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24/06/07 Open Boaters on the Conway

The open boaters met up at the Beacons in Conway on the Fathers Day. Little did we know the Ryder Cup Seniors were also playing at the nearby golf course. Anyhow coming through Conway, we got lost, never being to the Beacons before. So you do what any sensible lost person does and stops and asks a local for directions. Not forgetting we have a dirty green 16ft boat tied to the top of the car and the elderly gentlemen we asked says so you want the golf course do you. As it was raining heavy the day before, Charlotte says no we are going on the river. Well with that he told us how to get to the golf course anyhow. We finally made it to the Beacons and for once, we arrived before anyone else, I thought we had the wrong day. Soon Alison, Ian and the whole convoy turned up. In all there were 12 boats and 20 paddling on the day. Good turn out for the open boaters. We were even graced the presence of Ste Paterson for the day. Nice to see him out and about!



So we unload the boats and all the gear and take them down to the waters edge, whereby the tide is coming in at some knots. I am thinking, this should be an easy day, take the current up, and bring it down again in the afternoon, what a lovely peaceful day this is. How wrong I was going to be! Alison comes around to make sure everything is tied down and there are throw lines for every boat. We even

had a bit of a pep talk from Ian and he organised the order in which we set off. This is when I begin to think, this is a bit more involved than the River Dee.

So we all set off on the river towards the marina and the castle in the background. It's a bit of a breathtaking sight from the water level. Anyhow everyone is in good spirits and starting to relax because we are on the water and moving. Going out past the Marina is a bit daunting with the current as the boats moored on a buoy seem to be moving towards you when in fact you're the one heading to them. So a couple of bumps with boats and we make it through the marina and heading towards the Conway bridges.

As we come under the bridges this is where it went pear shaped, or should I be saying Poseidon shaped. One of the Grumman's capsized and the two are in the water. The main group is ahead and almost out of the currents worst. Alison shouts to me to group everyone together in the calm water whilst the first two are recovered. Up ahead another one goes in. How he managed that I still don't know. By this time Charlotte had turned to see what was happening and then panicked and paddled the wrong way. I am shouting for everyone to group up and wasn't aware of what Charlotte was doing. This then put us broadside against the incoming tide. That wouldn't have been so bad but we turned right in front of the last moored boat in the river. The current pushed us right over the buoy and I am paddling to try and get us around the buoy but over we went.



Charlotte goes in the water and is picked up by Nick, one of the scouts. I went in, over the buoy around the mooring ropes and then promptly under the boat. I came up a few seconds later at the stern of the boat to hear Ste shouting me. The underside of that boat needed a good inspection anyhow.

Ste then dragged me to the shore and as I came out of the water was told that I was bleeding. It's a scratch I say, I am ok, as I am walking out of the water with the sunglasses halfway down my nose and no hat, I had lost my hat, what a downer that was. As it turns out the left arm is all scrapped, the left leg has rope burns and the lower back sustained some damage too. All in all, it has to be the open boat wipe out of the year.

Anyhow the rest of the day was great; I dried off in the sun. The rope burn got a lovely shade of sunburn over it and we all paddled happily up river where we had to dodge all the speed boaters and water skiers. We had lunch on a grassy shore as the tide was turning and had the normal debrief of the morning. I do know, we need some proper watertight lunch boxes. Our sandwiches stayed dried but the sausage rolls didn't. We all relaxed for about an hour and then set off on the return journey. Hope its as exciting as the outward bound.

Anyhow we made it the bridges, we pulled in to the shore where Ian and Alison sorted the order of who was going in what order. We passed the bridges and the marina without episode and made it back to the Beacons in one piece. We even managed a big smile and wave to the Harbour Master.

Would I do it again, of course, without hesitation. Have I learned more about canoeing and the importance of proper instruction and the safety equipment, without doubt. Alison, Ian and Ste all deserve a big thank you for the day and it goes without saying the appreciation everyone has for them on the day. ***Mark Wilson***