



1948-2012 - Celebrating 64 Years of Personal Endeavour

April 2012

DW2012 Race Report – A Year of Quiet Challenges

An easy DW doesn't exist. The beguiling course doesn't need thundering rain, gales, cold or intense heat to test. Simply holding back the rain is enough to add thousands of paddle strokes to the event letting slow flow steadily increase the pain.

Conditions were reasonable over the weekend which saw 331 boats and 607 paddlers set out from Devizes. Temperatures were slightly colder than ideal with a gentle wind and no rain forecast. The main challenge was the slow river flow on the Thames, reducing assistance from moving water. Overall one third of Senior Doubles crews retired from the race, with the graveyard stretch from Reading to Teddington stumping most crews. It's the mix of a sense of achievement from being on the Thames, with the daunting realisation that it's not even half way that plays havoc with the mind. One stroke at a time. From D, to W.

Richard Hendron and James King won the Senior Doubles in a time of 17 hours and 58 minutes, completing a hat trick of wins for the pair. That's an incredible achievement only achieved three times before in the 64-year history of the race. Hendron, notching up his fifth race win overall, said the victory was "painful due to the lack of flow on the river", referring to the dry weather of recent months. King, celebrating a 4th senior doubles win, said the race was "surprisingly nice".

Shuna Braithwaite and Kat Burbeck were the first female crew with a time of 20:08:36, finishing 6th overall for the second year in a row.

Travelling from Belgium, Jan Laenen of Kastelse Kayak Klub won the Senior Singles over four days in 17:14:43, securing maximum points for the International Canoe Marathon Classic Marathon series.

Also on the stages race, Michael Southey teamed up with Connor Peters of Fowey River Canoe Club to win Junior Doubles in 17:22:07. For Southey it was great to win after coming second for the last three years. Next year he'll be too old for the Juniors, so he's considering DW2013 in K1.

Schools play a massive part in the Junior Doubles. It was great to see a new school enter the race. Eastbrook School entered the record books as the first comprehensive school in the history of the race to enter a boat. Tomas Valatka and Gintaras Kaminskas finished in 22:13:08. As all schools know, DW is an organisational and logistical challenge in addition to the demands on paddlers taking part. Eastbrook's entry came about through the school working closely with Barking and Dagenham Canoe Club who provided kit, coaching and

support before and during the race. Bryanston School helped with some of the risk analysis that schools have to do and Kimbolton helped provision a replacement spare rudder at the end of Day 2. Sounds like everyone wins.

Every DW is packed with stories, too many stories to list in detail. But it's worth pulling out a few.

For anyone to take on DW is a challenge. It's particularly impressive when high-profile people set themselves the challenge of DW. Perhaps it's the low-key nature of the event that allows people to enter and take on the challenge in relative anonymity, if that's possible. Step forward Sir Steve Redgrave, one of the world's leading Olympians with five gold medals. Sir Steve was in a K2 having offered to pair up with his long-time friend Roger Hatfield who retired in 2011. Boat #364 set off from Devizes at 9:44 on Easter Saturday like any other boat, on schedule exactly as planned. After 16½ hours and 74 miles, the crew pulled out "knackered and gutted", according to Redgrave's blog (www.steveredgrave.com), ending with the enticing prophecy that "we will be back". Everyone would understand if Sir Steve sticks to his promise to never go near a boat again, but we hope he does.

Sarah Winckless and Ben Hunt-Davis created a crew with full Olympic honours. Hunt-Davis stepped up as an injury replacement in early February and gave it their best shot, retiring after 15:45:55. Hunt-Davis, blogged that despite having just a few weeks of training, they thought that they'd done enough. "I completely underestimated the event," he writes in an open and honest account of their DW campaign, adding "We forgot the reason we've both been successful in other areas – there is no short cut to hard work." He too, said they'd be back. (www.hunt-davis.co.uk) It could be a coincidence of London 2012, but a fourth Olympian was in the field. Kate Mackenzie paired up with Olly Shaw, ultimately suffering the same fate retiring after 18 hours and 22 minutes close to Marlow.

It's a common story. The Senior Doubles race had 44 of the 155 crews retiring with several top performing crews misjudging the conditions. One crew had to visit hospital after trying to paddle under a low bridge. Others suffered stomach cramps, fatigue or missed time targets.

As the miles drop away sheer dogged determination can emerge. Two crews could claim the Award for longest portage. Mark Powell and Matthew Toyne walked the six miles from Putney to Westminster on Sunday evening, just before midnight with a race time 31hr 47min. Jean Ashley and Tamsin Phipps also strolled the last eight miles from Hammersmith, covering around ten as they followed the Thames Path en route to Westminster, finishing the course on Sunday morning.

Jonathan White and Lee Waters were one of 31 forces crews in the race continuing a long tradition of military entries. Captain White entered the race as a triple amputee after suffering injuries from an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan, with partner Lee Waters who was also shot three times while

serving. Taking on the course the pair balanced the competing demands of challenge and risk in a display of admirable courage which secured the paid the Lady Gluckstein Trophy.

No mention of DW should happen without a nod in the direction of volunteers. From Devizes to Westminster, there are around 330 of them, out in all weather: checking kit in Devizes; manning checkpoints along the course through the night; marshalling traffic and spectators as they move down the course; managing and staffing the Junior Double campsite villages over four days; crewing the safety ribs on the tideway; helping weary crews and their boats off the water is the Steps Crew; and the rough and welcoming comforts of the Westminster Village. Lots of regular faces helping year after year, with plenty of spaces for new faces that want to help out.

Next dates for your DW calendar are the awards ceremony at Bouverie Hall, Pewsey, SN9 5ES, at 2pm on Saturday 26 May.

Followed by DW 2013 – our 65th – running from Friday 29 March to 1 April 2013.