

## **What a difference a Year makes!**

(Or an irreverent commentary by a support crew)

As the alarm clock rang at 04.45, you have to wonder what you are doing – somehow I got ‘volunteered’ to support Mark Evans and Neil Matthews for their final leg of the Waterside series. After listening to the weather forecast, shorts and shirt sleeves were in order, but once venturing outside 2<sup>nd</sup> thoughts started to arise as the temperatures were lower than expected.

Mark and Neil turned up promptly and we managed to get a good start down to Devizes – noting that the young man who volunteered me was still wrapped up in bed and wouldn’t surface till I had left Pewsey, at least 4 hours later!!!!

We arrived at Devizes around 6.30 to find a fair few had the same idea of a prompt start. Soon after Jamie Cox and his entourage pulled into the next parking space and I bumped into Isobel and Naomi wandering around the Car Park so the Club was going to be well represented once more.

By this time the Sun had started to rise and you overheard the usual dilemma of what to wear – this year much different than previous, shall it be one top or two as opposed to shall it be 5 or 6 plus a Cag! Even though it was still only around 6 degrees Centigrade, the forecast was for the temperature to exceed 20 around mid day.

Mark and Neil were off very shortly after 7, and once I reached All Cannings, realised that Paul and Andrew Jeffs managed an even earlier start as I saw them go under the bridge. By now you realise what a wonderful sight rural England is at dawn in Springtime, I couldn’t imagine more perfect conditions – hopefully the paddlers felt the same.



Paul and Andrew Jeffs approaching All Cannings Bridge – complete with Race Face!!!!

Waited around a while to see if any other B3C paddlers would appear, but it was not to be, so off to Pewsey. I managed to find a parking space and whose happy smiling face should I see, but Alison Jeffs with a crate of supplies for her 'boys' in one hand and a boisterous dog in the other – I had visions of Paul and Andrew being joined by a canine chum when they pulled in. Neil and Mark arrive and 2 hours into the race hop out for some refreshments. Unfortunately the Portaloo is engaged so the needy party will have to wait, for some reason over the next phase they seemed to pick up the pace!!

Paul and Andrew follow shortly after, and Paul lets us know he has banged his head on a low bridge. It didn't seem to affect his consumption of jaffa cakes, and as a precaution we called Wiltshire Councils Highways Department to carry out a structural survey on the bridge first thing Monday morning.

Now is the time to issue a warning - that you soon realise that being the support for the competitors does have its hairy moments. These generally revolve around people in vehicles with odd shaped metal structures attached to their car roofs, actually believing they are in a race, where in their minds the country roads of Wiltshire are in fact the streets of Monaco, and the car in front is driven by Lewis Hamilton. There are certainly some interesting driving and parking habits – anyway back to the actual event itself, we're off to Crofton



Neil and Mark paddle off in the distance

Crofton is a series of locks, for which the competitors can either run the length or just portage each lock individually and paddle between them, here we meet Jamie and Derek's support crew as they are closing in on Mark and Neil. Also the Portages are getting busier as the faster crews are closing the field. My team are doing extremely well, and apart from some heavy weed seem to be keeping well on track. After another water and feed they're off and I'll see them in an hour's time again.

I arrive at Froxfield, and soon after am joined by Alison Jeffs, who now tells me Paul has broken his paddle, something to do with the Crofton Croc, so he's now got a splitting headache and a splitting blade, but he perseveres and carries on. It is here we get to see Ivan Lawler and Ben Brown for the first time, and it really is hard to describe the difference between these two and even their closest rivals, but I am proud of Mark and Neil when they inform me they managed to wash hang them for 3 strokes. I also had stern words about letting the gap between them and Brown/Lawler get too great as they will never be able to make that up by Newbury!!!

We also get to see Sam Rees Clark for the first time and she and her partner seem to be going well, even though they got a telling off from Tracy for chatting – something I find hard to believe of Sam.



Sam Rees Clark announces her arrival at Kintbury (Neil and Mark are the blur in the background)

Kintbury is a great place to see what is happening, you have a good view along a straight section of canal and by sitting on the lock you can see along the centre of the waterway. First we get to see Lawler and Brown again, followed by an influx of B3C paddlers, Sam, Neil, Mark and Jamie all come through in quick succession.

One thing to note about the World Champions, is that seeing them paddle directly head on it is very difficult to make out it is a K2. When they appeared under the bridge it was quite distance before you realised that it wasn't a K1, their paddle

stroke was so in time. Next time I will ask Neil Matthews not to wear the same coloured top as Ben Brown as I very nearly confused the 2 crews here. I'm not sure how Ben Brown would have appreciated being force fed a piece of Fruit and Malt loaf by a stranger.



Someone masquerading as Neil Matthews in a White Craft Top

By now Neil and Mark had lost their sense of humour, as a bit of encouragement I might have mentioned in passing that it's only a Hare and Hounds to go – I can't write in a family publication the response I got, and I always thought that Mark Evans was such a polite chap.

Anyway, onto Newbury and what can anyone say apart from a fantastic effort by everyone who took part and all who entered from B3C finished.

Even though I have written this from a personal perspective of the day I can't overlook the achievements of all B3C paddlers

### **Waterside D Summary of Results:**

K2 Snr Men – 7<sup>th</sup> Jamie Cox and Derek Campbell – 5:27:18

K2 Ladies – 1<sup>st</sup> Isobel Smith and Naomi Smith – 5:12:31

K2 Veterans – 8<sup>th</sup> Mark Evan and Neil Matthews – 6:02:41

11<sup>th</sup> Jason Ashwell and Nigel Cole – 6:15:10

K2 Mixed – Sam Rees-Clark and Conor Peters(FOW) – 5:35:18

K1 Senior Men – Jon Freemantle – 6:02:03

Junior/Veteran – Andrew Jeffs and Paul Jeffs – 6:34:20

For Interest Ivan Lawler and Ben Brown – 4:11:14

**Waterside Series Summary of Results:**

K2 Ladies – 1<sup>st</sup> Isobel Smith and Naomi Smith – 13:19:06

K2 Snr Men – 4<sup>th</sup> Jamie Cox and Derek Campbell – 13:49:05

K1 Senior Men – 4<sup>th</sup> Jon Freemantle – 15:03:12

K2 Veterans – 7<sup>th</sup> Mark Evan and Neil Matthews – 15:15:53

Junior/Veteran – 3<sup>rd</sup> Andrew Jeffs and Paul Jeffs – 16:08:57

**Isobel Smith and Naomi Smith**

I know we are all very familiar with Isobel and Naomi Smith and sometimes it can be easy to overlook what they are achieving, but I was sent a summary of their history in the Waterside Series and felt it was worth adding as a special note and it goes as follows:

This year they beat the Waterside Series Record that has stood since 1995 with a time of 13 hours 19 minutes and 6 seconds.

They are only 17 and have been competing since 13 when they took part in their first Waterside A and B. They have entered 18 separate races, winning 12 of them and coming no lower than 6<sup>th</sup>, which was their very first race.

At 14 they first won the Ladies K2 for the Series and have won it every year since.

So all in all I think you'll all agree an outstanding achievement.

PS a message from Reading CC on their website:

A special mention must go to the "Basingstoke Twins" Isobel and Naomi Smith who not only broke the Race D record on the day but also set new Ladies K2 series and Junior Ladies K2 series records in 13:19:06 a stunning performance over the 4 races.

Hopefully I have suitably embarrassed them – well done girls.

Gavin Branch

13.04.11