

Exploring Mangrove Creek

on the Clarence River, at Maclean



The Lookout at Maclean. An easterly perspective of the Clarence River and the Harwood Sugarmill.

Mangrove Creek

Maclean

Clarence River - NSW

The Clarence River, in the last 65 kilometres from Grafton to the sea at Yamba, looks more of a salt water estuary, than a freshwater river.

Often more than half a kilometer wide, the river is mostly invisible to the traveler on the Pacific Highway. On the road, a couple of river bridge crossings give no real hint that the Clarence River more than once splits into a North Arm, and a South Arm, with Chatsworth Island (6 x 4 km) and Woodford Island (15 x 7 km) lying between the waters.

This area has been heavily modified for farming. Small creeks have been sealed off from the river, and islands permanently joined with earthworks to the mainland. What this can mean for the canoeist is that the river often resembles a large drainage canal, with long straight banks devoid of vegetation. Given the large scale of the river, it can be a monotonous venue for a paddle.

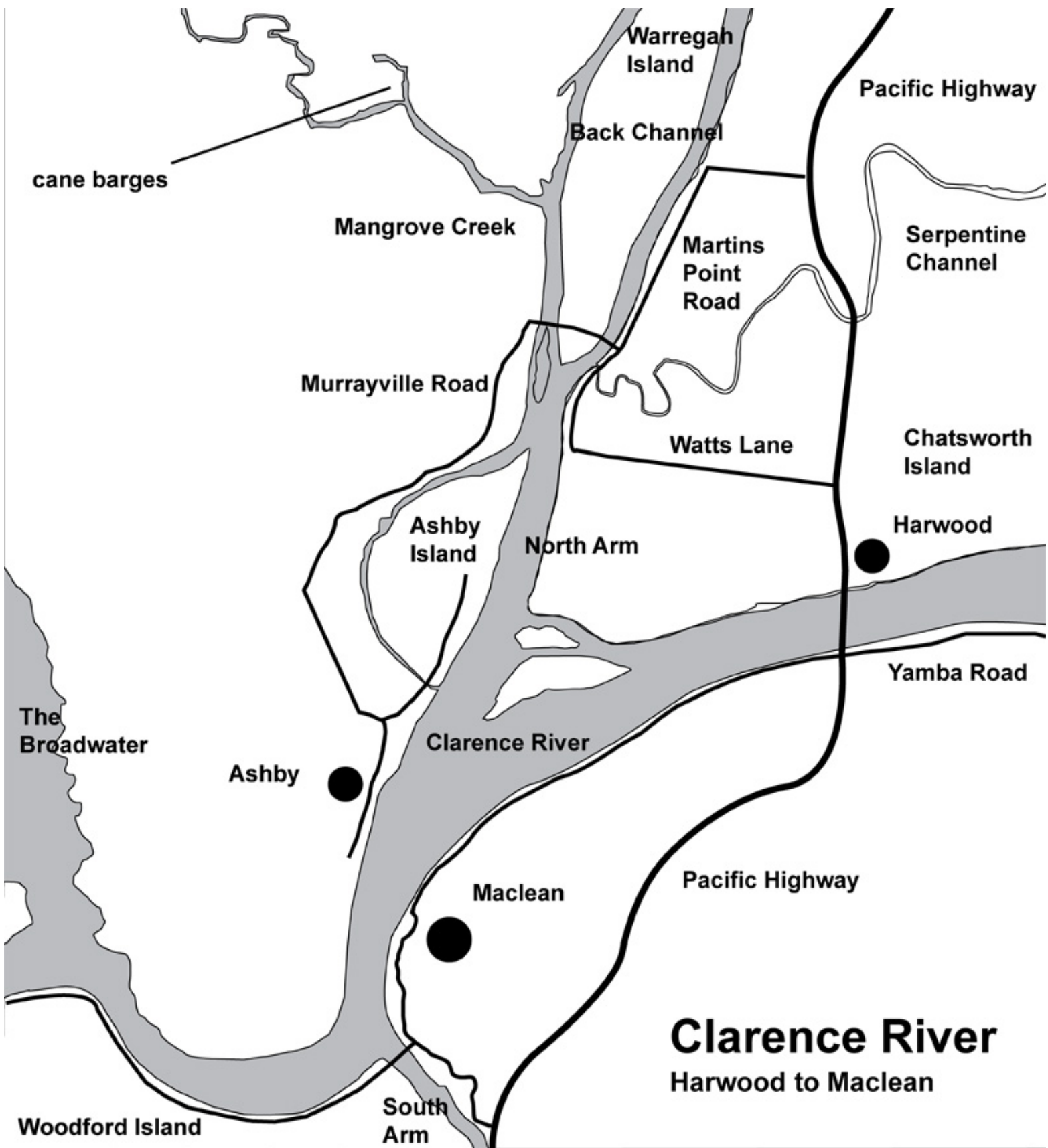
With that in mind, this article is a guide to Mangrove Creek in the Maclean township section. In the creek are the rusting remains of three cane barges, engineless boats pulled by shallow draft river tugboats, carrying sugar cane to the mills on the river.



image top: Summertime, late on Sunday afternoon, at Maclean township on the Clarence River. The street sculpture is a sugar cane derrick.

image mid: sugar cane derrick in use

image lower: river tugboat awaiting restoration in the Clarence River Sugar Heritage Project workshop, next to the mill at Harwood



It is about 7.2 kilometres from Maclean (at the start of River Street, over the levee wall) down to Mangrove Creek in the Back Channel. You will pass the working Dry Dock at Ashby, and if the tide is high enough, you can paddle around Ashby Island. It is another 1.8 kilometres from the mouth of Mangrove Creek up to the cane barges, with more creek to explore further.

Alternatively, launch into the Serpentine Channel where it joins the North Arm, off Martins Point Road, and go west around the tip of Warregah Island for a shorter trip out of the wind and tide. The waters edge at that launch point looks like soft black mud, but is actually very firm black sand. This option gives you a chance to paddle Serpentine Channel, narrow, winding, and sinuous.



Clarence River. Looking from the southern tip of Warregah Island to Maclean 5.5 km upriver.

looking to the Dry Dock, Ashby, from Maclean

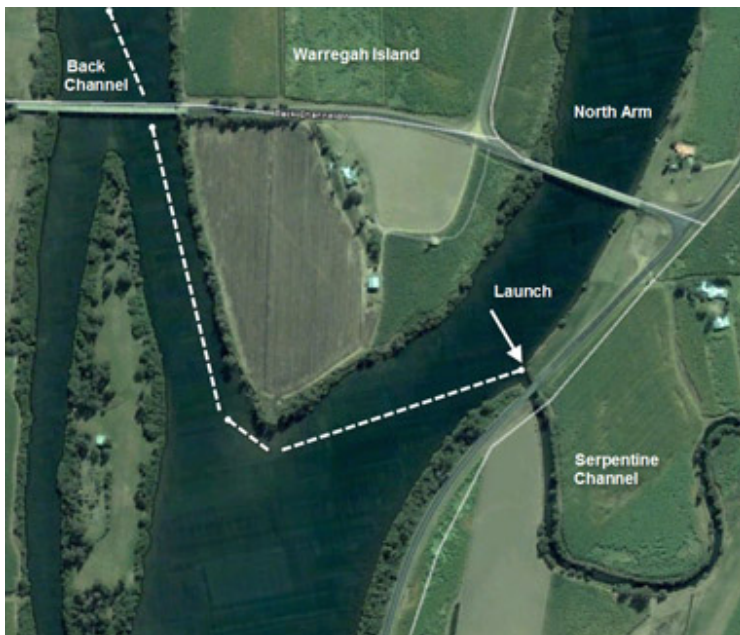


small bridge over the Serpentine Channel, North Arm





cane barges, Mangrove Creek



left: launch map, Warregah Island

below: flood debris May 2009 flood, Warregah Island

