

Irish National Canoe Marathon Championships 2011

Last weekend Salmon Leap Canoe Club in Leixlip, Co. Kildare, celebrated the club's 50th anniversary by hosting the Irish National Canoe Marathon Championships over Saturday and Sunday. Marathon Canoeing consists of racing in single or double canoes over vary distances from 8km-20km in length. An exciting weekend of racing was always in store as some notable racers from around Europe were in attendance, with the biggest crowd puller being Britain's Ben Brown who is currently the reigning World Champion at senior level. His presence at the event certainly created a stir with many of the Irish athletes eager to test themselves against the world champion.

On Saturday all the individual (K1) events took place. The longest race was for the senior men, which consisted of completing five gruelling laps around Leixlip Lake a total of 20km. As if this were not enough, competitors also had to complete four running sections (Portages), which involved jumping out of one's kayak and running with it for 500metres before re-entering the water. World Champion Ben Brown certainly did not disappoint spectators as he took the gold medal in what was a very close race at the front between himself and Irish paddler Neil Fleming from the Celbridge Paddlers Canoe Club. Thomastown local Donnacha Brennan also competed in this highly competitive field finishing in a credited 14th position after a solid outing.

Anthony Forristal from the Thomastown Paddlers competed in the junior K1 class on Saturday over a 16km course which included three portage sections. A mixture of exhaustion and sun-stroke certainly did not help Forristal's cause. He had high hopes of a podium finish in the run up to this event. However not one to ever throw in the towel, Anthony completed the 16km course and was happy with his fourth place finish. On Sunday Anthony teamed up with Iomhar MacGhiollaPhadraig from the Salmon Leap Canoe Club, to race in the junior K2 event. The pair knows each other very well as they recently raced together at a canoe event in Northern Italy. Once more luck was not to be on Forristal's side as steering difficulties with their kayak meant that the pair were unable to challenge for the coveted first place and had to be content with a second place finish.

On the 8km course brother and Sister Alex and Cait Broderick both took part in their first ever Irish National Championships. Both had a hugely successful and enjoyable weekend at the Kildare venue. On Saturday in the K1 classes, Cait finished in second place in the Girl's category while Alex was third in the boy's section. Sunday saw both siblings team up with members from the Kilcullen Canoe Club to compete in the K2 races. Cait and Fiona Wilmott had a fantastic race to clinch third in the senior ladies class, while Alex and Oisin O Farrell were also third in the Boy's group.

Two other members from the Thomastown Club who attended the weekends racing were Martyn Walsh and David MacCormack. Both paddlers are relatively new to the exciting sport of canoe racing but showed that their hard work and training is paying off as they completed the 8km course competently. Troy Walsh from Danesfort took on a huge field on Saturday in the 2km novice's race. Troy who is just back from injury showed little sign of it, as he powered his way to a fifth place finish.

The next race on the Irish domestic calendar will bring canoe racing to Thomastown and the south-east, when Thomastown Paddlers Canoe Club hosts their annual marathon event on August 7th. This race will have three distances. These include, a 2km fun race, the 8km course from Thomastown-Inistioge and the longer 23km course from Bennetsbridge-Inistioge. In excess of over 100 canoeists

will converge on the area over this weekend for what is always a fun and colourful event on the River Nore.

Between now and then, two members from the Thomastown club will be competing across Europe at various different events. Senior member, Michael Brennan will be competing today (Wednesday) and also this Saturday, at the French National Wild-Water Racing Championships, in La Pagne in South-East France. Wild-Water Racing is similar to marathon, only in that the course is much more unsettled and racers compete against the clock over shorter distances. Michael will return home next Monday.

Junior member Anthony Forristal will also be flying the Irish flag abroad this weekend when he races as part of a K4 (Four person kayak) at two event in Northern Spain. Anthony qualified to race at this event at a recent time-trial in Dublin and also based on his previous performances to date this year. For this event Forristal will be paddling alongside juniors from both the Salmon Leap and Celbridge Canoe Clubs in what is sure to be a fascinating event. All at Thomastown Paddlers wish both Michael and Anthony the very best of luck. Full club details and recent event can be found at www.thomastownpaddlers.com