

Wemmer Pan Rowing Club

100 Years on the Pan



It's an almost circular expanse of water, fringed by reeds, its ruffled waters reflecting a lone mine dump in the distance. Looking north, the skyscrapers of Johannesburg's CBD loom low on the horizon. On any early morning you will find a scattering of rowers circling along the shore, their blades beating a steady rhythm, the low rays of the sun shining across the clear water. This is Wemmer Pan, tucked off Rossettenville / Turf Road, in La Rochelle, south of Johannesburg.

Wemmer Pan has been a home to water sports for 100 years of unbroken tradition, first yachting, then rowing, and latterly kayaking and dragon boats. It was in 1911 that Wemmer Pan Sailing Club was originally established by miners from Old Village Deep and City Deep Gold Mines, back in the days when Johannesburg was little more than a dusty, brawling mining camp. The Club was given surface water rights by the 6 mining companies who owned the water-filled former brick quarry. Rowing started formally some years later in 1920, followed by the establishment of a rowing section, which continues to flourish as Wemmer Pan Rowing Club. The proud history of Wemmer Pan was recently recognised when it was listed as a national heritage site.

WPRC's incoming Management Committee, chaired by Rod MacKinnon, aims to ensure that 100 years on the water at Wemmer Pan is celebrated in fine style, by making the forthcoming Wemmer Sprint 2011 Regatta (15 & 16 October) one to remember, along with a number of other commemorative events, including a dinner dance.

Other members of the Committee include: Nicolette Hayes (Secretary), Graham Hubert (Treasurer), Charley Lewis (Vice Chair), Shaun d'Hotman (Captain), John Sokolsky and Graham Hutchins.





The Committee aims to ensure that rowing at WPRC experiences a resurgence, making the club vibrant and sustainable, with a well-equipped fleet of boats providing the basis for recreational and competitive rowing for all members. Says chairperson, Rod MacKinnon, "We are proud of the performance record of our Club through the years in open competition, its preparation of national rowers and Olympians, its support and nurturing of school clubs and junior rowers, as well as providing administrators at all levels of our sport. Over the years we have experienced

ups and downs as all clubs do and this 100th year on home water is a significant achievement for members made possible through all their many contributions. We are charting a new course and look forward to setting a solid base for the start of our second century here."

The Club will shortly be hosting the 53rd Wemmer Sprint Rowing Regatta. For the first time in several years the regatta will be held



over two days, on 15 and 16 October 2011, offering a full programme of sprint racing on a fully-buoyed course over 702 metres.. Rowers of all ages, girls and boys, women and men, from U14 to Masters, will be competing. Dragon boats and kayaks will also be in action, along with special races for parents' eights. The regatta is planned as a celebration of 100 years of water sports at Wemmer Pan

One of the traditional highlights of the regatta is the men's coxless four – and particularly the chance to break a record that has stood up too all comers since 1993. Wemmer Pan Rowing Club has offered a prize of R 10 000 - up for the taking by the crew that breaks this 18 year-old record - together with the honour of gracing the cover of the regatta programme until the record is broken again.

Wemmer Pan Rowing Club will also launch a series of Sunday Learn to Row Clinics, with the first of these scheduled for 9 am on Sunday 6 November. The Clinics are structured as a 4-week course aimed at the novice rower or those who would like to be introduced to this exciting and challenging sport.

Wemmer Pan may be a rough circle of sometimes choppy water, tucked away south of Johannesburg. But it is home to a proud rowing tradition and a club with a determination to build the sport into the future. Come down one morning, dip your blades into the Wemmer waters, and feel your boat drive forward under you.



Charley Lewis

Photographs by Doug Hayes and Charley Lewis

