



PADDLING PARENTS

By Claire Lancaster

When we found out we were going to have a baby we did what many prospective parents do and bought plenty of baby books, ploughing through them for information and tips on anything to do with having a newborn. Something that we hunted for but couldn't find was how to carry on kayaking. My husband, Mike and I met kayaking at Liverpool University and although we knew our lives would change with a baby we wanted to continue paddling both with old friends from university and Regents Canoe Club based in Islington, London.

Pregnant and paddling

I decided I wanted to carry on doing a bit of paddling while I was pregnant but only wanted to do so if I could minimise risk as much as possible. I managed to paddle a couple of rivers in Scotland and at five months pregnant went on a Regents trip to paddle the lower Tryweryn. As with any medical or physical condition it is advisable to make sure your group are aware of it and what you can and cannot do. I was clear to my group that I didn't feel able to rescue boats if there was a swimmer and was lucky enough that other people volunteered to carry my boat to and from the river.

Your choice

The BCU do not have any guidelines about paddling when pregnant and advise consulting your doctor. On the internet there are a few stories and viewpoints on kayaking when pregnant, from not even looking at a kayak once you've conceived to a play boater in New Zealand who paddled until she was 8 months pregnant and was back on the water a few weeks after the birth.

I think the best advice would be to only do what you feel comfortable and safe doing. I had to be careful to choose rivers that I knew I would be able to competently paddle; I found that it actually made me better at choosing a safe and accurate line down a river. I paddled white water (grade 2/3) until I was 5 months pregnant and on Regents canal in London with Regents Canoe Club until about 7 months.

Good Planning

James was born at the beginning of September 2009 and I gave myself an aim to get back to paddling for the club's annual Christmas trip to the river Dart. Mike and I realised it would take some planning though; I don't think we realised how much!!

The Friday of the trip saw us travelling down to Devon to stay in a B&B to keep the screaming baby away from the rest of the Regents paddlers at the local YHA. For me a usual Saturday morning on a club river trip normally involves breakfast, group talk and a drive to a river. With James in tow it became wake at 6.30, feed James,

change him, dress him, leave him in the capable hands of Daddy while I dressed and got my kit, eat breakfast while trying to hold wriggling baby, change James, get him to nap, drive to river, feed James while Mike got my kit and boat ready, change, get on river, wave to James from the river as I paddle off.....!!

New routine

Mums don't tend to spend much time away from a 3 month old baby so 3 hours on the river is a significant time to be away. However, by the time I was at the eddy above the Washing Machine rapid it was like I'd never been away, nothing like a familiar river to get you back in the swing of things! Although I had to keep reminding myself my skills and physical strength had reduced with the time away from paddling.

Since then with some good planning and kind relatives to babysit we have managed quite a few paddling trips. We've tried out different combinations of childcare/paddling combinations; having a day each paddling on a weekend away, having a kind group of



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friends who paddled a river section on the Kent twice in one afternoon to give both me and Mike a go and leaving James with his grandparents while we paddled for the day (handy having in-laws in the north west near plenty of rivers!).

Alfresco nappy changing

Last summer we spent a couple of weeks in the Alps and admittedly it wasn't exactly the same as previous Alps trips where we'd cram in a couple of rivers a day plus bike rides and runs but we both managed to paddle a few times whilst the other went for walks with our son along the river.

James is used to driving up and down rivers in our van, having his nappy changed alfresco overlooking a rapid and eating lunch at the get out while he waits for Mum/Dad. When we got home from the Alps I think he wondered why neither of us put funny clothes on in the morning and disappeared for a couple of hours. I'm not looking

forward to a few years time when he'll be old enough to laugh at me swimming!



You can paddle and be a parent!

It is great to do a sport that is flexible enough to incorporate children, although when paddling with just adults it's important to be mindful of the fact that some people might have chosen to go on the paddling weekend to get away from their children or their friends

constantly talking about their kids! We have tried to stay at alternative accommodation or camp slightly away from others to keep baby out of people's way. It definitely helps that we both kayak so the parent who's on childcare duty knows what's going on when the shuttle happens or the paddle takes a bit longer due to a couple of incidents. However the benefits of a non-paddling parent would be no 'discussions' on whose go it was to paddle!

Thanks to everyone I've paddled with; for being helpful in carrying my boat when I was pregnant, understanding about my decrease in paddling skills and entertaining James!