

5th March 2011: BCCC paddlers 'rock-on' at River Teign, Devon.



Paul Jeffs organised a trip to the River Teign for nine BCCC paddlers.

It was an early start for most as the first meeting point was a 9:15 breakfast at Whiddon Down on the northern edge of Dartmoor.

Paul had described the paddle as about 7 miles starting at Sandy Park and finishing at Steps Bridge. Caroline and I thought that, as it was only 7 miles, it would be a bit of a doddle.. this assumption was to be proved very wrong.. A friend of mine, who used to live on Dartmoor, had described the river as having "many large rocks". I thought this was an exaggeration by someone who did not canoe but he was very accurate!

A local canoeing group started just before ours at Sandy Park and the leader expressed surprise that we were going all the way to Steps Bridges and stated "that's a long way". Bells started ringing - it is only 7 miles – just over a Hare & Hounds distance - how can that be a long way?



The first 'feature' was a weir with fish steps and described in Paul's river guide book as 'gnarly'. The experienced paddlers showed their skills and shot the weir without incident.



Garry very bravely attempted the weir, got to the bottom and then decided to practise his rolling skills.. His video is on utube and well worth a look: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cHnmenXy5H4&hd=1>



Caroline and I decided to portage the gnarly weir as we did not have dry suits and there was a very good probability of going in – very sensible at the beginning of a long day's paddle..



Progress was very slow as many features were exaggerated by the slightly low river level. The problem was mainly.... You guessed it... ROCKS. Big ones, small ones, medium sizes ones... If we were not passing the large ones at high speed we were getting stuck on riffles or inconsiderately placed rocks.. My kayak seemed to have a magnetic attraction to the boulders and more than once heeded Brian's advice to hug the rock (beats trees I guess..) as the water pressure threatened a capsize.

We stopped for a quick late lunch at Fingle Bridge and realised that we had to get a wiggle on to reach the end point before dark.



More features presented themselves including one weir with very little flow. Brian decided to throw his kayak over the top and then himself, losing his wet shoes in the process. Relieved to say both surfaced undamaged a short distance down stream.

By this stage of the paddle I had got used to getting stuck on rocks at the start of a 'feature', then performing a 180 degree pirouette and attempting at least half of the feature backwards.. Anybody watching might have thought it was deliberate – but we know different!



By this time, as light was beginning to fail, some of us were thinking “Where on earth is that end point”? Have we missed it?” Then around the next bend we spied Steps Bridge. I was almost as glad to see that as Westminster Bridge at the end of the DW...

It was a long paddle given the conditions and numerous ‘features’ but very enjoyable.

My thanks to:

- Paul Jeffs for organising another superb trip;
- Brian Biffin for lugging most of the gear (and rock-hugging advice)
- Paul Mant for leading our group
- And to my friend Patrick on his warning about the Teign rocks..

Happy paddling!

Alan Ebbage
9th March 2011