

A pinch of salt...

Not for the faint-hearted, coastal rowers have to cope with whatever the sea throws at them. **Caroline Roberts** finds out more



Coastal rowing gets you places... Rachel Tarr (right) with crew in Istanbul at last year's World Coastal Championships

The swell of the ocean, salt spray crashing across the boat, the challenge of pitting yourself against the elements on open water – waves may be the bane of a river rower's life but they're just one of the things coastal rowers relish about their sport.

"Rowing on the sea can be exhilarating or calming," says Rachel Tarr, of Exmouth RC in Devon. "There's something very special about the way it connects you with the environment. We row out in all weathers, get rained on and hailed on, see dolphins and seals, and the most amazing sunsets."

It's also a branch of the sport where all abilities, from the purely recreational to the competition-focused rower, can have fun together. "We row along the coastline and

go and have lunch in a pub," says Rachel, "and we have a crew who go out and take coffee and cake with them – I have the pleasure of rowing with them sometimes at weekends. I do everything from that to training with a regular four.

“You can't replicate the feeling of going over a big wave at speed when rowing on a lake or river”

"We tried the World Coastal Championships when it was in Plymouth in 2009, but it was terrible weather and our boat almost sank so we decided to have another go in Istanbul last year. We had a ball and didn't do too badly with the rowing from our perspective in coming ninth."

Coastal rowing mainly takes place along England's south coast and Rachel's club is a member of WEARA (the West of England ARA) which, along with HDARA (Hants & Dorset ARA) and CARA (the Coast Amateur Rowing Association) covering

Hampshire to Kent, make up the three coastal rowing associations.

Member clubs of each association compete against each other during the regatta season with championships awarded through a points system (see box

opposite for more details). This means that contenders are keen to attend all regattas to avoid falling behind on points, which makes for a full-on season.

One coastal rower who knows this only too well is Mark Mitchell of Bexhill RC. Mark has won the CARA single sculls championship for the last 11 years, the first as a junior, as well as eight coxless pairs and four coxed fours championships. He is the only rower to win all three championships in the same year and decided to finally retire from ▶



Olympians overcome the waves: Guin Batten, Miriam Luke, Elise Laverick, Lenka Wech and cox Sarah Dunn from Thames RC take the coxed quad title at the 2009 World Coastal Championships

The Coastal Challenge – are you up to it?

On 14-15 May the Explore Rowing Summer Series kicks off with a 30km row from Christchurch Harbour via Keyhaven to the Isle of Wight Needles and back. Sign up for updates at www.explorowing.org/summer





PHOTO: TOM HURLEY



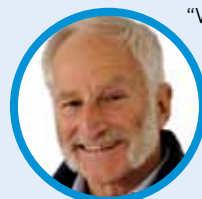
An Exmouth crew battling hard - who said rowing was fun!?

PHOTO: TOM HURLEY

Coastal rowing facts

- **It's not just about rowing off the beach.** Clubs also row in river estuaries and other sheltered areas of water, especially during the winter.
- **Boats used by CARA, H&D and WEARA are slightly wider** and shorter than fine boats so they can withstand rougher sea conditions.
- **The regatta season championships are awarded based on wins only in each category**, and the individual or crew with the most wins overall becomes Association Champions. There are also league titles based on points awarded for placed crews.
- **The coastal season culminates in the South Coast Championships in September.** The top two crews from each association compete in six race categories for the title of South Coast Champions. Each year this alternates between coastal boats and river boats. It also includes a programme of open and junior events. This year's bash takes place on 10 September at Dorney Lake in coastal boats.
- **One of the toughest coastal challenges is the annual Eddystone Challenge**, which takes place on 2 July. Competitors row from Plymouth to the Eddystone Lighthouse and back, a distance of 40k.

What I love about coastal rowing...



"Walking your boat into the sea, sitting the boat in heavy weather, and then there's still the small matter of landing it through the shore-break. Perhaps the camaraderie has a lot to do with battling the elements as well as competing against other crews."

David Gordon-Watkins, Eastbourne RC

"The excitement of rowing with waves lashing against the boat and over your head. Then, on a magical day when the sun shines and the sea is glass-flat, the surreal feeling of gliding on ice."

Sally Watkins, Captain of Folkestone RC (the first female captain in 159 years!)



"Coastal rowing is not for the faint-hearted - but the bigger the waves and the more challenging the conditions, the more fun it is. Any four competent scullers can drop into a coastal quad with an experienced cox and have a rewarding, and often exciting, outing."

Suzannah Curtis, Royal Navy and Royal Marines ARA, RM Turnchapel, Plymouth



"You can't replicate the feeling of going over a big wave at speed when rowing on a lake or river. And life's a beach in the summer with regattas spread along the South Coast."

Chris Price, Dover Rowing Club



"The endless variety in racing. Crews have to adapt their rowing to the conditions on the day. And spending summer regatta days on the beach is always a good thing!"

Sil Wallach, Coalporters ARC, Southampton



"It combines the technical challenge of sculling with panoramic scenery, surging waves, and epic coastlines - just a few of the things that make coastal rowing the ultimate sport."

Jonathan Whittaker, Mayflower Offshore RC, Plymouth

PHOTO: ANDY WEST PHOTOGRAPHY



Mark Mitchell, winner of the CARA single sculls for the last 11 years

competition last year after achieving the feat for the second time. "It's going to take someone at least ten years to break my record, so I'm safe for a while," he says.

One of the things Mark enjoys about coastal rowing is the variety of conditions. "One day it can be dead flat, exactly the same as a river, the next day it can be a bit bumpy and the next it can be extremely rough," he

explains. Coastal races, which involve rowing along the shore for 1000m, making a sharp turn around a buoy and then rowing back, present particular challenges too. "One way it can be really back-breaking going into the waves but when you're coming back you're essentially surfing," he adds, "and then there are the turns to master!"

Bexhill has won the CARA league for the past ten years, and last year set a new record for the most points and championship titles ever won by a club, all despite operating out of a little shack.

Check out...

The Coast Amateur Rowing Association - www.rowinguk.com
The West of England Amateur Rowing Association - www.weara.co.uk
The Hants & Dorset Amateur Rowing Association - www.hdara.co.uk
The 2011 South Coast Championships - www.hdara.co.uk/dorneyscc

"We're now building a new clubhouse and we're looking for £20,000 to finish the £470,000 project. I'm very proud to be a member of Bexhill - especially when everyone has put in so much hard work whilst at the same time having so much fun, and I'm grateful to those who made my final year so special," says Mark.

So what's different about coastal rowing techniques? Not a huge amount, says coach Tim Bull of Lymington RC, part of the HDARA.

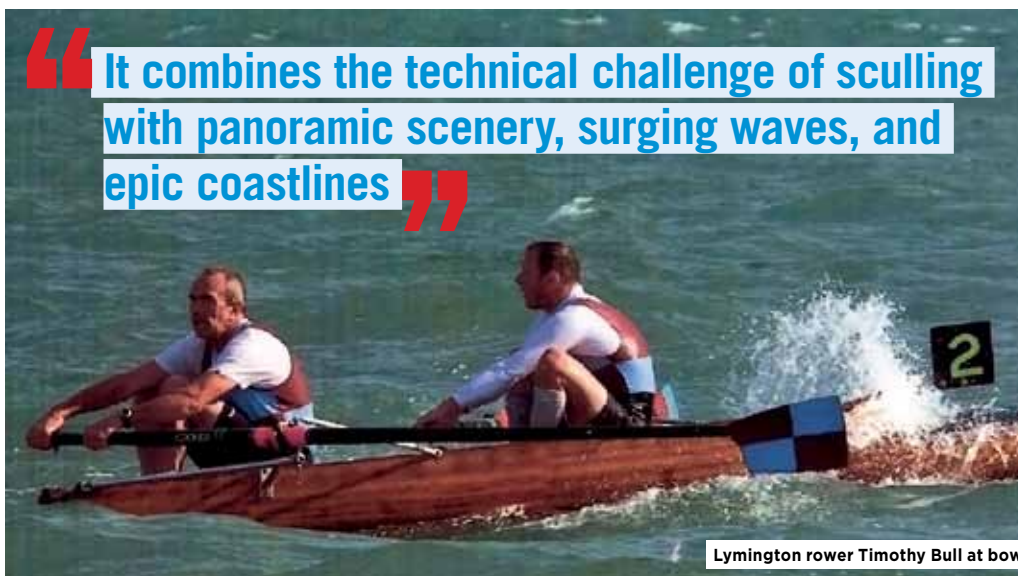
"Coastal rowing has played catch up over the last 15 to 20 years and come more in line with the tried and trusted techniques used on the river," he says. "The height of the blade coming off the water can be different because you don't know the water is going to be there every time. But you still look for the same sort of technique for the catch."

Coxes need particular skills though. A good cox can save a length or two on a buoy turn, says Tim. They also need to be able to make fine adjustments for waves, which often come at 45° to the beach.

One of the things he likes most about coastal rowing is the friendliness of the regatta season and all the socialising between clubs. "It often takes me half an hour to get from one end of a regatta to another because of all the chatting," he adds. ▀

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Lymington rower Timothy Bull at bow