

A beginner's experience of Beccles Rowing Club
By Karen Kennedy (brand new to rowing in February 2009)

It all began with a small piece in the local paper about Beccles Rowing Club. First contact was almost scuppered when a compulsory capsized drill reared its ugly head. I wanted to be on the water not in it, but a visit to the club got the better of me and I joined the next beginners' course.

I'd only ever visited one rowing club before BRC, year's ago in London. My abiding memory was serious and not in good way. BRC was a breath of fresh air in comparison. Everyone was really friendly and welcoming when I looked around; that turned out to be the default setting rather than best behaviour. The coaching is provided by a large team and each and every one of them is patient, calm and encouraging. Just as well given some of my exploits to date and the challenge of teaching someone who struggles with left and right when travelling forwards never mind backwards.

I was really worried about being very unfit, but BRC is composed of folk of all shapes and sizes and, as I've discovered, appearance is no guide to rowing performance. No one is judging what you look like, unless it's to do with your rowing stroke. The prevailing view is everyone has to start somewhere and wherever you are is as good a place as any. Having said that I understand there are a few direct descendants of Ghengis Khan who will put you though your paces if you ask nicely.

The club is simple compared to some of the large clubs with a boathouse that is full to the gills and a club house with basic facilities, but as the aim is to row, that's fine! There are a bunch of old timers, lots of newer people and a range of ages. The really brilliant thing about the place is that everyone mixes and gets on. People will go out of their way to ensure you're included, which gives the place a great feeling and takes the strain out of starting something new on your own.

My experience so far.....

Week 1 at the club by 10 am on Sunday, not my favourite hour. The first session was a mixture of ergo, (rowing machine) and training boat, the equivalent of a bike with stabilisers. I think I got hooked there and then! I also got worried about how unfit I was.

Week 2 straight back, soft hands, thumbs at the end of the blades, look ahead not at the blades, slide up and down the boat and move the blades all at the same time. Help! I think I'm going nuts, but I'm enjoying it. I suppose it would be unseemly to elbow the juniors out of the way and hog the boat?

Week 3 out in a double scull with a coach "sitting" the boat to keep it stable. Fantastic! You can instantly sense how fast these "fine" boats could go and

how easy it would be to fall out. Have started doing ergo sessions mid-week to keep up!

Week 4 turned into the Beccles boat race. Fun to watch but I wasn't confident enough to join in.....maybe next year!

Week 5 play boat and doubles this week. First outing in rowing gear. I've never been a great lycra fan and feel like I'm going out in my undies.

Week 6 defaulted to an individual coaching session with loads of boat time. No stabilisers on the play boat for the first time, challenging, but I got lots of encouragement.

Week 6 encountered the mobile launch coaching experience for the first time. Quite disturbing to be sculling along with someone watching your every move for a while and then dissecting it for you.

Week 7 saw my first outing in a quad with my fellow new starters and a coach. Co-ordination has never been my strongest point I think I'm more of a double or a single sort of person!

Week 8 double expeditions with fellow beginners. I hadn't realised how much balancing those coaches had been doing and steering is clearly going to be a challenge for me, it must be the going backwards factor.

Week 9 can't go rowing have to go to London for family birthday so sign up as a BRC member and order some club kit to cheer myself up. I must be getting used to the lycra.

Week 10 back on the water ye ha! Finally go in a single and made a superhuman effort to throw myself into the river before I even got into the boat. Acquired some spectacular bruises and rediscovered a whole new meaning for "does my bum look big in this?".

Week 11 in the singles again with a group of beginners and improvers marauding up the river like a bunch of demented ducklings while the safety launch keep watch.

Week 12 combination of singles and doubles with a coach. I look forward to rowing all week, it really gets under your skin. Everyone is really friendly and welcoming.

Week 13 technical exercises en masse, a bunch of singles ranged around the club pontoon being put through our paces. Not my favourite pastime I want to be off up the river although I know exercises are good for me.

Week 14 the great escape. I got carried away. Following a misunderstanding I chugged off up the river to the quarter mile post before I realised I was all

alone. I should have been doing technical exercises back at base. Was suitably repentant and promised not to do it again (but I really did enjoy it!).

Week 15 I seem to have volunteered for a sponsored row from Beccles to Oulton Broad and I've just realised how far that is - PANIC!

Week 16 single practice again and arrange to do a mid-week session as well. Have joined a gym to try to improve my fitness as I've got the pace of a tired sloth.

Week 17 dunking week. I fell in up by the swing bridge and was rescued by the safety launch. The rowing version of in flight refuelling followed to sort out a couple of boat issues. The capsize wasn't so bad after all, at least it was warm!

Week 18 my pact with the rain gods is entering a rocky patch so far every time I've gone out sculling it hasn't rained, just before, just after but not during. Today I made the mistake of letting a double go in first and got soaked.

Week 19 according to our glorious leader I'm not quite getting my blades [oars] off the water and I'm not quite convinced I want to as it all gets a bit wobbly. I'm sure I read somewhere that rowing was supposed to be an easy sport to learn!