

Editorial

Paddling down a river, I encountered a man paddling an aluminium open canoe in the opposite direction. He had two small girls in the bow. As they passed, one of the girls leaned over and picked a flower out of the water. Somehow it seemed very familiar. Then I remembered Frances Ann Hopkins' painting *Canoe Manned by Voyageurs*. Could we reproduce that picture or something related? No, for the simple reason that they had already disappeared around the next bend. Sometimes a snap decision has to be made without delay.

To shoot or not to shoot

On another occasion I was walking up the footway away from the popular beach at Rockcliffe on the Solway. Looking back, I saw coming towards me a small vehicle carrying a slalom kayak vertically, even the cockpit clear of the top of the vehicle. I unpacked the camera as quickly as possible and swung round as it passed, to be faced with a naked child in the centre of the shot I wanted to take. An immediate decision was made not to take the shot. This was at the time when there was increasing objection of taking photos of children in any circumstances. Some think they should be neither seen nor heard. Indeed, a respected instructor once had a word with me on use of a photo on a Welsh canal towpath with a group of children in anoraks and buoyancy aids with their backs to the camera. Twice I have had objections by adults for taking canal shots when they were present in the scene, both times in central Manchester, places which would look odd without people present. In fact, there are no restrictions on photographing in public places.

During a marathon I was faced on the roadside by the naked rear of a man as he changed. Normally I would have had no interest whatsoever but this was the rear of the BCU's chief executive, who had recently made a pronouncement about covering up when changing in public. The public do not like being told how to behave by somebody who ignores his own pronouncements, as Boris found out to his cost. I did not take the shot. I have, however, since decided that any potentially interesting picture should be taken and the implications thought through thoroughly at a later date.

The luxury of having time to decide is not always enough. In Llangollen I photographed a car with a GB Slalom Team sticker on its rear window parked across the gateway of a house displaying a notice asking for access to be kept clear. The issue was who owned the car as publishing the picture was likely to lead to problems with somebody and I was unable to find out whom as a publishing deadline approached. On one hand, should I publish without fear or favour? On the other, it would not make sense to do so without finding out who was likely to react. In the end I published.

A leading paddler accused me gleefully of being cruel for taking a photo of a paddler falling in big time at a portage at a marathon nationals at Worcester. However, I took the picture, to consider at leisure. The swimmer was cracked up with laughter when I examined it closely and enjoying the experience as much as everyone else, a lovely picture, so it was included in that issue.

Stuart Fisher

Most of us can tell the difference between a man and a woman more easily than we can define the difference between a canoe and a kayak. At least, we thought we could. Recently, however, it seems to have become increasingly difficult, especially when gender change is involved.

When is a woman not a woman?

Thus, April's judgement by the Supreme Court on sex and gender, especially in relation to sport, is to be welcomed as simple and clear and has already resulted in some sports having to make changes to their rules.

Despite the variety of the disciplines, competition canoeing has avoided sex problems better than some sports. This is because there is often a women's class and an open class. Trans people no longer have the advantage of being brought up as biological males, to the disadvantage of biological females. Everyone gets to compete. The tail does not wag the dog. In a Lords debate on Sport: Gender Inclusion, Baroness Noakes suggested 'that for nearly all sports, the only rational solution which is safe and fair for all is to have two categories: an open category for everyone and one reserved for natal women only'. That is the way various canoeing disciplines operate. If there was a class for natal men as well then it is likely there would be a small number of

left over people who would rarely be able to compete as classes would usually be iniquitous. For those who have undergone the trauma of a sex change it would seem that competitors in sport would be a lesser concern and less than for natal females against whom they might compete.

David Train's marathon divisions were set up using only performance, with no reference to gender at all, except for a ceiling stopping women going into the top divisions at a time when they would be too thinly spread. Otherwise, iniquitous classes might get their entries moved towards senior male kayak paddlers, those likely to produce the best results. A girl in a C1 in the nationals might be moved to boys, to girls of the next older age group upwards (downwards for veterans) or kayaks if there are not enough in their own category. Men are expected to have a strength advantage. I am still sore about being overtaken by Pauline Goodwin in an Usk WW race while still in the team! There might be an overall finish list but with additional lists of subcategories, as in the Devises-Westminster Race or quadrathlons. Dragon boats will not allow men in women's boats although women can go in men's boats and there also mixed crews. Women may compete in men's polo teams, usually to make up numbers.

Occasionally women or canoes may compete against men in sprint out of choice to get meaningful competition at the sharp end of sprint. It does not help a competitor of international standard to only compete against others far slower.

It does not always work. Vic Brown was prevented from working her way up the slalom divisions on the men's side as a personal challenge although she still went on to get Britain's best canoeing result in the 1972 Olympics. Such requests are usually accepted.

There can be unintended consequences. Where we used to live, the best athletics club in the area was a ladies' club, who were obliged to admit men when single sex clubs were no longer allowed. Our son left the Scouts when big girls were able to join and changed the mood of his group.

While the Supreme Court ruling will be widely welcomed, it only applies to Britain. Other bodies including the International Canoe Federation and International Olympic Committee could come up with other interpretations. As sport governing bodies are each to come up with their own rules this is unlikely to be the end of the story.

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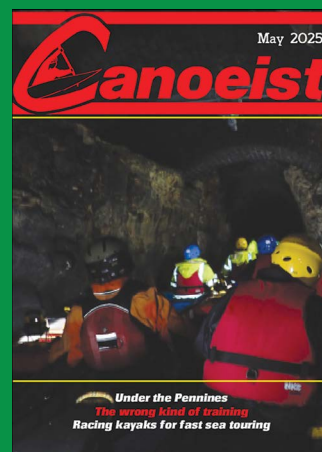
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Paddling through Standedge Tunnel, Britain's longest, highest and deepest canal tunnel.