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11/12/06 An Epic on the Irwell!

Having offered to run a trip down the Irwell for FOA, I was a tiny bit upset that no-one had contacted me to say that they were interested in coming along (Do I smell that much?). But having said I was going, Ruth, Ian and myself duly turned up at the Burrs to run the Irwell, an excellent little river. Just as well we did turn up because there were some people there, John and Alex, who were going to paddle the river with us. The wonders of e-mail, I have been getting so much spam these days that the filter had probably rejected their e-mail saying that they were interested.

Anyway, with the river at a very good level (highish) we were all keen to get on, so up to Nutall Park we headed. Kit unloaded, it was time for a quick warm up and introduction to River Signals.

Fully warmed, conversant in the signals for the day it was onto the river for a final in boat warm up, several ferry glides, before we braved the confines of the Irwell gorge. It was then that the "EPIC" began!

Whilst warming up another group came down, we decided to let them run the rapid first as we were still organising ourselves. "Give them a few minutes to get through and we will follow down in line astern with a few boat lengths between us" I said. This plan rapidly fell apart as first one, then a second and then a third of the other group got pinned and swam. The few minutes expanded into such a long time that not only did we have time for forty winks (I'm getting old) but also for a quick snooze and a quiet nap too!

Eventually the rapid cleared and we headed off, Alex and John powering through the standing waves and catching some nice eddies along the way! A quick pit stop half way down to regroup and it was back off into the flow using variations of the break in to take us from the eddy across to the main flow which was on the other side of the river.



Down to the bottom of the rapid and we have time to practice more ferries and surfs whilst the other group works the way through the next rapid. With yet more swims, it really wasn't there day, I had time to recount the story of when LCC paddlers risked their lives to save an Owl from that very spot! Forget what you hear about making a raft on which to place a casualty whilst you practice CPR, you make a raft so that you can stand up in the middle of the stream to save an Owl! I wonder how it's doing??????

With the other group clear of the rapid we paddle through their group as we didn't want to have to keep sitting around in the cold and had a date with the pub.

From there on down the group paddled the river like experts, break-ins and outs were practiced along with some mega surfs (and near swims when the upstream edge was allowed to drop - whoops!) and we had a chance to use the river signals as we practiced various river running techniques like follow my leader, one at a time and eddy hopping. Ian, a supposedly good paddler who likes playing the violin whilst surfing, also had time to practice his self rescues due to his continued attraction to rocks and the resultant upstream pin. Remember, HUG THE ROCK!!!

Then we hit the first weir! With a confused route and a tree on one of the main lines, it was a case of one at a time down a specific route. Again using the hand signals, the group ran the drop with ease and it was plain sailing all the way to the next weir, which was about three sixteenths away by this point, or was it two twelfths?

The BIG one.

Having only ran this with very little water, seeing it with quite a bit of water gave an uneasy clenching in the buttock area and as a group we wisely decided to portage.



Back on the water it was time for some smooth paddling, with more sharp breakouts and a quick shower as we passed under the canal to the get out.

All in all, a very nice day on the river that was followed by a very nice trip to the Brown Cow. I can heartily recommend the gammon and

pinapple baguette with a cup of tea.

Cheers Guys
Mike Alter