

Cuckmere Valley Canoe Club Women's Development Day



CASE STUDY

Inspired by a similar event held in Bude, Devon, Cuckmere Valley Canoe Club adopted the idea of running a woman only development day in a bid to encourage more local women and girls to try and hopefully stay in the sport of canoeing. The club held their first event in 2007 successfully attracting 35 women from the surrounding area. With the desire to host another equally successful event in 2008 a team of volunteers set about organising their 2nd Women's Development Day to be held on 20th July 2008.

Promotion of the event

The event was advertised primarily via word of mouth (mostly around people's work places) along with flyers posted on staff room notice boards. This alone proved to be all that was needed to attract numbers that meant people had to be put on a standby list as the club reached its capacity. As a result the idea of promoting the event through local radio and newspaper was promptly reined in. A total of 76 women and girls attended on the day, far exceeding expectations and previous year numbers.

Participants

The participants came from all over Sussex, Surrey and Kent with ages ranging from young 8 year old girls to women in their 50's. Interestingly the majority were women rather than girls. There was a vast range of abilities, some were trying paddling for the first time, some had attended last year's event, others were friends of club members or people who lived nearby and had paddled before (quite often a number of years ago).



The Day

A great deal of preparation went into the organisation before the event started at 10am. Male club members were on hand first thing to help set out the boats and equipment, returning again at the end of the day to reverse the process. With the majority of participants pre-booked they knew the numbers that had to be catered for. The event started with registration and signing up to different sessions for the morning and afternoon (some people only attended half the day but most were there for it all). Tea, coffee and biscuits were made available throughout the day. Everyone had a chance to mingle and meet one another before the organiser made some introductions and covered basic housekeeping. The first sessions then got underway with the groups on the water for approx 1 1/2 hours. There was a picnic lunch on the river bank before heading back out for a different session in the afternoon. Due to the location and the good weather, there were many passersby of which several women stopped and asked about the club and showed interest in wanting to have a go sometime in the future.

Sessions available

Raft Building- A great team building exercise always guaranteed to be fun, with the final challenge of paddling the newly constructed raft and hoping it floats! This was mainly taken up by the younger participants on the day.

Children's Games- Designed to pro-

vide a paddling experience whilst having fun and games with each other in a group. The coach used plastic ducks, Frisbee, hula hoop and balls as props for several games.

Journey- Starting at the club house this session took the participant along the meanders of the river, over a portage to the sea and back again providing a chance to see the surrounding area as well as enjoying paddling in a group.

Try a Boat- With several different boats on offer this session gave an opportunity to try them all.

Kayak and Canoe sessions- With sessions split into intermediate and beginner, these coached sessions helped people learn new skills and advance any existing skills.

Slalom session- For more advanced paddlers this session provided an insight into the level of technique used in slalom racing and gave the participants advice on the fine tuning of their stroke skills.



Equipment available

A large variety of boats were available to paddle including junior boats as well as paddles, buoyancy aids, helmets and cagoules. The boats included Piranha Junior masters, Dagger TG light and master TG, Open Canoes, a Topelino Duo and Slalom Boats.

Questionnaire

At the lunch break there was a chance for people to complete a questionnaire. As there was limited time only 7 questionnaires were completed, some were done as a group therefore at least 10 people contributed in total. The general summaries of responses are as follows; the majority had paddled before and found out about the day by either word of mouth or were recommended it by friends. Most were attracted to the women's day because of the fact it was women only and through recommendations from friends. Most would not mind being part of a mixed group although they enjoyed the fact it wasn't on this occasion. The perceived barriers were thought to be lack of female coaches and role models. Many commented that men are too competitive and tend to dominate sessions being quite demoralising for the women. The general favourite thing about canoeing was being on water. There was a variation of dislikes- amongst which was getting wet, cold and banging thumbs on the side of the boat (this is a result of the boat being too big). When asked what could be done to attract more women and girls into paddlesport the common answer was more women only days or sessions, kit that fits, good facilities and to be taught in a fun way.



Observations

It was very encouraging to see so many women wanting to go canoeing, great to see some women had come alone, not knowing anyone. Others came with friends and family and were up for some fun. Interestingly the majority were women rather than girls- perhaps this was down to the fact it was advertised as a Women Development Day? This should maybe be considered with advertisement of future events. If it was advertised as a Girls Development Day would it have been the other way around? Most of the younger paddlers, of which there were approximately 10 to 12 of, were current club members or friends of members.

The event itself was well organised, with helpers to direct and answer questions. There was however a lot of hanging around before getting on the water and as many were already changed in paddling gear perhaps the sessions should have got started sooner- although this did provide time for people to chat to one another.

The try a boat session in the morning was well attended and provided many with their first paddling experience. Observations suggested that more tuition would have been helpful to some, particularly those that had never paddled before (this was also some feedback from a couple of people in the session).

The children's games session was very well prepared for with lots of props for games and all the participants seemed to be having good fun- with many requests to capsize!

In the afternoon a slalom session was run by an ex GB team paddler. With no slalom gates available the session covered the basic stroke techniques involved in slalom, finishing with a mini head to head race putting into practise what the participants had learnt. At the end of the session there was an opportunity to ask questions, providing an insight into slalom racing that many did not know about. The general feedback was very positive

even though they were worked quite hard! A few commented on the way they were taught, they liked the very technical input and found it clear and easier to understand than when taught some of the same skills before. The club had some slalom boats available, these were fairly old with little volume, this could put someone off as they would be very unstable, although two women did try them and didn't seem to have too many problems.

The day was very enjoyable and there was a great atmosphere and camaraderie amongst the women. The impression was that the majority would come again.

Future objectives

- **Promote the achievements and experiences of women and girls in the sport.**
- **Encourage clubs and centres to provide women only sessions and development days.**
- **Provide coach education for coaching women and girls.**

