is a short grade 3 section above Downies hut but do not run the gorge above. This section is best when Horse Terrace gauge is above 50m3/s.
- **Matakitaki: Mammoth Gorge** - 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 set of nasty rapids at Horse Terrace road bridge (gr.3+) Suggest exiting prior to horse terrace gorge to fishing track.
- **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

- **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. Can be run by small teams of experienced packrafters at low flows
- **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 - [Consider portaging](#).
- **Mangles - Blackwater to the Buller Confluence**
Gr.2+/3 - If flows are favourable then a brilliant run. Normally run from the Blackwater swingbridge. This features some technical padding in a smaller flow and can be over committing for novices. At higher flows some get in at the bridge near the Tutaki Rd
- **Maruia: Ruff Creek to Maruia Falls** - Not often run by packrafters, takes in some scenic bits in a couple of nice gorges but mostly farmland, mostly grade 2. Check the takeout (track behind the loo at Maruia)

And then theres the “other” other runs: Dovedale River, Gowan (choked with trees), Owen, or further afield towards Inangahua, West Coast, Marlborough, Lewis Pass or Tasman.

A massive thank you to our supporters



... and the awesome team from
Reefton Community Kitchen