



**British Columbia
Kayaking
Expedition 2004**

Supported by Imperial College Exploration Board.

Photo: Rob tackles a fall on the Callaghan.

This report outlines details of a kayaking expedition to British Columbia undertaken in the summer of 2004, primarily supported by the [Imperial College Exploration Board](#).

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1 Introduction

The idea of an exploratory expedition to paddle the rivers of British Columbia was first fielded in the middle of the Colca Canyon in Peru, by Tim, James and Rob. Just before leaving the UK for this particular stint of paddling we had heard of the huge flooding that British Columbia had been subjected to, which made for a compelling reason to travel out to find out what had changed and what the area now had to offer.

Collating information on the coastal region of British Columbia proved difficult. No official guidebooks existed, and information from various local websites was often fairly sketchy. However, slowly but surely, a picture was built up of the available paddling and terrain we would have to face.

Next, we slowly built up a team. The large volume rivers were going to be distinctly different from the UK paddling everyone was accustomed to, and a prerequisite of a foreign country paddling experience was to be desired. Enthusiasm for the expedition was built up over a few pints, and eventually we had obtained a fairly large team ranging from highly experienced to those with as little as one foreign trip under their belt. For most, this was the longest continuous paddling trip they had participated in, and the first outside Europe. It offered the ideal opportunity for all to cultivate their skills in preparation to help train the influx of freshers to the Imperial College Canoe Club on their return.

With large student participation, the trip would have to be as affordable as possible, especially as it would take place during the period when most would be undertaking paid placements. A provisional budget showed we were going to need some help. Bliss-stick offered their support in the form of cheap creek boats, and the UCL Travel Fund contributed financially, but the body that really made the trip possible was the Imperial College Exploration Board. The discovery of Zoom, a budget transatlantic airline willing to carry kayaks for a small fee, was also essential.

Due to the lack of information available for the region, it was decided to publish as much as we could ourselves on our return. This work is still currently in progress, but we hope to release a DVD guide and accompanying written material in early January 2005.

2 The Team

In paddling, as in any outdoor sport, safety is of paramount importance. The team possessed a wide range of safety experience, with the rescue experience of Rob, Jon, James and Tim particularly valuable. All members of the team held current first aid certificates. A risk assessment was undertaken, with the principal risk of the rivers paddled lying in their relative isolation from the nearest available medical help.

Rob Tuley - Trip leader. Has over ten years kayaking experience. Worked as a kayak and open canoe instructor for one year in France and N. Wales. Extensive personal paddling experience in UK and Europe (France, Germany, Austria, Sweden, Norway, Italy, Switzerland, etc.) and also a month kayaking in Peru. Qualified as level 2 open canoe coach, trainee level 3 inland kayak

coach, and has undertaken formal whitewater rescue and safety training. Confident paddling grade IV/V whitewater.

Tim Burne - Has been kayaking since the age of 4. Personal paddling experience includes destinations in UK and Europe (France, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Austria, etc.) and longer kayaking trips to the Zambezi (Zambia), White Nile (Uganda), and Peru. Confident paddling grade IV/V whitewater.

Jon Lovell - Only member of the team to paddle an open canoe rather than a kayak. Worked in the Ardeche region of France as an open canoe instructor, and has plenty of UK and European paddling experience (France, Germany, Austria, Norway, Italy, Switzerland, etc.). Qualified as a level 2 open canoe instructor and has undertaken formal whitewater safety and rescue training. Confident paddling grade IV whitewater.

Ralph Evins - Grew up on the rivers of south Wales and has plenty of UK paddling experience in Devon, N. Wales and Scotland. Confident paddling grade IV whitewater.

Claire Browne - Has a total of about 4 years personal paddling experience, in the UK (Devon, N. Wales and Scotland) and French Alps. Confident on grade III/IV whitewater.

James Pratt - Personal experience includes multiple UK and European destinations (France, Germany, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, etc.), and includes longer trips to the White Nile (Uganda) and Peru. Confident paddling grade IV/V whitewater.

Alice Grogan - Has about 2 years paddling experience in Ireland, UK, Austrian and Swiss Alps and the Ardeche region in France. Has competed in the famous Irish Liffey Descent two years running. Confident paddling grade III/IV.

Raph Munton - Very experienced kayaker and qualified raft guide. Has personal paddling experience in UK, Europe and a longer trip to the White Nile in Uganda. Is formally qualified in whitewater safety and rescue (Swiftwater Technician level 1 and 2), and has experience raft guiding in Norway. Confident paddling grade IV/V whitewater.

Mark Flower - 3 years experience paddling in the UK (Devon, N. Wales and Scotland) and the Austrian Alps. Confident paddling grade III/IV whitewater.

Nick Farren, present on the original proposal to the Exploration Board, was forced to cancel his participation at very short notice due to unforeseen circumstances. In addition, information about three additional paddlers is included below - these three were not participants of the main expedition and derived no financial benefit from the Exploration Board's support, but paddled with us at various points during the expedition and are included for reference.

Harry Wood - paddles with relaxed confidence, 5 years experience in the UK, France, Austria, Germany and has recently moved to Switzerland where he has been paddling regularly. Confident paddling grade III/IV whitewater.

Dave Burne - paddling from the age of 3, extensive experience in the UK, French Alps and the Pyrenees. Has competed in various competitive events - polo, slalom and freestyle, but 'prefers river running.' Confident paddling grade IV/V whitewater.

Theo Petre - started paddling at school, has extensive experience in France, Austria, Spain, Norway, and Sweden. Confident paddling grade IV/V whitewater.

3 Expedition Diary

This section follows the day by day progress of the expedition from Claire's perspective.

3.1 Saturday 31st July - The day before the flight

For most of us, this was the beginning. The main party staggered, sweating profusely, into Beit Quad carrying all we could carry - and more. We had gathered in order to confirm that we had all the personal and group kit we required between us. Once we had completed our tick list we stuffed our boats with as much excess kit as possible. In order to ensure we were not outrageously outside the baggage allowance, we had an amusing time trying to weigh boats, paddles and kit bags with Newton balances. This all done, it was decided that the best way to prevent jet-lag was to party all night. At least it would save us having to get up at 4 am (the curse of cheap airlines)!

3.2 Sunday 1st August - Leaving London

Bleary-eyed, we greeted each other at 5am. It was going to be a long day... We all nodded off on the way to the airport, in the comfort of the Union minibus (Thanks Jim!). There was a minor panic as we approached Gatwick to discover nobody knew what terminal we were leaving from. Luckily we guessed right. The airline staff were unbelievably helpful. As soon as they saw us heading in their direction with trolley-loads of boats they hastily opened up a new check-in desk, just for us! They dealt with us surprisingly quickly, not bothering to even try weighing anything (bonus!). And then we were off...

It was a clear day as we took off from Gatwick at 10:00. I was the only who had managed to blag a window seat, and I was glad. The views of the Isle of Skye were spectacular - the Red and Black Cuillin so clear that I could easily pick out the routes I had climbed a couple of months earlier. Then there was Greenland, with her stunning glaciers, and her huge white ice-cap. Unfortunately it was a little cloudy over Canada, and as we were landing we only caught glimpses of the Rockies, but we still attempted a little river-scouting from the air!

We landed in Vancouver at 13:45, almost 12 hours after take-off. A few hours later we made it out of the airport and were on our way to the Youth Hostel in our smart, clean, rented saloon cars, the boats strapped to the roof with emergency inflatable roof racks! Here we met up with the advance party, and had a brief discussion about our plans for the next day, week, and month. We also had a first-aid briefing, a 'how to deal with bears' briefing, and a hill-billy warning!

3.3 Monday 2nd August - Heading out of Vancouver

The next morning it took us several hours to pack the saloon cars, due to the enormous amount of stuff we had brought, along with the additional belongings of the advance party. After eventually managing to cram everything into the cars by sitting on the boots, we headed off to the Mountain Equipment Co-operative (MEC)

to acquire even more stuff! This was soon to become our favourite shop! It contained everything and anything an outdoor enthusiast could dream of.

But we had to leave the shop sooner or later, and when we eventually dragged everyone out, we headed north out of Vancouver to Squamish, only a few hours drive away. We settled into a campsite nearby, and set up our extremely cheap tents from Walmart, that the advance party had been kind enough to buy. The tents were so cheap, in fact, that one of them had no outer sheet, but a bonus extra pole!

Unfortunately it was too late to paddle a river today, but much discussion was had over plans for the next day, and much pouring over newly acquired guide-books was done. Some of us went to scout one of the rivers in a guide, only to discover that it was almost bone dry. Damn!

After a painstakingly long cooking session on three small stoves (due to a fire-ban) we enjoyed a delicious stew, followed by a well-deserved sleep. We had finally arrived!

3.4 Tuesday 3rd August - The Elaho

A morning mission to buy a gas barbecue and proper roof racks for our three hire cars meant that we didn't leave for our first river, the Elaho, until 10:30. Unfortunately we didn't come across any shops or diners to buy breakfast from on the way, and after a long drive up a logging track, and a similarly long shuttle of cars, we got onto the river with empty, nervous stomachs at 14:30. This was a really big volume run, much bigger than anything the majority of us were used to. Taken by surprise by the huge waves, the sheer width of the river, and a couple of huge stoppers, I felt it was a real battle paddling the Elaho, and I don't think I was the only one... This probably wasn't helped by the fact that it had been months since any of us had paddled white water, and the lack of breakfast. Although it wasn't the ideal warm-up for some of us, it certainly gave us a taste of real BC white water. Stunned, we drove back to the campsite and made up for the lack of breakfast by having a massive barbecue.

3.5 Wednesday 4th August - The Cheakamus

Having learnt from our mistake yesterday, we headed off to the 'White Spot' diner in Squamish first thing this morning. Here, they served us with breakfasts fit for North American giants, and we struggled to eat half of the food. Our excuse for inelegant paddling today was sure to be... 'But I was too full!'. However there wasn't much inelegant paddling, just inelegant map reading. We started off the day in an extremely gentle manner (apart from the bumpy dirt-tracks) by paddling the warm Lower Cheakamus, an easy grade 2. The 'lads' then raced off to attempt the Upper Cheakamus (Grade 4/5) (or that's what they thought it was...) in torrential rain only to discover 'multiple log jams large enough to make a beaver blush'. This meant they had to walk off the river, but where was the road? A long walk, and a railway crossing later, we were all eventually re-united - no harm done. It was only later, after discussions with a couple of friendly Californian paddlers, that we discovered the 'lads' had got on the river at the official take-out, and the section they had started to paddle was officially unrunnable! Which explains a great deal....



Raph paddles a drop on the Middle Cheakamus

3.6 Thursday 5th August - More of the Cheakamus

Having paddled the Lower Cheakamus and Upper Cheakamus yesterday, we thought we'd give a section of the Middle Cheakamus a go today. This was a happy medium between the two sections yesterday. A fairly low-volume river, this was a challenging, enjoyable Grade 3 run, containing one particularly hard Grade 4+ drop which some of the more sensible of the group decided to portage. After a successful run down what was most definitely my favourite river so far, the lads decided to head back up to the top section, and try and paddle the right section of the Upper Cheakamus this time. It was a scorching hot day, so Alice and I decided to dry out our kit in the sun, and take a few photos of the lads on the demanding, but very picturesque upper section. This run was evidently a success, the lads arriving at the bottom, panting for air, but ecstatic.

3.7 Friday 6th August - The Callaghan

Despite August supposedly being the driest month of the year in Canada, it was raining today. Six of the party got up early, along with two cameramen to paddle the Grade 5 Callaghan Creek. We'd heard from a paddler we met in MEC that this was an awesome run, with a couple of 25 foot waterfalls, one of which is apparently very friendly, and you can run it 'forwards, backwards, sideways, any way you like!'. Personally I would never consider a 25 ft fall to be friendly... Anyway, the dirt track up the side of Callaghan Creek turned out to be quite a challenge for our small saloon cars, and it took the majority of the day to get to the put-in. To get from the road to the river proved equally tricky, involving the use of several ropes. The combined look of exhilaration and exhaustion on the faces of all the paddlers as they got off the river several hours later showed that

the hellish put-in was worth it. It must have been a taxing river though, as even Tim seemed relieved to be on dry land again!

[During all this excitement, Alice, Harry and I had a relaxing day eating soup and reading our books in a café, the only dry place we could find, after discovering that the roof racks on our car caused it to rain just as heavily inside as outside!]

3.8 Saturday 7th August - Harry and Alice's birthday

We had got to the stage where we were running out of rivers we could all paddle around this area, so it was decided to be our last day in the Squamish/Whistler area. We decided to re-run the Middle Cheakamus, as it was such a classic run, with something good for everyone. Harry and Mark decided to give the Grade 4+ drop a go this time, with varying degrees of success. Unfortunately the result for Mark was a very bruised shoulder, meaning he was out of action for a couple of days.

With enough daylight left to paddle another short section of river, we headed for the Cal Cheak, yet another section of the infamous Cheakamus. A well-known play run, with a must make take-out before the river plunges into a deep unrunnable canyon we ensured we left some people by the riverbank at the end of the run, and set off. This was an extremely enjoyable afternoon paddle. There were loads of exciting features, and play-spots, and I reached the bottom happy, but exhausted after my first two river day in BC.

This was followed by a birthday meal in Whistler - the hideous, fairy-tale ski resort village. (At this time of year the slopes were taken over by mountain-bikers.) After a pleasant Italian meal, we headed back to our campsite for a few beers and some birthday cake.

3.9 Sunday 8th August - The journey to Skookumchuck

The plan this morning was to get to Skookumchuck Narrows - the famous tidal play-wave along the Sunshine Coast, north of Vancouver. This involved a rather long detour to Vancouver to pick up some hired playboats from MEC, as the creek boats we had with us were unsuitable for playboating. Arriving at dusk at a beautiful, secluded lakeside campsite, the lads took an early opportunity to test out the hired boats on the lake, before heading to bed.

Unfortunately at some point during the evening we had a small accident involving boats and one of our hire cars, resulting in a smashed back windscreen... It was completely accidental and couldn't have been helped, but it would mean yet another detour to Vancouver and the car-hire place.

3.10 Monday 9th August - Skookumchuck Day 1

The unusually warm lake was tempting in the morning, and many of us went for an early swim. The lads then eagerly headed off to Skookumchuck while Alice, Jon, Mark and I had a relaxing morning, and did some much-needed washing. We headed over to the wave later on to be on camera duty, and were impressed that the lads had managed to carry their boats such a long way - it was a few kilometres walk to the wave from the road. The play wave didn't seem as impressive as we'd all imagined it to be, and the lads were struggling to stay on it as it kept turning green

and flushing people off the back. But it was a good warm-up for tomorrow, when the speed was going to be much faster.



How many people can we fit onto Skookumchuck wave?

3.11 Tuesday 10th August - Skookumchuck burgers!

The boys headed off early to return to Skookumchuck, while John set off for a walk. Alice and I set off a bit later and headed up Mount Hallowell. This was a little unrewarding, as although it was a few thousand feet high, it was covered in pine trees, and horrible undergrowth, so we battled through the undergrowth in a determined manner, only to find we had reached the top when there was no more uphill. There was absolutely no view whatsoever, due to the trees and undergrowth. We also saw some fairly fresh bear faeces, which scared us a little until we realised how much noise we were making - crunching and snapping our way through the undergrowth! We returned to the campsite scratched and bleeding from the brambles to find a very smug Jon. He had given up trying to get up the hill, and gone for a gentle wander to discover an Italian restaurant where he had dined on a seafood platter!

This evening the boys were much happier. The wave had been bigger, faster and more furious, and they'd all had a good day. We finished off the day with Skookum burgers at the local bar/restaurant. These were 10 oz burgers in what seemed like a round loaf of bread, along with a ton of fries. Another North American eating challenge...

3.12 Wednesday 11th August - The journey to the Chilliwack and an evening paddle

An early start this morning saw us heading once more for Vancouver and the MEC to return boats, and fix the back windscreen of the hire car. We then headed out east of Vancouver along the US/Canadian border to the Chilliwack River. We arrived at the Chilliwack shortly before dusk, but after another long driving day, we were all

eager to get on a river, and several of us had a quick evening taster of the Lower Chilliwack before the sun completely disappeared. It was blissful to be back on a river again, and just what was needed to unwind from the long journey. Having a campsite at the take-out helped too....

In the evening Alice managed to get chatting with an open boater from the area, who then offered to take us down the Middle Chilliwack the next day. Bonus!

3.13 Thursday 12th August - The Chilliwack and a stunning meteor shower

The Middle Chilliwack is normally a Grade 3/4, but as the water level was unusually low, it was a little easier but quite bumpy and scrapey! The river was absolutely packed full of spawning salmon, and subsequently the riverbank was packed full of fishermen (a little intimidating!). Harry was keen to show the fishermen a thing or two however, and did a little fishing from his kayak, catching a huge salmon with his hands! (Some later enjoyed this for dinner.) The Middle Chilliwack was a really long run, but being keen to get as much paddling as possible, a few of us carried on down the Lower Chilliwack to the campsite. After consulting a map, it was suggested that we had paddled as much as 20km today! Well, I certainly felt as if I had...

This evening there was a fantastic meteor shower. A completely clear sky, and very little light pollution made this a very memorable experience.

3.14 Friday 13th August - The Nahatlach

Last night Ralph narrowly avoided being sprayed by a skunk, so we promptly moved on in the morning... We headed north to the Nahatlach River. After a short stop at a rafting station for a chat about the river, we drove up yet another logging track to the top of the middle section. It was a scorching hot day, and we were all extremely glad to be on the river. The middle section was a Grade 3+ with several horribly named rapids. Running 'The Meat-grinder' successfully without realising it was 'The Meat-grinder' made me feel much better about the whole thing though. This was a fantastic river, the middle section full of tricky boulder gardens, which were great fun. After this exhilarating run none of us wanted to get off, so we carried on down the canyon section. This was most definitely my favourite river. It was a classic Grade 4 run, full of thrilling pool drops, in a striking steep sided gorge. I was thrilled as I got off the river, probably the toughest stuff I'd ever paddled.

For some this wasn't enough, and a few carried on down the last short section of the Nahatlach before paddling 10km down the relatively flat Fraser to the road. There was a bit of confusion with the take-outs, and it took a while before we all made it back to the Nahatlach campsite. By this time it was really late, and we had very little food. After scavenging what food we did have, we went to bed exhausted and happy, if a little hungry.

3.15 Saturday 14th August - The Thompson

Most of the party went off to paddle the Thompson today. This was a very high volume river, with one significant rapid near the beginning. I was a little intimidated by the thought of such a big volume run, and had enjoyed the Nahatlach so much yesterday that I stayed behind and paddled the Middle Nahatlach again with Rob, Alice and Jon. Rob and Alice had missed out yesterday

as they had a rest day, so were very keen to paddle it after our enthused comments. The middle section proved just as good as yesterday, and my bad memory of rivers meant that many of the features were just as novel and interesting as the day before!

The Thompson was also a success, containing huge whirlpools and wave trains that kept everyone on their toes!



James takes a nice line down a nasty fall on Cayoosh Creek

3.16 Sunday 15th August - Cayoosh Creek and an all-you-can eat Chinese!

Forest fires in the Stein valley forbid us from paddling the Stein river today. This was a major disappointment for us as we had heard so many enthusiastic comments about this beautiful river. A spur of the moment decision led us to Cayoosh Creek, a steep Grade 4+/5 run. Rob, Tim, Dave, Theo, Raph, James and Ralph set off down the river, while the rest of us drove to the take-out and settled down with our books. The description of the river we had told us it was 5km long, and should take roughly 3 hours. After 4½ hours the boys paddled round the last bend panting. They'd had an epic run. Despite a couple of minor incidents resulting in the loss of a set of paddles and a couple of bumps and bruises, the lads were obviously thrilled. Continuous and steep were the two words I managed to get out of them once they had recovered their breath. And the reason they'd taken so long was due to much necessary scouting, and a few portages.

To celebrate a successful creeking mission we headed off to an all-you-can-eat Chinese. We then wanted to cover as many miles as we could and so drove off into

the night until we ran out of petrol, rather conveniently next to a plush looking campsite.

3.17 Monday 16th August - The Clearwater

We woke up in the morning to discover just how plush our campsite was. Not only were there showers (none of us had had one since the first campsite in Squamish), there was also free internet access, and a swimming pool! We had a relaxing morning catching up on emails (much to the exasperation of the campsite staff), writing postcards, and washing. In the afternoon we drove (only 15 mins) to the next river on our sketchy itinerary - Clearwater. This was another big volume run that the Canadians we had met had all raved about (partly due to the warm water). Unfortunately the shuttle took a couple of hours, as one of the cars managed an impressive puncture on the way down the dirt track. We did eventually get on the river though, and the first section was great fun. There were lots of big and bouncy waves, and very few holes. Unfortunately the river flattened out fairly quickly and we all reached the take-out a little disappointed.



The 'road' to the Chilco (and this is a good bit!)

3.18 Tuesday 17th August - The mission to the Chilco

The classic Chilco with it's 'White Mile' was next on our to-do list, so we headed there early this morning. Unfortunately the drive in to the river was along an extremely dodgy dirt track. This took a while to navigate with our overloaded saloon cars, and involved a lot of jumping out, directing, and occasionally a gentle push of encouragement. Due to the long drive in, we didn't reach the take-out until dusk. A short thunderstorm made us a little nervous about our chances of driving out along the (now muddy) track again. We camped at the take-out

deciding an early start was necessary in order to have any chances of paddling the river before dusk the next day.

3.19 Wednesday 18th August - The Chilco and black bears

Despite our 6am start this morning, it was not until 12:30 that the majority of us got on the river. It took 2 hours to drive from the take-out to the put-in, due to the very dubious track. We then sent an advance party down the river, as the cars were driven back down the track. The cars and advance paddlers reached the take-out at roughly the same time, and one car was driven back up to the put-in. This complex shuttle seemed to work and we all eventually made it onto the river. I was extremely nervous of this continuous Grade 4 river, possibly the hardest thing I'd ever paddled. The first rapid took us all by surprise by its size, and Harry, Mark and I all ended up swimming down it. Not the most pleasant swim either - it was a long time before I discovered where the surface of the river was. Eventually we were all safely reunited with our boats and paddles, and after a short breather we were on our way again. It was all huge and white and completely unrelenting. The stunning scenery was complemented by the overwhelming feeling of remoteness. Bald eagles soared above us, quite unperturbed by our presence. However the climax of the river came as the waves reached their highest, and several black bears and bear-cubs watched us paddle past with bemusement. This was most certainly the highlight of my holiday. Never had I been so close to a black bear before, and the cubs were so gorgeous. I was glad I was in a boat though...

3.20 Thursday 19th August - The Quesnel

To take some of the load off the cars, it was decided that the majority of us should paddle out down the river as far as the main road. This was a pleasant and relaxing paddle, as the ferocity of the river eased on the lower section. After a nifty bridge jump by Rob, Tim, and Dave (who all proved their swimming skills weren't quite as good as their paddling skills) and a chat to the native fishermen, we headed off to the Quesnel. This river started off fairly flat, but soon narrowed up, and there were several great features. Once again the take-out was at a campsite, and I collapsed in my tent, completely exhausted by the last couple of days - but feeling on top of the world.

3.21 Friday 20th August - The Cariboo

This morning we headed off to the Upper Cariboo. First we stared at an incredibly difficult 5m drop for a good portion of an hour, while fascinated by the crazy salmon trying to jump up it. Then James, Tim, Dave and Rob ran it. All successfully, apart from a 'deck-pop' by Rob, who ended up swimming down the next section.

The rest of us put on below the big drop and paddled the nice big and bouncy Upper Cariboo. This all went smoothly until first me, then Dave dropped into an innocent looking stopper, only to discover we couldn't get out of it. It held two people and two boats for an incredibly long time. But Tim was quick to the rescue, and managed to get us both out safely with his incredibly accurate rope-throwing skills. I think I will always feel indebted to Tim for that...

A little shaken up, we all carried on down the Lower Cariboo, and were glad to reach the campsite after another long day.



James moves onto the shoulder of Caribou Falls

3.22 Saturday 21st August - Driving and the Lower Lower Willow

This morning bid farewell to Jon, James, Harry and Raph, as they headed back to Vancouver to fly home. It was another long driving day for the remaining eight of us as we headed yet further north to McBride and the Rockies. There was a quick stop on the way for some to paddle the Lower Lower Willow, a very low volume run, containing many dead salmon. Rob managed to spot a Moose while running the shuttle, making the rest of us exceedingly jealous. There was most definitely a change in the weather as we headed further north. It became much colder and that night brought heavy, unrelenting rain.

3.23 Sunday 22nd August - The Holmes

Thankfully the rain had stopped in the morning, and we headed up yet another dirt track towards the Chalco, after a short encounter with a bin-raiding hillbilly. Unfortunately this dirt track was in worse condition than most we had driven up, and we were forced to abandon. Instead we paddled the Holmes/Beaver Creek, which conveniently ended at our campsite. These rivers were glacial-fed rivers, and we were much less eager to get our faces wet, wincing whenever we came across a wave. However Theo was not too bothered by the cold water, as he demonstrated by catching us a couple of large salmon for dinner. That evening we went to a local bar. Here we met a friendly local drunkard, who amused us greatly. He couldn't find the words to express how beautiful we were, before asking me what I was doing on holiday with a couple of Orang-utan's (Mark and Tim)!

3.24 Monday 23rd August - The Dore

The weather was no warmer today as the boys headed off early to run the hardcore North Fork of the Dore. Alice, Mark and I headed up a little later to meet them on the river and run the lower section. Unfortunately some workmen had begun ripping up the road bridge half way up, but a little skilful driving and we all made it up to the top safely. The middle section was a delightful run, despite being extremely cold (glacial again...). It was challenging (lots of boulder gardens) without being too scary - perfect for this temperature water.

That evening we found we had a fellow camper - a man from Quebec with a large open boat and a friendly dog. He was very interested in our expedition, and insisted on escorting us to the Upper Fraser the next morning.

3.25 Tuesday 24th August - The Upper Fraser and Canoe Creek

The Upper Fraser is a classic Grade 4+ and contains the famous 15m (?) Overlander Falls, which Tim has had a poster of on his bedroom wall for a while. There is definitely a line down it, but there is a serious lack of spots for safety below the falls, so if you miss the line, you're probably in big trouble. The lads all stared at it for quite some time, before they each, in turn, decided against it. Instead they enjoyed seal-launching off the cliffs beside the falls. The rest of the run was beautiful. I walked along the riverbank as the lads paddled down.

Then we were off to Canoe Creek. Pulling on wet thermals once more, I winced at the temperature of this river. This was by far the coldest river we had paddled. And there was no way of not getting you head wet. The first section was fantastically continuous for about 6/7km. We seemed to paddle this section extremely fast - possibly due to the lack of eddies! The lower section of Canoe Creek was much less continuous, but contained several pretty tricky pool drops. This was a fantastic river, if a little cold...

That night we started driving South, slowly heading back towards Vancouver. We arrived very late at a campsite just past Clearwater, and woke up in the morning to find we had pitched our tents in the picnic area, and not the campground at all!

3.26 Wednesday 25th August - More driving and Pebble Creek

Heading off early, we spotted yet another black bear, as it ran across the road. Another long driving day ahead of us, we aimed to get to the Lillooet river in time to paddle it that evening. Unfortunately the dirt tracks took longer to navigate than we had allowed for and there wasn't enough time to paddle the Lillooet that day. Instead, the lads paddled a crazily steep looking, but very full ditch that we had driven across on the way. It was less than a kilometre long, but contained only one eddy, and paddling it was described as 'being trashed while still upright'. I think exhilarating is a pretty suitable word.

Having not made it to the shops that evening we had our 'emergency' meal - pasta, sauce and cheese that evening.

3.27 Thursday 26th August - My 21st Birthday and the four rivers mission

The boys were so thrilled with Pebble Creek yesterday that they got up extra early this morning to paddle it again. Unfortunately the creek wasn't as full as it was

glacial melt and the sun hadn't had time to melt enough glacier yet. But apparently it was still enjoyable.

We then all headed up to the Lillooet put-in. This looked like a wonderful river from the road. It was not until we got down the steep bank that we realised how big it was. The first rapid - at the put-in - took me by surprise and I rolled three times on the first 50m section of river as I plunged into hole after hole. Apparently Tim did exactly the same behind me though, which made me feel better. However this promptly put Alice off paddling the river, and we carried on leaving her by the car. This river was much bigger than I had expected. Huge waves kept crashing over me, knocking all air out of my lungs. But I was thrilled. The lower section mellowed out a bit, but was still pretty exciting.

As soon as we were off this river, we quickly got changed and jumped in the cars. We headed back down towards Whistler, where we had spent some time in the first week. We were off to paddle the Green River, as we had heard it was warm, an extremely welcoming prospect considering we'd been paddling glacial melt for the past few days. The warmth aspect of this river was probably its greatest asset. The river was a little disappointing, with very little water and only a short rapid section of any note. But it was nice to be completely relaxed floating down a river, giving us a chance to unwind and mess about a bit.

At the get-out of the Green river, we discovered we were very close to the put-in to the River Soo, a continuous Grade 4 run that we had heard great things about. The lads were so keen to have a four river day that they rushed off enthusiastically, despite being completely shattered from this morning's jaunt. The put-in wasn't so easy to find though. Alice, Mark, Ralph and I headed down towards a campsite south of Whistler as we left the boys faffing. The plan was to meet back at the campsite before heading out for a birthday meal. As it got darker and darker we started to get a little concerned, not to mention a little hungry as we waited for the lads. But eventually they all turned up with apologetic grins on their faces. They had made the classic mistake again, and had put on the river too high up, which meant they had paddled a very committing gorge in addition to the official Soo run. But all was well - they loved it! And eventually we got to eat....

3.28 Friday 27th August - A lie-in and the Cal Cheak

A month of getting up fairly early, kayaking all day and being outdoors 24/7 was obviously catching up on us, as we didn't wake up until 11.30am today. Thankfully we had camped by the put-in to the Cal Cheak, which we had planned to run in the morning, so we still made it onto the river. Unfortunately we didn't have time for the planned walk up Stawamus Chief though....

Some of us had run the Cal Cheak at the end of our first week in BC, and we had all agreed it would be worth running again with the others. It is amazing how you can completely forget sections of a river you've paddled though, and I was just as thrilled the second time - this time getting the confidence to surf the play-wave half-way down.

We then headed down to Squamish, and stopped in at our favourite diner - the White Spot diner. Unfortunately many of us decided that to end our stay in North America we should have 'endless fries'. I have never felt so sick before...

In the evening we had a fire, and stayed up late chatting and debating about many obscure things... It was great.

3.29 Saturday 28th August - Back to Vancouver

Today we headed back to Vancouver, in preparation for our flight the next day. And of course this had to include a stop at the MEC... We then had a little drive and wander round Vancouver, stopping in at the Wooden Boat Festival, before heading out for food, and then a couple of drinks. But we were all so shattered that the majority of us practically fell asleep in the warm pub, and we dragged ourselves back to the Youth Hostel before collapsing with exhaustion.

3.30 Sunday 29th August - The journey home

Despite our flight being in the afternoon, we had an early start, as we had to sort out hire cars, stuff boats with excess kits, and deal with lots of odds and ends. All worked out well - the hire car company were as nice as we could expect them to be considering the state of their cars, and everything went fairly smoothly at the airport, even though they insisted on weighing our luggage... We waved goodbye to Mark (who was staying on in Vancouver, but had kindly offered to come and help us at the airport) and headed to security where Rob was told off for carrying too many lighters....

It had been a very successful expedition by all accounts.

4 Equipment Report

4.1 River equipment list

This is the equipment that was carried or wore on the river itself.

4.1.1 *Personal*

- Boats with airbags (most members of the team were paddling creek boats, Jon was paddling an open boat)
- Paddle
- Cag
- Deck
- Helmet
- Buoyancy Aid (about half with rescue harnesses)
- Thermals
- Wetsuit/Drysuit
- Adequate footwear

4.1.2 *Group Safety*

- 8 Throwlines (each line accompanied by a knife)
- Three 'on river' first aid kits

- Three pin kits (for boat extraction carried out by the more experienced members) - Includes crabs, pulley, tape, a few prussik loops.
- Three sets of split paddles (used to replace lost/broken paddles on the river)
- Spare Clothes
- Three group shelters
- Emergency rations
- five emergency torches

4.2 Other Equipment

For the duration of the expedition we were camping out the back of our hire cars. As such, we carried all the usual camping and cooking equipment required such as tents, stoves, sleeping bags, sleeping mats, etc. A list of this equipment has not been included here as it was all very standard equipment. As it was carried in vehicles, there were also no issues with the weight involved. If a detailed list is required, please contact the trip leader.

4.3 Equipment Feedback

This section outlines some of the useful comments and feedback gathered from the team during the expedition.

Waterstick Paddles - A few of our party bought this make of paddle from the MEC in Vancouver at the beginning of our expedition. Unfortunately we found that none of the 4 sets of paddles bought withstood the wear and tear we exposed them to during our stay, and all sets were returned. The shafts of three sets (two crank shaft, and one straight) filled with water within a few days. One of the blades of the remaining set simply broke off on a grade 2 stretch of water. Whether all Waterstick paddles are flawed, or whether this was simply a bad batch is unknown.

Bliss-stick Huka boats - 4 of our party purchased Bliss-stick Huka's before this expedition. On returning, 3 of the boats contained considerable sized dents. This is thought to be due to the quality of the plastic used.

Video Cameras - Despite using watertight peli-cases on the river, our 3 video cameras seemed to all be very temperamental. This is possibly due to them getting damp by holding them with wet hands. It is important that the camera cases are opened and dried out regularly, as any water that gets into a peli-case will cause damage to the video cameras.

Stoves - We took 2 MSR stoves and 1 Peak Stove - all multi-fuel. We burned unleaded petrol in them as this was very cheap. However unleaded petrol is a relatively dirty fuel, and stoves required regularly cleaning to prevent blockages. The Peak stove was fairly old, and unfortunately developed a leak, which prevented the fuel bottle from remaining pressurised. As we purchased a gas barbecue, three stoves were sufficient between 12 people. Had we not had the gas barbecue, we would have struggled to cook efficiently on 3 stoves.

Radios - we purchased four two-way radios for this expedition. They proved extremely useful during convoy driving, as they had a range of a couple of

kilometres and worked within cars. This saved us from having to keep within line of sight at all times. They proved of limited use on the river. This was because they were extremely hard to hear through their waterproof cases and temporary loss of signal meant they could not be relied upon.

Hire Cars - Our saloon cars were not the most suitable vehicle for this type of expedition. Ideally, 4x4 vehicles should have been used due to the terrain. Although we did not have any major problems with the cars during the expedition, they slowed us down on dirt tracks, and they looked (and sounded) a little the worse for wear at the end of the trip.

Roof racks - It was reasonably easy to find a shop that sold multi-purpose roof bars. However the roof rack only fitted one of the cars well. Due to the shape of the door it was not possible to use the roof racks on one car, and the others required additional straps to secure them.

GPS - we borrowed a Garmin handheld GPS system from the Exploration Board to log the get-ins and take-outs from the river. This was less successful than we had hoped - the GPS itself wasn't very accurate, and we found it hard to remember to give the system enough time after boot-up to locate itself using the available satellites.

5 Medical Report

Apart from the few minor scrapes and bruises which are inevitable on any outdoor expedition, we had no injuries.

The teams' general health was good throughout the expedition.

A pump water filter was used for all drinking water as Giardia is a risk in Canada. In retrospect we should have carried a spare filter cartridge as it was used heavily, but in this case the cartridge just lasted to the end of the expedition.

The only possible medical after-effect to this expedition is Mark Flower's persistent uncomfortable chest cough. He is currently seeking medical advice.

6 Documenting the Rivers

The main aim of this expedition was to document some river guides to the Coastal region of British Columbia, especially after the dramatic changes it has experienced over the last year. As such, we are in the process of producing...

- A visual DVD guide to the region. This does not attempt to be entirely comprehensive in the rivers it covers, but does try to be as informative as possible. Editing the 10hrs+ footage collected during the expedition into a 50 minute DVD is not a quick process, but we have 5 current editors, and are hoping to release the DVD in early January. The DVD will be distributed almost free of charge (a small surcharge in the region of £3 to £4 pounds will be needed to cover postage and blank DVD costs).
- In addition a series of detailed written guides are currently being formulated to appear online. These will link in with the DVD and provide additional information. They will probably be released alongside the DVD.

Both guides will be advertised to the paddling community and will be available from the expedition homepage www.bc.robt.cc.

7 Financial Report

This section of the report gives a very brief overview of the trip expenses. If there are further queries, please direct them to the trip leader.

Funding	
Personal Contributions (£500 from 10 people)	£5000
UCL Travel Fund Grant	£300
Exploration Board Grant	£3000
TOTAL	£8300

In addition to the main Exploration Board grant, the exploration board covered the cost of travel insurance from snowcard for the student members of the team. Substantially discounted kit was almost made available for expedition members by the kayak manufacturer Bliss-Stick.

Expenses	
<i>Equipment Purchase:</i>	
camcorder	
radios	
group shelter	
first aid equipment	
guidebooks/maps	
roof racks (inflatable + fixed)	
straps and aquasure	
spare water filter cartridge	£733.30
Car Hire (incl. penalties on rtn)	£3321.20
Fuel Expenses	£705.77
Ferry crossing to Skookumchuck	£152.61
Camping fees	£452.16
Boat hire (for Skookumchuck)	£52.71
Flights (individually purchased)	approx £4500
Food Purchases	£1014.37
TOTAL	£10932.12

8 Useful Information

Below is a list of the main sources of written information we used while we were in British Columbia. A lot of information is also passed through the local paddling community by word of mouth and we sought local information wherever possible.

- Backroads Mapbooks: Not only are these the best and most detailed maps to the region, but they also contain some very brief river notes which can be used to guess the grade of a variety of river sections. More information is available from <http://www.backroadmapbooks.com>.
- Canadian Rockies Whitewater - The Central Rockies: A guide written to the area north of where we spent most of the time paddling. Written by Stuart Smith, it covered a couple of the rivers we paddled when we ventured further north.
- Canoeing and Kayaking BC's Central Interior: A guide written by The Northwest Brigade Paddling Club that we were not aware existed until we met some members of their club while paddling the Chilco. This again mainly covers the area north of where we paddled most, but does cover some of the more northern runs we attempted.
- www.kayakwest.com : This site has some guides to the harder grade 4/5 creeks around the area we paddled. It does not cover any river section below grade 4/4+, but is a useful resource for the harder creeks.

These were the main sources of information we had concerning the local rivers, which as can be seen is not a lot. However, the Canadian paddling community proved to be very friendly and we obtained a lot of local information while we were out there. It is the conversion of this local knowledge into some written guides that was the aim of this expedition.

9 Contact Details

Please direct all questions about this expedition to the trip leader:

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