

## **Brigade Summary Report to CVBS**

### **2022 Peace River Brigade – Passing the Paddle – July 22 to 28, 2022**

Clayhurst Bridge to the Town of Peace River

The brigade was originally planned for 2020 but was postponed twice due to public health concerns related to COVID.

Overall the brigade went very well. There were 8 boats registered through CVBS and Zone 4. There were 76 paddlers plus 5 support crew for a total of 81 people attending. Crews came from Victoria, Saskatchewan, Kelowna, Hinton and Edmonton. Paddlers were from all over including Wisconsin and all of Alberta.

The river water levels were lower than normal for this time of year. Flows were about 950 cms for most days. This created some more shallows and gravel bars but mostly did not affect paddling. Paddling speed was generally 10 km per hour plus breaks. Fortunately the dam was opened and the flow increased on our longest day of paddling, increasing our typical speed somewhat.

The organizing committee contacted all the surrounding communities to let them know about the event. This resulted in some exposure in local media but not many people actually came out to see the brigade launch, paddle or land. The nature of the deep river valley means there is limited river access, with few places to really see river travel.

The local counties were very supportive of the brigade and contributed 4 suppers and one lunch at virtually no cost to us. The brigade organized and paid for a supper the first day as crews arrived plus a farewell event on the last day.

The brigade theme was “Passing the Paddle”. This was intended to promote a younger demographic to experience paddling in a brigade and also to get new, younger people involved in organizing a brigade. This was generally successful as there were 9 minors paddling the brigade, aged 9 to 15, approximately 10% of total paddlers.

There were no injuries or incidents during the brigade. One boat tipped over due to a miscommunication related to calling a paddling switch. The captain quickly organized the crew and started bailing the tipped boat. Others boats quickly came to assist and everyone was back in the boat before long.

The weather was very favorable with mostly sunny and warm days. The heat actually came close to being too much as the high temperatures hit 32 and 35 degrees on two days. Crews were good at dressing for sun protection and drinking lots of water.

The only section of the river that caused any concern was Sawchuck rapids, Class 1, approximately 9 km downstream of Pratt's Landing. The low water levels resulted in more gravel bars and left a small fast channel to go through. The boats all ran around at some point and had to be pushed or lined past the shallows. One boat went backwards through the narrow chute, while carrying the Brigade Chief.

The brigade used 4 two way radios for communication between the boats. This was a big help in keeping the boats together and knowing what was going on at all times. Three satellite phones were rented, one each for the lead and sweep boats and one for the ground support crew. There was a concern that the deep river valley limited cell coverage. Unfortunately the phones did not work well, apparently due to recent solar flare activity.

TJ Gladstone preformed brigade opening and closing ceremonies. This included a smudge ceremony for all participants, land acknowledgement and setting of personal intentions at the start, plus a native song and reflection at the closing. It was simple and heartfelt. The closing ceremony at the Town of Peace River included speeches from the Mayor and two MLA's.

Feedback is being collected from the organizing committee, team captains and participants. One comment that stands out is that this brigade represents the future of brigading. It focused on encouraging youth to attend and made sure there were opportunities for them to have fun. The daily paddles weren't too long, allowing a slower pace. From Day 2 to 6, the youth paddled on other boats and kept the mood playful. The kids often jumped overboard and went swimming alongside the boats on the hot days. Some adults did too.

A private Facebook group page [Passing the Paddle Peace River Brigade](#) has been set up to allow participants to share photos and experiences. It is getting lots of action and we encourage you to check it out.

The organizing committee was mostly made up of people who had not done that job before. This may have helped the Passing the Paddle theme become reality but may also have resulted in some opportunities not being realized.

Personally, leading the planning and running of the brigade was a lot of work but it was made easier by the great assistance from those on the organizing committee. I should have tried to get more people on the committee that could have taken on roles for community engagement and media relations. That might have resulted in more local people being exposed to the brigade activities.

The Safety Plan initially listed me as Brigade Chair, Brigade Chief, Route Chair, Safety Chair and Community Coordinator/Liaison. I was able to get one paddler to assist in doing the daily safety duties. The Brigade Chief duties were shared with the captains that volunteered to be lead boat each day.

It is fortunate that many of the crews included experienced brigade captains and paddlers. That provided a high level of expertise and safety for on water activities. The nightly captains meeting discussed start times, hazards, boat crew composition, designating lead and sweep boats and many other items. Captains were very helpful with good suggestions and a positive attitude. This was a huge reason the brigade was so successful.

Overall it was a good experience for the organizing committee, the participants and me. We have been receiving many compliments on how well the brigade was run and how much fun everyone had. That is very satisfying and a great reward for our efforts.

At the closing ceremony we passed the paddle on to the organizers of both the Trent Severn Waterway (Bruce Clark) and Athabasca River (Quentin Olson) brigades being planned for 2023. Hopefully, they will also enjoy success and keep passing the paddle.

Stewart Inglis  
Peace River Brigade Chair