

Nottingham Regattas: For new paddlers and parents.

This is meant to be a rough guide to Nottingham regattas for new paddlers and parents. However, the best thing to do is ask those that have been before, where the best places to eat are, which motorways to take (or not) and how long it actually takes to get there despite what your satnav tells you.

When you arrive at the national water sports centre (Holme Pier Pont or HPC) you need to enter in the main (2nd) entrance.

There is a fee for all day parking (about £5 but subject to change) and clubs are usually to either the left or the right of the entrance, all the way along the regatta course up to the 500m mark. You may have to drive further along the regatta course and turn right up a grass hill and back along the top of the rise to the club site. If you need to leave in the day whilst the racing is on, please think about how you park as you may get trapped in.

Regattas are all day affairs and need careful managing of the paddlers or yourself. You need to know when you/they are racing, which lane and possible with who and in what boat (K2 are usually from the club but you need to fit in it & K4s which are down in the boat sheds at the far end of the regatta course and take time to get to and set up). This information is in the regatta program and also on-line.

You should have enough kit for a variety of weather situations (even in the height of summer) and off the water clothing to keep you warm/dry (including footwear). Crew boats can be very wet despite the air temperature.

You must stay out of the sun or rain/sleet or snow! Keep warm or cool depending on what you're faced with and you can have this all in one day!

A programme with your races highlighted and a watch or phone set to the same time as the regatta clock is also useful (or a parent or coach doing this for you when younger, but you need to be doing this yourself as you get older). Finding out where to get on and how long it takes to get to the start-line is also essential for competing at your best (plenty of people have missed races as they didn't realise how long it took them to get to the start).

Race numbers: You need the correct lane number (which you get from the program) on your boat, you need to know where these are kept (usually in the club marque but others may have left them on their boats or be using them for their races), please don't hoard them as everyone needs to use them and put them back (in the correct order) as soon as possible. You also need to locate the results board that gives you your new lane number once through a heat into a semi or into a final, either physically (in the centre at the reception outside the restaurant) or on a website. This should also tell you how many go through to help you plan your race. Wrong or a missing lane numbers gain you penalty points and can lead to a ban.

Club race tops must be worn in all races. So, bring/borrow enough for all your races.

Check your boat: check all the wingnuts and fittings, footrest and steering.

Warming up: do this according to your normal routine, either on land or water, do you need your normal routine if you are on the water every hour? Don't paddle too far away from the start, you can miss your race quite easily- it's always a good idea to know who is off in front of you so you can gauge whether the regatta is running behind schedule and how long until your race.

Appropriate clothing: you may need to wear extra layers to go to the start (for instance into a head wind) and remove them for the race (it's always hotter with a tail wind), remember this takes time. Also don't get cold sitting in the wind and rain before your race. Make sure your kit is named as it can easily get mixed up on washing lines or on chairs etc.

Racing: You have to start in a start bucket which you place the nose of your boat into, it is going to disappear under the water when the starter says go, watch the starts before yours to understand the procedure. If the wind is blowing it can be quite hard to stay straight in the buckets. Don't push them forward as they will spring back and you'll end up getting a worse start. You must stay in the centre of your lane and not wander, and you can't wash hang either! Don't paddle onto the course whilst racing is going on (there is a warm up lane but stay away from the racers) and don't join in with a race (even if it's yours which you've missed) in the warm up lane.

Boat weighing: random boat weighing occurs, and you'll need to listen to the announcer over the speaker system, this is sometimes hard to hear with wind and when you're tired. You must go to the weigh station and your boat must be the prescribed weight (if in doubt weigh it before the regatta or if you haven't you can use the regatta scales for a small fee, 12kg for a K1) with fixed in buoyancy and ballast (if needed), loose stones don't count and nor does water! Stones in a bag secured under your seat or proper Nelo weights work, flipflops and an old T-shirt don't.

Be careful getting out by the tower/finish line for weighing if it's windy as your boat can get swept away in the wind and it can be cold in the shadow of the building. Remember you should be tired after the race you've just done.

Get changed into dry clothing as soon as possible, never stand in wet kit! Always use flip flops don't walk bare foot.

Nutrition: You may be racing every hour throughout the day which makes eating hard, you need to find out what you can eat in small portions and often, without negatively affecting you on the water. Energy drinks are a definite NO. Water and oat/cereal bars, creamed rice, dried fruit or whatever works for you (but not sweets or protein shakes). Don't eat a massive lunch if you have less than an hour until your next race. Eat well in the evening and properly in the morning, remembering that Sundays are usually an early start, try to stick to what you would normally have i.e. don't go for the full English breakfast just because you are staying in a hotel/B&B. The restaurant is definitely not what most people would call it and its menu is very limited. For parents there is coffee and ice-cream stalls, but this is dependent on the weather and usually overpriced for the experience! If you are Vegan/vegetarian or have food allergies or intolerances, it's best to bring your own food.

Evening food: There are plenty of places to eat near the centre but do remember that there are a good few hundred people with the same idea, so nearby places fill up with canoeists really quickly. West Bridgeford has plenty of restaurants but be careful there isn't a cricket or football match on as it'll be packed. Speak to other club parents as they have discovered the best places to park and eat. Going into Nottingham city centre isn't really the best idea either.

Hydration: even on a cold day you should be drinking regularly and going to the loo often, Hydration is the easiest performance enhancer and dehydration is going to negatively impact performances quite quickly. Drink constantly but also think about loo breaks, how far are the loos from your car, how long does it take to walk? There are portaloos close by, but they can be interesting by the Sunday! Other toilets are in the centre but can be a long walk every hour! Energy drinks are a definite NO, as are other fizzy or caffeine drinks. Water or whatever you would drink at home (non-sugary) in a drinks bottle so you can monitor how much or little you are having per hour.

Avoiding nerves or boredom - How to fill the time?

Regattas can be full on but there are low points in the racing, if you get bored or nervous you may need ways to fill the time. Homework, yes seriously. It can be a good time filler or distraction and you won't get time on Sunday night (or feel like doing it) so it's especially good for GCSE yr11 or A level revision (you won't be the only one!) although you might be in September!

Don't sit in the car playing on your phone, try talking to people in your races, you might be spending years with these people and travelling the world with them (eventually). Watch the top racers, you can learn a lot from watching the top Men & Women or juniors, see how they execute their races, what times they are doing (conditions dependent) and study the timing in crew boats and different styles of technique and racing approaches, borrow a bike and follow a top race (be careful not to crash they are usually very busy). Check out the boat manufacturers or clothing stalls (time permitting – don't miss your races!) but enjoy the whole event.

End of the regatta As Sunday progresses people usually leave at various times. Make sure your boat or paddles (which are harder to spot) aren't in front of other clubs' cars! Make sure you have food and drink in the car as it can be a long journey home with traffic, and you are tired and bored! Check you haven't left kit on the ground before you leave and that the boats are strapped down (plenty of boats have been lost on the M1).

Journey home: Seriously have your satnav or phone on to tell you about traffic jams and have alternative routes available. Also, the last services on the M1 before the M25 is Toddington services (in case of a loo break for the southern clubs!). Lots of the motorway has a 50mph limit and the Sunday evening M25 can be very slow. Expect to add hours to your homeward journey and you'll be happier with less!

Lastly have some milk in the house (for that deserved cuppa) and something in the fridge to heat up when you finally make it back as cooking from scratch can be daunting at 9pm before school on Monday (fingers crossed for inset).

Remember regattas are brilliant training and should be good fun. They are tiring events so make sure you are rested before the regatta and fully recovered after the event before you train again.

There are five Nottingham regattas and quite a few regional club regattas and even club international regattas, so get racing, make new friends and most of all enjoy them.

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