

Frank Luzmore K2 race, Sunday 4 January.

A freezing cold day with a temperature well below -5C greeted 16 BAS paddlers at the start of the Frank Luzmore. The three lock cuts were all impassable because of ice, and the temperature stayed below zero all day. All of our crews could be mightily pleased with their times in such trying conditions. The full results are on the Richmond web site <http://www.richmondcanoecub.com/luzmore09.pdf> The report below records Jason Ashwell's experiences in the K2 with Nigel Cole: their first Luzmore race.

Freezing cold fun

The Thames has been an interesting learning curve for Nigel and me, good in training but mainly swim inducing in our few races, so we had mixed feelings about the Frank Luzmore before the race. The cold didn't particularly bother us and with no wind, the conditions were OK for the 13 miles.

After paddling round to the start we felt comfortable even if Nigel's knees were still knocking a bit. We got off the start OK and got into a good rhythm quite quickly, Mark and Alan and Pete and Chris moved away from us in front down to the first lock. The rest of our group had all hung back at the start and hadn't come past us so we were quite pleased. With the first lock cut frozen we had the 600m portage to negotiate, we decided to put the boat on our shoulders and once I had got rid of the pins and needles and Nigel had picked up the hydration pouches a couple of times we managed to jog most of the distance before the high put in.

So far so good and in a nice pace, the second section was to be our worst though and once we had got into the middle of the river after being hemmed in by another K2 we were being caught and passed by the speedier later starters. We got really ragged in all the wash which didn't improve really all the way down to the next lock with a fair few support strokes. I still can't get my head around the fact that if the front of the boat is under the water it isn't really such a bad thing. I had been watching the numbers of the other crews as they passed and still hadn't seen any other Men's C boats go past.

Good portage at Molesey and on to the third leg, with more clear water we thankfully got back into our rhythm, the drinks system were working well and other than my newly purchased "foil lined 40 below" poggies making my hands sweat and rubbing the tape on my paddle we were enjoying ourselves. We had started to catch up slowly to Pete and Chris, but the tideway was looming!!

Into the rollers at Teddington which was a slow portage, the front of the boat got stuck in the ice between the walls and I had to pull the boat back to the wall while leaning over to grab the slippery concrete. A couple of crews went past us at Teddington including Charles and Michael who we had overtaken just before the lock.

The tideway was nice and flat and again we got back into a good stroke rate, we were catching up the groups who had overtaken us at the lock, possibly inspired by one of the Leighton Buzzard crews telling us we didn't want to get beaten too much by Jamie and Derek. We were paddling well and feeling strong, we over took the yellow Mirage who tried to come back at us (or at least that's what it felt like!) as well as another few crews. The finish line came up quickly and we finished third in 2 hours 2 minutes in the Men's C, to make it a Basingstoke 1st, 2nd and 3rd. A very enjoyable race, no swims and more to take on board in our learning curve:

- Must get quicker at Portaging
- Put the seat forwards one more hole (may stop the pins and needles which have come back)
- Poggies make you sweat and give you blisters
- Sort out the hydration pouches for long portages
- Try and relax when you are in the wash
- The tideway isn't that scary (we reserve judgement on this until we go further down and meet more boats and wind)

Well done to everyone who got out of their bed to brave the cold and ice. I am still in awe how people paddling really wobbly boats paddle through all that wash like it isn't there. My colleagues at work still can't believe people paddle when it's that cold; neither could the Port of London Authority according to the Richmond website.

Definitely in the calendar for next year.

Jason Ashwell January 2009