



PPCA Newsletter
May 2024

Introduction

Welcome to May's Newsletter. This month we have news for owners of small boats, Terry replies to Clive while Clive goes over to the dark side.

Editorial

The debate about coaching and the role of BC/BCU/PUK is something that has rumbled on for years. It is a given that whenever two or more paddlers gather together, they will moan about the BCU but matters do seem to have become more serious over the last few years with a worrying shortage of coaches coming through.

Talking of shortages of people coming through, I haven't exactly been swamped by people fancying having a go at editing the Newsletter. Hopefully someone will come forward soon as I will be setting a definite date for my final issue next time....

I believe that's what's called ending on a cliffhanger.

Ivor Jones

Newsletter Editor

News

Boat Storage by The Committee

We have spaces available for a few GP and smaller kayaks.

We still have a waiting list for sea kayaks but would welcome any members who have a GP or smaller kayak and want it stored in the members' shed.

It's a very competitive price at only £55 annually. You will get your own key and can access the members' shed at any time at your convenience when the Mountbatten Centre is open.

If you want to store your boat please let us know.

Features

The Club Coach - A Relic of a Bygone Era by Terry Calcott

I think it is important that the conversation about the future of coaching within the club is kept going. These are very much my own thoughts as a long-standing club coach and member of the PPCA. The title reflects my thoughts.

I have read Clive's excellent article a couple of times and his thoughts about coaching. I must agree with everything Clive said in his article, you cannot argue with fact. I may repeat a few things which were mentioned in his article.

At the moment Paddle UK, the governing body for our sport allows the club committee to authorise non-Paddle UK coaches and experienced paddlers to run a number of our sessions. This means our club sessions are covered by the Paddle UK insurance policy. I believe there will come a time in the future where Paddle UK will insist club sessions can only be run by coaches/leaders who hold in date Paddle UK qualifications. I certainly don't want to be gloomy but, in my opinion, we have passed the point of no return where we will no longer be able to provide our core sessions run by just qualified and experienced coaches/leaders.

I will start with a few historical facts from a few years ago about the number of coaches we had available in the club. Back in 2010 I held the post of Club Leader; I continued in this role for 5 years. During this time, I was in the enviable position of having well over 30 fully qualified coaches from L1 to L5 (there was no such thing as a leader then). This enabled me to plan the club training and recreational program relatively easily. We also had a large source of willing helpers, many very experienced paddlers. As Clive has mentioned we offered several different star sessions on a Tuesday evening. The following year 2011 was the change to the new star scheme and multi boat use came into the star awards. I have looked back in my old Club Leaders logbook, and we offered the following on a Tuesday evening.

- 1 star plus
- 2 star (kayak)
- 2 star (open)
- 3 star (sea)
- 3 star plus

There were no Tuesday rec paddles back then only skills training. The club had enough coaches to cover each session and have assistant coaches and helpers as well.

These sessions not only provided a natural progression for improving skills but also a stepping stone for club members who aspired to become coaches. With so many coaches mixing with club members it was inevitable that many were influenced to start the coaching ladder. We had a good number of club members starting coach training each year. This worked well as the junior coaches became qualified and joined in running club sessions. We managed to maintain a steady pool of coaches with new coaches joining as other coaches retired or moved on.

The BCU as it was known then had an excellent network of local coaching officers, including a full-time officer representing Devon and Cornwall. The BCU rep would often visit the club and give advice about all manner of subjects, not just coaching. The BCU also had a system of coaching updates which every coach had to attend every 3 years to remain current. These were like mini symposiums where various on water and shore-based activities were held. They were not only for coaches to update their qualifications but were excellent for meeting likeminded paddlers, networking and making new friends. The current system for updating is still every 3 years but is heavily weighted to e-learning and getting enough points by sitting in front of a screen. There is very little face to face contact with any representatives of the governing body now.

These weren't better days or the good old days just different days and a different outlook on paddling. The sport has evolved and although the core activity of the club remains closed cockpit kayaking (sea and river) and some open boating. Things are very different in our governing body. I read an article from Paddle UK about a survey carried out where people were asked what 'Paddling' means to you and most replies were going out on a SUP. Paddle UK is chasing this sector of paddling, after all it's where the money is. They are now the governing body for all things SUP.

The current format of Tuesday evenings is a skills session and a rec paddle. One of the outcomes of not having progressive skills sessions for all paddlers is that we are not producing enough of the skilful club paddlers who would then go on and start coach/leader training. That is a fact of the times.

As Clive alluded to in his article training as a Paddle UK coach is out of reach for many. I have read the online requirements and various pathways and numerous documents several times. It does mirror the old coaching scheme in some ways in that it has different levels of coaches in the discipline specific pathway, sheltered water, moderate water and advanced water. It appears that potential coaches and clubs are being gradually excluded from this due to its complexity and cost. It doesn't help when we have very little experience of the new coaching scheme within the club. Another point is why would a club member go down the coaching pathway when they can become a Leader. Although this still requires a lot of time and effort to achieve. Plus, we already have Leaders in the club who have qualified for Sea and River, they have the experience of gaining the award and can provide assistance to anyone interested. Adam has been an advocate of the sea Leader qualification and has had some success in getting some club members interested.

I am one of the dying breed within the club who are still paying my subscription as a coach to Paddle UK. We are just about managing to cover the club sessions with our mix of BC coaches, BC Leaders, ex BC coaches and experienced paddlers.

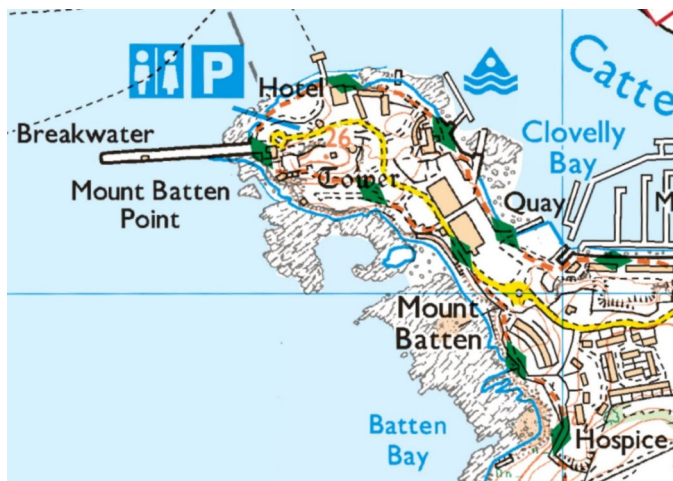
What is the future of the club without adequate numbers of coaches/leaders? If we don't start to see more club members getting qualified to coach/lead, then it will be down to even more experienced paddlers picking up the reins and being sanctioned by the committee while Paddle UK still allow this. The other obvious thing that Clive said was that many of the club coaches are of a certain age, and we desperately need some younger blood to take up the reins. Many of the senior coaches have been coaching and leading club sessions for well over 20 years, me included. Will we gradually evolve into a club that just paddles as peer groups due to having no other option?

I know the committee have the subject of coach/leader recruitment and training as a priority. I would ask anyone who is interested in coaching/leading to come forward and start the pathway of getting qualified. We desperately need you.

Plymouth Sound Snippets #27, Lentney Battery by Terry Calcott

This snippet is another military themed one. The next few months snippets will be from around the Mount Batten area, our local patch. The first one is about the flying boat hangars. Just up from the eastern slipway which we regularly launch from.

Built in 1917 the type 'F' hangars were built of corrugated iron and asbestos sheeting over a steel frame.



I won't go into too much detail, but the hangars have been used to store and maintain sea planes of various types over the years. Most familiar the large Sunderland sea planes used during World War II.



Sunderland Flying Boat

The hangars are used today for a variety of marine based industry and the ancillary buildings as café, offices, art galleries and numerous other uses.



Recent View of the Hangars from Clovelly Bay

The site was first commissioned in 1917 as the Royal Navy Air Service Station Cattewater and then in 1918 the RNAS merged with the RFC to form the RAF and the station was re-commissioned as RAF Cattewater. Later on in 1928 it was again re-commissioned as RAF Mount Batten.



RAF Cattewater

The hangars are of national importance and Grade II listed, as being some of the last surviving examples of this type of hangar. They have remained intact except for bomb damage during the last war.



Bomb Damage During WWII

Snapeishness by Clive Ashford, Photos Courtesy of Banjo

For anybody out there who's involvement with anything Hogwarts matches my involvement with anything social media, I will inform you that Professor Snape is the Dark Arts professor in the Harry Potter franchise.

On 31 March Jane led the final river trip of the PPCA 2023-24 white water season. I thought I would tell you a little bit about the dark art of river paddling and a little bit about our latest season.

In order to have a successful river trip you need 2 things:

1. You need a river with a sensible amount of water flowing in it.
2. You need suitably enthusiastic paddlers.

So, how did that pan out? Well:

1. In previous years I have likened Devon to a desert place. I have moaned about cacti growing in the eddies, tumbleweed blowing across the landscape and rattle snakes basking on the arid soil that may have once been river a bank. That hasn't been the case this winter. Unless you have spent the dark months hibernating you will have noticed that this winter has been both wet and mild. It has been so wet that I swear I recently saw a duck sheltering under an umbrella in a vain attempt at keeping water off its back. I also claim to have seen a blue whale lurking in the darker recesses of some of our rivers, would you believe? There has been so much rain this winter that we have had to cancel some trips due to monsoon like conditions.
2. Our paddlers turned up determined to enjoy themselves and keen to improve their paddling skills in a high-octane sort of a way. If you turn up to a river in that frame of mind it won't be long before you get a bit damp but with a huge grin. It's a good job that our white-water warriors have ears because otherwise their grins would have gone all the way around their heads, thus causing the tops of their craniums to fall off. I have finished many of this season's river trips with arms and shoulders a little stiff but with my face's happy muscles aching. This is a good thing.

River paddling has been described as a bit of a dark art. In order to enjoy river paddling our budding Professor Snapes have to understand features like eddies, eddy lines, downstream V's, upstream V's, standing waves and stoppers. In addition, they need to acquire the skills needed to break-in, break-out and ferry glide. All this needs to be learnt quickly because the learning environment is harsh and the learning curve is steep. The cost of failure is cold and wet, and that cold and wet happens fast. There is, of course, an alternative. Our white-water hero could grow a set of gills. I would imagine that doing so would also be a dark art.

Our budding Snapes start off on a beginners (grade two) river, more than likely the Lower Dart. Having learnt a few of the requisite paddling skills, (or is it spells?) our white-water hero sets off in a generally downstream direction. A few weeks later our budding Snapes will be seen with their happy muscles fully deployed. This will indicate a first river descent that didn't involve swimming, a huge milestone in anyone's paddling career.



Our budding Snapes are then encouraged to have a little play. Playing involves self-made excitement that come in various forms such as surfing, spinning and ferry gliding, all with or without paddles. Whilst acquiring paddling skills is very much a solo effort, playing is more team orientated. You sit in eddies watching your paddling companions playing and think, "I'm going to try that." Your paddling companions will give you all the encouragement you need, sometimes maybe a bit too much encouragement, and very soon you are learning first hand if said play move is easy or hard, and whether that particular move is inside or outside of your spell level. If the move is beyond you then you realise that river recues are also a team effort. It's all very educational, this Snape lark! It is quite possible that our budding Snapes are the source of my blue whale observations mentioned earlier.

The first priority with a river rescue is to make sure that all non-swimming Snapes are accounted for and that our less experienced Snapes are safely ensconced in an eddy. The more experienced Snapes can then go about getting our blue whale impersonator out of the water, rounding up their boat and any other items of kit that our hapless Snape has discarded, and re-uniting all said items. It's about now that our budding Snapes realise that whilst a river rescue is a team effort, emptying a boat on the river bank and getting back into it is very much a lonely exercise.



Suitably skilled our budding Snapes now progress to intermediate (grade three) rivers, locally the Loop and the Walkham. Our budding Snapes can now consider themselves to be proto Snapes. The learning curve once again takes an upward step and it's about now that our proto Snapes demonstrate spells that involve extending one's eyes onto stalks and puffing out one's cheeks in true hamster fashion. There will probably be more blue whale impersonations, giving the team yet more opportunities to practice their rescue skills.



With plenty of practice our proto Snapes skill levels will improve further. Some will become fully fledges Snapes and will be able to attempt an advanced (grade four) river. We in Devon are lucky enough to have the magnificent grade four Upper Dart on our doorstep. The Upper Dart is regarded as one of the top 10 river paddles in the country and whilst that is a subjective opinion it is undeniable that you do need to be of a certain paddling standard in order to enjoy it. I will name names. At the end of the season both Julian and Will graduated as fully fledged Snapes made their first descent of the Upper Dart. Well done to them. Happy muscles in overdrive.

The 2023-24 PPCA river season is over. The 2024-25 season will start at the beginning of October, all levels of Snapeishness will be welcome.

Footnote. Just after 1066 the lands of England and Wales were divvied out among King Williams mates who immediately went about putting us surfs* firmly into our place. (Generally down.) A few centuries later us surfs learnt to kayak and looked longingly at our rivers but were told by the landowners that we needed permission to paddle them, and that doing so without permission would be illegal. Our sport then acquired a governing body. (BCU/BC/PUK or whatever they are calling themselves this week. To give the impression that I move with the times I will refer to them as PUK.) Initially PUK entered into some restrictive access agreements with the few landowners that would agree to such things. At the same time PUK embarked on an access campaign and their legal chaps and chapesses investigated the landowners claim that we needed their permission to paddle our rivers. My understanding of the current situation is that PUK say we have a right to paddle on any river at any time we choose, as long as we access and egress the water from a public place and that we do no criminal damage. The landowners dispute this and still claim that we need permission to paddle our rivers and that our activities are illegal. (They claim that we would be trespassing. It's worth noting that as things stand trespass is a civil offence and as such the police will not get involved, unless there is a likelihood of a breach of the peace.) To my knowledge no-one has been taken to court in England or Wales for paddling our rivers, which does seem to somewhat undermine the landowner's position.

PUK continue with their access campaign. They are doing a good job and although progress is slow there is progress. (Yes, that really is me supporting our governing body.) Personally, I rather like having a river season and don't look to partake in any Snapeish activities over the summer months, but I'm not you. PUK say go ahead and paddle when and where you want so the decision is yours, but be aware that if you do paddle our rivers in the summer then you may well encounter people who think you shouldn't be there.

* Editor's Note. It is believed that this spelling is a pun of some sort. Mr Ashford was unavailable for comment at the time of going to press.

Exchange and Mart

Discounts and Offers

A selection of discounts and offers are available on the PPCA website. [Click here](#) to see them.

Next Committee Meeting

Please forward any items you would like considered at the next committee meeting to secretary@ppca-canoe-club.org.uk. They will go to the secretary.

Next Edition

There is no specific deadline as such for contributions but please bear in mind my general sloth and indolence and let me have anything time-sensitive well in advance.

Contributions

Please send any contributions to newsletter@ppca-canoe-club.org.uk

Acknowledgements

As ever, I have plundered Facebook for the cover photos - my thanks to all concerned.

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