

CANOE FOCUS

**The team
behind the team
- Peak UK**

Read more on page 14

**From Source
to Sea**

Read more on page 20

**National Go
Canoeing Week
Highlights**

Read more on page 8

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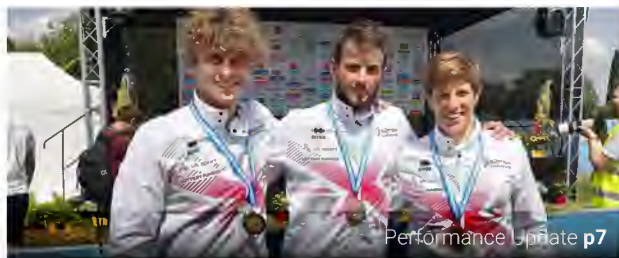
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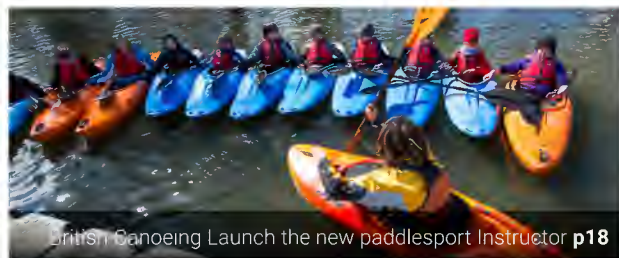
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Welcome

Welcome to this early summer edition of Canoe Focus.

Our Olympic and Paralympic athletes have got off to a great start this year, with some outstanding performances and results for the slalom and paracanoe teams in their respective European Championships and some strong performances too for the sprint athletes in the first two World Cups (page 7).

We know that our senior international athletes in all of our disciplines help to inspire the next generation and it is really pleasing to report that the Olympic and Paralympic athletes attended more than 440 different events last year in their role as ambassadors and to inspire the nation.

Of course it's not just our athletes that can inspire others and I was excited to see the recent launch of our Women's Ambassadors' Programme. Every one of our ambassadors have a fantastic story to tell and are simply in love with paddling. I urge you to take a moment to read their inspiring stories on our **website**.

I recently had the pleasure of meeting Pam Phillips at Paddle in the Park. Pam is happy to share that she is 65 now and fully hooked on the sport training eight hours a week in the summer months. She took up white water paddling after responding to a Facebook advert inviting her to a This Girl Can series of sessions at Lee Valley and as they say, the rest is history.

Pam's story is a classic example of the power of data and digital advertising. We have recently published new privacy notices on our website, which show how we are operating within the new General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and how we use member's data.

We are very protective of this data. We store it securely and we don't share it with anyone else. We take our compliance with GDPR very seriously but equally, maximising the power of data and digital marketing is very important too.

We have started work to invite clubs to register all of their members, as either full or associate members of British Canoeing, and to promote our membership through digital marketing and partnerships with the trade and retail to the tens of thousands of paddlers who are not members of clubs.

We remain on track to increase our membership from 32,000 members in 2016 to 75,000 by 2021

and with our new database and communication tools, we will provide a much improved membership service and more personalised communications.

We will be using digital marketing as a key tool to encourage would be and novice paddlers to engage with skills and safety sessions in clubs and centres all over the country.

National Go Canoeing Week was a great example of this working in action this year and there were over 300 sessions held during the week (pages 8-9). Congratulations and thanks to the hundreds of people who coordinated and delivered these activities.

Finally I want to share with you the progress we are making around our Access and Environment Charter (page 16). Over 650 responses have been received to the open consultation and these are being analysed to further inform the Charter.

Within the consultation we also gathered lots of case evidence about where disputes have arisen and we will use this in our campaigning from Autumn onwards, to show that real issues exist and why the status quo is not acceptable.

In June and July we have a series of meetings arranged to discuss the Charter and access issues with key groups and individuals including several MPs, the Minister for Sport, the National Farmers Union and the Angling Trust. We plan to release the Charter in September and hold a formal launch in Westminster later in the year.

We have recently announced our first campaign around the Charter with a nationally and locally driven coordinated rivers clean up on National Rivers Day on 23 September 2018. We are hoping that hundreds of members and clubs will become involved and raise the profile of the access and environment issues within their localities.

This really will be an example of **Stronger Together** in action. The summer is here and it's full of promise. I hope you enjoy some long, warm and sunny days on the water.

David Joy
Chief Executive

NEWS

You can find all the latest news from British Canoeing on our website or by signing up to our FREE newsletter.

www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/news

www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/membership/join-us-online-here

Hurley Classic leads the way for environmentally friendly paddling events!

We love this video from this year's Hurley Classic which highlights the changes they made, and will be striving to make in the future to ensure the event is more environmentally friendly.

 **Click here**
to read more



Paddle Clean Ambassadors

British Canoeing is delighted to announce three Paddle Clean Ambassadors; Paralympic Champion Emma Wiggs, two time canoe slalom Olympian Fiona Pennie and Olympic gold medallist Tim Brabants, who will support us to promote clean sport.

 **Click here**
to read more



Performance round up

It's been a fantastic start to the season for our GB squads as medals and successes are coming in from across the disciplines. You can find all our performance news on our website by going to www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/news/olympic-paralympic

 **Click here**
to read more

Michaela Strachan joined us for National Go Canoeing Week!

Michaela Strachan, the wildlife presenter and outdoor enthusiast famed for her work on programmes such as The Really Wild Show, Countryfile and Springwatch joined us this year as an ambassador for National Go Canoeing Week 2018! You can read more about National Go Canoeing Week on [page 8](#).

 **Click here**
to read more



Meet the British Canoeing Women's Paddling Ambassadors

Saturday 19th May 2018 was a busy day in England. Prince Harry and Meghan Markle got married, the FA Cup Final took place and most importantly, the British Canoeing Women's Paddling Ambassadors were launched!

The ten ambassadors come from a wide range of disciplines and take part at all levels of the sport. One thing they all have in common is their bucketloads of enthusiasm and the desire to inspire more women to go paddling!

 **Click here**
to read more





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EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIPS
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8 - 9 SEPTEMBER 2018



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SUPER SEPTEMBER

LEE VALLEY OPEN

15 - 16 SEPTEMBER 2018

**SLALOM BRITISH OPEN
DIV 2 SLALOM COMPETITION
RAFTING NATIONAL CHAMPS
BOATER X NATIONAL CHAMPS**



Performance Update

Five medals for GB at Slalom European Championships

Great Britain claimed five medals at the 2018 ECA Slalom European Championships in Prague.

In the men's C1 Ryan Westley became European Champion, winning his first senior title. Inspired by teammate Adam Burgess, who was lying first, he pulled off a stunning clean run, which was 1.57 seconds quicker than Burgess who claimed silver. Great Britain's success in the women's C1 continued with World Champion Mallory Franklin taking the silver medal.



Adam Burgess, Ryan Westley and Fiona Pennie

Franklin, Kimberley Woods and Bethan Farrow - making her senior international debut, combined forces in the C1 team event to win gold to retain their European crown.

Fiona Pennie got her season off to a brilliant start, claiming bronze in the women's K1, her third European medal in this event.

Britain top the medal table at Paracanoe European Championships

Great Britain's Paracanoe team dominated the European Championships in Belgrade winning four gold medals, three silver and a bronze.

In the Va'a there was a breakthrough gold medal for David Phillipson in the VL3 who claimed his first European title, with teammate Jack Eyers winning the bronze.

Emma Wiggs became European Champion in Va'a VL2 for second time, with teammate Jeanette Chippington claiming the silver medal. In the kayak events Emma Wiggs made it double gold by winning the women's



David Phillipson

KL2 with Charlotte Henshaw winning her second successive European silver.

In the women's KL1 race Jeanette Chippington was upgraded to gold after Maryna Mazhula was disqualified. The victory was Jeanette's sixth European title.

Paralympic bronze medallist Nick Beighton won a superb silver in the men's KL2, an upgrade from his 2017 European bronze.

World Cup medals for Katie Reid and Lizzie Broughton

The Great Britain sprint team have made a strong start to the season, with three medals at the season opening World Cups in Szeged and Duisburg.

Richmond paddler Lizzie Broughton took a well-earned silver medal in the women's K1 5000m in the opening World Cup of the season in Szeged.

A week later in Duisburg Lizzie proved she is the athlete on form by winning gold in the women's K1



Katie Reid

1000m event, crossing the line over a second ahead of Karin Johansson from Sweden.

Katie Reid claimed a fine bronze medal in World Cup 2 in a competitive women's C1 200m due to the event being added to the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games programme.

NATIONAL GO CANOEING WEEK

THE BIG ADVENTURE

26TH MAY
— TO —
3RD JUNE

HERE'S SOME HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE WEEK...

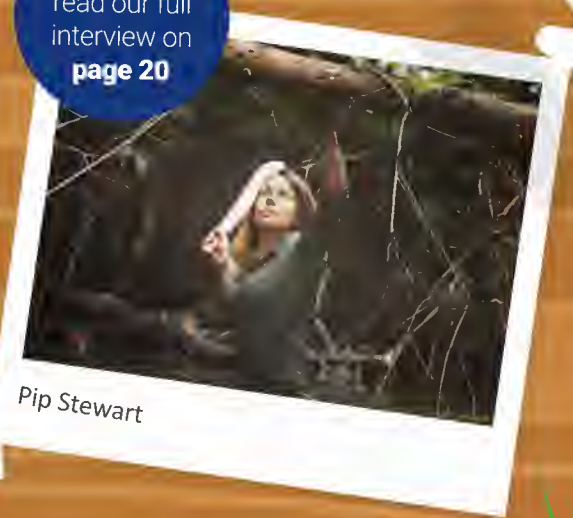
National Go Canoeing week took place during **May half term** and across the country there were paddlers taking to the water and **clocking up a record breaking 57,574 miles!!!**

WE HEARD FROM ADVENTURERS...

We caught up with adventurer, journalist and presenter Pip Stewart to discuss her latest expedition which saw her become one of the first people ever to paddle the length of the Essequibo River alongside seasoned adventurers Laura Bingham and Ness Knight.

"Adventure is the chance to get out, be at one with nature - and yourself. Ultimately it's about feeling connected. You feel the elements, I may look like a drowned rat at times but I feel like a million dollars; adventure makes me feel alive."

You can read our full interview on **page 20**



Pip Stewart



WE WERE JOINED BY MICHAELA STRACHAN...

The wildlife presenter and outdoor enthusiast famed for her work on programmes such as *The Really Wild Show*, *Countryfile* and *Springwatch* joined as an ambassador for National Go Canoeing Week 2018

"With anything, if you've not tried it before sometimes you need a reason to give it a go and that's why National Go Canoeing Week is brilliant, because it gives you a push. It's a reason to try it! Always take opportunities, if you have the chance to try paddling for the first time, get out on the water."

Michaela Strachan



 [Click here to read more](#)

DEAN DUNBAR - ADRENALINE JUNKIE!

With over 80 activities ticked off his bucket list from across the globe, earning 20 world firsts and a number of records along the way, it's hard to believe that Dean Dunbar, a self confessed adrenaline junkie from Scotland, and Palm Equipment SUP ambassador, is registered blind.

We caught up with him ahead of National Go Canoeing Week to find out why he added paddling to his catalogue of adventurer.



Dean Dunbar

 [Click here to read more](#)

WE MADE A SPLASH AT PADDLE IN THE PARK!

Hundreds of paddlers headed to The National Water Sports Centre for Paddle in the Park.

There was plenty on offer; from white water workshops and fun competitions, to having the chance to demo the latest boats and equipment from top manufacturers in the trade village to 'come and try it' events for beginners and families!



 [Click here to read more](#)

RECORD BREAKERS - THREE LAKES CHALLENGE...

Gary Partridge took on the Three Lakes during NGCW in a racing surf ski and now tops the leader board for overall time of the Three Lakes! As part of the challenge Gary broke the record for the Loch Awe Challenge Route.

His reason was trying to beat his previous time, which he did, and his motivation was to go on an adventure with his friends and log a fast time.

Lake Bala - 0:54:00 Lake Windermere 1:40:00
Loch Awe 3:32:00



Three Lakes Challenge

 [Click here to read more](#)

WE CLOCKED UP THE MILES!

From staff in our British Canoeing offices, to our partners at Palm Equipment to the hundreds across the country who submitted miles, we all hit the water and got paddling for The Big Adventure!



Click here to watch staff from Palm Equipment take to the water



PADDLE PICK UP

Erin Bastian, one of our British Canoeing Women's Ambassadors lead an all-female group of adventurers on a 240km Paddle Pick Up Expedition, covering the length of Wales, along with fellow Women's Ambassador Clare Osborn.



Click here to read more



THIS GIRL CAN CANOE DAY

Sixty women and girls took to the Oxford Canal, with Banbury and District Canoe Club's annual This Girl Canoe Day. With gazebos set up around the site, visitors had the opportunity to talk to adventurous women, "Meet the Elite", warm-up with a physio and take part in games and challenges.



Click here to read more





Steve Waters, 10 Miles!



Thames SE Group, Canoe Camping Club, 120miles!



Raasay Rona Circumnavigation Expedition, 194 miles!



Jess Huxley Canoeing ambassador for The Dry Bag submitted 8 miles!



Timothy Inman, 2 miles!

We hope you enjoyed **National Go Canoeing Week** and got out on the water! The campaign will run again next year during **May Half Term!**



Take the August Paddle Challenge

Challenge yourself this August and paddle 30 or 60 miles to claim your boat sticker and log your miles!

britishcanoeing.org.uk
@BRITISHCANOEING / 01915 411128 / 01915 411128

LET'S GO SOMEWHERE

Our experts can help you start your journey, wherever it takes you. Find everything you need for your next adventure, with over 250 of the best brands and kit made to last, only at Cotswold Outdoor. With warmer weather on the way, it's time to start exploring canoe trails across the UK, making the most of the great outdoors.

There's nothing quite like an adventure; big or small, we're here to help you prepare with a few top picks for lightweight camping so you feel inspired to get out there and explore more.

Ortlieb Dry Bag PD350 59L

Keep your kit dry on and off the water without worries. Seriously waterproof with welded seams, proven roll-closure and stiffener bar, this bag is 100% impermeable. Great protection and enough volume for all your gear, plus added stability and easier loading thanks to the reinforced base.



MSR PocketRocket 2 Mini Stove Kit

The perfect all-in-one cooking system for lightweight adventurers. This pocket-sized stove kit doesn't take up unnecessary space but offers everything you need for a quick hot drink or meal after the day's adventures.



Vango Pulsar Pro 300 Tent 2018

A tent for everyone, from beginners to those who are well broken-in to the wonders of the great outdoors. Designed with unpredictable British weather in mind, this tent adapts to adverse weather conditions, in particular strong winds. Get a secure and sturdy pitch every time and put it up in record time leaving more time for adventure.



GoPro Hero 5 Black

Rugged, durable and waterproof up to 10m without the need for casing, the addition of a SuperSuit allows you to take it down to 60m, making it perfect for most, if not all of your underwater needs. This is GoPro's toughest camera yet. Relive your adventures in stunning 4K video and enjoy hands-free control when you're out and about exploring. Improved low-light capture means you can get that shot of the sunrise from your tent flap, whilst Advanced Video Stabilisation allows you to capture life smoothly, wherever and whenever you choose.



Jack Wolfskin Smoozip +3 Sleeping Bag

An innovative piece of kit, designed with you mind. The S-shaped zip follows an intuitive flow of movement, making it easier to open and close the bag, so you can jump out of bed and into adventure. Extra insulation equals optimal comfort, even on chilly nights by the water.



Therm-A-Rest NeoAir Venture WV Sleeping Mat

Warmth, comfort and compressibility for three-season use. This mat offers great protection from the cold ground and provides ultimate stability via the horizontal wave baffles. A great night's sleep makes for great adventures.



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Need help preparing for your next adventure? Pop into your local store and one of our experts will help you to discover your great outdoors with kit from the very best brands.



THE TEAM BEHIND THE TEAM



If you follow canoeing gear in any form, chances are you will have come across Peak UK's gear - whether you've seen it on an athlete, compete in it yourself or an owner of some of their recreational products.

We headed to The Derbyshire Dales to chat to Pete Astles, founder of Peak UK, on his long standing partnership with British Canoeing and how his company has gone from a small idea, developing products with friends in the late 1980's to providing world leading equipment for international athletes and Olympic gold medallists.

Providing equipment to British Canoeing athletes for the past 25 years, he chats to us about helping lead the way to British Olympic gold with innovative equipment to becoming one of the most in demand kit suppliers in the world of competitive paddlesport, what he has up his sleeve for Tokyo 2020 and how he is behind Stronger Together to help grow the future of paddlesports.

"The Stronger Together strategy is like a breath of fresh air. People are interested in what we do and want to work together.



"The more who get behind British Canoeing and join the trade partnership, the more we are all reinforcing the message that we are all working together to promote the sport." Says Pete.

Pete's journey started with a gap in the market. After finding that the equipment sold in

paddling shops wasn't up to the standard he thought it needed to be, he decided to try it for himself. Being a paddler himself and having friends who were on GB teams meant he had an instant audience to test his products with and with great success.

"Right from day 1 I was involved in canoe slalom

and my friends were athletes, so straight away leading athletes began to use my equipment and because of that word of mouth spread, and quickly international paddlers heard about us. So we started right from the beginning as a high level performance niche market brand.

"Ever since then we've followed our own interests with the line - from canoe polo and white water to sea kayaking; and now I'm a dad we're making kids stuff. So everything we make at Peak has followed our own interests."



Innovation has lead the way from the very start, from personalisation and full colour printing for London 2012 to provide individuality and team identity, to the marginal turned considerable gains of the Racer ST which Joe Clarke was using when he was crowned Olympic Champion; Pete explains how the world's leading athletes are now banging on the door in demand for Pete and his teams products.

"The racer ST we made for Rio is part of what's called the marginal gains project, but the garment was so advanced and revolutionary that it was a considerable gain and we possibly gave Joe the edge on the gold medal with that one. It was great to work with those guys and so amazing we got the result too. "What happened after that was pretty much every leading slalom athlete in the world was straight onto us, and we now provide many of the slalom legends with this product because it was such a considerable advantage."



You can read more about this years Slalom kit reveal day with Peak [here](#)



For the team at Peak, the pride of the product goes way beyond the production process and their involvement is viewed as playing a huge part in British success.

“For us we feel like we are part of the team, the achievement is something we have been involved in. The team here at Peak are like a family and it’s great when the athletes come and see us and show their appreciation, especially to our machinists.

“My team here feels like we are part of the wider team and it really inspires us to keep on doing a good job.

“We’re always developing new ideas and for 2020 we may well have something up our sleeve....”



Racer ST

The Racer ST is a ground-breaking three-in-one garment. It combines a paddling jacket with a spraydeck and buoyancy aid for the ultimate streamlined performance. Rather than using the PFD as the main source of buoyancy the Racer ST holds around 30 percent of its flotation in its spraydeck, leaving just 20mm flotation foam on the athlete’s torso. This allows the paddler to get closer to the slalom gates, cut the racing lines tighter and ultimately race at higher speeds down the course.

After more than four years in development, It was approved in time for the British team to compete at the penultimate ICF World Cup event prior to the Rio Olympics. The secret was out and the canoeing world was stunned.

The Racer ST assisted Joe Clarke to Britain’s first K1 Olympic gold medal and David Florence and Richard Hounslow to their second Olympic silver medal in two Games.



Access and environment

CHARTER

Recent consultation with our members on access and environment, has made it crystal clear that access on and along our waters was their number one issue for British Canoeing to campaign for change. This will enable paddlers to have more opportunities to paddle more places without the risk of conflict.

The access and environment team have been extremely busy in the preparation of the Access and Environment Charter. We are thrilled that members have been actively involved in finalising the contents and we are now confident that we have a clear way forward to approach Government, and influential partner organisations on a sustainable, fair and responsible way of sharing our waters.

To give you an update on some of the activity which has taken place, the team has:

- travelled to 11 regions to visit our members to discuss their views on our way forward through regional access and environment consultation meetings and had brilliant feedback via the online survey
- Met with a number of existing partner organisations including the Canal and River Trust, the Ramblers, Sport and Recreation Alliance and British Mountaineering Council as well as developing new partnerships with the Wildlife and Countryside Link to garner expert support for our campaign

- Been able to speak to Government influencers through new contacts at DEFRA, and MPs including a fellow paddler, Andrew Percy MP for Goole and Brigg.
- Met with the Scottish Canoe Association and Scottish Natural Heritage to learn see how open access has been managed through the Land Reform Act. We have also met representatives from the Welsh Assembly to ascertain their thoughts about the Welsh Government's consultation to increase public access along water. This follows a joint comprehensive response from Canoe Wales, British Canoeing and their members.

But the work hasn't stopped. The draft of the Charter is now under consultation with some national experts in this area and are busy collating all the feedback from the online survey. We have built some fantastic momentum behind the campaign and we plan to continue. The Charter will officially launch later this year.

Following the launch of the Charter in early September, British Canoeing will be celebrating World Rivers Day on 23rd September by promoting a mass national clean of all waterways. We will be kicking off our pledge to collectively 'protect and improve the health of our rivers' by encouraging clubs, regional development teams, members and anyone passionate about their local waterway to collect litter and build our baggage total.

Details of how you can get involved on World Rivers Day will shortly be announced, but we see it as a fantastic opportunity to engage your local MP with the Charter, to raise the profile of our sport and emphasise the need to back our access and environment campaign.



If you would like to get involved and require any further information, please contact ben.seal@britishcanoeing.org.uk

GoMembership

Our new membership portal is now live, and it's even easier to login, view and update your details and renew your membership.

Login from the homepage using your membership number as your username, and follow the "Forgot Password" to set up a new password.

You're able to view qualifications and course attendance, view your membership information and renew online. You can also search for upcoming events in your local area or by event category.

Canoe & Kayak Insurance

The additional insurance offered covers canoes, kayaks and stand up paddleboards. The cover includes your craft, paddles, helmets, spray-decks and buoyancy aids.

The insurance covers for accidental damage, white water and all levels and types of racing.

You can choose from single or multi craft cover, and the price will depend on the value of the canoes, kayaks or stand up paddleboards to be insured.

For full details please visit:

 www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/membership/why-join-british-canoeing/boat-insurance

It is simple to purchase the insurance with your membership; either online through the membership portal or over the phone.

Membership Cards

We have recently introduced e-membership cards. When members join or renew, they will receive a PDF of their licence with their payment receipt. It's a great way to prove your membership from the moment you join or renew, and you don't have to wait for your printed card to arrive before getting out on the water!

Don't forget to renew!

There's lots of reasons why you should renew your membership:

- ✓ If you're a paddle on a regular basis
- ✓ If you use licensed waterways
- ✓ If you want to know you are insured and have peace of mind that you get legal liability cover following negligence, nuisance or trespass
- ✓ If you want to show your support for our campaigns
- ✓ If you want to save money on being licensed, insured or through discount codes

Why not share with a friend and **encourage them to join!**

BRITISH CANOEING AWARDING BODY

LAUNCH THE NEW PADDLESport INSTRUCTOR

British Canoeing announced the launch of the new Paddlesport Instructor award on 3rd July, which is designed for people whose main focus is to deliver paddlesport taster/starter sessions and short journeys in very sheltered water environments.

The two day course aims to help prepare candidates for their first paddlesport instructing role, ensuring they are 'primed and ready' to support taster sessions for people new to paddlesport.

- > Only prerequisites are Home Nation membership and Foundation Safety and Rescue Training (FSRT)
- > Two days of combined training and assessment
- > No workbook but optional eLearning is available
- > Available in a range of craft including closed and open cockpit kayaks, sit-on-tops, stand-up-paddleboards, and open canoes



Full details are available on the **British Canoeing website.**

The **NEW** Paddlesport Instructor course will be available **from 1st January 2019.**



As part of British Canoeing's commitment to reviewing the coaching and leadership awards, it is with great delight to announce the new Paddlesport Instructor qualification which will be launched in January 2019, replacing the existing Paddlesport Instructor course.

The qualification has undergone significant changes through consultation with the industry, including clubs, providers, centres and coaches. The British Canoeing qualification has been developed to support the work of the instructor in introducing people to the exciting world of paddlesport through fun games and inspiring sessions in a very sheltered environment.

Lee Pooley

Head of Coaching and Qualifications at British Canoeing

Shall I wait until 2019?

If you are interested in completing your Paddlesport Instructor qualification, you have the option of whether to wait until the new qualification is launched or attend a course in 2018. We would recommend you undertake the Paddlesport Instructor course in 2018:

- > If you require a working qualification before 2019
- > You are looking to work in sheltered water, rather than very sheltered water environments
- > You are looking to become a coach. Although the Paddlesport Instructor is not a prerequisite of the Coach Award, it can accelerate your journey through the Coach Award pathway if it is completed first. Therefore the current Paddlesport Instructor qualification is a great stepping stone to the Coach Award.



FROM SOURCE to Sea



Introducing Pip Stewart

Now back on dry land, we chat to Pip Stewart, an adventurer, journalist and presenter whose latest challenge alongside seasoned adventurers Laura Bingham and Ness Knight, saw her become one of the first people ever to paddle the length of the Essequibo River in South America from source to sea.

After nearly three months in the remote jungle, hiking, kayaking and immersing herself in the life of the indigenous Wai Wai community, Pip tells us what possessed her to take on the challenge in the first place, how the power of teamwork got her through and her plans now she is back on dry land...for now!

Hi Pip! Lovely to meet you... welcome back to the UK! How are you finding being back on dry land!?

I think I'm still suffering from reverse culture shock! Having spent nearly three months in remote jungle it has been a jolt to the system landing back into London life - the noise, the consumption, the fast pace - it's manic.

You hadn't done much paddling before you decided to paddle the length of the third largest river in South America... what possessed you!?

Nope, it's fair to say my paddling skills were limited, I'd tried it a bit on holiday in New Zealand - and hated it. I was recovering from glandular fever at the time and was absolutely shattered. I'd ruled it out as a sport entirely. I am so grateful I gave it another go as I love it now. Before I went to Guyana I was invited to spend a day at Lee Valley with Olympic gold medalist and Red Bull athlete Joe Clarke. That was a lot of fun and although I spent most of the day swimming I came away feeling massively exhilarated.

The Essequibo trip came about as Laura Bingham is a friend of mine. Her husband, the explorer Ed Stafford (best known for walking the length of the Amazon), had done some filming in Guyana and said it was absolutely stunning, like Disneyland for nature. He planted the seed of an idea in Laura's mind and it grew from there. She then roped in Ness and I and the rest is history...

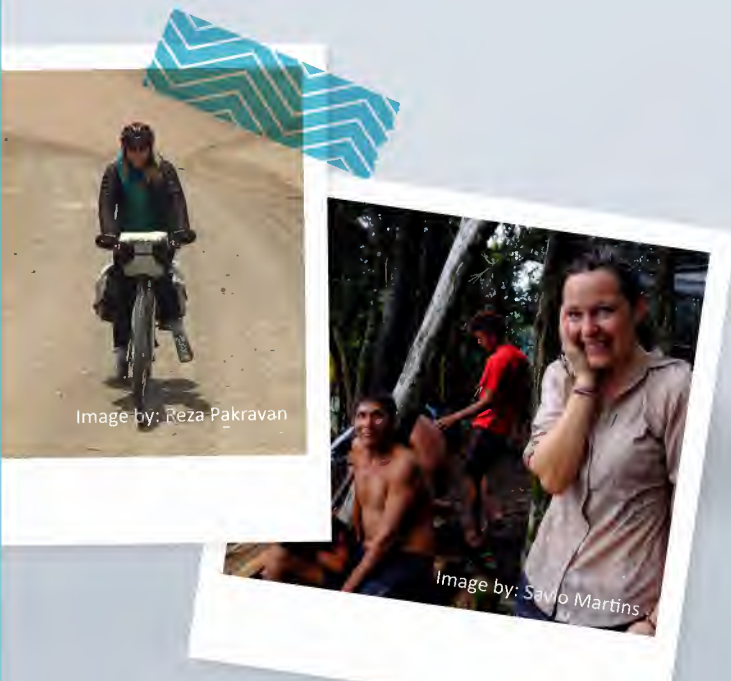



Image by: Reza Pakravan

Image by: Sawo Martins

How was the training on the lead up to the expedition? Can you talk us through a typical days training?

Because we knew our skills were limited (non existent!) we tried to recruit a team that could help. Chris Murin from The Leicester Outdoors Pursuit Centre was fantastic, he helped teach us various paddle strokes and safety. Andy Oughton also took us out for training days and suggested we go to the British Canoeing Symposium which was a really fun weekend in Lakeside, Cumbria. I was blown away by how friendly the paddling community were - and how much help, advice and assistance we received. It's amazing how fast you can progress when you put your mind to something and have the right team in place.

Meeting David Bain, from NRS, was fantastic. Not only did NRS sponsor our expedition, David (and his girlfriend, Gabrielle Ridge, also a canoe slalom athlete) also took us out to Wales on training trips on the River Dee and the Tiefs, where we did multi-day trips focusing on how to read water, paddle technique and generally building our confidence on the water. It's amazing how quickly you can go from feeling exceptionally nervous to more relaxed when you're in safe hands.

I also got myself a personal trainer, Dan Peterson  www.instagram.com/dpetersenpt/ who was amazing at helping me develop paddling specific strength. We focused on a lot of core and stability exercises.



Where did you train for the expedition? How quickly did you pick up the skills you needed?

Wales - the obvious choice for a hot, humid, jungle expedition... Ha ha. The climates could not have been more different. We were in dry suits in Wales (note to any other newbies, make sure ALL the zips are done up properly, especially if you're liable to capsize. I made this error. It was a cold lesson!)

Because we had a great wider team in place it was amazing how quickly you can learn. We did a white water course at the British Canoeing Symposium and it was great to see how much more confident I became - even in a weekend.



One thing to stress though is that when we headed out to Guyana we were all acutely aware that we were not high-level kayakers. Knowing our skillset was key when it came to choosing what rapids to run and which ones to portage around. That was the beauty of the Essequibo in a sense - it was a challenge for us but not so technical that we couldn't do it. Any paddler in search of serious white water would probably overlook this river but for us it was perfect!

Your latest adventure with Ness Knight and Laura Bingham took you through some pretty tough terrain both on and off land. Was there ever a point where you thought you couldn't do it?

To be honest, not really. There were points where I wondered 'what the hell am I doing' but there was never a moment where I wanted to pack it in. On the hike to the source of the river I got my foot stuck in a log at one point and wiggled it around to try and

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free it. As I did so I must have disturbed one of the most deadly snakes in the jungle - the labaria snake. Thankfully it didn't strike, as that could have been fatal. For a few days after I did wonder what I was doing. We were in dense jungle, days away from medical help and that incident really helped hit home how isolated we were.

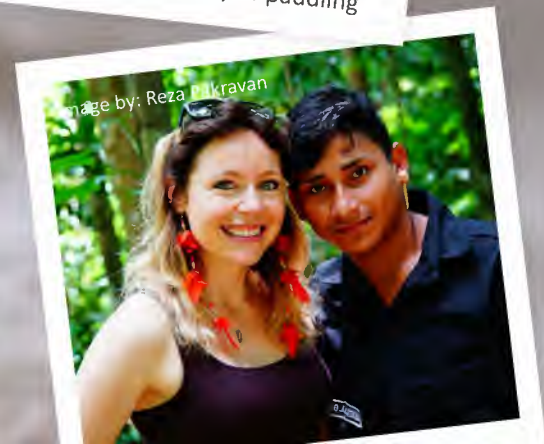
Fear was an emotion I felt a fair bit - from hearing the call of the jaguar, to grunts of territorial caimen, to rapids - but, as in daily life too, it's a case of trying to rationalise the fear and get your mind back under control. It is a bizarre feeling though when you paddle past a 16ft caimen and see anaconda in the water! Somewhat different to our training trips in the UK...

We had a rule as a team that if one of us felt uncomfortable with any of the rapids we wouldn't run them - and discussing which line of the river to take with the whole group before we went down was super helpful. This trip illustrated to me the power of teamwork. If you'd have told me a year ago that I'd even be on white water I wouldn't have believed you. For serious kayakers the rapids we ran may look super easy but for me they were a serious challenge!

How did it feel when you realised you had made it to the end of the expedition and you'd become one of the first people, alongside your fellow adventurers, to complete this challenging route?

It was an incredible feeling. We enlisted the help of the indigenous Wai Wai community who live in the remote Essequibo to complete the journey. On the hike to the source, Nigel, Jackson, Eron, Nereus and James joined us (as well as our cameraman Peiman Zekavat) and on the river we had Ant and Romel (and cameraman Jon Williams). The Wai Wai's collective knowledge of the jungle and the river was insane. We really couldn't have done it without them. I'm pretty sure I'd be dead in the jungle somewhere if it wasn't for the Wai Wai. I think part of doing more challenging adventures is knowing your limits - and when you need to enlist support.

Knowing that as a team we'd achieved way more than I would have as an individual was an amazing feeling. Laura, Ness and I, belly laughed down the river and on those hard days the power of sisterhood really lifted us up. We also met a woman called Fay who runs a lodge called King William Adventures halfway down the river. She'd paddled a lot and wanted to join us as well - so our group grew in size and Fay became a brilliant team member too. I'll never forget that gigantic team hug at the end. A lovely memory.



Now you're a paddling expert, if you had just one day to paddle anywhere in the world, where would you go?

Geez, I'm no expert, ha ha!

Tough call but I'd probably head to Scotland. The north-west coast is insanely beautiful.

I also met Al Pace who runs Canoe North Adventures in Canada at the British Canoeing symposium. Not only was he and his son incredibly helpful in terms of helping us plan a route in Guyana, his pictures of paddling in Canada looked immense. Would love to paddle there.

What advice would you give to anyone undertaking their own adventure, what top tips would you share?

1. Remove those doubts from your head that say you can't - and don't be afraid of laughing at yourself when learning a new skill. I was utterly rubbish a few months ago when I started kayaking. I spent more time swimming than I would have liked when learning to navigate rapids! Just laugh.
2. If you're attempting a more challenging adventure reach out to those with experience, you'll find people are usually very happy to help. The outdoors community is fantastic and we have some seriously amazing teachers here in the UK. Upskilling is fun and you're likely to meet like-minded people who you'll want to go on adventures with.



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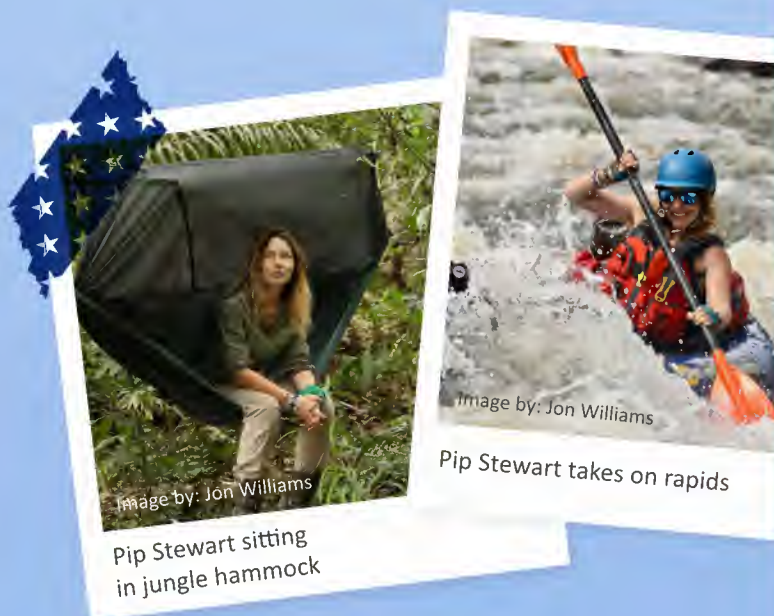


Image by: Jon Williams
Pip Stewart sitting
in jungle hammock

Image by: Jon Williams
Pip Stewart takes on rapids

Paddling was obviously a huge part of your latest adventure. What was your paddling highlight?

Just how much I enjoyed it! I found it to be almost meditative on the flat sections - you really feel immersed in the landscape and part of nature. It was such a joy to spend the last few months on the water. Rapids aside, paddling is an extremely peaceful activity.

Will you be continuing to paddle here in the UK? We've just launched a new challenge route in London just to tempt you...

Hell yes! I AM IN.



Image by: Felman Zekavat

PROTECT YOUR PADDLING GEAR



In the summer, rivers, lakes and water parks are at your beck and call, it's not an option to stay inside on hot days but there's one major downside - **UV rays hammer your active gear.** Fact. They'll fade the flashes of colour on your kit and if your paddling gear is made from neoprene (which 90% of kit is) **the seams will degrade over time if exposed to the sun's harmful UV rays.**




Paddling gear is not cheap so it's worth protecting your kit, the simplest way to do this is to ensure it dries inside or in the shade. But then you have the problem of indoor puddles or damp gear when your next session comes around.

The Dry Bag will solve your UV protection needs

The 300 denier material stops harmful UV rays reaching your gear, while the black outer material contains heat from the sun's rays helping to dry your wet gear. And if you're worried about the unpredictable British weather the outer material is also showerproof so your wet paddling gear will continue to dry naturally even when the weather acts against you.

To protect your paddling gear, store and dry it in a Dry Bag, wash in non-soapy water after use and try to avoid snagging it!





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