

ON a brisk breezy winter's morning with the sun bouncing off the clear ripples on the water, a handful of rowers are already up braving the chill.

TAKING TO THE WATER

Following in the footsteps of the many elite enthusiasts that have gone before crossing the Isis, Oxford Adaptive Rowing Club (OARC) are in fine fettle.

Originally set up by a medical student in 1998, OARC was one of the first clubs to take part in an ambitious new project to bring British disabled rowing up to date. The intention was to provide high quality facilities and coaching for both adaptive and integrated rowing for athletes with physical and learning disabilities in Oxfordshire.

More than twelve years on, and the team have a healthy mix of volunteers, coaches and members. What makes the club unique is it is run independently, whereas the majority of adaptive clubs are funded and affiliated with host clubs. They do, however, use the City of Oxford Rowing Club as their base, which kindly agrees to let them store their boats and equipment at the Meadow Lane base.

Club Captain, Rachael Lunney, who has been with the club since its formation, believes the sport is forever expanding.

"Adaptive rowing is a sport on the up with ever increasing participation. And what better place to do it than in Oxford where rowing is a thriving sport with more than 60 University clubs alone using the river," said Rachael.

"We are always looking to expand and constantly looking for volunteers and rowers alike to join. We feel we have the basis of a strong and growing club, we just need to get the word out that we are here and out on the water most Sunday mornings."

Advances in the equipment available for adaptive athletes and the ever-increasing number of accessible rowing venues, has seen the sport rise in popularity across the country in recent years.

Adaptive races were introduced to the historic and hugely popular Oxford City Regatta for the first time in 1999. Last year marked the first event where other adaptive rowing clubs took part, with the help of Rachael and boats provided by the West Midland Disability Rowing Association.



Rory Stenton

"It is a very personal group and we welcome new faces who share an interest in the sport."

Ready for the off



Bill Bull

“It is a great opportunity to get out on the river and I would recommend it to others with learning disabilities. I get a real sense of excitement and a thrill from doing one of my favourite sports every week. I've been here a lot of years now and think it is the mix and match of people, the sport and learning new skills which have kept me coming back.

Brian Bull, whose son Bill has been attending sessions since 1998, said the club was a fabulous example of what can be achieved with volunteers and enthusiastic rowers.

He said: "It is such an enjoyable thing to do and should be a sport anybody can get involved with, disability or not. With the rowing club there is no real limit to what the guys can achieve and they learn a lot about teamwork and social skills within a small intimate and friendly group.

"It is a worthwhile and rewarding thing to be involved with and Bill looks forward to it more than anything, never losing his enthusiasm for the sport after 12 years.

"It is also good for the student volunteers to broaden their horizons and get a better understanding of how to work with people with learning disabilities."

Club member, Rory Stenton, first found out about the club on the internet and has been actively involved for a number of years.

Oxford student and rowing coach, Kyle Martin, jumped at the chance of volunteering at the club.

He said: "Rowing is such a beneficial sport and brings lots of people from all circles of life together. It gives people of all abilities the chance to compete, and win or lose; it doesn't matter, for the club members it is about the taking part and being out on the open water.

"It is a very personal group and we welcome new faces who share an interest in the sport. The boats are specially adapted with pontoons (stabilisers) and are extra wide which makes it both fun and safe to go out rowing."

The club is always looking for volunteers and new members throughout the year.

Contact for further details

Rachel Lunney, Oxford Adaptive Rowing Club, City Boathouse, Meadow Lane, Oxford, OX4 4BL or
Email: oxfordadaptiverowing@live.co.uk