

SEVEN PERILOUS PORTAGES (Avon Pub Slalom)

It was 3.15pm on a blistering summer's afternoon, when two male chauvinists left their good wives and children to join the other hardy souls in the most potentially perilous event on the canoeing calendar. Brian Cox, veteran of at least six trips through the infamous boat shed rapids was the leader of the small group, accompanied by Paul McStay, fresh back from his famous Ashley trip, which was so tight he had to use a specially made Prijon with two feet cut off either end. Other members of the party were; Clarence Hines, who was to be indispensable for his ability to spot Piranha fish and Barracouta at 100 yards, Neil Hines, whose blistering pace kept the party from foundering many a time, Bruce Anink, iron man of many an expedition into Christchurch sauna parlours, Wayne Turner the notorious Coca-Cola kid (alias Chocolate Fishy), plus an unnamed support group of three.

After a warm up in the Carlton rapids, canoes were slipped into the seething torrent below the Deans Avenue Bridge where Clarence saw a few 6inch brown trout. The water soon flattened out as the party followed Neil Hines through the largest stretch without a rapid. The first challenging section arrived in the form of the Grenadier slot. As Clarence, Brian and Paul followed Neil in through the dark passage they became aware that they had taken the wrong course and were only just able to sneak out of a large stopper into the back eddy where Neil was waiting. A few liquid refreshments were had while the Coca-Cola kid guarded the canoes from the onslaught of a vicious tribe of junkies. Back into the water for the next section before the Clarendon falls, where it was noticed that Bruce and the support party were not in sight. Fears were held for their safety, but all met up again above the falls and these were negotiated as a group.

The local inhabitants of Clarendon falls proved to be extremely friendly and the big chief clothed in a resplendent yellow and red gown, performed a touching ceremony involving two cauldrons of brown liquid, in which all were emersed, before Bruce was finally made a blood brother. Seal launching back into the river, Clarence reported two three foot trout beneath the Worcester St bridge. The stretch to Noah's Cascade was short (extremely) and uneventful and the whole

party was able to leave more wet seats for incoming bikie gangs. By this stage the Coca-Cola kid's kayak was making peculiar rattling noises and everyone hoped that he would be able to make it to the end of the trip without sinking. Clarence reported twenty, ten foot long trout beneath the Gloucester St bridge but even at this stage these were still not visible to the rest of the party. The next rapid to be negotiated was the Oxford Corner in which a large backlash off a low bar swept the party upwards into a little known tributary where the native tribes were surprised to see them. More refreshments were turned on and after paddling furiously to avoid the 60foot orange crocodile which Clarence had spotted in the clear water, Forresters Hole approached extremely fast. The whole party was sucked in at the top and spat out after swallowing a good deal of Amber Fluid which was to affect them for some time to come. After avoiding the 90foot red shark which only Clarence saw at first, the group neared the last and most dangerous rapid, the Star and Garter vortex. The area was even more perilous than they had first thought, but they were reassured by an American friend of Pauls who said that the rapids were no worse than the Grand Canyon which he and Graham Dingle had done recently on Rubber Duckies.

After spending more time in the Star and Garter than they had anticipated, the party loaded all the canoes, except for one, onto the trailer. The boat belonging to the Coca-Cola kid was so heavy with bottles that it took four people to lift it while all the time being menaced by a 200ft high pink elephant which was seen by everybody except Clarence, who was by this time, fast asleep.

The trip had taken five gruelling hours, but it was worth every minute of it, even though two of the party got beaten over the head with rolling-pins when they returned home. We hope to do it next year with more canoeists and without the need for a support party.

B.T.C.