



Matariki brings a new life

Once a year, twinkling in the winter sky just before dawn, Matariki (the Pleiades) signals the Māori New Year. Coinciding with the winter solstice, it was traditionally a time to remember the dead, and celebrate new life.

You will notice a couple of changes in Dragon Boating in Christchurch soon, such as the arrival of a new club, Waitaha. And some changes and challenges for our training venues.

Schedule for the season

Here are the tentative season dates. Training will start at the end of October, then...

Ice Breaker – our first racing will again be about 5 weeks into the season, on Sunday 8-Dec-13 at Lake Pegasus.

Super 12 – Akaroa again for this awesome event in the Ten Man boats. Fairly early this year on Sunday 12-January-14 due to the favourable tides.

Aoraki Open sees the start of the serious racing. Lake Pegasus, Sunday 23rd February.

South Island Champs are again at Lake Hood, Saturday 15th March.

NZDBA Nationals at Lake Hood 29th March.

Then we expect several teams to build up toward the IDBF Club Crew World Champs in late August 2014.

New Aoraki website out soon

Coming soon - our new website, designed to be easier to use on mobile devices (phones and tablets) ...



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Christchurch Golden Girls

This month sees the return of Christchurch Girls High School Dragon Boat team from their second tilt at the World Collegiate Games.

Scott Johnson, former Aoraki Board member Swept the team to fifth place in the 200m sprints, and fourth place in the 500m event. But the ten-paddler crew are clearly stronger at the endurance event, winning Gold in the 2,000 m Races.

International Collegiate Dragon Boat Federation runs the Regatta, which this year featured 870 students from 47 universities – and a few Secondary Schools! The Ten-Man boats race on the Fen River, in Taiyuan, capital of North China's Shanxi Province. The competition is in its fourth year and attracted 62 teams from 22 countries and regions, including teams from Harvard and the University of Southern California.



Collegiate racing in Taiyuan

Scott reports that Christchurch Girls Collegiate trip to China was a new experience for 16 of the 18 travelling group. They had no idea of how many thousand times they would be photographed, even though they were told.

Race draw is done in front of all teams: draw for your own lane, then you draw the next team's name out of the stack. All witnessed by 3 judges. Fair, but it took 1½ hours.

The organisers certainly know how to marshal teams: 1 crew in boat, 1 crew in waiting tents and 1 crew waiting to go into tents outside marshalling area. With just 12 racing boats it worked pretty well.

Scott knew the lighter teams would do well in the 200m sprints and CGC finishing 5th in the division. As the distance increased they were more competitive, leading during the 500m final but finished 4th after a push for line by the other teams.



The 2,000m final starts are at 30 second interval. First leg is 100m in straight line to the first of 4 left-hand turns, then 400m up the course before beginning the second turn. Another 400m followed by turn 3 and final 500, which is the 400 plus distance past the start to finish but that's another story.

CGC covered the distance 15 seconds faster than the next team, but had a wait for the results. What seemed to be hours was more likely 45 minutes, but the celebrations from the team had some spectators wondering what on earth was going on!

Traffic slowed the team's bus to Prize Giving by over an hour but they arrived in time to receive the first place trophy and gold medals (presentation of the 5th and 4th placed trophies were at the same time, but off stage).

Paddle makes a return to China

After the racing was over at the ICDBF Champs in Taiyuan, Girls High presented a very special gift to Mr Tain Shu Bao, of the International Collegiate Dragon Boat Federation.

Coach Scott Johnson had bought a set of wooden Champion paddles a few years ago. He took one of these racing paddles and sanded it back to bare wood. He then asked the very gifted carver (and paddler!) Alex McLeod to turn it into something special. Alex returned the beautifully carved and stained paddle to Iceman just hours before the team flew out.

After the racing, CGHS Team Co-Captains Sarah Lyne and Sophie Anderson (pictured, left) met with Mr Tain in a private room at the Prize Giving and, aided by interpreter Michelle, presented the paddle.



Two Manaia, representing NZ and China

Mr Tain greatly appreciated the significance of how the paddle was built in China, was raced hard by teams in New Zealand, retired from service to be decorated by a local craftsman and returned to its home in China.

Welcome, Waitaha

One of our foundation Dragon Boat teams – Canterbury Paddling Club – has successfully merged with Nga Maata Waka recently, to form Waitaha Paddling Club.

Pom Connell tells us "Hopefully Waitaha will be competing this season".

Changes at New Brighton base

Firstly, a big thank you to those teams and individuals who came down to Owles Terrace in May to help us clean up the sheds and the boats, preparing them for the winter. It meant that our Equipment Director has now been able to repair any gel-coat damage that our Dragon Boats have sustained over summer.

We have left a couple of boats easily available, so that the Ridge Riders U23 team have been able to continue training on the Avon on Sunday afternoons. Give them a call if you feel like joining in – I'm sure they will welcome you.

However our operating plan was turned on its head recently when we (Meri, Noel and Rick) met with fellow Waka clubs, Surf Life Saving and engineers from City Council to discuss earthquake repairs at the site. The land and buildings belong to CCC and had been used as a maintenance base until they abandoned it some years ago. In the months up to the earthquake Aoraki had formed an alliance with Waka Clubs to formalise a Sports Lease on the site, but Council never got around to meeting with us. However they have always been supportive of paddlers using the base.

But Council are doing engineering assessments of all their buildings and at the meeting they told us a "Level Two Rapid Assessment" showed the buildings were deemed unsafe to occupy. Cracks are visible in the concrete block buildings and there is significant land damage. Hence these buildings are "Yellow stickered".

Unfortunately this means that we *cannot go into the buildings for safety reasons*. While Council cannot make a formal decision about the building's future until they have a Detailed Engineering Evaluation and/or a Damage Assessment, it is unlikely anyone will spend the money to take it from Yellow to Green.

But Aoraki Dragons is working with Council and other users (several Waka Ama clubs plus SLS) to organise a day when we can get into the buildings and retrieve our gear. We might leave some boats in the shed in the meantime, but we will need to get some of our gear out. We are working on other plans which include buying containers and semi-temporary roofing structures, as well as some ideas we have around Lake Rua.

Meantime, we will make sure that our boats are available to teams that want to paddle!

Sweep training and accreditation

Aoraki has been running Sweep School at the start of each season, but we are looking to ramp up the quality now. You may recall that two of our Sweeps, Rick Smith and Russell Stocks are on the NZDBA *STAG* (Sweep Training and Accreditation Group), who have developed a tiered accreditation system, ranging from Novice sweep, Restricted and Provisional accreditation, and then Full Sweep accreditation up to the Advanced sweep (Guru).

The Levels include the 'recognition of prior learning' but will include formal Sweep training material, to ensure we recognise and develop those 'salt of the earth' types that step up for the role. Rick has been working on a schedule for the Sweeps which looks like something this:



In August, Aoraki will call for nominations of current and aspiring Sweeps. Then in September we will run a *Level One Theory* class for Novice Sweeps, in two sessions.

In October we will back this up with *Level One Training/Certification* sessions on two Sundays, from about 10 am to midday. This will use 12 or so experienced paddlers to provide stable paddle power for these on-the-water sessions.

In November Aoraki will continue to assess the new Level 1 sweeps and coordinate more theory classes and practical sessions. By early December Aoraki will have completed *Level/Two Certification* over two sessions. This will include a written assessment to test Sweep's knowledge of maritime and racing rules. All sweeps must complete this assessment to be able to compete in NZDBA championship events.

January will include two sessions of training and assessment to Level Three Certification.

Schools to Uni – Junior Development

Several Christchurch Secondary Schools continue to field consistently strong teams in our competition, while some have struggled lately.

In the 2012-13 season, Aoraki launched a very successful and well received "Secondary Schools Challenge" that saw the introduction of Dragon Boating to six Christchurch schools. We will actively target those schools to return this summer with a "full season team".

And Aoraki will run another session, repeating the format of five training sessions plus a regatta, in February to March 2014. Only new schools (that have not been in a recent Secondary Schools Challenge, or are a "full season team") will be invited to take part in this SSC format, while we work with the teams from last season to convert them to full-timers.



Meanwhile, Aoraki Board members Caleb te Kahu and Glenn Dickie are reaching out to school leavers to make sure they have an opportunity to continue paddling. Mostly they are being picked up by long-standing club Ridge Riders, who are continuing to post fantastic race results at all levels.



Another New Boat – but not for paddling!

During the off season we decided that our rubber inflatable boat with 15hp outboard was not that good for setting up racing lanes etc, and too slow to keep up with Dragon Boats as a safety (or training) vessel.



Now, thanks to Canterbury Community Trust and Fonterra, we have been able to buy a boat that will be much more capable.



Equipment Director Rick Smith settled on a *Sea Surge* 4.8m aluminium pontoon boat with a 40hp Mercury Outboard. It will allow us to tow boats, pull out lane rope and, more importantly, quickly get to any Dragon Boat in distress.

We were hoping to continue sea trials (perhaps by shadowing ABOL Amazons when they take a Waka out on Lyttelton on Sunday mornings) but the locking up of Owles has stymied that for a while.

AGM Date set

Aoraki financial year finishes at the end of June, so we will hold our Annual General Meeting from 2 pm on Saturday 3-August-13 at Airways building in Russley. The first hour will be the AGM – and as always, all paddlers are welcome to attend and encouraged to get involved.

AGM includes the 'Election of BOM' and these positions are due to 'terminate' (on odd years): Secretary, Treasurer, Boats/Equipment, Junior Development and Events Director.

As always, we are keen to see new candidates step up <hint, hint>.

After the AGM we will have a session to update our Strategic Planning (2 hours).