

Durham Kayak Club Ladies' Day– Case Study

One nice sunny day!

It all started while doing some open canoe training over the winter at Ellerton Lake (near Scotch Corner). Sue, who has supported her husband and daughters over the years, refused an invitation to try paddling because of the cold conditions. However, she made a rash promise to give it a go on a nice sunny day! We chatted about this with our girls and soon the idea of hosting a Ladies' Day was born. We wanted to get the right kind of atmosphere, so that everyone would feel able to have a go without feeling worried or self-conscious. The lake would provide the ideal environment to try different boats in sheltered, clean water with a shallow bay for those wobbly first attempts.



Target Audience

The target audience for this event was 'non-paddling' mums and partners like Sue, and friends of members who could be invited along to this fun taster event. There was a really positive response to some initial market research, so planning began in earnest.

At the top of the list for the event was Carol, who's husband secured her place in secret, and who confessed to being a very reluctant customer. Over the weeks I overheard girls

persuading their mothers to join in and the women supporting and encouraging each other as the event drew nearer.

Participants

In the end there were 23 women and girls on Ladies Day; a good mix of experienced paddlers, invited friends who were up for a challenge, and a small group of very nervous ladies who have avoided getting on the water for many years! We also had three helpful men who offered vital services like driving the bus, cooking the barbeque and providing safety back-up on the water and on shore.

The Day

We started the day in style by meeting up for coffee at a service station on the way, so that everyone could get to know each other and start to relax. We drew some funny looks since we were wearing hats and name tags, but it certainly helped break the ice!



(Sue having the time of her life.)



(Christine wonders what's in store.....)

The weather was helpfully glorious, and everyone seemed keen to get ready and make their choice between kayak, canoe and sit-on-top for the first session. We did a very brief introduction to holding a paddle and steering, before singing 'the penguin song' which is our favourite funny warm-up.



(Having fun rafting up together- Georgia (foreground), left to right on raft: Christine, Sue, Jane, Erin, Lynn, Val, Carol & Lindsay)

On the Water

Then it was time to get on the water! I was amazed at how quickly everyone became confident, and it was great to see so many smiling faces as people got used to manoeuvring their boats. After paddling around for a while and then rounding up those who had become a bit too adventurous, we set off as a group to explore one of the hidden bays, before being blown back across the lake towards the barbeque, chilled drinks and chocolate cake.

Rafting up!

The wind really picked up over lunch, so we rafted the open boats together in threes, and the kayakers confined their activities to a sheltered bay. The rafts were a great success, with everyone working together as a team and enjoying the proximity to have a chat and a laugh. In my raft we managed to get everyone standing up while we sailed along, and no one looked nervous anymore!



(Carol takes to canoeing like a duck to water)

'Gunwale Bobbing'

There was a bit of boat swapping so everyone had tried something different and then we ended the day with a splash-about session where the girls jumped off the sit-on-tops and open boats and a few brave women tried a little bit of 'gunwale bobbing'.

Annual Event

Too soon it was time to pack up and go home, after a group photo and a promise that Ladies' Day will become an annual event in the DKC calendar, although I'm hoping to see some of those ladies back on the water long before the year is out!

Feedback

Those who had not paddled before said that it was primarily the all-female environment that enabled them to take the plunge, after so many years of watching from the bank and making excuses to stay dry! Participants said they appreciated the support, acceptance and encouragement offered by the rest of the women and girls in the group. They all enjoyed paddling far more than they thought they would, and said that they felt safe and well looked after, which enabled them to relax and enjoy the experience. And hot off the press...Sue has been back on the water already!



(Robyn and Vicky try something a bit different -a windsurf board)



(Lynn thinks it's a bit of a 'Tupperware party')



(Martha (bow) & Lindsay (stern) set off on Martha's maiden voyage)