

Saturday, October 3, 2009

Morning

Linnton, Oregon – just north of Portland

Willamette River, Multnomah Channel

I stayed with Stu Brown and his family last night. He and I are out the door early to row on Multnomah Channel. We'll launch from Portland Boat Club. PBC is housed in two floating boathouses moored adjacent to the Channel's mainland side. Multnomah Channel hides from the Willamette River's main course behind Sauvie Island, a sparsely-populated and bucolic chunk of farm land that lends a peaceful ambience to the Channel. I love to row these peaceful waters, so much so that I store my 25 year-old Owen cedar single here (250 miles away from my home) for the rare outing. The stitches are hurting me, so I'll just paddle the Owen and let Stu be the first to give *Better Angel* a real test.



The larger of the two PBC boathouses. PBC is Portland's only rowing club with showers.

Stu is my friend and double partner, and an outstanding rower. I am eager to share *Better Angel* with him and to hear his opinion about it. Worried about breaking the boat, Stu climbs aboard cautiously; then away he goes, putting in some real work while Old Judge paddles and sight-sees in the Owen. We return to the dock at about the same time.

Climbing out and beholding the boat, Stu is downright *effusive* in describing it. Stu is a reserved man and I have rarely seen him this fired up.

Monday, October 5, 2009

Suttle Lake, Oregon

Foot of Santiam Pass, 15 miles northwest of Sisters

I spend Saturday afternoon and Sunday at Terrebonne, east of the Cascade, visiting my son Ian. We have a grand time watching college football and about a dozen *Firefly* episodes. It snows Sunday. Monday morning I leave his place in the dark and arrive 90 minutes later at Suttle Lake, in the dark. When I park at the boat ramp at the west end of the lake it is 30 degrees outside. I keep the car and heater running, and watch the sun rise over Black Butte. It will be a pristine day.



Suttle Lake, Oregon

Bethanne Kronick arrives promptly at 7:00 AM, as planned. She lives in nearby Camp Sherman and is a fellow member of the Portland club I race with, Willamette Rowing

Club. She is someone of interest to me because in recent years she has revived a rowing tradition at Suttle Lake that had begun and ended with my rowing there during the years 1981 – 1986, while living and practicing law in Sisters. She accomplished something that eluded me, securing the permits and permissions required to affix a low-profile rowing dock to the end of the two-foot high dock I stepped down off of in the olden days.

She pulls her single off of her car roof to the sound of ice clattering from it and onto the ground. I launch first, rowing toward the east end of the lake and she catches with me. On the way back I

give the boat my first hard workout in it. *Better Angel* is a joy to row. I feel comfortable at both ends of the stroke with the stretchers showing one hole to the stern.

Geometry including pitch and height is right. The boat favors a deliberate and soft catch (as Co Rentmeester would say, as the blades "caress the water") and encourages acceleration through the drive. My Croker hatchet blades complement the boat perfectly. The boat is challenging and wants to be rowed well. The absolute level finds when sitting empty next to the dock wants to hold throughout the stroke. It feels much lighter than composite racing shells weighing less. It springs away from the release, runs far and tracks true. Fore-and-aft rocker is nil. Goodies and custom touches include: comfortable seat (I usually use a pad and won't need one with this boat); stretcher tighteners that are kind on the fingers; every material and joint meticulously conceived and executed; rare and superior woods; matched grain on the hull; etc.

Most importantly from a competitor's standpoint, the boat is very fast. I look forward to racing in it. Steve Chapin is to be commended. He is really onto something. The boat is both art and competitive machine. It is in a class of its own, worthy of the Pocock name and transcendent in many respects. Steve put a lot of wisdom, experience and love into this rare craft. It is a privilege to be in its care.

Bethanne takes the boat for a lap. Her assessment tracks closely with mine.

Sunday, October 11, 2009
Petaluma, California
North Bay Rowing Club



NBRC rowers on Petaluma River

I row away from downtown Petaluma through the “S” curves and past the line of flags, and stop and turn about 500 meters past the lone tree to starboard. I have rowed at Petaluma a few times in the past when I am in nearby Sonoma visiting my parents. Rowing in Petaluma has special meaning for me because it was in this town one day in 1963 that I had my “breakout” game as a high school basketball player, scoring a lot of points and coming to realize for the first time that I had a future as an athlete. As do most clubs, NBRC thrives mostly due to a nucleus of stalwarts, all competent and fit rowers, all generous and friendly. I look forward to rowing with them more. They are, of course, impressed with *Better Angel*.

Click back to get to [Travelog Index](#)