



Yukon River Quest
Team 28 Experimental Curry Powder

It was quite a journey just trying to get to Whitehorse as it was, but neither Chris or myself really knew what this race was all about. We did know that it was 740kms down the river, and that we were trying to finish in under 60 hours.

It all started about 2 days before the actual start of the race, Chris and I hopped in a canoe together for a training run down the river, this being the 3rd time we actually paddled together. We began meeting some amazing people and shooting the breeze with them. My old man was suppose to fly in that evening to be our support team, of course he missed his flight, so, it got pushed back to the next night.

When my father finally got into Whitehorse and we got back to the hotel it was 2am on race day, and we had to be up around 7am to begin getting ready for the race. Needless to say my father was up at nearly 6am, thus not allowing Chris or myself a whole lot of sleep to prepare for the race. The day started cold, wet and semi-miserable.

We got our boat all ready, required gear checked out, and went to Subway for a final meal before the start of the race. I must have been a bit nervous about the race on account I couldn't eat my whole sandwich, so I took the second half with me (which in the end was a brilliant idea).

The race began at noon sharp with a 300 meter mass start dash to the boats. Quickly jumping in and begin paddling more to simply warm up, than to get out ahead of the

other crews. Pushing incredibly hard for the first few hours was desperately needed to help maintain a lead and get on the 50km lake just about 2 hours down the river.

We wanted to get this lake out of the way so that we could get back into flowing water. Thankfully behind us was a tailwind which created meter swells. While this was a God send it did make keeping the boat straight incredibly difficult. Chris at the front of the boat was loving life while I struggled. Every time a wave came in, Chris paddled hard to try and surf, I got nervous about getting pushed sideways and swamping.

We had a system down, every hour on the hour one person stops paddling for food and a pee break (don't ask). A pact had been made that at no time on the water would there not be a paddle in the water, we simply had to keep moving. This system would play a vital roll in the race.

At the end of the lake it had been 9 hours since we started paddling, and it was time for some real food other than just cliff bars and goo. I broke out the subway sandwich I kept, cut it in half, and for the first and only time during the whole race, our boat was in the water, but no one was paddling. That sandwich was the best food in the entire world.

While all the other groups stopped to change clothes for the first night paddle, Chris and I pushed on, and turns out, gave us a tremendous lead. All the way across the lake we were only 2 hours behind the leaders, and of course we didn't know this.

Down this next portion of the river we ended up catching and passing a team that would cause us much grief in the second half of the race. The race committee decided a few years ago it would be a good idea to have safety camps after the lake, they had a fire and coffee for anyone that wanted to stop. It was very tempting but we had an agenda to keep to, needless to say, it was nice to see these people cheering for us.

Around 3am (15 hours into the race) we came across Gatesy, a solo canoeist looking to break the record that had been held for nearly 12 years. He had fallen asleep in his canoe and could not be more grateful that we came along when we did. He reminded St Jack of a jackrabbit on steroids. Gatesy ended up paddling with us for much of this evening and again the next evening when the exact same situation arose. This was his 3rd time in the quest but his first in a solo canoe, typically he paddled in a tandem.

As our two boats paddled together we saw a tandem sea kayak a fair distance ahead of us, so we started paddling harder. The thing about the Yukon River is there are many short cuts. Sheerly by accident we took a channel around a group of islands and ended up being nearly 500 meters ahead the sea kayak that was in front of us. Needless to say this would not last too long as they ended up doing the exact same thing to us, but gained nearly a kilometre.

Chris and I found out the hard way when tiredness would start winning the battle. That magic hour came for us at 5am. I was in the back of the boat and would fall asleep while still paddling. The only way Chris knew is when he would hear me talking and ask me a question, and I came to for only a few seconds. Finally, I noticed Chris' stroke rate falling off, so I said "you want some sleep?" He agreed and

laid his head down on his knees for a few minutes while I continued to paddle. When he awoke, he asked me I wanted to take a snooze. My response was simple “I did, back there when I was still paddling.”

Finally we hit another check point, and for the first time in more than 18 hours we stopped and stretched our legs, stayed for maybe 5 minutes and jumped back in the boat for the final 4 hours of this first leg of the race. It was in this next section that Chris and I both started seeing things on the shore and in the trees. I looked on shore and I saw this beautiful girl bathing in the river, Chris saw faces in the cut bank, and we both saw a giant bear in the tree. It was also where we both started biting our tongues. In races like these its inevitable that your going to get cranky with your team mates, and you have to push those negative thoughts out of your head. Oddly enough, this was the same time that “the burps” started acting on me.

24 and a half hours from starting the race, we were at the first of two mandatory stops. At this stop we were required to stop for 7 hours, and it was much needed. My father had set up the tent, and began making food for us. It took many discussions with my father to get him to understand the food that we wanted to eat, was not the food he was suggesting. Needless to say, because of “the burps” I didn’t exactly feel like eating. Chris and I laid down to sleep and my father prepped our boat, refilled our water and got food ready for our departure.

After sleeping, we ate, got our gear rechecked, and shoved off as soon as we could. We came into the stop in 20th place and left in 19th, as we were able to pass that damn tandem sea kayak that eluded us.

On this next section of the river we joked about getting first place, talked of girls, and paddled in silence from time to time. Feeling fresh from the sleep we had just had, and pushing on hard, we hit the 1st of 2 rapids. On a normal year this first rapid would have been challenging, but this year, it was really more of a joke. “The Burps” were getting worse and more frequent, and Chris was, rightfully so, getting annoyed with them, as it started sounding more and more like I was going to die.

Keeping our stroke rate up, and trying not to get annoyed with “the burps” we trucked along until we again ran into our old friend Gatesy. He fell asleep while paddling, again. So, we continued to shoot the breeze with him, and tried very hard to remember who had the count of paddle strokes for when we would switch sides. We had developed a system that at every 30 strokes we would switch. Now and again, we would miss the count and either one of us would just say switch. It did take us awhile to come up with this magic number.

After sometime, Gatesy would again push well ahead of us and we would be left alone. “The burps” were getting to me something fierce, so, we pulled over for a minute. This was a great chance for us to clear our systems. All the while looking behind us searching for the team that was gunning hard for us. Fortunately, they were nowhere in site, but we did see a lot of “things” that looked like paddlers. And we paddled on.

We came across a couple in a canoe simply paddling the river for scenic reason, but they were part of the race for emergency reasons. We would see this couple again, and they would share great news with us.

Shortly after seeing this couple, we looked over our shoulders and we saw our enemy coming up from behind. This gave us a hard drive to paddle harder and increase our lead on them. For about 20 or so minutes we paddled harder in that race than ever. Finally, we saw the sign we were hoping for, our next layover point. From this point we thought it was only about 7 hours to Dawson City. At this layover we would stay for 3 hours before pushing on for home.

When we were ready to leave this last layover, we found out it was between 10 and 12 hours to the finish and that we were a mere 17 minutes ahead of our competitors. As soon as the officials said “go” we dug in and paddled for as hard as we could.

Paddling for nearly 2 hours we crossed a small lake and back into the current of the river. Just as we entered the river we began seeing lightening, and the wind began to pick up into our faces. A storm hit us just at the same time we saw the couple on the river from a few hours earlier, and in this storm they yelled out “3rd place, your in 3rd place for C2.” Not being able to respond we paddled into the wind, and got blown sideways. The river going one direction, the wind going the opposite, we just barely kept the gunnels above the water line to tuck in behind an island for protection. This little storm gave us a tremendous lead on the boat behind us. And we continued.

After moving about 16 kilometres per hour for about 7 hours, and “the burps” causing me more hassle than I’d like to admit, my stomach gave up the battle and I threw up. I mentioned to Chris that we needed to pull over for a minute. Just as I stepped out of the boat I was on my knees dry heaving. Our plan had changed, Chris would paddle, and I would rest, while trying to rudder. After an hour of this, I looked around and stupidly said “we haven’t gone anywhere.” This was a terrible statement. Finally I said to Chris “if I vomit again, I vomit, I have to paddle, cause we aren’t moving.”

I began to lily dip for a few minutes trying not to burp, then we just started to dig in hard for the end. Being sick and tired Chris took the map and guided us in the last 20 miles.

5 miles from the city you can see one of its main defining features, a massive rock slide. This gave that little bit of extra hope, and we pushed in. We gave it our all for the last bit and came into Dawson with style. After pulling up people came up saying “congrats, you got first in men’s tandem canoe.” Neither Chris nor myself believed them, we took a nap, and a shower, and checked the internet. Sure enough, we had won. 54 hours 50 minutes of paddling paid off.

We started the race looking to finish in under 60 hours, and we did it. Everyone bagged us for having wooden paddles, but they worked. I ended up getting cranky that I couldn’t eat any food or drink any water that I had to go to the nursing station and got put on a drip. I’m not really sure on what Chris did, but I reckon it was to call Jessie.

Cant wait to do it all over again next year, and look for all those other races that happen.

