

North Sumatran Waterfall Hunting

By Sam Ricketts





Sam- Photo by Robert Collister

In the middle of November 2018 three friends; Lachie Carracher, Robert Collister and Sam Ricketts set off on a mission to northern Sumatra. We were all in high hopes and looking for our chance to exploit the regions un-run rivers, creeks and waterfalls before the third Asahan River Festival commenced at the end of the month.

Every year for the last three years, Lachie and myself have been traveling to this amazing country and Lachie has spent the last 9 years coming back. We have both been running the world-renowned kayaking festival on the Asahan River 'Toba Wild - The Asahan River Festival'. This time around we had Robert Collister on board, a solid kayaker from Okere Falls NZ, and we all had a couple weeks to kill before everything kicked off with the festival.


We all met up with our great friend Ubul, who is the owner of a local rafting and travel company, a river enthusiast, local guide and our chauffeur. We scoured Google Earth and used local word of mouth to discover that we had landed in the new mecca of waterfall and slide kayaking in southeast Asia. Sumatra is the most northern island of Indonesia, where the last super-volcano, Toba, erupted 50,000 years ago. This was the biggest super-volcano to go off in human history and put the earth into a volcanic winter for over a decade, pushing humankind to the brink of extinction. So obviously Sumatra is rich in natural history and the local people are more than welcoming. The ingredients for a successful waterfall exploratory mission were perfect; the highly volcanic history means there are hundreds of basalt canyons with tea-cup waterfalls, huge vertical spires created by lava flows breaking away by the waterflow, leaving deep gorges, and big clean drops. Sumatra is very close to the equator; this gives it a very reliable monsoon season. The rain comes like clockwork, so you can plan your day quite easily, but you have to be in the right place at the right time because it comes hard and fast, and then the waters gone again!

We arrived in Medan, the biggest city in the island of Sumatra, at 8 pm local time after a big transit with kayaks. We were greeted by two young men who couldn't speak any English, and we couldn't speak Indonesian, so we were communicating through Google Translate for an hour or two before we came to the conclusion that they were here to pick us up. We all piled into the back of a pick-up that was covered by a huge tarp. We sat on kayaks, and our bags, and struggled through a seven-hour drive through the busy and bouncy north Sumatran streets and backcountry roads. We arrived in Siantar, Ubul's hometown, around 4 am. He greeted us with open arms, and we slept the remainder of the night through the morning.

Late morning, we were relaxing for the first time after our transit so it was perfect timing when we all heard a small bell making its way down the street towards us. It was the noodle man, working his way around the community with his fresh local handmade breakfast noodles. We almost bought him out and enjoyed our first breakfast in the sun.

Our first goal was to find a perfect 30 ft drop (10 metres) that we had seen on Google. It seemed like a tourist attraction because there were countless selfies taken with the waterfall. We asked around and Ubul talked to his connections in town. We set off after lunchtime to get this waterfall done, three in the front and three in the back of the truck. As soon as we started driving, we were hit by hard rain, so hard we had to stop because the windshield wipers couldn't move fast enough. A friend of Ubul's was having his wedding the same day, so we stopped there, got out of the truck and followed him under cover into a full-on traditional batak style wedding. There was loud music, dancing and singing. They all offered us huge plates of delicious food and welcomed us to their country. When the rain subsided, we carried on with our journey. After hours it seemed, and stops to question local people, we made it to the waterfall. It started as a big slide into a small pool then off another 10 metre vertical drop! We were so excited. We didn't have enough water to run the slide at the beginning, but the drop was good


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Sam, Tibet Falls- Photo by Lachie Carracher



to go! I suited up first to run it, surrounded by an ever-growing local crowd who were very curious about what we were up to and why we had stopped in their village. It's a picture-perfect waterfall that if we came back, and had more water, would be one of the coolest Grade Five park n hucks ever! We can't wait to return to it again, and to keep exploring the area, which is full of rivers, falls and delicious noodles.

We found a few drops and slides but as time progressed, we had to put energy into preparing for the Asahan River festival. Much is out there still waiting to be found and run. During last year's festival on the Asahan River, we also had the opportunity to run another new waterfall that we found out, runs directly into the Asahan River. Newly named 'Union Falls' is a 15 metre, technical lead-in waterfall. It is picture perfect and the access could not be easier. I ran it first followed by fellow kayaker Liam Fournier. I expect that this waterfall will be run countless more times at the Toba Wild- Asahan River Festival this year, and we are excited about the new unexplored waterfalls that will be discovered in the future.

Before the 2019 Asahan River Festival commences, the plan is to have a full-blown exploratory mission to discover the potential of this amazing country one waterfall at a time. Entries are open for this year already, so please visit <http://tobachampionships.com/> for all inquiries about this year's festival, follow us on Facebook & Instagram 'Toba Wild- Asahan River Festival' and we will keep you in the loop about how you can get in on this amazing opportunity and participate in one of the best river festivals and competitions in the world. 🌿



Sam in Perfect Storm- Photo Alex Nicks



Sam, Tibet Falls- Photo by Robert Collister

Want to Become a Kayak Guide or Instructor?

By Peter Townend

After thirty years of teaching kayaking skills to thousands of people, both young and old, I have had time to reflect on how enjoyable and rewarding my career has been.

As we get older, we become aware of the importance of bringing in new blood to the industry to keep it alive for future generations. To give the young ones the opportunity to enjoy the great outdoors, to connect with the environment and hopefully enjoy a long and rewarding career.

So, we asked Chelsi Williams about her introduction to Kayak Guiding and how she found her Canoe & Kayak Instructor Training helped her in her career.

1./ How long were you training with us?

I can't exactly remember how long... I think maybe three or so months.

2./ Did you enjoy your training?

I loved my training with Canoe & Kayak. Especially the overnight skill courses, as I found teaching other people how to do/ improve the basic skills really improved my basic skills.

3./ How well do you feel your training set you up to be a guide/ instructor?

It's definitely helped me out a lot with my guiding and it's helped my clients too, as I can give them little tips which helps them throughout the day. And I find they enjoy their day a lot more as they aren't so tired and sore halfway through the trip because I have shown them the correct technique. Which I wouldn't have been able to give them without going on and teaching the skill courses.

4./ What was most memorable about your training?

Pete's little sayings for paddling technique like; punching forward like your Joseph Parker, holding your paddle loose like your holding your grandma's fine china and of course keeping the box shape while paddling and rotating.

5./ What did you enjoy the most?

I really enjoyed getting out there and teaching others on the skills courses, as I found everything stuck in my head a lot easier that way.

6./ What opportunities have opened up having gained you instructors qualification?

Since doing this course I have been kayak guiding with Kaiteriteri Kayaks in the Abel Tasman National Park for five seasons, currently going into my sixth. And I am now also the assistant operations manager which is great and challenging at times. But I definitely wouldn't have this position without my training with Canoe & Kayak.

Any other comments?

Just a massive thank you to Pete and the team for all their training and help. It's definitely stuck with me and I won't ever forget it!

We thank you Chelsi for your comments and we wish you well for your new house build and your future. 🏡



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