

'Swellies Extreme' Sea Kayak Races 2011

Overview:

Kayak Essentials are organising three sea kayak races across the weekend 29-30 October 2011.

Based in the Swellies, in the Menai Strait in North Wales, the key feature of these races is their location: among the strong tidal streams of a spring ebb tide, demanding solid skills in a white water environment, fitness, route finding and all-round sea kayaking savvy. We believe that these races will present a unique competitive challenge for paddlers and will demand a broad range of skills for success. The overall aim of the weekend however, is fun and adventure with an enjoyable, relaxed atmosphere. Don't be too relaxed though - we expect you all to race to win on the water!

What are the races?

Before we answer that, we need to look at the likely conditions on the weekend. We've chosen a chunky spring tide of 9.63m (HW 1225 GMT) at Liverpool on Saturday 29 October for the Swellies-Extreme Sea Kayak Slalom and Mass-Start Downstream Madness, with a solid 9.32m tide (HW 1309 GMT) on the Sunday for the Sea Kayak Boater-X.

HW Slack times in the Swellies will be at 1025 GMT (Saturday) and 1109 GMT (Sunday), with peak flows of 8+ knots occurring around 1hr 30 mins to 3 hrs 30 mins after these times. We aim to coincide the races with these peak flows.

The Swellies is generally protected from Strong winds, although a SW gale can cause very squally conditions in the area around Britannia Bridge. Rough seas do not develop within the Swellies (other than those caused by the tide races), although the waters can be very challenging when the wind blows hard. In all, it's a suitably challenging place to run an extreme sea kayak race!

OK, OK - enough about conditions! What about the races?

The first race - the Blue Riband event - is the Swellies-Extreme Sea Kayak Slalom race. A time trial to coincide with a period of peak ebb flow, racing from upstream of Menai Bridge to Nelson's Statue downstream of Britannia Bridge via the Menai Bridge arches, the Platters, Price's Point, Ynys Gorad Goch, the Anglesey shore, the mainland shore, Britannia Rock and finally the Nelson statue. With a maximum field of 60 competitors, paddlers will start at 30-second intervals during a 30-minute period when the tide is running at a consistently fast flow. All the races will test fitness (speed and endurance), white water skills, navigation and route-finding strategy in rough water.

The second race - the Mass-Start Downstream Madness - will follow a similar course through the Swellies, with the added excitement of manoeuvring for position among a fleet of racing kayakers.

Both these races will take place on Saturday 29 October, with a time interval between races to allow competitors to return to the start area before race 2 (the Downstream Madness).

The third race - the Sea Kayak Boater-X - will take place on Sunday 30 October, again to coincide with the period of maximum ebb tide. The race venue will be in the fast water formed by the arches of Menai Bridge, with competitors racing in heats of 6 paddlers - from the green above Menai Bridge, through the arch next to the road and into the eddy next to the concrete slab, across the fast water jets to Ynys Moch and back to the finish line at the concrete slab eddy. 3 paddlers from 6 go through to the second round, same again to reach the third round, then the semi-finals and grand final! The winner can rightfully claim the title "Swellies Sea Kayak Boater-X Champion 2011"!

A fleet of plastic sea kayaks will be provided for the event - helmets obligatory!

Can anyone enter?

Well... no, not really. Competitors will need to have a combination of white water and sea kayaking skills, a confident independent ability on the water, a solid white water roll and a good familiarity with the race venue. Detailed race instructions will be provided, but competitors will need to thoroughly research the fast - and safe - routes through the Swellies. You'll need to vouch for your own ability in this regard.

What kayak can I use?

Any kayak suitable for the conditions to be encountered - capable of being rolled (a required skill at the start line of the first race). Sea kayaks are obviously OK, racing sea kayaks too (if you're confident rolling and paddling them in fast white water). White water kayaks are fine (although you might come last)... Racing kayaks are not acceptable, nor skis - we will not have safety cover to adequately deal with these specialist craft, and in any event you'll need to roll them at the start of the first race!

We'd love to have open canoes, but have reluctantly decided to make this race a kayak-only event.

What race classes will there be?

Only one for kayak-type. We're really not sure what the fastest kayak for the Saturday races will be - all part of the intrigue! We will publish race results for male and female competitors and will record boat types. We expect almost everyone to race in single kayaks, although if you fancy a bit of Double Trouble we'll set up a separate class for you!

How much will the event cost?

The entry fee (to access all three races) will be £25 - to cover direct running costs that will include event organisation, race timing/marshalling and safety provision.

If you only wish to compete in the Saturday races, the cost will be £20.

What are the event timings?

Saturday: registration and competitors' briefing will be held between 1030-1100 at Menai Bridge, with the Time Trial event commencing at around 1200. Competitors can choose to go directly to this venue or can meet at Y Felinheli (excellent parking) for a social paddle on the last of the flood tide to Menai Bridge (0915 launch from Y Felinheli). Race results/prize giving and post-event activities will take place on the waterfront beside the Gardd Fon Inn later in the day.

1200-1230: competitors start Time Trial event, finish first race at Nelson Statue, paddle back to Menai Bridge.

1345: Mass-Start for 2nd race (Downstream Madness)

1415: Paddle back to Y Felinheli on ebb tide

1530: Race results/prize giving

Sunday: a competitors' briefing will be held between 1100-1130 at Menai Bridge, with the Boater-X event commencing at around 1200. Again, competitors can choose to go directly to this venue or can meet at Y Felinheli (excellent parking) for a social paddle on the last of the flood tide to Menai Bridge (0915 departure from Y Felinheli).

The Boater-X event will be completed by around 1430, with prize-giving and event conclusion at Menai Bridge.

What about Safety?

All competitors will need to use suitable equipment - boats must be equipped with watertight bow/stern bulkheads, be fitted with deck lines and toggles. Spraydecks must be worn - you won't get far without one! Personal safety kit must include, as a minimum, include a mobile phone in a waterproof bag, an exposure bag and spare clothing.

A full safety briefing will be given at the start of each day.

Given the nature of the paddling conditions competitors must have a self-reliant attitude and be willing to render assistance to any other competitors in difficulties during the event.

How do I enter?

For further advice, please contact Nick or Matt at: info@kayakessentials.co.uk