**Oconee River Trip:**

(February 2nd – 5th, 2018)

*Jimmy Thompson (Jackson Cuda 14’)*

*Preston Lewis (Jackson Cuda 14’)*

*Kevin McDonald (Jackson Cuda 14’)*

*Michael Semple (Jackson Kraken 15.5’)*

*Arin Christensen (Old Town Predator 13’)*

*Ryan Murphy (Vibe Sea Ghost 13)*

*Kedron Houghton (Dagger Alchemy 14’) w/ top hat*

**Oconee Greenway Landing - Milledgeville 🡺 Buckeye Landing - Dublin**

**(62.75 miles)**

Day 1: (*Friday*) 21.75 miles

Awoke: 0600hrs

Breakfast: 0700hrs

Embarked: 1000hrs

Break: 1215-1230hrs (on sandbar)

Lunch: 1730hrs (at campsite)

Break: None

Ending Time: 1645hrs

Dinner: 1930hrs

Sleep Time: 2130hrs

* Everyone met the morning of launch at my home except for Preston who met us at the launch and will leave his vehicle there while we paddle.
* We noticed some small turbulent water about 30’ downriver from the launch in Milledgeville.
* Arin brought some festive plastic “Happy Groundhog Day” top hats that I talked everyone in to wearing for “crew shots” (watch this video) <https://m.youtube.com/watch?t=4s&v=lo6otc6SOiM>
* In an effort to break-in the new guy I edited the footage of everyone wearing them but him. It’s all in fun.
* Most of us braved the wash while a couple paddled to the opposite side of the river where one got stuck in low water.
* We were off to a great start having gotten onto the water on time at 1000hrs.
* Jamie Brack met us at the launch and shuttled our trucks with the exception for Preston’s truck.
* The river was swift which was matched only be a steadfast tailwind which made our daily speed average of 3.25 seem effortless albeit chilly.
* There were no obstructions to speak of other than an occasional limb sticking out of the water. Keep in mind, the river was up.
* We made it to mile marker 17.5 where Preston and I pre-positioned some firewood on the scouting trip three days before launch. Given the excellent time (it was 1530hrs when we made it to this sandbar) we all decided it be best to push on for another hour. Some drifted for the last hour in lieu of actually paddling which I thought was the point of “pushing on”. Nonetheless, we did reach a viable sandbar around mile 20 but the audible presence of dogs in the woods swayed our decision to stop.
* We all made it to mile 21.75 around 1630hrs and camped on a very large sandbar. Given the bad weather moving in the following night we needed to log every mile we could to cash them in tomorrow as we contemplated pushing all the way to Johnson County Landing located around mile 51!
* Rookie mistake on my part… I opted to not bring my muck boots as previous trips with them only rendered my feet hot and sweaty! I quickly regretted that decision upon my toes going numb around mile 0.01!
* Arin was very gracious and gave me a pair of wool socks. I’ve never owned a pair of them and was stunned at their ability to keep my feet comparatively very warm.
* I ate chopped steak marinated with teriyaki and instant mashed potatoes.
* We made a sizeable campfire and reflected on the day prior to going to bed.

*Sunrise: 0646hrs*

*Air Temp: 34-58° average*

*Water Temp: 46°*

*Barometer: 1038*

*Wind Speed: 13-17mph (Northwest)*

*Water Gauge: 10.5’*

*Drift Speed: 2.5mph*

*Water Clarity: 4’*

*Cloud Cover: Clear*

*Sunset: 1832hrs*

Day 2: (*Saturday*) 27.75 miles, 49.5 miles overall

Awoke: 0530hrs

Breakfast: 0700hrs

Embarked: 0815hrs

Break: None

Lunch: 1145-1215hrs (on sandbar)

Break: None

Ending Time: 1600hrs

Dinner: 2030hrs

Sleep Time: 2400hrs

* I awoke exceptionally early at 0530hrs and took my time getting started. Ultimately we were all on the water at 0815hrs! We usually launch closer to 0845-0900hrs.
* The river was still moving swiftly but the wind was certainly not as helpful as we did encounter some headwind.
* We decided to assess how we all felt once we made it to Balls Ferry State Park Landing which was around mile 42-43 before pressing on to Johnson County Landing.
* We stopped for lunch immediately following a trestle bridge which was the location where General Sherman of the Union Army flanked the Confederate Force at Balls Ferry.
* We saw a man in a jon boat just before making it to Balls Ferry State Park.
* We all stretched our legs and decided we felt solid enough to push on to Johnson County Landing which was another 8-9 miles.
* About 2 miles into our push we smelled smoke and started joking about the pavilion at Johnson County Landing having been burnt down with the wood we pre-positioned!
* The remainder of the day was fairly uneventful aside from a lot of paddling to reach campsite #2 originally destined to be campsite #3!
* Upon making landfall we were all glad see the pavilion still standing and to have pushed ourselves as we could cash-in the day’s effort and not paddle a single stroke tomorrow!
* We met two men that informed us of a sugar cane field burn-off that was the cause of all the smoke. They were out looking for bald eagles as they often hunt for displaced small game during those fires.
* We struggled making a fire with very limited small wood as well as the pre-positioned wood having been drenched with the rain the preceded our trip. Thankfully we met another man at the landing who stopped by to say hello. Apparently he is Larry Hines the Asst. Chief of Police for the Wilkinson County Police Dept. He was a cordial and conversational man that seemed to fill lulls with a joke or other amusing anecdote. He saw some of our struggles with the fire and left a gallon of kerosene for us to dispose of. We made good use of it!
* The thunderstorm hit us around 0300hrs and didn’t let up until 1100hrs. While we are equipped to paddle in the rain nobody really wants to.

*Sunrise: 0646hrs*

*Air Temp: 34-55° average*

*Water Temp: 44°*

*Barometer: 1042*

*Wind Speed: 5mph (East-Southeast)*

*Water Gauge: 10.5’*

*Drift Speed: 1.5*

*Water Clarity: 2.5’*

*Cloud Cover: Cloudy*

*Sunset: 1832hrs*

Day 3: (*Sunday*) 0 miles, 49.5 miles overall

Awoke: 0800hrs

Breakfast: 0900hrs

Embarked: None

Break: None

Lunch: 1400hrs

Break: None

Ending Time: None

Dinner: 1900hrs

Sleep Time: 2100hrs

* 0300hrs came with a thundering clap! No pun intended…. It started to STORM overnight! I rolled over with a smile on my face knowing we were under cover, dry, and didn’t have to paddle in this weather.
* We had nothing on the agenda today other than to relax and we did just that.
* The only external excitement if you will was when two guys drove to the launch with a jon boat attempting to locate a hunting dog. These guys put the boat in the water and scurried back into their truck for about 30 minutes before withdrawing the boat from the river and leaving. I suppose the weighed the risk of a water-born rescue for that dog and their own lives won out.
* We carried on that day enjoying a nice campfire and eating the majority of our snacks to include adult beverages all in the name of lightning our load of course.

*Sunrise: 0646hrs*

*Air Temp: 38-63° average*

*Water Temp: -°*

*Barometer: 1027*

*Wind Speed: 17mph (Southeast)*

*Water Gauge: 7’*

*Drift Speed: -mph*

*Water Clarity: -’*

*Cloud Cover: RAIN*

*Sunset: 1832hrs*

Day 4: (*Monday*) 13.25 miles, 62.75 miles overall

Awoke: 0715hrs

Breakfast: 0800hrs

Embarked: 0915hrs

Break: None

Lunch: 1500hrs (Cracker Barrel in Macon, GA)

Break: None

Ending Time: 1200hrs

Dinner: None

Sleep Time: None

* With only 13 or so miles left for this trip we were in no rush to hit the river. However, in true BPC fashion, the first guy up sets the pace.
* Houghton let out a gasp when we found a half dozen mice under and in his kayak. Apparently they found his sit-in kayak to be a good shelter from the rain. That could make for an exciting day on the river!
* The river had risen about 1-2 feet since Saturday as evident by the now submerged tree that we saw as we made landfall.
* The river was very scenic in this part and there is a newly built bridge at Country Club Landing. One part of the river is split by a rocky island with little foliage. I went left and was able to reach a new all-time water-speed record of 9.3mph which shattered my previous 8.5mph achievement. I don’t foresee me ever topping this one.
* Buckeye Landing was a welcomed sight just before noon. Although there are restroom facilities there they are locked. But there is an operable water spigot on the light pole in the middle of the parking lot/ramp.
* I made it to our extract first and was able to jump out and record the other guys make landfall at the end of our trip.
* Jamie Brack was gracious enough to adjust his schedule 2 hours to meet us at the extraction as we made it there sooner than expected. We met his parents there, I see where his sense of selflessness and benevolence come from. These are good people, thank you.
* We packed up our gear and dropped off Preston in Milledgeville before heading home.
* We stopped at the Cracker Barrel in Macon for lunch, I ordered the country fried steak with two sides of fried okra and one side of dumplings. It didn’t disappoint!

*Sunrise: 0645hrs*

*Air Temp: 37-60° average*

*Water Temp: 47°*

*Barometer: 1032*

*Wind Speed: 5mph (Northwest)*

*Water Gauge: 11.5’-Milledgeville & 4.5’-Dublin*

*Drift Speed: 3mph*

*Water Clarity: 2’*

*Cloud Cover: Clear*

*Sunset: 1833hrs*

Conclusion:

The trip was a really an eye-opener in regards to how sensitive the Oconee River is to rainfall and the unscheduled release of the dam at Lake Sinclair. Whereas we planned to have ample sandbars, there were very few. The scenery was comparable to what we’ve seen in the past mainly due to the foliage. We averaged 20.9 miles a day as we paddled down the river. The Big Agnes Tumble-2 w/ Mountain Glow was exactly what I’ve been looking for. It’s sizeable and offers plenty of headroom (I’m 6’2” tall) and the added LED option is great too. The biggest thing to take away from the trip is to make better decision in regard to footwear. I love my Keen water shoes but I shouldn’t have brought only them! I’ve since tested the pairing of wool ankle socks with waterproof “over-socks” which can be easily put inside of my Keens.

Things to do differently…

1. I have since purchased some wool socks and will include waterproof over-socks in my kit.
2. Arin is actively looking to get a Jackson Cuda-14’ for future expeditions.
3. Bring something other than Fireball for consumption, everybody brought that stuff except for the beer-elitists.