



**WinnipegCanoeRentals.com**



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## **Safety Precautions**

Whether you are embarking on your first canoe outing or are an experienced canoeist, please read through the following safety tips on how to handle a canoe. Amid the excitement and pleasure of getting out for a paddle it can be easy to forget that a canoe can be the cause of serious injury or death in and out of the water. Taking the time to consider these precautions and share your knowledge with others has the potential to save lives.

### **#1 While transporting**

Strong forces are created when transporting an 18 foot canoe at 100 km/h. Next time you're on the highway, stick your arm out the window and then imagine it is 18 feet long - you'll get a sense of what we are talking about. Here are some tips to prevent the canoe from separating from your car.

#### **a.)Tying down the canoe**

- Always tie the ends of the canoe tightly to all four corners of the car. The support you require comes from diagonal ropes - straight down ropes don't offer even a slight amount of side support in a crosswind.
- It is essential that you have a center strap that passes completely inside the vehicle and out over the canoe.
- Never tie to the roof racks they put on minivans and some other cars. These racks are often more ornamental than functional and are not designed to hold down a canoe travelling at 100km/h into a 30km headwind.

#### **b.) Straps**

- Take care where you position ropes or nylon straps. Exhaust pipes and mufflers can get hot enough to melt them.
- Stop frequently to tighten or readjust straps - always check after an abrupt stop that may have shifted the canoe
- Secure the extra loose ends of the straps so they don't get beat to tatters at high speeds.

### **#2 At the launch site**

#### **a.) Removing the canoe off of a vehicle or trailer**

- Never untie a canoe in gusty conditions and In moderate winds be sure your car is headed directly into or away from the wind before removing the straps off of the canoe
- Have one person securely hold onto the center of the canoe while the other person removes all the straps.
- Canoes don't want to be upside down. They have a nasty habit of rotating around to right side up when you are not prepared. To prevent this from happening **never hold an upside down canoe anywhere near the ends.** Instead have a person at the front and rear hold the gunnels more toward the centre of the canoe with hands spread well apart. Step away from a vehicle before rotating in a controlled manner. This will avoid broken wrists, dented cars and cracked canoes at the start of a canoeing trip.
- Carry the canoe to a soft location before you set it down. Do not set a composite canoe down on a parking lot.
- **DO NOT DRAG A CANOE!** Dragging it causes friction which will wear holes in the canoe. Make sure all passengers are aware of this. Although it may seem unnecessary to mention this rule, we have canoes ruined each year by people too careless to abide by it. When you are ready to take the canoe down to the water, carry it empty with a person holding it at both ends, not just one end.

#### b.) Setting in

- Place a canoe in the water parallel to the shore so that it is free floating. **A free floating canoe is a happy canoe.** Have a person on duty to keep it from banging against the shore.
- Load the canoe only when it is floating. Don't throw in a load of loose items – bundle things into two or three packs instead, then run a cord through all your packs and tie it on to the canoe, securing the extra length for safety. A loose rope in a canoe is a hazard. As you fill it with goods and passengers check to be certain that it keeps floating freely as the load increases. Push the canoe into deeper water if needed - a wet foot is not a sign of failure - it's a sign you care about the craft that carries you safely home.

#### c.) Getting into the canoe

- **Put on your life jacket** before climbing into a canoe. Canoe with a buddy.
- Passenger loading order: **Front first when getting in, rear first when getting out. The front person may be alone** in the canoe because their seat is closer to the center and the width of the seat adds stability. **The rear paddler should never be in the canoe alone** because the rear seat is at a very narrow part of the canoe and does not offer much stability until

the front is lowered into the water by the weight of a person or a suitable load of gear.

- When getting into a canoe step right into the center and reach for the gunnels just in front of you. Keep your center of gravity low as you enter and center your weight within the canoe.
- Avoid getting into and out of canoes from docks that are higher than the gunnels of the canoe.
- Push off using the blade of the paddle instead of scaring up the handle where you'll be holding it.

## #4 On the water

### a.) The nature of Rivers and Lakes

- *If canoeing on a moving body of water **read the river ahead of you** - Canoes do not steer like wheeled vehicles. You paddle to move your craft but your craft is also being moved by the path of the river so that you don't end up going where you were expecting. Always look ahead and factor in the flow of the water as you calculate your path to avoid objects. Note that as a river flows around a bend, the shallow water is on the inside of the bend and deeper water on the outside of the bend*
- When canoeing lakes, don't cut across bays where you will be exposed in the risk of sudden wind or bad weather. Accidents often occur when people are caught off guard by wind in open water. **Stick to the shore.**

### b.) Navigate the V's in the river

- A single obstacle will create a v in the river as the water flows past the obstacle. This v will form even if the obstacle is well below the surface. The point of the v will be closer to you and the wider part of the v will face further away. In this case you want to avoid the point on the v where you are likely to collide with the hidden object. You also do not want to be caught crossing in front of a v because the river is also moving forward and any miscalculation could mean a broadside strike against the object.
- If there are two obstacles in the water each making a v, they intersect down stream and create a v that faces the opposite direction. In this case you want to go straight into the intersection of the two (directly into the point), this will be the safest, calmest water between the obstacles.

### c.) More on Obstacles

- Never touch things passing by your canoe - a tug on an overhanging branch can flip the canoe.
- Avoid all above water obstacles - Bridge abutments, trees, stumps, poles etc. Again take into account that the river is moving and should you fail to read it correctly, you might be carried into an object even when you

are paddling away from them! This is a serious concern. For example, when a canoe contacts a bridge abutment broadside, it will pin itself against the abutment due to the force of the flowing water. People in the canoe will often shift their weight due in part to the impact or panic and the canoe may begin to take on water. At this point there is easily tons of force pushing against the canoe. It will buckle and bend around the abutment even with just a minimal current. We have lost canoes this way on the Red and the Assiniboine rivers right here in Winnipeg. In a worst case scenario the occupants of the canoe could get caught between the canoe and the object that it is pinned against. A person trapped in such a manner would be under tons of pressure and would be unable to escape.

#### **d.) If you Tip the canoe**

- If you ever find yourself floating down a river after a little upset don't turn a minor problem into a major incident. It is safest to separate yourself from the canoe by a few meters so that you cannot get trapped as mentioned above. Never float downriver ahead of the canoe
- Even if the canoe is filled with water it will float and eventually end up on shore. If the water is cold, get to shore immediately, dry off and get warm.

#### **#5 Landing the canoe on shore**

- Never paddle/ram straight onto shore. Rather position your canoe parallel to the shore in a way that is best for the rear paddler to step out sideways first followed by the front paddler
- Unload the canoe keeping it floating
- Lift the canoe out of the water and place it on a soft spot. Never leave the canoe half in the water and half on shore as the current and wave action can grind the canoe against the shore.

Thank you for taking these safety precautions and tips into account on your next canoe outing. Observance of these suggestions will ensure that you have a positive and safe canoeing experience without incurring any damage to yourself, your passengers, and the equipment rented.