**Ocmulgee River Trip:**

(February 25th- March 03rd 2017)

*Jimmy Thompson (Jackson Cuda 14’)*

*Michael Semple (Jackson Cuda 14’)*

*Preston Lewis (Jackson Cuda 14’)*

*Ryan Murphy (Jackson Cuda 14’)*

*RJ Fernandes (Jackson Cuda 14’)*

*Chris Mercer (Wilderness Ride 13.5’ & Jackson Cuda 14’)*

*Dameon Carver (Feel Free Lure 13.5’)*

*Jack Millet (Native Ultimate FX 15’)*

**Spring Street Landing – Macon 🡺 Half Moon Landing - Abbeville (109.75 miles)**

Day 1: (*Saturday*) 21.25 miles

Awoke: 0500hrs

Breakfast: 0630hrs

Embarked: 0900hrs

Break: 1030hrs

Lunch: 1215-1245hrs (on sandbar)

Break: None

Ending Time: 1515hrs

Dinner: 1830hrs

Sleep Time: 2030hrs

* Everyone except for Dameon met at my home the day prior to the trip. Most loaded their gear onto my multiple spot-trailer and put their frozen food in my chest freezer. We cooked some hamburgers and everyone was able to get to know one another prior to launch. Dameon met us along with the shuttling crew (Andrea Fletcher & Tommy Conner) at Spring Street Landing in Macon, GA where we launched.
* During the confusion RJ’s frozen pork chops were misplaced and weren’t found despite a valiant effort to locate them.
* We woke up early and decided to get a good meal in us prior to launch so we stopped at the Waffle House before leaving McDonough. While eating Jack surprised RJ and purchased s couple of frozen pork chops and gave them to him; very commendable.
* We loaded up and drove an hour to the launch, all of us anxious and ready to start the expedition.
* The day was perfect for paddling, nice breeze, overcast skies, and we were full of enthusiasm.
* The river flowed well at about 1.75-2.0mph, although slower than the Savannah River, we paddled previously (<http://www.paddling.net/places/showReport.html?3741>).
* The Ocmulgee River wasn’t tremendously scenic compared to the Satilla River. Although, it did render us in awe at some of the sights.
* Through considerable thought and additional conversation between myself and Semple it became apparent that I had forgotten to check my own cooler for RJ’s missing pork chops. I felt terrible at the thought of giving such grief to the guys without having done my own due diligence. Thankfully when we made it to the next break on a sandbar I didn’t find the missing pork chops.
* Preston discovered he is still taking on water!
* We passed two men in a small boat.
* We saw about 5 cows and a beaver.
* The tree-fall on this river was minimal except for a few turns that you must pay attention on.
* Jack flipped his kayak at some point during his negotiating one of these tree-fall turns. He was a ways behind me and the group I was with, we decided to quickly push forward and get a fire going to prevent any complications throughout the night.
* Deciding upon a campsite was a chore given the high bluffs, thick vegetation, and posted signs on those areas that did appear favorable. We were fortunate to find one only 1 mile after learning of Jack capsizing.
* Upon making landfall we started a campfire and set-up camp. Jack arrived shortly thereafter and started drying out his clothing and other items that got wet. It was only then that we learned that his medication also got soaked and had dissolved into a glob. Upon discovering this Jack was unable to continue on the expedition and arrangements were made to extract him and the next landing. Coincidentally, RJ had succumbed to side effects of medication as well and felt as though he couldn’t continue with the expedition. Seeing the disappointment in both these men’s faces was difficult given the sacrifice and anticipation both had for this trip.

*Sunrise: 0637hrs*

*Air Temp: 50-80° average*

*Water Temp: 64°*

*Barometer: 1019*

*Wind Speed: 5-10mph (West Southwest)*

*Water Gauge: 8’*

*Drift Speed: 1.75-2.0 mph*

*Water Clarity: 3’*

*Cloud Cover: Cloudy*

*Sunset: 1835hrs*

Day 2: (*Sunday*) 23.75 miles, 45 miles overall

Awoke: 0500hrs

Breakfast: 0700hrs

Embarked: 0915hrs

Break: 1115hrs at boat ramp during extraction

Lunch: 1300hrs

Break: None

Ending Time: 1630hrs

Dinner: 1845hrs

Sleep Time: 2130hrs

* I slept great in my larger Snugpak Scorpion-2 tent! It’s much roomier than the Ionosphere also from Snugpak.
* We heard some owls hooting and some answering by turkeys. Hearing owls always makes me think of my daughter Kate, she likes owls.
* The campsite was packed up without incident and we embarked on day number two. I pulled trash detail today and added a trash bag half-full to my gear.
* Mercer got stuck on a log for a brief moment, it provided us with a few laughs seeing him shimmy-shake off.
* At around 1115hrs we made it to Bullard Landing where Jack & RJ extracted. Thank you Scott Carver and Pug Fernandes for coming to get these fellas.
* Mercer decided to swap kayaks as the Wilderness Ride 13.5’ that he was paddling didn’t have a rudder whereas the Jackson Cuda-14’ that RJ was paddling did.
* The remainder of the day was fairly uneventful as we passed Knowles Landing to find a good campsite.

*Sunrise: 0638hrs*

*Air Temp: 38-68° average*

*Water Temp: 58°*

*Barometer: 1032*

*Wind Speed: 5-10mph (West)*

*Water Gauge: 6.5’*

*Drift Speed: 2.0mph*

*Water Clarity: 3’*

*Cloud Cover: Clear*

*Sunset: 1835hrs*

Day 3: (*Monday*) 16.5 miles, 61.50 miles overall

Awoke: 0700hrs

Breakfast: 0800hrs

Embarked: 0900hrs

Break: 1100hrs

Lunch: None

Break: None

Ending Time: 1400hrs

Dinner: 1830hrs

Sleep Time: 2100hrs

* We all have hammocks and tarps for our trip. However, I found that when dry land permits, I prefer to sleep in my Snugpak Scorpion-2 two-man tent. This gives me the ability to sleep on either side and on my back or belly.
* We had an uneventful morning and learned that bad weather was headed our way. We cut our break short and paddled with a purpose until we made it to J. Dykes Park Landing. This park offers a covered picnic area that we we’re thankful to have given the deluge that come upon us that evening around 1930hrs.

*Sunrise: 0638hrs*

*Air Temp: 43/76° average*

*Water Temp: 58°*

*Barometer: 1036*

*Wind Speed: 10-15mph (East)*

*Water Gauge: 6’*

*Drift Speed: 2.0mph*

*Water Clarity: 3’*

*Cloud Cover: Overcast*

*Sunset: 1835hrs*

Day 4: (*Tuesday*) 14.25 miles, 75.75 miles overall

Awoke: 0630hrs

Breakfast: 0730hrs

Embarked: 0845hrs

Break: None

Lunch: 1430hrs (in camp)

Break: None

Ending Time: 1215hrs

Dinner: 2130hrs

Sleep Time: 2230hrs

* I didn’t sleep well last night due to the constant barrage of vehicles entering the park. Granted one was a police officer which put us at ease given the number of us that are in the business. However, the concrete really kept me, and I’m sure others, from having a good night’s rest. Naturally none of us would utter a word about any kind of ailments
* The paddle to Hawkinsville was gorgeous! We saw a couple of springs, a great deal of cypress tree islands that looked very spooky, and the temperature was perfect.
* Just before arriving at Mile Branch Landing in Hawkinsville we contacted Chuck Southerland who graciously met us at the landing with a trailer to shuttle our kayaks to the campsite! Mr. Southerland is a truly selfless man who put us in contact with “a friend of his” who also happens to be the Pulaski County Commissioner to run some of the guys into town for some BBQ!
* In the meantime I decided to give the restroom and shower facilities a workout! It’s been a while since I have partaken in “shower beer” but let me tell ya… It was divine!
* Sure enough in about an hour Butch Hall (Pulaski County Commissioner) showed up in his Mercedes to give a couple of the guys a ride into town. I figured why not stop at the Dairy Queen too?!!? So all in all several of the guys had BBQ and some had DQ. Not a bad way to end a long day of paddling if I may say so!
* Mr. Hall asked what our plans for tomorrow were and I said not much of anything as we’re having our down-day and won’t paddle a single stroke. He suggested a tour of the city via his shuttle bus. We graciously accepted not really thinking anything would really come of the offer.
* We went to bed under the cover of two pavilions that included power and running water via a spigot!

*Sunrise: 0638hrs*

*Air Temp: 55-80° average*

*Water Temp: 57°*

*Barometer: 1036*

*Wind Speed: 5-10mph (East Northeast)*

*Water Gauge: 6’*

*Drift Speed: 2.0mph*

*Water Clarity: 2’*

*Cloud Cover: Overcast*

*Sunset: 1836hrs*

Day 5: (*Wednesday*) 0 miles, 75.75 miles overall

Awoke: 0730hrs

Breakfast: 0830hrs

Embarked: None

Break: None

Lunch: 1300hrs

Break: None

Ending Time: None

Dinner: 1715hrs

Sleep Time: 2330hrs

* Last night was a great night’s sleep in the hammock. It was well needed too.
* Ryan and Semple decided to walk to the local gas station to pick up some beer for the day.
* Preston and Mercer went for a walk along the nature trail at Mile Branch Landing.
* Shortly thereafter we located the hole in Preston’s kayak. Apparently the drain plug was leaking as well as a small puncture in the scupper hole near his starboard rudder pedal. We used to plastic adhesive and this appears to have solved the problem.
* Around noon we saw what we had kinda been on the lookout for all morning long…. An entourage consisting of a shuttle bus with two vehicles following! We couldn’t believe they were actually turning into the campground and heading our way.
* Sure enough, Mr. Hall’s smiling face exited the bus that was driven by Leslie Sewell, the Fire Chief and local EMA Director. From around the back of the bus walked Mr. Southerland with a large camera around his neck as he then mentioned him being the head of the Hawkinsville Dispatch & News, the local newspaper. We shook our heads in disbelief! We lined up and Mr. Southerland snapped a few photos and we loaded onto the shuttle bus now turned party bus for the nickel tour!
* We departed the campground and went through town to the newly converted Fire Station. Apparently the building once served as a National Guard Armory.
* The Fire Station housed several interesting things most notably two dug-out Indian canoes that were carbon dated to be 500-700 years old! Very cool!
* We then went behind the Fire Station and found ourselves in the presence of a 60 foot long smoker used to smoke meat for fundraisers, holidays, and in other times of goodwill. Mercer, an avid BBQ and meat smoker, was in awe at the volume of meat this thing was capable of pumping out!
* From there we scurried over to the Horse Track. Apparently this is one the few Harness Horse Tracks along the East Coast and the Harness Horse Capital of Georgia since 1894.
* It was very comforting to see all our belongings still in place when we left thanks to County Worker “David” keeping an eye on things for us.
* We’ve paddled several rivers and hundreds of miles and we’ve never had such hospitality. If you’re ever in the Hawkinsville area be sure to check out Mile Branch Landing and the community.
* Compared to the day, we had an uneventful night other than grunting for glow-worms which supposedly are also famous at Mile Branch Landing.

*Sunrise: 0638hrs*

*Air Temp: 55-80° average*

*Water Temp: -°*

*Barometer: 1030*

*Wind Speed: 5-15mph (West)*

*Water Gauge: -’*

*Drift Speed: -mph*

*Water Clarity: -‘*

*Cloud Cover: Overcast*

*Sunset: 1836hrs*

Day 6: (*Thursday*) 24 miles, 99.75 miles overall

Awoke: 0600hrs

Breakfast: 0700hrs

Embarked: 0915hrs

Break: None

Lunch: 1230hrs

Break: None

Ending Time: 1545hrs

Dinner: 1800hrs

Sleep Time: 2030hrs

* Last night was very windy and we got a good bit of rain as well. It misted under the pavilion and I could feel it on my face. Semple flipped in his hammock due to the heavy winds.
* Mr. Southerland returned to shuttle us back to the landing that morning. What a nice man, thank you.
* The day was gorgeous and the wind was at our backs the entire time. What a rarity!
* We unintentionally paddled the longest distance of the trip today… 24 miles! This as a result of not finding any suitable campsites for 6 spots. Alas, we found a decent spot just shy of the 100 mile mark.

*Sunrise: 0638hrs*

*Air Temp: 48-65° average*

*Water Temp: 58°*

*Barometer: 1030*

*Wind Speed: 15-20mph (North Northwest)*

*Water Gauge: 5’*

*Drift Speed: 2.0mph*

*Water Clarity: 2’*

*Cloud Cover: Cloudy*

*Sunset: 1836hrs*

Day 7: (*Friday*) 10 miles, 109.75 miles overall

Awoke: 0600hrs

Breakfast: 0745hrs

Embarked: 0830hrs

Break: None

Lunch: 1200hrs

Break: None

Ending Time: 1045hrs

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

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

* Last night I got very chilly. My Kelty Cosmic-40 didn’t work out as well as I had hoped. Although the weather did dip into the upper thirties, I would imagine my Snugpak Under Hammock Blanket, thermal underwear, and fleece beanie would’ve kept me warm… I was wrong. (Side note: I contacted Kelty and they accepted my Cosmic-40 sleeping bag for a new replacement bag. That customer service is tough to beat!)
* Just prior to launch we emptied our coolers and disposed of the food in the fire. I heard some cackling and cajoling from Semple & Murphy’s area where they beached their kayaks. Come to find out RJ’s pork chops were in Semple’s kayak seat! How’d they get there? I know he didn’t sit on them all week. Nobody wanted to fess-up to how they came to be in his seat or from whence they came. I suppose we’ll never know.
* We broke the 100 mile mark around 0900hrs.
* About 4 miles above Half Moon Landing we were detoured around a planned cut in the river. Apparently someone purchased an oxbow island and created a make-shift bridge to harvest the trees off of it. In doing so quite a bit of construction material was left in the cut! Thankfully the person had the courtesy of posting DOT detour and do not enter signs on both entrances of the cut warding off any boaters. Something tells me he’ll have to account for that in the near future.
* We were delighted to see Half Moon Landing at 1045hrs. Andrea was there with my keys as Tommy had just left having brought my truck to the extraction point.

*Sunrise: 0636hrs*

*Air Temp: 37-65° average*

*Water Temp: 59.5°*

*Barometer: 1042*

*Wind Speed: 5-10mph (North)*

*Water Gauge: 5’*

*Drift Speed: 2mph*

*Water Clarity: 2’*

*Cloud Cover: Clear*

*Sunset: 1836hrs*

Conclusion:

The trip was a wonderful adventure and we met some amazing people. The scenery was decent and I’d say average compared to what we’ve seen in the past. We averaged 18.25 miles a day as we paddled down the river. The biggest thing to take away from the trip is for me to do a better job at creating and plotting the maps we use. Preston was spot-on the entire trip while my calculations seemed a bit low as listed on the map. Granted, there is always a variance with any type of estimate. Preston accounts for more of the outside of a river bend where I seem to have been counting distance a bit closer to the inside of a bend. I’ll be sure to not do that again.

Despite hull design being a major player in the efficiency of a trip, Mercer swapping to the Jackson Cuda-14’ that RJ was paddling was a welcome change to his ability to navigate bends.

Things to do differently…

1. I plan to stay in the rear of the group more as photo-ops and the footage seems better in the rear. Not to mention I’ve got the SPOT tracker GPS messenger!
2. I plan to upgrade my sleeping pad to a Klymit V-Luxe that is the same weight as my USGI sleeping pad but is half the bulk.
3. I’ll need to get a cold weather sleeping bag. I’m looking hard at the Nemo Riff-15. Despite its insane cost, it’s compact, lightweight, and rated to anything I imagine I’ll see paddling.

We initially had 8 paddlers which was our largest group yet. There was going to be 9 paddlers until Dick Wilkins phoned the night before launch to confirm he was unable to make the trip due to a shoulder injury. I hope he can make the next expedition. I noticed a couple of the guys would naturally flock together, the faster paddlers and the guys wanting to take it slow and enjoy creature comforts did create some separations that raised concerns.