

STROKEWATCH

BAY AREA ROWING CLUB OF HOUSTON • JANUARY 2008



Hat Races & Fog

By Martha Hood

BARC had another successful hat race held on December 15th on Mud Lake. Even though it was foggy, several of BARC's rowers had fun participating in the pea soup conditions. Everyone showed their holiday spirit by wearing new headgear! ■

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*From left to right:
Denise Cooper, Henry Epstein, Barbara Wellhausen,
Marilyn Bullard, Hannes Hofer, and Karl Zimmer*

A Word from the Prez

By Hannes Hofer

One thing that has often been discussed, is how we go about retaining new rowers. Both our Try-it-You'll-Like-It Classes and the regular 8-hour classes are fairly well attended, but only a very small percentage of the students "stick with it". Last winter, a committee tried to come up with ways to retain people. My suggestion was to hire a coach to give people an opportunity to master the skills better, and to motivate them to come and row on teams. This idea was rejected by the committee, and instead it came up with the idea of having volunteers at the boathouse at certain times during the week, to be of assistance to people wishing to go out, but felt uncomfortable about handling the equipment by themselves.

We had volunteers signing up for a couple of months, but the students they were supposed to assist stayed away in droves, so the program was discontinued.

Holding on to new rowers continue to be a problem. I still think that if we want to grow, we must offer more to our members. Our membership have remained pretty flat in the last few years, in fact, it has declined slightly. While BARC remain a great club for recreational rowing, I would like to see it evolve into club with both recreational and competitive rowing. This can happen only if we offer something beyond introductory classes.

My term as President expires in February, but I hope the new leadership will take a serious look at this issue. I would like to see BARC continue to thrive in the future. ■

A Texas Sculler in Sir Steve's Favorite Water!

By Paul Erb

Preface

Those in BARC from the UK, or those who have been fortunate enough to experience rowing in the UK, will doubtless find this account quite matter-of-fact (as well as noting some errors in my descriptions). To them, I make my apologies in advance. It was quite an adventure for a Texas boy, and I hope all will be amused by the read nonetheless!

The Adventure Begins

"Just push off gently and paddle to the other side. Find a spot near that small flotilla of swans, and hold steady against the current. I'll be with you in a flash, or maybe two."

So began my first row on the storied Thames River. My posterior was delicately settled in a racing single, very kindly offered on loan by a work colleague's husband. My colleague Bridget would be my water guide, as soon as she launched her very fast looking practice boat. I'm sure she held only the faintest of hopes that I could avoid embarrassing her by turning turtle before we got out of sight of the club!

While Bridget launched, I took in the scene. As I stemmed the gentle current with a few strokes and looked back downstream, the town of Marlow lay on the left-hand bank, with the old bridge, and then the church just downriver, the busy rowing club lay on the right hand bank. Just beyond the rowing club and bridge, was a well-known Inn named The Compleat Angler. Just beyond the Inn, the somewhat ominous sound of water pouring over the weir next to the locks did little to calm my nerves!

True to her word, her ladyship joined me in about a flash and a half, and we started upriver. Some indignant honking followed, as I repositioned in the current and surprised a couple of swans. "Take no notice of those greedy birds" Bridget said, "They belong to the Queen, so they think they own the river, but they always get out of the way at the last!" The penalty for a commoner skewering one of her majesty's birds would be just a few hours in the pillory... I hoped... only a small price to pay for escaping the suction of the weir! The sun shone, I was on the Thames, and I had begun to feel at home in the boat (at least I was still dry!).

The Venue

The venue for my adventure was the Marlow Rowing Club, established 1871, just a set of locks downriver from famous Henley. It should be said that this is only moderately old for a UK club, with some of the more established ones dating to the late 1700's. For those who know the London area, Marlow is in Buckinghamshire, west of Heathrow airport about 30 minutes journey on the M4. I arrived in good time at the club on a partly sunny and (mercifully) warm Sunday afternoon in late September.

Since I was a touch ahead of my host, I acquired a quick first impression of the club and the town. The "new" iron suspension bridge crossing the river next to the club was build around 1830. From the pedestrian walkway on the bridge, impressive views of the river were presented for the camera. The beautiful church on the bank was built in 1835, though records show a religious building on the site since 1070. Izaak Walton is rumored to have written his famous book on fishing while staying in the Marlow area in the 1600's, (thus the name of the Inn mentioned earlier).

Marlow has hosted rowing events since the mid-1800's and the annual regatta is considered a warm-up for Henley, which is two weeks later. Competition at Henley began in 1839, about ten years after the first Cambridge vs. Oxford "Boat Race" recorded in 1829. Marlow is the birthplace and present home of Sir Stephen Redgrave, and a large statue of this most famous of Olympic oarsmen graces the town square with oar in hand and 5 Olympic Medals around his neck.

A short aside for those new to rowing, who may not know Sir Steve: One can truthfully say he is a sculler of great repute! His five gold medals (and one bronze!) in five successive Olympics (1984-Los Angeles to 2000-Sydney) were earned during 20 years at the very top of his sport. He also won 9 world championships during this time. Generally rowing in a double (and later a quad), he practically owned Henley and other major European regattas throughout this period. His quote, "I don't know what all the fuss is about, I'm just a chap with an oar!", gives a bit of insight into his approach to life!

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Thames Technique

Meanwhile, back on the river, I was beginning to lengthen my stroke a bit under Bridget's watchful eye from a position just upriver of me. Families glided quietly under power on the calm river in runabouts and larger yachts. The speed limit of 5kph kept the situation well under control. Also the British habit of anticipating the position of bicyclists on the roads apparently transfers well for scullers on the water! Only one boat caught a swift rebuke from my colleague, as they pushed the limit and raised a bit of wake. Unlike Texas, they immediately throttled back and apologized!

I began to learn some of the river rowing techniques that are required on the Thames but not needed on Mud Lake. First, Bridget patiently coached me on the art of looking behind every 2nd or 3rd stroke, on the paddle (pull), while the boat is more stable. Successive turns of the head gradually paint a picture. Nevertheless, I had the thought that I would invest in a mirror for my sunglasses should I ever have the good fortune to row here regularly; the supple, flexible neck of youth has long gone now!

More subtle was the precise art of guiding the boat around the gentle turns of the river with a very slight increase of pressure on one oar. Bridget taught me to achieve this by thinking of foot pressure, not oar pressure directly. When done correctly the boat works its way smoothly around the bend without apparent steering and without loss of pace! However, things are not as easy as they may seem. Every bend is different, and the current can change from bend to bend and day to day, which leads to different reaction of the boat. Nevertheless, Bridget assures me that within a month or two, it becomes second nature to feel and adapt to the river, following the curving bank naturally, while placing full pressure on the oars in a hard workout!

Bisham Abbey

Midway along in our row, I was already astounded by the understated but luxurious properties fronting the river (each worth millions of pounds, I was assured by my host!). However, I was not prepared for the next bit of scenery, as old Bisham Abbey came into view. The manor house was originally built in 1260 as a community house for the Knights Templar. The foundation stone is said to have been laid by King Edward II. In 1310 the building was used as a place of confinement for Queen Elizabeth of the Scots, wife of King Robert the Bruce. In 1335 the manor was bought by the 1st Earl of Salisbury and in he founded Bisham Priory there alongside his manor house in 1337. Many successive Earls of Salisbury have been buried there. Now the Abbey is in use as a navigation school for disadvantaged youth, with dozens of small boats making a surprising sight on the grounds.

Back to the River!

Refocusing on the river, I discovered another subtlety of rowing on the Thames. Bridget had us close along the bank as we came to an area of the river favored by fishermen. Several had lines cast well out into the middle of the river from long, flexible poles. I thought she might diverge, or they might reel in their lines, but neither took action. Instead, they smoothly lifted their lines as we glided through without a pause. Fortunately none took a strike on the hook while we were beneath!

By this point I was also beginning to appreciate one of the adjustments Bridget had made to adapt the boat for my use. Her husband is a tall (6'5"), lanky, and very powerful sculler, and his boat was not a good fit for me. She solved most of the issues by fitting a soft seat pad of about 1" in thickness. This brought me into line with the raised oarlocks and solved most of the fit challenge... and it felt great. Bridget said that in the UK women frequently use such a seat pad to adapt men's boats to fit them better.

Soon the now familiar sound of water over a weir signaled that it was time to return along the other side of the river back to the club. The Marlow club rows anti-clockwise, just as we do at BARC (at least we have that in common!). We completed the turn without a problem, just in front of the marina entrance where all the motor boats docked. Now headed back downriver, I continued to practice my new skills as we made our way back to the club. More spectacular homes and properties were in view on this bank, and a closer look at the Abbey was also on offer.

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My colleague

It may be of interest to say a bit more about how my kind and patient colleague became my river guide. We met recently, when I joined her work group. During a casual chat about exercise interests, I mentioned that I had recently taken up sculling. She said that she also rowed and asked what type of boat I had. I noted that our rowing club supplied boats, but I also had an open water single. She wasn't familiar with that type, so I emailed her a picture of it. When she followed-up with some very informed questions, I knew that something was up, so I asked if she competed. When she answered in the affirmative, I asked if she would email me a picture of her in a race. After receiving a picture of her coming second in Women's Quad (only just!) this past summer at Henley, I decided that I'd best not send her any more of my rowing pictures! Hopefully she will grace BARC with her presence some time in the near future!

Finishing Up

We made another full circuit of the river, which was a big help for me in relaxing, focusing on the new techniques, and also just generally coming to believe that it was really happening! After about an hour on the river, it was time to return to the dock. As you may imagine, since I was in a borrowed boat, and a delicate one at that, the landing had occupied a portion of my mind for some time! However, in the end, it was straight-forward. Bridget had explained the importance of landing into the current, and how the boat would respond to the current by crabbing sideways, if just enough way was kept on, and, most magically, how the current would swing the stern in once the bow made contact... Incredibly, it seemed as easy to me as a landing at BARC. Safe and dry, and with no damage done to boat or dignity!

Back on the dock, we began the wash-up, and, to my surprise, we had to clean a small line of scum off the boats. Another similarity with BARC, but one I'm sure the Thames oarsman would not hesitate to discard! The rowing master, who had been shepherding juniors on the river with the club launch, pointed out our good example to his young charges. Apparently, taking care of the gear is not a natural habit of the young on either side of the Atlantic! He asked me, "How far have you journeyed for your row at Marlow?" "From Texas", I replied. "Well this is a special place isn't it?" he asked. I had to wholeheartedly agree!

The Club

The club was established in 1871. The facilities are "all business" with no frills. The upstairs includes a weight area and a line of ergometers, where many a not-so-happy hour is spent during the winter thinking longingly of summer mornings on the river! The grounds are covered with more than a hundred boats, mostly singles, stored in several sheds and under the bridge. Trailers for away regattas are parked on the property.

Swan-Upping

As we took a last stroll around the club, I noticed that several swans had reclaimed their rights to the docks. Bridget told me that the club is involved each year with an ancient custom on the Thames called, Swan-Upping. Curiosity piqued, I did a bit of internet searching and found out the following:

Every year, during a week in mid-July when the cygnets are about two months old, the annual swan marking begins. This tradition dates from the 12th century. The annual procession of six wooden skiffs, headed by the Queen's Swan Marker, and with the distinctive crested flags of the swan uppers attached to their sterns, passes through Marlow Lock before going on to Marlow Rowing Club and then continuing up river.

It has always been the duty of the sovereign's swan marker to count the new cygnets each year and to maintain their overall population. In days gone by, the swans used to be eaten as a delicacy at feasts and banquets. Today, Swan Upping has evolved into an opportunity to monitor the welfare of the swan population on all the upper Thames.

The swans are surrounded by the boats of the swan uppers and each swan is lifted on board, ringed, logged and checked over before it is left to go on its way. Finding and handling the birds, which can have a wing span of up to three meters, is a skilled job done by men who work as watermen the rest of the year round. All of them are given the title of Freeman of the River Thames before they can become a swan upper. They wear colorful and traditional costumes throughout the week.

Anyone want to start a tradition of Heron-Upping at BARC?... **Alex** and **Hannes** would look great in those costumes... Oh, well, maybe not! ■

See page 9 for photos and check out the Marlow Rowing Club website at <http://www.marlowrowingclub.org.uk/information.asp?page=>

More from the Prez—

By Hannes Hofer

The 2007 BARC Kilometer Challenge

As of the end of October, 16,667 kilometers had been logged by BARC rowers for the year. This is slightly more than the same time last year where 16,452k was logged. The leader so far this year is **Carlos Westhelle**, who had rowed 1493 kilometers as of October 31st. Will he reach 2000k for the year? The challenge is on! **Tom Topalu**, **Tom Lotz**, and **Alex Parkman** had all logged over 10,000k and **Karl Zimmer** and **Hannes Hofer** will have reached the 10,000k milestone by the time you read this.

Logging your rowed distances is not mandatory, but it is strongly encouraged. Not only is it fun to keep track of the data, it can also help the club's leadership detect trends in the usage of the club and its equipment. Also, starting next year, logged kilometers may be used to help resolve conflicts of equipment usage at regattas: Rowers with longer distances logged will get priority over those with less in case of the kind of conflicts we sometimes have going to the marathon. ■

Fall Work Day

On Sunday, November 3rd, we had one of the most productive workdays ever at the boathouse. About 20 people stayed after rowing, probably lured by the great breakfast spread put out by Marilyn. The boathouse and surrounding area looks the best it has for years! Thanks to all who helped! ■

BARC's Boat Names (*A series continued*)

By Martha Hood

Each issue will discuss yet another bird species which is named on one of the Club's boats.

"Eagle" - Vespoli Quad 4x

The Bald Eagle was selected by Congress as the national emblem of the United States in 1782, and is unique to North America. Primarily a hunter of the water, the eagle was once in danger of extinction due to the widespread use of DDT, a pesticide which affected the birds reproduction. Earlier this year, the Eagle was taken off the endangered list, but is still protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Act.

Many do not realize that it is illegal to collect eagles or eagle parts (including feathers), nests, or eggs with a permit. However, Native Americans are able to possess these items because it is part of their culture and heritage.

Although some might confuse this beautiful bird with our more popular Osprey, one can clarify this bird by the solid white tail and head. Also, they are much larger in size. Every winter, rowers have a good chance of seeing these magnificent birds. So stop and enjoy them while you are out on the water. ■



A Bald Eagle recently spotted at Baytown Nature Center.

Master's Nationals, Bronze Medal & Chaos

A short story by Susie Jones

I had the opportunity to row at Master's Nationals this year with a group of women from varying parts of the U.S. (Avalon Rowing Club). The event was held in the picturesque town of Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

The events leading up to this bronze medal were nothing short of chaotic. As procedure has it, we met at the tent every morning at 8:00 for a briefing with the cox'n, person rowing bow or coach.

This particular morning is when I found out that I was stroking a women's quad. The bow person, being in charge of the briefing, ask me for my start sequence, stroke rate and strategy. Wow, lots of questions. Well, I had the start sequence and strategy memorized- three quarters, half, three quarters, lengthen, full; high ten, lengthen and bring it up at the last 250 meters. As for the stroke rate, I did not have a clue. She looked at me as if to say, "what have I gotten myself into." I just ignored it and chose to think of something else.

As procedure has it, we met at the tent one hour before race time to go to the trailer to get our boat. BUT WAIT, change of plans, different boat. But WAIT, it hadn't been rigged. BUT WAIT, no one had the right metric tools and it had overlapping rigging with back stays. So, 7 people converged on that boat with borrowed tools and rigged it not once, but twice. BUT WAIT, we can't go without the stroke coach.

We launched at last call and got to the practice area in time to practice two starts, then rowed to the start line. I decided to concentrate on the start and let the rest of the race take care of itself. So the start was good, we were in the pack. The only thing I remember about the rest of the race was the last 250 meters when I noticed that we were still in the pack. That is when I got mad and decided to BRING IT UP!!! As best I could see without my glasses, the stroke coach read 35. WOW, I can actually row that fast?

After the race, as procedure has it, we met at the tent for debriefing. On the way to the tent a lady came up to me and said, "We lost third to you by just a little bit." All I could say was... really???

At the debriefing, one of the ladies said to me "if only you have been that determined throughout the race."

The moral of the story is:

Some of the best-prepared races gets you last

Sometimes out of chaos comes medals

Bronze medals aren't always enough for everyone

I had done my best, I was happy!!! Can't wait till next year. ■



Left to right: Gina Navia (Community Rowing Inc.), Janice (Potomac Boat Club), Susie Jones (BARC), and Gail (Potomac Boat Club) at Master's Nationals

*That is when I got mad
and decided to BRING IT
UP!!!*

~Susie Jones

Regatta Schedule



March 8-9	Heart of Texas—Austin, TX
April ?	Woodlands Championships—The Woodlands, TX
May ?	Space City Sprints—Clear Lake, TX
May ?	BLAST—Dallas, TX
June 13-15	US Rowing National Championships—Mercer, NJ
August 14-17	Master Nationals—Long Beach, CA
October 18-19	Head of the Charles—Boston, MA
October 25?	Pumpkinhead—Austin, TX
November 8?	Head of the Hooch—Chattanooga, TN

BARCers at Fall Regattas

By Hannes Hofer

BARC rowers traveled to several regattas this Fall.

About a handful BARC rowers went to the Head of the Oklahoma on Oct. 14. This was a very exciting regatta with participation of international elite rowers from several countries. For the second year, the regatta also featured night rowing: A 500 meter course had been lit with portable stadium lighting, for once making rowing an exciting spectator sport. In order to qualify for the night races, teams had to place among the top six teams in the head races that preceded them. Two boats with BARC rowers “cut the mustard”, but placed 6th in the sprints. **Susie Jones** rowing with a Dallas crew member got a bronze medal in the Women’s Masters 2x event. This was a great regatta with a superb setup and support. Unfortunately, the weather did not quite cooperate, and several races had to be canceled Sunday because of high winds. Full results of the regatta can be seen at <http://secure.powerhousetiming.com/powerhouse/webpages/staticRaceResults.jsp?racelid=157>

Two Men’s Masters Doubles, a Men’s Masters and a Women’ Quad and a Women’s Eight - all from BARC - went to the Pumpkinhead of the Colorado on October 27th. Several boats came home with medals, though none were of gold. It was a nearly perfect day for rowing on beautiful Town Lake in Austin. Results at <http://www.austinrowing.org/liveresults/results.html>

As always, BARC was well represented at the Rowing Marathon in Louisiana. A men’s and a women’s quad, The Great Eight (with a little help from GHRC), and BARC/Lake Lanier RC men’s quad completed the 26 miles on the Cane River near Natchitoches on November 10th. Despite morning fog and light rain in the afternoon, it was quite a pleasant row with very little wind. All BARC rowers returned with medals. Results on <http://www.row2k.com/results/resultspage.cfm?UID=6579485&cat=2> . Pictures Marathon can be seen on the BARC website. ■



Mary Gormanson (stroke), Becky Morlier (3), Kim Howell (2- DRC), Connie Cannady (bow- DRC)

Ohhh-klahoma, where the wind comes sweepin' down the plain... And boy does it ever!

By Becky Morlier

Several BARCers raced at the Head of the Oklahoma which was held intermingled with the World Rowing Challenge at the Oklahoma Centennial Regatta Festival October 11-14. **Mary Gormanson** and **Becky Morlier** rowed a club W4x Saturday with two DRC women; this boat placed 6th in the head race and qualified for the 500m Night Sprints where they won 5th place. **Susie Jones** placed 3rd with her DRC partner in the masters W2x on Saturday which qualified them for the night sprints. **Hannes Hofer** and his GHRC partner placed 6th in the masters M2x on Sat which also qualified them for the night sprints. I do not recall how well **Susie** or **Hannes** did in the night sprints however. **Mary Gormanson, Becky Morlier, Susie Jones** and a DRC member placed 3rd in the masters W4x on Sunday.

The weekend event was very large with numerous clubs, colleges and Olympic-training teams from various countries participating, and multitudes of local spectators who came out to watch. Blocks of Championship 2000 meter races were mixed into the Head race schedule which enabled most rowers to watch some of the pro races. I have to say, I barely came up to the chests of the championship men; no doubt they assumed I was a club cox. The boathouse at the race site is spectacular; it is of course corporate-funded. It contained three or four garage-door-style-opening bays for boat storage, an office, and a complete gym with at least ten ergs. Gorgeous boats filled the bays and the front lawn, but these did belong to the Olympic teams and not to the local crew. The Head and Championship races were held during the daytime Saturday and Sunday. On Saturday evening, participants in select Head races were slated for the 500 meter Night Sprints.

The racecourse was a challenge to say the least. The river channel is sinuous, along the course there are ten bridges with greatly varying span widths and angles relative to the course, and the race was designed with two lanes for race boats. On top of all that, in true Oklahoma standard form, the wind was whipping across the course at 20 – 35 mph minimum. It was very difficult to stay in the lanes with the cross wind. The Saturday evening Night Sprints were fun, but would have been much more so in calmer weather. In my boat, the Open W4x, each of us caught at least one crab! On Sunday the wind worsened and race officials cancelled all the small boat races. **Susie** was supposed to row a master's Mx2x with Bob Houston on Sunday, but this was one of the races cancelled. ■

PICTURES FROM ENGLAND

Continued from page 4—photos by Paul Erb



Marlow Rowing Club - From the "new" bridge



Bisham Abbey

Rowing in Brazil

By Andrew Johnstone

Unfortunately my ranking in the kilometer challenge has been hampered, I think rather unfairly, by the fact that international rowing kilometers are not included.

I have just returned from three months as a member of another club... Clube de Regatas do Flamengo, rowing from their boat-house on the Lagoa Rodrigo de Freitas in Rio de Janeiro.

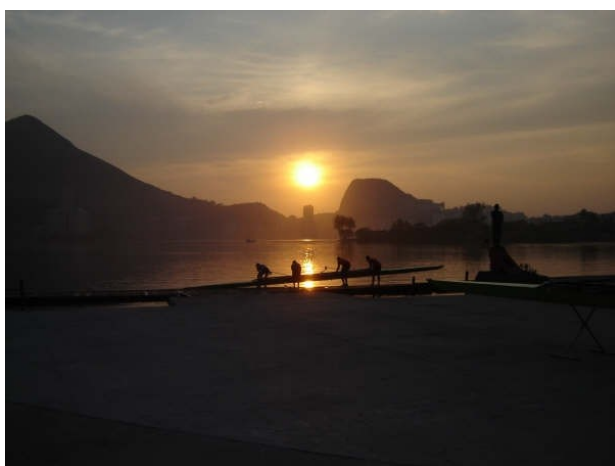
C R Flamengo was founded in 1895 rowing whalers in the bay of Guanabara. In 1911 a futebol (soccer) department was formed. The soccer club is now regarded by everyone (with the exception of **Carlos Westhelle**) as Brazil's biggest and best.

As for rowing the first major victory was in 1900, with the winning of the Jarra Tropon Trophy, during an International Regatta, which commemorated the four centenaries since the discovery of Brazil.

The club is the largest holder of national and state titles, and several notable adventures include Everardo Peres da Silva, Antonio Rebelo Junior and Alfredo Correa Angelo Gamaro, who rowed from Rio de Janeiro to Santos over 5 days in 1932 (210 miles along the coast).

It has been an amazing experience rowing at 0600, six mornings a week with the masters squad, as the sun rose over Ipanema and Cristo Redentor (the famous Christ statue) looked down from Corcavado. Frequently the masters we assigned a octuple (8x) which was an interesting experience. Having a major soccer team as part of the club means the club is well funded with a lot of boats, as well as people to make you breakfast after the morning outings.

I also managed to row the Head of the Charles again this year for Curlew RC of London (England), although a coming together with the Elliott Bridge, a broken blade and running into a tree means the result is too embarrassing to mention. ■



Rowing in Rio de Janeiro at sunrise.



Rowing in Brazil— Andrew Johnstone (seat 6) practices with his crew.



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Rowing Dev.	Theresa Tompkins
Equipment Chair	Alex Parkman
Newsletter	Martha Hood
Webmaster	Hannes Hofer

BARC offers members the opportunity to sweep & scull. The club owns an eight, a four, quads, doubles, pairs, & singles, & can provide storage for privately owned boats. We also offer sweep & sculling classes, as well as 'Try It, You'll Like it' sessions for those new to rowing. Members' rowing objectives range from racing to recreation. BARC has a very good feeling of camaraderie & has frequent social outings.



Rowing Quote

And all the way, to guide their chime,
With falling oars they kept their time.
-Andrew Marvell

*Am eerie sight on Mud Lake during the Hat
Races on December 9th*

