

Rowing an Ocean Boat in the Desert

by Mary Rose



Getting ready to try Dippers, the ocean rowing boat. Photo by Larry Arbanas.

June 7, 2014 marks the start of the race to show that Extinction is Optional™. Through the Pacific Rowing Race, Mary Rose will be rowing almost 3000 miles from California to Hawaii to raise funds to benefit avian conservation. A 90 day journey across the Pacific Ocean, powered only by oars. Don't let another species become another Carolina Parakeet or Passenger Pigeon. Let's do something now to help the birds. For more information visit www.chirpingcentral.com.

Up until February 2013 I had been training in sculling boats on Tempe Town Lake. This is nothing like the Pacific Ocean but this training helps me to work on technique and improve my distance capability. On February 4, however, I had the amazing opportunity to row an ocean rowing boat for the first time. Not just any ocean rowing boat – this boat had belonged to Sarah Outen and had already crossed the Indian Ocean! The boat is *Dippers*. It is crossing the Pacific from California to Hawaii in May as part of the 50@50 challenge launched by Romano Scaturro of FRAANK.org. Romano is based in Arizona and generously allowed me to row his boat until May. What were the odds of finding another ocean rower right here in Phoenix?

And so, on February 4, I stepped aboard an ocean boat for the very first time. I was both nervous and excited. Here was this boat right here in front of me, waiting for me to take my first oar strokes. It is similar to the boat I will row across the Pacific and which will become my home for approximately 90 days. I was in awe of this boat and a little stunned that it was right here in Arizona and that I was about to row it. Let the ocean boat training begin!

Rowing an ocean boat is very different from rowing a sculling boat. The feel is totally different; the ocean boat is much more stable, and notably heavier than a sculling boat. I can see now why the erg (rowing machine) training I am doing in the gym is very important for building up strength in my legs. These boats are heavy which means that I have to push harder with my legs to get the boat moving at a decent rate. The rowing style is also different in that things you can do in an ocean boat are much more forgiving when it comes to balance than in a sculling boat. In a sculling boat you try to keep the oars together for balance, but in the ocean boat that is not an issue – and for good reason. An ocean boat is designed to row in wavy conditions and it would be very difficult to keep your oars together when you are moving around so much. It was not hard to adapt. However, I



Mary Rose in training.
Photo by Larry Arbanas.

need to make a mental note of what I am rowing going forward because if I row a sculling boat like an ocean boat I will definitely be going for a swim in Tempe Town Lake!

For my first row in *Dippers*,

I had an expert coach with me to teach me some tricks and give me tips. Chris Martin from New Ocean Wave is a world record holder for his row from Japan to San Francisco and has also rowed the Atlantic. What better person to have as my coach on Day 1? Chris had all sorts of advice for me and also provided "wave simulation" while I tried to row. And what fun that was! Chris was in the cabin area of the boat moving around from side to side which of course caused the boat to rock. I tried to keep control of the oars as they moved about as they would in wavy conditions. It's quite an

experience trying to keep both oars in the water as the boat is moving about, while also trying to not hit yourself in the face with the ends of the oars as they bounce about. The good news was that I still managed to row at 2.6 knots while this was happening. Not a bad effort for the first time in the boat!

And so now I've had training in an ocean boat, Project FlightPlan is moving along nicely. I felt incredibly privileged to have Chris as my instructor for Day 1 and very thankful to Romano for allowing me to row *Dippers*. Check out video from February 4 on YouTube: search for Chirping Central. You can see all the video including some humorous short footage of me trying to work out how to "park" an ocean boat. Please share the video with your friends as this helps my campaign to raise awareness about the issues facing birds globally. That really is what this race is all about. 🐦



Mary Rose trains in *Dippers*, the ocean rowing boat. Photo by Larry Arbanas.