

## **The Olympics Are Coming**

by Michael Paercy (784 words)

The Olympics are coming – run for the hills! This was the reaction of some residents of Dorney and Eton Wick near Windsor when it was announced that Dorney Lake would be the venue for the Olympic and Paralympic flat water sports in 2012 – that’s sporty jargon for rowing and canoeing.

With just twelve months to go before the Olympic juggernaut rolls into Berkshire, what has been happening at Dorney Lake and what is just around the corner in terms of last minute preparations.

Ivor Lloyd is the venue manager at the lake and MD of Dorney lake Services which runs the centre for Eton College.

“We had the World Championships here in 2006. The way I describe 2012 is that the Olympics is half the number of competitors but five times the trouble – hence the five Olympic rings,” said Ivor Lloyd.

True there will be less than 600 athletes at the rowing and canoeing events. But Dorney will be groaning under the footfall of up to 25,000 spectators every day for the twenty days of competition. That could total half a million people traipsing across the temporary bridge between Windsor and Dorney.

“It’s a massive logistical exercise,” explained Ivor Lloyd. “The catering for 30,000 visitors and athletes will have to be replenished overnight . There will be concession stands and merchandising outlets to be restocked. Rubbish will go for recycling and since we are not on main drainage all the effluent for 30,000 people will have to be taken off site every night.”

That’s an image that does not bear close examination.

So if you are one of the lucky people who have tickets for Dorney Lake in 2012 what will it be like to visit the venue? Competition will start at nine o’ clock each day and finish at lunch time. All visitors will arrive at Windsor Race Course

and cross a foot bridge over the Thames into the rowing centre. This footbridge will be eleven metres wide and will be demolished immediately after the event.

It seems that the tidiest way to reach Dorney will be by train. There will be buses provided to carry visitors to Dorney from Slough, Maidenhead and Windsor and Eton Riverside railway stations. It will also be possible to reach the venue by boat along the Thames from Windsor. Event ticket holders will travel free by train from London on competition days.

Car drivers will use park and ride facilities and complete their journeys by bus. The only private cars allowed into Dorney Lake will be blue badge holders and a select band of workers.

Pedestrians and cyclists with event tickets will be allowed in via the main entrance on the Dorney and Eton Wick side of the lake. There will only be seating for 16,000 people so if you are running a bit late it's a rug on the grass for you.

Although it appears to have the right credentials for an Olympic venue, Dorney was never guaranteed the job. Serious consideration was given to building a new flat water sports centre in East London. Dorney Lake needed some major work to meet the Olympic requirements. This work involved the construction of two new bridges. The largest was fifty metres long and weighed 280 tonnes. It was delivered using a massive crane.

"There was a lot said about legacy from the London Olympics," explained Ivor Lloyd. "This venue was always here – it's been enhanced but you can't really say those enhancements are adding much to the sport. Rowing clearly would have benefited from a new venue in East London."

The major temporary structures on the site will be the grandstands, the media centre and the seven kilometre security fence. LOCOG – the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games – will take over the running of Dorney Lake during the games and bring with them 1200 extra staff to supplement the twenty permanent staff at the lake

"We belong to LOCOG from June to September 2012," explained Ivor Lloyd. "Work on the temporary structures starts in February 2012 and the last

part will be removed in December. Work on the security fence and the temporary Thames bridge starts this Autumn.”

Rowing is one of Great Britain’s strongest hopes for Olympic medals in 2012. In Beijing Team GB topped the rowing medals table with two golds, two silvers and two bronzes. Our canoeists won three medals, one each of gold silver and bronze. In Beijing our paralympic athletes won an overall total of 42 gold medals, 29 silver and 31 bronze.

Dorney Lake Rowing Centre could see the union flag being raised to celebrate a crop of medals. Whatever happens, Dorney will be ready when the Olympics arrive.

(ENDS)