

A day on the river with Matt Collier

18K, what a horrible thought! As if Henley wasn't far enough we did one even further. Despite the distance it was a great paddle downhill from Stourport, with a great atmosphere in the boat, and some different scenery to paddle in.

Personally I started off the day terribly getting up at 9, with Ray picking me up at 9.05, stopping at McDonald's for breakfast, to my eternal shame. Nevertheless I made it, to meet a crew standing around shivering waiting for the bus to Stourport. After repeated shouts of 'are we there yet?' we arrived at Stourport fresh, eager and ready to paddle. 5 minutes later 'are we there yet?', soon to become the quote of the day.

Warming up to the first lock, steam began rising off the boat the air being so cold and ice lay floating around the lock, making a strange sound in our wake, only to be broken by Nigel's phone going off. Then came that sinking feeling as we dropped 'downhill', and looking like something out of 'Lord of the Rings' the lock gates opened and we were on our way, settling into routine listening to Sam's commentary on the local pubs.

Reaching Holt Fleet I spotted some peculiar looking hedgehogs which, Lizzy quickly pointed out, were bales of hay. Oops! Finally, after 3 locks, we reached the Camp Inn, to the relief of us all as everyone was in need of 're-hydration' as I heard it put, and to meet up with our spectators from the bank, Debbie and Lizzy's mum, and Tim and Polly all the way from France!

1½ hours later we were back into the boat and racing to get to our new home for 2:30, and we did it in style. Those were some of the best 5min pieces, mainly I think because we were having a good time, but also after having one too many! 25 min's after leaving the camp we were seeing familiar sights, it felt good to be home, and finally racing back, giving lots of style for the spectators on the bank. Pulling into the bank we were again greeted by our spectators, and soaked in Champaign by Sam in celebration of our arrival. Toasts all round!

Quite a few people to thank: Sam for organising our passage through the locks, Nigel for helming us down, the members who came up with the idea, Debbie and Lizzy's mum for following us down and Lizzy for reminding me I need to get new glasses. Tim and Polly's timing was perfect after their long haul across the channel.

Thanks to everyone, it was truly a fantastic day, with one final quote – 'now we've got to do it with the yellow one!'

Matt