**Satilla River Trip:**

(December 11th- December 19th 2015)

*Marty Thompson (Jackson Kracken 15.5’)*

*Jimmy Thompson (Jackson Cuda 14’)*

*Michael Semple (Jackson Cuda 14’)*

**Highway 121/15 - Waycross 🡺 Highway 252 - Burnt Fort (91.5 miles)**

Day 1: (*Friday*) 20.25 miles

Awoke: 0600hrs

Breakfast: 0700hrs

Embarked: 0830hrs

Break: None

Lunch: 1200-1215hrs (on sandbar)

Break: None

Ending Time: 1530hrs

Dinner: 1800hrs

Sleep Time: 2100hrs

* Semple & I stayed at my Mother’s home in Brunswick overnight. Marty met us there early Friday morning. Both my Mother and her husband Bill piled into Marty’s truck and we all left for the starting point. Semple and I stopped at McDonalds on the way for breakfast.
* Mom & Bill were very gracious in agreeing to shuttle us to the river and for the eventual pick-up as well.
* The day was perfect for paddling, nice breeze, clear skies, and enthusiasm.
* The river flowed tremendously slower than the Savannah River we paddled earlier this year (<http://www.paddling.net/places/showReport.html?3741>)
* The Satilla River is much more scenic than the Savannah. Perhaps the narrow width attributed to its intimate feel. However, the wildlife was just as sparse as on the Savannah River as we only saw a few turtles and a glimpse of an alligator.
* The tree-fall on this river makes for some interesting paddling. Each of us got into a few limbs but Semple got the worse of it.
* Deciding upon a campsite wasn’t a chore at all. For the most part there are sandbars around each corner of the river.
* While relaxing in camp we heard a continuous splashing in the shallows on the sandbar near our camp. We discovered a fish in the shallows. I promptly grabbed the single carp with my bare bands and thus secured more fare in one moment than any of us had on the previous trips!
* We heard some ATVs & dogs in the distance around 1900hrs.

*Sunrise: 0733hrs*

*Air Temp: 65°, 55-60° average*

*Water Temp: 53°*

*Barometer: 1039*

*Wind Speed: 2-5mph (North)*

*Water Gauge: 4.75’*

*Drift Speed: .75-1.0mph*

*Water Clarity: 25/75 (1’)*

*Cloud Cover: Clear*

*Sunset: 1729hrs*

Day 2: (*Saturday*) 18 miles, 38.25 miles overall

Awoke: 0630hrs

Breakfast: 0730hrs

Embarked: 0830hrs

Break: None

Lunch: 1200-1215hrs (on sandbar)

Break: None

Ending Time: 1515hrs

Dinner: 1830hrs

Sleep Time: 2115hrs

* We heard some coyotes howling in the distance about 0530hrs.
* The campsite was packed up without incident and we embarked on day number two.
* About 30-45 minutes into the day’s paddle we encountered some SERIOUS tree-fall. So severe that in one spot the entire river was obstructed except for a branch arching over a section of the river wide enough for only one boat and so low we all had to duck. At 6’2” that was no simple feat for me!
* Shortly after threading the eye of the needle we all entered the worse spot of the trip. The tree-fall created a series of s-curves that not only forced us to go single file but also created additional challenges due to the abrupt changes in direction. Unfortunately Semple got hung up on a series of limbs about 2’ above the waterline. I was forced to pass him and was able to backstroke in place in an attempt to verbally guide him through. All of a sudden we heard a SPLASH!!! Followed by a gasp for air as Semple had capsized his boat!!! Once determining he was able to stand up in the 3’ deep water we switched gears into gear-recovery. Miraculously the only two things floating was his cutting board and Nalgene bottle which were both recovered moments later. It wasn’t until we made camp that night that Semple learned his tarp ties/rigging were also a casualty of the mishap and they undoubtedly sank. I hope Davey Jones enjoys them.
* Once getting ourselves out of the obstructed river we hit dry land and Semple changed into some dry clothes. He is fortunate that he packaged them in Seal-Line dry sacks as well as most of his other gear.
* An hour after Semple’s mishap we passed two older men each in a powered canoe/mini-gheenoe. They were fishing without success. Although this fact was never voiced, I think each of us were more interested with the knowledge that if they could make it this far up river we’d be ok heading down river!
* We saw four deer and a blue heron.
* We again found a suitable sandbar and camped effortlessly.
* While camping my chair broke! Fortunately I was able to lash it back together with the help of my Boy Scout training and Marty’s fat-lighter that I used for support. I name the chair “Franken-Chair” due to its unsightly appearance.

*Sunrise: 0631hrs*

*Air Temp: 44°, 55-60° average*

*Water Temp: 54.5°*

*Barometer: 1013*

*Wind Speed: 1mph (Northeast-North)*

*Water Gauge: 5.25’*

*Drift Speed: 1-1.5mph*

*Water Clarity: 25/75 (1’)*

*Cloud Cover: Clear*

*Sunset: 1807hrs*

Day 3: (*Sunday*) 18.25 miles, 56.50 miles overall

Awoke: 0630hrs

Breakfast: 0730hrs

Embarked: 0830hrs

Break: None

Lunch: 1145-1200hrs (on sandbar)

Break: 1330-1345hrs

Ending Time: 1545hrs

Dinner: 1830hrs

Sleep Time: 2030hrs

* We all have Skeeter Beeter Pro hammocks and Kelty Noah 12’ tarps for our trip. However, I found that when dry land permits, I prefer to sleep in my Snugpak Ionosphere single-man tent. This gives me the ability to sleep on either side and on my back or belly. My 6’2” 240lbs frame does make entering and exiting the tent more of a yoga exercise but I find it comfortable once situated. I woke up at some point in the early morning hours from the sound of raindrops falling on my tent’s rainfly. Unfortunately for Marty & Semple they gambled on the 15% forecast and didn’t erect their tarp until after the rain began sometime in the early morning hours. I feel guilty for saying it but rolling over inside my dry tent was the only effort required on my part fall back asleep.
* Breakfast was uneventful and we all began the monotonous task of breaking down camp and repacking it all into our kayaks for the day’s paddle.
* Marty remarked “*My gear is really compacting nicely. I’ve got a bunch of extra space!*” while repacking his kayak. Semple and I both nodded our heads with envy as our Cudas require a bit more of a method in packing due to both hull design and capacity.
* The morning was very surreal. There was a medium-thick fog that welcomed us onto the river. The river was calm and shift. We experienced the swiftest part of current this morning as it tipped the 2mph mark! We made great time together.
* About 0905hrs Marty shrieked “*Oh my God!!!*” and began opening hatches on his kayak as he made his way to dry land. This was followed by a “You’ve gotta be kidding me” and a few more expletives. As it turns out Marty forgot his Ruger MKIII .22 pisol in camp where he was showing it off the night before! It is a fine piece of craftsmanship and I’d be sore too knowing I’d have to paddle over a mile back to camp against the current to retrieve it.
* Semple and I could barely control our laughter and didn’t once we were sure Marty was out of ear-shot. The perils of the trip had bitten Marty. Semple and I convened and decided to not stop on the nearest sandbar and wait for Marty’s return. Instead we decided to drift and make “easy miles” until Marty caught up to us. We also agreed that if we encountered any tricky spots along the river we would immediately stop to insure Marty was able to traverse them. Based on some rudimentary math we figured his one mile stint backwards would require him to paddle 4-5 miles to catch up to our meandering pace. This may have benefitted us all given how disappointed Marty must have been, surely he wouldn’t welcome any chiding at his expense.
* Marty eventually did catch up to us. Marty revealed to us that when he returned to camp he discovered his pistol case in his sleeping area along with his hammock & tarp!!! No wonder his gear was compacting so nicely.
* We saw a boat with two young guys in it as well as a young couple sitting oddly in a swing alongside the river. I couldn’t help but think of the movie The Hills Have Eyes.
* We paddled for about 1-2 more hours and came across some partiers on a sandbar, two couples in two boats just chilling out on the beach enjoying the weekend.
* Marty was overcome with a feeling inside of him that he could no longer ignore. He was forced to beach his kayak barely one-turn beyond the partiers and let lose a torrent. The landscape will never be the same. Thankfully he has the toilet on his kayak! It provided Semple & I a few more laughs as we set out towards the Highway 82 ramp where one of Marty’s friends was to meet us with some beer and well needed ice.
* We met up with Charlie Harris and thanked him and his wife very much for their efforts. As we launched back into the river we saw a car stuck up to the doorframe in the sand on the sandbar adjacent to the ramp. There were two occupants that had unnatural colored hair. The both seemed rather lethargic just sitting in the two front seats as we paddled by.
* Prior to our departure we met a nice older lady that held-up four fingers in response to learning we were paddling all the way to Burnt Fort. Apparently this represented the number of days she thought it would take to reach our destination. Each day thereafter we would arbitrarily hold up 4 fingers and say “Four days” in a Large Marge way. We saw them that afternoon heading back to the ramp as the day closed in.
* We made our camp on another sandbar. The night was uneventful other than it beginning to rain at 2130hrs.

*Sunrise: 0632hrs*

*Air Temp: 65°, 60-70° average*

*Water Temp: 56.5°*

*Barometer: 1011*

*Wind Speed: 3-7mph (East Northeast)*

*Water Gauge: 5.25’*

*Drift Speed: 1.5-2.0mph*

*Water Clarity: 25/75 (1’)*

*Cloud Cover: Partial*

*Sunset: 1808hrs*

Day 4: (*Monday*) 11 miles, 67.50 miles overall

Awoke: 0630hrs

Breakfast: 00745hrs

Embarked: 0900hrs

Break: 1030-1045hrs

Lunch: 1645hrs (in camp)

Break: None

Ending Time: 1230hrs

Dinner: 1745hrs

Sleep Time: 2030hrs

* We experienced rain off and on throughout the night. Fortunately we all had our tarps rigged. Due to the heat I decided to not put on my rainfly but instead erect my tarp over the tent for better ventilation.
* My rigging wasn’t as good as I had hoped and I discovered a low-spot in the tarp which was evident by the overflow splashing the ground near by head. I had to crawl out of the tent about 0200hrs and change the height of one line to eliminate the low-spot. Once this was accomplished I went back to sleep.
* Today’s paddling was mainly uneventful. Karma didn’t get his claws on me this day and despite the previous two mornings’ mishaps, nothing notable occurred.
* Semple is looking tired and nearly eaten alive by the Georgia mosquitos. They have put hundreds of whelps on the upper portions of both arms where they lay in the hammock.
* I took a well needed bath in the river. About 2 minutes after putting my clothes on a boat cruised on by. Timing is everything I suppose.
* We erected the communal 16’x24’ tarp in the event rain came upon us prior to bedtime.

*Sunrise: 0632hrs*

*Air Temp: 69-80° average*

*Water Temp: 60°*

*Barometer: 1001*

*Wind Speed: 8-13mph (South Southwest)*

*Water Gauge: 5.25’*

*Drift Speed: 1mph*

*Water Clarity: 25/75 (1’)*

*Cloud Cover: Overcast*

*Sunset: 1808hrs*

Day 5: (*Tuesday*) 12 miles, 79.50 miles overall

Awoke: 0700hrs

Breakfast: 0800hrs

Embarked: 0915hrs

Break: 1245-1300hrs

Lunch: 1530hrs (in camp)

Break: None

Ending Time: 1315hrs

Dinner: 1745hrs

Sleep Time: 2030hrs

* Having read the previous paddle report about the Satilla River (<http://www.paddling.net/places/showReport.html?772>) we noted the “No camping spots beyond Rains’ Landing to Burnt Fort”. We estimated this to be about the last 8 miles of our trip but we gave ourselves 2 extra miles as a buffer to prevent any goofs!
* The day’s paddle was pretty uneventful.
* I got nailed by the Satilla River’s equivalent to Montezuma’s Revenge and was crafty enough to stage a break… Ah’ relief!
* We found a beautiful sandbar that was nestled at the confluence of a large creek and the river. This provided a constant breeze that swept the mosquitos away!
* We finally cooked the boiled peanuts I had been carrying on my bow the whole time! They were good but ultimately not worth the extra weight in my opinion, they won’t make the next trip.
* We had an uneventful night.

*Sunrise: 0633hrs*

*Air Temp: 70-74° average*

*Water Temp: 61.5°*

*Barometer: 1003*

*Wind Speed: 1-3mph (South)*

*Water Gauge: 5.25’*

*Drift Speed: 1mph*

*Water Clarity: 25/75 (1’)*

*Cloud Cover: Clear*

*Sunset: 1809hrs*

Day 6: (*Wednesday*) 12 miles, 91.50 miles overall

Awoke: 0600hrs

Breakfast: 0745hrs

Embarked: 0845hrs

Break: 1015-1030hrs

Lunch: None

Break: None

Ending Time: 1215hrs

Dinner: ----------

Sleep Time: ----------

* I had a great night’s sleep on the last night on the river! It began to rain at 0530hrs. Thankfully it dissipated shortly thereafter.
* We did an inventory of our gear and determined what food items we needed versus what we could ditch. I made steak & eggs to prevent me ditching a steak. I also filled my Nalgene bottles with the melted ice in my bottles.
* The paddle for the day was mainly uneventful expect for my attempt to detour from the known route. I thought I saw a shortcut in the river which turned out to be an unmapped creek. Oops!
* We noticed marsh grasses around the 86 miles mark which was a sign that the coast was impending albeit miles away from us!
* The last two miles were against the tide as the river also became tidal. Yet again another sign that we were getting closer to the ocean.

*Sunrise: 0633hrs*

*Air Temp: 65-70° average*

*Water Temp: 62.5°*

*Barometer: 1013*

*Wind Speed: 1-2mph (South)*

*Water Gauge: 5.35’*

*Drift Speed: 1.25mph*

*Water Clarity: 25/75 (1’)*

*Cloud Cover: Overcast*

*Sunset: 1809hrs*

Conclusion:

The trip was a wonderful adventure. The scenery was much better than we’d experienced on the Savannah River. As stated above we all felt the narrow river really added a level of intimacy to the trip that not only afforded us some great sights but also challenges! We saw minimal wildlife: 4 deer, 1 red tailed hawk, 1 hand-caught carp, and one alligator. We averaged 15.25 miles a day as we paddled down the river. The biggest thing to walk away from the trip knowing is that water level is paramount! There were places where the addition of 1’ in height would have prevented us from passing under a large limb and the reduction of 1’ in height would have required us to portage hundreds of yards. I lost count how many times the blades of my paddle struck the sand beneath me and heard the sound of my rudder dragging as well.

As always hull design played into the overall attitude of this trip. Marty’s Kracken has an overall speed and capacity advantage over the 14’ Cudas that Semple & I both captained. But the agility of both Cudas was better suited for the tree-falls that plagued the early portions of this expedition. Novices be forewarned, if you don’t know the multitude of strokes to maneuver your kayak around obstructions you’d be better off launching at either the Highway 301 bridge (mile marker 28.5) or the Highway 82 bridge (mile marker 51).

Things to do differently…

1. I was constantly annoyed by the need to swap batteries in my GPS throughout the day. I use a Garmin Montana 650T and despite it’s excellent performance I was plagued with battery swaps. I’ve since decided to forego the AA rechargeable NiMh battery option and pony-up for a dedicated 22ah 12v battery made by Mighty Max. It weighs 13lbs and will shift weight from the stern to the bow of my boat. I’ll also install a surface mounted “tent” socket on the center hatch for a 12v socket and double USB port for auxiliary devices (cell phones, portable HAM radio, blue tooth speaker, etc.). I plan to supplement the battery with a 14 watt solar panel.
2. I’ve got to upgrade my cooler. We were out of ice on the third day in moderate temperatures! Semple & I have a Coleman cooler that isn’t cutting the mustard. I’ve researched quite a few and decided on the RTIC 20. From what I’ve heard, some Yeti guys left and started their own cooler company. They have all of the knowledge, skill, and ability to make the Yeti but the RTIC costs literally ½ of what the Yeti’s of similar size cost! Kind of a no-brainer there.
3. I plan to carry more of the MRE entrees (just the entrée). I brought only three this time which was a great meal combined with a Cliff Bar.
4. I’ll not bring a #10 can of boiled peanuts next trip.
5. I’ll upgrade by camping chair from the 300 pounder to the 500 pounder at Walmart.

Do understand we all like to get the best of one another. I’ll also caveat that by saying at no point would we jeopardize each other’s safety for the sake of a laugh. Bad things can happen instantly when you take Mother Nature for granted. Well, there was that hornets’ nest I shot at. But I intentionally pulled my shot!