

GIBSONS PADDLE CLUB

LANGLEY CANOE REFERENCE MANUAL

When you are on the water in a big canoe you are a part of a **small floating community**. As in any “community” there are traditions, rules, and expectations that all community members need to understand and agree on in order to be together in a good way, and in a safe way. The following represents some of the customs, traditions, rules, expectations and requirements for everyone to have “fun” in a big canoe but still be safe and free from annoyance or worry.

1. Pay Attention to your crew leaders

The small floating “community” in a big canoe needs leadership - both for fun and for adventure - and to keep everybody safe. The leaders in a big canoe are:

a) The Skipper

He or she is the ultimate authority in the canoe. The Skipper has been trained and recognized as an individual capable of operating a “big” canoe. (Skippers are often experts in small canoe operation as well.) It is the role and responsibility of the Skipper to:

- Keep the canoe and everyone in it:
 - safe
 - right side up on the water
 - on track
 - away from possible hazards
- Make the day on the water as enjoyable as possible
- Talk to the canoe occupants prior to leaving the shore
- Share information with the canoe occupants about the plan for the day
- Share information about the canoe, it’s history, etc. and the water and the area you are traveling through
- Coordinate the loading of the canoe for the purpose of balance, efficiency and safety
- **The Skipper is the FINAL AUTHORITY on the canoe.**

b) The Bowperson

He or she sets the “pace” for paddling and is second in authority in the canoe. The Bowperson has been trained and recognized as an individual capable of operating the lead end (the “bow”) of a “big” canoe. If there are two people at the bow, one should always be delegated as the “lead” bow person, and that person should be known to the crew as such. It is the role and responsibility of the Bowperson to assist the Skipper by:

- Communicating with the Skipper from bow to stern is of utmost importance
- Setting the paddling pace - with some guidance from the Skipper

- Keeping the canoe and everyone in it:
 - safe
 - right side up on the water
 - on track
 - far away from possible hazards
- Warning the Skipper of approaching hazards such as submerged rocks or logs, or strange and visible currents or water movement
- Working with the Skipper in taking fast, but safe, evasive action when necessary
- Making the day on the water as enjoyable as possible
- Sharing information about the canoe, it's history, etc. and the water and the area you are traveling through
- Assisting in the loading and unloading of the canoe

c) **The Safety Officer**

In every big canoe event there is someone designated as the "Safety Officer". If you are out with only one canoe then the Safety Officer is generally the Skipper unless he or she specifies and delegates otherwise. With more than one canoe the "Safety Officer" will be designated by agreement amongst the Skippers. The Safety Officer has full authority on matters related to route, weather and general overall safety of the occupants of all of the canoes and will assume full organizational and operational responsibility for:

- safe route selection
- planning and directing special paddling operations such as "ferrying" to cross moving water or to move past difficult water
- insuring that First Aid kits, bailers, throw bags, patch kits and tie ropes ("painters") are in each canoe
- overseeing the appropriate and constant use of "PFD"s (Personal Flotation Devices) (sometimes referred to as "life vests", or "life jackets"), must should be worn by all occupants of the canoe at all times.
- arranging for the presence of certified health professionals on all large multiple-canoe events

NOTE: IN MATTERS OF SAFETY THE DIRECTION OF THE SAFETY OFFICER IS FINAL. THE SKIPPER IS AT THE DIRECTION OF THE SAFETY OFFICER AT ALL TIMES.

d) **The Chief of Protocol**

The Chief of Protocol is the person on the journey who is dedicated to provide guidance and leadership on matters related to the most appropriate or proper protocol and traditions that are expected when entering into the territory or into the community of a First Nations community. He or she will often be an Aboriginal Elder or individual who has the wisdom and the knowledge to advise the big canoe group and their leadership on these very important matters.

SOME BIG CANOE BASICS

For Entering, Occupying and Leaving a Canoe

In order to keep our canoe in the best possible shape so it can provide education and fun for the canoe “community”, and to keep all occupants of the canoe safe, and for everyone to have an enjoyable day on the water, it is important that **all occupants of the canoe** honor the following “respecting our canoe” protocols.

1. Honor the two primary rules of life on the water in a “big” canoe.

Rule # 1:

The **Skipper** of the canoe is like the Captain of a ship. He or she is fully in charge of the direction of the canoe and has taken on the *responsibility* for the safety of the canoe and its occupants as well as their enjoyment of the experience. Please honor and respect that responsibility.

Rule # 2”

The **Bowperson** of the canoe is second to the Skipper in authority and *responsibility*. At the request of the Skipper he or she can assume full responsibility for the direction of the canoe, the safety of the canoe and the enjoyment of its occupants.

2. “Please don’t step on me.....especially when I’m hung up”

Remember, however strong the canoe appears, it is still fragile and subject to scratches and cracks if not treated with proper respect. The canoe is particularly vulnerable to damage if you climb in it when one end is on the shore or on the dock and a part of it is suspended above the water. Wait until the canoe is in the water before you step into it.

3. The Skipper will “tell you where to go...”

It is the responsibility of the Skipper to decide the appropriate place for each paddler that is going to be in the canoe each time the canoe leaves the shore. This selection process is for reasons of balance - side to side and front to back, and sometimes for distributing “pulling” power. If you have a friend you prefer to sit beside talk to the Skipper before the loading process begins, and it may be possible for your wishes to be taken into account.

4. I mean it. “Please don’t step on me.....”

Do not step or stand in the canoe when it is on land. Rocks or rough surface under the canoe will scratch the finish, and sometimes even damage the canoe.

5. And, please don’t “crash me into the rocks.....”

Make every effort to land on soft ground and keep away from rocks, gravel, landings whenever practical or possible. Help the Skipper when he or she asks you to “back paddle” or “brake” when landing the canoe.

6. Take the “middle of the road....”

When entering and leaving, walk down the middle of the canoe, keeping your body as **low** as is comfortably possible and using gunwales (side rails) and thwarts (cross pieces) for balance. Do not step on seats if at all possible. It is unlikely that anybody wants your muddy footprint transferred onto their butt, and the canoe becomes much less stable when you are standing on a seat.

7. Please keep your “stuff” neat.

When exiting, leave your PFD on your seat, as close to the outside (“gunwale” pronounced ‘gunnel’) of the canoe as possible. Similarly, stow your paddle as tight up against the side (gunwales) of the canoe as possible. **DO NOT** exit the canoe when you are at shore, a dock or into another vessel, except at the direction of the skipper.

8. Sit ‘tight”

When paddling, sit as tight against the gunwale (outside rail) as possible. Your butt should touch the side of the canoe. Then paddle as close to the canoe as is comfortable for you. This will make you a more efficient paddler and will reduce the strain on the muscles on the outside of your arm and shoulder.

9. “Stay Close”

When traveling on the water, stay in a pack - close enough to feel a part of the group but not so close that other “Skippers” feel crowded. No “lagers” or “bounders”, please. It is about having a good time with the rest of the crews, and it is about safety. Ideally, all canoes should be within reasonable shouting distance of one another.

NOTE: This is a matter for the Skipper. A tactic used to keep the fleet “tight” when the fleet is large is to use radio communication between the lead canoe and the “sweep” canoe. The sweep canoe skipper is in charge of the fleet. That skipper can hold the lead canoe at any time. No canoe is to pass the lead canoe, and no canoe is to go behind the sweep canoe. By using this tactic as a fleet you ensure that the pack stays tight and in the same waters being traveled.

10. No Racing!!

While traveling in a fleet, spontaneous races will happen between individual canoes from time to time. They happen **ONLY** at the direction of the skippers of those canoes involved, and must always be done first and foremost with **SAFETY** in mind. If you feel a need from time to time to race for the fun of it, then do so at appropriately defined times with the support of the group leadership. Otherwise, please manage your high energy, zest for fun, and competition, and put your energy and enthusiasm into pulling the paddle. Stay with the group for fun, inclusiveness and safety. Racing is fun for some of us, and opportunities for racing can be organized at the end of the day's journey for those so inclined.

11. Protect your paddle

When doing traditional acknowledgements or greetings with “paddles up”, do not thump your paddle on the floor of the canoe. Sand gets driven into the handles. It damages the finish. Even more importantly, the gritty surface will cause blisters.

It is best not to thump the handles on any surface of the canoe that is made of wood as it will damage the finish on the wood. In such cases it is best to thump the paddle on the seat beside you. Do it. It's part of the fun and part of the tradition. Just be wise and respectful of the canoe and your paddle when doing so.

12. “Pull together”

The big canoes work best, and travel more efficiently when all paddlers pull in time with one another. **Keep your head up** and move your **paddle in time** with the Bowperson. It is his or her job to “set the pace”. If you get out of time you also have the risk of your paddle clashing with the person ahead of or behind you. And not paddling in time with the others just doesn't look “kewl”. The Skipper is the person best positioned in the canoe to see and observe the paddling timing. As such the Skipper has the responsibility to advise the crew when they are out of time. That is the job of the Skipper – **DON'T RESENT IT!** You will travel further and easier when you learn your timing.

13. Keep “heads up!!”

In order to “pull together” it is critical to “keep your head up” so that you are able to paddle in time with the Bowperson. This keeps the canoe moving smoothly and efficiently. And it “looks good”. And the view of the water and the scenery passing by is better than whatever is on the floor of the canoe.

When the Skipper sees one or more people that seem to be not paying attention and not paddling in time with the rest of the team he or she will call out “Timing!”, “Heads Up” or “paddle in time, please” as a reminder to do so, and to keep time with those paddlers in front of you.

If you find the Skipper doing that a lot, please do not take it personally. He or she is just trying to keep the canoe moving smooth, straight and safe. And most Skippers would rather be enjoying the smooth flow of the canoe, the wonderful scenery, and the peace and quiet, than calling out something as silly and repetitive as “Heads Up!!!” It can be rather boring actually.

Similarly, you have a job to do in terms of safety. When your head is up, you too are aware of the surroundings. If you see something that is of SAFETY concern, you are to immediately advise either the bow person or the Skipper.

14. Don't stop unless you “have Too!!”

When the canoe is underway and you are in difficult circumstances such as pulling into the wind, or into a current, or making a difficult turn, unless you are in pain or distress do **not** stop paddling. Pull your best. These events are usually not very long and your Skipper will not risk your comfort and your safety by asking for a long and brutal pull. When everybody paddles, the canoe has good momentum and is much more stable and safe for its occupants and it gets through the hard pull sooner. The Skipper will call a rest stop as soon as the canoe is out of the “pull hard” part.

15. Resting is okay, but...

If you must stop paddling and have a rest or drink etc. pull your paddle completely into the canoe so it does not interfere with the work of the paddler behind you. And try not to conk the head of your seatmate when you are doing so.

Remember, you are a community “pulling together”. When you stop the rest of the community is pulling you. Your job in a canoe is to help move that craft forward. No person, unless designated by the Skipper, is along for the ride.

16. No splashing pleeeeeaaaaaaase!!

However you might be tempted, and however you might think that occasional splashing is only in good fun, please do not do it. It is important to respect the rights of others to be comfortable in the canoe. A splashing match is not necessarily fun for all the people in your canoe - or the other canoe. Guys, it's been done. It is no longer original or funny. If you want a splashing match, arrange for such a contest on the water after you have landed and those who want to be in the canoe are all fun lovers and have volunteered for the experience. Splash enough to sink the canoe if you want, as long as all of you are volunteers, and maybe have some kind of water thing.

NOTE: Soaking wet paddlers have become hypothermic even on hot summer days. Having fun in the canoe is important, but so is being safe. Follow the direction of your skipper in such matters as “water wars” on the journey.

17. Changing sides

If you want to, and “need to”, change sides, wait until the canoe is at a rest stop and then do so only with the okay and guidance of the Skipper. The Skipper will coordinate the changing process and will instruct both paddlers on the appropriate and safest way and time to do so. Changes are best done when all the canoes are “rafted up” together for a rest break.

NOTE: Changes can be done while on the move, but only by experienced canoeists, AND UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE SKIPPER. Each canoe will develop its own policy and practice in this regard.

18. And there will be a chance to rest

From time to time the group leaders will call a rest break and all the canoes will raft up. This is a time for a chat with your friends and neighbors, a snack break, or just a plain rest from the pull. The group leaders may also choose this time for cultural lessons, songs, prayers or ceremonies, announcements, safety talk, and sharing route and landing plans, etc. And it is the safest time for seat changes under the guidance of the Skipper.

Many skippers use “seat breaks” while the canoe is moving. That is done by allowing each seat to take an individual rest break while the canoe is moving. The seat breaks will usually start with the bow seats and move back, each seat taking a break as the seat in front puts their paddles back in the water. Each seat takes a break for as long as they need and want to replenish their strength and energy.

NOTE: WHEN RAFTING UP – WATCH YOUR FINGERS, HANDS AND ARMS!

19. Pick up after yourself

At the end of the day the Skipper or the Bowperson - or both - will remind you to pick up your PFD and your paddle and put them in the canoe, van, etc. for storage or transport home. Please do so. It makes the whole day more enjoyable for all. And we want to keep these expensive items for future canoe events.

20. Please take all of your “trash” with you

The canoe is a floating mini-environment. The only thing left in the canoe after you have finished your journey should be your butt print on the seat and your handprints on the gunwales. On arrival at the end of the trip take your wrappers, bottles, etc. to the nearest trash facility.

NOTE: When you touch shore after a day’s journey, THE CANOE IS YOUR FIRST PRIORITY. The canoe is properly put to rest before the entire crew is dismissed by the Skipper.

21. Nobody make a sudden move.....

Do not for any reason make a sudden move - away from the side of the canoe to avoid getting splashed for example. Such a move could make the canoe unstable, or could frighten others into doing something similar. The outcome could be a “not very happy” one and could make you wish for the time when you were “just a little bit wet”.

22. “Don’t rock the boat....”

Making the boat rock is an easy do. It is not “cute”. As with ‘splashing’ above, it’s been done before. It can be hazardous. It will make some of the occupants of the canoe uncomfortable and possibly annoy the Skipper. He or she may not react at all. However you may also get a reaction from the Skipper similar to the one you get when you poke a mean dog with a stick. So why take a chance.

23. Emergencies

If you are having a health issue, or are just “not feeling well” tell your Skipper immediately and it will be addressed. And if you are having an “elimination emergency” and can’t wait until the canoe is expected to go to shore, share your distress with the Skipper or the Bowperson. If circumstances permit, perhaps arrangements can be made to either toss you overboard or take you to shore. Whatever it is, don’t be uncomfortable if something can be done to help. We all “gotta go” urgently at some time or another.

24. No alcohol or drugs

The presence and use of alcohol or drugs by any and all participants of canoe events will not be tolerated. Even if you arrive at a canoe event with evidence of previously ingested alcohol or drugs in your system you may be refused an opportunity to participate at the discretion of the Skipper, the Bowperson, the Safety Officer or the Chief of Protocol. Any one or all four. Such substance use and abuse is not only disrespectful of the canoe and its occupants, but can also present a safety hazard to all of the participants in the event.

25. Respect all cultural protocols

Aboriginal canoe events honor and respect a number of “culturally appropriate” behaviors (“protocols”) when landing, visiting, or departing from First Nations communities and territories. Appropriate behavior in communication and sharing circles, on landing, in the community, or in the community hall, big house or long house, and as well as on departing are important in honoring the Nation whose territory you are visiting and passing through. This information is provided in a document specific to “Aboriginal Canoe Event Protocols” and is available to all participants. Look to the “Chief of Protocol” for leadership and guidelines at such times.

26. Help when asked

It is the role of the Skipper to give clear and audible **paddling instructions** to all the occupants of the canoe. The following are the basic instructions that you can expect to hear from your Skipper.

a) PADDLING

Paddling is simply a way of reaching forward, taking a grip on the water with your paddle, and pulling the canoe forward as best you can. In a large canoe, with someone else responsible for the steering is it just that simple. If the Skipper needs you to do anything else other than paddle forward and pull your best he or she will let you know. The language that the Skipper will use is listed below.

1. “Paddles ready” (to prepare all of the paddlers for the “let’s go” signal)

Hold your paddle up and ready - poised over the water, and wait for the next signal.

2. “Okay, let’s go”, “Take her away”(to get all of the paddlers started in unison)

Begin to pull the canoe (paddle) forward in time with the paddler in front of you. The pace will be set by the Bowperson.

3. “Move this canoe”, “FULL POWER!” (to move the canoe quickly through challenging water)

Pull the paddle in a normal paddling stroke **as hard as you are able** still keeping time with the Bowperson

b) CLOSE-UP PADDLING

Sometimes when the Skipper is guiding the canoe into a landing, or a dock, or simply trying to “raft up” with the other canoes for a rest stop he or she will ask one side or the other, or even individual paddlers, to perform one of the following paddling functions:

1. “Hold up”, “Hold the canoe!” (to stop pulling the canoe forward)

Reverse stroke, again in time with the bow puller, until the canoe has stopped and the skipper has called you off the “hold”.

2. “Let it ride” (to let the canoe go under the guidance of the Skipper)

Let your paddle float lightly in the water. Hold on to it with both hands in case the Skipper calls on you to “brace” the canoe.

3. **“Brace the canoe”** (to brace the canoe against rocking)

Hold your paddle with the blade firmly in the water and push lightly down with the blade of the paddle to brace the canoe against rocking or tipping

4. **“Stop the canoe”** (to help stop the forward motion of the canoe)

Drag your paddle blade deep in the water to act as a “brake” for the canoe. Push rather than pull on the paddle.

5. **“Back paddle”** (to help move the canoe backwards)

Paddle backwards keeping in time with the Bowperson and/or the person sitting in front of you

6. **“Pry”** (to move the canoe sideways)

Put the blade parallel to the canoe and close to its side so you can “pry” against the canoe and move canoe sideways using your paddle

7. **“Draw”** (to pull the canoe sideways)

Reach out sideways with your paddle and pull the paddle straight in towards the side of the canoe

8. **“Right side (or left side) back”** (to help in a turn while launching or landing)

Whichever side the Skipper calls on paddles **backward** – the other side paddles forward as usual.

The canoe can almost make a 180 degree turn within its own length using this technique.

9. **“Thank you”** (The Skipper will also tell you when your help has been enough)

When the Skipper gives the “Thank You” signal, immediately lift your paddle out of the water and bring it inside the canoe.

10. **“Watch your paddles!” “Watch your fingers!”** (to protect either one - or both)

When the canoes are pulling together for a “raft up”, or the canoe is making a landing, pay attention to where your paddle is. Don’t get it caught between the canoes, and even more importantly, do not let your fingers be pinched between the canoes as they come together. You are going to need those fingers later.

RECOMMENDED GEAR FOR DAY TRIPS

Dressing appropriately for canoe travel requires planning and flexibility. You want to protect yourself from cold air and from splashing on colder days, and from the rain. You also want to protect yourself from too much sun exposure. And you do not want to be out on the water suffering from overheating because you are too well dressed. So dressing in layers is your best guarantee to have some control over how warm or cold you feel at any time during the day.

- () paddle - and PFD - of course
- () both short sleeve and long sleeve top (for weather changes)
- () wind and rain resistant jacket
- () head cover - protection from the rain - and the sun
- () spare socks - two pair
- () easy access and easy dry footwear
- () a complete set of dry clothes for “wet” emergencies, i.e. rain, stepping into deep water, etc. These should be stored in a “water tight” bag.
- () sun block
- () insect repellent
- () personal “snacks”
- () personal supplies
- () medication that you need for the day. And please let your Safety Officer or Skipper know - in confidence - if you have any medical risk concerns, such as diabetes, epilepsy, asthma, allergies, etc. He or she may also ask for your home and your doctors phone numbers, etc.

Note:

1. Blue jeans:

They are great pants and are comfortable for most uses. However you must know that they do hold a lot of water and are slow to dry when you wear them in wet conditions. If they are a stiff fabric they can even be abrasive and even more uncomfortable when they are wet. A light, soft and water resistant fabric is best for paddling pants.

2. “Dry Bags”

There are special water-tight bags (“Dry Bags”) available at outdoor stores. They come in many sizes and can be sealed against moisture intrusion. The most economical place is probably **Three Vets Outdoor Store** at Yukon and 6th Avenue in Vancouver – just behind the Best Buy and Canadian Tire stores on Cambie at the south end of the bridge. You can also make a reasonable replacement by using strong plastic garbage bags and putting them in a protective canvas pack sack or duffel bag. Double them up for even more protection

3. Cell Phones (IDEALLY, ALL CELL PHONES ARE BANNED FROM A JOURNEY – ONLY SPECIFIC PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE CELL PHONES AND THOSE PEOPLE SHOULD BE DESIGNATED BY THE ORGANIZERS. ALL OTHER CELL PHONES ARE NOT WELCOME ON THE JOURNEY)

If you carry your cell phone with you, you wrap it in a watertight plastic bag - a kitchen type “baggie” will do. It is best to use two of them. As a matter of consideration and protocol your Skipper will probably instruct everyone, in the interest of enjoying the water and the wilderness, to turn their phones off for the duration of the trip. And most trips are in areas that do not have any service anyway. In fact, it may be the rule of the trip, announced very clearly at the beginning, that cell phones are not to be used at anytime. Sometimes they distract too much from the whole intention of the trip. If that rule of trip etiquette is announced, respect it.

4. Personal Safety Related Information

Prior to the trip your trip coordinator or your Skipper may ask you to fill in a personal safety information form. Please cooperate in this process as it is simply about the safety and well-being of all the occupants of your canoe. This information will be kept confidential by the agency sponsoring the club.

PADDLES

Why different styles of paddles?

On paddling trips you will see many types of paddles. The West Coast paddle typically has a pointed blade and is often appropriately ‘decorated’. These paddles are modeled on those used since the beginning of the history of the ocean-going west coast canoes.

The other type of paddle, which generally has a rounded tip, is modeled on the paddles used by the woodlands, northern and plains tribes from east of the Rockies. You may also see variations on this type of paddle that has a square ended blade rounded a bit at the corners. These paddles are simply variations of the original round tipped paddles used by the tribes of the plains and the east and copied and used for at least two hundred years by the voyageurs who paddled for the Northwest Company, the Hudson’s Bay Company, or for numerous trading and exploring entrepreneurs operating out of the east of Canada and the U.S.

You may also see paddles with bent shafts, made of carbon fiber or exotic woods. Over the years paddling has become sophisticated and diversified and as such many innovations have taken place in paddle technology. No paddle is necessarily “better” than another. On these journeys the paddle that is comfortable for you is the “best”.

“Protecting” your paddle

There are two competing opinions on the proper handling of a paddle when it is in your hand, for example, when you are standing in a circle at the beginning or end of a trip. The first opinion is that the handle end should be the end that touches the ground, for if you put the tip on the ground you could damage the finish and the wood will be exposed to the water thereby suffering even more damage. The second view is that you should not put the paddle end of the paddle on the ground as the handle can be damaged and cause blisters on your hands.

The studied opinion on this matter is that it should not matter which end you put up or down, because, whichever end is on the ground - and especially if you are leaning on your paddle - will be damaged. Therefore, all “with it” paddlers rest the paddle on the toe of their shoe - and not ever on the ground. Whichever end is up or down then is simply your choice. Follow the group’s protocol or your nation’s way, if there is one - or follow your own judgment. But whatever you do, protect your paddle. It is your best friend and the tool that is going to help you have a great trip - and get you home.

We have been taught by more than one native teacher that the proper CULTURAL way to hold your paddle is with the tip up. The paddle is your friend and as such it is always held with its head up showing its design.

Before each trip – thank your canoe and hug your paddle. And after that, shake the water from your paddle, hug it again, and put it in a safe dry place. We are taught by the native people that the canoe and paddle have a spirit, they are our friends and they are essential to our safety on the water. Without the canoe and the paddle we go nowhere. With them, the waters of the world are as close as our dreams and visions. Together, we can experience the waters of Canada and the culture of our First Nations people with our canoes and our paddles, simply by PULLING TOGETHER!