

End of an era

After 73 years this is the final issue of *Canoeist* in magazine format. There have been some fantastic times, despite everything, but at times it has felt more like the Chinese curse of 'May you live in interesting times' or Burns' 'The best laid plans of mice and men' despite which it has been a central pillar of British canoeing.

The past

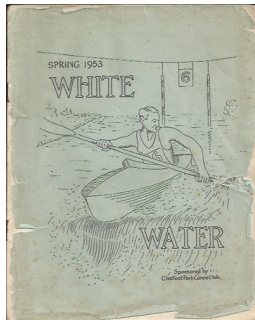
White Water was launched by Chalfont Park Canoe Club in 1953 as the magazine of the BCU* Slalom Committee. The editor for the first decade was Bill Horsman, at a time when one knew the driver of nearly every car passed with a slalom kayak on the roof. Most kayaks were home built to Percy Blandford PBK designs, especially through the Scouts.

Eventually Cambridge University took over, improving the appearance but not the content, and it quickly died. After a year Manchester Canoe Club revived it, Maurice Rothwell gathering a team at his home to output the Roneo pages, collate and staple them and undertake distribution. The editor was Ian Pendleton, a Scottish lawyer who excelled in resolving complex slalom judging situations.

Vic Brown, a Cambridge University paddler from a later era was the next editor, with more humour. She had obtained our best result in the 1972 Olympic slalom. However she was also Slalom Secretary at the time and this was an impossible workload. A call went out for help, answered by Pete Brothers of Reading, who thought it possible to run *White Water* commercially. He could get Slalom Committee information from me as the nearest member of the Slalom Executive. I was sent to interview him.

It didn't go to plan. After a long discussion I had agreed to be the editor while he was the production manager. Printing was moved to Henley-on-Thames, almost back in Chalfont Park territory, and was done professionally, including photographs for the first time.

After the first issue it was clear that we were not going to make a viable profit and Pete pulled out. Vic was still Slalom Secretary and I felt it was unfair to load the magazine back onto her so I kept on with it, including the production. That was in 1975, fifty years ago.



Developing Canoeist

In 1982 Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, decided to use engineering as an 'economic regulator'. As work disappeared, many engineers began looking for career changes and I decided to jump in my own time rather than waiting to be pushed. A widening of scope to cover the whole of canoeing, not just white water, and change of title to *Canoeist* seemed it might now be viable and I went head to head with Mike Clark's *Canoeing*. It took four years to build up enough income to live on. In earlier times, being from slalom, wild water racing and white water touring, I had suggested going in with Mike, who was from a sprint and marathon background. His lack of enthusiasm was understandable.

First I had to get the approval of the Slalom Executive, who were surprisingly positive. After I went public, they announced the launch of *Feedback*, edited by Richard Fox, later *Canoe Slalom Magazine*, edited by Joe Lyons. The new title would be slalom only, no wild water racing, no surfing, no touring, just serious slalom. Who could resist a magazine edited by the world's top slalomist, giving training hints?

For 22 years I worked a 105 hour week, preparing detailed guides (over 300 of them, paddled solo), writing articles, typing them out, chasing advertising, packing, posting, meeting monthly newstrade deadlines, the lot. I suspect I have attended, written up and photographed more canoeing competitions than anyone else, anywhere, ever.

This country became perhaps the most overloaded in the world with canoe titles but new ones started to be launched or attempted at about 18 month intervals.

We had readers in 30 countries and exchanged with a number of national bodies and many clubs. The media came to us because we had accessible information and the largest magazine and photo archive in canoeing. Only Mike Clark claimed a sales figure in the order of our print run. We refused to go down the sales claim road.

There have been so many positives in what has been a way of life, mostly put in print over the years in the magazine, and so many friendships around the world. I have read and reviewed around 1,800 books. Occasionally there were sponsored trips. Particularly noteworthy were two successive weekends, in Michigan and Perth. My flight from Detroit to Los Angeles passed over the Grand Canyon. My onward flight took off from Los Angeles at 10pm and landed in Sydney at 6am. On the way I slept through my entire birthday, my first crossing of the Equator and my only crossing of the International Date Line.

Our greatest honour came in 2003 when we took the inaugural Achievement Award in the Periodical Publishers Association (now the Professional Publishers Association) annual awards, the British publishing Oscars. We were the only sports magazine to be successful that year, most awards going to household names.

Moving online

We were used to some members of the trade telling us how they wanted the magazine run. In 2005 the British Association of Canoe Trades decided they would withdraw advertising support. No reason was given but the suspicion was that there was an objection to information on access issues being prominent, not helping to sell boats. Becoming an online magazine got rid of our two biggest expenses, printing and postage. 'B... stupid' said the publisher of a narrowboat magazine, whose issues are now available online although he hated the concept at the time.

We had often been ahead of the trends. We were the world's first canoeing magazine to publish every month in full colour throughout, a claim that could have gone to Mike Clark if he hadn't skipped so many issues. For a second time I was offered the editorship of the BCU's magazine, which I again refused although the salary was two thirds higher than I ever earned in my life. They had at least twice attempted to launch onto the open market, without success. Nobody else could make a success of a magazine that was already compulsory for

* I use the term BCU throughout rather than trying to be accurate with dates of name changes from the British Canoe Association to the British Canoe Union to British Canoeing to Paddle United Kingdom. Indeed, many paddlers are still referring to it as the BCU, the name longest in use.

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Disclaimer

Opinions expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the editor or publishers. References to waters do not necessarily imply that access or passage is legally permitted or that they are safe in all conditions. The editor and publishers can not be held responsible for any omissions of references to hazards from notes on these waters. They do not hold themselves responsible for inadequacies in items of equipment reviewed here.

Governing body enquiries

Canoeist is the not for profit magazine of Paddlers International. Enquiries to governing bodies and associations should be addressed as appropriate.



Under 12 Dexter Diggins of Lee Valley competing in the Division 2 event during the Interclubs Slalom Championships at Cardington, where the course has been upgraded recently.