



OCA Newsletter



OPEN CANOE ASSOCIATION
2023 | Autumn

From the Chair

Autumn's arriving. It's time to spend a warm evening looking back on the warm weather paddling and thinking of what the winter will bring. A rain dance to enable white water paddling or a chance to test the winter camping kit?

Settling in and looking back, I start with 2023's Canoefest. Wasn't it amazing? Thank you to everyone who came together to make it the biggest canoefest. So many folk helped to make it happen but a big thank you must go out to Dan Spry for bringing it all together and for stepping up to do it all again, next year. I only have a rough view of the numbers but I think canoefest has doubled in size in the last 5 years!

Over the summer, we returned to Poole Harbour and enjoyed a weekend at Cleavel Point, joined Axe Vale CC in their annual sea canoeing weekend; enjoyed Oxford CC's hospitality at their site soaking up the city's

intellect whilst paddling, as well as hosting our own weekend in Oxford later in the year. A weekend on the Wye, the Broads and much more. Thanks to Paula as Events Secretary for keeping us on target with so many events. As ever the West Midlands region have also had events all round the country, with a bushcraft weekend, and various river and estuary paddles. Thank you Sue and the team in the West Midlands.

Over the next few weeks save-the-dates and booking pages will open for the 23-24 winter white water season's weekends, all of which will have beginner and supportive groups in place of the previous Petrified weekends. Keep a lookout, as events can book up fast.

Bookings for Canoefest will likely open before Christmas. With the AGM also back at Canoefest by popular demand ;-), along with the Paddler's Pint it's a no-doubt sell-out.

(continued)

I recently sent an email seeking volunteers to help with OCA structure, trips and organisation. The OCA is growing and it's fantastic that you all want more trips and events. If you are able to, please volunteer to help us grow to the next stage. We can only grow as far as we have folk to join us in building bigger. IN 2024 we'll be sure to celebrate our fabulous volunteers, so if you have seen someone do something great, why not let me know so I can say thanks.

Now, to be serious for a moment.

We all know that bullying is harmful and unacceptable in any form. Canoe England have updated their safeguarding related policies and guidance. With this comes a new anti bullying policy, now encompassing adults. The Committee is working on a Safeguarding process which will factor in new guidance from BC.

We have a small group of members working on river leadership training with OCA support, and we will shortly be requesting member submissions for another set of training funding. Keep an eye out if you are interested as we look forward to helping more people on their journey.

We hope you enjoy this round up of what people have been up to. Thanks to Dan for putting this together. If anyone is interested in editing and contributing he would be happy to hear from you.

Enjoy the autumn colour and colder, faster water.

Sarah

Wye from Byecross Farm

as experienced by Jon, Wendy and Bonnie the dog.

This was only our second trip with the OCA, and our first on the Wye, so we were rather enthusiastic about it. The campsite, on arrival, was a beautiful orchard on the banks of the River Wye, and we were met in the friendly, relaxed fashion we are beginning to associate with the OCA. Briefing later that evening gave us the option of two routes, and we chose the shorter at about 17k. Roll on Saturday!

Saturday was dry, with a fairly full river; we did the usual canoe-jenga to sort out shuttles, and set off for the put-in. This was tucked away on a farm in a valley, parking was ample, however the put-in was best described as a little precarious. Whether it was the fumes from the fermenting apples in the orchard the night before, or perhaps a desire to make an impression, Wendy quickly found the otter slide at the put-in, and was wet before we even set off....but as usual took it in good grace.

The paddling day was superb, with a couple of nice stops for the Dog Canoe Club members to stretch their canine legs, and the rest of us to eat. The river truly was memorably pleasant.





Getting out at the campsite was fine, the evening was dry and warm. The beer from the site shop was cold and most excellent, and the company was of course, convivial. The briefing confirmed that the consensus was a trip to Hereford on Sunday, with of course the associated shuttle planning issues.

Sleep that night came easily after the efforts of the day, and was disturbed only by the sound of bonking....bonk, bonk, bonk, as the apples fell into canoes under the trees.

Sunday promised to be warm with little or no wind, the shuttle drivers set off for Hereford to find a pull-out with parking, and we all geared up for the day. Very quickly after the start is a short fast stretch of water on a bend; the step on the left was quickly determined to be a little challenging, so most of us headed down the bouncy riffle, and on to a most glorious day of paddling.

Sun, little wind, a beautiful river, great company, and the day progressed onwards with everyone commenting on how well the leaders had organised the weather. Several small riffles, a lot of beautiful scenery, and plenty of wildlife to spot whilst paddling. As the day crept on however, perhaps the apple fumes and the heat took their toll, as delirium may have set in on one boat (ours); threats of cannibalism crept in if a lunch stop was not found soon! Fortunately, shortly after that a suitable beach appeared on the left bank, and there then followed an idyllic lunch break in the sun.

More paddling in the sun took us to the bridges of Hereford, and a pull-out which deserved the name, with a very handy car park behind. More shuttling back to the campsite, and everyone was packed up and heading home.

We would like to thank everyone involved in organising the event. We know only too well how difficult it is. Our particular thanks to Ian for his advice over the two days paddling. We hope to meet you all again soon at another event. Thank you all. 🛶

Easter on the Broads

Joan Robinson

We met up on Friday afternoon and were pleased to see some familiar faces and also some new ones. The weather forecast was for a chilly couple of days but dry.

At Saturday's briefing we decided that we would all sooner launch from the site and we were given some options for trips. Most chose to paddle to How Hill and Stalham (ice cream had been promised) and others decided on a skills session.

We set off at 9.30 am first up to Neatishead (the stathe was closed so we had the water to ourselves) and then to How Hill. Visiting Toad Cottage for the ice cream shop and the loos! We had our picnic-lunch and set off for Stalham. We had a relaxed paddle hoping to see a Kingfisher or otter. Dan spotted a kingfisher and on the run up to Stalham, James spotted an otter that he had seen earlier when he went for a very early morning paddle. We managed a glimpse as it scurried away to the bank.



The water was busy with hire-craft and one of the employees said they had put 200 boats on the water that day! Finding a mooring was not easy and I was beginning to think we wouldn't get another stop but Sarah found us a get-out and there was more ice cream. The loos were locked so I practised pelvic floor exercises for the next hour while we paddled back.

We had a superb dinner of beef stew and dumplings followed by orange and rhubarb pudding with custard at the centre. Delicious!

Dan was keen to get a campfire going so there was more laughter and swapping of canoeing stories and adventures.

Sunday briefing and choices of trips. Pete and I decided we'd like to paddle Hickling Broad. Not many pleasure-craft are small enough to risk the bridge, so we expected a much quieter day. The majority went to Dilham Canal.

Hickling is a large Broad with many small sheltered cuts enabling us to paddle out of the wind. After manoeuvring around the sailing boats we headed across the Broad to a coffee to and leg stretch. We had sightings of a Marsh Harrier that was good enough to swoop past us and land in the reeds behind us before lifting off again. So we had a long time to stare and feel lucky.

More sightings of Marsh Harrier as we paddled up a small cut to the disused wind pump where we stopped for lunch and were treated to another long sighting of a Harrier who flew very close to us. We had 6 sightings of Harriers during our paddle and on the way back down from the wind pump we heard a bittern.

The wind was picking up and the water was decidedly choppy and I was pleased to head into a cut on our way back to the car park. As we got off the water another Harrier!!

Monday morning was Wet, wet, wet.

All agreed to go home so said very quick goodbyes and set off having had a lovely weekend paddling. 

Oxford Thames Weekend

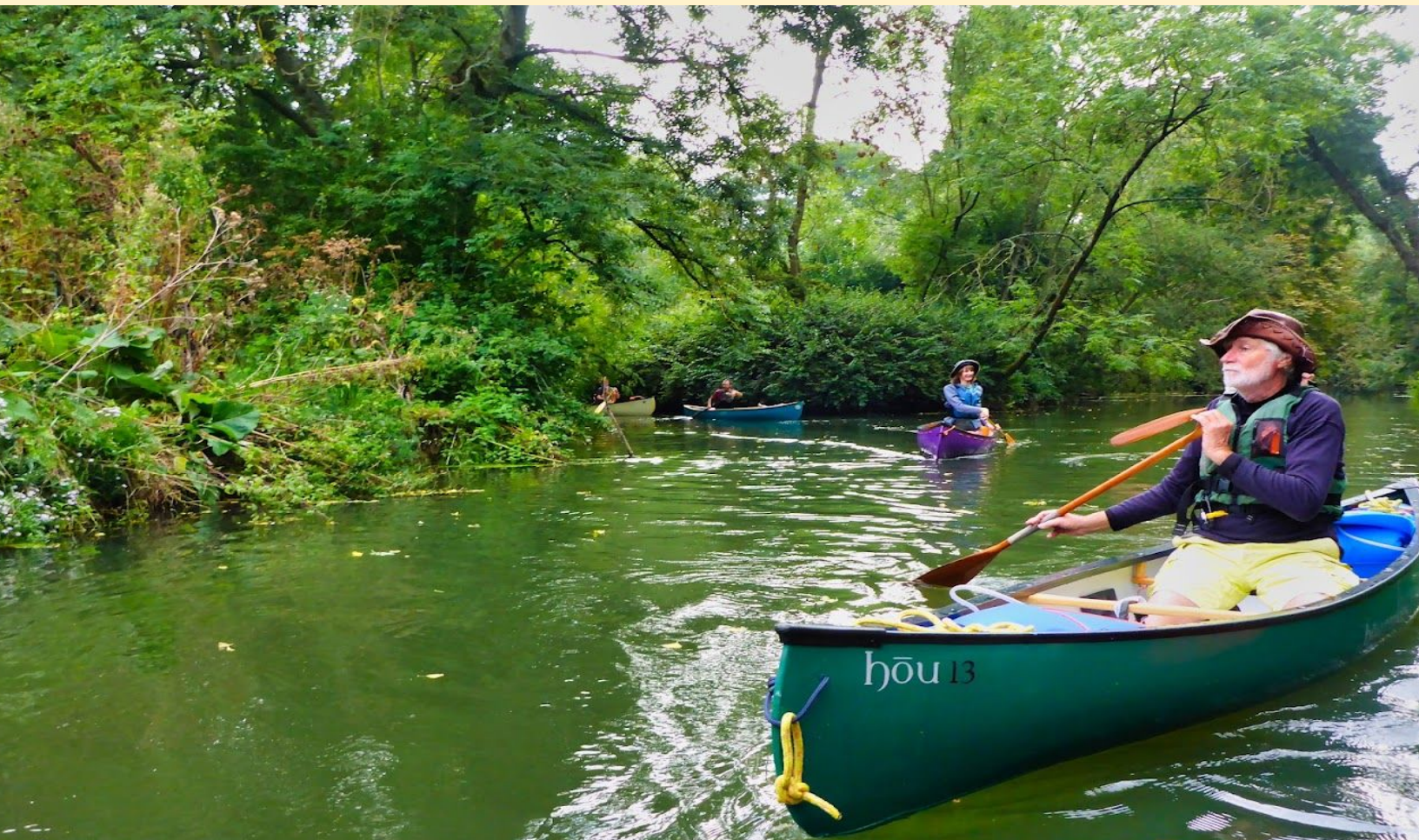
15-18 September: Fantastic flat-water Fun!

Pete Starr (with photos from Andrew Berry, Pete Starr, and Brian Ward)

On a bright, sunny afternoon, I was heading north on the return leg of a road trip. Down to Hampshire to visit family for the week, timed, not coincidentally, with the OCA Oxford Thames Weekend.

I joined OCA for Canoefest and Glyndyfrdwy this year was my 3rd– I've always loved them but never really considered the other events created by our hard working committee and enthusiastic coaches and leaders.

The OCA crew had done a great job getting the communal area set up at Valley Campsite so it was easy to see where to pitch. They had also checked river levels and done some 'gardening' on an overgrown backwaters in preparation for the paddling options that were to be revealed in the evening. Uncharacteristically I was a bit apprehensive and felt a bit self-conscious turning up on my own; I needn't have worried, right off the bat I was welcomed with open arms by a crew of friendly faces. It felt like a gathering of established friendships but in no way was I ever made to feel like an outsider. If anyone reading this has any reservations about attending OCA events then cast them away and get stuck in. I know that you will be welcomed with open paddles! If still in doubt, ask!



The only reservation I have about the campsite is its two resident donkeys. Donkeys look cute but their braying is loud and irritating – I'm glad we were not pitched too close to them.

Friday evening was great fun – I pottered around after setting up camp, checked out the facilities and collected my pizza from Farmbox – a permanent fixture to the site that does wood fired pizza and burgers. The sun was out so I ate it on one of the site's picnic benches, serenaded by the donkeys! The pizza was excellent.

I strolled up to the communal area to see what was going on. There was a shared barbecue and the atmosphere was informal & friendly.. Later, after everyone had eaten and congregated the paddling options were revealed.

There were four to choose from ranging in distance and character.

- The Biggun' – The Oxford Loop, 12 miles
- Chillin' on the Cherwell – a there and back pub visit, about 9 miles
- Bulstake Stream – a small backwater off the Thames (Isis), about 6 miles
- Danger Danger! A small backwater of about 4 miles.

Saturday 16 September – Paddle 1

I started the day with a home-made muesli, foraged blackberries from the laden bramble behind my tent. Yum. Later that evening my neighbours were collecting sloes for gin. Yum yum.

I had chosen The Biggun' for my Saturday paddle. Arguably not the wisest choice for someone wanting to rest their elbow but hey! It was a lovely paddle and popular so we were split into two separate groups – for leadership purposes.

All groups headed out North from Donnington Bridge South of Oxford. The river was busy at the put in as there was a rowing regatta in full swing. Our groups were well prepared so we left them whizzing up and down while we slipped up the sides.

One interesting aspect of this paddle that I hadn't encountered before was using locks. We were lucky to have leaders on the paddle that had a lock key and experience of using them – although many of the Oxford locks had lock keepers. This was a novel experience – especially in some of the smaller locks where we would have to squeeze in many canoes – 19 I think, including leaders!

A variety of different approaches to lunches were consumed at a convenient half-way (ish) point on the paddle – we were beaten to our intended spot by a group of kayakers, but managed to find a nice alternative nearby 😊

I rehydrated a pouch of out of date Fire Pot chili and it was much better than expected!

During the paddle we encountered a cruiser being piloted rather erratically by a novice skipper who made up for any lack of knowledge and confidence with Magners cider. It was a little alarming sharing locks with these guys who were friendly and very merry. They took a blind corner badly almost colliding with a narrow boat coming the other way. I understand that similarly erratic punts were encountered by other groups, which is, perhaps, more to be expected and less likely to cause accidents!

On the return leg of the loop we opted to take a backwater requiring us to pass under a small footbridge. This proved to be a bit perilous as a group of high-spirited young lads were jumping in off the bridge and thought we looked like fun targets. Marion saw them off and we had a delightful drift through the overgrown channel, which was lovely.

The final challenge was a very low bridge that had everyone ducking backwards and trying to maintain some sort of momentum and dignity. Mixed success I'd say!





Saturday night was pizza night for many but, having had the pizza the night before I tried the vegan burger with fries. It, too, was excellent.

The evening was windy and it definitely did not feel like summer any more but with the gazebo sides up and a carefully managed fire-pit it was lovely. Everyone there was in good spirits and I was invited to take the 'can-you-guess-what-this-random-bit-of-camping-equipment-is' initiation test. I must have passed as my failure to get it without considerable prompting and help amused the kids – especially the grown-up ones. 😊

Sunday 17th – last day for most

Day two was departure day for most and so the shorter paddles were more popular. I was torn two trips. I love a pub, but I love overgrown backwaters more and besides, rain was forecast so it seemed like the more sheltered option. Apparently others thought the same and this trip again needed to be split into 2 groups.

After another healthy breakfast, we made our way to Donnington bridge again and set off in the same direction as before. At some point we turned off onto the Bulstake and at this point the paddle was a completely delightful. The overgrown stream had benefited from some 'gardening' from some members of the organisation on Friday, which was much appreciated. But it did not domesticate it too much.

The narrow channel really lent itself to practicing paddling strokes with a bit more finesse, side slipping the canoe using prys and draws. I got some great tips from Marion to help me make those strokes more efficient.

There were loads of natural obstacles to overcome, a short portage around the natural lido and a scrappy bit that required most of us to get out and walk. It was a thoroughly enjoyable paddle – my favourite of the two.

Summing up....

I had a lovely weekend. Shared quality time with lovely, like-minded people. The camp site was great. The trips were well planned and led. You could get instruction from coaches if you wanted it, or you could just get on and paddle. I spend a lot of time, and get a lot of pleasure, planning amazing adventures that I may never get to make –at the end of the day, it's the paddles that you can do that make the memories. I will be signing up for more.

I would like to thank the OCA and, in particular the organisers of this trip, Paula & Marion and all the coaches, leaders and everyone for your friendly welcome and great company. 🛶



CANOE FEST SPECIAL PULL OUT SECTION





Thanks for all the shared photos

Expedition Planning #1

Basic Expedition Planning

Expedition Planning series by Mark A W Gittoes

A series of articles to support open boat paddlers planning to undertake multi-day trips

Split into basics and detailed planning areas. we will consider more detailed planning considerations, including: Training, Equipment, People, Infrastructure, Doctrine & Policy (Routines), Organisation, Information and Logistics.

Mark has experience of planning and participating in extreme and remote expeditions, mainly in Northern Canada.

A basic set of principles to consider when planning a trip is:

Who? What? Where? When? How?

Who are you planning to take on your trip?

Do you require a set of selection criteria? On my very first expedition to N Canada, some twenty five years ago, I answered an advert looking for interested parties to conduct a two month expedition, travelling unsupported, for 700 miles, following the arctic circle across the tundra.



There were over 300 applications and 30 people were chosen for interview. Five months later five of us deployed with the expedition planner and leader.

Do you plan to take Family and/or Friends? What are their ages, ability, skill sets, limitations? Will you join a Canoe Club Trip? A Guided Trip? A Holiday Company? [Safe but expensive – sometimes essential]. Will you study the river, guide books etc and be a self guided group?

All of these considerations depend upon the people with whom you wish to share this experience with. For an extended trip, you will remember the people who enjoyed this special trip with you, for much longer than the memories of the scenery, rapids or wildlife. Personality, Attitude, Eating Habits, Medical issues and skill sets are essential to consider.

Do you take someone you know who plays the guitar / mouth organ / bagpipes! A gourmet chef perhaps?

What are you planning to do? Or What do you want to achieve?

Is the route planned through navigable water? Flat Water, Moving Water, White Water? Remember a laden boat with two people, food and camping equipment on an extended trip can weigh over one tonne! Can you manoeuvre this boat in fast moving water? Have you practiced?

What sort of distances do you hope to do? Daily, or for the entire trip. How much time are you allowing for the trip? Two days or Two months? Is this a remote trip?

You will need to carry everything or plan to have caches / drops of food. Are there any portages? How many, how long? Is this trip through urbanised areas? Great for food shopping, cafes/restaurants. How urbanised? Are the locals friendly?

My friends paddled the length of the River Ganges – almost everyday they were surrounded by 30-50 locals watching everything that they did (no personal space!). They were robbed, taken hostage and endured constant Diarrhoea and vomiting.

They will never forget these experiences!!

Where are you planning to go?

Local, National, Europe, America/Canada, South America? You will need to consider: The climate – Temperate or Tropical, perhaps Arctic. In N Canada during the short summer season it can be 30 degrees during the day and -5 degrees at night.

Where ever you choose will have particular issues to consider; How to get to the put-in and return from the take out – cars, train, float plane, sherpas? Consider what mapping, navigation, GPS is required. If taking electronic navigation devices, always take spare batteries AND paper maps.

Think about the logistic requirements of your trip both at home and in a foreign country. As mentioned above, think carefully about the climate and likely weather, as well as water levels – always check, before you go! On two occasions, having flown hundreds of miles to the planned put-in, we discovered that the lake was still completely frozen over and on the second occasion, that the first 20 miles of river was dry!



When are you planning to go?

During your holidays? At a specific time? This may also be dictated by the climate and environment, water levels/conditions. The wildlife, insects, people, health. On the arctic tundra the blackfly and the mosquitoes are a serious problem in summer. That is why only Inuits and canoeists go there!

Think about how you will deal with the bears, wild boar, monkeys, wood bison and the local people etc. The time of year will also have an effect upon your travel plans, shuttles and logistics. If you are not organising a military or supported trip, it is no longer cost effective to take all of your food, paddling gear, camping gear and canoes to somewhere such as N Canada. It is more cost effective to use a seasoned outfitter and arrive with just your clothes, paddle and buoyancy aid.

Associated with the above considerations, how do you intend to get to your destination?

Considerations may include; National/International travel, Public Transport, Car, Minibus – shuttle, Air – International / Internal / National, Floatplane / Helicopter booking, costs. You may wish to deploy by foot and carry all your gear, perhaps with an inflatable boat.

On the South Nahanni River, some years ago, we met Joe (The Swede). We had flown in 250 miles, Joe had bushwhacked along summer trails over 75 miles to the put-in, carrying a Packraft and bicycle helmet. He drank all of our whiskey!



Consider using local sherpas to carry boats and equipment, as well as the other logistic considerations and buying/hiring food, kit and equipment. Today a two week trip to N Canada, with 10-12 days on the river can cost in the region of £7-8,000. Approximately 33% of these costs are for International Flights, Internal Flights and Float Plane hire costs.

Finally – consider climate change.

In some areas around the equator, the water is disappearing, or has gone. In other areas, such as the arctic tundra and alpine, it is increasing. The tundra permafrost is melting, creating even larger bodies of water and sinkholes. In the alpine mountain rivers, the summer melt is generating huge volumes of water, which when channelled through canyons, is making some rivers often completely un-navigable.

The vegetation up north is also changing, often choking river deltas with numerous strainers. All trip planning should include a careful Risk Assessment before you go. 🛶



Events round up

White water events are currently being announced and we are currently planning our new summer season of events.

Below are confirmed OCA events, along with a few non-OCA events that may be of interest as well.

10 - 12 November:	English Canoe Symposium - River Dart (<i>Non OCA</i>)
08-10 December	Okehampton WW weekend

2024

19 - 21 January	North Wales WW Weekend
16-18 February	Okehampton WW weekend 2
29 March – 01 April	Broads Easter Weekend
01 - 05 May	Kringelfieber (Germany) FreeStyle paddling (<i>Non OCA</i>)
24 – 27 May	OCA Canoe fest 2024 (River Avon, Worcestershire)

Paula - events@opencanoe.info



Coaches corner:

More CPD updates

Every British Canoeing accredited coach needs to perform Continued Professional Development (CPD) to remain qualified and able to take our members on the water.

CPD can take the form of further leader training or assessment, but often we coaches need to find training opportunities to remain up to date. Whilst this is important, as coaching frameworks develop and folks memories fade, this can take a lot of time and money - and sometimes result in studying material that has no connection to our on-the-water leadership.

British Canoeing are running a series of webinars that both provide useful new perspectives as well as offering CPD points. They are free or heavily discounted for BC members and affiliates.

- [Understanding task design](#) (Free - 5 points CPD)
what challenges do we set and how do we know they're the right task for that person?
- [Learning about learning series](#) (£15 - 20 points CPD)
An exploration into how people develop skill in paddlesport, and how we can help support this.
- [Taking more control of your Paddling!](#) (Free - 5 points CPD)
what you can do to help keep yourself safe on the water as well as making good decisions individually and with the people that you are paddling with.
- [Paddles Up Training Annual Review](#) (Free - 5 points CPD)
This open session is aimed at paddlers considering use of formal or informal opportunities for their Paddlesport Learning and Development.

Let's start a conversation!

Have a question, an idea for a trip, or want to share a great day?

Pop over to our [OCA Members lounge](#) on facebook and make a post

Want to submit an article?

Contact our newsletter crew with your idea:
newsletter@opencanoe.info

Got a great photo we should feature?

Drop it into our photo pool:
<https://photos.app.goo.gl/b2pZdH1wG3ML2d167>

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Key OCA Contacts

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