

4th European Tour – British Rowing – Berlin 2023

From 8th – 10th September we welcomed around 70 guests from Great Britain at BRC. The plan was for three days “recreational”, i.e. touring rowing, in C class boats.

Around a year ago my colleague, Birte, asked me if it would be possible to host this rowing tour in Berlin at BRC. Birte has lived in England for the past 8 years. I asked how many participants would be expected and as the answer was 30 – 40, I volunteered to take care of it. Berlin was quickly approved as a venue by the organising team, consisting of John and Caroline Turnbull and Malcolm Hingle. After consulting our board, it was confirmed that BRC would fully support the arrangements for the tour. From then on, Birte and I also belonged to the organising team.

British Rowing is the equivalent of the Deutsche Ruderverband (DRV) and the trip was published on their website. Anyone interested could book a place and participants came from many different British clubs: Lea RC, Broxbourne, Avon County, Weyfarers, Kingston, Devil’s Elbow, Castle Dore, Yare, Maidstone Invicta, Phyllis Court, Nottingham, St Neots and Goring Gap.

Berlin and our rowing route round the Kleiner and Grosser Wannsee attracted many participants and in an instant more than 60 had booked and paid a deposit of £50. I quickly counted up our available seats in C Class gigs and arrived at 77, some in bigger boats as well as quad sculls. Since most participants preferred to scull, I needed more boats. Prompted by the training partnership with the FRCW (ladies Wannsee rowing club), I enquired there and the Chair, Ellen Becker, and boat administrator, Susann Seeger, quickly and without fuss allocated three C-gig quad sculls to the event along with their personal support, for which I would like to express my thanks.

On Thursday 7th September we brought the three quads from FRCW to BRC so that we could start with the whole fleet from BRC on the Friday. The weather forecast for the whole weekend was for no wind and summer temperatures up to 30°C. That removed one worry, but we were still anxious.

Day 1

At 9 a.m. the guests arrived and, with the help of the signs which we had placed, found the changing rooms and lockers, which had helpfully been designated for visitors. Everyone had their own padlock on their packing list.

Every participant received an attractive blue polo shirt with the British Rowing and BRC logos and so a blue wave approached the boating area. First we had a group photo and then a safety briefing for the boat captains. Maps of the tour were distributed with locations of the DLRG stations (rescue service), telephone numbers for emergencies, both serious and less serious, a translation of the main rowing commands, tools and spare parts.

Then we were off and 13 big boats had to be launched. Everybody helped each other and so the possibly difficult operation made good progress. A few minutes before the planned time of 11 a.m. all the boats were already lined up as a fleet and on their way to Scharfe Lanke. The destination was Ruderunion Arkona, where meatballs with potato salad, chilli (with and without meat) and drinks awaited us. Many thanks to Kerstin Dosing and her team, who despite our earlier than expected arrival served us in a friendly and efficient manner. The terrace and lawn provided an inviting spot for a rest.

On the way back some of the rowers fitted in a cooling swim in Kladow.

The explanations of the local rowers were welcomed as they passed on their knowledge of the Wannsee bathing area, Schwanenwerder island, the landing strip for sea planes during the Berlin air bridge and the Grundewald tower.

All the participants and boats came safe and sound back to the club and we enjoyed a cool drink on the terrace. At 5 p.m. Andreas Schummert began his presentation "Rowing in Potsdam/Wannsee: rowing in a historic environment" which held his audience's interest and prepared them for the sights along the route on the following day. Many thanks, Andreas!

Day 2

The timing of the tours was planned to allow for the club's normal morning rowing activities. So some of the crews could be swapped into the bigger boats straight away on the pontoon, which speeded up the start of the tour. The goal was the Templin brewery, 17 km away, where there was a small landing place with a large field for storing boats. Nearly all the boats reached the location and the crews enjoyed the big beer garden. Time pressed on and we returned through Potsdam, past the Hans-Otto Theatre, the Flatow tower, the Glienicke Bridge, Babelsberg castle, Little Glienicke castle and the villas along the Griebnitz lake.

Winston Churchill stayed in Villa Urbig during the Potsdam Conference (17th July to 2nd August 1945). Joseph Stalin and Harry S. Truman also stayed in villas on the Griebnitz lake. They signed and sealed the end of the second world war in castle Cecilienhof.

All the waves from the steamers, motor boats and jet skis, which rowers have to battle in such fine weather, were conquered. Many of the boats had taken on water and our strong youth section helped us to lift them out and empty them. Thanks, boys!

After a quick refreshing dip in the lake, we showered and made ourselves presentable, ready for the champagne reception at 19:30 before the gala dinner. Susann from the FRCW had brought her bagpipes and played an English rowing song, a perfect introduction to the official proceedings. Many thanks, Susann!

Short speeches from Ralf Korge, John Turnbull and Malcom Hingle opened the buffet. John presented the club with an oar blade with the BR and BRC logos as a thank-you gift, which Ralf accepted with pleasure.

The buffet, which was set out in the Kaiserpreis room, looked fantastic. After 35 kilometers rowing in the summer heat, we had all really earned this refreshment. It was an excellent evening with interesting conversations between the participants and clubs.

Many thanks are due to the catering team "Achtergedeck".

Day 3

The finale of the programme was "Around the Wannsee". Not as a regatta, but as a tourist trip. Again there was a lot to see and to talk about. The house of the Wannsee Conference, Peacock Island with its castle, unfortunately still being renovated, Nikolskoe, Heilands Church in Sacrow with

the “Royal Louise” in the foreground, and Cecilienhof castle, lined the route. The “Bridge of Spies” was negotiated and the return along the Griebnitzsee for a second time wasn’t at all boring.

All the participants were more than happy with their rowing tour and envied our impressive and beautiful location. At the end there were quiches and bagels and many participants tried our refreshing 1-2-3 drink on the club terrace.

A few of our guests also helped to return the three quads to the FRCW, so that all the boats were back to their home bases by Sunday evening.

Many thanks also to our local supporters, who showed me the way to the brewery, joined us on the three days, rerigged the boats from rowing to sculling and vice versa before and after the tour, and who adjusted the timing of their own rowing sessions to fit in with us.

When all is said and done, it was a thoroughly successful event, which has made our club better known, not just for high performance rowing, in Great Britain.