

SOLO KAYAKING THE DANUBE 1000km



SUMMER 2024

Imperial College London
Erikas Kymantas



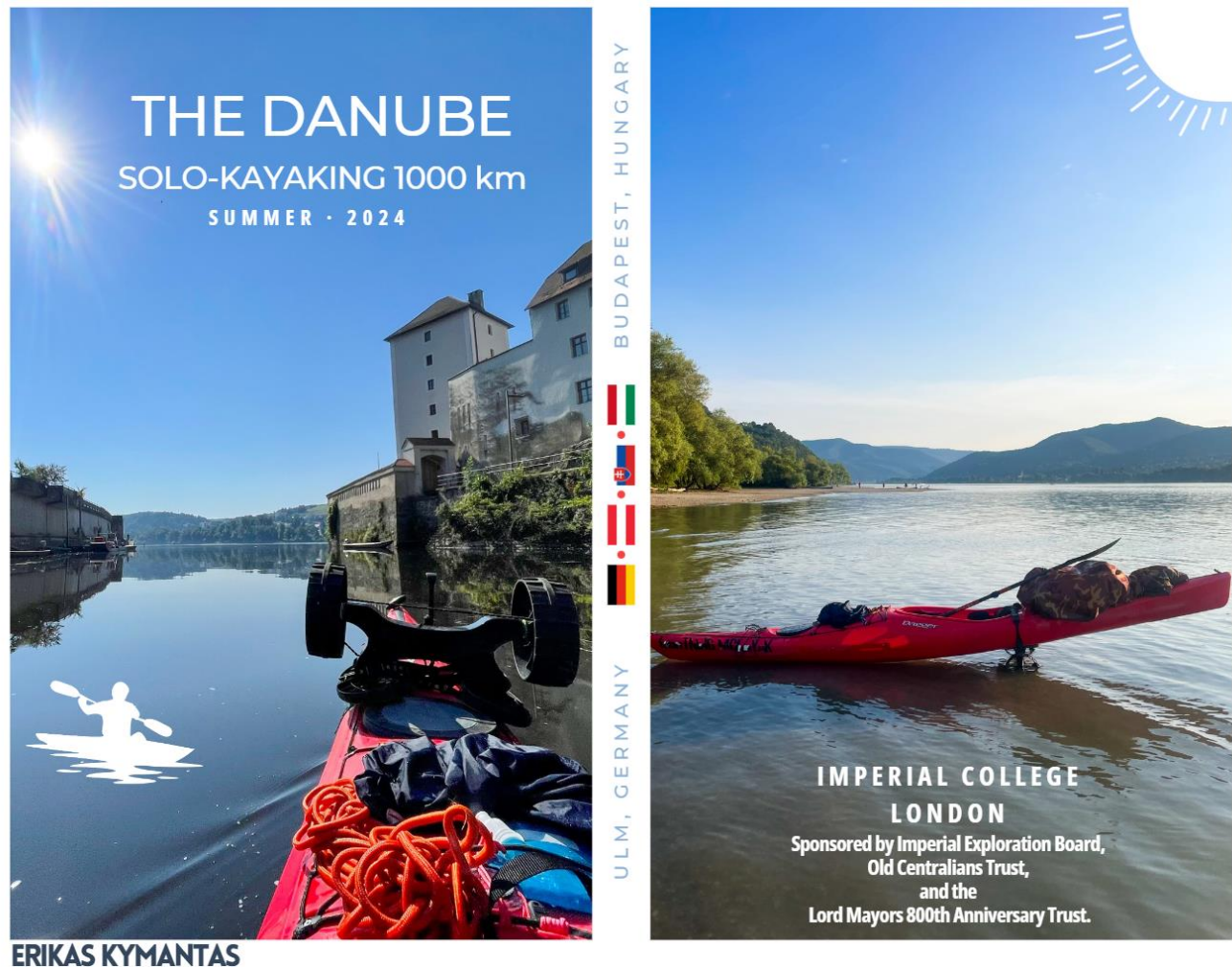


Figure 1 - Front Cover of Photobook/Logbook

***Photobook in progress which will be shared with the Board in due course, will include:
More in depth daily entries & far more photos***

Contents

Expedition Overview.....	5
.....	6
.....	7
Expedition Members	8
Logistic Details.....	9
Environment & Social Impact.....	9
Logbook.....	10
Day 0: Germany: Ulm	10
Day 1: Ulm to Dillingen	11
Day 2: Dillingen.....	11
Day 3: Dillingen to Donauworth	12
Day 4: Donauworth to Neuberg	12
Day 5: Neuberg to Vohburg.....	13
Day 6: Vohburg to Regensburg.....	16
Day 7: Regensburg	17
Day 8: Regensburg to Straubing	17
Day 9: Straubing to Deggendorf	18
Day 10: Deggendorf to Passau.....	19
Day 11: Austria: Passau to Untermuhl.....	22
Day 12: Untermuhl to Linz.....	22
Day 13: Linz to Au	23
Day 14: Au to Marbach	24
Day 15: Marbach to Krems.....	25
Day 16: Krems to Tulln	29
Day 17: Tulln to Vienna	29
Day 18: Vienna.....	31

Day 19: Vienna to Bratislava	31
Day 20: Bratislava to Cunovo Floodplain	32
Day 21: Cunovo Floodplain to Neszmely	37
Day 22: Neszmely to Kisoroszin	38
Day 23: Kisoroszin to Budapest	39
Day 24: Budapest	40
Conclusion	42
Appendix	43
Copy of Risk Assessment	43
Original Proposal	44

Expedition Overview

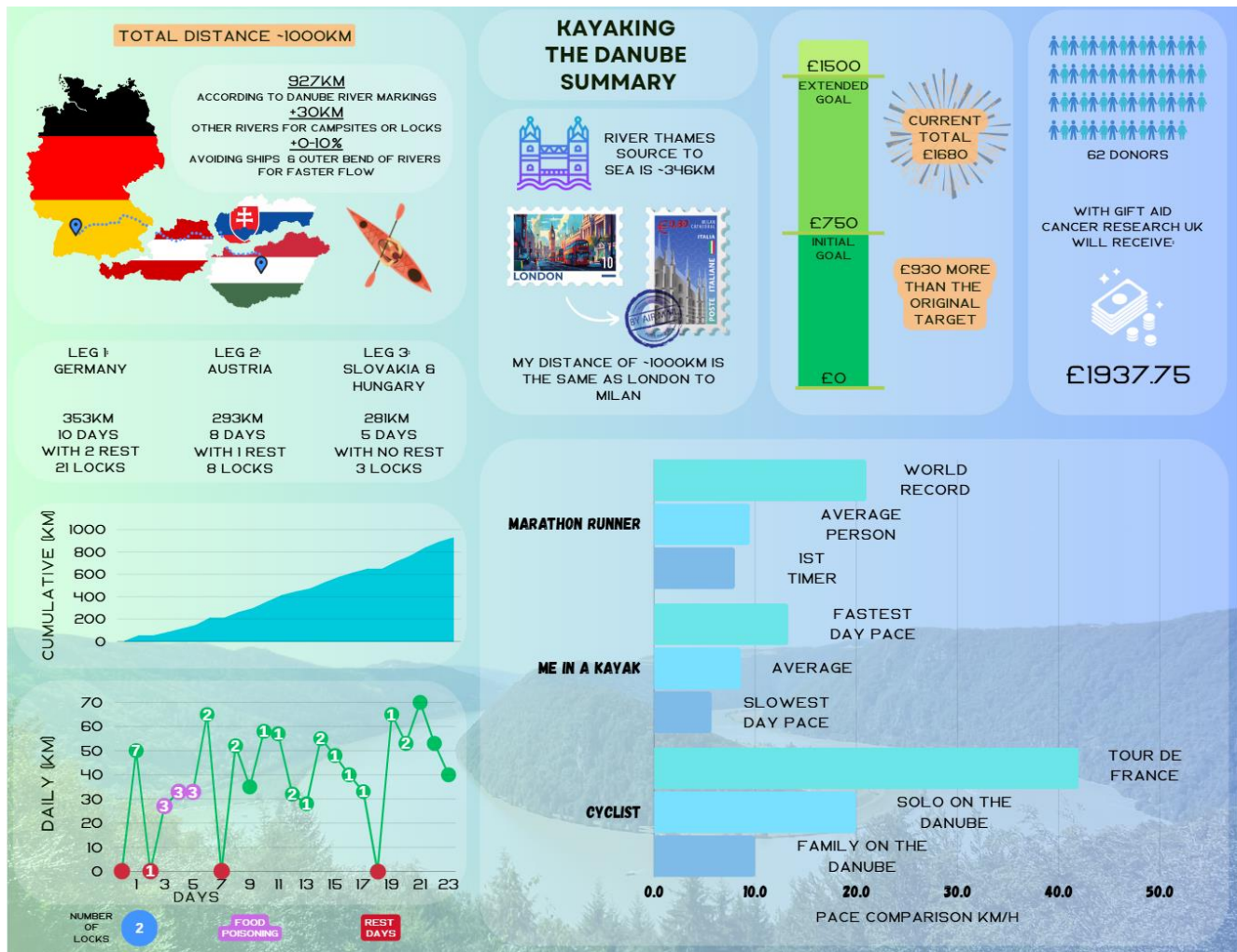


Figure 2 - Expedition Stat pad

The expedition covered an estimated 1000km and raised nearly £2000 pounds in 23 days – as I travelled from Ulm in Germany to Budapest in Hungary. The journey took me east, through Bavaria (Southern Germany) and across the length of northern Austria via Vienna, then to Bratislava and along the Slovakia-Hungary border and finally turning south towards the heart of Hungary, Budapest. With 3 days rest, this endurance challenge saw me tackle 50km a day, with minimal support from the river flow for much of the journey. With an average speed less than the *average* marathon runner, the 50km distance plus a lunch break, locks, camping setup and kayaking logistics saw me on the move and busy around 12 hours a day through the European Summer.

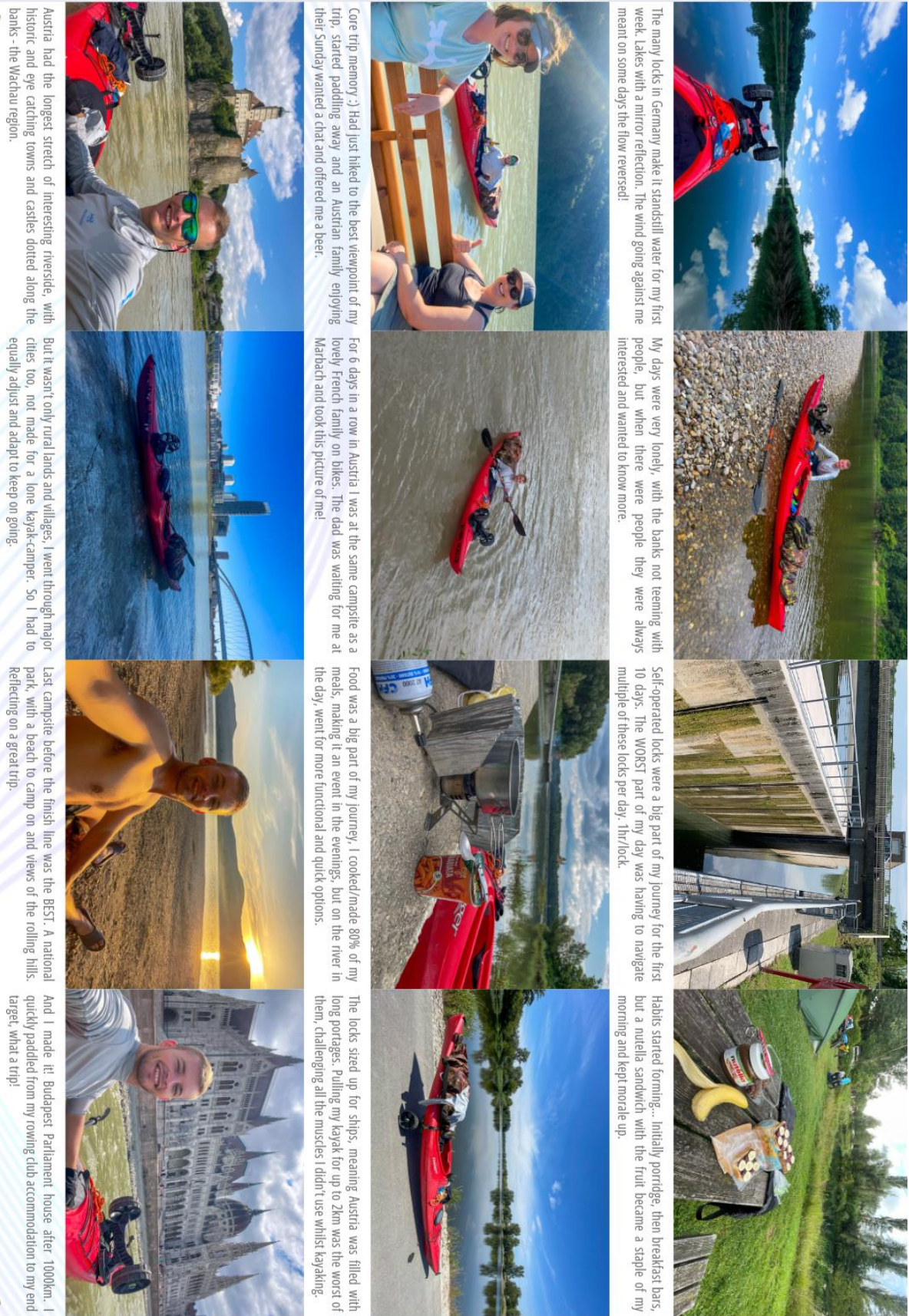


Figure 3 - Expedition in 12 Photos

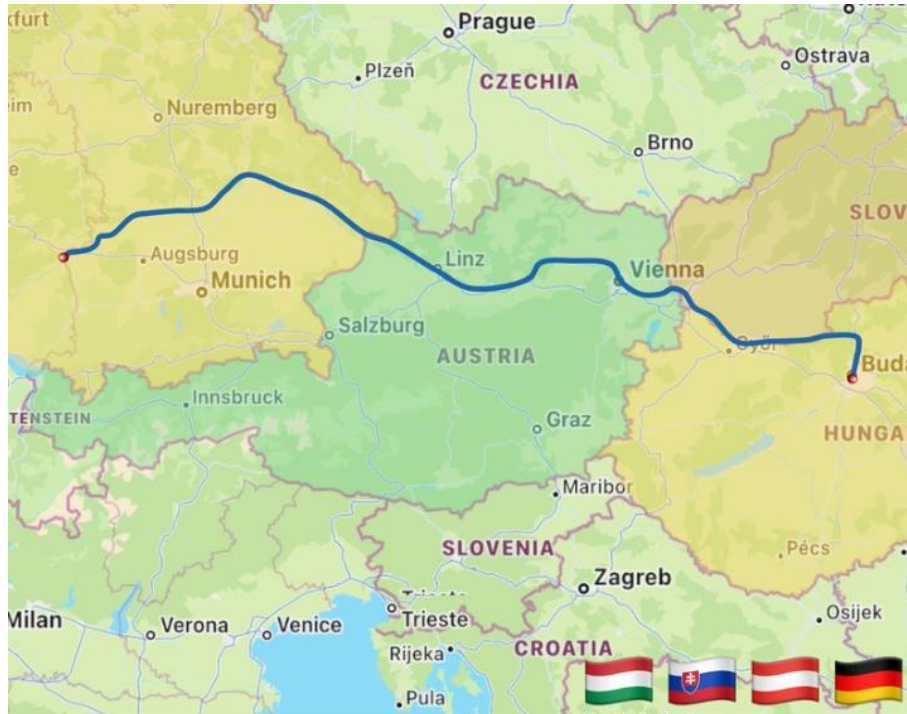


Figure 4 - Map Overview of Travels along the Danube

DAY 0 - GERMANY

Fly from Stansted to Memmingen, train to Ulm. Walk to campsite, accept kayak delivery and then collect paddle from Decathlon. Stock up on food.

DAY 1

Ulm to Dillingen 50km

DAY 2

Day Off

DAY 3

Dillingen to Donauwörth 27km

DAY 4

Donauwörth to Neuburg 33km

DAY 5

Neuburg to Vohburg 33km

DAY 6

Vohburg to Regensburg 65km

DAY 7

Day Off

DAY 8

Regensburg to Straubing 52km

DAY 9

Straubing to Deggendorf 35km

DAY 10

Deggendorf to Passau 58km

DAY 11 AUSTRIA

Passau to Untermühl 57km

DAY 12

Untermühl to Linz 32km

DAY 13

Linz to Au 28km

DAY 14

Au to Marbach 55km

DAY 15

Marbach to Krems 48km

DAY 16

Krems to Tulln 40km

DAY 17

Tulln to Vienna 33km

DAY 18

Day Off

DAY 19 SLOVAKIA

Vienna to Bratislava 65km

DAY 20 HUNGARY

Bratislava to Cunovo Floodplain 53km

DAY 21

Cunovo Floodplain to Neszmely 70km

DAY 22

Neszmely to Kisoroszin 53km

DAY 23

Kisoroszin to Budapest 40km

DAY 24

Paddling around Budapest

DAY 25-31

Having completed ~1000km, some time set to let it soak in by visiting: Budapest, Vienna & Prague.

Figure 5 - Itinerary, including day, place and distance kayaked

Expedition Members

Team Lead:

Erikas Kymantas – Before training started, I had never been in an expedition kayak before, nor been camping for an extended period. This endurance challenge was one which did not involve technical skills on the kayak. The Danube is a navigable river, made for ships and leisure craft and therefore the difficulty here was logistical and physical. The necessary training and preparation occurred, and an expedition kayak rated for the sea was chosen – as such a design has the required storage to live off the water for 3 weeks. Christened ‘Lightning McKayak’, an ode to Disney/Pixar’s Lightning McQueen, following a vote on Instagram from the trip account I have been keeping.

THE TEAM

ERIKAS KYMANTAS

Age: 23

4th Year MEng Aeronautics with Year in Industry

Ex-Junior Tennis Coach & Competitive Swimmer

Trained across 12 months, including:

12 hours of coached sea kayaking in Portsmouth

Pool sessions with ICC at Ethos

25 hours Richmond Canoe Club Training Sessions



LIGHTNING MCKAYAK

Dagger Stratos 14.5L Sea/Tourer/Expedition Kayak Age: 1 month

Overqualified for the river, suited to dealing with multi-day travel and the kit that comes with camping/cooking.

Origin: UK Brand - but shipped from Munich

Logistic Details

One of the key difficulties of this trip, given that the aim was to solo kayak as fast as possible. Flooding the month before had destroyed banks, piers and jetties in Southern Germany, and with limited online information – having back up plans was key. Equally to navigate the locks, Satellite imagery was used. Beyond this, the nature of travelling along the river makes the decision process short, as the way to go is clearly defined.

Environment & Social Impact

The method of transport for this expedition, a solo kayak meant the environmental and social footprint of this journey was very small. The kayak was locally sourced from Germany, with a short transportation from Munich being the worst of the emissions. A plane journey back and forth being the other notable contribution, but with all my possessions on me, an equally negligible outlay given I would be kayak-camping for the next ~3 weeks.

At the end of the trip, I sold my kayak and trolley to two local buyers, meaning no waste or fly tipping of this large ticket items. The paddle was fairly cheap from Decathlon, and I opted for a divisible paddle, the mechanism to lock in place was fairly cheap and I had worn through it. Disposing it was the only option. All other items were taken back with me and can be re-used.

Solo-travelling along a rural highway meant that interactions for much of the day were limited. Rivers in Europe are no longer the high-traffic trading routes they once were. During most days, my stops were in rural locations where I did not necessarily see anyone, a couple of cyclists going past, or a on the weekend a couple of speedboats. At the campsite, the cyclists that are kayaking along the Danube (worth noting most of the journey is not actually on the river edge, so I do not see them) are the main source of interaction. But long days for all, setting up camp and making dinners, meant that only the odd occasion did a conversation last more than 5 minutes. Across the trip, in Germany the large amount of mosquitos plus a surprising amount of rain that only arrived in the late evening, forced people to seek refuge in tents; in Austria the beautiful towns meant I was exploring in the evenings; and then Slovakia/Hungary the cycle route

abandons the campsites of the river meaning I was in very empty campsites with only locals who did not speak much English.

Logbook

Going day by day and scoring the day out of 10 in two ways. The first is the Paddle score, this takes into account, the happiness of the distance covered, the condition of the water i.e. was the flow helping me, stagnant or going against me, and also the views from the water impact the score slightly. Overall day score tries to not factor the paddle score in, but as kayaking is most of my day, it has a slight bearing – but this takes into account more the campsite, the food I had, the people I met, the weather, and any key memories from along the day.

Day 0: Germany: Ulm

Paddle: N/A Overall Day: 9/10

In one line - great city, flight and deliveries all went smoothly – the portion of the day where I was tourist-ing was very sunny and left a really good impression! It was sunny, and humid warm when we landed. The pilot said some sun but then rain in the afternoon and evening. It was clouding over more and more as I travelled by train from Memmingen to Ulm. Rained a little while I made the tent, but then turned for the better and was really sunny. Got some great pictures of Ulm as I went into town to soak in the vibes of the town. Got back to camp to do my chores etc and things I had to do, such as collect my kayak and apply the name to it. Then went around town to collect my paddle from Decathlon and do a food shop, and the rain really started pouring and some thunder too! Then on and off rain for the evening, a couple of thunder rumbles but everyone was enjoying their evening and the town, although small was bustling with people. Maybe it was the earlier good weather or the Donau festival that happens every other year lining the banks with food stalls and activities – but the town was so alive and bustling. After getting back to camp to put back my purchases, I changed my plan to watch the Euros on my phone in my sleeping bag and went into Ulm to watch at a pub, England vs the Netherlands, a great 90th minute winner and I got back to camp later then I would've liked for my first day on the water.

Day 1: Ulm to Dillingen

Paddling: 4/10 Overall Day: 3/10

Paddling was a lot tougher - the locks took way longer than expected. The currents were nonexistent and that wasn't expected. Very late finish, very manic and drained for the day after. Stressed for the first day, and did not get a good night's sleep. Packed up fairly quickly to start kayaking in the morning, but maybe it was the very early start. 8 locks between start and finish. I thought locks were going to be quick once I understood how to work them, and that walking around would be a viable option. Reality, a working lock takes a while for water to fill and then empty, and the locks do not necessarily all have a viable way around it, and the locks themselves do not necessarily work in this more rural stretch of the river that does not see much water-traffic. In summary 1st lock, a local was already there and had called the lock helpline and he came to operate it for us. The next lock I could not operate it, and luckily a worker was there and helped me out. The 3rd lock again had difficulties and had to call for help, the worker from the previous lock was dispatched to come and help! I managed to operate locks 4 and 5. Lock 6 was broken, as the controlling mechanism was not even whirring to life. And equally lock 7 was not budging, and had no service to call, so had to walk around – but there was no actual place to put the boat back in the water on the other side. I started at about 10:30am and stopped at 10pm! Had started to go dark, very close to it being too dark to see anything at all. Phoned ahead to the campsite so I could make 10pm check in. Had to bail from doing the eighth lock, stopped on the “wrong” side with respect to the lock to get to campsite but no way to get the boat out of water! Wasn't going to make it to the check-in, so I moored up the boat in the bushes then ran and left the boat with most the stuff and ran through this forest/park, very dark, with only my torches helping to navigate. Once checked in, I had to go back to collect stuff. Once I got back, made camp, had a shower, water and all the other chores, I went to bed at 2am.

Day 2: Dillingen

Paddling: N/A Overall Day: 2/10

Late morning start following the late time to bed. Resupplied involved a 45-minute walk to get camping gas, at the same time re-stocked on food. Heavy rain in the evening. In

the afternoon/evening sat down for an early dinner by the camping site kitchen – burger and fries with a beer. Long story short, got food poisoning. Suffered all night long.

Day 3: Dillingen to Donauworth

Paddling: 0/10 Overall Day: 2/10

Persevered with a half day paddle - felt awful. Barely a functioning human couldn't eat either so was paddling on empty. Threw up whilst kayaking and quick pitstops on the riverbank for a diarrhea poo. Only positives were once I arrived at camp, a fairly scenic place – lovely woman helped me take out the kayak as it was a two-person job with the ledge present. She was due to cycle to Budapest, likely within the next 7-10 days. Also, that night in the showers/changing room got chatting with a French man who was equally cycling, he was with his wife, and we were just exchanging stories whilst shaving. But even these nice touches couldn't boost this day's score, the pain, hunger and exhaustion from not being able to stomach food was overpowering. I had to persevere if I was to keep to my schedule.

Day 4: Donauworth to Neuberg

Paddling: 1/10 Overall Day: 3/10

Still paddling on empty, as I couldn't stomach any food and had 0 appetite. The uncontrollable and explosive parts of food poisoning reduced slightly. But likewise, an overall tough day when the food intake is not providing the necessary calories to carry on. The last few hours were nice, sun beaming, and good river flow meant that even in my state, I could reduce my paddling effort and get to the destination. Again, the campsite and town were nice and watched the euros as a chill way to unwind that evening – meaning still some positives of the day. The original plan was for me to be here at the end of day 2, but with the locks on day 1 being a much larger time drain – I had taken day 2 as a day to regroup. Then the food poisoning meant instead of going from Dillingen to Neuberg in a day, my weakened state led to a decision to split that journey across two days.

Day 5: Neuberg to Vohburg

Paddling: 3/10 Overall Day: 6/10

On the road to recovery, the last two days both featured a vomit on the river. Still not a full day's paddle distance due to low energy, but also no convenient location to camp. In my current state overexerting beyond 50km with the slow water conditions – which stem from the regular locking of the river – was not an option. But trying proper food, albeit small portions, gave me some strength to kayak 3 days in a row in quite poor health. Kayaking through Ingolstadt, rescue helicopters and boats were out in full force looking for someone. A very shouty German patrol officer asked me if I had seen anything, since I did not speak German, I elongated the conversation by asking them to say it in English, this led to them approaching with their speedboat and splashing me in the process, which was not what I signed up too. Free campsite, nice touch, although flooded with sand from last month's very heavy rain which was on the news – killing a few people across Southern Germany. Getting to camp fairly late meant the prime real estate options had been taken, but still got into a decent place and set up camp. A delicious ice cream doing some heavy lifting of this score, earlier in the day I had my first meat – managing to keep it down and rewarding myself for not stopping kayaking whilst battling with the longer term effects of food poisoning – the ice cream was well deserved as I watched the sunset. Thunderstorms that night and very heavy rain kept me up, the sounds were deafening, a quick look at my kayak to make sure everything was withstanding the barrage of water meant I got soaked. The last few days have been very humid, with a constant switching of heat and thunder, so far, the rain being isolated to the evenings and the nights. Good timing for me, as I am not sure I could've handled a wet day of kayaking whilst already battling so much, equally these few days have had this high heat, but not the blazing sun I had on day one – another thing I was grateful for.



Figure 6 - Stillness of the water on day 1. The locks every 2-5km on this stretch basically convert the river into a series of lakes. Not in the program, so an unwanted surprise. The mirror reflection was pretty cool when the sky was clear for the first few hours.



Figure 7 – Suffering from the food poisoning. This is the morning after my second day of paddling, which was the first day of paddling whilst intensely in pain from the food poisoning. My immune system gave me, and in line with eh sickness, my whole forehead broke out in a mix of hives/acne. Tough start



Figure 8 - Camp set up. Tent up, and my kayak nearby, overnight I cover it in the army camo kayak-tarp to protect against the elements and to limit any opportunistic thieves. Featuring the sandy campsite that was flooded last month in Vohburg.



Figure 9 - View from getting out just before a lock to operate it

Day 6: Vohburg to Regensburg

Paddling: 9/10 Overall Day: 9.5/10

River flow was strong for a good portion - solid 65km day, which really made me forget about my doubts of sticking to schedule given the fact I was currently behind where I wanted to be. I was unsure if the locks/lake effect that delayed me on day one, would be something that might happen again – the river flow conditions were very different to what I had imagined. A day or two being lost to food poisoning took up the contingency in my plan – not the end of the World but very early to use that quota up. Today I could feel the water pushing me along, thunderstorm during the night with heavy rain fall must've helped, or maybe this stretch of the river was benefiting from the fewer locks in this region. I powered along. Lovely lunch stops at Weltenburg abbey, 2 guys I met at Vohburg (father/son from Netherlands) left before me, but I must have overtaken them during the morning, as 1 minute out from Weltenburg, we were both heading into the monastery area. So, for the first time, I was faster than cyclists. Very rural in this part of Germany and cliffs were beginning to appear instead of really flat lands with forests either side. So, I guess the cycle route was less direct and the flow accelerated me. Kayaking away from my lunch stop, cool gorges made for a nice change, my whole journey so far had been perpetuated by flatland forests, ugly industrial plants and locks and then the odd town with no 'riverside' development, so there was nothing of note to see from my kayak. Passing the gorges that changed as I arrived at Kelheim, the major shipping lane that connects to the Rhine, Netherlands canals and North Sea joined onto my Danube River – changing the river dynamics completely. Increased signage, and rivers and bridges big enough for large ships to navigate the past. The town hall perched atop the hill looked cool. I was approaching Bad Abbach, a complicated series of channels that had to be selected by boat size. Kayaks were forced down the longest route, but instead of a self-operated lock, which have been the thorn in my side, a new mechanism existed, a boat slide. Not very exciting, but after the struggles and the anger I have now directed at those self-operated locks, this was the most exciting engineering feat I had witnessed on the river. Instead of an hour of self-operation of a lock solo, this slide could easily be done in 30 seconds. Being the first, however, I still had to get out to check that it was safe and understood exactly what I would be doing. This put me ahead by 40 minutes, and I already the good flow in the morning allowed me to take a longer lunch break - so my mood was high. The sun was still blazing but an hour later the change

was sudden, clouds rolled in, and a thunderstorm caught me out 30 minutes from my destination. Had to abandon the kayak, and quickly hop out and take refuge under a railway bridge. Some cyclists equally did the same. Overall great day, and even this didn't overly dampen my spirits.

Day 7: Regensburg

Paddling: N/A Overall Day: 7.5/10

The fatigue from the previous days was catching up. I think if it was not for the food poisoning I could've pressed on, but equally I had seen from my research that Regensburg was meant to be a very picturesque town and the fact that the campsite was quite far away from the center, I did not manage to explore the night before. I took a day off, cleaned the boat, did chores and re-applied the lettering to my kayak, so not a very glamorous or relaxing morning on this rest day. Everything was soaked from the day before, and today was cloudy – but a few chairs borrowed from the clubhouse meant I could set things to air-dry. Walked around the beautiful town, and headed towards an internet café, where I spent 2.5 hours planning out Austria – a tiring but obviously needed task. I had planned out Germany, plans A, B, C and so on. With some back up locations, some places to see and a plan for every lock and exit point that I may need. With that I also planned how long things would take, I did not look much further ahead, as there were things I did not know, and only experiences would help me plan. With Austria there were stretches of river that had many options dotted near each other, and equally some that were at the very limit of what I thought I could do. My experiences so far, helped me scope that out and GPS scouting on a computer a lot easier than using my phone. Then walked to a place for dinner - had a drink and updated my Instagram, equally hosted an ask me anything, where a few of my friends and people following my journey sent in some questions that I answered whilst having a few drinks. Solid day, but full and tiring, not exactly rest day.

Day 8: Regensburg to Straubing

Paddling: 4/10 Overall Day: 6/10

Shorter distance than day before, but much tougher paddle. Currents against me for large portion, also a tough one to take when you are paddling as hard as you can, and

the kilometres aren't dropping as they should. Passing Kelheim the river is now deeper and wider, the surface water is dictated by the wind, and that was against me for a lot of the day. The surprising fact was that, in places if I stopped paddling, the river flow was not pushing me along, but actually pushing me backwards. I started the day with a 5% chance in mind of pushing along towards Deggendorf, but 52km today was enough, the conditions were much worse than my Vohburg to Regensburg leg. Even with an early start this took me to near sunset. I arrived at the exit point only to see a massive hill. I leave the boat moored, and go investigate, I have to climb over this hill to get to Straubing Kanu club. Hills and expedition kayaks do not mix, this climb was sharp – about 30 steps and not in a gradual way – carrying it solo with all the kit was not possible. As I pay for my campsite, I ask if someone is available to help, luckily the woman running the campsite puts her husband to work and he helps me. To show the toughness, he has to take 2 breaks to get it up and over the hill. This day's paddle was not overly exciting, with the same view present, but now with the wider river slightly less interesting. Calm water now takes up more of the view, the large distance to the trees makes them appear as a small line of black/green from the sun contrast and the sky now a massive portion of the vista. The act of kindness from the campsite owner, getting to chat to a guy from Birmingham doing the Danube cycle, and his interest in my journey was a nice chat before bed and then also I coked up chicken and veg skewers to make the best dinner so far – adding some excitement to the day.

Day 9: Straubing to Deggendorf

Paddling: 4/10 Overall Day: 8.5/10

Half a day paddle was on the cards, as no convenient campsite existed otherwise. This is the only difficulty in logistic planning, as the state of the locks are unknown and with few exit points, the distances can write themselves. Tough paddle though, currents against me again, so my mental state which may have been relaxed thinking that it was easy was not ready for the challenge of today. Got in only around 3 or 4 pm and was exhausted at that! Setup tent and had a very early dinner, of loaded nachos, which featured the last of my remaining veg and some cheese, I then laid on the grass and fell asleep. The exertions of two days of paddling against the wind, and the lull after some food, meant I just passed out on the grass – not even in my tent. Woke up slightly dazed, only about half an hour nap, I then walked to update my food storage, and it was along a very

beautiful riverside. I took the moment of sun, very nice location and a 'beach' bar sun lounge and had an ice cream to cap off the day.

Day 10: Deggendorf to Passau

Paddling: 7/10 Overall Day: 8/10

Big distance today ~60km. First 30km really good, powering along. Basic sandwich for lunch, and a cloudy day so got a little cold at lunch, as from the kayaking the odd spray and getting myself wet as I try power through is inevitable. Being dressed for the warmer weather, when the air temperature drops, the sun disappears, and the wind picks up – the chill is noticeable but manageable when I stop moving for my lunch. Then currents turned against me around 35km, became an “uphill” slog and really had to power to get any distance, so progress slowed. Sun came out thankfully, and Passau looked great from the river, smooth lock earlier as well. The addition of the big shipping boats, meant that in most places now, locks were not self-operating – they were now only for ships, and for kayaks the odd boat slide existed but in most cases I had to wheel my kayak around. Apparently joining a ship is not forbidden, but I see about 3 boats a day so the timing aspect could be difficult, and my forum research meant it's at the discretion of the lock controller and the experience can be made worse by uncooperative ships/boats – so I never actually took that chance, as I was fit enough to go around a lock faster than going through it. I kayaked into camp by turning off the river Danube and onto one that feeds into it. It took me right to the campsite where I saw a busy and bustling scene. The weekend now in Germany, so a fair few locals, the University nearby gives the town a mix of old architecture, but the wants of the new generation and this campsite had an Italian pizza restaurant on site. Solid end to Germany. Pizza not great, but that campsite surrounding was doing some heavy lifting. After the long day kayaking, and needing to press on the next day, I had no time to go and explore Passau which was a little walk from where I have pitched up.



Figure 10 - Selfie outside Weltenburg Abbey, a beer brewing monastery.



Figure 11 - Day off in Regensburg to do some chores and to resupply.



Figure 12 - The river significantly wider now post Kelheim - but still as stagnant



Figure 13 - Arriving in Passau, a stopping point for the big river cruise ships I share the river with

Day 11: Austria: Passau to Untermuhl

Paddling: 6/10 Overall Day: 9/10

Very nice morning in Passau, first 10km very fast as 3 rivers – the Danube, Ilz and Inn all join but lock Jochenstein was approaching and puts a very sharp end to those great flow conditions. I was now kayaking on the Austrian German border, and the lock represents me fully entering Austria. Very tough paddle from 10km-40km, I was looking forward to a key viewpoint I had earmarked, but the distance was going down so slowly – really makes it a difficult mental challenge as I exert myself to get more distance but then lose focus and zone out from the semi-endless monotony. It was the weekend and the speedboats whizzing past meant that the choppy waters broke up any rhythm I had and equally disturbs the water in an unnatural way. I finally reached it and hopped out at Schlögen for a hike to the viewpoint - very worth it, very tiring but it was using my legs and stamina which is not what my kayaking was testing so much. Started going again, and a lovely Austrian family asked me where I was going, they were boating in circles for fun. Second time they came offered me a beer and we had a longer conversation – great moment. Kept on pushing till 57km, less choppy now at least so not as much of a battle but still not assisting me, powered through till the exit at around 7:45pm. The actual paddle conditions were not great, but the views of the hills were awesome, equally the weather and the 2 core experiences of free beer and the viewpoint boost the overall day to one of the better ones. The late arrival meant that taking a shower and having dinner pushed me into the late evening – but as I was preparing my meal a French man approached me, he said that he saw me in Passau – once I saw his two sons, I recognised them as we were all huddled by the charging sockets in Passau. We got to conversing about the trips we were both taking, and I was surprised that I kept pace with cyclists, but they were a family not using the better touring bikes I see many who attempt this use. They were using foldable bikes which they came with by train from France to the very source of the Danube, they were also taking nice lunch breaks and having a lovely family time out. At this point I did not know that we would be meeting each other at campsites for the next 4 days!

Day 12: Untermuhl to Linz

Paddling: 5/10 Overall Day: 6/10

Woke up early ready to attack a 60km day, with no ramp only a pier at the campsite, it was an ordeal trying to get it in the water. The morning consists of packing up the tent, packing up the boat and having breakfast, and with the difficulty getting in the water I started kayaking at the fairly early time of 9. Then as soon as I started, felt so fatigued and stiff, and saw that it was going to be a tough day. First lock after 30 min, trying to get back in the boat, out of nowhere big waves came thrashed the boat, got everything wet including my seat, big mood killer. Feeling the tiredness and knowing that my day off was planned for Vienna, the first stint of slow water again made my decision to cut the distance down and stop early at Linz to have time to resupply with food. I continued to the next lock and did it in good time to be fair, at 20 km, 2 locks and lunch was complete in 4.5 hours. I aim for 10km in an hour, a lock with break to be an hour and lunch to be 30-60 minute depending on how warm it is to be stagnant. But decision to cut day short was already made. Mentally not in the state to go till 8pm if the water continued to be slow, and equally would be running low on food. Slow paddle to Linz, 32km done and boat out of the water and pulled to camp by 3. Food shop, and cash withdrawal the chores I could do with my newfound time. Linz giving weird vibes, a lot of graffiti, things don't seem to be very pedestrianised/organised, it had an unwelcoming feeling, not quite the perks of the major cities and not the charm of a smaller town.

Day 13: Linz to Au

Paddling: 5/10 Overall Day: 6/10

Slow morning as I was in no rush. With yesterday's decision to do a half-distance, that impacted today's plans. No other campsite made sense, so completing yesterday's plans was on the agenda. As I speak to Cedric (French family I previously mentioned), they had the same idea – restocked with some food in Linz and a shorter cycle to Au where they plan to rest up. Nutella banana and grapes on bread becoming a favourite for breakfast. The water was fast to begin with and then slowed, as the river got wider. Had a lock to deal with, and the signage was bad, and I was tired probably, walked the wrong way for a good kilometre before realising the mistake, then I had to walk back which was so frustrating. The rest of the paddle was uneventful, a mere 28km today. The campsite very expensive but quite nice and made more for glamping with huts etc. Chores and admin the call for the long evening ahead.

Day 14: Au to Marbach

Paddling: 6/10 Overall Day: 6/10

First kilometres were a tough paddle, but soldiered through I knew it was a long distance today and 2 locks that I was slightly worried about. From the evening before and my initial planning, I scout ahead all the exit points and locks via satellite imagery, you can tell a lot from the bird's eye view, pairing that with a blogged journey I can mentally prepare for what lies ahead. There is no avoiding it however, so it's just a sense of inevitability of what is to come. The 1st lock seems to show a very long walk and a double portage – which is very annoying but not an impossible task, the trees somewhat obscure the path so its hard to tell exactly where I'll need to get out. The 2nd lock, I can see that there is no ramp or stepped approach to get out, and equally struggle to see a ramp to get back into the water. The bloggers are a 2-person team with an inflatable kayak, they are a lot more flexible when it comes to getting in and out the water, so they gloss over the details but re-affirm that this is the only lock with only a pier to stop at. Potentially a massive obstacle for me. The 1st lock was very early in the day, had to go into an old Danube River. Very stagnant water added a few kilometres to my journey and was very, very slow – the effect of slow water is as much mental as it is physical. Mentally it saps the motivation and energy as no matter how good you are feeling, the progress slows down significantly. Physically its painful as I begin to compensate, equally any sort of wind against me, increases the effort expelled 10-fold and there is no preparation or planning that can be done. Once past the lock the speed really picked up. Today was a rainy day, 2 times it rained whilst kayaking but some pretty sights along the way and had my blue coat and poncho to hand so wasn't too affected. Got to the second lock quickly, the 30km flew by as I got some good speed and was at the 10km an hour average, something I aim for but rarely hit since I take breaks every hour in the boat to re-assess progress, the maps or take on food/water. The Ybbs lock was the one I was afraid of. No ramp, only pier and then steps the other side, no cycle route as private land, meant no passersby which I was not prepared for. Luckily there were workers and using google translate I told them what I needed, and they helped! Very long though as I couldn't rush them, and they were not as incentivised as myself to get this done quickly. The last 10km, I had the wind against me, and the weather turned for the worst again. The temperatures dropped, wind rose, and the clouds rolled in. To my surprise Cedric

and his son Timothee were waving at me – from our morning conversation it seemed like they were going to push on further and we were going to part ways. They called over that there was no ramp, but a marina further along behind the campsite, which I planned to use, they met me and helped me out the water. But before that, I gave Timothee a chance to paddle around the marina a little bit. Cedric told me that there was a small landslide that closed the road in one of the towns, they had to ferry across to the other side and were delayed by 60-90 minutes so they re-adjusted and ended up at the same campsite as me again! I managed to set up tent and have a warm shower to boost the mood, but whilst I was doing that, the rain arrived. Rain in the evening wasn't very convenient and meant I didn't cook up a dinner, the food reserves were low otherwise, so it was loaded nachos – but not heated up nor cooked veg. A very nutrition-less meal and I could feel the hunger as I went to bed.

Day 15: Marbach to Krems

Paddling: 8/10 Overall Day: 9/10

Not the most ambitious of days but I did the 48 kilometres quickly and navigated the 1 lock semi well. I was a little wet just from paddling and the morning wasn't warm and mainly cloudy. So, I took off my top to dry on the kayak while I wheeled it. This was a double lock, and I read up if you have your own wheels, it is easier to walk the 1.5km than get out twice. After navigating my first few double-locks by kayaking the distance between it, I felt that there was a more efficient way – equally the physical impact of paddling harder while the option to wheel existed was tempting. Also, as a nice change of pace. Had lunch and I was about to leave before I realized I didn't have my top, must've flown off the back of the kayak! I ran back and yes, 1km away it was there on the floor. Lucky! Little bit of a sweat on, I returned to my kayak and started paddling away with a little bit of self-loathing at ruining the bliss of the lunch break. The speed was good post lock and got to the marina near the campsite in good time. This campsite was not on the water but was adjacent to where the boats docked – although mooring kayaks is not allowed and was shown with a clear kayak sign with a cross through it, exiting the water quickly did not seem to bother anyone so I just kept my head down and get on with my business. Decided I wanted to walk around Krems, since paddling into camp, a few nice spires were visible and indicated that this was a bigger town than expected, so I updated my food stocks. Krems was beautiful, nice churches and old

streets and a few nice restaurants and bars which I didn't really want to afford, nor was I dressed the part. Walked around and stopped for noodles as the goulash tinned soup I had when I made camp at 5 wasn't enough. Got back to my campsite and did some phone-based chores. But overall, a great day, the paddling was not too tough, the views were good and made it in good time to enjoy an evening of wandering around a great town.



Figure 14 - After hike to a viewpoint at Schlögen Loop - a worthy detour even if I was pressed for time.



Figure 15 - With the small distances Between Untermuhl, Linz and Au, more time to enjoy my meals



Figure 16 - Campsite at Au, one of the fancier ones I have stayed at. Cloudy days, but the sky's clear for the evening



Figure 17 - The worst lock of them all, only a pier to get out with a 30-50kg loaded kayak. Refuelling to get the energy to take this on.



Figure 18 - Cedric taking this picture as I arrive to camp at Marbach

Day 16: Krems to Tulln

Paddling: 5/10 Overall Day: 7.5/10

Woke up and had a later kayak start, as I was posting my kayak for sale and doing some admin tasks that I procrastinated from for the last two days. Equally heading to Vienna was a stretch too far, so Tulln was a short distance away and did not impose many time constraints on me. After chatting to Cedric, it seemed like today would be the day that we parted, they were scouting a cycle-friendly campsite much closer to Vienna after a few bad reviews seen on Tulln – which I equally saw, but I had no flexibility to avoid. They had a similar plan to stay and rest in Vienna – with their bikes, the family tend to find good spots to rest during the days and only take bigger breaks in the major cities – potentially staying in Vienna for a couple days. I meanwhile would travel less today, leaving a near full days distance to Vienna the day after, and then reward myself with a day off. A very tough paddle today, water standstill and wasn't enjoying it as much today and in comparison, to last few days the sights on the water weren't as interesting. I had gone through the Wachau region – a known area of protected natural beauty, which sets the bar pretty high. Long walk for portage as well today, meant there were no obvious highlights from the today, meaning it was going to be a 5 or 6 out of 10 days. Until the great news I got whilst checking into the campsite, free water park included, went to swim in the lake and relax on the grass/beach and the sun came out and I caught the last few rays as I dried off. The campsite ok, slightly off vibe but squeezed in on a Friday afternoon peak. And I mean squeezed, very few places for tents to pitch, and the grass left was sandy, very hard, and a lot was unusable since tree roots were poking out. Nevertheless, a water park makes up for a lot, at least for me, nice way to unwind. Only other sour note, it was not the most exciting dinner since my chicken went off, leaving me with fairly plain noodles and sweetcorn for dinner.

Day 17: Tulln to Vienna

Paddling: 4/10 Overall Day: 8/10

Was expecting a very quick day today. Short distance about 33km, but the water speed was non-existent. One of the slowest days yet, so was a tough paddle. Speedboats made it choppy too. Had 1 lock and it was another two part-er. The walk around was so long, luckily mainly in the shade, today was boiling. My trip in general had seen favourable

weather, no intense heatwaves but equally not supremely cold, from what I expected looking at averages, I was experiencing a few degrees cooler weather most days – which helps when the plan is to exert yourself to the max. Today however saw heatwave warning get issued in Vienna, and I was really feeling it as I wheeled my kayak. Since I started at 10 and expected to finish at 2 thought I would have lunch after. At the lock had some snacks, was busy with people enjoying the great weekend weather. The ramp into the water was filled with mud and sludge, I tried wheeling my kayak into the water firstly pulling from the side so I wouldn't walk through mud. Mud was so sticky that it clogged up the wheels, ripped the two pieces apart which is really hard to do, and off the boat! The amount of energy needed to pull through the mud, lift the boat off and onto the wheels within this muddy nightmare, in the heat was excessive and I had to take a breather. I then rigged the kayak with no wheels through the mud to try and glide through. I was so close to not being strong enough to do that but luckily got into the water all good. Then spent ages cleaning the wheels and myself to avoid getting too much mud into the boat before setting off. I now was targeting 3-4pm. The rowing club was actually closer than I thought so made it there 3:15 and waited for Nick. I met Nick at a European Space Agency workshop, and after posting my journey and plans on Instagram he offered to house me and meet me along my way. Thankfully he was so nice and met me there at the club at the very edge of town. It was a pier so I needed the help, I was told by the club that there would be a ramp, but I think certain things got lost in translation. It was so hot that day! Sweating from pulling the kayak up and then unpacking it as I left it at the rowing club left me dripping. I had organised to leave it at this club in their garden, slightly apprehensive but covering it in my army camo and sticking it near the bushes meant it was hardly noticeable at a fleeting glance. Travelled an hour to get to his place as the club was basically outside Vienna. Dropped bags and quickly went to get camping gas and do a food shop before shops closed, it was a Saturday, so the chances of me doing any of this on a Sunday were very slim according to Nick. Very hectic and hot but all good, everything achieved and a weight off my mind. Dinner time, and we went out for pizza, and met his girlfriend there, was a really nice meal and time with practically two strangers. Kayaking was a 4/10, with the water conditions, and the muddy ramp really putting a dampener on a day that I could've made more of on the water, plus a busy chore evening left me tired. But the shorter day, nice

weather, successful evening, great dinner and sleeping on a sofa for change was very nice and meant an overall good day.

Day 18: Vienna

Paddling: N/A Overall Day: 8/10

Much cooler and even raining in the morning, works for me as we agreed to sleep in and have a slow morning. The intense heat just lifted out of nowhere, and it's something that I could tell across the next few days of paddling, that the humidity I had felt over the past 2 and a bit weeks had disappeared. Nick made breakfast which was very nice. I was doing emails, Instagram work and planning the route to the finish. Always a time-consuming job that eats up the day. But by 2 I was done, and it had stopped raining. We went to tour the city and gradually the weather got sunnier and sunnier. It was always warm and saw so many cool things and excited to come back in just over a week post expedition to see more of it. Chatting with Nick was great, a quick McDonalds for lunch and then with the whole touring we were out until like 7. Got home, carried on some laptop work, Nick had 3D printed a mini kayak which was very cool. Late, late dinner, that Nick made while I was trying to make Instagram videos and some small things on Canva. In general, went to bed way too late but I was working away and quite content. Day out exploring was a 9.5/10, really nice to spend time not by myself, but all that phone and computer work did drag a little, so as normal the rest days do not feel totally reviving.

Day 19: Vienna to Bratislava

Paddling: 9/10 Overall Day: 9/10

Anxiously was waiting to see my boat once I woke up, have not left it this far from me and for this amount of time yet. An hours journey ahead, but first Nick again cooked up breakfast and then we were off. Him to his university lab and me to my boat. Got there at 8:50, and began to pack everything back, and wheel it to the pier. It had a roller at the end so putting in the water was easy alone and had help from a stranger bringing down the stairs. Set off ahead of 10am which was the target and began to kayak 10ish km to the lock. It was not as stagnant but still not great. Paddled hard as I hoped the other side would be easier, and knew I had a big 65km day ahead. Got to and through the lock in

just under 2 hours so was ahead/on time. And then after the water was really helping me along, was doing some of my fastest 10km splits so far, so this boosted morale no end. After a good day's break, and now this, felt very happy and started to let myself think that I could have time to wander around Bratislava in the light too. I was way ahead of schedule by lunch, about an hour. I had a longer lunch as once I started, I got lazy on sandy beach so just tanned and laid down, enjoying the moment. Expecting a 6:30-7finish, I again made-up time even with some river chilling and finished an hour ahead, at 5:30, and wheeled to the club by 6pm. Not an official campsite, but I messaged ahead, and they agreed to let me stay. It wasn't as easy to get in, had to wait for someone who knew what was happening but after a great conversation with a hydraulic engineer who lived in London on Erasmus for 3 months in 1993, he pointed out the best ways through the next two locks which was actually something I was still debating as the blogs and satellite imagery were outdated and contradicting each other. So, I was all setup and heading into town at 6:45pm. Enjoyed Bratislava by walking fully around the town (minus up the castle hill) through the old streets, very busy with locals and tourists but a nice small capital city and sat down for dinner at 8 at a not so touristy place I had recommended by a friend. Had pierogi, strudel and a beer for 13 pounds, and sat there a while, texting and doing some of my social media related chores. Then I started to head back at 9:15, and a supermarket was still open, the Germans and Austrians could never – so genuinely was a surprise, so I got biscuits, a sandwich for lunch the next day and more bananas. And was back at the campsite at 10.

Day 20: Bratislava to Cunovo Floodplain

Paddling: 7/10 Overall Day: 6/10

52km 2 locks, went from busy Bratislava to a slightly used shipping lane which then split off. No ships through the floodplains, eerily quiet. So, few people too, neither a good nor bad thing. The distance was falling away, not quite to the 1-hour pace but the 2 locks were very quick and easy. Even had time to film a butterfly. The 1st lock right by a modern art museum - a very isolated place for it next to a water sports centre which actually make sense. The second had a lock to the right and a weir to the left to portage. The weird distance was very hard to judge by sight, a lock with a waterworks is this towering gate almost, the weir is just a drop. Looks like a horizon line for so long, and you get so close. Unaware you can easily take this route keep right and then shit yourself

and get hurt. Water very slow coming to the weir, so you'd be safe in summer to paddle back. I knew it was on the left, and very close to the weir, Germany and Austria could never have this with no signs. Also, my talk with the engineer at Bratislava, also helped me know how to tackle the two weird locks of the day. Very short walk and had food and the shipping canal 2 minutes away on foot. Quickly stepped over and saw the mammoth width of the lake at the beginning of the channel, controlling the water no doubt and adjusting size depending on seasons. The floodplains sort of hypnotised me, all the same with some twist and turns, kind of bored me into autopilot. The campsite I knew wasn't on the river, either a paddle or a walk away. The weir connecting the two made getting to the adjacent ramp a very big effort at the end of the day. I chose to walk and that was a mistake, very difficult on gravel/stone road. Very rural place, not that many houses, no paved roads... and not many people. The campsite though was buzzing, some kind of school group, a lot of adults, some with the school, and some separate. Manager was quite rude (from being overworked, tired and not enjoying the job probably). But I set up all good and had a fairly seamless end to the day. But the night was so cold, the temperature drop was instant, my kit list featured minimal warmer clothing as I knew that overheating was the likelier problem as well as storage in my kayak. This was an anomaly from the trip which was a good thing.



Figure 19 - Tulln Marina, the exit point of the day



Figure 20 - Lunch stop, nice quiet stopover between Vienna and Bratislava



Figure 21 - Nighttime walks in Bratislava.



Figure 22 - Exit point at Cunovo floodplains - up against the weir.



Figure 23 - Cunovo floodplains

Day 21: Cunovo Floodplain to Neszmely

Paddling: 7.5/10 Overall Day: 6/10

70km day, the big one - very big effort. Woke up pretty on time, slept well. Got everything ready, including more time to try and find buyers for the boat and wheels as well as figure out campsites as Hungarian websites rarely in English, and Slovakian waterside campsites rare - more of a task. Left at 9:30, avoided the long walk by “breaking” into a water control facility which very much looked like a single shed so not sure what they are doing. And the lock was a simple gate, and a metal wire loosely wrapped through two holes of either gate. They had a ramp so justified break in. 9:50 ish started to paddle, water ever so slightly against me and satellite imagery showed one part with a lot of trees in the water and only a narrow way through - looked bigger in real life so maybe the lake ever so slightly fuller than when the imagery was taken. Kayaked to the weir, not really an exit ramp - I examined the day before more like a worn down muddy stoney path. With the entrance ramp on the other side a nice, paved slab. The day finally began at 10:35. Quite late for a 70km paddle, add on 1 hour for lunch and 30 min for breaks looking at a 7pm finish. I paddled very hard that day, determined and consistently pushing. Paddled the first 25km for my lunch break on time without any short breaks so I was within the 10km per hour speed. Gonyu had lunch. Then the push to Komárom/Komarno, started to get tougher, fatigue but mainly wind going against me and boat traffic making it choppy disrupting any rhythm. Another 20km to go and I had tried emailing and calling to ask about late check in - but all outdated info so nothing was sending – seemingly out of business. Go to camp ramp at 7:30! Not too bad, still had time to do my evening routine. Campsite was a ghost town, had a marina with boats, even had kayaks left on the side of the ramp. Campsite was large, one of the largest so far, loads of plots for caravans and some permanent houses to rent or own. But the vibe was off. Quiet, and empty for a beautiful day and even 10 minutes upstream I passed people fishing, out on boats enjoying the weather so there are people in the distance. All the caravan slots empty, not a single tent, the facilities are very large and empty and in disrepair - most the stalls are locked to not be used. All looks a little rundown. The housing empty. I walk to reception, pass unfinished structures which have been overtaken by nature. The reception locked, restaurant closed and looks like it hasn't been maintained in years. All the numbers and emails list on the door are invalid or inboxes are full. A car drives up, finally life! I ask if they know what's going on here. They

say they are waiting for someone with a card to drive in and they are tailgating them in - and pay tomorrow. The campsite so big, they both drive to completely the opposite end not to be seen. I setup tent and dread the feeling of being out of place and unsure about my surroundings. Such a large place, and I can see no-one. I eat dinner, setup camp and a cyclist entered, and he also warily came up to me and ask what's going on? We very much agree on the vibe, he even says it's like 'The Shining' or the location any generic woods-based horror might be set, and out of 100+ plots - we agree to share a plot for herd mentality safety.

Day 22: Neszmely to Kisoroszin

Paddling: 8/10 Overall Day: 8/10

Paddle was 55ish km. Water now never stagnant. Strong start I got to Esztergom which was 25km on schedule, stopped for lunch and I could see rain coming - luckily gave me enough time to heat my chilli con carne and dry some clothes as the wind was picking up. I covered the boat up and sat under one of the only bridges I went through this day, good luck indeed! An Italian duo were doing the same thing with their hand made boat going from Linz to Budapest. I left before them, taking my chance that the rain had left, didn't find a private place to pee in that busy town. So, I got out 10 kilometres later and had a snack and got my place at graduation because I was unsure if tickets for royal Albert Hall were better to get first. Unplanned, I did that annoying task, whilst I was doing that, a big cruise ship went past, and being distracted, splashed the boat and me. Mad dash to save different things - a big old waste of precious time, seat was wet and some of my electronics too - not damaged but needed time to dry off. Pushed back my arrival just past Visegrad to 7pm. What a campsite view. Filled with Hungarians enjoying their evening, some paddle boarding, some swimming while the sun is still out. Some just came, probably to have a party, a really great place to be fair. I am low on food and dinner was Doritos with salami and cheese. Grapes for dessert, just sat on the beach watching the sun hide behind the mountains causing a slightly earlier darkening at 8pm. Very large area so I'm alone sitting on the beach as most people have built up camps with tables and chairs and are a little further from shore. Trying to take in my last evening, not sure it's hit me that this is the last night before I reach Budapest.

Day 23: Kisoroszin to Budapest

Paddling: 6.5/10 Overall Day: 8/10

Much later start, as I knew I had time with the shorter paddle distance. Was confirming times to sell kayak and wheels, trying to work out where to sleep, and where to store kayak. Luckily that morning someone registered serious interest in the wheels for the first time! And through conversation, his wife belongs to a rowing club in Budapest, so I asked if I could store my kayak and finally a response back. FYI tried to contact many of these places. Booked a hostel, not anything overly convenient as the rowing club that responded was far away. But morning looking good, buyers for kayak and wheels lined up, place to sleep booked since camping in city centres near impossible. Was only doing final prep to paddle post 11! As soon as I start, I bump into two paddlers, in Gore-Tex inflatable semirigid kayaks. I realised I spotted them on my 70km kayak day and passed them on a very wide river. They wave at me from the water, as I begin to paddle, I catch them up and have a little chat. They are going from Linz to Budapest, but much slower pace than me. After a nice chat, I paddle onwards determined to get to Budapest whereas with the winds they think it's unlikely they will get there today. Paddle to the finish line went smoothly, slower pace today as the last few days have built up on my body, since the last break in Vienna. The weather not as warm, cloudy and very minimal rain. The paddle itself not overly interesting. With a late lunch break about 10/15km from finish line, still uncertain whether I'll get to do my Budapest photo shoot this evening. Meant to get sunnier, but as I get closer the forecast changes with a chance of lightning. Tiring day and not the weather for it, I decide the rowing club will be the finish line! As I park up, an older rower asks me my destination (seeing my large kayak and wheels, as he kayaks in his racing kayak). I tell him I am here, 1000km later. He asks if I camp here tonight, I wasn't sure that was an option so lucky I got chatting with him. Went into the club found the person expecting to store my kayak and he also let me camp as long as I setup post 8pm and take down my tent before 9am - free of charge. Lucky! Quickly cancel hostel and realise how good this is, as now I can shower and grab dinner here before setting up tent and not worry about commuting with half my stuff in a big rucksack. Very nice touch for my finish. A big McDonald's order and calls home round out the evening. My body enters a state of relief, and I can really feel the miles in the bones and muscles.

Day 24: Budapest

Extra little kayak - to Parliament for photos. Not that sunny either sadly, so I delay as much as I can in the morning before attending my afternoon selling of kayak and wheel meetings. I pack everything from the kayak into bags for the first time since Ulm. With Vienna being the other packing effort. Clean things. I set out in my kayak, winds extreme gusting, little anxious if I can kayak upstream back to my club after this. I kayak down no issues and luckily the cloud's part slightly for some blue skies for my end goal photos. The kayak back was extreme, 37km/h winds with higher gusts made it no joke and nothing I'd experienced so far. To make it worse, it was going with the current. I kayaked for 1.5km of my 4 kilometres but realised it was futile, and I would struggle to make it back going at 3- or 4-times slower pace than my normal. And I've kayaked upstream before too, so knew that I was desperately unlucky with the wind today. I got to a ramp that I had spotted as an escape on my way up, and whelk my kayaked along the bank and then through the outer neighbourhoods of Budapest until I got just across the marina from the rowing club, I got in and did the last few hundred metres. I had officially finished my last kayaking effort! Quickly I cleaned the kayak and wheels. My price for kayak if 1000 euros was steep but luckily one person wanted it, they have been lovely over text. Offering a place to stay and providing an option for boat storage near Budapest if I didn't find anything. They arrived and after a little chat gave me a bottle of wine to congratulate me. We talk further, and only then get to business, inspect the boat etc. quite a few scratches so I wouldn't have blamed anyone for wanting a lower price I was being very optimistic and giving myself room to be "haggled" down. We turn the boat over and a massive indent is there 😬 I get really shook, this could give me a massive problem. Either no sale or get a lot less money. They were lovely and we have an open honest conversation. They talk, and we try and diagnose how this happened and if it can be fixed. He calls some friends to try and get some trusted advice. In the meantime, I sell the wheels no problem for 80 euros, a profit actually. And then return to kayak, they offer 700, given the kayak cost me 1299 and 200 transportation I was happy to accept. I had enjoyed the kayak very much, scratched it and indented it (which should be an easy fix, but you never know) and it was enough to cover some more expenses from the trip! And with that, the expedition was fully over, and I went on to spend a couple days holidaying in Europe.



Figure 24 - Exiting Cunovo Floodplains



Figure 25 - Finish Line, Budapest Parliament House

Conclusion

I would like to thank all the boards that donated – Imperial Exploration Board, Old Centralians Trust, and the Lord Mayors 800th Anniversary Trust – without the money, this expedition would not have been possible! The trip was a great success, I wanted an endurance challenge, with that I aimed to push myself, raise money, and deal with the mental challenges of doing it solo. I can say that I achieved all that, and overlooking the food poisoning and the tough 1st day, there were no setbacks or major difficulties that led to any temporary or longer-term negative result on my trip.

My confidence for expeditions, solo travel and kayaking has gone through the roof – and the practicing of self-reliance where there was no one who could directly help me was a great experience too. Seeing the impact of climate change in a the temperate region of Europe, and myself having to depend on nature more as I travelled along the waterways, was a big change to my city upbringing in London – with this trip a deeper appreciation now exists and greater understanding of the river environment too. Along the trip I was fairly actively sharing my trip on social media and managed to raise far more than I thought I could – which is great!

I set out for an endurance challenge, from Ingolstadt to Budapest the Tour International Danube takes 24/25 days, and I aimed to be faster. In Germany especially, but everywhere where there are locks or places you have to get out – having people to help carry your boat is in places essential, and in other places a massive aid for both time and energy. Going solo I did not have this luxury, but equally some of the tour group go much further to complete the whole Danube River. I would rate doing half the distance solo still more challenging, as those that are part of the tour, have dinner provided at many of the camps – saving a lot of time in the evenings to recover, avoiding the need to think about logistics and resupply constantly and they can carry less on their boat in the day. In summary I kayaked 120 km (approximately) further starting from Ulm and dealing with about 10 more locks within 23 days whilst also overcoming with food poisoning. To my knowledge it is the fastest solo-kayak journey that has been performed, with no support crew or other kayakers in constant contact.

Appendix

Copy of Risk Assessment

8.4 Risk Assessment

Table 5: Risk Assessment Matrix - where L=Likelihood, S=Severity and RF=Risk Factor

Risk	Cause	Consequence	Avoidance	L	S	RF
Drowning	Falling into water or capsize	Need for rescue or medical attention	Care will be taken by maintaining stability in the boat, as well as buoyancy aid in rougher conditions. Training will minimise this threat.	1	9	9
Minor Trauma (Repetitive strain injury, bruises, cuts, blisters etc)	Regular kayaking daily activities and small mistakes	No major consequence if treated properly	Plasters and correct technique will mitigate the effects. Ensuring a comfortable boat/seating position	7	3	21
Major Trauma (Broken bones or severe wounds)	Collisions on the water or injuries while portaging	Need for rescue and medical attention	Practice on UK portages will occur, the process will not be rushed and the rules of the water will be learnt and followed.	1	9	9
Dehydration or Exhaustion	Long days on the water with insufficient water, caloric intake or sleep	Affects judgement, may lead to need of rescue.	Re-stocking of supplies, and taking enough rest and recovering when required	5	5	25
Getting Lost	Taking a wrong turn or not spotting markers	Increased distance and time for journey. May miss campsite.	Maps will be taken, and the daily route will be analysed in the morning to be aware of upcoming challenges. If capsizing, keep a hand on the boat. Store and lock the kayak in safe location with secure methods. Keep a tracker in the boat.	3	3	9
Losing the Boat	From capsizing or from theft	Need replacement kayak	Stay visible through bright colours and follow rules of the water	1	9	9
Major damage to kayak	Boat collision or mistreatment	Need of rescue or replacement	Monitor the health of the kayak and address issues as early as possible	1	9	9
Minor damage to kayak	Repetitive impact or misuse	Need of repair	Covering up be it with clothes, hats or a makeshift shelter are options. Suncream and aftersun will mitigate	3	3	9
Heatstroke/sunburn	Travelling in the height of summer, the sun and heat are risks	Need for medical attention or minor injury		7	3	21

With a 1-9 scale being used to measure likelihood and severity, the largest risk factors are all seen to share the common theme of physical health, which needs to be maintained especially given the endurance element. Dehydration and exhaustion is fairly likely to happen, but the important thing will be to limit its extent. The severity of being tired and dehydrated is not as high as other risks stated, but the knock on effects it can have on judgement means that maintaining good levels of both hydration and energy levels is paramount to mitigate the likelihood of all other risks. Minor traumas across a 2 month period are likely to happen, the combination of them could risk the success of the expedition and in most cases would need time to heal. As such mitigating them and being preventative is the key to avoiding the risk. And then joint second, the risks related with hot weather are likely, but are easy to avoid and mitigate them from risks to just comfort issues.

Original Proposal

Being ambitious and liking the idea of ‘completing’ a river, the full length of the Danube was originally proposed, keeping in line with a yearly tour group that hosts people along the legs of the journey. This would’ve seen me undertake a 2500km journey from Ingolstadt to the Black Sea. There was an obvious challenge of the Ukraine-Russia war, with the river in Romania bordering Ukraine, the safety concerns are clear. The insurance implications are the key thing, as the local news in the area says life is continuing as normal in that area.

This would mean a final destination in Braila in Romania, with an option to get taxi-ed 150 km downstream to where the river no longer borders Ukraine. This poses a problematic end point to the journey. The final nail in the coffin was the time that such a journey would take, 2-3 months. Graduating and needing a job, such a time away was not possible, equally the time of the journey would see a significant rise in costs, which was not within budget.

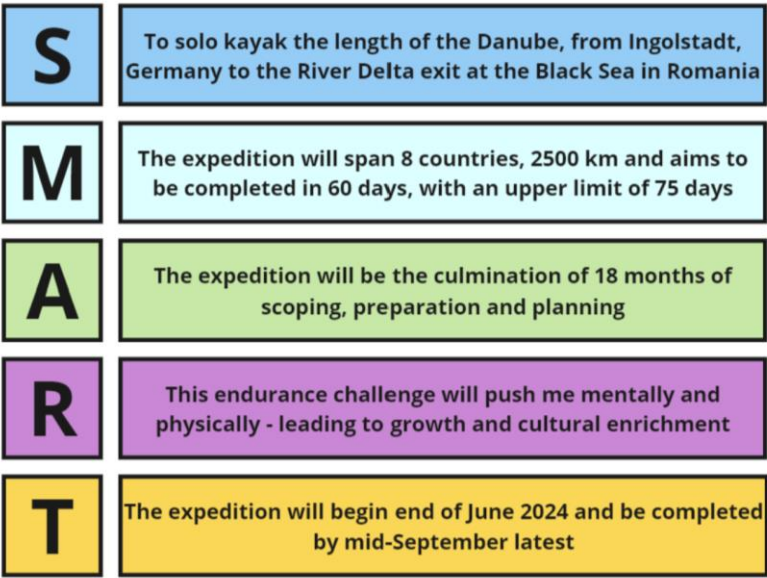


Figure 1: SMART Goal - Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound

A similar yearly tour - Tour International Danube (TID) - has formed the backbone of the planned route. The tour starts in Ingolstadt, Germany - the first major town with a reliable summer water depth on the Danube and culminates after a total distance of 2516 km (exact distance varies from source to source). With the breakdown on TID 2023 documentation being: 242km in Germany, 331.5km in Austria, 170km in Slovakia, 275km in Hungary, 505km in Serbia, 55km in Croatia and 509km in Bulgaria. This year the Romanian leg did not go ahead due to the fact that the river borders Ukraine for 80 km - as such the tour ended on the Bulgarian/Romanian border in the town of Silistra - total distance of 2087.5 km. This expedition scopes the full distance until the Black Sea and the go or no-go decision will be made in May 2024 based on the current situation.