

Staying Alive

ROSPA
The Royal Society for the
Prevention of Accidents

ISSN 1354-2249

August 2011

Coasting safely along

Adventure

Coasteering safely



By David Walker

Coasteering is a popular and developing activity which involves traversing the intertidal zone, using a combination of scrambling, walking, swimming and jumping to complete the journey. In the summer of 2007, primarily as a result of a number of incidents and near misses, members of the National Water Safety Forum considered the management and development of coasteering, and, in parallel, approaches to managing “tombstoning” incidents.

In its early days, coasteering was a niche activity, run by a small number of well-managed outdoor centres. More recently, a growth in the sport’s popularity has brought new activity providers on to the scene.

In response to these incidents, a joint project was launched involving the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and the Royal Life Saving Society. Under the direction of the NWSF beach advisory group, an industry working group was established involving around 120 organisations and individuals

providing commercial coasteering services to the public.

Bringing the providers, regulators and rescue organisations together has been the key activity over the last few years. New and emerging sports often have local pockets of knowledge and excellent practice. Sharing this and embedding good practice was the objective, along with helping the industry to formalise the knowledge which was sometimes locked away.

One of the key early achievements was the development of this workable definition of coasteering: Coasteering involves traversing along a stretch of intertidal zone, often as part of an organised group activity. Participants travel across rocks and through water, using a variety of techniques including climbing, swimming and jumping into water. Coasteering guides and participants wear appropriate clothing and equipment while undertaking coasteering activities.

Agreeing industry standards and common practice was no mean feat. Many of the providers had to sacrifice some of their hard-earned commercial experience and compromise. The maxim of “not allowing excellence to be the enemy of good” proved true. Many providers had first rate standards and operations, which were beyond the capability of smaller companies.

The working group addressed this by developing a “safe as necessary” standard which was



Links and useful info

NWSF Coasteering skills and competence
<http://www.nationalwatersafety.org/coasteering3.pdf>

NWSF safety and risk management guidance
<http://www.nationalwatersafety.org/coasteering4.pdf>

AALA use of guidance:
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/aala/guidance/6>

National Coasteering Charter:
www.nationalcoasteeringcharter.org.uk

along



achievable by the industry. Two documents comprising the agreed practice and information were the key outputs from this group.

The guidance has proved influential and both documents have been adopted by the outdoor industry regulator.

One of the issues identified early in the project was the number of organisations involved in developing the sport, who were doing a good job in terms of promoting good practice, but had little resource to scale this nationally.

The original industry group has now progressed from being a NWSF working group into the National Coasteering Charter, which now includes the majority of providers and training bodies. This group will take forward the

sharing and embedding of good practice across the sport.

Not everything wanted from this project was achieved. Not all the training providers are currently involved, nor are some of the other wider industry groups. But the key providers are involved and they have a common vision of improving the safety and quality of the sector.

The wider impact of the project should not be underestimated. The process and the fact that an industry group overcame its difficulties to work together through what were contentious issues and achieve a good number of excellent outcomes have been noted both in the UK and internationally. The coasteering project was presented at the World Conference on Drowning Prevention in Vietnam.

The NCC will take over the governance of the key documents with RoSPA, RNLI, MCA and other members of the NWSF taking more of a watching brief. The NCC, if it grows as promised, looks to be the best forum for managing the issues associated with coasteering and as such it will have a formal reporting route through the NWSF and we hope through other groups.

In May 2011 the group appointed John Paul Eatock as chair of the NCC, with Keirron Tastagh as secretary.



What's in the guidance?

Coasteering risk management guide:

- Risk management approaches
 - Understanding the hazards involved
 - Selecting controls
 - Accepting risk
 - Competence (of group/ guide)
 - Technical considerations: route planning, weather etc
 - Emergency response and liaison with Coastguards
 - Risk assessment factors including: ratio and jump heights
- http://www.nationalwatersafety.org.uk/member/projects/info/wg1210_coasteering3.pdf

Coasteering guide competencies:

- Personal skills
 - Briefing
 - Rescue and Emergency response
 - Understanding environmental consideration
 - Planning
 - Leadership
 - Equipment selection
- http://www.nationalwatersafety.org.uk/member/projects/info/wg1210_coasteering3.pdf

For more information, see <http://www.rospace.com/leisuresafety/Info/PublicationsJournals/staying-alive-dont-jump.pdf>

ency framework:
http://www.nationalwatersafety.org.uk/member/projects/info/wg1210_

Guidance for Coasteering:
http://www.nationalwatersafety.org.uk/member/projects/info/wg1210_

<http://www.nationalwatersafety.org.uk/member/projects/info/wg1210-nwsf-coasteeringguidance.htm>

(site under development)