

**Dart Trip 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> November 2006**  
**“Smile Dave Smile”**

This was my first experience of a Dart trip and to say I was somewhat dubious would be an understatement, some of the Stories of past horrors that had been relayed by Adrian had not helped at all. Vince tried to put my mind at rest on the way down to the Dart but to little avail, in fact he may have made it worse. It was discussed on the way down that Karl Saagi would be bouncing around with excitement like Tigger and true to form he was doing just that, which was fine until you realise that you are sharing a room with a bouncing guy that shouts Yippee when ever he sees a wave. I have sympathy for Andy who also had to endure this feat. On arrival the accommodation was brilliant and the company fantastic with a wide range of experienced paddlers. The first morning was fantastic weather and the day started with a great cooked Breakfast by Neil and Gary. We walked down to the put in point via the School Rapids (not the best route for some one who was kacking his pants on his first day!!) Once on the River my fear really began to take hold but I was in a great group with Jo and Carl leading us and Tom, Sarah and Shona making their way down. It was at this point that I realised I should have paid more attention reference eddy's and eddy Lines and ferry gliding. With amazing patients from the whole group I learned to make my way down the river with the constant shouting of SMILE DAVE SMILE ringing in my ears from Jo. Approaching the first dodgy looking rapid I realised I had the uncanny ability to paddle as fast backwards as I could forwards, I blame fear !!!!This caused Jo to shout a second saying, which was PADDLE FORWARDS!!! Not great when you don't like the look of where you are going. On approaching the rapid known as corkscrew, I was a little concerned when Carl disappeared from view and was signalling with just the top of his paddle. Seeing Sarah, Shona and Tom navigate it with ease. I approached with caution with Jo shouting both Paddle forwards and Smile which was fine until going over the lip I froze completely (not the best idea) Thought I was going to capsize and decided to get out of my kayak before it was under water or even near to it. A few meters later and using my head and hand to dredge a deeper channel in the Dart I was collected by Carl given words of wisdom and was off again. Approaching the get out point realising that I was going slightly to close to the bridge finding my paddle stuck I decided to head butt the bridge to put myself back on line, although it worked a treat I would not recommend it!!!!!!!!!!

The Rest of the day was spent enjoying solid ground and watching the others on the school rapids.

The second day had seen a lot of rain during the previous night and the river level had risen significantly. Again after a hearty breakfast we were off to the put in point. I was somewhat disturbed to find that it had in fact disappeared and was under water. It was at this point when I was actually sitting on the water that I froze with fear and wanted to get off the river to the safety of the firm dry land. After a lot of patience from Jo and still little movement by me, the front of my boat was directed into the current by Jo and with a scream I was off. This was probably the best thing that could have happened. Shona was great company throughout the trip down and although the familiar sayings were ringing in my ears “Smile Dave Smile and Paddle forwards” I had a great paddle down. Sarah could not paddle this day as she had injured her back prior to the trip. While out walking Sarah heard yippee being shouted over and over again, looking down on the river there was Karl aka Tigger shouting yippee every time he hit a wave no one else in sight!!

The third day had a change in location with me, Sarah and Shona going off with Jo, Gary and Paul concentrating on ferry gliding and eddy hopping. After much practice we had a look at little weir and with support everywhere we went over this into an eddy ready to go down school rapids. Jo was on my shoulder screaming at me to smile and to paddle forwards all the time. Once at the bottom Paul had a wonderful suggestion of rafting down the school rapids. Sarah was first to say yes (Thinking that me a Shona were too stupid to agree) but with ever predictability we agreed. I told Paul how thoughtful he was to bring a raft with him. To which I got a puzzled expression and a strange smile. Once again at the top of school rapids (still no sign of the raft!!) we handed in our paddles and made our way down to the water, “to which it suddenly dawn on me that there would be no big rubber raft coming along to help us. And we would be holding ourselves together with no paddles. On asking Gary what happened when he did this he replied that he had not been that stupid to try this, (Gary always the reassuring voice) and Paul just smiled amazed that there were a group of people gullible enough to do his suggestion. But looking on the “Brightside” my instructions was to be placed in the middle of two ladies and too hold tight and on no circumstances let go!! A good deal, I felt. To be fair it was great fun and we were watched with somewhat amazement from other paddlers as we shot past clinging to each other. Upon returning to dry land Shona feeling refresh attacked the obstacle course with somewhat unusual results.

The final morning, having got changed ready to paddle and do a little bit of ferry gliding and eddy worked. It was with some surprise that Adrian sat next to me asking if I was ok. Replying yes and thanking him for asking, he said good as plans had changed and that everyone was going to do the loop and I would be able to get off half way down. I am

not sure where the gentle paddle with ferry gliding went!! And I sat shocked thinking of my fate. I can still remember the look on other peoples faces in the car park at the beginning of the loop as who is this chap walking around in a nervous trance.

As with the whole trip I was looked after fantastically with support, advice and encouragement all the way and dare I say it I managed a SMILE on the journey down once or twice much to Jo's surprise.

During are time away some of the paddlers managed to get three three star awards, and even a 4 star was achieved. All of us learnt something every time we took to the water.

The loop was paddled by a wide range of the guest's throughout all days all with different stories to tell of popping in and out of eddy's and various drops and play waves.

The meals and general hospitality were seconded to none. Neil managed to cook amazing meals for all. Both houses always joined up for the main meals and this was great to swap stories of the day gone by. It was during one of these fine evenings that Sarah advised us on a First Aid technique, which involves singing Nelly, the Elephant while resuscitating someone. Having seen Vince's and Jim's version of this procedure anyone fortunate enough to survive their condition may question where they have return too, with two mad men hit your chest singing Nelly the Elephant in hysterics!!

Everyone one I encountered offered support and advice to everyone else creating a great atmosphere. Talking to people from different areas and what and where they had paddled before.

My biggest surprise was how individuals with skills to paddle all most anywhere were happy to spend time with people like me and others with various levels of skills and to help them improve always with a good sense of humour and willing smile. This I learnt was not an exception but is how things are and often there can be as much enjoyment from seeing someone improve and showing them new techniques. I have a big thanks to Sarah and Shona for putting up with me during the trip and their patience. There are far too many others to name individually but I thank you all for an unforgettable trip and wonderful company.

As I have written this a SMILE has often come across my face as I think back to things that happened and that's got to be good and I can't wait to go back!

Dave Jeeves