

COMPETITIVE CANOEING

MARATHON RACING

Marathon racing offers the opportunity to race on an equal basis with other people within the nationwide divisional system.

The many hundreds of miles of canals and slow moving rivers on which we have free access are ideal for marathon racing. Race distances vary and often involve carrying your boat around weirs and obstacles in what are known as portages. Entry level races start around three miles, whilst races for experts such as the classic Devizes – Westminster race are 125 miles long.

SPRINT RACING

The Olympic sport of sprint racing can be compared with track athletics; the fitness and technique of paddlers tested in a head to head contest in as controlled an environment as possible.

Racing is performed in single (K1), double (K2) and four seat kayaks (K4) as well as in canoes (C1, C2, and C4). The distances raced range from 500m to 10,000m.

Each competitor is timed over the course with judges and photo-finish equipment stationed on the line to sort out close finishes. World Championships for seniors are held every year except Olympic year. For juniors, world championships are held every two years.

Traditionally the preserve of the eastern European nations, British racers are now coming of age and with the wider commitment to sporting excellence we are, as a nation challenging the very best in the World both in marathon and sprint paddling.

SLALOM

Excitement and personal challenge - an ultimate test of skill. Speed and precision are crucial as slalomists need to squeeze through a series of gates without making contact to avoid penalty seconds being added to the time taken to paddle from start to finish.

Slalom was invented to test river-running skills in a safe and friendly environment but is now a much more athletic event with top end events taking place on grade 3 - 4 rapids.

The object of the sport is to negotiate a course of 18-24 gates. The winner of the event will have negotiated the course in the fastest time, with the fewest penalties. If you miss a gate, go through it in the wrong direction, or go through gates in the wrong order, you'll incur a fifty second penalty. If you hit a gate with boat, paddle or body, two seconds will be added to your time.

Entry level to canoe slalom is division 4 and these slaloms are generally held on calm water and the courses will be simple. Those with higher level white water skills can apply for ranking status and start in division 2. Any boat may be used

up to and including division 1. You don't need a slalom boat to come and try slalom.

SURFING

Surf canoeing is a very popular and thrilling aspect of paddlesport in which most canoeists participate at some stage using standard canoeing equipment. The more modern freestyle design of boats can offer a new and equally challenging experience for those seeking the thrill and the rush of the ultimate surf wave.

Specialist composite surf boats can be used for carving across the wave and for performing aerial moves, spins, etc. From the 1970s emerged the Wave Ski a fast, manoeuvrable boat, capable of extremely radical moves where the paddler sits on top of the boat.

Local competitions are held all around the country. They consist of heats of 20 minutes with four paddlers in each heat. The three highest scoring waves for each paddler are totaled and the best two paddlers go through to the next round until only four paddlers are left fighting for 4th to 1st place.

CANOE POLO

The fast and exciting game of canoe polo is played by teams of five paddlers (with up to three substitutes) who endeavor to score by shooting the ball into their opponents' goal, which is suspended two metres above the pitch. Generally it is played in swimming pools with specially designed boats but in the summer there are several large tournaments outside.

The game requires excellent team work and quick reactions with kayak and paddle. The ball can be thrown by hand or flicked with the paddle. Canoe polo, played at the highest level is a fast and furious game – pushing opponents in is allowed. Body protection, helmets and faceguards are all compulsory.

With many friendly inter-club games as well as local and regional leagues operating, canoe polo is the fastest growing paddlesport in Britain. World and European championships are held every two years. Great Britain is one of the World's foremost nations, the national teams often winning medals.

WILD WATER RACING

The speed, control and freedom to choose one's own path, whilst competing against the elements and the clock, is the attraction of wild water racing.

The racer's control in the rough water has to be as precise as that of the slalom paddler through the gates, the distance raced demands the endurance of the marathon paddler and the power to overcome the frequently changing water conditions requires the finesse that is needed by the sprint canoeist leaving the start or in the middle of the 10,000 metre event.

Races vary from 10 to 35 minutes duration – some races are nearly flat – ideal for beginners, while others include some excellent and challenging rapids.

FREESTYLE PADDLING

The fastest developing whitewater sport. Freestyle, or whitewater rodeo as it used to be called, is the competitive development of playboating. Playboating is all about having fun in whitewater, it's about surfing, getting vertical, falling in, using the water to pull off the most impressive moves. It adds enjoyment to running a river or many paddlers simply 'park and play' at their local weir or whitewater course.

Britain's first rodeos were organised in 1988. Since then playboating and freestyle competitions have grown in popularity both with paddlers and spectators.

Like other action sports, freestyle paddling is getting better all the time. Paddlers all over the place are now improving in skill faster than ever before and looking for new places to try their developing free expression skills.

A corresponding explosion in boat development now allows paddlers to push the limits of playboating in fun, informal and friendly settings.

Competitions are normally "free expression sessions", paddlers performing to impress the judges and play to the crowds. Surfing, flat spins, cartwheels, split wheels, blunts and loops. New aerial moves are being continually developed – donkey flips, mc nasties, helixes.... If it looks good, do it and try to score.

Squirt Boating

Squirt boats, developed in the 1980s in the States, are the ultimate in low volume playboats. They are designed for planing and easy spins, and have hard edges for wave speed and carving but their key feature is the minimum of volume and slicey ends. They have neutral buoyancy enabling them to sink beneath a wave, using the current beneath the surface. In the correct hands they dance through the water, effortless moves linked seamlessly. To squirtists, this is soulboating. Experienced paddlers can even disappear totally underwater reappearing skyrocketing into the air twenty yards downstream. Squirt boat competitions take place alongside freestyle events.

INTERNATIONAL CANOE SAILING

International canoe sailing is one of the oldest competitive disciplines in the canoeing world. The original competition was held in 1875 for the Sailing Challenge Trophy.

The advent of competitive sailing prompted the development of canoes capable of moving efficiently forward, a centreboard to aid windward performance and a sailing seat to provide greater power, to balance the heeling effect of the wind in the sails.

Developments since then have produced a modern and highly refined racing machine, requiring a combination of skill, fitness and agility. An International Sailing Canoe, an IC, has a sail area of a total of 10 square metres and has for many years been the fastest single-handed sailing boat around an Olympic course.

Open Canoes

Open canoeing can mean many things to different people; whether it is a means to escape into the wilderness with camping kit packed inside, the perfect craft for all the family and dog, a stable boat suitable for young, old and disabled or a great boat to run rivers in.

People are now looking for different experiences to improve their quality life. Wilderness camping trips, where a person spends a long period of time away from civilisation with all necessary equipment stores in their canoe, are becoming popular and naturalists are able to view wildlife in its own natural surroundings, causing a minimum of disturbance.

Parents with small children wishing to take part in leisure activities together are turning to open canoeing; partly because it helps with family relationships, but also as it creates interest in their children's education.

The open canoe can also provide for those wishing to experience the challenge of white water. Good outfitting and additional buoyancy allows river running at all levels. Not only can you now paddle Grade 5 whitewater and run big drops, but you can also compete in freestyle events in short open canoes

Whitewater Paddling

Paddling on whitewater is not for everyone but for others it is the ultimate in adventure. White water can come in the form of high mountain streams, wide raging torrents and everything in between.

Whitewater paddling is a personal thing. Excitement and adventure is what we seek and we are happy to search for it on an endless succession of rivers, all different yet offering the qualities needed to make it so – gentle valleys, forested banks, steep gorges and challenging rapids.

The international river grading system grades all rivers on a rising scale of difficulty from Grade 1 to Grade 6. Mastering manoeuvres such as breaking in and breaking out, ferry gliding and support strokes allow for the instinctive development of timing and strategy and bring confidence of movement, an understanding of the mechanics of the river and an appreciation of safety and personal limitations.

Modern boat designs have made 'playing the river' - surfing a wave, spinning in a stopper, cartwheeling along an eddy line - more accessible and fun.

Whitewater paddling can be whatever you make it – a blast down a local river, going one better than your friend in a river feature, access to nature at it's rawest or most luscious, adrenaline, fear or excitement.

SEA KAYAKING

Simple tours in familiar coastal areas attracted by a mixture of curiosity and a sense of discovery, or week-long adventures in the high seas around the roughest of coastlines. Both are the appeal of sea kayaking. The British Isles have enough to keep a sea kayaker occupied for a lifetime. Our coastal areas of Pembrokeshire, North Wales, Anglesey, North West Coast of Scotland, the

Hebrides and the Shetlands attract sea kayakers from all over the world, each area rich in bird life, wildlife and impressive scenery.

Away from beaches packed with tourists, there lay little known coves, sea cliffs, sea stacks and offshore islands, all awaiting exploration.

Sea kayaking, you soon discover strengths and weaknesses and learn to pay attention to the natural world.

To begin with, a basic and healthy respect for the sea in all its changing moods will direct enthusiasts to seek expert guidance and tuition to acquaint themselves with the necessary knowledge of tides, navigation, equipment and advanced rescue techniques. However, those keen to seek the challenges and freedom offered should not let this put them off.

Our coastal environments offer a truly wilderness experience.

ADVENTURE PADDLING!

From Anglesey to the Alps, Scotland to Scandinavia. There are as many types of expedition as there are reasons for going. The choice of craft, distance paddled and difficulty of the water is all a matter for the individual's decisions, which hopefully, are based on their own experiences and imagination.

In the past there persisted a myth that only 'big boys in big boats' went on such expeditions and even then, to a wild exotic place, heavily sponsored, to complete a first descent of a raging grade 5+ river.

However, most would argue that none of the above are pre-requisites and that the real exploration is one carried out within yourself. When pushing yourself both mentally and physically, certain aspects of your life become crystal clear.

Friendships are forged, experiences are sought and met.

It is surprising how quickly we shrug off and reject the modern conveniences of life once undertaking a journey.

Unrealistic criteria and programmes beyond the nature of the trip or paddler's experience can often get in the way of a more successful approach. Some things can't be rushed. The logistics of getting boats to the river can be an epic in itself. Going further afield, the lure of the Grand Canyon, Costa Rica or the great Zambezi River in Zimbabwe may fire your enthusiasm for exploration in these superb areas. You don't necessarily have to be world-class paddler – many organised trips are aimed at novice to improver level.