

SPRING SPECIAL
EDITION

*The Journal
Of*

The Coracle Society

Founded 1990

April 2006





The Coracle Society

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Conwy Richards

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Cover Picture

The 'dummy trawl' at Leintwardine 2005. This was the first time that permission had been granted for a netting demonstration on the River Teme. The net was a traditional River Teifi example made from hemp mesh, horsehair ropes and cowhorn rings. The mix of coracles were a River Tywi and Shrewsbury. (River Severn). In the picture the net is being trawled through a deep pool that was without Salmon at that time. (Fortunately!)

Photo by Dick Mundy



In the following pages we have the eagerly awaited story from Wendy Gee of her journey from the source of the River Severn to Shrewsbury, more of the family featured on the cover photo from the last edition, a 'from the archive' feature and much more.

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I recently received a call from a member enquiring if I was a 'retired gentleman?'. I am not-hence the photo, but would welcome being retired to spend more time on coracle projects.

The Coracle Society is administered by members in their spare time and others who are retired, both doing good work for the Society. Later on this summer will be the A.G.M. when some of these officers will be standing down after-for some of them-years in the post. So this is an appeal for all members to consider becoming actively involved. Would you like to produce this magazine or any other of the posts you see in the 'List of Officers', so please consider it if the Coracle Society is to continue.

When I first became involved with the society we had two magazine /newsletters a year. This is the first spring edition and is financed by donations from the East Anglian members, also in full colour. I approached this edition-and I hope I have got it about right, differently by sourcing most of the articles between submitted ones. I might be able to produce one more magazine but this publication will probably need a new editor for the winter edition.



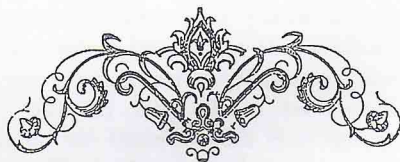
The Mortimers Cross Challenge. In the last edition of this magazine the coracle challenge was outlined. Since then the racing has started and this is the latest from Chris Partington.

This year saw the start of the Mortimers Cross challenge trophy coracle race. I have put it forward to Herefordshire Council as the 2012 Olympics coracle course. They ignored my letter; I also invited several local schools and organisations to get involved. They too ignored me! The race has gone ahead anyway and starts on the millstream and involves paddling up the weir, getting out onto the bank and carrying the coracle across the river then paddling down stream to the finish and all against the stop watch. Competitors can turn up whenever they are in the area to race against the clock.

The fastest time this year is Peter Faulkner with a time of 7 minutes and 12 seconds. Second is Rob Marshall in 11 minutes and 37 seconds. Third is Mel Draycott in 15 minutes 1 second and fourth is Alex Harrison in 28 minutes and 51 seconds. Alex fell out at that point where there were a lot of dead trees and obstacles across the river. You will be pleased to learn they have all been pulled out by the Environment agency and the course is now free from obstruction. I am also busy improving it some more, particularly where one gets out of the millstream carrying the coracle. Hopefully more people will take the challenge this year!

At the last Leintwardine regatta I discussed other coracle events and the possibility of a fly fishing competition from a coracle before the regatta. I could mark out the bank into 6 sections I think and perhaps 3 hours fishing and with 2 hours rest for the water. 8am to 11 am for the first six anglers followed by 1 to 4

second six, 6 to 9 for the third six could cater for 18 coraclers and of course they could enter the challenge trophy in-between times because the race is on a stretch of water I don't own the fishing on but has free navigation. Coraclers could stay on my campsite for the weekend if they wished but there are camping charges of £3 per person per night. Fly fishing on my water costs £10 per day but on the day of the competition I would not charge coraclers to fish nor make any charge for the competition. I am six miles south of Leintwardine so coraclers could make a weekend of it. Related trade stands would be welcome to set up shop and the public encouraged to attend. Please bring a life jacket and volunteers are also needed for stewarding and rescuing. I can have a rescue boat on the river but the mill stream is too narrow and at five feet is about the deepest part of the water in the race.



mortimersmiller@btinternet.com

01568 708820

Mobile 07941 328979

The mill house

Mortimers Cross Mill

Herefordshire

HR6 9PE

Stop Press

*The Leintwardine regatta is now
To be held at Mortimers mill.*

*Saturday 17th of June
2006*

From the bookshelf

The Coracle Builders

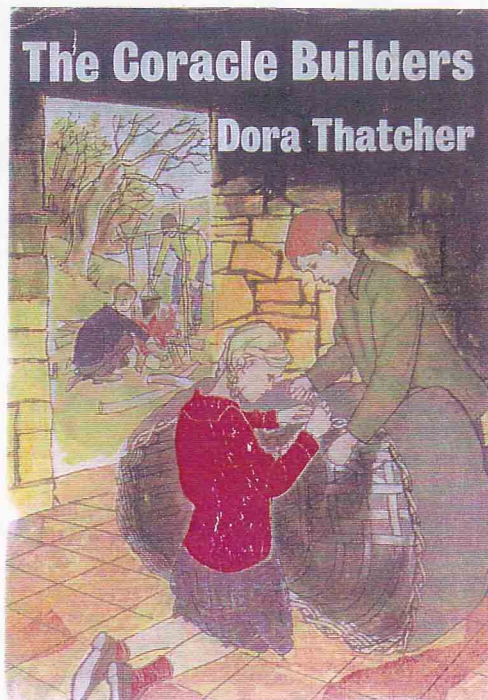
By
Dora Thatcher

First published in 1964 this children's book was described as 'A do-it-yourself adventure of the sea and boats'.

The story is about a holiday in Wales of three children who build a coracle of their own. The location is in and around Cilgerran where the name Berrancastle is used.

In one chapter coracle making is described with a couple of line drawings to illustrate the text. In a note the author thanks a Mr Hubert James of Roseleigh, Kilgerran Pembs for technical advice on coracle building. When did Cilgerran adopt the Welsh Spelling? Also any information on Hubert James would be welcomed. This book is a children's adventure story in the 'famous five' genre and recommended.

It was published by Brockhampton Press Ltd of Market Place Leicester. If there were any later editions is not known.





Luke in a scene from Series 1 of 'The Secret of Eel Island'

We have heard from the producer who has informed us of plans for a second series. (Channel 5.) The coracle appears to have taken a bash on the rear corner. (Photo courtesy of Eye film and Television Norwich)

Where to see working Coracles

The society has always received enquiries asking when and where to see working coracles in Wales. The opposite page is an extract from the byelaws for the close season on the three rivers where netting is practised. Probably the easiest venue is the waterfront at Carmarthen where under the street lamps the coracles can easily be seen. The coracles are also stored there in a wire cage. For anyone new to the town just walk across the road from the Tesco store to the river side. Fishing is normally practised in darkness unless the river is coloured and netting might be seen during the day. Netting is not permitted at weekends.

Extract from 1999 National Salmon Byelaws

Byelaw 3 Annual close season for fishing for salmon and migratory trout other than with rod and line

- (11) The coracle net fisheries on the River Towy and its estuary where the annual close season shall be from and including the 1st day of August to and including the last day of February following.
- (12) The coracle net fisheries on the River Taf and its estuary where the annual close season shall be from and including the 1st day of August to and including the last day of February following.
- (13) The coracle net fisheries on the River Teifi and its estuary where the annual close season shall be from and including the 1st day September to and including the 31st day of March following.

(b) permitted areas and kinds of nets

The parts of the Authority's area where netting for salmon or migratory trout is permitted and the kinds of net which may lawfully be used therefore shall be as follows, that is to say:-

(xi) In the River Teifi

- (b) In that part of the river which lies between Cardigan Bridge and Llechryd Bridge, such nets shall be coracle nets.

(xiv) In the River Taf

- (a) In that part of the river which lies between the main road bridge carrying the Carmarthen-Pembroke road situated approximately 1.6 kilometres south west of St Clears and an imaginary line drawn straight across the said river from Wharley Point to Ginst Point, such nets shall be coracle nets.

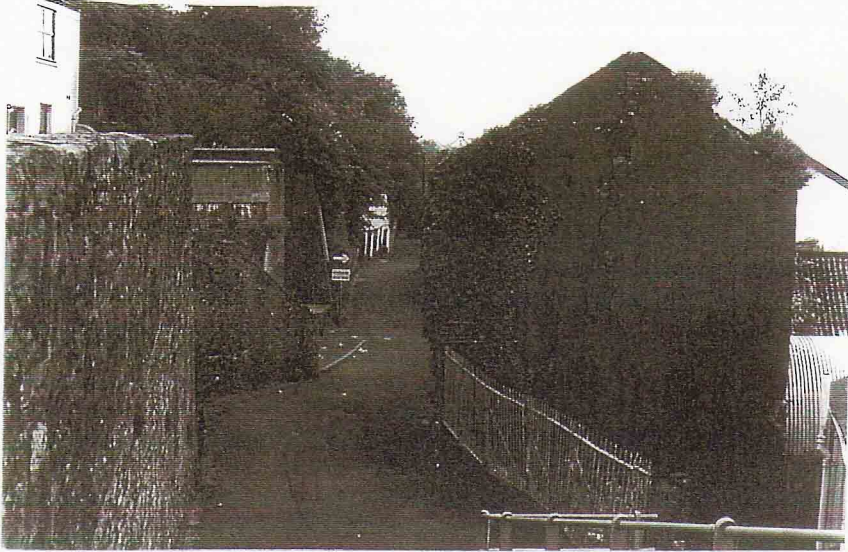
(xv) In the River Towy

- (a) In that part of the river which lies between an imaginary line drawn straight across the said river from the Railway Pumping Station near the old Carmarthen Tinplate Works at NGR SN 420 205 and the river crossing of the electricity transmission line at NGR SN 394 137, such nets shall be coracle nets; and

(Note that this electricity line has now been moved approximately 400m upstream of this point. The downstream limit is defined by the grid reference not the transmission line. March 1990)



Dan-y-banc looking towards Parade Road, circa 1900



Old Carmarthen-then and now



Dan-y-banc looking towards Castle Hill, circa 1900



*Dan-y-banc looking towards Castle Hill 2003
(Photo by Conwy Richards)*

DASH WITH A SPLASH

Visitors passing through the village of Leinwardine, Shropshire, are treated to a wonderful, quintessentially English scene this summer. The usually tranquil grassy meadow stretching down to where the Teme is joined by the River Clun was a hive of activity as competitors from all corners of Britain gathered for the 13th annual Leinwardine Coracle Regatta.



Above: Leinwardine's celebrated butcher Douglas Griffiths carries his cow hide and willow coracle towards the banks of the Teme.

The strength of the old stone bridge spans the river, and attracts a host of spectators along its side, eager to get a good view of the afternoon's entertainment.

With a name derived from the Welsh word *congl*, coracles were being used by Britons long before the Roman invasion and were made by weaving together willow, hazel, ash and oak by craftsmen on the Spey, Don and Sever for centuries. Shapes and building techniques differed slightly from region to region with around 18 variations being recognised.

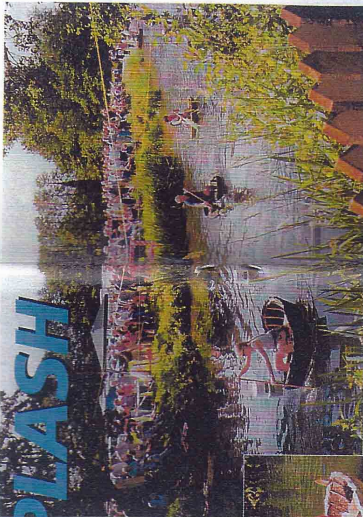
Those used on the Welsh rivers such as the Teifi and Towy are usually more egg-shaped than the circular craft of the Severn and the slightly more oval boats of the Don. They are made of stretched animal skins while others are made watertight with tar-covered canvas.

The regatta was opened by Bob Mellings, whose term of office as Mayor of Leinwardine began in traditional manner on the 1st of June in the legendary Sun Inn, where Florio Teme - now the Sun Inn - has held office in Britain's oldest towns - for as long as anyone in the village can remember.

Master of ceremonies for the day was Peter Paulner, Leinwardine's own resident clog dancer. He explained how two other coracle regattas had taken place in each year, one in Wales and the other in Shropshire, each having the common aim



www.bestofbritishmag.co.uk



Above: The grassy meadow opposite the bridge at Leinwardine, Shropshire, is crowded with spectators as one of the junior coracle races gets under way.



Above: Experienced coracle man Quentin Hage travelled from the Suffolk/Essex borders to take part in the Leinwardine regatta.



Best of British - September 2003

Brian Howes
Right: Dressed for the occasion - the Mayor of Leinwardine.

Left: On your marks, competitors prepare for the first race of the afternoon.

Best of British - September 2003

From the archive.
Best of British September 2003

Dash with a Splash
Coracle racing is alive and well in Herefordshire.



Best of British - September 2003

A Victorian Sporting Family

Sporting Coracles. The cover picture of the last edition of this magazine portrayed the Stepney-gulston family on the front cover. The picture was taken at their house at Llangadog which at the time was called Dirleton, renamed from Llyn-y-Berllan by Alan James Gulston in about 1859. The house changed hands in 1881 and its name changed to Dan-yr-Allt Park. The Gulstons became the Stepney-Gulstons some time after 1860. Photographic images have survived of their activities on the River Tywi in coracles from about 1871. Three coracles can be seen in most of the pictures and a canoe. The formal ladies dress of the time has not appeared to have caused a problem for the them 'getting on the water'. Was this the only time a coracler wore a corset and crinolines? If you have any more information about the family we would like to hear from you.

Are the family still in the area today and if so do the still own the coracles?



The W. H. Goss Llangollen coracle

The Goss family pottery business traded from the 1880s to 1929 making 'models' of miniaturised historical artefacts, buildings, animals etc and bearing a coat of arms or badge associated with a particular town or city. Two types of coracle were made, the Carmarthen and the Llangollen. Oddly some examples of the Carmarthen type were decorated

with arms that had no connection with Carmarthen. The Llangollen type displayed the Llangollen badge or the arms of Wales. The underside bears the description "Model of Welsh coracle. Survival of British wicker and hide boats." The arms of Wales Llangollen variety is not very common and now difficult to find. The example in the photo was loaned by a collector.





This is the only existing example of a Scottish River Spey Currach and can be seen at the Elgin Museum. The editor tried a modern copy of this craft a few years ago and found it very heavy to carry but surprisingly stable on the water due to the weight of the skin. The large paddle was also a welcome surprise and produced a lot of pull.

East Anglian events.

The following information is from Dick Mundy about the new coracle event on the River Stour at Bures on the Suffolk/Essex border. Bures is a small picturesque market town on the B1508 between Colchester and Sudbury. The event is to be held at the recreation ground about a quarter of a mile from the town on the Nayland road where there is a car park and the river is on the far side of the recreation ground. There the river is slow moving and about a hundred yards down stream is the Bures mill although not open to the public. Upstream is an easy paddle through the town and under the bridge.

The format of the event is to be finalised but as well as the usual races and polo there is space for a long distance race.

The area is well worth a visit with Sudbury, Dedham, and Flatford on the Stour. Other interesting towns are Lavenham, Colchester and Ipswich.

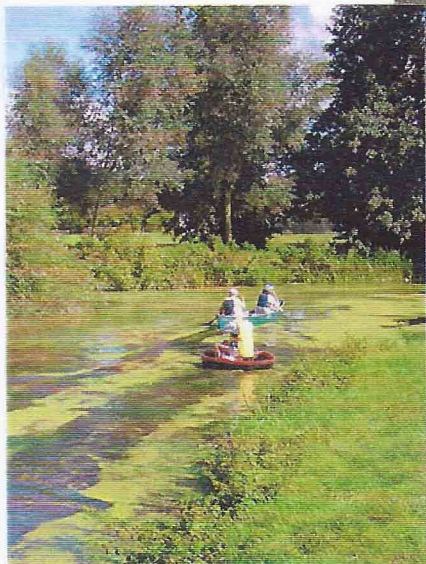
Later in the year on the 16th and 17th of September is the Sudbury to the sea cruise, an event open to small boats including coracles. At 23 miles it can be challenging. The start is between 8.30 and 10 am at the Granary, quay lane, Sudbury. (Follow signs to the Quay Theatre). There is an overnight camp site at Wissington and the event finishes Sunday evening at Catwade near Manningtree.

Further information from Dick Mundy on 01206 302033.

The spring flyer and the website have the latest updates.

(www.coracle-fishing.net)

Click on the coracle society button



The Great Coracle Challenge

September 2005

At the beginning of last year I answered a call for people to take part in the Great Coracle Challenge from the source of the River Severn to Shrewsbury early in September.

The most I had paddled in a day was about 6 miles on the Montgomery canal's dinghy dawdle, I'd also paddled short distances on quite a few rivers in my Lizzie Moonlight, but only placid ones, no rapids. Luckily there was one other person who was mad enough to think of doing the same, my brother Dave Nicoll who had built the coracles. So now it was pay back time, I had to do the organisation for him as I was closer to the River Severn.

I had a romantic vision of carrying the coracles up to the source and floating them down to where we could safely start paddling. A walk up to the source about three and a half miles on steep tracks by a very shallow narrow rocky stream soon scotched that idea. I might add that we are both pensioners. Plan B was to drive the van up the forestry access road nearest the source and carry a mere twelve hundred yards from there up hill. The Shrewsbury tourist association conceived the idea for this trip and helped by getting Forestry Commission permission for the access and in lots of other ways. Walking down to Llanidloes we checked for access points but there did not seem to be enough water to actually paddle very far so the start of paddling had to be at the town 'port'. My husband Ken and I made several other visits checking all bridges, roads, tracks and paths downstream to Shrewsbury access places and recording there position on a GPS (global positioning system) satellite navigator. It was lucky that we did as it was impossible to see paths or tracks from the

water. We also had a lot of help from the BCU (British Canoe Union) upper Severn access officers Sue Drummond and Dave Proctor. Saturday the Third came all too soon and being of advanced years we had decided to travel home each night for a bit of comfort. It was an early start (well for us) up at six and off by seven fifteen and even had a chat with the local radio station on the way and helped raise the profile of the local hospices we were raising the money for.

We met up with Michael and Jennie from the tourist association also Danny a photographer and the Right Honourable Daniel Kawczynski MP for Shrewsbury by a bridge downstream from Llanidloes. Dave said the speed of the water under the bridge looked 'interesting', Daniel wanted to be hands on with carrying the coracles to the source and when and when big brother needed a rest half way up (he is older than me) Daniel took over and carried Daves Shrewsbury coracle to the source and most of the way down but me being stubborn/stupid carried my bowl coracle both ways. After photos at the source it was down to the start at Llanidloes Port where after a quick snack we loaded up the coracles with our dry bags, spare paddle, maps, gps, water, waterproofs and umbrella and launched from the slipway at two thirty. After a twenty yard paddle we stepped out mid-stream as the water was too shallow before the bridge to continue. We carried or floated the coracles for the next hundred yards over the shallow rapids then got back in for the next fifty yards.

This was the pattern for the next three hours as we checked the depths and decided on the best way through the channels.

We finally arrived at our check point at about five thirty pm-only five miles of water that first day. One good thing was that the fast water under the bridge which had looked so daunting that morning was a doddle to paddle apart from a few scrapes on the bottom.

The next day we were more confident at reading the water and were slightly more adventurous. This meant trying a few more rapids without getting out checking them although the water was still rather shallow. On one rapid Dave hit a rock and fell in although the coracle stayed upright and dry. I managed a straight eighteen inch drop on one rapid much too both our surprise and also saw lots of Kingfishers, Dippers and Buzzards close up. My coracle was holed, luckily smallish so we put on a temporary patch of plumbers tape. The finish was with a flourish as Ken met us just before the end saying that they were the fastest rapids he had seen and with fallen trees just round the bend.

We got out and had a look and decided to run them. He was impressed when we told him they were not as bad as some we had already done. We also had to negotiate two lots of barbed wire strung across the river by farmers (difficult to stop when the current was over two miles an hour-had to scoop it up with the paddle and hope!) Also we had travelled twenty miles guided by the GPS. Home again that evening and a more permanent repair job on the bottom of Lizzie Moonlight. Mentioning bottoms, Dave tended to suffer from OAPs boney syndrome. I am more well endowed so don't have the same problem, ample seat padding is to be recommended.

The rest of the trip was delightful, we both enjoyed it immensely. In the end we had both capsized and had also got wet while walking over rocks in the water. Each had rescued a sheep, reunited a Way ward dog with its temporary owner and seen lots of wild life over the eight days it took us to get to Shrewsbury.



Apart from Thursday when we were joined by Nick and Jim Coppin with their coracles for the morning, we did not see any other water craft until we reached the outskirts of Shrewsbury where we were overtaken by two Canadian canoes. We also encountered the rowing club eights of Shrewsbury school. For most of the trip the only signs of civilization were the rare bridge (usually deserted) and the occasional field of sheep and cattle. Through this the River Severn appeared totally natural, forcing its way unhindered through the landscape.

We finished the penultimate day at the Shrewsbury show ground so we could arrive on time for the official finish at Porthill Bridge Sunday midday. We were accompanied by the Shrewsbury coracle makers John Davies and Richard Green. The Tourist Association kindly gave us a civic reception and afterwards we paddled on, not into the sunset but to Shrewsbury weir as a fitting end to our adventure.

We had coracled a distance of ninety-eight point seven miles measured on the GPS at forty-two point seven-five hours with an average speed of two point three mph. There was a good current in places but the water was rather low and we spent a lot of time scraping round the outside of bends (crouching under Willows and being showered with Aphids) where the deepest water was. We had covered the bottom of the coracles with an extra layer of calico but still needed patches and paint over the gouges at the end of each day and were pleasantly surprised at how well the coracles performed in the rapids. Many friends and also Rob the reporter from HTV Wales have said that sitting up on top of a small inherently unstable craft is silly and tackling rapids in them is madness but we had a great time and raise over £1,730 for the Hospices.

Wendy Gee



A fuller account of this voyage can be found on the website under 'coracle challenge'.

Harry Rogers sails off in his last coracle. *Craftmanship-built...but not for sale to non-swimmers*, says Harry Rogers.

The above was from a Sunday Express edition in what is thought to be from 1965. The heading for the following article was, *'After 65 years his hands will not obey'*.

For 65 years he has been making coracles-the saucer-shaped boats that were used by ancient Britons before the Romans came to England and are still used by amateur and professional fisherman.

Now he has made his last one.

Harry Rogers who has made coracles on the bank of the River Severn at Ironbridge Shropshire since he was ten years old, now says "My old fingers seem to know what to do, but they act as though they don't want to do it".

The art of coracle making has been in Harry Rogers family for 300 years. His little boats-they weigh only 30lb-are in museums in Bremen, Hongkong and Sydney.

American, French and Russian visitors have signed the battered address book in his workshop.

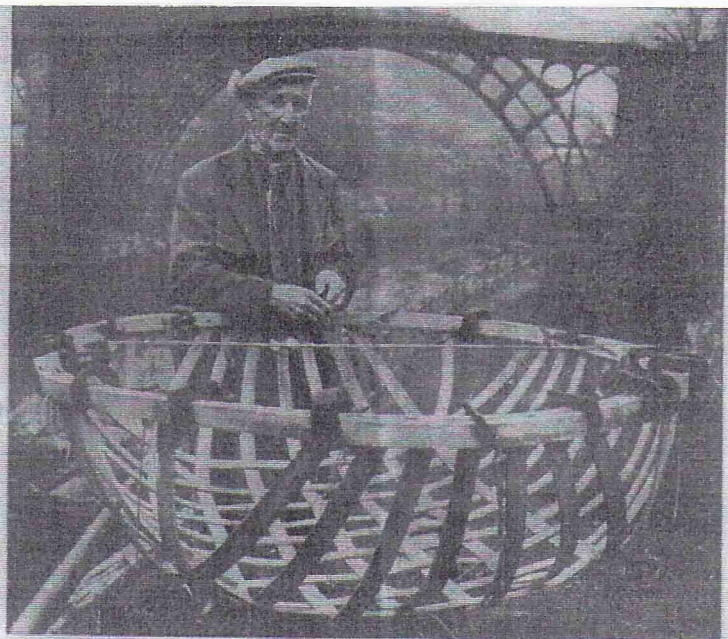
Now his 47-year old son Eustace will carry on his work.

"My last coracle has no buyer as yet and the first person with £10 can have it." says Harry.

His last sale went to an officer on the atomic submarine Dreadnought now being fitted out at Barrow-in-Furness.

"It was not easy to make that one" said Harry. "My arthritis is getting pretty bad these days, but I shall still supervise any that my son makes-they have got to be balanced right. Even so, no one buys a Harry Rogers coracle unless he can swim..

I remember the visitor from Russia who would not give up until he'd had a go in a coracle. He said he could swim so I told him to go ahead. He put one foot in the coracle and over it went. He was pretty damp when he came out".



Craftmanship-built...but 'not for sale to non-swimmers,' says Harry Rogers



Ironbridge Shropshire on the River Sever circa 1900

Guidelines for Coracle Safety

1. Always wear an approved buoyancy aid.
2. Be a proficient swimmer. The British Canoe Union suggests 50m in light clothing as a minimum standard.
3. Learn to handle a Coracle on still or slow-moving water.
4. The limitations of the Coracle are :
 - If it capsizes, it cannot be re-entered.
 - Because of its shallow draught and high windage, the Coracle can easily be blown rapidly downwind.
 - Due to its lack of forward speed, it is also at the mercy of strong currents.
 - There is no built in buoyancy. If the coracle is holed, it will sink !
5. Be aware of your own limitations.
6. It is preferable never to go out alone. Always inform someone of your whereabouts.
7. Even in Summer, UK waters are usually cold and windchill can be a serious problem. Take a windproof top if venturing far.
8. Never walk with a Coracle on your back close to the water's edge, especially on a windy day.
9. Be vigilant and look-out for submerged obstacles in the water that might puncture the hull.
10. Always respect the water.

Suppliers

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