

May 2010 rowing tour from Konstanz to Schaffhausen - an embedded correspondent's report

(Disclaimer: Numerous requests to write this report in Finnish notwithstanding, English was chosen as the language that would most ease comprehension. The author is aware that this choice itself might be incomprehensible to some. Apologies.)

Sometime in the spring of 2010, Maren (NRF) and Claudia (PRC) sent out an invitation for a rowing tour on Lake Constance ("Bodensee") and the Upper Rhine. In the end, a mixed crew of 10 rowers from PRC and NRF was to embark on a mildly adventurous trip. In addition to Claudia and Maren, there were Eva, Martin S., Patric, and Petra from PRC, and Franzi, Martin C., Robert, and your correspondent from NRF. The plan was to leave with two C-gigs from Constance on Thursday, May 13th, and to arrive in Schaffhausen (hopefully with intact C-gigs and crews) on Saturday, May 15th.

After meticulous planning (involving detailed reconnaissance work along the route) by Claudia and Maren, almost the entire crew met for a pre-tour briefing (those excused were requested to send homemade cake as a sign of sincere apologies - "I like"). Your correspondent, a rower only since June 2009 and exclusively on Lake Zurich, felt that the briefing was truly an initiation into the dark arts of rowing on a river: the current, the navigation rules and signs, the bigger ships and the narrower waters, landing a boat against the current on a pontoon, 36 ways of sinking your boat, etc.

The weather forecast for the tour days was less than spectacular, to say the least: rainy in the morning, rainy at noon, rainy in the afternoon, rainy in the evening. Nevertheless, on the evening of May 12th, we loaded two C-gigs onto the trailer: Christopoly of PRC (I assume there is also a Poly-JC to go with it - note how JC are the initials not only of Jeanne-Claude, but also of that other JC) - and Røde Orm of NRF (which actually should be "Röde Orm", I'm told; to avoid future arguments between the Swedish and Norwegian fractions at NRF, your correspondent's humble opinion is that to go with the already existing "Sampo" from Finnish mythology, NRF's next boat should ideally be called "Väinämöinen").

After making sure that also all other essential items (outriggers, lifevests, tools, Mariestads, Norrlands Guld, Kopparberg) were loaded on the trailer, it was time to head home and pack our bags of very limited size - all our belongings would have to fit into the two boats.

On Thursday morning, we arrived as scheduled at 9:00 in Constance after an uneventful drive. After we had made the boats and ourselves ready, we embarked for the first part of rowing up to the Reichenau peninsula. Since our two drivers (Martin C. and Patric) had to bring the trailer and the cars to Schaffhausen, they would join us later on the peninsula. This meant coxless rowing for the first stretch, which was not necessarily extreme fun considering the rain, the wind, the waves, and especially the current which required plenty of course corrections. But the highlight was still

to come: At Reichenau, there was no pontoon, so the crews had to step from the boat directly into the calf-deep water. Suffice it to say that this water was darn cold. It was at this time that the necessity to carry one of our boats onto land beautifully collided with our earlier careful distribution of weight in said boat: Lots of small items (most of them weighing pretty precisely 0.33 or 0.5 kg) had to be collected from the boat and carried to land; otherwise the boat would have been too heavy for lifting. Thankfully, after a few minutes in cold water, our feet did not feel cold anymore. As many a crew member admitted later on, the question "Why, oh why?" came to a few minds.

After an extremely extended lunch in a local restaurant (with focus on hot beverages), it was time to reacquaint our feet with cold water. Probably it was the arrival of our two good-humored (dry clothing can work miracles) drivers that turned the tide from this moment on: Once we were all back in the boats, with semi-dry socks on our feet and with some warming, coxed rowing ahead of us, the mood got much better. So off we went to Radolfzell, where the local rowing club Undine graciously allowed us to use their facilities. With the boats safely stowed away and the prospect of a lengthy appointment with a hot shower, we spent some time in the cozy clubhouse before heading into town. We made sure to reduce the weight in the boats for the next day's rowing by letting many of the items weighing 0.33 and 0.5 kg fulfill their intended purpose of rehydration (and illusion of warmth). It is still a matter of debate whether our by now extremely good mood was the reason for the instructions we received from the receptionist at the hotel or not ("This is your room key. It will also open the small side entrance, which you can use to enter the hotel after midnight. One important thing to consider if you should come back tonight around 4:00 am: the key has to be inserted horizontally in the lock and will not fit vertically."). We were smarter than this: We got home relatively early and then enjoyed quite a few centiliters of a homemade, healthy, nut-flavored beverage (thanks Claudia).

The next day was still cloudy, but with almost no rain - the mood in the boats was very good, although some complained that "without rain, it's not really as much fun". We stopped for an extended lunch break on the rowing pontoon (yay!) of a boarding school at Gaienhofen, and continued from there to Stein am Rhein. On the way, we concocted, practised, and perfected a new rowing discipline, aptly named "beer sweep", where rowers alternately row on stroke or bow side (thus "sweep") while holding a can of beer (thus "beer") in their other hand. In Stein am Rhein, we landed on the gravel shore of the local swimming baths. Probably due to a combination of much fun on the way there and of our expertise acquired the day before, exiting directly into the water was a cakewalk this time. Maybe the imminent appointment with another exciting hot shower also had a small part in it.

After an extended dinner at the hotel where most of the crew was staying, it was time for Eva, Franzi, Robert, and your correspondent to head to the "Hotel Grenzstein" - fortunately only a 1.6 km walk. Martin C. was kind enough to accompany us halfway, where we stopped at the "Rhy Lounge" for a few drinks. Incidentally, the two barkeepers were from Denmark - your

correspondent was relieved when he realized that they were not speaking an extreme version of Swiss German - "ah, it's just Danish!"

On Saturday morning, it was time for the final stretch to Schaffhausen. Since the weather was a bit rainier again, the prevailing opinion was to skip the planned lunch at Gasthaus Schupfen and row directly to Schaffhausen. A small stop however (precisely at Schupfen) we did make: A motorboat (of the motorboat "driving school" no less) going into the other direction passed Røde Orm and created some waves. These waves ("quite manageable") were amplified by a strait in the Rhine to such levels ("holy ****!") that after a few seconds, we had sufficient water in the boat to comfortably cover the lower part of the cox seat – trust your correspondent on this. Hence that boat's crew took out and emptied the boat just in front of Schupfen, while the other boat's crew waited patiently. Keeping a distance of a few hundred meters to Røde Orm had definitely paid off for them.

Just a few more km separated us from Schaffhausen, where we landed at the pontoon (hooray!) of the local rowing club, loaded the boats and our remaining belongings onto the trailer and into the cars, and headed back to Zurich. After unloading the trailer and taking care of the boats, we agreed to arrange an after-meeting soon and headed to our respective homes to celebrate the reunion with that old friend, the hot shower.

Those were definitely three days to remember - a big thank you to Claudia and Maren for organizing and to the whole crew for a great time!