

Irish Freestyle Committee AGM, 9 November 2002.

Training Officer's Report

Two training weekends were held this year. The first, a women's only weekend to Ballina in March, received much interest, with sizable numbers keen to attend. We ran the event over two days, and were blessed with good water levels and lots of helpful coaching input. The standard of paddling was diverse, making it difficult to pitch the course at any particular level. However, while certain basic principles can be covered with the whole group, we quickly found that freestyle coaching can be done very successfully on an informal and individual basis. With a feature accessible to all, the weekend was a great success. What struck me most perhaps was the great enthusiasm and attitude in the group. These girls paddled hard for 2 days and displayed great determination to improve their skills. It's important that we continue to develop the women's side of the sport, and help Irish women really make an impact at home and abroad.

The second weekend was a trip to Wales in August. Coran Kelly and myself ran a 2-day freestyle course for 6 keen playboaters. The course was based on 2 tidal features - Stanley embankment and Swelly wave. Again the level of paddling was mixed and again we found an informal style of coaching to be the most productive, pulling people aside to throw up some ideas and help iron out some bad habits. Back at the hostel, some sort of structure was put in place on the blackboard, summarizing some key areas of technique and helping to clarify different moves etc. By day 2, improvement was noticeable in everyone. The success of the weekend highlighted a couple of points: firstly that coaching freestyle is different from coaching other river skills and requires a different, more flexible approach. Secondly, that there is enormous benefit to be gained from paddling a wide variety of features and it is well worth the effort to get away from your local playhole.

Another, less visible function of the training officer is to act as a source of information for people looking to get into the sport. The training officer contact details are posted on the website and throughout the year I received requests for information and guidance from some young (and not so young) aspirant freestyle paddlers. I had intended to set up a training resource section on the website but unfortunately a bout of leptospirosis got in the way and it never materialized. I must also apologise for not always being available for committee duties, as I spent a sizable part of the year paddling overseas.

Some people are debating the future of rodeo as a discipline. I don't know if the competition side will remain as it is but I have no doubt that freestyle paddling is here to stay. All over the world paddlers are embracing freestyle boating and having more fun on more rivers. I guess the role of the training officer is to try and encourage more people into the sport, and help existing paddlers get over their learning plateaus. By doing this they can do their bit to make sure that Irish paddlers are out there with the best of them, both at competitions and on the river.

Finally, BIG thanks to all those who helped out over the year. With luck, this season will be an active one, in which case I'll see you all on the water...

Colin Irvine.