

Canoeing

Advanced Canoe Award

Award Description

This award is designed to advance your canoe skills and your ability to make appropriate decisions for safe days out canoeing on rivers of grade 3(4), in open water over 500m from shore and in winds of up to and including force 5. On the sea, you will be operating along simple coastlines with easy landing throughout.

Extended Award Description

As an advanced canoeist you will have extensive experience of 'wilderness journeys' of anything from a day trip to a multi-day expedition. Your experience will include paddling a wide variety of rivers with different flows, volumes, gradients and a range of different open water venues.

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. 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? Will they be in tandem or solo? What are our agreed aims for the day? Is the group an appropriate size? Does anyone we canoe with have any specific needs? Do we all have the skills and equipment needed for the planned day?

Factor: What are 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, 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 and use it to interpret the likely conditions on our journey?

Factor: What type of flow is there? Is the flow tidal? What is the volume of the river? How technical is the river? What is the gradient? What factors 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 will 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.

Skill: Can we plan a safe and enjoyable trip for us and those we paddle with?

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? Are we organised and can we use our kit efficiently? At times we will be paddling canoes loaded for multi day trips. How will we load our canoes and will we change how we do this depending on the nature of the trip and kit we are taking?

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?

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 on the water without damage to the environment, our kit or ourselves. Canoes and kit are often are 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: Although we will often be operating in remote areas, are these managed or supervised? 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 harness 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. We need to be able to manage our momentum and decide when to use power to drive the canoe and when to slow it. We need to be able to do this with, against and across the wind, waves and flow.

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?

How does our canoe set up and load influence how we journey? When paddling a loaded canoe, what adaptations to the route choice and journeying methods do we make?

Decision Making

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

Environmental Factors

As we journey, we need to notice changes in the environment. 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). We need to be able to evaluate these and decide if they impact upon us.

Skill: Can we identify the changes in the environment 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? Can we adapt to our methods as required because of the load we are carrying?

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 paddle 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?

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 launch a loaded canoe in a range of different types of place.

Skill: Can we identify the best place for us to get on the water and work as a team to prevent injury while being responsible for ourself?

Skill: We need to be able to paddle a canoe loaded for a multi-day trip.

Open Water:

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. Do we have a range of skills which will give us, and those we paddle with, options on open water? 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 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 in the wind?

White Water:

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 preventing capsizes in rough water.

Do we have the skills to give us, and those we paddle with, options on rivers?

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 as necessary?

Skill: Can we manage the momentum of our canoe? Can we add sufficient power to drive it with, against and across the flow when necessary? Can we change direction of travel and travel forwards, backwards and sideways as required?

Skill: Can we skilfully ferry glide across a grade 3 river? Can we 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 3 flow?

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

Skill: Can we skilfully pole up and down and snub down grade 2 rapids and use lines to move our canoe up and 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 we may travel with poor visibility caused by heavy rain, thick fog or falling light levels.

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? How would we deal with a raft if it swamped in open water? How would we recover a paddler who fell out or a canoe while sailing?

White Water:

Skill: Can we self-rescue after we capsize on white water? How 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 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 deal with incidents and continue if any kit breaks, gets lost or is pinned to an obstacle in the flow? Can we summon external help if we need to?

5. 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?

6. 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 our decision making ability.