



The History of Wemmer Pan Rowing Club



1990 to the Centenary

by Rod MacKinnon

(edited by Charley Lewis)

Competition

The period started in fine style with Andy Maclachlan winning the Silver Sculls in 1990. He is, however, the last WPRC member to have done so, winning two more while at Rhodes. Senior rowing was in the doldrums, but the prospect of wholesale re-entry to the international sporting world started being discussed as our political circumstances moved towards democracy. 1993 was pencilled in as a possible date until suddenly in late 1991 entry to the Barcelona Olympics became possible. With less than a year to go, Paolo Cavalieri, VP Coaching & Selection at SAARU, set up the system for heavyweights to Barcelona and lightweights to the World Championships.



The 1992 Barcelona eight with members (R-L-) Martin Walsh, Rogan Clark, Paolo Cavlieri, (miss 3), Eric Mauff and Tim Lahhner

Suddenly the dream of generations of rowers became possible. There was a scramble as rowers emerged from retirement. Martin Walsh, Eric Mauf, Rowan Clarke and former member Tim Lahner made the Barcelona eight, with Kurt Landsberg, another former member, as spare man. The training was intense and the experience worth the effort, achieving an 8th place. But effect on the Club was short-lived because most rowers retired soon after the Games. Greth Osch and Ivan Pentz rowed through to make the 1993 national boat.

John Callie, Graham Cooke, John Gearing and Roy Pepper made the lightweight four to Worlds, with Doug Gouw as Manager.

However Paolo also brought in a focus on women's internationals for the first time. Wemmer boated a strong squad, with Colleen Orsmond dominating the field, winning national titles in the scull, pair or four every year for 12 years. From the first African Championships in Cairo in 1991, Colleen participated in the challenging and costly process of developing a multi-year approach to training and competition. It took many years before sufficient funding was available to sustain a

national squad for the training and competition needed for each Olympic cycle. Even in 2000 Richard Wilkinson had to launch the Y2K Club to raise R200 000 needed to get the Olympic squad qualified for Sydney.



The light / heavy brigade at Vereeniging, (L-R) Kurt Landsbuerg, Daryl Phillips, Adrian Buddingh, Clive Gilman, Kevin Bennett, Estie, Eddie Bruce

qualification via the melting pot of the B Final. They jetted to Atlanta in Ndizani and made the B Final, placing 11th in the competition.

Colleen set her sights on Sydney and kept up the focus with competition at two or three World Cup regattas and Worlds each year. At Sydney she and Helen had a flyer in their heat, winning against some of the event favourites and finishing with 5th in the A Final.

She then took a year off and re-set her sights for Athens, rowing with Rika Geyser, who had joined Wemmer on her return from the USA, later transferring to Roodeplaat. This campaign ended when they failed to qualify at the World Champs in Milan in 1993. Thus ended 9 years of international competition encompassing 12 World Cup regattas, 6 World Championships and 2 Olympics, with a Silver and Bronze in World Cups, and best World rankings of 5th in the pair and 12th in the scull. Although only occasionally at the Club due to her schedule, Colleen remained a staunch member. Colleen is now Events Manager at FISA in Lausanne – and has won a Gold and Silver in the W4X+ at the World Rowing Coastal Championships in the past three years!

Brenda Read and Caroline Miller of St Mary's were Junior Tridents in 1993 in the quad, at the first Junior Worlds after readmission. Brenda also sculled in 1994 at the African Championships in Egypt, with Derek as tour manager.

By 1995 the Wemmer squad of Tanya Jeffrey, Carla Tishman, Michelle Cowan, Helen Flemming, Lindsay Cretchley and Colleen dominated SA Champs with a clean sweep, and raced several times in Europe to attempt qualification for Atlanta. The squad raced Lucerne (without coach due to lack of funding) and Colleen and Helen were selected for Worlds in Finland where they achieved



Colleen and Rika at Worlds, Seville 2002

Lindsay Cretchley also competed internationally, winning her SA Colours in 1999 at the Worlds in Canada, having raced the pair at two World Cups that year.

Two girls from St Mary's were selected into the Junior Development squad in 1995 and toured the UK. The link to the Club came through the support that Wemmer gave to St Mary's for the establishment of their club, providing equipment and a home for 4 or 5 years before they became self-sufficient. The relationship was managed by Derrick Read, but was not without its tensions as the Club codgers were faced with bundles of youthful enthusiasm sometimes lacking in boathouse decorum. Wemmer hosted an ex-Wits eight to Henley in 1996, but, unfortunately, as in 1992, there was little follow-through into senior rowing in the Club.



Filming an advert for Old Mutual as a fundraiser, Dirk van Deventer in the scull

In 1999 Wemmer joined Durban RC in celebration of their 125th anniversary. This was done as a row around the harbour. Tradition has it that Allie so enjoyed the event that he proposed it be repeated. This was the annual harbour row, Head of the Bay, initiated, which has been attended by the Club each July since.

A squad of Masters and youngsters tackled the Sen. B category in 2001. With consistent wins through the season, they won the Dan Donegan Trophy at Champs. This is as much an indictment of the state of senior rowing at that time, as it is a celebration of training commitment in the Club.



George Lambert-Porter at the halfway, only 1 450 nautical miles left

One day in 2003 George Lambert-Porter idly announced he would be away for a couple of months. Pressed further, he revealed that he was rowing the Trans Atlantic Race with his son, and he had done a few prep sessions on the ergo. George and George jnr. were the first father & son crew, the first South Africans, the first to carry the Wemmer pennant; and were amongst only six of sixteen starters to complete the race unaided. It was a tough year due to the weather and they completed the 2 900 nautical miles

from the Canaries to Barbados in 78 days, 1 hour and 23 minutes.

Wemmer made its first entry by into the Junior Boat Race at Port Alfred in 2009 with a Junior Women's coxed quad. This was a culmination of development of a junior squad in the Club over a couple of years. It was preceded by the Wemmer Winter Junior Clinic, which had been started in 2004 as a 6-week Sunday morning programme in the schools' off season. Colleen was the first Coach on the programme and was followed by Jean Kelly and subsequently Michelle Cowan. The Clinic was possible only with collaboration of KES, Parktown and Mondeor who assisted with boats when more kids came down than could be boated in the Club fleet.

Administration

The Pan was became bedevilled by weed that progressively invaded from the early 1990s. A floating weedeater was brought in by the Council and spent many months creating stinking piles on the lawns and in the Park. The weed was not reduced, however, because it sprouts 2 branches for every one cut, so the problem was exacerbated. Eventually Chinese carp were introduced in 1996, after Sprint had to be relocated to Roodeplaat in 1995 because the Pan was unrowable. The carp got to work and had it under control within two years. They are unable to breed and the population has been 'topped up' twice since. They grew to specimen size and the SA record of over 23 kg has been caught at the Pan despite a bye-law prohibition on fishing.

The Wemmer Sprint has been through ups and downs in this period. Sprint was traditionally held the week before Junior Champs in February and this became increasingly used for final prep at Roodeplaat and entries dropped off during the 1990s. At the same time senior clubs experienced a drop in membership. Many rowers were also coaches at schools, and so were not available to row at Sprint. The dearth of new senior course records in the current decade is an indication of this dynamic. In 1998 Junior u14 and u15 sculling races were introduced on Friday afternoon to reduce pressure on the Saturday junior racing. This experiment ran for 4 years and was abandoned when the logistics of getting rowers and officials down became too onerous. In 2008, when the rowing calendar was reviewed to create a better spread of events through the season, Wemmer took the plunge and moved Sprint to the early season in October. In the last three years the Junior u16 and Junior Open event have been combined with the Sen. C, B & A races with success. The regatta has grown once again, with 100 races in 2010. In this year, 2011, the regatta will be held over Saturday and Sunday to reduce congestion on the programme.

In 1999 the Club was saddened by the death of Alfred Phela, who had been boatman for 32 years, and was a skilled sculler and cox. Alfred's nephews Jacob and George took up employment in his place. However, tragedy struck in January 2005 when George drowned while rescuing a woman with her baby who was trying to drown herself at night; he was posthumously awarded the Order of Mendi for bravery. Both are remembered in the Club in sculls named for them.



GEORGE PHELA

George together with his cousin Jacob had been joint caretaker at Wemmer Pan for six years.

On the evening of 31 January 2005 George went to the aid of a desperate woman and her child, and while saving them both, he gave his life in the waters of Wemmer Pan. It was a heroic deed, and he has been nominated for the President's gold medal for exceptional bravery.

George frequently acted as cox for Wemmer Pan R.C.; he was a talented artist, and he loved his dogs. He in turn was loved by all who knew him.

He was a small man but with the heart of a lion.



Colleen and Rika at Worlds, Milan 2003
wider rowing family in leadership roles.

Kurt Hipper was elected as the Africa Continental Representative to the FISA Council. In addition to serving as Treasurer to NOCSA, he was on the Olympic/Cape Town bid team from 1993 to 1997. Richard Wilkinson was a Team South Africa administrator at both the Atlanta and Sydney Games, in addition to his RowSA President responsibilities. Richard and Rod MacKinnon were founding Stewards of the Riviera Vaal Regatta. Each chaired it for 5 years serving on the management committee for 12 and 16 years respectively. Rod Chaired the RowSA International Commission from 2002 to 2005, and was RowSA President from 2004 to 2008.

With the Club's illustrious history as a strong foundation, it continues to make a contribution to rowing in South Africa, at Wemmer Pan, at Roodeplaat, and further afield, both on the water and in the administration of the sport. 2011 marks the centenary of water sports at Wemmer Pan, and the 53rd Wemmer Sprint Regatta. We have come a long way from the clumsy old clinker hulls of yesteryear to the sleek, fast shells of today. Wemmer Pan Rowing Club, can look back on a proud history. But the club also looks forward into a future in which many more members will enjoy the pleasures, challenges, camaraderie and achievements of our wonderful sport.

In 1999 Peter Heidstra resigned as Captain, and Alan Cook as Chair, after 7 and 6 years in office respectively. These members are of a band of rowers who took to the sport in mid-life, often when their children were rowing at school. They brought great enthusiasm and made significant contributions as well, as officials, in Club and GRA administration. Others include Willie Madely who succeeded Alan in the Chair, and three successive Captains: Dave Krumm (2002 to 2007); Gavin Park (2007 - 2009), Shaun d'Hotman (2009 to the present) and Graham Hubert, past Chair, and long-standing Treasurer.

Club members continued to serve the



Allie Francis on the water when Junior Champs were held at the Pan, 2008

