

## **The Dart 2007**

I was ever so slightly worried about going to the dart. The only stories I'd heard from Mr Saagi and Mr Slim were about people dying or getting munched in massive holes and never ending drops. I was somewhat relieved when we arrived at the slab and weren't faced by a torrent of mud and trees.

We found the rest of the group at the lodge and I really hope that the Slims don't ever have a house that only relies on open fires for heat as they'll all freeze!

We briefly visited our cabin and went in search of some scrumpy and at 80p a bottle I wondered if Steve actually knew what he was doing!

### **Thursday**

I soon learned that you don't stuff yourself too full of bacon and eggs before squashing into several layers of neoprene.

We split in to 3 groups, well two, the smiley group and those who squeeze in to stupidly small boats in order to do stupid things!

After a bit of ferry gliding practise we were ready to rock the river! Who would've thought that low water and rocks would produce what it did. But with a great sound track from Jo we produced a series of high supports from a smiling Dave, my boat getting wedged vertically on it's tail, Ben loosing a shoe and baby Bens barge blocking the river with it's turning circle! I was more than happy bumping along until a little weir where I was informed that when we reached the bottom we would have to steer. We had one capsize, Ben decided to copy Ian's demonstration of how not to hug a rock. Jo and Ian managed to get us to wiggle our way down to Buckfastleigh and a very happy group came off of the river that night. A bottle of whisky later and Vince found himself with a bed buddy.

### **Friday**

We were left slightly more to our own devices today, taking it turns to be 'super probe'. You soon learn to not follow someone who's wiggling and not going anywhere! We caught up with the other groups and I soon realized just how many kayaks will fit in to and play around in a 2m wide channel, it must be that steering thing. I've also learned that if I don't want my bung removing I'd better not get any better! Later on that afternoon we heard a rumour that Karl was going to have a go in the wave hopper so we went down to laugh! After a few sketchy wobbles he was off. It was probably the first and last time I'll ever see someone really try and capsize, as in fighting the boat to not stay upright. Baby Ben needed to do his homework and big Ben was very stupid and volunteered to capsize for him, well done Ben.

### **Saturday**

Different day different boat. A very trusting Vince lent me his inazone and boy, have I gotta get me one! My confidence found me and I was actually looking to steer myself in to standing waves in the middle of rapids (they were to me anyway) practising high supports (fat lot of good that did me-read on) and actively seeking out rocks to hug. How I didn't capsize I'll never know as I really was inviting it! Dave smiled loads today! We had a play back at the lodge in the little rapids. It was really good being able to get involved with better people as it pushes you. You might not look any better but you certainly feel it and with a little imagination you know you were tail squirting and stalling with the best of them!

I had a go in a canoe and rather enjoyed it. Could I be converted? I also tried to get in Andy's vision. Tried. I wiggled for all I was worth and no Tom, taking the foam padding out of the bottom was not going to help. It wasn't my legs that wouldn't fit into it!

Dave had a go in a canoe and was last seen drifting towards school rapids whilst Gary was last seen trying to keep up with baby Ben when he had a go in the wave hopper.

### **Sunday**

Rain. News was in that the loop was running. That'll be good for the boys to go play in I thought. Hang on, everyone wants to go. That means that I'll have to go to. Queue the nerves. I wasn't worthy of being in the smiley group for quite a while. I couldn't understand it, why were Andy and Karl bouncing around? I was bricking it! Dave and I came up with the perfect plan, raft it! Smiles appear only to disappear when told it wasn't going to happen. After a bit of eddy hopping and ferry gliding on slightly more turbulent waters we were off and my smile was back! How cool are wave trains! I did note that the further down the river the bigger they were getting but I whooped and hollered my way down. We came to a set of rapids that I thought looked ok compared to the ones we had done. Why were we waiting so long? Why were people strategically positioned? Why did Mick have his camcorder out? And why were people waving madly and pointing 'river left' when Gary and Jo had calmly told us to try and stay left? Well, as I came to the top of the drop everything slowed down. I saw this big white thing and remember thinking 'is that one of those hole things? Oh crap, I think it is' and with the words 'paddle' ringing from the eddies and 'smile' in my head I paddled like a maniac totally unaware of what I'd gone through until a guy who got munched was pointed out to me and I stopped smiling and started to worry about the route ahead! At least I didn't do a Dave and go right into it. He came out the other side fine and smiling! It must be those small boats that suffer!

We walked round triple drop and Dave said he'd do it next year. So, a nice quiet bit of water no rocks no waves so how did I manage to capsize? No idea, probably stopped smiling! Jo must've too! I learnt one river rule, give way to those upstream. I put this to good use by ram raiding two other boats one of which was Adrian but I got away with it as he should know better! I think the real reason he backed off was that I ended up stopping on the edge of a hole and if he hadn't moved he would have had to rescue me!

We made it down to the bottom very happy bunnies and I can now say I've done the loop- woohoo!

Thanks to everyone for making it an awesome trip especially the smiley group, we were the best looking (and sounding) ones out there!

What I learnt: Always check the 3 B's.

Bed

Boat

Bung!