

# BIRMINGHAM CANOE CLUB MAGAZINE

APRIL 2010



## From the Editor.....

This has been a bit of a dry winter. In fact, the cry of 'where's the water' has been heard all over the West Midlands, as Birmingham Canoe Club members attempt to try and find white water to paddle in their boats.

So this magazine covers more what happens when there isn't any white water, although of course some intrepid club members have still managed to get out and out over the last few months - even though that may have involved crossing the Atlantic.

The club has also trained 12 level 1 BCU coaches, continuing the Club's strong tradition of encouraging people

to coach and develop people new to the sport.

We elected the new Committee in January - Dave Hughes stepped down as Chairman after 8 years, but luckily remains as Treasurer, Ian Dalloway continues as our committed Secretary, whilst somehow I became Chairman. Richard Stubley, John Woodhall, Jerry Crouch, John Powell, Steve Rogers, Rod Shelton, Steve Dix and Andy Simmonds make up the rest of the Committee - do talk to any of us if you want to help out, have any suggestions or ideas to improve the club.

We also became nationally famous when the club was featured in February's edition of Canoe and Kayak magazine. I've attached the article to the magazine, for those who didn't get round to buying it (and also because it made the magazine bigger).

The new trip list features loads of places to go and paddle with friends - both here and abroad. See you on the river soon.....

*Nette Carder*

## CHRISTMAS 2009 PADDLING IN THE SNOW

Fed up with no water, Andy, Bec, Pete, Chris, Toby and Helen decide to head to Scotland for a few days to paddle some serious Scottish white water - the Etive, the Spean, the Orchy, the usual hardcore rivers.

Undeterred by the snow en route, they continue on. Beautiful though the Orchy is at this time of year, there's not a lot of water for paddlin'.....



But the Etive - and the triple steps, should be running.....

Perhaps not this time..... Nor the Spean either.....

Nothing left for it then, but for Pete, Helen and Andy to improvise with kayaks



Before spending New Years Eve in the Nevis Bar in Fort William, trying to keep up with locals.....





#### **40 USES FOR A KAYAK**

**After the successful river skills weekend at Llangollen on 30-31st January 2010, my thoughts meandered on alternative uses for a kayak. In no particular rank order some possibilities included:**

1. A meeting place for two small people who have been apart for a long time
2. An aquarium
3. A washing machine
4. A cool box for stout or maybe light beers and ales
5. An echo chamber
6. A planter for geraniums outside a Swiss Chalet
7. A dice cup
8. A swing seat
9. A hat (worn upside down)
10. A shoe
11. An earring
12. A badge signifying the mystery of eyesight (on its side)
13. A sledge
14. Part of a wedding cake at a kayaker's wedding
15. A propeller blade for a light aircraft
16. A soup bowl
17. The cup for a sizeable catapult
18. A talking point for that empty spot in the front room
19. A Secure store for bananas
20. A pipe(saw one end off)
21. A mould for a chocolate éclair
22. A telescope (saw both ends off)
23. A low seat
24. A dance partner for a singleton(stood on end)
25. A jelly mould

26. A hot water bottle
  27. A barricade for the pub door at lock in time
  28. A road sign warning of the approach of kayaks
  29. A road sign warning people of kayaks in general
  30. A road sign advertising kayak shop in the vicinity
  31. A road sign used in wartime by surrealists to confuse fish
  32. A post box for use by island peoples everywhere
  33. A way for a castaway to get a rescue message out and keep his bottle for other uses
  34. A piggy bank(close the hatch and open the drain stopper)
  35. A currency (“that will be 1 kayak 99 please”)
  36. Poster in a dentists ‘beware of tooth de-kayak’
  37. A cement mixer
  38. A grape treader for wine making
- A way of reaching fish with an advertising campaign by painting slogans on the keel such as: *We are all in the water but some of us are gazing at stars.*
40. A weapon for use in kayak slapping events (semi-professional).
- I feel sure this is a rich field for fertile creativity and would welcome any more contributions in the next issue.

**Rod Shelton**

And when he’s not thinking of alternative things to do with this a kayak, Rod is a keen sea-kayaker, seen here out near Anglesey in April. If you’re interested in sea kayaking, please do get in touch with him.



## LEVEL 1 KAYAK COACHING

*Steve Rogers has always been a committed member of the Committee and Club, but as the photo shows, something was missing. So, supported by the Club, he decided to train as a Level 1 coach in November. This is his story.....*

It seemed like such a good idea to write about my only canoe and kayaking experience since my shoulder operation; but to be honest it was back in November and my memory isn't that good - but here goes...

I remember my girlfriend (and the surgeon) had been 'banned' me from all canoeing/kayaking until the New Year but there was no way I was going to let the UKCC Level 1 Course pass me by, having been ranting on about it since I joined BCC 3 years ago.

The new format for the L1 course is run over 2 weekends and all of us were reliably assured we ensure we would be far better coaches after qualifying than any previous L2 Coach. The club has had a lot of members interested in coaching and so the club were able to organise a course exclusive to its members, 12 in all. All successfully achieving the qualification-so if you want top coaching from a 'modern' perspective then BCC is the place to be!

The course started at some silly time in the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup> November 2009 (silly because it was before 10am on a Saturday). Lots of us were dreary and suppin' on coffee before Phil Hadley, the Course Director, kicked things off. Over the weekend the potential coaches also had to convince Ian Dallaway and Dave Clifft we were worthy of the first stage in the coaching scheme.

Personally, I was expecting a lot of classroom based teaching, and although the morning on day 1 was spent in the classroom going through paperwork and learning 'stuff' I was pleasantly surprised to find the afternoon was spent outside with boats. What I was more than impressed with was the amount of time we did spend on the water given the rumours about the new L1 Course being a longer course with more time in the classroom. I must say, I thought the course was exactly what I needed. The course covered a range of planning and preparation skills to include risk assessments and lesson plans. It also covered a range of teaching methods, and basic principles in how to teach when perhaps some methods aren't suitable to the environment. I honestly can't remember all the details; but I do know I walked away from both weekends exhausted but very pleased with the way the course was delivered.

For those who don't know, the course is 4 days long with a training weekend and an assessment weekend. Arguably training and assessment is continuous over that period,



**Steve: Before training as a level 1 coach**

and during the time between 'contact hours' we were expected to do 'homework'; something I have not done in nearly a decade.

Day 2 of the first weekend we all met with our completed homework and set about running through our prepared lesson plans, each taking it in turns to coach the rest of the group. Much of the day was spent doing this with very comprehensive debriefs provided from both the group and the assessors.

The following weekend did much the same, with us all having to do more coaching sessions. Without realising the sessions became less involved and the debriefs were less involved (maybe a sign we were improving) allowing more time for some 'fun'. This involved developing games to improve our paddling skills and trying them out. By the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> day we were all told we met the standards required to become a BCU UKCC Level 1 Coach.

I would like to remind those of some of the things we experienced over the weekend; perhaps bring a smile to their faces or get other club members intrigued (maybe then you'd consider becoming a coach - as we still have fun!). There was the Canoe Jenga, Joe Langham (always good to have around for some laughs), fun ball games, Dave Clifft (always good to have around to take the Mickey out of) and the 'blow-up' doll (used as a teaching aid). We all experienced using a range of craft, from canoes to slalom kayaks, playboats to river racers. We all had a go at tandem canoeing and some even learnt to enjoy the leisurely 'old man' sport of canoeing.

I would like to thank BCC for their support and to the assessors for providing the course to all the new coaches. It was a great, and if anyone wants further advice on the coaching then either speak to one of the committee members at the club or find a BCC coach-we'll be happy to answer any of your questions.

Steve Rogers

**Steve - after the Level 1 course**



## **Birmingham Canoe Club - Forthcoming River Trips 2010**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Venue &amp; Detail</b>	<b>Difficulty</b>	<b>Meet leader</b>
11 Apr	R. Thames Cricklade – Lechlade	Tour – 14 miles	Steve Dix 01922 474635
11 Apr	TBA	Easy/mod	Paul Edgar 01543 418274
25 Apr	R Severn Bridgnorth – Arley	Tour – 11 miles	Steve Dix 01922 474635
1-3 May	Wales Weekend – staying at Ffynnon Wen bunkhouse. – places limited on this trip	Med	Andy Simmonds 07966 448338  Clare Morgan 07968 118137
1-3 May	Scotland canoe- camping 3 day trip		Ian Dallaway 07715 005153
9 May	R Avon Doggy Paddle	Tour – 19 miles	John Powell 0121 429 8498
16 May	Washburn	Med	Dave Evans 07950 450663
22 May	Youthfest event Upton Warren		Richard Stubley Joel Hoskin
22-23 May	Surfing weekend - Bude		Clare Morgan 07968 118137
23 May	R Wye Whitney – Byford	Tour – 13 miles	John Powell 0121 429 8498
6th June	R. Severn: Ironbridge - Bridgnorth	Tour - 10 miles	Annette Hunt 0121 427 8427
6 Jun	Washburn	Med	Ian Dallaway 07715 005153
13 June	Dee – coaching	Mod	Dave Hughes 07780 697337
19Jun - 4Jul	French Alps	Hard	Andy Simmonds 07966 448338
19-20 Jun	Tryweryn weekend	Mod/mod	Sarah Clifft 07762 631108
20 Jun	R Wye Byford – Holm Lacy	Tour – 19 miles	Val Morris 0121 705 1300
27 June	TBA	Mod/mod	Penny Spooner 07768 790736
4 Jul	TBA	Tour	Steve Dix 01922 474635
4 Jul	TBA	Med	Toby Phillips 07900 498403
18 Jul	R Avon Pershore – Tewkesbury	Tour – 14 miles	Steve Dix 01922 474635
18 Jul	Dee	Mod	Chris Booth 07973 850653
30 Jul-15Aug	French Alps	Med	Ce Dallaway 07921 768610

1 Aug	Lower Tryweryn	med	Andy Simmonds 07966 448338
1st August	TBA	Tour	Annette Hunt 0121 427 8427
15 Aug	R Severn Hampton Lode – Bewdley	Tour – 9 miles	John Powell 0121 429 8498
15 Aug	TBA – coaching trip	Mod/med	Ian Dallaway 07715 005153
28-30 Aug	Surfing at Bude		Andy Simmonds 07966 448338
5 Sept	R Avon Evesham - Pershore	Tour – 11 miles	John Powell 0121 429 8498
12 Sept	TBA – Canoe	Mod	Dave Clifft 07762 631105
19 Sept	R Wye Lower (subject to tides)	Tour	Val Morris 0121 705 1300
19 Sept	TBA	Med	Toby Phillips 07900 498403
26 Sept	TBA	Mod/med	Dave Evans 07950 450663 Richard Stubley

### River grading -

As a rule of thumb, rivers marked “easy” will be predominantly flat water and up to up to grade 1, but may contain isolated grade 2 rapids, such as the Derwent, lower Wye or sections of the Severn below Shrewsbury. Rivers marked as ‘moderate’ (mod) will have more continuous sections of grade 2 rapids. The aim of moderate trips is to paddle simple whitewater, and will tend to be used on coaching trips. Rivers marked “medium” will be up to class III. Any trip marked “hard” will be above class III. ‘Tours’ won’t have any technical difficulty but tend to be longer distance trips. They do require a degree of stamina and may not be suitable for the first timer.

Please note that river grading can be open to mis-interpretation. The venue’s will be decided upon by the meet leader nearer the date. This allows for water level fluctuations and gives more flexibility to tailor the trip to suit the needs of who wants to attend. You need to tell the meet leader that you wish to paddle on a particular trip, so that provision can be made for you.

I have left some weekends free for some adjustment as necessary, and to allow other trips to take place on an ad-hoc basis. These trips will be organised at short notice and will tend to be rain dependent. They will be advertised on the noticeboard at the pool or on the BCU West Midlands Forum whenever possible.

<http://www.bcuwestmidlands.org.uk/phpBB2/index.php>

Anyone wishing to put ideas for future trips forward, please contact us:

See you on the river,

Andy Simmonds/Ian Dallaway

## Florida Fun

### **Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> Feb Travel Time**

You always know when a holiday is off to a good start, you wake up refreshed, you have a nice cup of coffee to welcome your morning and your taxi arrives to take you to the airport...if you're lucky!!

So four of us had to pace the bijou floor space of my living room waiting for the taxi man probably to get up out of bed, start his people carrier up and drive over to Solihull - we'd been forgotten! Meanwhile the others were pacing up and down the entrance to departures at the airport awaiting our arrival!

So we finally arrive, check in (following a red alert on a security man's laptop when Lee's passport was scanned). Lee was registered as Richard Lee Smith, which we all suspect is his secret agent name, but I didn't tell you that! The lovely lady at check in tells us we are stopping off at Boston to pick up no not a penguin, but a pilot!! No worries though we'll make it for our connecting flight out of New York!

Following a long 7.5-hour flight to Boston (Dave slept), after playing numerous games of Bejewelled and Patience and annoying the hell out of the passenger in front as you tap your individual screen to play we arrived at Boston and sat on the tarmac for 1 hr 30 mins! Arriving at New York 5 minutes before our connecting flight took off was also impressive, being told there wasn't a flight to Tampa for another 48 hrs was even more so!! After picking us up off the floor we negotiated a convoluted journey via Charlotte (Kieron was happy, lots of gift ideas for his daughter, can't for the life of me remember what her name is now!!)

So after lots of food, fun and games jumping on and off electric cars we boarded a plane from Charlotte to Tampa to eventually arrive at 1am local time, when we should have arrived 5pm! Man, I was stressed!!! We picked up our hire car and bravely Dave drove us to the hotel, navigated by me and Lee's GPS!

### **Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> Feb Chill Out Day**

Filling up on bountiful bagels we headed off on a trolley bus tour south of Clearwater (Dave slept), we got chatting to the driver who pointed out various celebrities' holiday homes and gave us a potted history of the surrounding area. We reached the end of the line at Pass-a-Grille Beach, had a beer and pottered on the beach for a while, which was a glorious white, fine sand (pity it wasn't less windy really) before heading back to St John's pass where we wandered around the shops, posed for a photo in Forest Gump's shoes sat next to a phoney box of chocolates on a bench outside the Bubba Shrimp Factory, and had a bite to eat.

Later we headed back to Clearwater towards the pier and scouted restaurants for dinner later that evening. Feeling the strain from the lack of sleep the night before we had a bite to eat early evening, and headed back to our rooms for some needed rest!

### **Monday 1<sup>st</sup> March Busch Gardens via Tampa Airport!**

We got up early the next day (well according to the Cliffts it was!) and got ready to go to Busch Gardens. I'd done a spot of morganising and booked our tickets on the website (10 dollars cheaper each) and asked the friendly receptionist if he'd mind printing off our tickets. Dave popped out to start the car (to cool it down apparently, even though it wasn't that warm!!) A swift return told us the car battery was dead!! Oh man, a phone call later we

were awaiting Hertz recovery who turned up only to tell us the battery was dead and he'd jumpstart it for us to drive it back to the airport to collect a replacement (Dave slept!) Fortunately Busch Gardens wasn't that far from the airport, so we blagged a different Toyota people carrier complete with satnav (a necessity for later in the hol).

We arrived at Busch Gardens around midday- it was so quiet! We managed to get on all of the rides and the little choo choo train to see view the Serengeti Plains. The first ride we went on was the Gwazi, we thought it was kiddie's ride really-a double wooden roller coaster can't be that scary (ask Keiron about it!) for a seemingly docile appearance it didn't half shift! We managed to beat that with the likes of the Scorpion, which boasted a 360 degree vertical loop-boy we had fun! The funniest times were viewing our photos after we'd been on some scary rollercoasters, everyone couldn't stop laughing for the best part of the day-it was a great day out (Dave slept!)

### **Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> March Meet Russ and Phil**

After much confusion regarding days to meet up etc. we made it to Russ' house (the guy who had organised our kayaking trip). We spent the morning sorting our spray decks, BA's and boats. Sarah and myself took a little trip on Russ' motorbike with Phil, which was great fun! Then a trip to Supertarget supermarket later, we drove over to Indian Rocks Beach and ate our lunch in fleeces on the beach (still windy!) We drove back to the hotel and chilled for the rest of the afternoon (Dave slept), ready for a nice dinner later.

On the evening we ended up in a lovely restaurant for an amazing buffet-stone crab claws, snapper, and steak... you name it was on the buffet!

### **Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March Weeki Wachee Springs with manatees**

Today we drove over to Russ' house, picked up two boats and two of Russ' guests - Nigel Foster and Kristin to drive up to Weeki Wachee in search of manatees (Dave slept). We made the compulsory stop off at the roadside for some boiled peanuts (with Cajun spices) interesting flavour sold by a rednex chappie much to the amusement of Keiron who had his accent to a t!

We began our journey at the bottom of the river and paddled upstream for a short distance until we reached the favourite place for spotting manatees, It didn't take long for some to surface, although while resting manatees can stay underwater for as long as 20 minutes before they need oxygen. It was very obvious when they did, as all you saw were these nostrils poking out of the water and the sound of them exhaling hard as they appear. We spent around 20 minutes observing and managed to get a few photos before we moved on in search of more interesting wildlife!!

The river took many twists and turns, and became crystal clear as we paddled upstream. It was hard going after a while, paddling a sea kayak and also manoeuvring it around some tight bends-still we spotted a few more manatees, lots of birds and Dave saw a raccoon on the bank! After stopping off for lunch, we paddled the last 20 minutes to the top of the Weeki Wachee where in high season you can see the mermaids perform apparently (I have to say the guys were disappointed the show wasn't on!)

We made our descent back, much happier with it being downstream and again saw more manatees along the way along with an array of mangrove forests and sawgrass swamps next to each other, that Jake (our senior guide in the absence of Russ) pointed out was because we were at the exact point in Florida where Mangroves grow south of the Weeki Wachee and sawgrass grow to the north, an unique sight!



Once back at Russ' house we all got changed and went out to a fantastic restaurant/bar that cooked the most delicious steaks, once watered and fed we were invited to a bar (by invite only) where they had an open mic session running. The calibre of singers/musicians was phenomenal, even Phil and Russ didn't dare go up and they're supposed to be good (Dave slept!!!)

#### **Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> March The first day of the Everglades**

Waking up bright and early we loaded our transport and set off for Goodman Bay, Ten Thousand Islands. These are a chain of islands and [mangrove islets](#) off the coast of [Southwest Florida](#). Despite the name, the number of islets in the chain only number in the hundreds.

After a three hour journey (Dave slept most of it) and momentarily losing Phil and Jake at a toll station, with a remarkable rendition of Bohemian Rhapsody (captured on Lee's camera, just like a re-run of Wayne's World) we were all raring to go and in high spirits for our adventure ahead. We met up at the side of the bay and while Sarah and I made sandwiches (terribly British) the guys unloaded boats and gear.

Jake and Ian drove the cars round to the marina on the other side and Phil skillfully towed the two boats over. I think at this point Lee was having doubts with his sea kayaking ability. Dave accompanied him over as the wind and picked up a little and a few waves were potentially making Lee feel a little unstable!

We met the others over in the marina and with both Jake and Phil holding sea charts we set off in search of an adventure!

We bumbled along, admiring the maze of mangrove that seemed to encircle us as we paddled. You can see how easy it would be to get lost among the hundreds of islands set out before us, but we circumnavigated the mangrove with ease courtesy of Jake, I think Phil was taking it easy (for a change!) The boats zipped along, making good use of the outbound tide (despite them being fully loaded with lots of food and water) especially with the occasional help of a skeg to stop the wind from blowing them off course too much!

After three hours we encountered Gullivan Key, right on the Gulf coast, the wind had picked up considerably and so had the waves. In fact poor Sarah got wiped out by one of the 3ft waves and ended up swimming (she didn't have the energy to roll). Once we'd got Sarah back into the boat, we made the decision it was not too windy to set up camp at Gullivan Key, so headed to the opposing island White Horse Key.

We set up camp, unloaded the boat and pitched our tents. Meanwhile Jake started cooking and we had a fabulous tuna pasta dish to replenish our lost energy! You may not believe this, but we took no alcohol whatsoever, Phil supposedly asked us the night before if we wanted anything from the off licence, but I think we were all too busy packing out kit! We were so tired we all retired to bed shortly after 9, Jake was pleased as apparently he's usually the first to bed!

### **Friday 5<sup>th</sup> March Pumpkin River**

We woke up bright and early. The trowel was well used, you had to dig your hole below high tideline and bury your treasure so it got washed away at next high tide! Then we had burritos for breakfast, which were yummy! We then had to pack all of our food away, in case the raccoons came along and ate it all (you couldn't even leave toothpaste, as they aren't fussy with what they choose to nibble!)

Whilst we were loading our boats an osprey flew overhead and swooped down onto the sea, caught an unsuspecting fish and then proceeded to parade his catch in front of us as we stood in awesome wonder (it was like being on the set of a wildlife programme).

Today we were paddling to Pumpkin River, to see one of the many ancient Indian shell mounds used by the Calusa tribe apparently to help them guard and protect their villages. This time Ian decided he was going to do the navigating, so after discussing his chosen route through with Jake we set off.

Yet more channels, several of which were dead ends lay ahead, even with a chart it would be easy to take a wrong turn. Ian did extremely well and managed to stay focused by aligning island edges with the chart, despite the plentiful toilet stops Dave requested on the way (next time I'd suggest a catheter bag!) As it was low tide on our outbound journey there were lots of shoals to avoid and we relied a lot on the red and green markers (which were also numbered to make it easier). After lots of manoeuvring round dog leg bends we finally ferried across a channel to encounter a mass of pink flamingos, which were resting just shy of the mouth of Pumpkin River. We paddled up Pumpkin River and landed where we thought the shell mound would be. Kieron and Phil had got lost at this point, but we figured they'd find us!

We explored the land with our paddles (to protect against snakes), stood on the shell mound, Lee planted a British flag and then we congregated for another fabulous lunch of wraps, cheese, different meats, crisps and other goodies!

After everyone was just finishing lunch, we heard a splash coming from the river, it was a dolphin swimming upstream, possibly following its lunch. We stood and watched him for a while and then got back in our boats to paddle upstream until it became too narrow and then did a u-turn and paddled back. On the way down the river we saw a Roseate Spoonbill (these birds aren't seen that often, so we were very privileged to see such a sight).

We journeyed back, with Ian still leading, Dave still peeing and saw two dolphins (mother and baby) looking at the size of them! It was Lee's turn to swim this time; apparently he was messing about trying to do a stern squirt!! Over he went and after three failed rolls he pulled his deck. We were all a little concerned he would try this again on the Myakka River...

We arrived back at camp in high tide, which meant we didn't have to carry our boats very far and again Super Jake cooked us fabulous chilli with rice. We gathered fire wood and built a huge fire to sit around whilst drinking cups of tea ( and Dave slept!!) It was so chilly by then, I had to don a pair of sock with my tevas (thankfully the fashion police weren't there) but it kept me warm. Lee reckoned he got bitten by a scorpion whilst picking up wood, looked more like a scratch from the wood to me, think he decided it was too once Phil offered to chew up some tobacco and spit on lee's hand!

### **Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> March Back to Goodman Bay**

The next day we packed up our things, loaded our boats and set off back to Goodman Bay, on the way back some of the guys saw a giant Sea Turtle. I missed it as I was too busy babysitting Dave to stop him from falling asleep! We paddled back to the Bay and booked ourselves on an air boat ride with Captain Jerome (man he was funny) apparently his mother was a dolphin as he was breast fed on 75% buttermilk!!

We then drove back to Russ' house after stopping for food and retired for the evening, ready for our big day tomorrow on the Myakka River to see the alligators!!!

### **Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> March Myakka River**

Today we woke up early and found we'd run out of coffee. Desperate for that much needed caffeine fix me, Ian and Lee found a Starbucks and replenished levels there, complete with pastries galore.

We drove south again to the Myakka River State Park in Sarasota to see our alligator friends! Once on the water we saw no less than 30 alligators in 30 minutes. I've never felt so vulnerable. It was actually better to lead the river as the alligators got spooked with too many boats and tended to slip into the water once a few had paddled past. That was the bit we didn't like, you never knew where they were as the water was a dark murky colour. The only time you knew they were underneath you is when one rubbed under the hull (happened to me twice) although Ian reckoned the one time was a log, I know it was an alligator! Sarah had a close call too; one went under her paddle, so she had to put a brace in to stop herself from capsizing. As Phil said a Grade 1 river with Grade 6 consequences!

The banks were littered with alligators, all watching us intently...I find it hard to believe they're more scared of us than we are of them! We paddled until we came to lower lake,

where a lot of the alligators congregate and bask in the heat-yes we saw loads!!! So many, there were vultures sat in the tree next to them waiting for the scraps!!!

Phil had a close call, when one got spooked underneath his boat and lifted him out of the water. Phil clonked him on the head with his paddle and the alligator snapped taking out a corner of Phil's paddle - man it was a sight to see!

After having our fill of the alligators and not vice versa thankfully we paddled back and started the drive back to Russ' house. Once we'd collected our gear and said our goodbyes and thanks to Jake and Phil we drove our next hotel in Tampa-we had one full day left on the holiday. We made an executive decision we'd drive to Universal Studios being as it was our last day and make the most of it! The only condition was that Dave wanted to sleep on the way there- no surprises there then! On the evening we found an amazing steakhouse, they do know how to cook good steaks, complete with endless warm honey oat bread-believe me there was no room for dessert!

### **Monday 8<sup>th</sup> March Universal Studios**



We had breakfast (early!) and set off to Orlando. With lots of rock tunes in tow, thanks to Sarah's ipod we cruised along making it there for 9am when the park opened. After waking Dave up we bought our tickets and hit the park!!

This was a funnier day than Busch Gardens! Starting off with 4-d Shrek show, we went on all the major rides, Spiderman, Men In Black-a roller coaster shoot um up ( I won! ) , Krustyland Simpsons virtual rollercoaster, which was hilarious, Jaws, The world's biggest Log flume you name it we did it! It was a fabulous day and everyone had a good time.

### **Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> March Segway ride and homebound**

After some research early morning I found a Segway agent that could accommodate us that day. We had to be at the airport for 1pm, so time was tight. We'd seen some people using Segways at the start of the holiday on Clearwater beach and said we would love to try them if the opportunity arose.

We found the meeting spot, had a quick practice on the car park. The Segway is sensitive to your feet position and will accelerate/decelerate accordingly-it all down to balance, which as kayakers we should be able to handle!

We set off for a tour of Tampa, Jake (another one) had to travel by bike, as the company only owned six Segways! We spent 90 minutes touring the city (Dave couldn't sleep on this one!) It was a real giggle, Sarah was like a big kid, (or rather a very small kid) she was trying to do tricks with hers, which could so easily have ended in tears!!

We ended the morning with some delicious pastries and Italian coffee and headed off to the airport. From there we caught our plane to Newark, NY and just managed to board our connecting flight to B'ham in time (Dave slept).

No-one can say we didn't make the most of our time in Florida; we packed so much in and had so much fun! The Americans we met were fantastic and we found nothing but a helpful and positive attitude by all wherever we went. We also appreciated how fortunate we all were to see so many wonderful sights, whilst we were out there! Despite the odd mishap, it was truly a top holiday! Thanks guys, for being such good fun!

Ps. Did I tell you Dave has changed his name to Yawnie!!!

**Clare Morgan**

**PS :**

And a gentle reminder of the aftermath of the BCC Christmas party.....

The rest of the photos - many unpublishable in a family magazine - can be seen on

<http://gallery.me.com/springy#100021>



Please keep articles, information, anything you think that anyone else will want to know about coming.

See you on the river

Nette