

GIRLS WHO SAIL CANOES AMONG THE WHITECAPS

CALIFORNIA girls have been noted for their great love of out-door sports. There has been the golf girl, the yachting girl, the rowing girl and the girl that loves to hunt. Now comes a new ideal. It is the girl who likes to tempt fate by working out at the end of a hiking board sailing a canoe. Up to the present time this sport has been monopolized by the sterner sex, but the fair maids of Alameda are challenging the men in their daring sailing off the clubhouse of the Encinal Yacht Club on the bay shore of Alameda.

There have been girls who have sailed canoes before, but it is a question if ever in the history of the sport the sailing has been done over waters as rough as those in the Encinal course. In fact, the average canoeist fails to appreciate the pleasures that the Encinals seem to enjoy in sailing on that side of the bay.

It demands a quick eye, a sailor's hand and an abundance of nerve. It is not the millpond sailing of the East, which is the home of canoeing, but a sport that for its hazard outshines the manipulating of the yacht. Some of the best racing skippers and crews on the bay at the present time graduated from this kindergarten, so when the position of these premier handlers of sheet and tiller is challenged by a young girl her pluck is beyond question.

Any Saturday afternoon or Sunday morning these delightful navigators can be seen handling their light craft. They beat out to windward until the sail is a mere white speck on the horizon, when sheets are slacked and the canoe headed home with the bat-winged sails, wing and wing, coming down the course like a white dove for its loft. This is repeated for an hour or so, when back they come to the clubhouse for a rest.

It is interesting to observe how these girls become proficient in the art of handling a canoe. They are first taken out as passengers by some friendly canoeist. The girl merely sits down in the bottom of the canoe, braced up with cushions and well wrapped to keep off the spray, being merely ballast.

After they have been out long enough to have confidence in the skipper and the canoe they are then allowed to sit on the side of the cockpit. On all these occasions the sail plan is limited. The use of the hiking board, even for the skipper, is limited. After they have shown that they have learned the art of balancing a little more sail plan is added until the canoe is taken out under full racing canvas.

This is the time the fun begins, for both skipper and crew lean as far out to windward as possible, using their weight as a balance to keep the canoe from capsizing. The slightest reduction in the force of the wind is met by a display of agility that is interesting to observe. The slightest mistake means a bath in the waters of the bay. But so proficient have they become that a capsizing is yet to be recorded.

Then comes the first lesson in sailing. There is a return to the small sail area and her ladyship is given the tiller. In the same way she progresses in the art until she reaches proficiency and is allowed to handle the canoe under racing canvas. The next step is a trying one, but so far no accidents have occurred. She is given full command and sails out on the bay alone, but with a reduced sail area. The canoeists follow in other boats with bigger spreads so as to be near by in case of a capsizing. Finally comes the day when she sails alone without even a trailer.

So skilled have the girls of Alameda become in the art of handling a canoe that the officers of the club are thinking seriously of giving races for them alone.

Many who have observed these girls sailing day after day have thought that it has been tempting fate for them to handle the canoes, but there is a factor in the construction of these boats that makes them perfectly safe. Forward and aft of the cockpit are airtight compartments, which act as buoys in keeping the craft afloat when the cockpit is filled, so at the most it would mean nothing more than a dunking. But few realize the benefit derived from this sport—it quickens the eye, and mind and gives a play to the muscles that very few other sports can offer.

Above all, the greatest benefit to be derived arises from the fact that it keeps the young people out in the salt air. It may produce a little sunburn and tan the complexion, but the healthfulness of the sport cannot be duplicated.

It is a game that calls forth all the self-reliant traits of the sailor. For a time the young woman has a single-headed tussle with wind and wave, a struggle with the elements that sends her back to the clubhouse, flushed with the sport, her hair flying in the wind, her cheeks red and every muscle aglow for the salt plunge from the wharf that brings the day's sport to a close.

