

A Gentle Saturday Paddle.....?

Written by Michael Pain

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It was a damp misty morning as a mix of Open Canadians and kayaks met up at Bradford on Avon with a view to a gentle paddle down to Dundas and back up the canal. We followed the guide and parked at the far end of the car park. There was a nice simple bank to get in under the railway bridge and a gentle flow to carry us along.

Ah this was the life. The sun came out. The Ash and Oak were resplendent in Autumn colours and the kingfishers spectacular in their iridescent blues and orange. There were plenty of swans too as Mark and Lauren had to duck as one took off over them.

It was not long before we got to Avoncliffe Weir. The guide had said a six foot weir which can be shot river right or a portage down the steps in the middle. If necessary one can clamber down the old mill river right. With plenty of water going over the weir we could not get close enough to view river right. The steps were washed out and the building river right was nicely protected with barbed wire. The guide says if all else fails there is a long portage river left up to the canal and back on under the bridge. The guide was not wrong and some thirty minutes later we were back on the river.

A quick paddle up to the weir confirmed that our decision was a good one. From below the weir looks a lot more than six feet. There was plenty of water coming over and at the bottom of the weir river right there was a nice tree trunk to land on.

The paddle continued in warm Autumnal sunshine. We chatted, enjoyed the wildlife this was in deed a great social paddle. Not sure how gentle the portage was but certainly the paddling was very enjoyable.

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The sound of birds and people chatting was replaced by the rush of water as we reached the weir at Limpley Stoke. With the prospect of another even longer portage we decided to get out and have lunch in the sunshine. Very pleasant it was too and the myriad of tiny spiders that descended just proved how relaxed the paddle was. By the end of lunch we had spiders webs to clear from our boats.

We decided to get on the canal and paddle back to Bradford. A scramble up the bank and we were soon on our way. The pace of life on the canal is very slow. So slow in fact that despite being on a gentle paddle we over took several canal boats. Although the view was limited there was a degree of excitement at crossing the aqueduct knowing the river was below.

Wait a moment what is that policeman doing standing on the corner of the bridge. OK so he was only a PCSO but none the less for that he had his hand out and we were not permitted to go any further. The canal, towpath and the river were out of bounds. The railway line and main road were closed too. Apparently an over head power cable had collapsed causing a minor fire.

At least we were stopped by an open pub serving chips. Phil decided to go for the healthy option and eat cake. After this respite the canal remained closed and it would not be long before the light faded. We found a foot path back through the woods and so the drivers set off. We must have looked quite a sight, helmets, spray decks and rubber foot wear. After a thirty minute walk we were back at the car park and drove back along narrow country lanes to Avoncliffe to pick up boats and the folk left behind.

A very varied paddle including scrambles up banks, portage and a walk back to the start. The weather was fantastic the scenery beautiful and the company great fun.

Thanks to Carla for organising an excellent day out.