

### Jo and Colin's Wye Trip (Two Numpties on a River)

Our trip began on Easter Monday, 2012; a day that started cold, wet, grey and windy. The Bank Holiday traffic was horrendous, and we inched our way up the M5 and on towards Glasbury, Powys, arriving at our campsite at 5pm. And what a site it was! The Holly Bush Inn campsite, a hillbilly

backwoods, reminiscent of the film 'Deliverance'; not recommended!



We survived the night and the challenging shower block, and leaving the car at the campsite, we managed to get all our belongings rammed into the two kayaks – Jo's Pyranha Fusion, and Colin's Robson Waikiki. There was a tiny bit of blue sky, but it was really cold, and the river was running high and fast after the recent heavy rain. It was completely terrifying launching into the unknown; in fact, I (Jo) spent that entire first morning terrified! The river was wider than imagined, dirty

brown, and with lots of baby rapids. Colin was amazed how fast I went through each section of rapids, not knowing it was purely fear that propelled me! We had only known each other a couple of months, and both thought the other was more competent than we actually were!

After a pub lunch stop, and a chance to warm up if not dry out, we had a more pleasant afternoon trip with some sun and even some blue sky. The river calmed down in some wider, flatter areas, and we were able to cruise along and enjoy the wildlife.



At 6pm we reached Bycross Farm campsite, 20 miles downriver from Holly Bush, and a million times better. It was a great delight to find that with the flow of the river we were able to paddle 20 miles in a day, as we hoped, without over-extending ourselves. Next came a sleepless night, worrying about the infamous 'Monnington Falls', the next hurdle.





Wednesday was a rather lovely morning, and we walked along the river bank to assess Monnington Falls. Ha! It was less than we had encountered the previous day! We wondered what all the fuss was about. More challenging was accessing the river via the river banks which were steep slopes of pure mud, hauling the heavily loaded boats.

As we gained confidence we began to relax and enjoy the trip and the surroundings. This day we headed to Hereford where we had a

bit of a panic as we were unable to land where we hoped to for lunch, so had to paddle back, against the flow of the river, under the bridge, to the Rowing Club. This was not the most idyllic of picnic spots, but I was able to make a foray into the town, attracting several slightly horrified glances at my bedraggled appearance.

The afternoon took us out through Hereford, past some beautiful houses, a sewage farm, and the confluence of the River Lugg, which was a non-event. Our campsite for this night was at Holme Lacy, a very posh site with a clever pulley affair to haul the kayaks up the steep bank. Unfortunately the clever pulley was not kind to Colin's back, although I was not aware of this at the time. I just wondered why we watched the huge black clouds drawing closer and closer, and the rain, then hail start lashing at us before Colin decided we'd put up the tent.....!



What a difference a good sleep makes! A lovely bright morning and fresh energy! River levels dropping but still plenty of water and fairly fast running; still able to do 20 miles in about five and a half hours paddling time. Lots of swans and Mandarin ducks with a few cute ducklings. Colin even had two sightings of a kingfisher!!

Lunch was at a very nice pub in Hoarwithy, and even though we looked like muddy river rats the staff treated us kindly and the food was good. That afternoon the weather was less kind: we had really heavy rain which then turned to hail. Colin had no head protection so took a battering and the rain seeped right inside; he was in his own private hell. I



had a baseball cap and was used to being constantly damp, so I was able to enjoy the rain on the water, trying not to show too much delight!

Later another nightmare as we searched for an elusive campsite near Ross-on-Wye, which was listed in the guide book. It doesn't exist. The next known site was 2 hours paddle away at Welsh Bicknor, but we were too cold and exhausted to contemplate that. Morale hit rock bottom. Meeting some local kayakers saved us when they told us of a nearby pub with camping facilities. The White Lion at



Wilton turned out to be an excellent site for us. They were already fully booked, but opened up a bit of newly turfed lawn for our private use. The pub food was good and reasonably priced, and the cider went down a treat!

Friday 13<sup>th</sup> was our final paddling day, and it was good! Early mist was soon burnt off by

some rare sunshine. We paddled past the impressive Goodrich Castle, and into a more frequented section of the river, with a lot of day-trippers in open canoes. Lunch stop was at Lower Lydbrook, a pretty setting beside the river.



Our final section took us through Symonds Yat, a famous beauty spot, which we hated! After the peace of the river and all the wildlife it was quite a shock to be in a popular tourist attraction with disco music blaring from a campsite, river cruise boats storming past, and heaving riverside pubs with no canoe berthing permitted!!

The other side of the town was Symonds Yat rapids, and these were proper rapids; short, but lively! The guide book told us to stop and assess, and there were plenty of toggged-up kayakers at the side, apparently doing this, but the water was gushing through the boulders and we simply shot through like bagatelle balls!! What a buzz!! By miracle we made it through unscathed and very exhilarated!

The final stretch was the not-very-scenic approach to Monmouth. We arrived at 5pm and executed our final perilous evacuation from the kayaks. There we telephoned 'Kenny, the taxi driver', who transported us and our kayaks back to Glasbury to collect our car. What joy it was to hand over





responsibility and relax in the taxi! We retrieved our car and drove to Hay-on-Wye for a last night, and another sampling of local cider.

Four days, eighty miles, five campsites, five Kingfisher sightings, more swans than I've ever seen, and an attack by a defensive paternal Canada Goose. Some adventure!

