

BIDEFORD AMATEUR ROWING CLUB

Words and photos: Dave Godfrey

Bideford Amateur Rowing Club's 'Reds' have had the pleasure of another hugely successful season, both at local and regional competitions and also in attracting and retaining members via a link with a local school and a calendar that includes an unusual 'Pub and Club' series.



Two Reds crews in action in the Women's J14 race at Totnes Regatta

Charming training ground

The River Torridge – where the Club operates – is familiar to many via Williamson's *Tarka the Otter* book and is a tidal river which the Club shares with fishing boats, small cargo vessels and recreational craft. Rowers from the Club are fortunate to have three-mile stretches of water either side of the Old Bridge on which to practice, and the upriver stretch towards the source of the Torridge is perhaps one of the most tranquil and scenic stretches of countryside in the whole of the South West.

It is on this lovely piece of water that the Reds stage their Head of the River Race in May of each year. It usually attracts over 60 crews from local clubs, but officials from BARC are always at a loss as to why the event fails to attract clubs from other parts of the country given it is such an impressive venue.

Continued successes

The Reds have always been very much at the forefront of West of England rowing and they have secured well over 50 local championships as well as three South Coast Championships. One of their earliest and most prestigious wins has been the National Daily Herald Cup.

Last year, the Club enjoyed a superb season and won the Points Shield for the club gaining the most points during the South West season. They also won the Men's J14 4x+, Women's J14 4x+, Women's J16 4x+, Women's J16 1x and Women's J18 4+ events at the West of England ARA Championships.

This remarkable set of results is very encouraging for the future of the Club and it is also worthwhile to note that all of these juniors started rowing via the ARA's Project Oarsome programme which is run in



The BARC Championship Women's J18 crew

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partnership with Bideford College. The Club is also fully Clubmark-accredited.

Improving the facilities

Clubs in the South West have a long tradition of involvement in the community

and the Reds are no exception, with a very successful social side to the Club which is based around an impressive three-storey building on the waterfront.

A striking new extension and internal improvement scheme – which was completed →

BIDEFORD ARC



FOUNDED: 1882
REGION: West
COLOURS: Red
BOATHOUSE: The Quay, Bideford, North Devon, EX39 2EY
TELEPHONE: 01237 478646
CONTACT: glenn@sadiwilkins.freeserve.co.uk

Despite being located somewhat in the backwaters of the recognised rowing centres, the small North Devon town of Bideford is famous for the fact that it has two rowing clubs – the Bideford Amateur Rowing Club and the Bideford Amateur Athletic Club. More commonly known as the 'Reds' and 'Blues' respectively, they are also joined in the town by students from Grenville College who also have a strong representation in local rowing circles.



Lord Burnett with chairman George Cox at the tape-cutting ceremony for new club facilities

The Bideford 'Reds'

The Bideford Amateur Rowing Club (BARC) was founded in 1882 and has been on its present Manor Wharf site on the main Quay area adjacent to the town's main Post Office since 1939. At a date in the early 1880s – generally accepted as 1882 (the same year which saw the foundation of the ARA) – a rowing club began to operate from Tom Pollard's yard in East the Water. It was located just upstream of the famous Old Long Bridge and was the infant BARC.

The first written records of the club were made on 21 January 1896 and indicate that George Couch was appointed secretary, and Rev H Mackworth Drake the first recorded president.

The club continued to use the Pollard's Yard Boathouse and held its meetings at Bideford Football Athletic Club. William and Lewis Shute are described as two of the earliest and keenest club members and records indicate they beat all comers on the Torridge.



A 'Pub and Club' crew on their way to the start of a race

CLUB SPOTLIGHT



BARC's J16 Coxed Quads celebrate their win at the South Coast Champs



Dignitaries attending the official opening of the new clubhouse

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cutting duties were undertaken by the former MP for Torrridge and West Devon, Lord Burnett.

New additions

Like many rural clubs, BARC suffers when young people leave the area to go to university. To attempt to counter this problem, the Club has introduced regular ‘Pub and Club’ regattas in an effort to encourage more mature-age rowers into the sport.

The main kingpin at the Reds is the current rowing captain Glenn Wilkins who puts in a remarkable amount of time to ensure that the Club continues on its upward path. His plans for the future include developing the recreational side of the Club, trying to get more seniors rowing at a higher level and attempting to get some of the Club’s promising juniors up to national standard to enable to compete successfully at such events as the National Championships. ■

extra training space and improved changing facilities. In addition, it makes better provision for access for the disabled.

With the benefit of funding from HM Treasury as part of an innovative programme between the Department of Media Culture and Sport, Sport England and the ARA – as well as finance raised by

the Club through local partnership – sufficient funding has enabled the project to move forward despite having to overcome a number of major obstacles along the way.

The official opening of the new facilities in June involved visits by dignitaries from the Amateur Rowing Association and the tape-



The victorious J16 Four at Evesham Regatta with GB international Zac Purchase



Club members with some of the new intake of ‘Pub and Club’ rowers before the dedicated regatta