

New Year 2000

The forecasts for 2000 are variable with no extremely large tides occurring around the equinoxes as expected. This is the result of the lunar cycle and the current celestial configuration. This situation will also occur in 2001, but then the tides will increase again through the next three years. The noticeable effects of this are the changing of the peak spring tides from full to new moon in late spring (and back again in late autumn) and larger than average bores occurring in the summer months while the equinox bores are smaller than average. Evenso there is plenty of opportunity for surfable waves and it is worth keeping an eye out for strong westerly winds in the Bristol Channel creating large surges.

The most significant change we noticed on our first trip out of the month was a dramatic shift in the lagoon in front of Newnham. The sand has pushed out a long way from the east bank, constricting the lagoon and increasing the amount of tide flow up the west bank channel! This is great news for surfing at this spot. At the same time the sand bank at the south end of the Bollow straight in the vicinity of Secrets has disappeared and this seems to have a detrimental effect on the wave - more of the energy disperses to the west bank causing a much smaller wave with several waves breaking behind it as they catch up.

Saturday 22nd to Monday 24th, January

The bores in January looked like being pretty reasonable with several 10m plus tides over the weekend. The Bore Riders Club were also privileged to be joined by a small TV crew working on a documentary about surfing the bore, which was certainly entertaining at times! There were also several first timers out this month (Martin, Keith and Emma) so the old crew were running out all the old *disaster* stories! And we were joined by cameraman, The Lung, who got some excellent sunrise footage!

On Saturday a strong NW breeze and high pressure combined did not fare well for the wave. Dwarfie, Keith and I (Tomo) rocked up at Newnham, only to see that the wave had already rolled through (hasn't this happened before!?), and Matt and Martin were wandering back along the bank. The wave had been a couple of foot and as expected, with the change in the lagoon, it had worked right up through the Newnham channel to the White Hart. The two guys hadn't ridden that far though.

At Secrets it was a bit of a squeeze with five of us in the water and 'Orange Beanie' Man in the boat. We all got a shock when the wave jacked up well out from the bank about a hundred yards down to a solid four foot. Dropping down on to it everyone picked the wave up except Martin, who flipped out the back. It was a real squeeze and poor old Keith (just as Liam had experienced a couple of months earlier) had his first experience of bore-surfing in the middle of a churning soup with mud and branches to avoid. But he hung on in there and was totally stoked! The wave died on the bend after about 300m, but that was enough, and I let out a great hoot at finally reaching 50 rides (in 12 months)!

Deciding Over was worth a visit we were pretty despondant on realising the freshwater was up to our shoulders in many place along the bank. Evenso Dwarfie and I picked up a tiddly one foot shoulder and rode it to the bridge smiling for the camera!

Surprisingly the bore was punctual regardless of the negative conditions!?

On Sunday morning we set the clock that extra bit early and made it to Newnham with plenty of time. Matt and Dave had wandered on down to Boatyards, while Martin, Gillie and Dwarfie's sister Emma waited on the lower section of Jaqui's reef. Dwarfie and I waited upriver on the corner of the sandbank to step out onto the wave in the channel. There was another (unknown) surfer there and several canoeists. In fact it was the most people I had seen in the water at Newnham since last April - and when the water is at it's coldest! The wind was blowing light northerly and the barometer reading had risen, but this didn't seem to affect the wave performance too much. Dave rode a solid wall of white water up from Boats where a three foot face had formed, while Matt suffered the long paddle back having popped off the back! Sadly the wave was really small at the lower end of Jaqui's Reef, and while Martin picked it up for a short ride, Emma and Gillie both flipped out the back and rapidly drifted out into the river. The problem with the lower end of the reef is that it is too far below the channel to be safe on the paddle back and poor old Emma had a tough old battle to get back into the channel and finally exhausted crawled out up by the rushes (with a camera prod in her face to catch the moment)! Dwarfie and I meanwhile picked up a lovely 2 foot shoulder and after a bit of work getting onto the clean face we were off up river. As if we weren't hooting loud enough when we got to Broadoak, we were really wailing by the time we reached the mudbanks at the west end of the Strand! The ride was clear of 2.5km and the furthest stand up ride in the estuary over the last couple of years. The face held all the way through as we worked from right to left and back to the middle again before finishing with much fin-grinding tucked in on the west bank. Fortunately Matt had driven Pegasus upto the White Hart so our walk back wasn't as far as feared!





At Secrets the wave formed in a similar way but rapidly pulled into the bank at the kink. This meant a rapid loss of power on the shoulder and I had made the fatal error of dropping too low only to pop off the back after paddling crazy to try and get into the wall. Dave Lawson (out for the first time in a while) had similar misfortune just below me. While 'Beanie' man got on along with Dwarfie, Matt and Dave. Matt got the shoulder for the first time in a while and used up a few of his manouveres cutting up and down the face. Again though it tapered off rapidly as the top bend was reached!

At Over the river was crowded with many of the canoeists from Newnham and a couple of other surfers. I couldn't believe that a canoeist determined that it was worthwhile stroking into a one foot shoulder off the bank, plowed straight through all of us surfers with his paddle flailing narrowly missing my head, sending Matt into the bushes, and finally taking five of us out as he came off! And then the guy turned and said 'Oh well, wasn't really worth it anyway'! Exactly...this was the most dangerous performance I have seen by a canoeist so far on the river. If a wave is clearly too small what is the point of plowing through the surfers to try and catch it. If his paddle had hit someone they could have been knocked out under water! I hate to go on but I wish they would use some common sense! As it happened Dwarfie and Dave scraped through to ride 200 yards up to the railway bridge where Dan promptly pulled off a head stand followed by a leg throw around Dave taking them both out. Quite amusing really!!

On Monday I had the river to myself at Newnham. The wind was light and the wave form was similar to Sunday but slightly smaller. I picked it up a little further down but after about 400m on the face I tried to pull off a trick and fell flat on my belly in the water as the wave washed on by! Gutted really! Had to give it a miss upriver as work commitments beckoned. Matt observed a similar but smaller wave at Secrets.

Sunday 20th to Wednesday 23rd, February

Dwarfie and Keith showed up again Saturday night from a Gower session to catch the morning bore. I sadly was out of action this month (and probably next) due to an operation, but planned on doing a bit of filming.

Sunday morning we didn't just miss it again(!) but neither of them even stirred from bed! In fact the only person out on the river was Dave. An entertaining tale is that Dave driving up the A48 noticed a surfboard on a car following him. As he was heading to a club *secret spot* Dave slowed down to let the surfer through. But the other car also slowed (upto almost 25mph!). So when Dave arrived at Secrets the car pulled up too! Suppose that's one way to suss out the river! Dave rode the wave by himself about 600m on a fairly small two footer.

On Monday the wind again was in the north quarter and the pressure was high. The river however was unexpectedly high and this showed at Over! At Newnham there were several canoeists, who'd come over from Wales, in the water. Dwarfie only just managed to paddle across in time to pick up the shoulder but after about 100m the pull into the sandbank flipped him off his board while a couple of the canoeists headed on up towards the pub.

At Secrets again the water was busy with Dwarfie, Keith, Matt, Dave and the 'car-tailer'. But the wave was disappointingly small and only Dave and Matt managed to get into it. At about two foot the wave carried just around the bend.

Over wasn't worth it at all - the depth of freshwater was high - and one of the Welsh canoeists nearly repeated last months spectacle as he barged through the guys to hang onto a less than one foot face! None of them seemed to be too fazed by it though.

Again on Tuesday we were late (my fault with tide times!) and as we looked down river we saw Matt and Dave proning on a hefty soup past the Nab. The wave had been solid four foot when it peaked. Dave had been picked up and hurled from his board as it was spun 180 degrees. But hanging onto the nose he stayed in the soup until it picked him up again and threw him out over the wave straight onto his board facing the right way - that's some 360!! Matt also got a fast head high drop beyond the rapids on the second peak and then was promptly hurled by the close-out. Even though the wave was close I ushered Dwarfie to go for it. With Keith's help we got him down to the water and kitted up as the wave was passing the lower end of the reef. Those watching seemed to be more interested in whether he would catch it than the wave itself. Miraculously Dwarfie just got across far enough and was up and away. But not for long as the shaky soup threw him!



Waiting at Secrets we heard an unusual noise coming from downriver - a bit like a *large* boat. Then as the bore rounded the corner we noticed four jetski's. Almost in formation like Apocalypse Now! We couldn't believe it! The noise the ski's made was abominable from a long distance and one of the local farmers came out rather irrate! They were totally destroying the wave as well. Matt and Dwarfie decided to take them on anyway and paddled across to wait for the wave, while Keith decided it would be safer not to take on a speeding electrical powered object with a lump of foam!

Fortunately the skiers saw the guys just in time and backed off the wave enough to allow them a clean shoulder. It was barely two foot and Dwarfie was so close to the bank that when he took off he was actually passing over the top of the mud and grass tufts! Both rode up to the bend where Matt slid off the edge of the shoulder leaving Dwarf another couple of hundred yards alone.

Matt decided to nip out Wednesday morning on a smaller tide to try and ride from Boats upto Broadoak. He ended up picking up a similar sized wave at the bottom end of the lagoon on the second peak and rode mostly prone all the way to the White Hart! The distance was about 2km and it was the first time someone had ridden across the (now small) lagoon to connect to the Newnham channel in quite a while!

The bores through the rest of the equinox period are sadly not going to be any bigger than these two months though in March it may be worth checking out both the full *and* new moons. There is also a rumour that a famous international (film-star) longboarder may be showing up to have a go on the tiddlers in May?! The best bores of the year are forecast for the end of August and September. If the river topography stays reasonably similar through spring and summer then Newnham could be on for some good ones! See you down there...

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