Chair’s Report, 2023

Hello and welcome to our new members as well as those returning for another year.

Although this is my first year as club chair, I’ve been a club member for a long time, and one thing that has always stood out for me is how much effort everyone involved with the club puts in to making the club such a great place. As I’m sure you’re aware, our club is entirely run by volunteers, and without the goodwill of these volunteers we would have no club. I’d like to take this opportunity to thank every single person who has done something, no matter how big or small, that has allowed people to enjoy what we do. Everyone on the committee (so much work goes on in the background to keep the club running, the vast majority of this work not seen by those outside the committee), all of our coaches who give up their time week-in-week-out to allow others to get into paddlesports, anyone who came for a paddle or to a river clean-up day, parents who drive their excited children to the coached sessions and hang around while we all have fun on the water, the list goes on and on. Thank you everyone!

You’ll see from my year highlights below that we’ve acted on feedback received from members and potential members, and changed the way we run a few of our coached sessions to allow a wider range of people to get into paddlesports (we now have new Saturday morning and female-led sessions). We hope these changes have made the club a more inviting place for both current and new members. Listening to what our members want is key to how the club is run, and I’d love to hear any ideas and suggestions that you have - either grab me for a chat when you see me, or just send me an email (chair@halifaxcanoe.org.uk). Our club is run by its members for its members, and we do listen, so please send me your comments and ideas!

Some club highlights from 2023:

* Thanks to funding obtained through British Canoeing (thanks to Les Ford For securing this), many of our club coaches completed their coaching, white water leader and paddlesport touring leader awards, with more coaches currently working towards these qualifications. These awards require a huge investment from those undertaking them, so congratulations and thank you to all who have completed or are working towards them.
* This year saw a change to how we run out coached sessions at Sowerby Bridge, with the Monday evening session moving to Saturday mornings to allow more people to take part (feedback we have received is that some people find it very difficult to do weekday evenings). Thanks to all the coaches and helpers who regularly give up their evenings and weekends, as well as the students, for making these Thursday evening and Saturday morning sessions so successful.
* Club Wednesday evening paddles continued throughout the year (river levels permitting!) at Sowerby Bridge. Thank you to everyone who came along to these evenings, enjoyed an informal paddle on the river and a pint in the Hogs Head afterwards.
* Club Sundays and our new female-led paddles were held throughout the year, both on the River Calder at Sowerby Bridge and at our Warley Moor site, and there were numerous river trips to various rivers in the north of England and Wales.
* Steve Smith (Snr.) worked closely with Calder Rivers Trust to set up a “citizen science” scheme where we monitor water quality on the River Calder at the club. Steve ran several tutorial sessions where he taught club members how to use the water quality testing kits, and members have been regularly testing the river water quality and uploading the results to an online database that will allow us to track how water quality levels change.
* Steve also organised and ran several river clean up days, where club members remove rubbish from the river and mill complex site and generally have a tidy up of the area. Thanks to all club members who turned up and helped out on these days!
* Well done to all our club members who completed the Paddle Safer Award and the Paddlesports Safety & Rescue courses, run at our Sowerby Bridge and Warley Moor sites.
* Mike Scholefield continues to go above and beyond by putting on his legendary social events. This year, these included curry nights, real ale trails, hiking trips, a coasteering weekend, and the fantastic HXCC quiz night at the Roxy in Sowerby Bridge. Thanks for all your efforts Mike!
* Les Ford organised and ran a national slalom race at the Tees Barrage.
* Club member Andrew Crowhurst was selected for the Great Britain team for the wildwater racing Sprint World Championships and World Cup races in Men’s C1, and took two top-10 finishes at the World Cup in Italy. Well done Andrew!
* A group of the club’s sea kayakers headed over to Anglesey for a sea kayakers improvers weekend, organised by Liane Hickling.

Once again, thanks to every single person who has paddled or helped out in any way to allow others to paddle. See you on the water, on a social night, or just down at the clubhouse for a cuppa and a chat!

Al.