

Women and Girls Development Project

Current Situation

General interest and involvement in this sport has been increasing over the last 10 years due in part to an achievable BCU star scheme, a sound BCU coaching scheme, increased publicity for events, increased publicity of successful competitors, equipment improvements and equipment affordability. However the sport is still dominated by men and so a development programme focused on women and girls was set up to run from 2005 to 2007 (extended into 2008) to address this imbalance.

It should be mentioned from the start that although the development programme has been an overwhelming success another important factor in the last



three years has been the production of plastic molded surf kayaks which at a price of less than £400 have had a significant effect on paddlers (male and female) who were in two minds about buying a surf specific kayak in addition to their normal boat.

The sport is very much split between a relatively small number of competitive paddlers and a much larger number of recrea-

tional paddlers. The BCU star and coaching scheme generally have more appeal to the recreational paddlers although more competition based paddlers are now getting involved in coaching clinics and paddling workshops run by BCU qualified coaches, the majority of these performance clinics being run by the various Home Nation teams around the UK.

Women paddlers are poorly represented in both surf kayaking groups as are paddlers under the age of 18. This may be due to some of the following reasons.



- Changing is often from the back of a car in a beach car park.
- Having a car to travel to different beaches is required.
- The sporting environment can be very intimidating.
- Women, Junior and Novice paddlers are often exposed to frightening experiences which put them off.
- Clubs have no knowledge of sound surf kayak skills, safety or etiquette
- Surf coaching can be expensive

Our North Cornwall based development programme set up to increase participation and to improve performance was run initially for 2 years leading up to the 2007 World Championships in Bakio, Northern Spain (then extended into 2008). This development programme addressed the points above with a focus on women and young paddlers. The development programme succeeded in introducing 86 paddlers to safe surfing techniques (47 adult women, 14 girls and 25 boys) and from this 86, five paddlers went on to represent England in the 2007 Worlds, two boys and three adult women.

Development Days

Advertising- Some advertising is through Canoe Focus and a large (450 plus) email list of interested surf kayakers held by Simon Hammond.

Attendance- Average attendance on a development day would be 10 women, 3 girls and 6 boys.

Equipment- All equipment so far has been provided by the participants themselves. A mobile set of kit would have a big positive effect both in terms of progression and promotion.

Coaches- The coaches used so far have all been male and carefully selected so as to provide high quality coaching along with a relaxed and personable manner.

Time of year- The Spring and Autumn sessions have been the best attended and indeed have also had the best conditions.

Sessions- Most sessions have focused on foundation surf kayaking skills and as such have predominantly taken place in the white water surf environment. This is also the best environment in which to build confidence.

The Day- The development days have generally started at 10 am and have consisted of two wet sessions and a reasonable break over lunch finishing around 4 pm. Coaches have been employed so that the sessions have run with women only groups and junior only

groups.

Lessons learned- Women and girls appreciate women only groups. The atmosphere is relaxed, non-competitive and fun. The coach is a key figure and its been essential to employ the right coaches. Clubs could be targeted and offered subsidised development days which would include women and girls but would not exclude men - they could be coached in separate sub-groups during the day but by including the men you would establish an educated surf culture back within the club which would benefit the women and girls into the future.



Thoughts on future developments and initiatives

- Continue to run yearly development programmes in the South West and the North East aimed at Women, Juniors and Men. Development days to be run as Women Only, Juniors Only, Men only to help build confidence and avoid progressing beyond paddlers abilities and comfort zones.
- Subsidised development days could be offered on a club by club basis as well as to individuals.
- Low level competitions to be developed for club level paddlers as a way of introducing them into the competitive side of the sport.
- Create one or two central resources to aid development days and low level competitions. This would be a set of self contained surf equipment and trailer including plastic surf kayaks, decks, paddles, BA's, helmets etc. One set to be kept in the South West and the other to be located in the North East.
- Manufacturers to be persuaded to develop a junior plastic surf kayak - which would then be added to the central resources.
- BCU supported DVD to be produced covering basic techniques and safety which could then be distributed to clubs around the country.

The Future

Subsidised development programmes have been a great success and will continue to produce better educated, safer and more skilful paddlers. By focusing on Women and Junior paddlers the Male club paddlers have so far been excluded and as these paddlers are often the most influential paddlers in a club/ group it would be best to include them in any future plans as their good practice will then be filtered down and indeed maintained within club and group paddling environments.

The South West and North Cornwall in particular are the primary focus for this sport in England however there needs to be provision for paddlers in the North East where surf kayaking also takes place.

For increased competitive success in the future

- Development programmes to include performance based workshops and days
- National teams to be given a coaching budget
- National Competition equipment (flags, bibs, etc) to be up-dated
- A National mobile competition trailer / judging office to be purchased
- Improved coverage and promotion of surf kayaking events