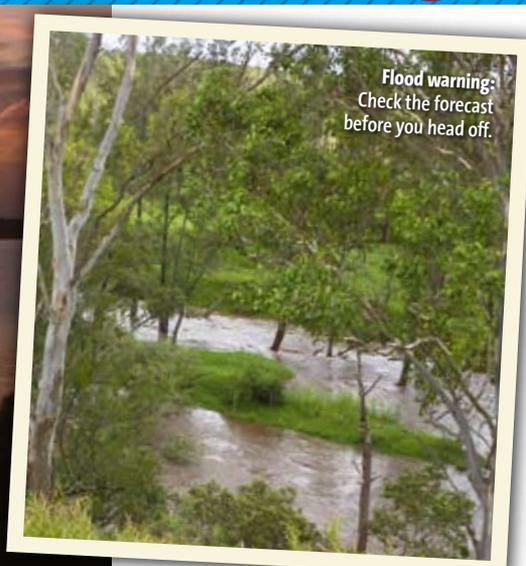


Setting the standard:  
The view over the  
Manning River.



Flood warning:  
Check the forecast  
before you head off.

# TOPS SPIN

**Alpha's man is all prepped for adventure in northern NSW, but there's a late change of plans**

## DAY ONE

The whitewater kayaking experience in Barrington Tops is an exciting and challenging journey across one of the most beautiful parts of NSW. Before I leave, a colleague illustrates the grade-two rapids I'm in for, with big, dramatic hand-chops downward from near the ceiling. Just 200km north of Sydney and 130km from Newcastle, you're surrounded by miles of national park, gorges, drops, ponds and pools, all the way from Cobark to Bindera and Rocky Crossing, along the Barrington River. A thrilling, rewarding experience, if only I'd done it.

It rains. It rains when we arrive and it rains during lunch and it rains harder in the

afternoon. The news shows crying Queensland schoolkids being lowered into emergency boats. During the night, it rains.

In the morning, I put on my kayaking gear (shorts) and go out onto the veranda. The river below seems closer than it did before. A bloke from the adventure centre up the road appears. He shakes his head and looks sad. Apparently the possibility of death by kayaking is now about 100 per cent.

By mid-morning the Barrington River has burst its banks, risen another 2m and flows roughly 70 times faster than yesterday. Entire trees rush downstream. When it stops raining we go for a bushwalk through the dripping near-rainforest around the old Copeland gold mine. Then it starts raining again. Back on the veranda, I drink beer

and watch leeches do the high-step up my boots. Time for Plan B.

## DAY TWO

Plan B was almost Plan A. The quiet town of Harrington is 100 or so kays north-east, and 30km off the Pacific Highway from Taree, on the edge of the Manning Valley and Crowdy Bay National Park. Harrington's best new feature is a complex nearby that stops you having to actually see the Manning Valley and Crowdy Bay National Park. Bushwalking is all very well, but golf, fishing and drinking are a lot more fun.

We stay at the Harrigans River Lodge, right next to a big Irish pub, which is right next to Harrington Waters golf course, all

of which is right at the mouth of the Manning River.

That afternoon, I sit on my big stone patio and look out at the Manning. The weather allows us a sunset. On a pontoon, a bloke in silhouette launches his line into the water. The only sounds are the murmur of water and the hum of the air-conditioning. I turn off the air-conditioning.

In the morning I ring Crowdy Bay Charters and tell them I want to go fishing. For \$500, you get the boat, the skipper, all the gear and a maximum of six onboard, for seven hours of reef or bottom fishing. I could go up to 20km out into the Tasman to search for perch and snapper, only he can't fit me in. His next available charter is on Saturday, by which time I'll be gone. Bigger. This may be an adventure story without any adventure in it, like *American Ninja V*. Come on, I tell my wife: we're playing golf. I don't care if it's raining frogs.

Thankfully, Harrington Waters golf course is a walk up and play. And one big group has panicked at the bad weather and cancelled.

The clouds are drifting away. I have the whole place to myself. My wife motors the cart at 0.005km/h, suns herself and marks my card. "Is it normal to hit so many balls in the water?" she asks at the third. Yes, I sigh. "This says five but you did an eight," she comments

at the fourth. Just drive the cart, I tell her.

My form is shocking and I need three mates who don't think a tee is something you have with sandwiches. But the sun is out, and the course has plenty of variety and enough bushland and water features to keep you thinking. I keep thinking I didn't buy enough balls in the pro shop.

Afterwards, we walk over to the Irish pub, get a pizza and Guinness and gaze at the quiet river again, just full of fish begging for someone to catch them. I have another Guinness, just to keep the other one company. One weekend soon I'm going to come back here with mates and really tear it up. I'll be looking at that weather forecast first, but.

— Ivan Smith

**"Bushwalking is all very well, but golf, fishing and drinking are a lot more fun."**



Ivan the terrible:  
"Left! Go left!"

## DO THIS (PROPERLY)

### BARRINGTON TOPS

**Barrington Outdoor Adventure Centre**  
For kayaking, mountain biking, bushwalking, (02) 6558 2093, [www.boac.com.au](http://www.boac.com.au). One-day kayaking tour \$130; two-day \$340.



We stayed in one of the beaut cottages at Barrington Riverside Country Retreat next to the Adventure Centre: (02) 6558 1263, [www.barringtonriversideretreat.com.au](http://www.barringtonriversideretreat.com.au). Rates \$150-210/night depending on season.

### HARRINGTON

**Harrigans Irish Pub and River Lodge**  
Harrington, (02) 6556 0555, [www.harrigansirishpub.com.au/Harrington-Waters.aspx](http://www.harrigansirishpub.com.au/Harrington-Waters.aspx). Golf and accommodation packages available.

**Harrington Waters Golf Club**  
Pro shop: (02) 6556 0404, [www.harrington-crowdy.com/ProShop](http://www.harrington-crowdy.com/ProShop). Just \$30 for 18 holes.

**Crowdy Bay Charters**, for weekend fishing: (02) 6591 3467; 0428 655 701. Seven hours of fishing, all-in, six people maximum, \$500.