

# Get to know the girls!

With the 2010 competition season in full swing, we took the opportunity to catch up with eight of our successful and up and coming female athletes to find out a bit more about what motivates and inspires them both within and outside of the sport.

**Read on for the full interviews.**

## Gabby Bates, 17

### Discipline: Canoe Freestyle

**Are you a member of a Canoe Club, if so, what club?** Midland Canoe club based at Darley Abbey and also Holme Pierrepont Canoe Club Nottingham (HPP)

**How long have you been in the sport?** I have been involved in the sport since I was about 8, however I have only been doing freestyle for about 3 or 4 years.

**What is your favourite thing about the sport?** The awesome people you meet. I have a lot of lovely paddling friends, the places it can take you and the pure enjoyment of the sport. My main rule for paddling is to always make sure I enjoy it, no matter how well or not I am paddling.



**What is your best result?** Current British champion for the 2nd time in a row and 7th place at the last Europeans in Ourense, Spain, which was my first international competition.

**How did you get started in your particular discipline?** I remember from the start, when I first got into paddling at the age of about 8, I remember seeing all these play boaters pulling off cool moves and I used to say "I'd love to be able to do that one day"

**What are you looking forward to this year?** The summer! Road tripping out to the world cup in Plattling, just before the Europeans, with fellow paddlers Claire O'hara, Nicola Beeby and Islay Crosbie and seeing everyone out there who I haven't seen in about a year. Should be a blast!

**Where is your favourite place to paddle?** Well HPP is my local and is always a blast to paddle, especially in the summer at weekends, because everyone camps and we always get a good BBQ going, happy days. Also, Thun in Switzerland has to be the most beautiful place I have ever paddled.

**What is your ultimate goal?** To travel and paddle a lot more (there are so many places) and to do well in international competitions (hopefully). Also, as I do performing arts at college, I'd like to do something orientated around acting, singing or dancing, or music (I've not quite decided yet).

**What are you most proud of?** Learning and achieving new freestyle moves, always gives me a buzz.

**What would you be doing if you weren't Canoeing?** Wow, that's a hard one. Perhaps doing more musical or theatrical things, or maybe I would of had singing lessons- who knows!

**Who has influenced or inspired you the most?** Well my mum introduced me to kayaking, everyone who has helped me to be where I am today (thank you), and of course my brother Oliver, he's a legend.

**What is your favourite piece of kit?** Cool board shorts are always a win, along with my 2010 Jackson Star, which is awesome.

**What is your favourite film?** Hot Fuzz

**What is your favourite TV programme?** Definitely The Mighty Boosh, it's so funny and weird, I would love to see them live.

**What is your favourite food?** Prawns, Jaffa cakes, Cream eggs and salad to balance it out (not all at once though!)

**What other hobbies do you have, apart from Canoeing?** Singing in a band, dancing, acting, keeping fit, going to gigs, seeing mates and generally having fun!

**Do you have any advice for fellow female paddlers?** Have fun! The Youth Freestyle Series is a great way of getting more involved in the sport, and making new paddling friends. It doesn't matter what level or ability you are, the key is to enjoy it, keep at it, and everything else will fall into place.

**How do you think we can encourage more women and girls to start Canoeing?** I think that perhaps by having more female paddling groups or female only trips and coaching sessions this would encourage more women and girls to start canoeing, if they see that it is not just a male sport. Most clubs have "come and try it" sessions and this is a great way to introduce the sport, so if interested, get down to your local canoe club!

## Hannah Brown, 20 years

### Discipline: Wild Water Racing WK1



**Where are you based?** Bradford On Avon, Wiltshire

**Are you a member of a Canoe Club, if so, what club?**  
Bradford on Avon Canoe Club, Team BATH

**How long have you been in the sport?** 6-7 years

**What is your favourite thing about the sport?** Being outside, seeing amazing new places and people. I also like the hard work of training against the elements, not just looking out at it all from a window.

**What is your best result?** Winning the 2009 World Cup race at Cataract Gorge in Tasmania.

**How did you get started in your particular discipline?** I started off paddling in flat water racing then suffered many injuries within my forearms from a combination of growing and training in the year 2005 so had to take time out of the sport and was only able to begin to paddle at the beginning of the winter where there are very few races about. I was lucky enough to be training in a group of juniors who competed in Wild Water Racing, and with a little persuasion from them and Kevin Bowerbank I did a couple of the little wild water races around the south and loved it! In 2006 I got selected as a travelling reserve for the Junior Team for the European Championships and have not really looked back.

**What are you looking forward to this year?** This year I am looking forward to my first senior World Championships in Sort, Spain this coming June. Follow us [www.Sort2010.org](http://www.Sort2010.org)

**Where is your favourite place to paddle?** I like many places! There are too many to mention, for racing I like the sun to be shining and for training I like there to be no wind. I have just spent the winter training in the Tasmania and Melbourne; paddling along the Yarra through Melbourne city centre is pretty cool! But for white water paddling I can't choose between the Dart, Usk or Lune when they are in flood.

**What is your ultimate goal?** To be happy with how I have lived my life. I want to be able to look back when I am 100 and something and know I couldn't have tried harder and of course I want to win World Championships.

**What are you most proud of?** I am proud of what I might achieve in the future, as of yet I wouldn't say I am not proud of what I done so far but I know there is much more to come which I will be proud of... if this make sense.

**What would you be doing if you weren't Canoeing?** Probably best we don't think about that!

**Who has influenced or inspired you the most?** Watching people around me fail, inspires me not to go down those roads.

**What is your favourite piece of kit?** I love my Garmin GPS Forerunner 305, without this I think I would still be lost out at sea around Tasmania. It also never lies; it tells me when I am not training hard enough. I also am getting along like a house on fire this season with my new EPIC paddles.

**What is your favourite film?** V for Vendetta

**What is your favourite TV programme?** Outnumbered, makes me laugh every time.

**What is your favourite food?** I can be known as the 'carb monster', but it's not my fault, pasta really does go with everything!

**What other hobbies do you have, apart from Canoeing?** I currently spend a lot of time training, but in the Summer I enjoy going and attempting to surf.

**Do you have any advice for fellow female paddlers?** Keep it up! I reckon it is also important to keep enjoying what you do as well. I think in canoeing we are so lucky to have so many disciplines we can try, so get out there and try them. And a very important one is to not let your paddling kit get too smelly; it's not a good look.

**How do you think we can encourage more women and girls to start Canoeing?** This is an issue for Sports across the UK, and I think we have to change the image of women in sport. Equality is the only way forward. I think Canoeing has addressed this, as in the past nothing says inequality like a whole racing class that only men can compete in, but the ICF opening a women's Canadian class is a start. But I think there are other avenues we can tackle. I think the recent international success of both men and women across the canoeing disciplines has increased participation in the sport. But getting a connection between the elite and the beginners will help. School club links would be a good start, maybe with some of the World class female athletes, help show the participation level that they are just mere human beings, not gods! There is a more simple solution for getting more women into canoeing; just get some better looking men in the sport!

## Louisa Sawers, 21

### Discipline: Canoe Marathon

**Where are you based?** The women's team is based at Bisham Abbey so I moved over and now live in Marlow, which is just down the road.

**Are you a member of a Canoe Club, if so, what club?** Elmbridge Canoe Club

**How long have you been in the sport?** 12 years

**What is your favourite thing about the sport?** The tactical nature of the racing, the crowd cheering your name and the great feeling you get when you are first over the line.



**What is your best result?** Silver at the U23 Marathon World Championships 2009 and gold (K1 and K2) at the Junior Marathon World Championships 2006.

**How did you get started in your particular discipline?** I started as my brother went to Elmbridge Canoe Club down the road and I decided I wanted to have a go. After quitting once I decided to have another go and I'm still going! I enjoy the race tactics. It's a long race and anything can happen. You have to think a few steps ahead.

**What are you looking forward to this year?** Going away on overseas trips, as this is a fantastic opportunity to see the World.

**Where is your favourite place to paddle?** My favourite place would have to be the 1000m stretch at Elmbridge Canoe Club. This is where the first and the last effort usually happen.

**What is your ultimate goal?** Winning an Olympic gold.

**What are you most proud of?** I feel I have achieved a good balance in my life and that I am part of a very strong women's team.

**What would you be doing if you weren't Canoeing?** Probably another sport, maybe swimming as I really enjoy that.

**Who has influenced or inspired you the most?** Rebecca Addlington the gold medalist swimmer. Roland Lawler from Elmbridge Canoe Club in my early years in canoeing. But my twin and I have always been competitive with each other from an early age and that has stayed with me.

**What is your favourite piece of kit?** I recently bought a microfiber towel that dries in no time!

**What is your favourite film?** Sliding doors and It's a Wonderful Life.

**What is your favourite TV programme?** Jonathon Creek, Eastenders, Gossip Girl

**What is your favourite food?** Anything that my mum cooks and nothing my dad cooks!

**What other hobbies do you have, apart from Canoeing?** I enjoy shopping, cooking and baking

**Do you have any advice for fellow female paddlers?** Don't be scared to fight on the water!

**How do you think we can encourage more women and girls to start Canoeing?** You have to target paddlers from a young age so they can develop the skills in the boat.

## Georgina Preston, 30

### Discipline: White Water Rafting

**Where are you based?** Nottingham

**Are you a member of a Canoe Club, if so, what club?**

My home canoe club – the Whitstable Winter Wallies!

**How long have you been in the sport?**

I've been paddling about 12 years, rafting for 8 and competing for 5.

**What is your favourite thing about the sport?** Travelling to wonderful places with my closest mates. I have been to countries I would never have visited and paddled some magnificent rivers. Just being on a river in the middle of nowhere with the girls making lines is an amazing feeling. Catching up with my mates from all over the world during competitions also makes me happy.



**What is your best result?** We are current World Champions in the sprint/ head to head discipline.

**How did you get started in your particular discipline?** My first experience of rafting was whilst on a youth trip abroad with my canoe club. It led to a few injuries but also a passion for the fun! A few years later I started raft guiding at HPP to supplement my student lifestyle whilst at Uni. In 2004 I was contacted by some other female raft guides trying to make up a team to start competing. We entered our first international competition in 2005.

**What are you looking forward to this year?** Turning 30! And I'm really looking forward to the rafting Europeans in Italy and first ever R4 World Championships in Holland. The World Champs also includes the first ever Youth Worlds at the same time which is a great development for our sport. We have a junior men's and women's team who made the selection cut so I am also looking forward to helping these guys out for the races.

**Where is your favourite place to paddle?** Ooh too many – Uganda for fun, Bosnia for its crystal waters, Ecuador for the tarantulas, and of course my favourite stomping ground, HPP, where you will find me most nights.

**What is your ultimate goal?** To be World Champions overall.

**What are you most proud of?** Being crowned Miss Hairy Lemon 2008 following a mud wrestling contest.

**Who has influenced or inspired you the most?** My best friends and the guys at my first canoe club, mostly Paul Southgate who I thank for getting me into this crazy sport.

**What is your favourite piece of kit?** My brand new birthday PeakUK Dry Suit!! An essential piece of kit I don't know how I have ever coped without! And you get to climb in through the crotch.

**What is your favourite film?** The Big Lebowski

**What is your favourite food?** Cereal

**What other hobbies do you have, apart from Canoeing?** More canoeing! I take my freestyle boat to most places, compete as a member of the GB Freestyle Squad and have recently started wobbling around and competing in C1 women's slalom. I also enjoy wakeboarding, being silly, and eating a lot.

**Do you have any advice for fellow female paddlers?** The best ever piece of advice given to me was 'make every paddle stroke count'. I was apprehensive about my first grade 4/5 Alpine river with the boys but this instantly gave me the confidence and reassurance that I was totally capable if only I put all my effort and concentration into it. I think a lot of girls doubt their ability too much (and I still do).

**How do you think we can encourage more women and girls to start Canoeing?** Encourage canoeing in school PE options. And advertise the male to female ratio ☺



## Natalie Wilson, 17

### Discipline: Canoe Slalom

**Where are you based?** Nottingham

**Are you a member of a Canoe Club?** Stafford and Stone Canoe Club

**How long have you been in the sport?** 6 years

**What is your favourite thing about the sport?** Every time I go canoeing it's different. There's a huge variety of rivers and courses.



**What is your best result?** Silver medal in the team event at the Junior European Championships, Liptovsky 2009, and semi-finalist in individual event.

**How did you get started in your particular discipline?** I started canoeing after Stafford and Stone Canoe Club gave a presentation at school. I thought it looked amazing so I decided to put my name down, and luckily I was picked! I've paddled K1 in slalom ever since.

**What are you looking forward to this year?** The Summer! Exams will be out of the way and hopefully I'll be canoeing somewhere hot!

**Where is your favourite place to paddle?** To compete: Leipzig, Germany and for training: Prague, Czech Republic

**What is your ultimate goal?** To look back in the future and know I've always done my best so I won't have any big regrets.

**What are you most proud of?** Coming through from illness and injury in previous seasons and still enjoying my paddling.

**What would you be doing if you weren't Canoeing?** I wouldn't be living in Nottingham! I imagine I'd probably be playing the piano or doing something musical.

**Who has influenced or inspired you the most?** Haruki Murakami

**What is your favourite piece of kit?** Sandilene Dry Cag – I wouldn't have survived the winter without it!

**What is your favourite film?** Let The Right One In

**What is your favourite TV programme?** Inbetweeners

**What is your favourite food?** Pancakes

**What other hobbies do you have, apart from Canoeing?** I'm very busy but I do like a good film or book in my spare time.

**Do you have any advice for fellow female paddlers?** In canoeing you can improve rapidly, but sometimes you can feel like you're standing still. I've found it beneficial to look back and see the improvements I've made since I started because it makes the swims and the shivering seem worth it in the end.

**How do you think we can encourage more women and girls to start Canoeing?** I guess canoeing can be portrayed as quite a male dominated sport. It's good to have female role models and coaches around. When I started at Stafford and Stone Canoe Club we always had paddlers like Laura Blakeman and Lizzie Neave to look up to.

## Hayleigh Mason, 23

### Discipline: Sprint Kayaking

**Where are you based?** Marlow

**Are you a member of a Canoe Club, if so, what club?** Nottingham Kayak Club

**How long have you been in the sport?** 10 years

**What is your favourite thing about the sport?** Getting to travel all around the world and the adrenaline of racing!!

**What is your best result?** Bronze Medal (K4, 200m) at the European championships 2009 in Brandenburg and fourth and fifth place (K4 200m & K4 500m) at the World Championships in Canada 2009.

**How did you get started in your particular discipline?** My dad competed internationally and took me down to the club where I did a beginners course!! I hated it to begin with but then came back for more and loved it!!

**What are you looking forward to this year?** My aim is to compete at the world championships in august and then the off season hopefully a hot sunny holiday☺ !!

**Where is your favourite place to paddle?** My favourite place to train is Szolnok, Hungary because it was really hot and always nice conditions to paddle in. My favourite place to race would either be Szeged, Hungary if there isn't a massive cross wind or Bulgaria was pretty cool too & of course Nottingham!!!

**What is your ultimate goal?** To win Olympic gold in 2012 & to be healthy and happy!!!

**What are you most proud of?** My last year's results in canoeing and never giving up on what I believe in!

**What would you be doing if you weren't Canoeing?** I have always wanted to join the police if I wasn't in canoeing!

**Who has influenced or inspired you the most?** I would have to say my dad as he got me into the sport and coached me for quite a bit when I was younger!!

**What is your favourite piece of kit?** It has to be my amazing Nelo Pink boat!!! Sweaty Betty Sports bras and any kit that's pink!! Havaianas flip flops!

**What is your favourite film?** Robin Hood Prince of Thieves!!!!

**What is your favourite TV programme?** I love Gossip girl, One tree hill and Home and Away

**What is your favourite food?** I'm a fan of Thai food and Caramel Nibbles!!! Scrambled egg with cheese, ham and tomatoes for after training!!

**What other hobbies do you have, apart from Canoeing?** Shopping!!!

**Do you have any advice for fellow female paddlers?** Always work hard and push yourself in every session, always follow your dream!!!

**How do you think we can encourage more women and girls to start Canoeing?** I think kayaking is a fun sport and something different that not many people know about so we always need to work on promoting the sport – also at the moment we have a great squad who are doing really well this is something that could be used to encourage girls to start!!



## Emma Wynter, 18

### Discipline: Canoe Surf

**Where are you based?** Cornwall

**Are you a member of a Canoe Club, if so, what club?** Penzance Canoe Club

**How long have you been in the sport?** I started when I was 15, taking up canoe polo at school and entering the Interceltics Water Sports Festival where I tried out all the other disciplines. I then started surf kayaking in 2008 and entered my first event in January 2009.

**What is your favourite thing about the sport?** Surfing amazing breaks and the adrenaline rush, excitement and fear when a big set comes through!

**What is your best result?** 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Ladies Hp at the World Championships 2009.

**How did you get started in your particular discipline?** When I took up canoe polo, the other members of the team persuaded me to try surf kayaking and I loved the challenge of it because the waves are always so different.

**What are you looking forward to this year?** Finishing my A-Levels and going travelling! Then hopefully going to Swansea Uni (nice and close to good surf breaks).

**Where is your favourite place to paddle?** I love surfing at Gwithian (my local break) as its got loads of peaks so it's never too crowded.

**What is your ultimate goal?** To be world champion.

**What are you most proud of?** One of the best moments had to be beating all the male juniors at the Cornish Open 2009, also becoming a member of the Mega Flying Squad and being selected to be part of the England Team at the world championships.

**What would you be doing if you weren't Canoeing?** Surfing, wakeboarding, any other type of watersport!

**Who has influenced or inspired you the most?** My canoe polo coach Ray Helmer, who persuaded me to enter my first surf event, and has helped me improve so much over the years.

**What is your favourite piece of kit?** My Mega Boost surf kayak, It's so fast down and along the face of a wave compared to anything else I've paddled.

**What is your favourite film?** The Hangover

**What is your favourite food?** Pizza

**What other hobbies do you have, apart from Canoeing?** Skiing, snowboarding, surfing and wakeboarding.

**Do you have any advice for fellow female paddlers?** Just get out there and enjoy it. Try to find some other people to kayak with who are better than you so you're always pushing yourself to improve and do better!

**How do you think we can encourage more women and girls to start Canoeing?** Have more development days just for women. Kayaking also gives you so many opportunities like travelling and is a great way to meet new people, keep fit and have fun.





## **Ginny Coyles, 36**

### **Discipline: Canoe Polo**

**Where are you based?** Farnborough (originally Whitehaven, Cumbria)

**Are you a member of a Canoe Club, if so, what club?** Friends of Allonby Liverpool

**How long have you been in the sport?** 24 years (if I can remember that far back)

**What is your favourite thing about the sport?** Difficult to say just one thing – being in a team; the different skills required and challenges of the game – good boat skills, ball skills, team work etc.; every game is different; it's full contact... plus we can play against the boys!



**What is your best result?** We currently hold all 3 major titles – World Champions (2008), World Games Champions (2009) and European Champions (2009).

**How did you get started in your particular discipline?** My Dad took me to the canoe club at the local swimming pool to try something different, so I spent the usual time learning how to paddle in a straight line, emptying my boat and eventually rolling it! As with many clubs, different members did different disciplines, but our club was mainly polo and slalom based. After the beginner's session the club had a canoe polo session... once I'd tried it for the first time, I was hooked!

**What are you looking forward to this year?** We have the World Championships in Milan in September, so that is the big one of the season, but am really looking forward to having some good competitive games against the other nations and having fun playing well as a team – there are a lot more teams in the running for medals now, so makes things a lot more exciting.

**Where is your favourite place to paddle?** Hmmmm... my favourite places to compete aren't always the most picturesque venues, but the best competitions, so probably the main internationals each year in Essen and Mechelen... Training on the Thames at Bisham Abbey is pretty nice on a sunny day though.

**What is your ultimate goal?** I think I have pretty much reached my ultimate goal in canoeing over the past 2 seasons, but the last on the list would be to retain a Worlds title, so fingers crossed for this year... other than that, to be happy in life.

**What are you most proud of?** My team mates :o)

**What would you be doing if you weren't Canoeing?** Some other mad sport I guess, or sitting on a beach watching the waves come in.

**Who has influenced or inspired you the most?** My parents... and their never-ending encouragement and support after so many years.

**What is your favourite piece of kit?** No question, my boat – a Flight Ili from DB Xclusive. Just the perfect design for the way I like to play – great speed and maneuverability to chase and tackle players and to get into some nifty shooting positions.

**What is your favourite film?** Little Miss Sunshine

**What is your favourite food?** CAKE!

**What other hobbies do you have, apart from Canoeing?** Wish I had more time for this...Canoe Polo is my Life!!!

**Do you have any advice for fellow female paddlers?** Just keep paddling and enjoy it – don't be afraid to try different things. If you're competing, then always give it 100% - you might have to sacrifice a few things to get where you want to be, but when you reach your goal or stand on the podium, you know it was all worth it!

**How do you think we can encourage more women and girls to start Canoeing?** I think there are so many different opportunities in canoeing, it's just giving women the chance to try the different disciplines and see what they enjoy best... speed, skill or adventure; individual paddling or in a team. Showing that the competitive disciplines aren't necessarily always strength oriented may also help – technique and skill count for a lot in this sport. In canoe polo, we can play in the open national leagues and many women play at a high level with and against the men and are successful, we may not be as strong, but are able to compete through our other skills. Female paddlers from this country have also had a lot of international success in many different aspects of the sport and I think it's important to keep promoting this to show others what can be achieved and how it can be done... perhaps getting more women into the coaching side too might help encourage other women to get into boats and stay in them.