

SKIFFIEWORLDS 2019

It's hard to capture the full story of Skiffieworlds 2019 in words. It was a roller-coaster of emotions - at turns exciting, exhilarating, exhausting and of course, epic.

Eskmuthe had never been to a world championships before - we weren't formed for the first event at Ullapool in 2013 and it was Musselburgh's once-in-a-generation Riding of the Marches in 2016, so we decided not to venture to Strangford Lough in Northern Ireland.

We were all excited - and a bit nervous - to enter for Skiffieworlds 2019 and to find out what competing in a world championships would be like. Yet we had no real idea what to expect - we'd been at Ullapool with 27 clubs for a weekend regatta in summer 2018 but Skiffieworlds had 57 clubs competing over the course of an entire week.

And what a week it was - on and off the water. The Saturday night out in the Custom House in Stranraer (after Gin Ladies Jane, Sandra & Wendy decided to pass on dominoes at The Commercial Inn with young local men) set the bar high in terms of laughs and weirdness.

Steedie went into the water on Sunday for some training and we bounced over the waves on a very lively Loch Ryan. The waters calmed for most of the racing, before some real bounciness on the Friday and Saturday. The Saturday launch in wild seas was something else and then Veronica's efforts to get the rudder on while the crew controlled the boat and baled out water was an epic moment.

With almost 60 gazebos lined up along the beach beside Agnew Park, it felt a bit like the Quidditch World Cup in Harry Potter. It was great to mix with other clubs from so many different places - and wonderful when they came along after a race to congratulate us on a race well fought.

And how hard-fought those races were. Even the clubs who ended up winning golds struggled to get beyond the heats in other categories, The randomised heat draws gave the less well-established clubs more of a chance to progress to the finals, or at least the repechage [which has only one R, at the start - thanks to Wendy for the clarification].

In the bigger categories, our target was top 3 - to get straight into the final - or top 6, as the 4th, 5th and 6th boats went into the repechage along with the 4th, 5th and 6th boats from three other heats.

We had trained hard, our technique and stamina had definitely improved, but we knew all the other clubs would have worked hard too - so how would we fare?

In the end, we exceeded our Eskmuthe expectations, reaching four finals (one via a repechage) and three other repechages - a brilliant performance. There were so many highlights - from day one when the Under-40s men made it to the final, despite two of them only having joined in the months running up to the event.

There was the elation of the 50+ mixed crew finishing 3rd of 13 to get into the final and then finishing 13th overall out of 50 boats and the incredible excitement as the 40+ women came through the middle of two rivals to qualify for the final through the repechage. But in a week that just kept on giving, the incredible performance of the Open Women to get straight to the final in some of the week's toughest conditions sent the Eskmutheers onto a new level.

Throughout the week, we rowed - and coxed - at a high standard across all categories and learned a lot about where we can improve further.

There was so much excitement and great support for all the teams - they were cheered individually into the boat and welcomed back to the beach with whoops, cheers and hugs, irrespective of where they finished. We had groups of supporters at the start/finish line chanting Esky, Esky, Esky, Muthe, Muthe, Muthe and we were definitely one of the the - if not THE - noisiest team there. The beach warm-ups, led by Fox, were tremendous fun and other clubs joined us as the week went on.

We played an enthusiastic part in all the social activities, including the raft race, quiz, various musical events and of course, Daft Duck Day, led by Daft Duck Director Fox. There were so many laughs and so much fun all through the week.

The team spirit all week was wonderful and we were so grateful to those partners, kids and other members who came so far to support us. Particular thanks to club members Sharon Hamilton and her family - and to Fiona Macdonald and her friend Ian - for making such long day trips to support our rowers.

Notionally, we came 28th - and would have been probably been top 20 excluding the youth races, where we had no entries. As Robbie Wightman of the SCRA wrote on our Facebook page after we said we were the 28th best team in the world: "Hey Eskmuthe Rowing Club, you are misunderstanding the term "best", and equating it with where you end up in this fairly random table. You are a supportive and fun club to be around, your members contribute to the wider skiff community, you have brought a massive number of people to Stranraer to get on the start line, you always did what was asked of you by the umpires, received no penalties, left the beach nice and tidy and introduced masses of new rowers to our sport. Stop being modest. Just tell everyone you are THE best."

There's not much more to say - apart from thanks to everybody who played any kind of part in an absolutely wonderful and memorable week.

David Lee