

FIVE WATER SAFETY STRATEGIES WHILE ON CANOE JOURNEYS

Winter 2022: Ron Snyder

There are hundreds of pages that can be written on water safety. The following five items recur regularly on culture related multi-day canoe journeys. Skippers can play an important role in keeping their crews safe, however, in the final analysis we are all responsible to ourselves and our fellow crew members.

PLEASE REMEMBER: SAFETY IS WHAT SETS YOU FREE TO HAVE FUN

1. Accidents are unplanned events. Plan ahead. Wear your life jacket all of the time while on the water. Be proud to arrive in good spirits and healthy. "Your PFD floats, you do not". Respect your PFD, don't sit on it, wear it....and buckle it up!

PLEASE REMEMBER: WEAR YOUR PFD TO THE LANDING PROTOCOLS.

2. Keep a weather eye, and your trailer in good condition. Skippers must put the safety and welfare of their crews first, above all other considerations. Neither the schedule, nor the need to be in line for the welcoming ceremony is more important than your canoe's safe arrival. When the wind is blowing hard, or the fog is rolling in, the waves are higher than your freeboard, and a gale is predicted before you can possibly get to your destination, put your canoe on a trailer, and drive to the next destination. If the weather at the protocol improves, put your canoe in the water, and join the ceremony.

PLEASE REMEMBER: THERE'S NEVER DISHONOR OR DISRESPECT IN BEING SAFE.

3. When a canoe capsizes in 50 degree water, you can gasp in enough water to drown, you can be trapped under the canoe, become tangled in the sailing rig, be drawn away from the canoe by the force of a riptide, be drawn off in a mistaken effort to rescue drifting gear, and everyone will suffer from the physical and mental debilitating effects of hyperthermia. In fact, when we do capsize trainings, everyone not out of the water and into the canoe in 20 minutes is declared dead. And give or take 15 minutes in the real world, they are actually more dead than alive. The solution is TRAINING, AND PRACTICE, AND THEN MORE PRACTICE.

PLEASE REMEMBER: PRACTICE IS ALMOST ALWAYS DONE UNDER IDEAL, AND SAFE CONDITIONS USUALLY WITH A SAFETY BOAT STANDING BY. IN THE REAL WORLD OF CAPSIZE, CHAOS IS BREAKING LOOSE ALL AROUND YOU, OVER YOU, AND UNDER YOU. EXCEPT FOR YOUR TEAM, YOU ARE ALONE, AND AT HUGE RISK FOR DISASTER. PRACTICE TODAY, TOMORROW IS COMING.

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4. Leave the young children out of the canoe when voyaging on big waters. At the age of 11, most children can follow directions, and have the emotional and physical strength to do what is needed as a team member during a capsize. Especially if they have training and practice. Younger children are a distraction that can endanger the entire crew as the adults stop being team members and become babysitting/rescuers.

PLEASE REMEMBER: TEACH CANOE CULTURE TO CHILDREN ON SHORT TRIPS, AND ON QUIET WATERS SO YOU CAN FOCUS ON THEM. PUT THEM IN THE "PRINCESS SEAT" AT THE FINAL PROTOCOL.

5. Don't travel without a safety boat and a skilled safety boat skipper in direct contact with your canoe. They are your link to canoe rescue, towing, navigation, communication, and first aid. Your safety boat is much more than just a bathroom.

PLEASE REMEMBER: SAFETY BOAT SKIPPERS, BE SURE YOUR CRAFT IS SAFE, FUELED, AND WELL EQUIPPED TO HANDLE EMERGENCIES. LEARN HOW TO APPROACH PEOPLE AND CRAFT FLOATING IN ROUGH WATERS AND HIGH WINDS. HAVE A SYSTEM IN PLACE FOR EXTRACTING PEOPLE FROM THE WATER. KEEP BLANKETS AND HOT DRINKS ON BOARD.