

A brief history of the West Lakes Canoe Club Inc. (est. 1978)

Fred Tanner has asked me to provide an article on the history of the West Lakes Canoe Club for the club newsletter some time ago. I do this gladly, but I make the following disclaimer. There is sufficient material to write a book about the 29 year history of the club; I have had little time to give this serious editorial work, my memory is not what it used to be and I apologise in advance for leaving out events, individuals and personal anecdotes. One day I should write and publish this book.

The West Lakes Canoe Club was formed in April 1978 by Roger French, Heinrich Sueppel (a kayak paddler from Germany) and Ken Venables. It started (as all clubs do) with humble beginnings. We asked Onkaparinga Canoe Club and CBC to help us get started. OCC gave us an old K1, K2 and K4. CBC gave us some gear too, but I can't remember what it was. Club members also had their own boats. We based our training at West Lakes and at the Pat when it was really bad weather. The first West Lakes Classic was held in September 1978 from the beach at the 1,000 metre start.

We had no clubhouse but one of our junior members lived at West Lakes, near the current 500 Metre start. Chuck Anderson kindly built some canoe racks in his side yard and some club boats were able to be stored there. We needed a trailer to carry our boats to regattas and races. Heinrich Sueppel produced a small (matchbox size!) photo of his old canoe club trailer from Germany. We thought 'yep! that's good enough' and so took to building it at a factory in Wingfield on week-ends with everything donated. We had to only pay for the registration fee and number plate (\$11.50!) The trailer was made of bent galvanised tube and the design was unique in that there was room for three K4's on the bottom layer, six K2's on the middle layer and nine K1's on the top layer. Boats were slid into position on old fire hose straps. It was OK for awhile.

The club grew quickly with some members coming from Nailsworth High School and Scout Groups after a come and try day. We invited local ski paddlers to participate in the club, but many could not balance a K1 and so they did not persevere. Some that did were Greg (piggy) Bowditch, Scott Bradley and a young lad who was more interested in playing football for Henley at the time - David Foureux. In 1974 SACA sent the first official State Canoe Racing Team to the Australian Championships in Stanthorpe, Queensland. The sport really took off in SA after that. I must clarify that Rob Wight was in the first SA Canoe Sprint Team in 1965 with Barry Hancock. The SA Canoeing Association was re-started by Blue Nolan in 1969. Gerry Cornelius, Tony Sedgwick and Bob Crouch paddled in the first Red Cross Murray Marathon in 1970 which Blue Nolan and Colin Newton encouraged people to go in.

I started paddling kayaks in 1968 with the scouts, but was fascinated one day by a new type of boat that no one in SA had seen or heard of. We were at the Torrens Island race in 1970 and a Danish guy (who couldn't speak any English) turned up for the race with a wooden Delta C1. He paddled on one knee! He did most of the race but got lost and had to turn back. His name was Per Manly and he had represented Denmark at the Junior World Championships, finishing eighth in the C2 final. He paddled and coached at Onkaparinga, for SA and Australia. The Wooden brothers Mark, Scott and Shane were part of his youth program at Onkaparinga and they also

2.

paddled skis for Southport SLSC. All represented Australia, with Scott making the Olympic Team in K4. Dreams are possible and don't let anyone stand on your dream! Anyway, to get back to the C1 I had a go and the rest is history. My father and the Bank Manager thought I was crazy importing a wooden C1, C2 and two Canadian paddles from Denmark. After a few capsizes, I got the hang of it and really enjoyed the racing, training and sprint competitions in C1 & C2 at my first National Championships in 1978 at Ballarat. Per told me about the C7 competitions at the World Championships and I just had to build one! So I did in 1982 at King Boats at Peterhead during my long service leave as a woodwork teacher and I named it the 'Pèr Manly'. Derek Stevens kindly organised for some old TC7's at Roonka that the Scouts had built for a National Jamboree to be made available for use, so that we could have C7 races.

The club also converted old rowing tub fours into C7's & later C4's. These were being given away by rowing clubs, who were transferring to quad sculls. The C7 was 11 metres long and was made out of cedar marine ply, spruce and ash. It was designed by Graham King and built at King Boats, Peterhead. At the first Australian Canoe Sprint Racing Championships held at West Lakes in 1983, West Lakes won the C7 King Boats Cup. There has always been intense rivalry between CBC and WLCC in the Canadian team boats, even up to some recent regattas.

In 1982 we still had no clubhouse and things were getting desperate for storage of club gear. I asked Flinders Uni Canoe Club if we could store some boats there temporarily, but this was not satisfactory as their Student Union was on our back all of the time to get our boats out. We held a junior come and try day on a Sunday and we were inundated with juniors from the Grange & West Beach SLSC's and a guy called Peter Petho who was a Canoe/Kayak Coach from Hungary. I can still remember paddling at the Pat in a C7 on Ash Wednesday in 1983 when the Adelaide Hills were ablaze and the sky was black with smoke and ash. There was little water and a lot of mud and it stank all of the time. Hugh Stewart was a new paddler who started paddling in C7 and Canadians after being enticed along by Bob Lynch.

Some club members and I applied pressure through our local members of parliament, local council members and began lobbying for a canoe clubhouse and (eventually) headquarters for canoeing in Adelaide. Mike Newton had a son in the Grange SLSC and heard of our plight. He was the Community Services Officer at the Woodville Council and they had been handed over responsibility of the West Lakes water system. The SA Rowing Association had been involved in building the Olympic size rowing course, but the Council were looking for somewhere else to establish other interest groups like canoeing, model boats, sailing, royal life saving, etc. at the Bower Road end of West Lakes.

In 1985 The Federal Government granted over \$300,000 to the Woodville Council to establish the facility at Bower Road, West Lakes as part of the Community Employment Scheme (CEP) to get long term unemployed people back into the work force. There were many such projects funded by the scheme around the country and West Lakes moved in as tenants in 1987, even before the papers were drawn up. I must acknowledge the work of our local Member of Parliament, Kevin Hamilton MP

3.

JP who was able to keep the pressure up during the initial and early stages. Kevin was our Patron and on our committee at the time and one of our blue K2's is named in his honour.

We unofficially opened the clubhouse ourselves, organised the publicity and invited the Mayor to attend. We had the Radio & TV cameras and a lot of locals there. Don Howell from Delfin Realty was our first major sponsor and we had some Espada K1's and some K2's built which still bear their banner. The white K2 Ste Howell is named in honour of Don's wife. Lyell Wilson from the Leg Trap Hotel was another sponsor. So in July 1986 we were finally in our present clubhouse with a commitment to pay a 20 year lease to the Woodville Council! The understanding was that once the twenty years lease payments were up, we would only have to pay a small Annual Rental to the Woodville Council. Carol & Wally Nejman were the local residents (and committee members) who officially endorsed the move of the West Lakes Canoe Club Inc. into the Aquatic Reserve Clubhouse. Their names (as Rate Payers) appear on the official Woodville Council transcript for this.

In the early days, the Club competed mainly in sprint racing and marathon paddling and it continues to do so. West Lakes Canoe Club has won the Champion Sprint Canoe Club of Australia many times, starting in 1985 at Ballarat. It was at this ACF National Sprint Racing committee meeting that Br Ray Howard and I convinced all of the other states that we should again host the 1987 National Championships at West Lakes. SA has hosted the National Sprint Championships many times because no one else wanted to do it. With an International Standard course built at Penrith for the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, all Nationals have since been held there because of the necessity to have hand held starts. The SA State Government announced in June 2007 that there will be a major upgrade of the West Lakes Rowing & Canoeing Course with hand held starts, lane buoying of the course and a new Judges Tower to attract National Championships back to Adelaide, to be ready in time for March 2008.

In 1987 the Australian National Canoeing Championships were held at West Lakes and we had a fundraising show in the not-yet completed clubhouse with a large crowd after the Titles and we had to run an extension cable to a nearby power supply so that we could have lights, thanks to the clever work of Bob Houston who was later on the committee. His daughter Kerry Houston was an excellent state marathon paddler. We were entertained that night by a top Victorian Kayak paddler, Martin (Marty) Ralph who was also a pretty good magician and juggler.

The boat racking system that the Woodville Council put in was appalling (it only held about eight boats in total) and so we threw it out. Phil Hinc had seen the National Titles at West Lakes and was keen to continue his kayak paddling and he trained up some juniors, including his son David Hinc who later became a Member of the Australian National Sprint Team. Phil is a Boilermaker by trade and he volunteered to be on the committee and set about devising new racking systems that would hold more boats. These racking systems have been improved about three times, so that now we are lucky to have so many boats stacked in like sardines. Phil also did a lot of work on boat maintenance and setting up the weights room and the clubroom. Tony Matz has done a sterling job as WLCC quartermaster for many years, keeping the flotilla of club craft going and always doing this, happy to help. A real gentleman!

4.

Canoe Polo is another activity that has gained prominence and many people enjoy recreational paddling on such a great waterway. Dragon boat paddling was a great club team building activity that we undertook and raced on the Patawalonga, the Torrens and at West Lakes. Our members were paddle specific and so we won against the ETSA Powerblades, who just thought that they were unbeatable. An indiscretion by a Dragonboat official at the State Titles on the Torrens saw the withdrawal of West Lakes from all future Dragon boat competitions in protest.

The clubroom facilities were put together through the generosity of many people. Phil Hinc and others helped to build partition walls to create the clubroom space and free carpet was donated. I built the trophy cabinet, honour board, perpetual club trophies and most of the framed photos hung on the walls. These all hold much club history, if you care to take the time to have a look. These include people who have made State, National and Olympic Teams in the sport of Flatwater Canoe/Kayak, Sprint and Marathon. It's good to have knowledge of where the club has come in 29 years.

Matthew Simpson was a promising junior kayak paddler who represented Australia at the 1987 Junior World Championships and I assisted the club to raise his entire funds to send him overseas. David Hinc made a National Senior Sprint Team and Lynda Lehmann and Kate Barclay were chosen in (different) the Olympic Teams in K4. David Foureur was a top kayak paddler who made a National Senior Team and then took on coaching and became Head SASI Coach, National and Olympic Coach.

More importantly, I believe that these Honour Boards include the names of people who are the backbone of the club and have diligently given freely of their time as volunteers to build up the strength of the club. You only have to look at the list of Office Bearers and Life Members, some of whom are Jim Murphy, Hugh Stewart, Morag & Phil Hinc etc. and then go to the current committee who continue on this great work ethic. Terry Duggin has sign written all of the detail on these Honour Boards and names on boats and the sign on the outside of the clubhouse. It is great that Julie, Terry and the Duggin boys are now all an integral part of the club.

There was a time in the late 1980s when Peter Petho and I loaned our weight training equipment to start the Gym area in the back room, but unfortunately there was a break in and all of our weights equipment was stolen. It was then decided by the committee to put aluminium bars across all roller doors. So when you are putting the bars back in position, this is the reason why they are there in the first place. The theft & loss was covered by our personal home & contents insurance policy because we had loaned it to the club. The club now had to look at getting insurance for all of the canoe, kayaks and equipment, as it had none.

The Maid of Auckland was an early venue that we held club meetings and a fundraising show for a club K2 and a C2. They were renovating and kindly gave us their old small tables and orange chairs that are still used in the upstairs CSA clubrooms. Delfin Realty was also renovating and gave us some desks, filing cabinets and cupboards, some of which are in the CSA office and some are downstairs. Jason Nejman won a junior K1 for West Lakes at a National Championships. The Holdfast

Hotel kindly sponsored the yellow club C2. Rob Wight kindly donated the use of a wooden Struer Tiger K1 for elite paddlers at the club and a C4 named in his honour.

One of the best developments for canoeing in SA was the appointment of a Development Officer to oversee all facets of the sport. Ian Hume has done a fantastic

5.

job in this role for many years and this has now been taken over by Siobhan Goble. The SASI Canoe/Kayak unit has also done an amazing job with our talented paddlers and David Foureur, Peter Petho and Bennett Maxwell are doing a wonderful job nurturing and extending these paddlers to achieve their best. The Talent ID squads see an influx of new paddlers to the sport and Peter Petho does a fantastic job with these youngsters. It is heart warming to see a squad of thirty juniors in Peter's training squad on the water going through their paces. The organisation that went into getting the many juniors and seniors from SA to the National Flatwater Championships in Penrith in March this year was amazing and Virginia Hanaford, Frances Goble and all of the cooks & helpers made the trip a great experience.

Matthew Goble and Luke Haniford from WLCC were chosen to compete in the 2007 World Junior Sprint Championships and Matthew was also chosen to compete in the World Marathon Championships a month later. A successful fundraising Quiz Night was held for them recently to assist with their costs overseas.

The club has enjoyed many Murray Marathon adventures and many of our members have competed in the gruelling Red Cross Murray Canoe Marathon 400 km race from Yarrowonga to Swan Hill in late December. Derek Stevens and Jim Murphy have done it many times, along with Don Gomer, Ian & Vicki Hume, Fred Tanner, Hugh Stewart, Rob Wight and myself. Apologies to any whose name I have omitted. Hugh Stewart and I trained very hard for two years and nearly made the 1992 Australian Marathon Team to compete in the World Championships in Brisbane but narrowly missed out. We did compete in a Marathon ICF World Cup in Melbourne. The Murray 100/200 on the June Long-weekend has become a club institution with many members competing in the 20 year history of the event. The Club Marquee and log fires are welcome additions to the campsite at the old Waikerie Caravan Park where many in the club set up camp. The Club Bar B Q's and Murray Ducks are legendary and live in the folklore of the club. Phil Allen's didgeridoo playing is also a great highlight of these week end trips.

The Olympic Games in Sydney in 2000 saw many of our club members volunteer for the Canoe/Kayak Sprint events at Penrith and it was just fantastic to be a part of it all. The legacy of the games was the Penrith International Regatta Centre which has held National and International Championships in sprint and marathon canoe/kayak, rowing and dragonboats and will hold the 2009 World Masters Games. The auction of all canoe & kayaks after the games saw many latest technology boats obtained at bargain prices by local paddlers. I got a beautiful wooden Cheetah C2 for \$1,550 which was an absolute bargain.

The World Masters Games were held in Melbourne and Nagambie in October 2002 and many members competed in the marathon races on the Yarra and/or in the sprint races at Nagambie.

The Toxic Weed problem in the lake about five years ago nearly killed off the club as well as killing off all plant and fish life in the lake. Club membership dropped to an all time low of 35 members and paddling was not allowed on the lake unless you had obtained an early exemption. If you paddled in West Lakes you had to wash & dry your equipment and this was carefully checked. The water quality in the lake was

6.

appalling and the colour of the water was black. Believe it or not, the Brim species of fish stayed alive in the lake despite the fresh water that was pumped into the lake from the Torrens. The big black plastic pipes are still submerged at the bottom of West Lakes, just in case they are required again. In recent times the Star Force has pulled a motor vehicle out of the lake that was driven off the end of the boat ramp at the club.

I believe that the club needs to aim at building back up to record levels of membership, especially with the new clubhouse that is being planned. Letter box dropping membership flyers & brochures to all residents in West Lakes and targeted marketing to local SLSC s and some schools are cost effective ways of actively seeking new members. Writing to former members may also bring some back.

NB: There are some parts of the Club s history, people, events, etc. that I may have omitted. Please let me know any such details so that I can update this and again apologies to anyone who s input or details that I have unintentionally omitted.

Thanks.

Roger French

Founding and Life Member
West Lakes Canoe Club Inc.