

When should the Avon Descent be held?

Traditionally, it has been the first weekend in August. This was rarely a problem, but a series of dry or late winter seasons have caused much anxiety.

Why worry?

First, the event can come into doubt if there isn't sufficient water flow. It is no longer a whitewater challenge, but a marathon with obstacles. The adventure of the valley is diminished and the skills set required to bash down a “dry” river is not that of whitewater experts, or even competents.

Second, a certain amount of preparation is required to tackle the Avon Descent as a race. This involves distance fitness but also requires competitors to re-familiarise themselves with the rapids of the Valley and to sharpen skills in moving water. I used to believe it was unthinkable to do the race without a couple of valley-runs under the belt.

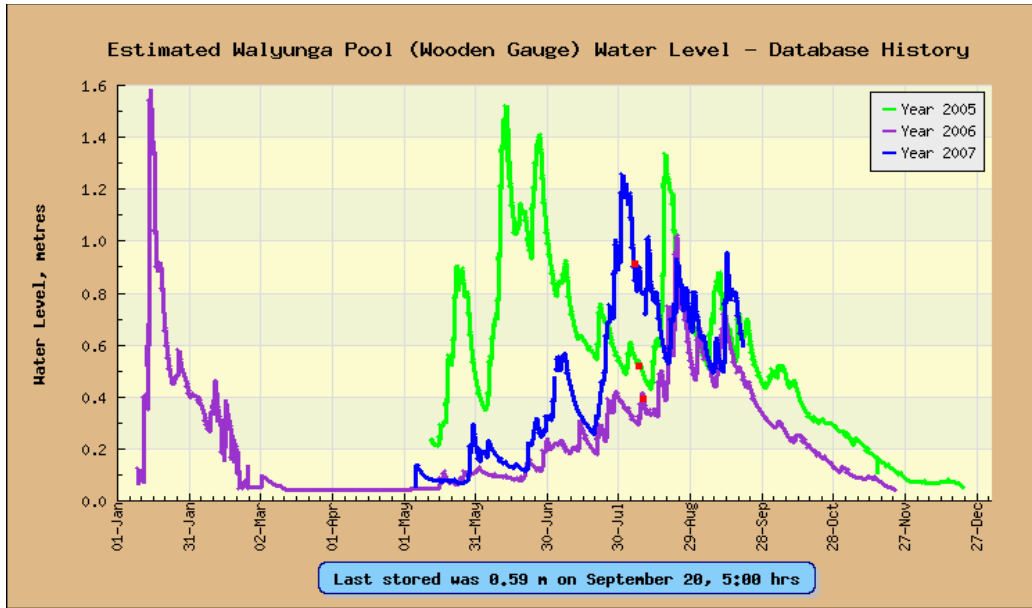
Third, these practice runs are a good excuse to make the effort to go and have some fun going down the river. The motivation to organise car shuffles etc after that first weekend in August drops considerably.

Fourth, there are businesses dependent on training novices to competency level for the race. Without water these novices could pose significant personal risk and the trainers lose out on income. This shouldn't be underplayed, as these same trainers are feeding happy punters into the sport of kayaking.

Well?

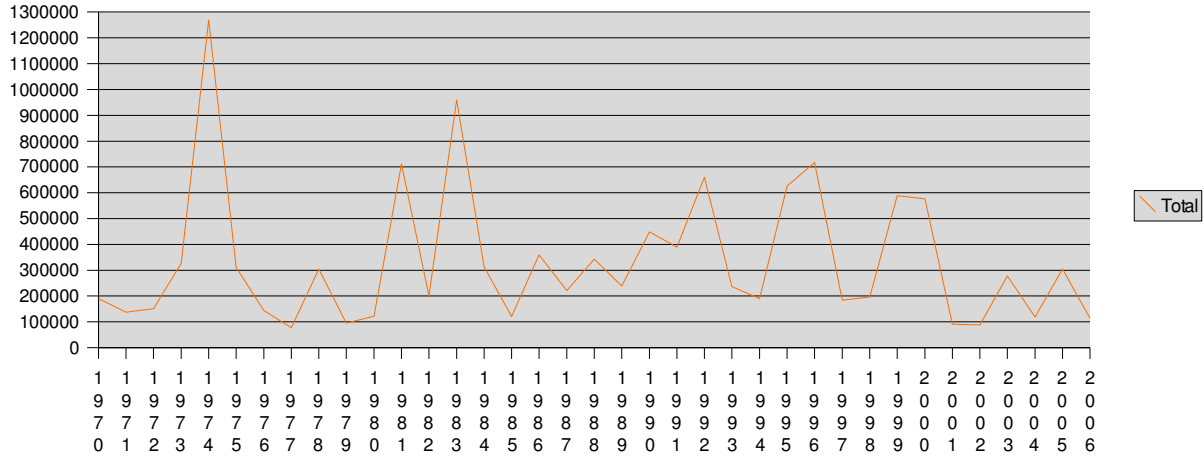
2001 & 2002 were pretty low. 2003 & 2004 were average. 2005 was great in May & June but no rain fell in July.

2006 was a very low year- almost impassable, some might say. 2007 was late- the rains only just made it in time. Let's have a look at the last 3 years.



Three different winters, but interesting that in each case there is reliable water in late August/early September. Are these years typical or unusual? Let us start with annual water flows. Notice that FLOWS are not LEVELS, but give an approximation. A moderate level for a month can give a monthly flow equal to a late but very high level.

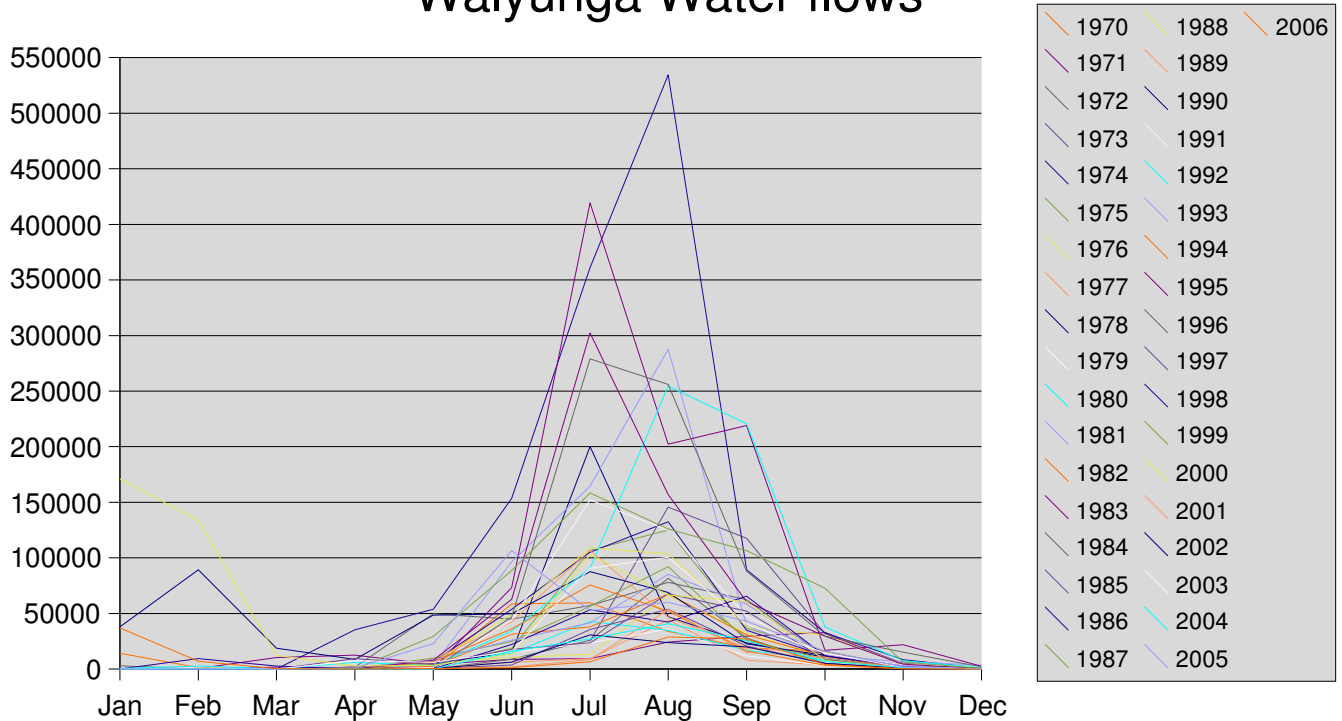
Walyunga annual flow



We have had a low series since 2001. The low years of 2001, 2002 and 2006 are apparent but 2005 shows better because of the early and late winter rains. The high years of the mid '90s also appear. So the annual water flow equates fairly roughly. We might also worry that the recent trend is a sign of things to come with lower rainfalls a fact, according to the dam-keepers and climatologists. There were other low-year series in the mid 80's and the late 70's although they were surrounded by wetter periods.

Now to see when in the year the rain does fall.

Walyunga Water flows



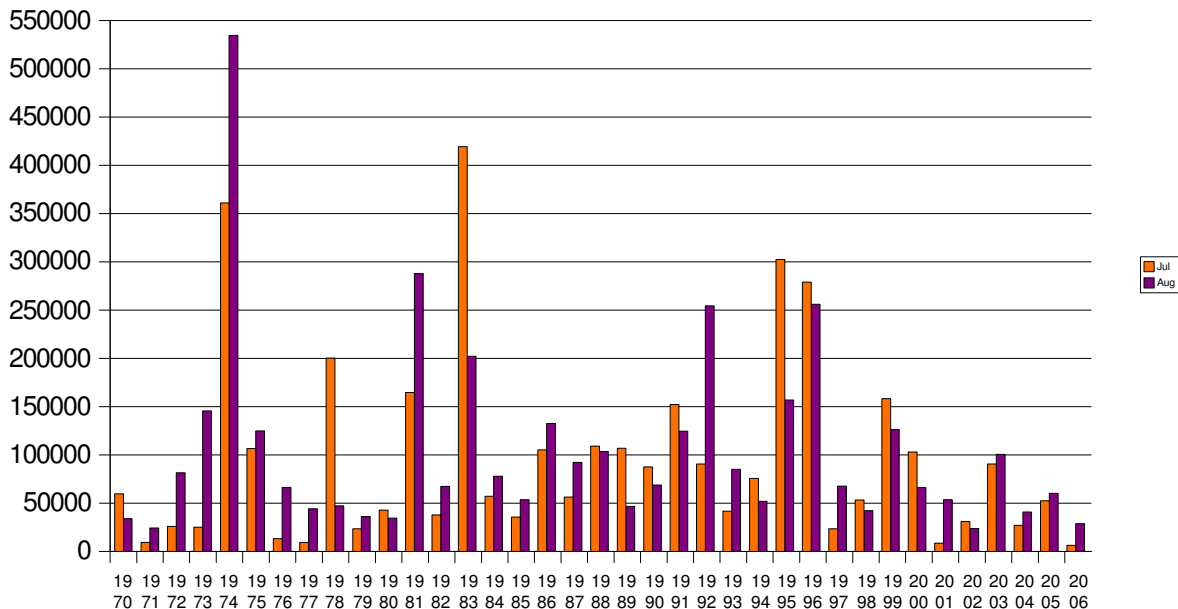
There is a spread and some variability but the month of August as a whole looks like the most reliable both in terms of avoiding low water and in terms of a good average amount of water. There are some

Julys where big flows have happened, but a number of worryingly low years. September certainly seems to tail off and the FLOWS may be propped up by more days of continuing run-off during the month.

Remember that currently the Avon Descent happens at start of August, so LEVELS only roughly extrapolated as something between the July and August figures here. The bulk of the August flows mostly happen after the Avon Descent.

Is there any difference between July and August?

Walyunga flows- July & Aug



It's swings and roundabouts here, but eyeballing the years where the monthly flows of each of those two months is under about 7000, it is three-to-one that August had more water. Or, to say that if it is going to be dry, more water will flow in August. Again this is biased by the number of days of water flow, but gives the impression that there will be more days of paddlable water, perhaps?

The conclusions we could draw from this are:

- It would be “safer” to delay the Descent by a couple of weeks to ensure a regular amount of water
- Delaying the race would give more opportunity for novice training and general race preparation.
- More of us would do more valley runs but correspondingly less time is available afterwards for slalom/playboating/post-Avon joyriding and introduction of newcomers.
- The chances of really BIG levels would drop by a very small amount.

real-time walyunga graphs from <http://www.whitewaterperth.org.au/water-level.html>

Other graphs are constructed from data taken from Department of Water- River Monitoring Stations, historical data