

## Slovenia 2007

### “What goes on tour stays on tour (A-hem...)”



The planning for the trip to Slovenia started in 2006. The whys, where's and when's don't really matter. Six paddlers Jonathan, Tony, Willie, Keith, Tim and James (me) set off from mainland UK to Ljubljana, Slovenia. It was the 19<sup>th</sup> May 2007. We had a variety of experienced paddlers with us; Canada, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Germany, France, Nepal, Africa and of course the UK were some of the exotic locations the group have boated in. We a strong team.

We flew from Glasgow Prestwick to London Stansted, and from there to Ljubljana, Slovenia.

This is my story of the event. Like everything, people have different tales and see things differently than I do. However, this is my tale of Slovenia 2007.



were

### Sunday

The first day we paddled from Vodenca to Cezsoca, on the Soca, according to the Soca guide it was grade 2-3. In the afternoon we paddled the river Koritnica, from Kluze to Cezsoca, again according to the guide it was grade 3-4. It's always difficult to quote guides in giving an indication of graded water and changes in flow will give different water levels from day to day. However, at the time of year we paddled with the amount of water on the river the sections were a dead easy grade three. Both sections were good fun with a really relaxed



playing section from Vodenca to Cezsoca. The first section of the Koritnica would have merited inspection just to check that some of the narrow tight sections were clear of logs. After the first days paddle we headed back to our apartments in Bovec.

### Bovec

Bovec is a small (ish) village, a bustling Mecca for the outdoor enthusiast. You can enjoy mountain biking, walking, gliding, skiing, snowboarding and of course kayaking, for example.



Logistically getting there was relatively easy, or so we thought, we had read various trip reports of kayakers going there so we had a fair idea of what to expect. Most of the reports mentioned they had got through airport check in with minimum fuss regarding the weight of kit. We managed to get from Glasgow to London with no drama. However, at Stansted we got hit with a large charge for excess weight. We had to pay an additionally £156.00. At the time we were cutting it extremely close to getting our next flight and as we initiated debate on the subject of costs the nice gentleman from Easyjet started to slow things up. On a sign behind him was marked "if your late, we won't wait". Needless to say we kept our mouths shut and paid the bill.

Arriving at Ljubljana, we picked up our two hired cars, Renault Thalias, and started the process of getting the inflatable roof racks on and the boats. We had three boats on each car; none of us had used an inflatable roof rack before. A couple of yanks on the straps, groans and creaks from the roof we had them strapped on. Arriving at the apartment the roof wasn't looking all that good, in fact by the end of the week it was bad and I am sure the group collectively agreed we would be getting billed for the damage.

## **Monday**

We had breakfast and got packed up and headed towards Srpenica. There are two car parks Srpenica 1 and Srpenica 2. We got in at the first one. We were to paddle three sections on through to the slalom course to the edge of the infamous Siphon Canyon! Grades 2/3 - 3/4 - 4-5 but they never managed past a hard three and that was the slalom course.

At the time of us going out to Slovenia a Polish paddler, paddling a Dagger Nomad 8.1, paddled the canyon earlier in the month, took a line close to one of the boulders and got caught in a siphon. Unfortunately, he died. Siphon Canyon has claimed many lives, both experienced and inexperienced paddlers. At the time we were there and after various inspections we decided (1) it was too precarious to paddle with so many visible siphons (2) not all of the group would paddle it, only two were seriously looking to kayak it and (3) it might have been disrespectful as his body was still to be recovered. As we set off from Srpenica, thoughts were of the paddler his family, friends, and those that paddled with him on the day.

The first kilometre was easy grade two and slowly progressed to more difficult rapids. We found a great play wave where most of the group surfed and played on the wave. Willie proved that he could cut the mustard with rolling at a critical point coming off the wave on to a huge boulder.

We soon came to the slalom course. A great run, difficult three! We had a spot to eddy out prior to Siphon Canyon. However, Tim and James paddled a wee bitty on into the abyss and got out slightly further down stream.



As the paddling day came to an end and the car shuttle was getting done a few of us went to look at the canyon. I think for me and Tim, that were looking to paddle siphon canyon, a heavy head job was going on, knowing that a paddler was, still to be recovered from the water. Was it disrespectful to contemplate kayaking this stretch knowing that someone was still in the water? I dunno, but we looked and thought that it all went, from the section we inspected. Yeah, it was low, and there were some easy lines and one or two more technical lines. However, the realisation of swimming any of the rapids in this section was fatal. You would almost die for sure and there was little or no chance of bank rescue coming in on a "live bait" to help. Having done more inspections

throughout the course of the week we decided not to kayak it.

### **Tuesday**

We had a late start on the water and had a lazy morning taking in a long lie and some local shopping for postcards. We would paddle after lunch.

We got in below Siphon canyon at Otona and paddled to Napoleonov Most. Graded 4-6 and 2-4. However, it never got past a difficult three. I guess the river was the easy part for the day; the walk in was a grade six!



At the get in we knew it was a 15-minute walk in which it was steep, steep, steep!!! After shuttling the cars we left the car park and walked down the Landover style path, missing the single track branch at the top thinking it wouldn't be that.

Well, it was the single track we were meant to take.

Following the double track for some 15 minutes we were more traversing the hill instead of descending it. It soon twigged we took the wrong turn. If it took us 15 minutes to get to the realisation we had taken the wrong turn, there would be another 20 minutes to walk up the path we came and a further 15 minutes to walk down to the get in! It was hot, hot and dam HOT. Almost back at the car park, to take the single-track path down to the river, tempers were frayed and steam was being vented!

Once at the river we took some time to cool down and we eventually got on the river. A few times during the trip we had team chats about strategy and tactics on the river. Today was no exception and we spoke about eddy hopping and space between paddlers on rapids. As the week progressed we started to break up the six paddlers into to threes, me, Tim and Wullie with Tony, Keith and Jonathan. The later group were normally in front leading they way. Anyways, we set off and came to a rapid. The first trio were down and we were to follow. Breaking it up and eddy hopping we were to see our first swimmer of the trip. Willie managed to become separated from his boat and swam. We reinforced the eddy hopping and signal system and continued down the river. Willie was to swim again. The heavens opened and the crystal clear water was starting to turn milky. We decided it was best to hasten our trip and get off the water ASAP.

Inevitably, in the pub and after a few beers, we all slagged each other off about the days events, tempers, emotions, eddy hopping, communication and a grade six get in.

It was all good we were kayaking in Slovenia.

### **Wednesday**

10am up and at it. We did a wee bit of checking the route out the previous night. That is to say the get in and get out. We got in at Velika and paddled to Stocje. For Wednesday kayaking we saw three portages a roll on a main rapid and a bit of skinny-dipping. Pictures to follow on [www.planetpaddler.com](http://www.planetpaddler.com).

The get in was at a spectacular site for taking pictures. From a bridge, we could take pictures looking deep into a gorge. After taking some great pictures we set off on our grade 1-2 section. The easy river surrounded by great scenery and good company was breathtaking. It's not always about the gnarly gnar, gnar runs and for now we were chilling out in Sloveina. We made our way down the river and came to one or two little rapids.

It was inevitable that we would come to more testing rapids. Tim Keith and Tony ran the first difficult rapid. It was an easy chute down with little to go wrong. However, severe under cuts and small caves were the real hazards to the untrained eye.



A swim or pin would be bad news here. Jonathan and Willie portaged. Yup, that left me, I ran it, cocked up my line up and

capsized on the run in. It severely constricted to about slightly longer than my boat for a short while. As mentioned there was a small cave on the rive left. It was being protected with a very expensive SLR camera! Yeah, I protect the cave with a throw bag and I get the camera. Great pictures. The guys were slagging me off after seeing the pictures of me and my leaping head out of the water like a salmon and lunging on to the back deck, exposing my face. What do they know, pah, they don't even have a credible one star between them! After the first 'point and shoot rapid' we came to another. Willie portaged it and it was left to Jonathan, and me as the others were down already. Jonathan shot it and I was soon to follow. We all got out after it and had lunch.

Lunch was at the side of the river basking in the sun. We had brought head torches to check out a cave we saw.

The water was lovely and cool looking (Baltic really, it's just came from the snow and ice) and the sun was warm. So some of us cooled off and had a swim in the pool. A swim led to bomb diving which led to skinny-dipping. Whoo Hoo. Was it cold! From lunch to the get out was about 10 minutes and we off for another relaxing night of food and beer.

### **Thursday**

Well, Thursday would be the day of all days. Pain, suffering, disfigurement and an uncompassionate slagging.

The routine of getting up, breakfast, loading the kayaks on the cars was all part of the morning routine. We were typically leaving the apartment about 10:00 each morning. Today we decided to paddle from Srpenica 1 to the start of Siphon Canyon. We had did this a few days ago and thought it would be good to do it again. However, Tim and myself hired boats for a wee change. I had the Project 62 and Tim had the smaller one, a 45.



Kit ready and the shuttle was done we set off. We were on the water for about 20 minutes and I eddied out to do some testing of the Project. On an eddy line I started the stern stands and spins. I broke in reached back with a right stern prise, cocked my hips passing the eddy line and rotated my head and torso towards the stern. I felt the bite on my paddle and the boat crossed the eddy line to grip the current. My left hand slipped from the shaft. As the

shaft left the grip of my hand I knew is was under a full load. In the blink of an eye it crashed into my mouth and broke my crown and drew some blood. The dentist here we come.

We finished the rest of the river with various leg pulling jokes at my expense.

### **Friday**

Some of the group had a lazy day and James, Tony, Tim and Keith went to paddle from Otona (bottom of Siphon Canyon) to Napoleonov Most. We completed the grade six walk in, this time we got on the right path. We managed to get some video clips of the river. As we came to Napoleonov Most, the kayaking was finished. We watched some Paragliders at he get out, packed our kit and went back to the apartment.

### **Saturday**

An early start and a bugle call at 07:15 got the group up. We struck camp and headed off to Lake Bled for some touristy sight seeing fun. From there we headed off to the airport.

It was over.

### **Lows**

I guess for me it was the breaking of my tooth. I guess for the group it was the extra charge for the baggage's at London and the grade six walk on to the river.

### **Highs**

Well there are too many, but I'll start with a few. The country, Slovenia was great along with the people.

The River Soca was great also, for an easy, not too demanding play river. Yeah, there are some serious parts but mostly are lottery runs in siphon festooned parts of the Soca river that are marked as not navigable for crafts.

I would definitely recommend the Soca for an easy introduction to a beginner's alpine style trip. It's a lot easier than Briancon, France.

### **Where we stayed:**

Appartmaji Mrakic, [www.mrakic.net](http://www.mrakic.net), Dvor 53 5230 Bovec, Slovenia.



### **Who we flew with:**

Ryanair and Easy jet



**Who our insurance was with:**

Direct Line

**How much spending money did I take?**

£200

**The Kayakers were:**

James Fleming, Willie Gardiner, Keith Page, Tim Blundell, Jonathan Goldthorp and Tony Davis.

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