Dear all,

Thank you for putting your name down to row as part of the 2014 Shropshire Adventure Rowing Club Celtic Challenge Teams. Ahead of finalising the team, we want to ensure that everyone knows the time and financial commitment they will making if they progress their entry. If you are no longer able to make this commitment, please let me know by return. We are currently oversubscribed for the event (by 1 person), so you will not be letting anyone down by dropping out now. If we remain oversubscribed, seats will be allocated in date order of membership of the club.

Should you wish to progress your entry you will be required to pay a deposit of £500 at the launch meeting. This deposit is not refundable should you pull out of the event, irrespective of the reason.

Background

The Celtic Challenge is a Bi-Annual Rowing Race across the Irish Sea from Arklow in Ireland to Aberystwyth in Wales a distance of about 90 miles. The boats used are fixed seat Celtic / Pembrokeshire longboats. Teams comprise 12 people, 4 rowing at any time, plus a cox and support crew (RIB and Team Management).

The event starts in Arklow in Ireland and ends when boats cross the harbour entrance in Aberystwyth. Dependent entirely on the weather conditions an ideal scenario would be to start to row on Saturday afternoon, arriving in Aberystwyth on Sunday morning, rowing throughout the night. The boats arrive over a number of hours during the Sunday morning; the fastest boats in good weather can take about 15 hours and the slowest in rough weather up to 26 hours.

The club rowed this event in 2012, crossing in a force 4-5, in 26 hours. Most members were heavily seasick for most of the crossing. It was very tough going, despite the fact that most were rowing over 80,000m on a machine, per week, ahead of the event (over 10000m per night – every night).

The event

We are deeply concerned that people may join the team without appreciating exactly what they are committing to. This in turn could lead to the team training very hard for 8 months, with people dropping out as we get closer to the event. This will decrease our chances of completing the event, and be very unfair on the other team members. If you decide to do this, please go into it with eyes wide open. In summary:

* You would be entering “one of the most gruelling sea-rowing races in the world”
* As the support boat will be travelling at less than 5mph, if the sea state is anything but superb, you could be constantly sick for over 20 hours
* Despite any sea sickness you will have to row every alternate hour, throughout the night in cold and variable weather, for up to 26 hours, with very little sleep.
* 8 months of sustained time consuming and very hard training will be required. This is likely to include buying or renting a rowing machine (£1000 new for a Concept 2 machine) so you can train frequently throughout the week, gym work, running and weekend sea training.
* 3 months ahead of the row, even if you are fit, you will probably be rowing for well over an hour EVERY day.
* Sea training will take place over a couple of trips at Aberystwyth, a 2.5 hour drive from Shrewsbury.
* You will be committing financially to a total cost of probably £800+
* You may do all of this, and the race could be cancelled if the weather is bad. In these circumstances, we may not be able to recover the money for the support boat
* We may start the race, but if the RIB or support boat fails we would have to pull out…..even if after 5 minutes rowing
* You will be expected, as everyone will, to contribute heavily to the logistical nightmare required to organise the event. You can not just turn up and row.
* If you enter and pull out, you will lose all of your £500 deposit.
* **Rowing an hour on the river is dramatically easier than an hour on the sea. Please don’t be fooled**. An hour on the Sea is probably similar to an hour on the rowing machine at 2-2.08 split times.

If you are in any doubt about having the time required to train, and to help organise this event, then please do not progress your entry. Pull out now. Please ensure that you are committed enough to put the time and physical and mental effort in to maximise the clubs chances of success.

When does it all happen?

The challenge takes place somewhere between Friday May 2nd and Monday May 5th 2014. A ‘Go to Arklow/Don’t go to Arklow’ decision will be made on Wednesday by the organisers. If the weather is clearly bad….the event will be cancelled (NOT POSTPONED). If the forecast has a weather window, we would travel to Arklow on Thursday 1st May. Depending on the weather window, you may start rowing Friday at 12.00. If the weather is poor but improving, you may be hanging around until Sunday to start rowing. If the weather stays bad, we may be returning on the ferry. You MUST be available from 1st – 5th of May 2014, and be prepared to stay in Arklow to wait for a weather window.

You should note that the boats will cross in unpleasant weather. In 2012, only 12 of the 22 boats finshed, as most others felt too ill to continue due to rough seas.

Is it safe?

Nobody has died doing this. Every rowing boat will be supported by a 38ft support boat, that can carry all of the crew members in the unlikely event that we have a problem. In addition there will be a RIB to transfer people from the support boat to the rowing boat, for crew changeovers. We will carry the extensive list of safety equipment with a support crew, and one or two nominated safety officers (who may also be rowers). There are risks, especially transferring between the RIB and rowing boat in the night, in rough weather, when people are tired. We hope to minimise risks with considerable ‘must attend’ training on how to transfer between boats.

What is the approximate cost?

The costs will be split between team members. They are likely to be driven by the extent to which we can borrow a support boat Vs have to hire a commercial boat. I’m afraid safety is unlikely to cheap.

The cost of the entry fee and support boat alone will be approx. £500 for each rower. This will be collected after the initial launch meeting. You should budget for other associated costs. Specifically:

* Entry Fee per boat: £240
* Commercial Support Boat that can carry 12 people (per boat we enter): in the region of £3-6000 per boat entered. The boat must be in Arklow on Friday lunchtime for a safety equipment check and will be chartered until Sunday morning, with an option to extend the charter until Monday, if the start is delayed. We are searching for the most cost effective boat, but you should note;
	+ Overall, we should budget for £5000 per boat.
	+ If the crossing is cancelled ahead of the weekend, we are still likely to incur the charter cost, although the fuel may be discounted.
	+ We will do all we can to negotiate this cost down (two years ago we paid £3000 for a small boat), but you do need to be prepared to lose the money, even if the race is cancelled
	+ **If anyone knew of anyone who has access to a 38 ft boat and qualified crew – please let us know. All boats must be MCA CG66 registered and able to cross the Irish sea.**

Other associated costs may include:

* RIB expenses We need two decent RIBs
* Personal kit/lifejackets
* Ferry across/coach
* Potential accommodation in Arklow for up to three nights
* Accommodation in Aberystwyth for at least one night
* Training expenses …..which will be considerable (at least 3 away days)
* Concept 2 (or other) rowing machine to train on

You will be required to pay a £500 non-refundable deposit. In the event that you drop out, for whatever reason (illness/death or other), you will not receive a refund. This is because some of the money will be spent. Replacement rowers will not be charged to join the team. This increases our chances of finding someone who may be fit enough, possibly at the last minute. I hope you find this fair.

What is the chance of not rowing?

This is the 12th challenge. Of the previous 11 challenges one has been cancelled due to bad weather, and one due to foot and mouth.

What next?

1. Please spend some time considering the undertaking before you commit to take part. Have a look at;
* http://www.celtic-challenge.org.uk/
* YouTube for videos of Celtic Challenge/Celtic longboats
1. Let me know if you have decided that you do not have enough time to train.
2. Start bidding on a rowing machine
3. Tap up all of your friends for a support boat to save us a considerable amount of money
4. Start training hard now

In the meantime, I will be organising a kick off meeting shortly.

Please ensure you respond with regrets as soon as possible.

I hope you can make what could be an epic trip.

Best regards

Stephen Harpin

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