



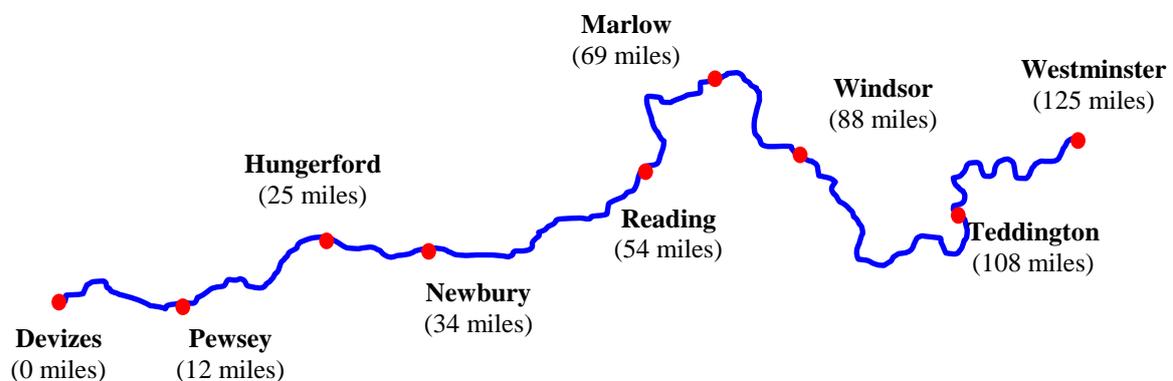
1948-2016 - Celebrating 68 Years of Personal Endeavour

PRESS PACK

Devizes Westminster International Canoe Marathon

The Devizes to Westminster International Canoe Marathon is one of the world's great endurance events and a typically British creation that takes place every Easter.

The race is simple. Travel from Devizes in Wiltshire to Westminster in the heart of London. The route follows the Kennet & Avon Canal, joining the River Thames at Reading down to Teddington, where the river becomes tidal for the final stretch down to Westminster.



It is 125 miles in total, with 77 portages around locks, with approximately 90,000 paddle strokes (give or take a few thousand). Competitors complete the marathon straight through or over four days. Whichever option a crew selects, it is one of the most rewarding and respected challenges in the UK.

DW2016 will be a popular event with over 550 paddlers setting out to test their training, preparation and fitness against the course. Some will be competing, looking to win, others to break 24 hours. Others will be looking to finish, completing a personal challenge of training and dedication unmatched in amateur sport. This year the record of 15 hours 34 minutes set 37 years ago in 1979 looks safe.

Watch the Weather

For Easter 2016, conditions are looking mild on temperatures, but it's going to be challenging. Four day crews setting out on Easter Friday have the usual mix of every type of spring weather with the exception of sleet / snow. Senior Doubles crews setting out on Easter Saturday have a mix of heavy showers and wind gusts of up to 45 mph forecast for Saturday morning moving down the course making for very uncomfortable conditions on and off the water.

Senior Doubles

In DW2015 we had the first mixed crew win in the 68-year history of the race in the Senior Doubles. Lizzie Broughton and Keith Moule, two of Britain's top male and female kayakers, finished in a time of 16 hours 40 minutes and 31 seconds – 80 minutes faster than the 2nd placed crew and one of the top 20 times in the race history.

Broughton is the current World silver medallist in canoe marathon while Moule, a former 200m specialist, has dominated selection races for the Great Britain team so far this year.

For organisers, the Mixed Crew win is a great boost in the push to increase female participation in the race which, in 2016, has topped 20% of the entry line up from just over 15% a few years ago.

Steve Backshall joined the crews on the water, pairing up with George Barnicoat. Strictly Come Dancing and star of the children's favourite Deadly Series, Backshall finished with a time of 23 hours and 17 minutes beating his 2009 time of 25 hours. Commitment in the boat extended to raising awareness and funds for the World Land Trust to purchase Colombian rainforest to protect the golden frog. Fundraising currently stands at over £46,000 so far. See <https://www.justgiving.com/steve-backshall/> for details.

Form is no guarantee of success in DW, which demands speed and minimum errors to make it down the 125-mile course as the winner. DW2016 sees a mix of crews pushing for honours. Two of the favourite crews pitch youth against experience. The DW2016 Runners and Riders list, compiled by race pundit John Morrissey (available at www.dwrace.org.uk), puts Freddie Purcell and Rodrigo Hortell (Boat #384) as favourites. Freddie won Junior Doubles in 2011, Rodrigo is on his first DW. John puts youth over experience in choosing Purcell and Hortell.

Experience comes in the form of Danny Beazley and James Smyth (#333). Between the two paddlers, they have six DW podium finishers in Senior Doubles. Together they have the quality and experience to push for first place.

In reality, any crew in the top ten could finish on top. DW punishes small errors. Strong crews, with quality support teams along the river bank, able to maintain good speed and few errors always stand a chance.

GPS tracking technology will be on every Senior Doubles boat so you can watch any crew through the link on www.dwrace.org.uk. While crews battle fatigue and sleep through day and night, you can follow them in warmth and comfort on your smartphone, tablet or computer.

Senior Singles

Senior Singles is also looking at being a good race. Last year saw the race lead at the end of each day measured in seconds. This year it's unlikely to be so close. Last year's Senior Doubles winner Keith Moule is in K1 and hoping for good flow on the river with conditions to push on the record. The record of 14 hours 46 minutes and 42 seconds was set in 1993 by Jimmy Butler and it's going to be a tough time to beat. Second favourite is Michael Southey who, with Junior Doubles and Senior Doubles wins already at the age of just 22, knows the course well. Tips for third and fourth place go to Daniel Berger from Germany and Pier Siersma from the Netherlands. Great to have these international crews and DW watchers will be looking to see with how they deal with the course.

Junior and Veteran Junior Doubles

While we don't have runners and riders for these categories, there will be strong competition for top honours and for the team prizes. As with the overall race, female entrants are increasing. A particular highlight this year is the fact that Lord Wandsworth College and Dauntsey's School have the same number of girls as boys in their large teams of Junior Doubles.

DW2016 in Numbers

As one of the great open-to-all endurance events this year's entrant's ages range from 15 up to 70. The average age of juniors is 17. Average age of seniors is 41. Women make up 20.8% (114) of the 548 entrants in 300 boats. The interest in the event goes far beyond the UK, bringing competitors from across the world to the quiet Wiltshire town of Devizes. This year there are entrants from 16 nationalities including: Australian, Belgian, British, Dutch, Finland, French, German, Hong Kong, Hungarian, Irish, Russian-French, Singapore, South African, Swedish and Zimbabwe and the United States of America. Four people are celebrating birthdays while paddling over the Easter Weekend. One is turning 16, two are turning 17 and one is turning 61.

History of the Race

The Objective (as set out in the official rule book)

To race from Devizes to Westminster by kayak or canoe in the fastest possible time along the course route. To further the interest in long distance canoe racing and to encourage the design of canoes and equipment that are light, serviceable and easily transported over rough ground, yet suited to estuary conditions.

The Course

The starting point for the 125-mile race is Couch Lane Bridge, Devizes on the Kennet and Avon Canal. The course follows 54 miles of the canal and occasional stretches of the River Kennet to Reading where it joins and follows the River Thames for a further 71 miles. The canal is far from plain paddling. It includes the 502-yards-long Bruce Tunnel at Savernake and 56 locks, all of which have to be portaged. On the Thames, much of which will normally be negotiated in darkness through the night, some assistance is gained from the current with another 20 locks to be portaged. Crews that successfully catch the tide at Teddington, where the Thames becomes tidal for the last 17 miles to Westminster, may have as much as 5 knots (5 mph) assistance at the height of the ebb tide. Those that miss the tide find it virtually impossible to make any headway against the flood stream. Hazards to be encountered include obstructions along the canal banks, steep and slippery banks, strong winds, weirs on the Thames, angry swans, sub-zero temperatures at night, the heat of the sun by day, and finally the danger of being swamped and capsized by passing pleasure craft on the tidal stretches of the Thames. The finishing point is just downstream from Westminster Bridge, where many an exhausted canoeist has to be lifted from their boat.

The Early Days

The idea of the Devizes to Westminster Canoe Race originated at the Greyhound Public House at Pewsey when, owing to a threatened rail, and bus strike in 1920, alternative means of transport were the subject of conversation at the bar. Arising from this discussion a group of friends bet £5 (equivalent to £230 in 2015) that they could travel by the River Avon from Pewsey to the sea at Mundeford, near Christchurch, in less than three days. Using a 26ft double sculling skiff and overcoming all sorts of hazards, the intrepid boatmen won their bet with twelve hours to spare. Although very well publicised in the local press at the time, so far as is known, the journey was not attempted again for 27 years. A 1947 crew composed of three RAF men and a local farmer were inspired to repeat the exploit by a conversation with a member of the original crew in the same Greyhound Public House, and won their £5 by reaching Christchurch in 51 hours.

The Devizes to Westminster Canoe Race arose as an off-shoot of the Pewsey to Christchurch competition when a Pewsey resident offered a prize to any crew which would better the 51 hours time of 1947. The Scoutmaster of the 1st Devizes Scouts wanted to take up the challenge but did not qualify because the Scouts' canoes did not meet the requirements of the competition. Once again we return to the back parlour of the Greyhound at Pewsey where one member

of the 1947 crew, Roy Cooke, was planning a boat trip from Devizes to Westminster in 100 hours. Although this particular project fell through, the idea was taken up by the frustrated Devizes Rover Scouts. Some worthy citizens of Devizes decided that their Scouts' initiative should be encouraged and raised a sum of money to be donated if the Rovers could reach the sea by the new route via the Kennet and Avon Canal to Reading and thence down the river Thames to Westminster, in under 100 hours. Thus it was, that at Easter, 1948 the first two crews from the Devizes Rovers, paddling heavy home-built double kayaks, completed the course with ten hours to spare. At Whitsun, 1948, two crews of the Chippenham Sea Cadet Unit covered the same course in just under 77 hours. Further attempts by other crews in the summer were foiled by the thick growth of reeds in the canal and so it became established that Easter was the best time for the journey.

The popularity of the race in 2014 is as strong as ever. The number of entries is approaching 1970s level, when the current record for the non-stop race was set in 1979 with a blistering time of 15 hours and 34 minutes. Today's elite marathon and endurance paddlers, with improved kit and training regimes, do their very best to get close to this time.

The Five Classes

There are five classes of entry to the Devizes Westminster International Canoe Marathon. The Senior Doubles class is the non-stop race. All other classes complete the course over four days, an equally demanding event, but for slightly different reasons.

Senior Doubles Class (non-stop) – 138 boats (276 entrants)

Seniors over 18 may start at any time between 0700 and 2000 on Easter Saturday, timing their departure from Devizes so as to arrive at Teddington 108 miles down the course at high tide (0649 on Easter Sunday morning) if they are to take advantage of the ebb on the final 17 miles of tidal water from Teddington to Westminster. In addition to completing the course, the departure time requires careful planning as well as tactical and strategic consideration. Serious competitors plan to paddle non-stop leaving the boats to carry boats or portage the 77 canal and river locks.

Junior Doubles Class (four-stage) – 85 boats (170 entrants)

The Junior class is open to double crews between the ages of 15 and 19 and was inaugurated in 1953. This section was introduced so that younger competitors could compete without the possible danger to health involved in continuous paddling for a whole day and night. Junior crews cover the course in four legs of 34, 36, 38 and 17 miles. The crews camp at Newbury, Marlow and Ham before completing the course on the ebb tide on Easter Monday morning. There is always fierce competition between the nominated teams and at the end of each day's racing the results will be available so that the crews know their position.

Senior Singles Class (four-stage) – 52 boats (52 entrants)

This class was contested for the first time in 1985 and is open to crews over 18. It follows the Junior format with four racing stages over the Easter weekend. The senior crews start as directed in Devizes between 0930 and 1030 on Good Friday, and between 0900 and 1000 at Newbury and Marlow. The K1s start 30 minutes before the top of the tide whilst the Junior K2s start as the tide turns. This makes for a great spectacle at Westminster as you end up with two big finishes as opposed to one.

Veteran/Junior Class (four-stage) – 7 boats (14 entrants)

Traditionally Juniors can only race over 4 days and the Vet/Junior class is much the same as the Endeavour class but intended for parents to bond in an amazingly intent way with their offspring. Like all classes in this great race life-time friendships and relationships can under going great change in this event.

Endeavour Class (four-stage) – 18 boats (36 entrants)

This event is held over 4 days and is a challenge not a race, consequently crews are not timed. The aim is to provide the opportunity for people to learn the course and to learn how to prepare properly if they decide to take part in the Senior Doubles event. It has the spice and variety of the straight through event without the danger of exhaustion, the big weirs and swirly waters of the Thames by night or the need to prepare as intently. What a fantastic way to spend Easter. Real self-discovery!

Taking Part

To get to the start line, crews are recommended to train steadily for a minimum of six months. The training is tough but with planning can be result in a successful DW campaign for most people.

Full details on how to take part are on the Devizes Westminster International Canoe Marathon website – www.dwrace.org.uk.

In summary, some key points of advice are as follows:

- Anyone can take part in DW. It is open to all (subject to the usual conditions of entry)
- Allow six to nine months preparation for the Devizes to Westminster Race.
- Join a canoe or kayaking club (although some clubs don't encourage participation in the DW because it's so hard).
- A racing kayak costs between £500 (second hand) upwards to £3,000 or more.
- Choose the right partner – it's very intense, you will get to know your partner intimately.
- Consider attending a specialist race seminar (more details at www.dwrace.org.uk).

DW 2017

Next year's race, over Easter Weekend, runs from 14-17 April 2017.

For interview, photographs or more information contact Peter Hutchison on peterhutchison24@gmail.com or call 07736 424200.

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