

Waterside D- The final Chapter

Following on from C our knees had just about recovered and the tendonitis in my forearm felt a lot better. We were ready to face the final chapter of our first Waterside Series. Our maximum distance was still only around 18 miles as C was more of a run than a paddle!

We met Brian and Stella, our superb support crew at 5.45 a.m in the morning on what looked like a dry, warm and pleasant morning. Quite a contrast to the -7C temperatures we faced 2 weeks earlier. The big debate was on what to wear in the potentially tropical conditions. Cag or no cag, buoyancy aid or no buoyancy aid, what decisions!

We arrived just before 7.00 a.m. in Devizes and got ready to leave at our planned departure time of 7.30 a.m, only to be delayed 15 minutes due to the long queue outside the 3 Portaloo's. With nearly 400 kayakers and all their support crew this was definitely the biggest bottle neck of the day and a learning for the future.

We finally set off at around 7.45 a.m. and got into a nice steady pace for the first 11.5 mile leg. We passed Jon and Sarah in their K1's after a few miles and could only admire their guts to attempt D all by themselves. The twins passed us at All Cannings so quickly we could not even get a tow.



The start at Devizes: three strokes in and already in sync.

We arrived at Pewsey in around 1 hour 50 minutes, a few minutes ahead of schedule and were fed and watered by Brian and Stella. Mark needed a pit-stop and managed to jump to the front of the queue at the Portaloo's and avoided wasting any more valuable time.

The next stage was broken up by our first locks of the day and then the famous tunnel, where we had a good clear run and managed to paddle all the way through without stopping. The tunnel certainly appeared darker than on C and the wash bouncing off the sides created some tension and we were thankful to come out into daylight and hit some smooth water.

At Crofton we got the portage all wrong and with the water being so low we failed to get hold of the side properly and went for a swim. We managed to empty the boat in the 1m shallow water and lift it up onto the 2 metre wall, before Mark gave me a leg up. It was just as well that the water was relatively warm!

After around 16.5 miles of paddling we were quite happy to run the Crofton locks, especially after we had been for a swim. At the end of the flight we got back in and discovered that the rudder had gone and proceeded to paddle from side to side for a bit before we got out at the next lock and Mark made running repairs to the wire (otherwise known as a knot) which we must have knocked loose following our swim at the last portage. This delayed us by 3 or 4 minutes, but we were back in the race.

For the next few miles we played leap frog with a green K2 before we finally lost them and the closer we got to the finish the longer each mile seemed to take.

At around 6 miles out we were fed for the third time by Brian and Stella and knew it was only 1 hour to go. Jamie and his partner came up behind us just after that and passed us 2 locks further down, but we managed to keep them in our sights right until the finishing line.

The crane of Newbury finally came into view and the cheers and support up to the finish line was great to hear. The beer presented at the finishing line by Mark's wife, Debbie was even better.

We had finally finished D and the series. Our time of 6.05 was 10 minutes ahead of Brian's schedule and 2 minutes ahead of Jason and Nigel in their heavy K2 laden with DW kit. Our overall series time was just under just 16 hours and we were tenth out of 11 finishers in the K2 Vets class.

Unfortunately we were just too late to sign up for the DW as we were still trying to sooth the blisters on our hands!

No prizes I am afraid but a great tee shirt to show off!

Special thanks must go to our support crew of Brian, Stella and Liz for looking after us so well over the series. It was great to have such experience at hand. Congratulations to all who took part, especially all of the prize-winning BCCC junior crews and the best of luck to all of you competing in the DW.

Neil and Mark

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