

CANOEING: 800 TO TAKE IN ANNUAL LIFFEY DESCENT MARATHON



World bronze medallist Antonin Hales has been added to the field for the annual Liffey Descent as the event gains world recognition

Descent hits heights

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IN ITS first year since its inclusion in the World River Marathon Series, the Liffey Descent is back on Sunday September 29, with over 800 canoeists ready to attack the white water rapids of the renowned river Liffey route.

The usual crew making up the Irish contingent will be ready to fly the flag – Thomastown Paddlers of Kilkenny, Wild Water Kayak Club of Chapelizod, Salmon Leap Canoe Club of Leixlip and Celbridge Paddlers – but this year they will be joined by the Czech National team who have been attracted to the event after it received its world marathon recognition

The Czechs, who are due to compete in the

C1 class, will be afforded the opportunity of gaining ranking points if they are successful around the course, as will those taking part in the K1 class, something that Irish competitor Keith McGuirk believes can only bring more international interest to the tournament.

“It’s huge to have the Czech team coming over,” said the C1 athlete. “I think a lot of other teams might take an interest in the marathon because of its new classification.

“If the Czech team have a good experience, they’ll be spreading the word about the event and hopefully that will lead to more and more international teams coming over in the future.

“The fact that Antonin Hales is competing is very big as far as the marathon is concerned. He’s a huge name in world

white water rafting and he was part of the team that won bronze at the world championships,” said McGuirk.

The Liffey Descent is one of the biggest events of its kind in the world and is not for the faint-hearted. The 28km course combines long flat water sections, swift currents, 10 weirs and numerous rapids, a heavily wooded section and a long portage around Leixlip dam.

Competitors need to be of level three kayak standard and the reasons for such a big turnout, from the casual athletes to the championship level, is the fact that the ESB guarantee the white water element of the event.

The ESB will release 30 tonnes of water from the Poulaphouca Reservoir to coincide with the race.

This brings the river up to flood level and transforms small rapids and gentle weirs into foaming white water, which gives the marathon its unique drawing point, making it one of the most unique and challenging courses of its kind, according to McGuirk.

“The fact that the race is guaranteed white water because of the role of the ESB it makes it a very interesting course for a lot of reasons.

“It’s a long course at 18 miles, and the fact that the competitors are working

against white water while still trying to conserve energy to endure the length of the marathon makes it a fantastic challenge and a great test at all levels of competition,” said McGuirk.

The event began in 1959 as an international event for the national scene, but has gone on to grow every year. McGuirk believes that Olympic competitors like Eberhard Rheinisch and Hans Craig have injected a new level of interest in the event and that the event is the back of their show at the Olympic Games.

