

Loch Morlich (Northern SASA Championships) A Report from the frozen north.



On the Wednesday before the swim we got a call from Keith Roberts the organiser saying the swim may not be on as the temperature in the Loch had dropped below the minimum temperature for the swims but they were taking further readings on the Thursday with 3 separate thermometers.

Late Thursday evening we got the call the water had warmed up and the swim was on. As we arrived at the briefing there was a light breeze and we were reliably informed the temperature was 14c unfortunately the thermometer they used didn't measure tenths of a degree so it could have been 14.0c or 14.9c but as we found out it was more 14.0c and we think they didn't measure at the far end of the Loch as this was definitely colder probably due to the melt water from the summit of Aviemore.

The course was challenging as we had to think i.e. as per the briefing:

"head straight down the Loch keeping the first orange buoy to your right then at the second orange buoy turn left and head for the green buoy passing this on your left. Then head for the next orange buoy passing this on your right and head back across the Loch to the bright orange buoy and pass this to your right. Head straight down the Loch to the next bright orange buoy which you should pass on your right and head for the finish buoy and start your second lap passing this buoy on your right. Repeat this for the second lap"

suitably confused we were all paired up with our own canoeists from Gordounstoun school and we tentatively entered the water which was definitely the lower end of 14c,



As we set off there was a light wind and the first mile passed fairly uneventfully as we got into our strokes, but as we turned at the second orange buoy I headed for the green buoy. Unfortunately it was a dark green buoy behind which were the green trees of Glen More. Needless to say we were glad we had individual canoeists so they could guide us, especially as we passed the green buoy the wind had picked up and the next orange buoy had been blown on it's side and all that was visible was the bottom of the buoy which was.... you guessed it green !!!.

Thankfully we managed to negotiate these buoys and we headed along the back straight where the temperature dropped so much so my lower jaw went numb but as I turned back down the Loch I managed to get this feeling back just in time for the wind to pick up making the water a bit lumpy.

As I passed the start/finish point for my second lap I could make out the water sports centre on top of which was the cafe with hot teas, coffee and fresh homemade cakes.....but I resisted the temptation for a pit stop and set off for my second lap. This was more of the same as the 1st lap, but I got my second wind as I passed the green buoy and completed the course picking up a pair of goggles on the way.

Everyone remarked there times were considerably slower & most of the swimmers were taken to the Red Cross ambulance to warm up apart from yours truly, but I did feel a bit lightheaded whilst getting changed.

Everyone agreed it was a hard and cold swim, even some of the Scottish swimmers saying it was the coldest they had swum and fellow NW swimmer from City of Liverpool (Henry) agreed that it was harder than Loch Earn and as tough as when we swam Windermere but we were somewhat fitter then.

As to how tough it was I completed the 4 miles in unofficially around 2hr 30minutes being beaten into second place by Brian Bain who finished in 2hrs 11 minutes with Henry 3rd in just under 3 hours.

As to the remaining races (I had entered the 1 mile as well) as the temperature had dropped to around 13c they split the Junior 2 mile into two heats for one to one canoe cover. They managed to complete the first heat with 4 being taken out with cramps/cold but due to

Red Cross van was full from the first heat

temperature was still 13c

wind picked up

they decided to cancel the remaining 2 mile, 1 mile and half mile events which was a good call as soon after the heavens opened and we had driving rain and wind.

The safety cover provided by the Red Cross was excellent as they had a 4x4 and a van which was a cross between a minibus/ambulance where people could warm up but most impressive were the two rescue boats (orange boat in photos) which were jet boats and if you were to be rescued you had to lie on your back and the as the boat came in behind you the bow of the boat

was a ramp which was lowered and you were 'scooped up' onto the ramp rather than being dragged onto a rib.

Kevin