

Home to Home - paddling from Osnabrück to Zwolle

The trip had been in the planning for a few months, but the day was getting closer and closer when, with all the preparations and planning, we were finally ready to actually set off. We got all our things together and jumped into the van to pick up the Hobie kayaks at the Kabootje shop. We were warmly welcomed and got an introduction to the kayaks with some tips and tricks that will help us on the way. Right away we were super excited to not only use our arms but also our legs for the perfect balance and variation. In short, a perfect full-body workout as we really got to feel only a few hours later. With Mark's assistance, the kayaks were nicely secured, so we were prepared to drive to Germany where we did the final food preparations. We went to bed with everything packed and with great anticipation. Shortly after we already got up again to begin our once-in-a-lifetime journey back to Zwolle. After a short ride, we came to our starting point at the Hase between Melle and Osnabrück. Finally, the moment arrived when we for the first time put the kayaks in the water, stored away our luggage, food, and water for the next five days, then we hit the water and started to paddle. The excitement did not last for too long as after only 500 meters we already came across our first obstacle. The river was going through private property and a mill. Still full of energy and inexperience we got the kayaks out of the water and started to carry and push them across a field a few hundred meters, over a road till we were able to put them back into the water. We also noticed at that point, that the water level was quite low. After we got the second kayak with fascinating looks from a small girl back into the water, we then continued our adventure with the hope and thought that such transfers would rather be a rare occasion. Unfortunately, that wish did not really come true due to the low water levels. But we carried on through very narrow parts that just about fit one kayak till it got a bit wider. In some parts, we were accompanied by some horses on the side or even some farmers that greeted us nicely and wished us good luck for our trip. After a while shortly before Osnabrück the river meandered through some nice fresh green meadows we took a small lunch break. After a nice comforting soup, we continued further down the constantly growing river Hase till we came into more urban areas just before Osnabrück. Out of the beautiful greenery we got into the urban jungle with all its obstacles. The river got dirtier till it was just a soup out of leaves, sticks, plastic, and all sorts of random stuff that was all held up by a pipe that ran across from one side to the other. There was no way that we were able to get out at the side because it was way too steep. The first tries to go over the pipe failed. We were already very tired from the first day, but we kept on trying with one pushing the pipe down with the paddle and the other taking up speed to use the momentum to go over. Finally, we made it! The first day of paddling was then also soon over because we had to exit the water at a larger weir near Osnabrück's main station. We came to rest next to a building site that prevented us from returning to the river. As it was slowly getting darker, we explored the possibility of returning to the water the following morning. As night fell, we established our camp and began preparing our meal. We slowly made our way to bed, exhausted, disappointed that we hadn't gotten very far, and frustrated at how frequently we had to transfer. Still, it was hard to recognize that we were actually undertaking this adventure while also realizing that neither of us had ever travelled in this manner before. We had the impression that nobody had ever considered using the available waterways to move from one place to another. The rivers we have travelled past thus far were simply there, being used and trashed by society. The many impressions of this first day passed by in our thoughts as we fell asleep.

The following morning, just before the sun rose, we got up, started packing our bags, and started cooking tea and breakfast. Even though we were physically exhausted from the challenges of the previous day and a sleepless night, we were energized about what was about to come today. We were also hopeful that we don't have to switch over especially as the first weir of the day leading us into the city centre of Osnabrück was actually like a slide. The city was still very quiet and seemed to be still sleeping. There was a slight mist over the river and only a few ducks joined us on the river. A bit later we again came across a weir and a woman that greeted us nicely a few meters before came to us and asked us if she could help in any way as the way out was pretty difficult. However, we were confident by now to do it ourselves also because we had figured out the movements to make it more efficient.

The water was quite disgusting due to the accumulation of dirt, foam, and trash. When we had both kayaks out of the water, we looked for a place to put them back in, but we were unable to find one as far as we could see, probably because we were in the heart of Osnabrück's historic district. So, we put the kayak back on its wheels and proceeded to walk along a busy street on the sidewalk, crossing several streets, until we came to a small patch of greenery where we could see a chance of getting them back into the water. We had to do this twice, which took quite some time, and we attracted quite a few curious looks from people on the street and in cars. Finally, we carried them through some trees and steeply down into the river because this appeared to be the only possible way to get them packed into the water. After that, we were able to pick up some speed and make some distance while gradually settling into a rhythm. Still, as you now might imagine, we got stopped again. We came to a factory that used the river for their business which meant we could not go through. To not commit a crime, we had to get out before we came into private property. We were asked what we were doing when we got out at yet another awkward location near the factory entrance. We inquired as to how far we would need to walk to return to the water, and he replied that it would only be a few hundred meters. With this short distance in mind, we began to move one kayak while using the trolley that Kabootje also provided for us, which already helped us save a lot of energy. However, a few hundred meters turned into at least over a kilometre. Even though our hands were burning, we had to get the second one. We further regained our energy with some nuts, chocolate, and energy balls, and we then managed to get the second kayak to the spot where we could get them back into the water. From there the rest of the Hase went relatively smoothly compared to what we have already gone through. After passing through the city, the landscape was once quite beautiful, despite the fact that the water levels were occasionally still low. Upon returning to the green, we also stopped for another lunch break with some bread and soup. We really felt the need for energy as the caring as well as the paddling took a toll on us. Also, Anna had already begun to feel sick and had a sore throat. We continued to follow the Hase river as it meandered until it came to an expansive end that looked like a lake. As the Hase continued only as a small stream below the Mittelland Canal, which was the next water to take, we had to exit again. We had to climb a steep hill on the trolley once more, which depleted our energy further. Therefore, as we got both kayaks up, we first had to take another energy break with snacks and a short nap. But we had a goal we wanted to accomplish, so the break couldn't last too long. We were optimistic when we got back in the water because we knew there wouldn't be any obstructions on the canal. The only thing we had concerns about was the canal boats. However, that anxiety also disappeared as the first boat passed us. Having the fins in the water we started to pedal using the strengths of our legs along the canal. People kept giving us curious looks and wondering if we were in a pedalboat or a kayak. After some time, our initial excitement about how simple a canal was slowly faded as we realized how much the current of the rivers had previously aided us and how monotonous it is to just travel straight for so long without any real variation. We were aware that paying too much attention to those ideas could lead to a reduction in motivation and energy. To avoid that, we gave ourselves small goals of paddling from one bridge to the next, rewarding ourselves with snacks and occasionally taking a break for our legs, to keep us motivated. We also began to hear an inspirational extreme athlete's story and positive outlook, which gave us more strength to successfully complete this challenge. Then, the sky was slowly turning colourful as the sun started to settle. People were drinking and celebrating along the canal's sidewalks while being accompanied by a wagon blasting music. Although it wasn't exactly the peaceful natural scene we had pictured, it served as motivation for us to eventually arrive at the location where we wanted to set up camp. As soon as the boats were out of the water, we were warmly greeted by our friends who were following us all the time to film and photograph us. It was nice to see them again and get some rewarding and astonishing looks and hugs from them. As it grew dark, we established our camp and began to cook. While we ate, the lights shimmered in the water. And while we were sitting there slowly getting tired, another day came to an end.

Again, we were exhausted but happy and proud of what we have achieved so far. The night of sleep was yet too short and still, we could not sleep too much as our alarm woke us up again early in the morning just before sunrise. We simultaneously packed our belongings and prepared breakfast, just

like the previous morning. We were well coordinated, and a routine has already emerged which made us more efficient. With the first rays of the sun, we got the kayaks into the water and continued our journey. It took us three more days, paddling on waters such as the Hörsteler, Große Aa, Dortmund-Vechte Canal, Ems-Vechte Canal, Nordhorn-Almelo Canal, Lateraal Canal, Linderbeek, and Overijsselsche Vechte. We had further ups and downs faced many more obstacles and were pushed to the edges of our strengths. To make our final goal, we started early in the morning and paddled until late in the night making use of our head torches. The bad cold that caught both of us further sapped our energy. Luckily, we had enough snacks in form of energy balls, nuts, dried fruits and chocolate with us and our photo and video crew gave us motivating words and provided us with enough cough drops to make it all the way to Zwolle. The entire journey with all its ups and downs, the many force-shattering obstacles we faced and how we kept motivating ourselves will still be shown on YouTube this Year. Within the video, you will also get more details on how we did the last three days and will get a feeling of how it is to swap the car with a boat. We hope to be inspired to believe in things that seem impossible, to question comfort zones and to redefine social norms. Adventures are waiting right on our doorstep and thanks to Kabootje, and the great help of Mark and his wife, we were able to realize one.