

BUFFALO REGATTA since 1879

The Buffalo Regatta began in 1879 and has been held every year since then except for an interruption during the war years. 2012 celebrated the 125th staging of the event. The Buffalo Regatta has been a major highlight on the South African rowing calendar due to the two magnificent trophies at stake – the Buffalo Grand Challenge (for Senior-A Coxless Fours) and the Silver Sculls (for Senior-A Single Sculls). These two Trophies are commonly regarded as the most valuable trophies in Southern Africa for any sport as they are priceless (although insured at over a million rand) and because they are made from pure silver.

The Buffalo Regatta is a National event and has seen participation of international crews from time to time. One of the features of the Regatta, which serves to underline its unique positioning within South Africa, is the fact that it is the only national regatta where participants from all the senior and junior clubs compete side by side. This creates a wonderful atmosphere, inspired performances, and memorable learning experiences for the up and coming juniors.

An extra bonus for junior crews is the Selborne Sprint regatta, raced over 500m that is sandwiched between the Buffalo heats and finals. This event was pioneered by the late Trevor Shelver specifically for schools rowing. It generates enormous excitement in fiercely competitive events where spectators can enjoy schools rowing at its best. 2009 marked the 50th occasion of the Selborne Sprint Regatta.

The 1990's saw the Buffalo regatta swell to the largest it's ever been, providing services and facilities on both sides of the river. The Regattas of 1997 and 1998 saw nearly 1000 competitors taking part in over 200 events over three days. Since then the number of events has been increased, particularly in girls and women's rowing, although a limitation has been applied to the number of entries than can be accepted. In recent years various infrastructure changes have also dictated that the regatta be scaled down and now operates entirely off the West bank of the river.

In past years the characteristics of the Buffalo River have dictated that the rowing course was limited to four lanes. During the floods of 2003 the creek at the 700m mark spilt so much debris into the river that extensive restoration had to be undertaken. An enormous project was completed by the local rowing community to clear the creek and widen the river at that point. Now that the debris, mainly in the form of rocks and stones, has been removed the regatta enjoys a six lane course.

Various initiatives are currently underway to continuously improve the event and attract top level competition. With continued support from local authorities the future of the Buffalo and Selborne Regattas looks bright.

