



I'LL NEVER FORGET THE DAY...

# I completed my epic Amazon adventure

**OLIE HUNTER SMART:** *Taking the leap from helming a sportsboat in Poole to kayaking 3,600 miles along the Amazon nearly ends in disaster for one young explorer*

**G**rowing up on the edge of Poole Harbour, I was always messing about in boats from a young age – from Mirror dinghy and Laser sailing to the second-hand Fletcher Arrowflight that my dad bought when I was eight, and the Windy 40 Bora behind which my cousins and I waterski – sometimes 12 up at a time. The great thing about boating around Poole is that I've always felt safe knowing that there is help nearby if I get into difficulty. I wish I'd had that safety net for my latest endeavour, kayaking the length of the Amazon from its most distant source, high up in the Peruvian Andes, to where it enters the Atlantic Ocean in Brazil.

Tarran Kent-Hume and I set off for the source in early June. We hiked 400 miles through the Peruvian mountains as that initial icy trickle became the Rio Mantaro. We then clambered into kayaks and paddled the remaining 3,600 miles, totally unsupported, through the infamous cocaine-producing 'Red Zone', dodging bullets from trigger-happy pirates and surviving painful stings from unknown Amazonian fish. Yet our final hours were more terrifying than all of that.

Due to the tides we'd not had much sleep in the previous week so we decided to make one last push and reach the point, eight miles into the Atlantic Ocean where the Amazon officially ends, later that day. We set off in darkness at 10.30pm, battling through the breaking waves to reach calmer water further out. I quickly capsized, retreating back to the beach to bail out; not a great start. Second time lucky and I made it. As the sun rose we were not far from the final headland, but the tide turned against us – we had to wait it out. We took the opportunity to stretch our legs but we were floating again within minutes as the tide came in. For the next six hours we sheltered from the racing tide and oncoming waves by tying up to mangrove trees – those knot-tying lessons from years ago proving invaluable! We were running low on fresh water at this stage so decided to add sterilised river

Out of the danger zone, Olie looks comfortable in his kayak



*Fishing boats saw us disappear into the wave troughs, themselves yawing all over the place*

water to our meals. I took one bite of the cold porridge and gagged; the salt content was way too much to even contemplate eating. I'd just have to go hungry.

Once under way again we followed some fishing boats out along the edge of a vast sandbank. The wind against tide conditions were causing havoc, huge waves now coming in from all directions. Fishing boats saw us disappear into the wave troughs, themselves yawing all over the place. Tarran watched as one hit me side on, almost knocking me straight in. Eight miles from land we finally reached our 'destination' – the official end point of the Amazon. Emotions were mixed: elation, fatigue and relief, but also the fear of being knocked out by waves bigger than anything I'd seen before was growing as the water lapped over our 6" freeboard. No boat would see us if we were swept out to sea and nor could they help us as they themselves struggled against the swell. We only managed a quick paddle high-five before retreating to calmer waters.

The tide had washed us much further out to sea than anticipated but fortunately it was turning again, calming the waters much to our relief. However, we'd not factored in that the tide would wash us straight on to the huge sandbank we'd passed earlier. As the water rose, we got washed further and further on to the sandbank, getting stuck every few minutes. It was a draining three hours before we got off the sandbank. The sun was setting fast, the tide turned one more time and we had our last battle against the stream to get into the river channel that would take us to São Caetano where we'd finally be able to put our feet on dry land, some 22 hours after setting off the day before. We were shattered, but our mammoth 131-day unsupported expedition was finally over! **MBY**  
Read more about the expedition at these websites: [www.amazonriverrun.com](http://www.amazonriverrun.com); [www.oliehuntersmart.com](http://www.oliehuntersmart.com)

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