



Jollity erupts.

Day 5 - Trying for fish

Luke and I pack up and, once in the canoe, set our sights on Ironbridge, home of the Ironborn, I joke. Passing through the creatively named town of Bridgnorth, we make it here by lunchtime and stop in a café for a full English breakfast. Ironbridge is another beautiful medieval town. The Iron Bridge as you enter the town is very ominous, being the first major bridge made out of cast iron in the world in 1781, which was very cutting edge at that time.

The next town is Jackfield, home to the Jackfield rapids. This is an incredible adrenalin filled part of the river where you have to come in from the right and power through the middle of the rapids.

Once through the rapids we notice many fisherman starting to line the riverbanks so decide to try our luck with the fish and throw a line out the back of the canoe with a spinner as bait. It's a little difficult as the water goes from a good few metres deep to rocky shallows and rapids very often meaning it doesn't make it easy to leave the line out. Our first cast gets caught on a rock and snaps the line. We string it up again and try a different approach by cutting the line and wrapping it around a stick, wedging the stick underneath the back of the canoe so we can just paddle and see what happens. We get a nibble not long after which gets us excited so we cruise over a few spots where we spot fish jumping out of the water, nothing yet though.

The afternoon is here and we're still paddling away, shirts off, Eddie Vedder blaring, waving at all the fishermen, some laughing at us and some less amused. We fancy a late afternoon beer so pull in to Bewdley, a gorgeous little town with a couple of pubs along the river's edge. We tie up the canoe and try to make ourselves a little decent by putting our shirts on, the first time in my life I've tried to be decent.

We try out the local ale and get chatting with a lovely couple sitting next to us who buy us another beer and tell us about some camping spots. We laugh and enjoy the afternoon sun with a couple of ales together. They call it a night and walk home; we do the same and wander down the stone steps back into our canoe. Shirts off, of course, and feeling a bit buzzed, we paddle onwards.

Half an hour later we spot eight black and white horses and a couple of foals along the riverbank. Paddling past them, they decide to play a game with us and run up and down with us. It's a fantastic sight, eight horses galloping along the river's edge with us, simply beautiful.

We scout out five places before eventually settling on a spot right next to the river for the evening.



Encountering Worcester's swans.

Day 6 Not the first to arrive

Off we go again, out onto the river; the day is sunny and beautiful. As we approach Worcester we make it into a lock and through it quickly, chatting with the lock keeper who's a friendly soul and gives us some good tips for the river. Once through, we make a beeline for Worcester. As you enter the town your eyes are drawn to the impressive 12th century cathedral. We slide our canoe under some overgrown vines, tie it to the railings that lead up to dry land and haul a few bits of kit off as we climb up the ladder and wander into Browns for lunch. We charge our kit up again and have lunch whilst waiting for a friend to meet us. Actually, it's my Dad's old school mate, Chrys, and his wife, Fiona; we've not met before but since we are in the area they pop in and we take a coffee together while Chrys regales us with a couple of stories from his and my Dad's youth, mainly of them partying with a few old rock bands including Thin Lizzy and Black Sabbath.

After coffee we say goodbye and Luke and I hit the water once more, paddling through a sea of swans on the river. We pass through another lock as we exit the town. We paddle onwards and try our hand at fishing once more and once more to no avail.

Luke has his head down and is pushing; we both get into our groove and make great ground this afternoon, both pushing and absorbing our beautiful calm surroundings. Eventually we begin looking for somewhere to camp. Just as we enter a little town called Tewkesbury we paddle under its bridge and pull up to the riverbank as there is a nice clearing next to the bridge. We haul the canoe up the bank and place it under the bridge. We say 'Hey' to the a couple sitting on one of the two park benches and begin setting up for dinner. Luke walks into town to grab a few bits and I prepare dinner. I notice a lot of people crossing the bridge and heading for the local pubs across the other side of the river. When Luke returns he tells me there are loads of people already on the smash and about 100 caravans not far from us and another 500 caravans on the other side of the river. It's a Saturday night and we know we'll not get any sleep, so we crack our colds beers and eat dinner. We decide to get back into the canoe and head on downstream in search of something a little more calm and quiet.

A little buzzed, we paddle on for another hour; eventually we spot a little fisherman's jetty tucked away from the main river flow. We pull in and climb the steps to see what the lay of the land is. Once up the top we see fields for miles and miles and no one around; it's simply gorgeous and, just as the sun is setting, we tie the canoe to the jetty and leave it floating in the water, grab our kit and set up camp.

Day 7 Stinging rebuke and an exciting bore

We're up at 6am and get the coffee on. I take one sip and know I need the toilet straight away. Rustling through my bag I find the toilet paper and make a mad dash for the first long grass, down my pants and squat only to realize I've run into the middle of a stinging nettle field and I'm stung to bits. It's swollen and stinging like mad. I decide the only way to get rid of the pain is to jump into the river and have a morning wash which is what we both do. The river is refreshing and wakes us up and gives us energy for the day ahead.

We get a bunch of miles under our belt and pass through another lock; the lock controller is very helpful and gives us some great advice about Gloucester, which is our next city. He hands us a flyer with a few numbers on it and we paddle onwards, discussing what we'll do about Gloucester. If we go into the town we will be coming off of the River Severn proper and onto the man made diversion; this also means we'll have to go through a couple of locks. One in particular is a huge cargo ship lock. I pick up the phone and call the controller in Gloucester and ask of we can go around to the right hand side which is on the river proper and sees us paddle around the city; he tells me 'Yep, that's fine.'

So it's decided; we pull our canoe off the bank and take the river right. Only a few minutes on and we hear fast running water; slowing down, we creep up to it, pulling our canoe in to the bank once more. We both get out and walk around to see what it is; it's a weir again and this time there is nowhere for us to walk alongside the riverbank so, after a bit of deliberation, we make the choice to go for it.

We're both a bit nervous and excited, strap our bags down, line our canoe up and gun it for the first part, though as soon as the canoe is halfway down it stops dead. We were thinking of flying down it and now we are shunting the canoe onwards and heaving it off the ground with our hands to get it moving. Eventually we get it sliding down again and then we get stuck at the final drop, a metre or so down back into the river. As we get stuck the water rushes alongside the canoe, turning it slightly to the right, which causes the canoe to turn, allowing more water to push against the side; we heave and, just as the whole canoe begins to topple over, owing to the onrushing water, we both