

CLUB SCENE

Chelsea Kayak Club



The first London paddle-sport club dedicated exclusively to sea kayaking and touring, Chelsea Kayak Club was set up in March 2010 and is now in full swing with access to a fleet of boats, regularly paddling the tidal Thames around the Houses of Parliament and the London Eye, as well as heading off on tour to places across the UK and overseas expeditions.

Paddlers from a number of London clubs, keen to pursue their passion for sea kayaking and touring realised that there weren't any local clubs that devoted themselves to this discipline. Not content with the occasional furore to the likes of the Isle of Wight or Scotland to sate their thirst for long boats and adventure, they realised that they'd need to band together and set up a club of their own.

Out of this came London's only club that's totally dedicated to sea kayaking and touring – Chelsea

Kayak Club (CKC). The club has been very fortunate to gain access and use of an award winning facility – Cremorne Riverside Activity Centre – in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. This relationship has meant that CKC members get access to some great 'home turf' facilities, such as changing rooms with showers and use of a fleet of top quality sea and touring kayaks.

Paddling on their home turf stretch of the Thames brings in some of the best sights in the capital – including running past the Houses of Parliament, right

“It's great to have access to sea and touring kayaks locally to practice and improve my paddle fitness on probably one of the most iconic stretches of water in the world. We've already had some fantastic trips and an amazing overseas expedition – I'm looking forward to many more to come.”

Phil Cumming, Club Membership Secretary

underneath the London Eye, and through the open arms of Tower Bridge. The sights, river traffic, and the tidal range make every outing a different and exciting experience each week not least because the club paddles the Thames all year round.

The creation of the club has also meant that local adults, who may have learnt through the centre, now have an opportunity to continue paddling with a group of like-minded individuals and peers.

Part of CKC's goals is to help people from the local community, such as the nearby World's End Estate, try out the sport and get involved with the club. The club has been lucky enough to secure a small grant in its

Andrew McMenamin, Club Chair



London is a fantastic city, and its raison d'être is the Thames. Yet our river is used much less than it used to be, and quite a bit less than in other major European cities. In fact, when most of us want to get paddling we spend hours struggling out of London to go somewhere else.

I've lived overlooking the river since I came here 10 years ago, and yet I hardly ever paddled it. Whilst there are several clubs that use the river, they were either too far away for me to get to or used boats, which don't really suit the tidal Thames. Sea kayaks are the obvious choice – yet very few clubs have sea kayaks or are willing to make the investment in them. Surely something could be done!

That something turned out to be in Cremorne, where a council run facility had a marvellous range of long touring kayaks, double kayaks and a full fleet of top quality plastic Nordkapps with the paddles and equipment to match and luxuries like changing rooms and toilets. The centre manager, Harry Whelan, turned out to be a fellow Irishman, and as we had done the same outdoor education course in Dublin, and had both worked for centres over there, we turned out to know a lot of people in common (and of course Harry is well known in sea kayaking circles). Many discussions were had, many, many beers were bought and we both agreed that it would be a great facility from which

to base an adult club, which had a focus on sea kayaking and touring. Good for the club, and good for the centre – provided everything was done well and run in a safe and responsible manner.

I knew nothing about the mechanics of running a club in the UK, but I knew a man who did – a stalwart of Battersea Canoe Club and one of the folks responsible for igniting a spark of interest there in sea kayaking and touring amongst the predominantly white water/surf/polo interests of its members. Phil Cumming agreed to a meeting with me and Harry and we then set about putting a proposal to the Royal Borough. In the end we got an agreement that gave us an independent legal club entity, with all necessary insurance and committee positions of responsibility, but that agreed to constraints on its operations in so far as those operations took place out of the centre at Cremorne.

Since then, we've been running regular weekly sessions on the Thames and also further a field. Over our first six months membership has been increasing steadily, we're receiving enquiries from active sea paddlers from outside London, a grant has been obtained to buy kit and deliver beginners' courses to local residents, space has been granted for club equipment to be stored and we're confident that the club will continue to grow and develop; safely and responsibly increasing the presence of kayakers on the Thames Tideway.

Island hopping in the Bohuslän Archipelago in Sweden.



Practising beach landings in Folkestone, Kent.



Glorious Scottish sea paddling near Kilchoan on the Ardnamurchan.

first few months of operation for funding towards taster sessions for local residents and a small fleet of sea kayaks and equipment of its own that's been put to use straight away.

Navigation on the Thames particularly at night can be quite hazardous. Earlier this year the club took part in a session organised by Shadwell Basin and the Port of London Authority (PLA) with other clubs, which paddle on the Thames to look at lighting options to improve paddler visibility. After a series of trials amazingly, thanks to two of its members (Richard B and Jacqui), it was the club's home-made lights – nicknamed the 'CKC Diffuser' that came up trumps in the group test and now feature in the official PLA Guidelines on Visibility and Lighting.

Paddling regularly on the Thames provides a fantastic 'dress rehearsal for the real thing' to quote one of its members and the club has certainly got off to a good start with a number of hugely successful sea trips.

Trips include day excursions to the Kent coast, a long weekend to the Ardnamurchan Peninsula in

Scotland, and the Anglesey Sea Symposium.

CKC made a commitment from the outset to actively support its members to develop their paddling, leading and coaching skills and is also working towards obtaining Clubmark status. So far it has organised 4 star sea training on the Isle of Wight, and specialist courses in outdoor first aid, coastal navigation and use of VHF radios.

More recently the club organised its first overseas expedition to the Bohuslän Archipelago on the west coast of Sweden. It was a six day self-guided wild camping island hopping tour, which saw its members harvesting wild mussels on day one, saying hello to some friendly seals on day two, and paddling some reasonably big seas on the extremities of the archipelago by day four.

Many more trips and expeditions are organised or in the planning, including day and weekend trips to the south/south west coast, the Scilly Isles, a longer return to the Ardnamurchan, a moderate to rough water handling course, and other self-guided and wild

camping expeditions at home and overseas in sea kayaks and possibly even in open canoes.

Fast approaching 40 members and with so many accomplishments in only six months the club looks set to be a big success and have some amazing adventures. So if you're a new or seasoned paddler with a passion for getting out and experiencing an array of landscapes and nature at its very best then CKC will be glad to have you aboard. 📧



For more information on the Chelsea Kayak Club visit www.chelseakayakclub.co.uk.
To find your nearest canoe club visit www.canoeukayak.co.uk/clubs/
If you'd like to write an article about your canoe club drop a line to rossm@warnersgroup.co.uk



Wild camping in the Bohuslän Archipelago in Sweden.



The club often undertakes occasional Thames paddles to HMS Belfast

“It's great to see a group of people getting together, forming an active club and enjoying the tideway responsibly. We're delighted to support this initiative in any way we can.”
Harry Whelan, Senior Youth Worker, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea



Lunch stop on another fantastic club sea paddling trip.



Taking in the scenery near Kilchoan on the Ardnamurchan.



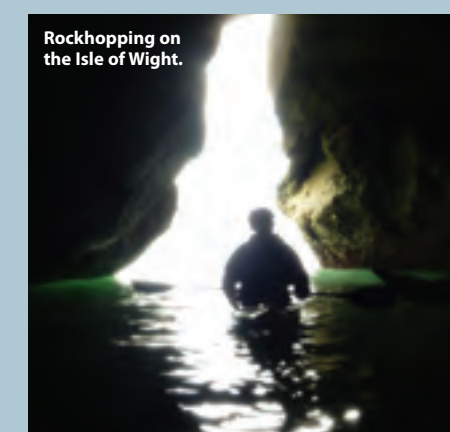
Phil shows Tim how to read tidal stream information.



Geoff and Jacqui at Cremorne Riverside Centre's Pontoon.



The start of another great Chelsea CC Thames paddle.



Rockhopping on the Isle of Wight.

“I was introduced to the London paddling scene when I went on a kayaking course with Cremorne. I hadn't realised how big kayaking was in London, and as an outdoor enthusiast I was stoked to discover this. Since my first evening with CKC – a spring sunset, listening to the crowds at Craven house cheer a Fulham goal and drifting home with the tide and shimmering night lights reflections – I haven't looked back.”
Judes Armstrong, Club Liaison Officer