

Endless Summers

Big wave kayak school

Day 1

I was up like a kid at Christmas, coffee on. Everyone turned up to Bala on time at 7am and just had enough time to finish the coffee pot and weigh the bags before heading out. Mike Connor rocked up with the minibus supplied by pies from get Wet, warning me that it may or may not make the 6hr drive down to Heathrow. Mike was in good spirits though, ensuring us all we would be all good. We were all stoked for the start of what is going to be the trip of a lifetime for the guys. There are some first time flyers this trip, should be an amazing experience. It has been quite a while since I was on a plane, looking forward to the mission. Going to be an easy check in with no boats, looking forward to that. Tyler will meet us on the other end and we can get strait to the river and settle in.

The initial plan warped slightly when Nathan got found with a river knife in his hand luggage and questioned on his intentions. Luckily, his innocent face and youth exonerated him from a thorough search and they let him go. After that we had a three hour delay at Heathrow before we flew, this was actually quite nice having some time to relax after check in.

Our flight was super smooth, about three movies long with some eating time in there too. We had one more delay on arrival when the Canadian Immigration decided to interrogate us about the purpose of our trip. After an hour of convincing them we were not terrorists, they let us go paddling. Tyler was their waiting for us, so we got strait on the road and headed for Tyler's place to get a well awaited rest.

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Day 2

All the guys were up like lighting, awaiting their first Ottawa experience. After the long day previously, I thought they would be up for a lie-in. I was wrong. All we needed was some daylight to fully appreciate where we were; the sheer beauty and convenience of our location blew us all away. The house is located just downstream of McCoy's rapid owned by Tyler's dad, Dale. Our first breakfast was bacon and eggs (Canadian style) that impressed the guys instantly. Elliott was amazed at how different the bacon was, it was like seeing someone discovering bacon for the first time. We had some help cooking from Tom and Martin who were on the river kayaking and were doing anything to prolong their stay on the Ottawa. Tom and Martin were top paddlers from Ireland and Germany. After we had all eaten and got sorted, we headed out across the flats to our first glimpse of white water; we did not have to go far. We paddled McCoy's for the best part of the day until hunger and exhaustion set in. We had spaghetti waiting for us back at the house that Dale, Tom and Martin had prepared for us. We rallied the students together to clean up, all part of the lifestyle training. We had some time to relax after dinner that gave us all time to kick back and enjoy the surroundings. Some hammock action, some slack line and some sun bathing. We all headed out again for an evening session and paddled until last light. We returned to the house for a movie, popcorn and Bed. I was really stoked to see the guys experiencing these truly amazing waves for the first time. I remember how I felt the first time I was here and I could see it in their faces and is the reason we run these trips.

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Day 3

Today we decided to do a run of the river to show everyone all of the rapids and all of what the Ottawa had to offer. We bumped into a whole bunch of paddlers including Eric and Dane Jackson, Nick Troutman, Clay Wright and many more. Another big part of the trip was to expose the students to the lifestyle of a professional paddler and to see where paddling at these locations could potentially take them.

We started out at Baby face wave at McCoy's rapid right outside the house. We paddled there for a good while and got to see all of the rafting companies come through and have some carnage. Nathan was super keen on surfing baby face, probably the second best wave on the river at low Summer levels. What he did not realise was the rafts don't make that much of an effort to paddle around kayakers surfing the waves. Nathan took a big hit from one of the biggest rafts on the river ending up being launched into the centre of the raft. Everyone in the eddy erupted with ooo's and ahhh's and stared cheering at the spectacular hit Nathan had just taken and utter amazement that no-one got annihilated.

After a good few hours surfing the wave, we all started to paddle down to Garberator. Garb as it's more locally known, is the biggest of the play waves on the Ottawa at Summer levels. All the guys were in one of the feature and had a great time paddling there for an hour or so before we pushed down to push button wave just down from Garb for a spot of lunch. Push Button is one of the smaller features, a great place to learn wave and hole moves if the other larger waves are a bit too much. The wave started to get quite busy when the Keeners showed up led by Clay Wright and Nick Troutman so we decided to push on down to the take out. On our run down we got to paddle through butchers knife and Normans rapids that are nice class 3 wave / hole trains with some nice whirlpools and rock splats. Tyler pointed out a nice spot to seal launch from so we all got out then hucked ourselves off the 20ft rock into nice deep aerated water. By the time we reached the take out we were all quite tired and were ready to head back to the ranch for a nice relaxing afternoon and a bbq that everyone helped prepare and cook. Homemade burgers, hotdogs + salad. ☺

After people had taken some time to relax, enjoy the fire, slack line and generally enjoying the scenery, they headed out for a split session. Some went to Baby

face for a surf and some went down to Garb in the tinny boat. Some stayed at the ranch to rest a little and enjoy some fishing and burning fire on the riverbank. When it began to get dark, we started to get a little concerned about the guys paddling back up from Garb, it is about a 30 minute paddle back upstream to the house. Just as we were about to rally together a search party, they pulled up on the beach with tales of an awesome mission. We all settled by the fire with smores and marshmallows before crashing out after another spectacular day on the Ottawa River.

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Day 4

Today's plan was to head up to McCoy's rapid and take some runs through saddlers and Phil's hole. These are two big hydraulic holes that will hold a kayaker until the river gods decide to spit you out. There are three big holes to choose from, some being stickier than others. We spent a good 30 mins on the lawn going through the sun salutation and some boating orientated stretches. Tyler then went through some drills on the flat water, preparing for hole and wave stability and trick positioning and initiation.

After everyone was sufficiently warmed, we all walked up the rapid behind the house to the top of McCoy's rapid, got out and went through the potential lines and their potential outcomes. Everyone had a few runs down the rapid resulting in most of the students having 10 or 20-second hole rides. They all loved it and kept going back up for more. Elliott was the day's rodeo king with a monster 20second beating in right side of Phil's.

When everyone was done with his or her Phil's hole violations, we headed down to baby face for a warm down surf before cruising back to the house for a spot of lunch on the decking. The guys cleaned up, chilled out for a while then loaded up the trailer for an afternoon Garb session.

Ten of us piled into Tyler's truck, people, boats and kit everywhere. We were dropped at the wilderness Tours lunch spot just downstream of Garb, we walked up to the top of the rapid and put in, cruising down for a session on the monster wave. The weather was spectacular. Bath warm water, sun on our faces. We were lucky to be one of two groups on the wave, usually it becomes really quite busy at that time of the day as it gets a little cooler and you don't get as burnt. The smaller line-up gave us all an opportunity to really session the wave and get the most out of it. When the wave is busy, you could be there for hours and only get a hand full of rides.

Continued...

Tyler sat on river left with his camera, I had a few rides but spent most of my time on the rock doing some coaching, swimming around and generally smiling a lot and making sure everyone was having fun too. After a while, I left most of the group up at Garb and took Jack through the monstrous wave and down to push button. Push button is a lovely little wave below Garb where you can loop, blunt, cartwheel, spin, everything really. Everyone eventually ended up there for a nice warm down. Louis made it down without his boat and paddle after taking a swim from Garb after his deck blew off and got sucked down in the boils. Unfortunately, despite all of our efforts we could not recover the paddle and lost it to the river. A hard lesson to learn. When we had all made it back to shore, exhausted and hungry, we all picked up a slab each to for Tyler's sauna foundations. We think if we all take one everyday, by the end of the course we will have enough to build so we can have a nice sauna house for next years trip.

This evening, dinner was prepared by our German friend Martin and Dale back at the ranch. We did not paddle after dinner as the boys were exhausted after the long surf at Garb. All of the guys were doing so well on the wave. Garb is quite unforgiving and extremely powerful, kind of a baptism of fire. If, when surfing Garb you are not continuously working your edges and keeping a positive firm stroke in the water at all times, your boat will go into an out of control frenzy that is hard to recover from. It was actually quite nice to just have an evening all sitting around the table on the deck sharing stories and chewing the fat. An old friend of mine, Chad Hitchins I met in Chile over ten years ago rocked up for diner, which was a nice surprise. The guitar made an appearance and before to long it was time to adjourn to bed under a spectacular moonlit sky.

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Day 5

We awoke to a clear blue sky with the sun already evaporating the dew from the thermals left out from the previous session. Another gorgeous day on the Ottawa River. We had a fairly slow start to the day, letting our pancakes settle a little before hitting the river. We all warmed up slowly then hiked up river the top of McCoy's rapid for another hit of Phil's hole to wake us all up. A few of us hit right side of Phil's for a good old wake up call whilst Louis hit the tongue and Jack got some air of the corner of left side. We realised we got down the wave a little too late in the day as all we could see was wall to wall rafts from four different companies all waiting to have a ride in baby face. We spent most of the time either surfing up at corner wave or sprawled out over the hot rocks beside baby face. The temperature was peaking 30 degrees, it was a hot one for sure.

Lunch was waiting for us back at Dales, just a 2-minute paddle from the wave. We all headed back in dribs and drabs after we had had enough of waiting in line, for me it was a couple of big rides then a nice float back for food, the others were not too far behind. We had a good few hours of chilling at the house before another afternoon Garb & push button session to be followed by taco's that the boys had prepared after lunch. Getting the guys to clean up in turns and cook is a big part of the lifestyle training provided during the stay on the Ottawa.