

Striving to be a rubbish canoeist

Nancy Maddock started the Great North American Clean-up in 2006 with considerable success. This was repeated in 2007 with even more support, then later that year Nancy joined the 'Song of the Paddle' forum and her event went global. Not only were there numerous clean up events in the UK but also members as far away as Brazil got involved.

Feature by: These clean-up trips all take place in early May each year and range from a canoeist on their own picking up litter to a flotilla of boats clearing whole lakes and sections of canals of every scrap of rubbish.

John Kelly.

The 2009 events are just starting to take place and so I thought I would share a short report of the first of these. I posted a message on the forum asking if anyone wanted to join me in clearing some of the rubbish at Castle Semple Loch at Lochwinnoch. As usual with these events there was a great response and on the day we had more than a dozen volunteers to help.

High water levels meant there was less rubbish than normal but still more than enough.

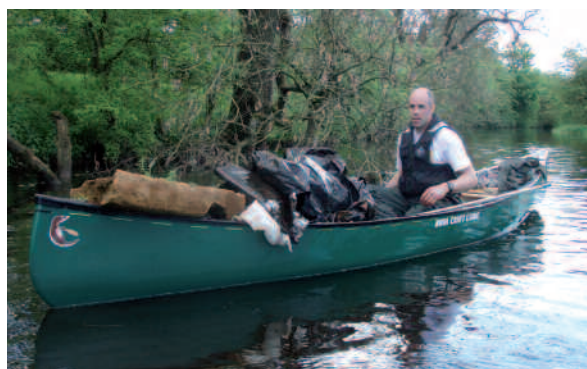
“We found a car wheel and tyre, two traffic cones, beer crate, punch bag, trike, buckets, a piece of gas main, camp chair, fishing lures lines...”

There was the opportunity to use or develop new skills to get to all the hard to reach places where litter was to be found. Paddling under overhanging trees, poling into

reeds or even just trying to get a spot to land so you could retrieve some piece of garbage from the shore.

It was fun and nonsense from start to finish. Finding and getting rubbish actually becomes quite competitive with people vying to get the most in their canoe and be first to find the more unusual items. As well as the usual bottles, cans, plastic bags, wrappers, fast food containers, paper etc we found a car wheel and tyre, two traffic cones, beer crate, punch bag, trike, buckets, a piece of gas main, camp chair, fishing lures lines and hooks galore, scales, rod bags, seven or eight buoys and much more that had no place being where it was.

Below: John paddles a boat full.



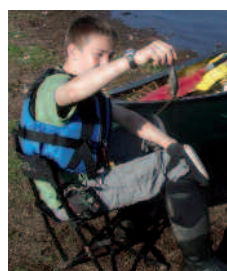
Above: John weighing in.

The volunteers split into two groups and worked their way round the loch clearing all the litter they could find. We portaged into the drainage ditch on one side and paddled and poled its length to clear the rubbish from this hard to get to spot.

We were of course fortunate to have great weather on the day of our clean up but I doubt any weather could have dampened our spirits or held us back. In the end, as the pictures show we cleared a lot of rubbish which was mostly in fairly remote spots and but for our intervention would have been there for years.

Best of all we had a great day on the water and the satisfaction of knowing we had done our bit to help clear a little patch of our paddling domain. It is of course never too late to join us in this battle against litter. So why not organise a clean up paddle on your favourite paddling place or just grab a bag for some rubbish when you next you lift your paddle from the rack. It does not take much and then like us you can hold your head high and say, "I am a rubbish canoeist!"

Below : Some of the more unusual items.



Above: Discarded fishing tackle.