

CHEW VALLEY LAKE SAILING CLUB

My name is John Smalley. For three years I have had the honour of being Commodore, (Flag Officer in charge), of the sailing club. I thought it may be helpful, as you fishermen wait for that illusive fish to latch on, to be able to spot the various similar, but actually very, very different breeds of sailor we have under the umbrella of Chew Valley Lake Sailing Club.

The Racing Sailors – Mostly to be found on Wednesday evenings in the summer, and on Sundays all year round. These sailors are usually very aware of fishing boats and plan a route around them that will not interfere with their race strategy. Watch for them gathering together when sound signals and flags emerge from either the Race Hut on the club balcony or our white Committee Boat, (the one with a small cabin). There will be frequent bursts of choice language invariably directed at other sailors, or occasionally inanimate objects such as marks. Our Race Officers will try to set courses to avoid patches of the lake with groups of fishing boats, but this is dependent on the wind direction. If you are fishing in the direction they are heading, racing sailors will plan to avoid you. Fishing boats are termed 'obstructions' in our Racing Rules! This means that if the sailor is going to have to manoeuvre to avoid you, he may call for 'water' on surrounding dinghies so that they must give him room. Bear in mind that these sailors follow a set course around the buoys on the lake so may find it difficult to keep 25 metres clear if you have attached your fishing boat to one of their selected turning marks.

On certain weekends the Sailing Club will host an Open Racing meeting for visiting groups of sailors, usually all sailing the same type of dinghy. Lookout for the large orange inflatable buoys we use – it is easy to see where the boats will be trying to sail.

Generally racers are easy going (!), peaceful individuals, but remember they are under stress and duress during a race and depending on the degree of their competitive nature they can become less rational at times!

The Pleasure or Cruising Sailors – most of the dinghies sailing during the day on Wednesdays and Saturdays will fall into this category, particularly in the summer and if the weather is fine in winter too. There tends to a very broad range of sailing skill that might affect their ability to keep well clear of you despite their best intentions.

You will spot the cruising sailors in a wide variety of dinghies but they are particularly fond of Wayfarers. These are broad barge-like boats with a capital 'W' on the sail.



Junior Training Squads – you will notice that they are all sailing exactly the same type of dinghy, often with a multicoloured sail. They will invariably be accompanied by at least one coach in a Club or other powerboat, (often garish bright orange). The coach will have the most irritating habit of blowing his loud whistle at seemingly every opportunity. These groups tend to be single-minded in their activity and will place themselves where there are least fishing boats. They will mark out their 'territory' with training marks – again usually of a fluorescent colour. The risk to you as fishermen is that our young sailors may be interested in what you are doing and try to 'raft up' alongside to get a good look in your keep net!

Adult RYA Training Sailors – These groups can be spotted with up to four people all sharing a large dinghy, often a Wayfarer. One of the group will be an instructor who should be keeping a watchful eye for fishing boats. The boat may be steering an erratic course but they will be trying to give you a wide berth.

University Sailors – students can be identified by the fact that they will all be sailing boats with an 'F' on their sail. These young people are totally dedicated in their pursuit of 'team racing'. Two teams of three boats racing on a tiny course; a bit like water chess for the initiated. They will use brightly coloured marks and different groups will sail the same course again and again. They will keep well away from fishing boats initially but once competition commences they will only have a limited awareness of the needs of others.

Chew Lake Association of Disabled Sailors (CLADS) – we are fortunate to have a keen number of disabled sailors with numerous able-bodied helpers that sail on Saturdays for 8 months of the year. They are the only group allowed to use multi-hulls on Chew. Their tri-marans are stable and safe to sail but do move quickly if there is any wind. They are less manoeuvrable than other dinghies but should try to keep well clear of you.

Our powerboats are all driven by members who have a Royal Yachting Association powerboat certificate. I realise it can be frustrating when their wake disrupts your fishing. We get equally annoyed when the waves affect our racing - their instruction is to drive only as quickly as is needed to look after any capsized sailors. Bristol Water Rangers enjoy the powerboat training offered by the Sailing Club and our Safety Boat crews also rescue broken down fishing boats and the occasional fisherman.

To sum up – we sailors and fishermen on Chew are sharing one of the finest lakes in the country. We have a remarkable level of tolerance of each other which I think stems from the fact that we both thoroughly appreciate how very lucky we are. Long may this happy state continue.

John Smalley, Commodore C.V.L.S.C.