

Canoeing

Progressive Canoe Award

Award Description

This award is designed to progress your judgment, decision making and expertise providing an understanding of journeying. As a canoeist you should be confident in planning and undertaking canoe journeys, anywhere from estuaries and coastlines to white water rivers. This confidence should be based upon both proficiency in skills and a broad appreciation of surroundings and environmental context.

Extended Award Description

Your Progressive Canoe Award endorses your ability to apply appropriate decision making skills for a safe day out canoeing on grade 2(3) rivers and large areas of open water. On open inland water, you might be up to 500m from shore and in winds up to and including force 4. If travelling on the sea, you would be using sheltered areas, small bays and harbours with the minimal possibility of being blown offshore. When on the sea, you will be happy operating in force 3 winds (force 2 if the wind direction is offshore). This award should be seen as a sound basis for independently building the experience and expertise associated with Advanced Canoe Award holders.

Award Content

1. Location

In order to have an enjoyable day out canoeing we need to make some key decisions to ensure we are in the right place at the right time.

Key factors influencing our decisions include the size of the lake/bay, the weather, any flow on rivers/estuaries and features of the location we choose. We also need to know about the experience, skill levels and aims of those we paddle with, and the way they are travelling (e.g. tandem or solo). We can take each of these factors into consideration and ask ourselves some questions to ensure the appropriate decisions are made.

Factor: Who are we paddling with?

We will need to know: What is their skill level and experience? What are our agreed aims for the day? Is the group an appropriate size? Does anyone have any specific needs? Do those we paddle with have the skills and equipment needed for the planned day? Will there be tandem and solo craft?

Factor: The logistics of our venue – what is our plan for the day?

We may need to know: Are we permitted to paddle? How can we plan a day trip?

Factor: Weather – this has a big impact on us, the other people we paddle with, our canoes and the environment we are journeying through.

What we might observe: What is the forecast and what are the actual conditions? Which direction and how strong is the wind? Is it due to increase or decrease? Is it going to change direction? What impact might the topography have and how will the forecast wind speed impact on the waters that we can choose from? What other weather factors are relevant?

Skill: Can we obtain an appropriate weather forecast? Can we interpret it and apply it to the journey we are planning.

Factor: What type of flow is there? Is the flow tidal? What is the volume of the river? How technical is the river? What factor will influence the flow and how might it change? Understanding this will give you a safer and more enjoyable day on the water.

Additional questions we could ask: Are there other factors that we might need to consider before we choose a location? What ecological and environmental factors influence us? How will we know where we are and find our way on the journey?

When we put all of this information together we can decide on suitable locations for our level of skill, to help us achieve the aims of our day.

2. Getting Ready

Once we have chosen where to go we must decide on equipment suitable for our location. Key points we could consider are:

How will you travel on the water?

There are different options available to us as canoeists (e.g. solo, tandem, rafted, sailing, paddling, poling, using ropes, portaging). How will we travel? Why might we choose one over another? Will the method change during the journey?

What will you wear?

There are many different options available to us as canoeists. What are these? Why might we choose one over another?

What will we take?

Do we have the kit we need to keep us safe and comfortable throughout our trip? How will we pack the kit and keep it dry?

What safety precautions should be considered?

What are the potential hazards and how will we protect ourselves from them?

How will we outfit and set up our canoes for this trip? What additional equipment might be useful and how/where will this be carried. How will we navigate on the trip? What potential conditions or injuries might we need to treat? How will we do this? What equipment might be lost or damaged during the trip and how will we deal with this? What escape routes and other contingencies do we have planned? How will we summon external help if it is needed? Have we left a route plan with other people?

Skill: Can we prepare, pack and use the kit and equipment required for our journey.

Having decided upon our equipment for the day we must get to the launching point without damage to the environment, our kit or ourselves. Canoes and kit are often heavy and awkward to move.

We will need to determine: How best to move, load and secure our craft to protect ourselves or others from injury and prevent unnecessary damage.

3. At the Water

Parking spots and places to get on the water are usually shared spaces. We must be aware of other users and any rules and restrictions by considering the following:

Consideration: Other users – some places can be busy areas. We may need to share the water with swimmers, kayakers and anglers, amongst others. To do this safely, an 'etiquette' amongst these users has developed to minimise conflict and help everyone enjoy the environment.

What we might observe: Who else is there? Are we using a managed or supervised venue? Is canoeing restricted to certain areas? How would we know? What is the 'etiquette'? How does this affect us?

4. Canoeing Skills

When canoeing we should be in control. To do this we need to be able to observe our environment, observe and communicate with those we paddle with and to monitor our own performance and wellbeing so we can make appropriate decisions. We also need to be able to move our canoe efficiently

on the water and plan ahead so we can use external forces to help us or minimise their impact. Key features of being in control include our ability to stay relaxed and understanding how our body and canoe can be best set up for any given manoeuvre. We need to be able to move our canoe forwards skilfully and will also need to be able to manoeuvre our canoe in tighter places and stop.

The environment will often require flexible and adaptive skills. Can we perform all the tasks on both sides, i.e. bilaterally? Do we have a range of effective cross-deck strokes as well as a range of techniques suitable for paddling on the upstream and downstream side of their boat? Can we select which of the available techniques is best suited to any given situation?

Decision Making

Considerations: We need to gather information and make good decisions on the move so we can journey safely and efficiently.

Environmental Factors

We will journey through different land and waterscapes. These may be permanent changes as we move from one environment to another (e.g. the topography we are journeying through) or temporary (e.g. water levels, flow, volume, wind, waves).

Skill: Can we identify these changes as we travel? Can we evaluate these and decide on appropriate action if they impact upon us?

Skill: Can we evaluate and change in situ the travelling method we are using (e.g. paddling solo or tandem, rafting, sailing, poling, using ropes or portaging) and decide on the most appropriate method to use at any given time?

Skill: Can we evaluate upcoming hazards and decide on the most appropriate strategy to control or mitigate the impact they have on us? Can we identify safe areas, the pathways between them and do we have the skill and ability to use them (e.g. when descending rapids or paddling against the wind)?

Group Factors

We need to monitor and maintain our own wellbeing and performance, and help other people maintain theirs. Are we, and those we paddle with, coping with the conditions and able to cope with the expected future conditions? Are we attending to our needs and the needs of others?

Skill: Can we monitor and evaluate our own performance and wellbeing and that of the other people we are with? Can we respond appropriately?

Skill: Can we work as part of a team and set up and follow group strategies to move safely and efficiently? Have we set up effective methods of communication? Can we use these on the water to pass instructions and information through the group as we are moving?

5. Paddling Skills

Consideration: The environment will present many features (e.g. wind, waves, stoppers and variations in flow) which may be used to help us or may be hazardous. Do we have the judgement skills to determine whether each is a help or a hazard, and do we have the paddling skills to either utilise or avoid them?

Getting on the water:

We need to be able to get on the water in a range of different types of place and identify the best place for us to launch and work as a team to prevent injury while being responsible for ourself.

Open Water Factors

We may be travelling on large areas of open water in wind and waves. We need to be in control of our canoe throughout the journey. We need to have a range of travelling options for different situations.

Skill: Can we set up our canoe to help us paddle in the direction we wish to go? Can we amend and adapt our trim, edge, paddling speed, stroke choice and style in the wind and wave conditions? Can we use appropriate strategies to travel with, against and across the wind and waves?

Skill: Can we set up safe rafting methods and simple downwind sailing rigs, and can we paddle solo and tandem at times if necessary? Can we use lines from the shore to move our canoe against the wind? Can we use a pole or half pole to move upwind in shallow water?

White Water Factors

We will encounter a range of different water features on a river journey. Different rivers will have different volumes, flows and hazards which will demand different skills to negotiate successfully. At times we will need to manoeuvre our canoe while facing upstream (ferries and S-turns) and while facing downstream (checking, setting and reverse ferry gliding). We will need to be able to control our decent by performing eddy turns (both into and out of the flow) and prevent capsize in rough water.

Skill: Can we set up our canoe to help us paddle in the direction we wish to go? Can we amend and adapt our trim, edge, paddling speed, stroke choice and style in the conditions?

Skill: Can we skilfully ferry glide across a grade 2 river and evaluate the speed, volume, distance and any variations in the flow and adapt our strategy accordingly?

Skill: When travelling downstream, can we check and reverse ferry glide the canoe to give us more time to achieve an appropriate line down a rapid or negotiate hazards such as strainers? Can we use these techniques to set into eddies from the flow?

Skill: Can we prevent capsize towards the paddle side in a grade 2 flow?

Skill: Can we paddle both solo and tandem at times on the trip if necessary?

Skill: Can we skilfully pole down a simple grade 2 rapid and pole up a grade 1 flow and use lines to move our canoe down a rapid when necessary?

Navigation Factors

We need to know where we are while we are travelling. We need to be able to monitor progress, adapt plans and plan and use escape routes. At times, visibility may be poor.

Skill: Can we use a map and compass to navigate our journey? Can we identify our position, relate features from the map to our surroundings, set and follow a bearing and use six figure grid references?

Dealing with mishaps:

We will need to prevent and deal with the inevitable mishaps – rivers, lakes, bays and estuaries are dynamic environments and at times we will make some mistakes. We might need some assistance to get where we need to or we might end up out of the boat. Knowing how to work with other canoeists and canoes and help each other when necessary, and knowing how to swim safely and deal with a capsized canoe are therefore key skills. It might not be us who needs help but someone we are canoeing with. Do we have a range of methods to help others throughout our trip?

How would we safely get ourselves or others back to shore or into the craft?
How would we deal with loose or pinned kit?

Open Water:

Skill: Can we self-rescue after we capsize on open water? How have we set up our canoe and kit to help with this process? Can we paddle a swamped canoe to safety or can we empty the water out?

Skill: Can we help another paddler who has capsized on open water? Can we rescue them and their canoe so they can continue with the journey?

Skill: Can we set up rafts and towing systems safely and efficiently? Can we deal with a raft if it is swamped in open water? Can we recover a paddler who fell out or a raft while sailing?

White Water:

Skill: Can we self-rescue after we capsize on white water? Have we set up our canoe and kit to help with this process? Can we swim safely in a flow and recover our own canoe?

Skill: Can we position our canoe into a suitable eddy so we can assist other paddlers if they capsize while descending a rapid? Can we perform a rescue of a paddler and their kit at the bottom of a rapid?

Skill: Can we help protect a rapid from the bank while others descend? Can we select an appropriate place to operate from and ensure we will be safe? Can we use a throw line to rescue a swimmer?

Other Rescue Considerations:

In the dynamic environment we are paddling in, there are many problems we might need to resolve. Some of these are more likely than others, so have we prepared for these?

Skill: Can we deal with ill or injured group members? Can we continue if any kit breaks or gets lost? Can we summon external help if we need to?

6. After the Trip

Every trip is an opportunity for learning and improving. We can create a positive impact on our future experiences by performing a good post-trip review.

Review the day: When we are back on shore we can think back about the trip. Did anything unexpected happen or did anything change whilst we were out? If so, how and why?

Watching what others do: It might be useful to spend some time watching other canoeists. How are they doing things? Are they using the same tactics and skills as we are? Do they seem to be canoeing more effectively than we were? Can we see why? Think back to our trip. Can we identify what went well and what did not?

Consider what you will take away: What have we learnt today? What can we focus on next time?

7. Future Development

Each day we spend canoeing further expands our skills and knowledge, creating a more enjoyable experience on the water. With no two experiences ever the same, we never stop learning.

Continually evaluating the choices we make creates a natural evolution of decision making ability. When we reach a certain point in this, it may be worth considering moving onto the Advanced Canoe Award.