

PAC Thames Skiff Rowing 19th– 26th June 2024

On 19 June, Day 0, 3 PACquanuts met at the delightful Trout Inn, Lechlade to try to reach the source of the Thames. After several hours battling through thick reeds (with lots of reference to Lou, Beryl, and both Mikes) we came to a halt upstream of the limit of navigation, but still some way short of Cricklade. After some on board refreshment we reversed course and spent a very pleasant evening in Lechlade enjoying an outstanding series of fish dishes at the New Wave Brasserie, and some Butcombe ale, backgammon and pool at the Crown Inn.



The excellent Crown Inn, Lechlade



A study in concentration

The following morning, Day 1, Graham (the one whose wife is called Sarah) departed southwards and Geraint and Charlie rowed onwards to their rendezvous with Pat and the other Graham (whose wife is also called Sarah) at Ye Olde Swan at Radcot Bridge. A very wholesome lunch was followed by a relatively relaxed row to the superb Trout Inn at Tadpole Bridge. It just so happened that they were staging a comedy night, and what better butt of ridicule than 4 middle aged ex-rugby playing Penguins. There was banter a plenty.



3 Men in a Lock



Comedy night – a 2 way exchange

Day 2 started well with an outstanding breakfast of Eggs Benedict, an indifferent lunch at Newbridge and a stop for a cleansing ale at the Ferryman Inn at Bablock Hythe where the landlord was generous enough to make a £10 donation to PAC. Expectations were now running high and an excellent dinner beckoned at the Talbot, Eynsham which lies up the Wharf Stream, a small tributary of the Thames. Previous enquiries had led us to believe that this was navigable, but it put the attempt to reach Cricklade into perspective. Mike, Beryl and Lou there were in abundance, in addition to overgrown and fallen trees and indeed a sunken motorboat, all of which impeded progress. Our average of 4 mph now dropped to 0.5 mph in this quagmire. It felt like being with Humphrey Bogart in the African Queen. 32 miles done 72 to go.



Carry On up the Mangrove



Open water, beautiful weather

Day 3 opened with a substantial breakfast, before we descended the River Styx which was marginally less bad than its ascent. We eventually regained the Thames and rowed steadily to Oxford where Charlie jumped skiff to meet the barge support party in Oxford. Geraint, Pat and Graham continued in a languid fashion, meeting up with some old chums at the Head of the River and watching the Wales XV come second to the Springboks. We eventually rendezvoused at Sandford Lock and enjoyed a delicious banquet aboard the Barge, expertly prepared by Charlotte and Gaynor.

Day 4 saw both teams hit their stride. Huw and his motley crew motored gently whilst the skiff creaked along (it's a bit like rowing a wheelbarrow). Huge amounts of wildlife kept appearing including herons, cormorants, kingfishers and flocks of swans, geese and ducks. We moored at the delightful Shillingford Bridge and enjoyed another superb dinner cooked by Charlotte and Sarah. This was followed by 'Gaynor unplugged' – acoustic guitar and a series of singalong numbers with enthusiastic vocal contributions from the rest of the party. 53 miles done.



Gaynor Unplugged



Heron plus 2 Cormorants (look hard)

Day 5 involved a stop in Wallingford for the Barge to take on water. Graham decided that the team was lacking calories and generously purchased Scotch eggs (from Whitby originally, not Scotland apparently) for all 4 rowers. One of the party detests Scotch eggs but consumed it (the first one for some 40 years) to keep the peace. We then continued rowing to the highly acclaimed Beetle and Wedge pub in Moulsoford for lunch. Unfortunately, as we had not booked, they did not have sufficient food for us. Luckily the very helpful server confirmed she could get us a snack – the last remaining 4 Scotch eggs. These were eaten with some excellent Golden Bitter. One of the party detests Scotch eggs but consumed it (the second one in some 40 years) to keep the peace, clearly not realising that Appeasement is not an effective strategy. We continued on to spend the night at Pangbourne, which has a well appointed and very welcoming Working Men’s Club and perhaps the best functioning public conveniences on the whole of the Thames. 68 miles completed.



A Whitby Egg



Charlotte x 2 chilling with the Geese

Fixed seat rowing, which is what occurs in a skiff, is an acquired taste. It demands a strong back, persistence, a degree of humour, the requirement to listen to crewmates droning on

endlessly about matters irrelevant, and cast iron buttocks. Most of the conversation for 8 days consisted of a series of 20th Century anecdotes, ribald observations, irreverent debate which usually degenerated into argument, and a fair degree of personally directed spicy language. It was great fun.

Day 6 saw us travel from Pangbourne to an undisclosed location south of Henley. Another fantastic repast from Charlotte was followed by another fantastic musical tour de force from Gaynor. Charlie Gush, who had expertly organised the drinks cabinet, ensured all were suitably imbibing throughout the evening. The service was flawless.



Woody the Dog facing off with an angry Swan

Skiff plus Barge prelock

Day 7 was the eighth, and last, day of rowing. We reached Marlow in the early afternoon by which time we had rowed for 92.5 miles, passing through 29 locks, and raising some £370 for Penguins Against Cancer. Tom the Boatman collected the skiff, which despite having to bear an unreasonable load of truculent middle-aged Penguins for 8 days, was intact. Geraint, Graham and Sarah then departed southwards, whilst the remainder stayed aboard the barge to return it to Oxford. A highly enjoyable adventure with fantastic food, weather, music, wildlife and company. Huge Thanks to Tom, College Cruisers and the Support Crew.

Next year will see a row from Pangbourne to London with support boat in the week commencing 14 Jun 25. Details to follow on the PAC website.



Rowing Crew: Geraint, Pat, Graham, Charlie B

Support Crew: Huw, Gaynor, Charlotte, Charlie G, Sarah, Woody

Rowing Crew Working Hard