

## Devizes to Westminster in a proper canoe



I cannot quite remember how I got talked into it. Must have been a combination of Mike's boundless enthusiasm to paddle anything rather than a pointy boat, and my resolution that, whilst being over the hill, wanted to make plenty of noise rolling down the other side. "Do a bit of training after Christmas and you'll be fine" said Liz. After failing to find anything we could afford, I was much relieved to be offered Charles' Reynard Open Touring canoe, which handled very tidily and was also tolerably light .

Friday 16<sup>th</sup> January we ventured forth with padded seats, Anne's carbon fibre cranked paddle and my touring paddle. On the water we were quite pleased with the 4.3mph average over the 6 miles we covered. Portages – problemo. Lee suggested a pair of wheelie bin wheels taped on the back. The genesis of an idea was forming....Back in the garden shed I dismantled Tom's mountain board. With Denis' engineering know-how we soon had pneumatic wheels on the back, enabling us to run with the inverted canoe, grasping handles slung from the forward thwarts on either side. Competitors and support crews seemed keen to clear a way when they heard us rumbling up the tow-path. Lesson one: let your partner clear before righting the canoe after a portage or he ends up swimming.

Tracy was right. Watersides are an excellent training for DW. Not just for us, but also for the support crew. Denis kindly took Anne and Lee under his wing and Lee soon learnt you can nearly lose fingers while administering jellybabies to Mike. Anne preferred to lance partly peeled bananas at me. Waterside 'C' was another part of the learning curve: We had misunderstood where our backup was going to be after Froxfield. Hungerford lived up to it's name. We were both getting quite warm and drinks were running out. Our morale had dropped and so did our speed. We achieved only 4.1 mph over the 23 miles and 35 portages between Pewsey and Newbury.

Now we were paddling longer distances, sore bums became a problem. Waterside D was an ideal opportunity to try some tracking and lining, using extended painters. Some K2 crews told us we were definitely cheating, but I had asked a rather confused steward at Devizes who admitted there was no reason why we could not track or line. On DW we tracked and lined several times including about ¼ mile along the Henley straight – rumors that we entangled pensioners sitting on the riverside benches are quite unfounded.

Paddling an open canoe you seem to attract a lot of appreciation from the bystanders, even if they really mean “You must be nuts” it’s great to hear “Nice to see a real canoe” and “Go C2, go, go”. Best support we got for the whole of DW was from Murray, on the very end of the Wraysbury Punt and Skiff Club pontoon, all by himself, jumping up and down, cheering us on.



It’s now Sunday 13th April. After four days of rising as early as 3.30 am, paddling distances of up to 38 miles a day, we finally made it to Westminster, arriving just before 9am. Our total time being 28 hours and 19 minutes. The fun was not yet over. All us 4 day event’ers were invited to a reception at Horseguard’s Parade by Ian Mattison for refreshments and an opportunity to sit on the Queen’s sofa and watch the Changing of the Guard taking place below us.

Mike and myself would like to thank our support crew, Lee, Sam, Mark, Jason, Denis, Charles and Kate but especially my long suffering wife, Anne, whose accuracy at launching peanut butter and marmite sandwiches at my mouth while running was remarkable - however, she is still convinced that I am quite mad for doing it.

Lastly, but certainly not least, a big thank you to Mike, my paddling partner. Mike kept me on target when I was thinking of skipping the odd training session and really inspired me to keep on going. I could not have asked for a better companion.

Achieving our fundraising target was also a big motivation to carry on with the training and the event itself. Thank you from Phyllis Tuckwell Hospice and from us once more!

Brian

