

Early Years

North Berwick Kayak Club began life as a small family club founded in 1999. Our aim being to promote paddling among the young people of North Berwick and the surrounding area. The club's aims and its nature is largely unchanged from those early days, we are still a club with a strong emphasis on encouraging young paddlers and families of paddlers. In recent years we have also seen an increase and steady growth of our adult membership.

The club is of course ideally situated to enjoy sea kayaking, the Bass Rock and East Lothian coastline on the doorstep. However, we also enjoy and encourage white water kayaking and canoeing and we hope to be able to offer Stand Up Paddleboarding in the near future. We run pool sessions in the Winter months and outdoor sessions at Levenhall Links during Spring. The Summer months are when we aim to run the majority of our trips.

In 2014 we were approached by Roger Holmes of the SCA, inviting us to become one of the SCA's focus clubs. We jumped at the chance! At that point we could not have predicted just how valuable Roger's input would become.

Until late 2015 the club enjoyed the support of three dedicated and enthusiastic coaches; Lesley Aitkenhead, Jeff Lowe and Dave Dunbar were the very heart and soul of the club and embodied the club ethos absolutely. Jeff and Lesley had been active club members since 2003. Together Lesley, Jeff and Dave ran all our sessions and trips, and their passion for paddlesports proved irresistible; encouraging existing members to develop their skills and enthusing others to join a growing club. Of course, like so many clubs, we were ongoingly seeking volunteer coaches to help with the running of the club.

In the course of 2015 Dave took up an exciting career opportunity which meant working away from East Lothian, playing a lesser, but still very valuable, role in the club.

Together Jeff and Lesley dedicated themselves to ensuring the continued success of NBKC and we began to explore and plan for the growth of our coaching team. Sadly, in the course of 2015 Jeff became unwell and in December we were all saddened that he passed away. We all felt Jeff's loss acutely, particularly the younger membership who were all very fond of him. Jeff's partner, Lesley, took a break from club activities.

Networking and internal growth

During that period the membership really pulled together. We approached Laura Bennett, Lothian's RCO, Roger Holmes and our own contacts, to help us connect with coaches at other clubs to ensure the club's survival by either helping out on an occasional basis, or to give their time more regularly. Our efforts paid off and we were able to offer all our pool sessions over the winter months.

With Roger's help we prioritised one of our key development aims; to "home grow" our own coaching team from our existing membership. To us, this seemed the most likely way that we could find success in ensuring both growth and sustainability as a club. Interestingly, despite the challenges we were facing, we were also moving rapidly toward our principal focus club target, to grow our membership.

Running Your own Course

We determined the best way for us to begin the process of training our "coaching hopefuls" was to run our own BCU UKCC Level 1 course. Martyn Pegg at East Lothian Council Outdoor Education ran the course and we secured a course director, Jim Gibson, from Aquaplay Scotland. Our hope was that by running the course ourselves we would be able to train a number of our own members and open the course out to others as well.

It's fair to say that we underestimated the administrative effort and pre-preparation that accompanies running your own course. That said, now that we have been through the process, the steps are logical and careful pre-planning, delegation of tasks and good organisation and communication would ease the process a second time through.

Once we identified our candidates, ranging from 16 year old paddlers to paddling parents keen to see the club thrive. We needed to ensure that they were all current SCA members, had passed their 2 star, and had completed their FSRT training. A number of our candidates were already in this position, however, prior to our Level 1 course we had to run an FSRT course and a 2 star training and assessment. Our thanks go to Bob Baird for running the FSRT, and to Tam Westwater for running the 2 star training and assessment.

Tam, who we approached in 2015, has been invaluable to us. He worked closely with all the coach candidates during our pool sessions providing extensive help and guidance, essentially "mentoring" the candidates prior to the Level 1 training and assessment. He became a club regular at our pool and outdoor sessions and we are very grateful to him for his help, support and encouragement. We certainly feel that having someone in that role

is essential to developing sustainability within a club.

One of our coach candidates, Liam Lamb, identified a Level 1 course in January of 2016. With our support and encouragement he joined this course and passed it successfully; this was a tremendous help to the club as we were in the happy position of having another coach for our pool sessions during the difficult period at the beginning of 2016.

Running a level 1 course can be costly for a club. In common with other clubs, I'm sure, we fund raise - and that has certainly helped. Coach candidates were also eligible for funding from Sport Scotland. It's worth noting that applications need to be in four weeks before the course begins. We also found that there were a number of other funding sources we could explore; with hindsight there were probably more funding sources available to us than we went on to access. We would encourage any club to explore the grants and funding support that is available to community groups and sports clubs. It does take time, but it can reduce the worry of needing to ongoingly fund raise large sums to meet club development targets.

Shiny New Coaches and the way ahead

In April of 2016, after two exhausting, but rewarding, weekends spent at Musselburgh Lagoons, plus a week of homework completing the workbook, NBKC were the proud "parents" of six shiny new level 1 coaches! Liam, who was trained in January, brought the compliment to seven.

Roger also alerted us to the opportunities provided by SCA's Personal Coach

Coaches "...when the going gets tough..."

Development plan. Three of our coaches are keen to make quite brisk progress through the coaching pathways and so we nominated them for this opportunity.

Since April we have offered a seven week block of paddling, based at Musselburgh Lagoons, where a number of newer club members worked toward their 1 star award. Tam has continued to support us and has been working with the newly qualified coaches in working toward their 3 star award in preparation for BCU UKCC Level 2. We have offered a four week block of sea kayaking 3 star skills training based in and around Dunbar harbour. One of our coaches has decided to start working toward his 4 star leader in sea kayaking. A number of our coaches have volunteered with a local community project getting adults with a disability into the outdoors, and will be attending the Paddleability training in September and October. We have also formed strong links with the North Berwick Community Hub. This helps us access safeguarding training, as well as publicity through their website and promotional materials. In mid September North Berwick Community Hub are holding a day promoting local sports clubs, as part of this our club will be running taster sessions in North Berwick pool. The buzz following the paddling success at the Olympics combined with this well timed taster session should help us sustain and grow our membership.

Max Aitkenhead, Jeff & Lesley's son, is active club member and supporter of NBKC. This year he achieved his 4 star whitewater leader. This is fantastic news for Max of course, and fantastic news for the club. This means that we are now in a better position than ever for led river trips. Well done Max!

There were times in recent months where we worried about the future of NBKC, however

the committee "dug deep" and really invested themselves in the future of the club, we benefitted from being a focus club and from Roger's support, help and guidance. At a practical level we were fortunate to benefit from Tam's ongoing support, encouragement and knowledge of skills and best practise. And of course there is a wider community of paddlers and coaches who have generously given their time and support.

Jeff would be very proud of where the club stands now and the emphasis we have continued to place on growing young paddlers and welcoming families to paddlesports. It's rare for a pool session or trip to go by without a mention of how Jeff would have enjoyed it!