

Canadian Voyageur Brigade Society

Proposal for

A Big Canoe Instructional Program: Paddler to Instructor Trainers

Objective:

To create a Canadian Voyageur Brigade Society (CVBS) program to safely, effectively and easily bring more people into big (brigade) canoeing by developing Big Canoe Paddlers, Crew Chiefs, Instructors and Instructor Trainers.

Rationale:

Present Canadian education programs for the development of Big Canoe paddlers, Canoe Chiefs and Instructors are difficult and expensive (Time & \$s) to access. These programs fail to recognize the skills of participants coming to a course or being able to start at an advanced course level and instructional experience.

Observations from over a few decades of brigade paddling has shown that with reasonable safety awareness and a willingness to direct beginners and on up to senior leaders, people can do day trips, vigorous workouts, races, expeditions, adventures and recreation in these canoes with safe and enjoyable outcomes. The voyageurs and coureurs du bois were not certified. Most of them survived, though drowning and injury was common. Today we have much much better safety practice and knowledge and foundational swimming skills. With reasonable planning, risk management, educational experiences and thought we can reasonably quickly and safely put people on the water in big canoe and have a terrific time.

How:

This program is to be:

1. Workable across all of Canada sea to sea to sea,
2. Easily accessible (equipment & site): possible to deliver with the minimum of site and equipment availability. I.E. still and moving water with as few as two big canoes.
3. Easily accessible (past skills): People often bring paddling and/or pedagogical skills with them to a course. Those skills which are worthy should be recognized. E.G.: Classroom teachers do not need to be taught what teaching is, or if the skills appropriate to a level are easily demonstrated by a candidate... more them along to the next level.
4. Inexpensive: the cost of enforced prior training could be as little as nil. Only two big canoe with the safety gear, lifejackets, paddles are required. Instructor cost and

compensation is to be worked out between the program sponsoring agency, and the instructor, or instructor trainer.

5. Directly managed by CVBS so the focus is on getting people safely onto the water to have a rewarding time. The CVBS Education Director is to maintain a record of all course requests, and successful candidate reports at the, Canoe Chief, Instructor and Instructor Trainer levels. Successful program candidates will be recognized by the Instructor with the awarding of a CVBS Canoe decal and wallet card.
6. This is to be an experiential learning program with facilitated guidance from skilled instructors and instructor trainers (IT). There are many skills you can learn or improve on your own. The environment will give you feedback if you are being too goofy by making you swim. Be prudent, preplan and wear your lifejacket.

Courses:

Paddler (5-6 hrs)

- A skills development program for novice paddlers to the big canoe. This program is to provide the middle and bow paddler skills for lake and easy river waters or easy tidal waters.

Canoe Chief (5-6 hrs)

- A program for the development of Canoe Chiefs with the appropriate Stern skill and canoe management skills for Big Canoes for lake and grade 1 river waters or easy tidal waters.
- Prerequisites: Paddler skills, Standard First Aid with a wilderness orientation, experience as a middle and bow paddler in various conditions including wind (up to 25 km/hr) waves and current flows. This would normally involve some 4-6 days of paddling experience through big canoe brigades or big canoe tripping.

Instructor (6-8 hrs)

- A program to prepare instructors to teach the Paddler and Canoe Chief Programs
- Prerequisites: a number (6 -10 days including prior programs) of big canoe trips on various regionally appropriate waters, including lakes and either easy rivers or tidal waters. Participation to include an increasing leadership role on these prerequisite trips. A background in physical skills pedagogy.

Instructor Trainer

- A means to provide ITs in the various regions of Canada
- Initially ITs will be approved by the executive of the CVBS from that pool of experienced big canoe paddling educators who have participated in a number of brigades or training programs of the society.

Moving Water supplement

- A supplementary program for the skills & knowledge required on more difficult rivers and rapids (up to Class II+) for paddlers and Canoe Chiefs.
- Note: Except for the emergency tip/reboard/rescue learning, the paddler and canoe chief instruction can happen on easy moving water.

Tidal Water supplement

- A supplementary program for the skills & knowledge required on tidal waters.
- Note: Except for the emergency tip/reboard/rescue learning, the paddler and canoe chief instruction can happen on easy moving water.

Trip / Brigade Planning / Leading supplement

- A supplementary program to look at the larger scale aspects of organizing a group trip up to a multi-canoe extended expedition.

Program Details

Paddler (5-6 hrs)

Overview

- A skills development program for novice paddlers to the big canoe. This program is to provide the middle and bow paddler skills for lake or grade 1 river waters.

Detail

- Equipment - normally two canoes and crews with appropriate gear for 10 to 16 paddlers. Bent paddles preferred, but not required... normal paddles should be short!
- Water - will require both a flat water and easy river (Class 1) sessions
- Students:
 - 12 yrs old and up with basic swimming skills while wearing a life-jacket
 - 1 less than seats in the canoe. Possibly double seating on interior seats.
- Pre-Launch understandings:
 - What the plan for learning/ demonstration is on the water
 - Safety equipment:
 - Personal: Life jacket fitting, whistles, reflective tape
 - Boat: bailers, painters, throw bags, reboarding loops, lights, reflective tape,
 - safety on water:
 - Hazards (cold, current, trapped between bridge and canoe, foot entrapment, wind)

- Reentry plan: who is in charge, who gets back in first, what others do
- Entry into, exits from and moving about the boat,
- Paddling: paddle (bend fwd), being in stroke (who to watch),
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- Strokes in the water / moving the boat / staying right side up:
 - Forward, back paddle, draw, draw at many angles from fwd to bk, pry, ruddering as a for of pry, sculling draws, canoe side slipping
 - The effective places to stroke for steering, turning, braking and moving ahead. The various responsibilities of the seats 1 through 6 or more for forward paddling, maintaining regular “switches” from side to side, and for seats 2 through 5 in assisting with turns, side slipping, landings and docking.
 - Low brace, cross-bow draw
 - Switching sides, changing places, leaning or not.
 - Water exercises: power ahead, stop, backward, stationary moving: pin wheel, side slip, Moving turns, docking,.....
 - Upsetting the canoe, bailing it out, and reentry.
 - Note: The emergency tip/reboard/rescue learning opportunities shall normally be done on easy lake water or still tidal water.
 - “T” Rescue on another upset canoe
 - Basic river maneuvers in easy current: eddy turns, and ferrying
- Other stuff for land talking (later):
 - Understanding where steering strokes have the most effect:
 - The physics of being off center.
 - Throw bag practice, loading / unloading canoes from trailers or trucks, short portages
 - Personal safety equipment for tripping, managing personal equipment in the canoe: fire, knife, rain gear, first aid,
- Evaluation a course the instructor of: forward stroke in rhythm, changing sides, and bow strokes for turning

Canoe Chief (5-7 hrs)

Overview

- A program for the development of Stern Paddlers and Crew Managers for Big Canoes for lake and easy river or waters.
- Prerequisites: Paddler skills, Standard First Aid with a wilderness orientation, experience as a middle and bow paddler in various conditions including wind (up to 25 km/hr) and waves, normally 3-5 days of big canoe paddling.
- Crew Chief may: participate on CVBS canoe brigades with a canoe crew, where two or more Crew Chiefs (with appropriate pedagogical and wilderness living skills) are involved they may lead programs on locally known waters, and overnight canoe trips.

Detail

- Equipment - must be able to assist new paddlers in selection of lifejacket, paddle and appropriate clothing for a variety of weather conditions. Normally two canoes and crews shall participate in this course
- Water - normally this course requires both a flat water and river training sessions.
- Students - normally 16 years of age or older
- Pre session knowledge
 - Management of a canoe crew, balancing the canoe for weight, skill and strength.
 - Management of the crew for safety, comfort, & nourishment
- Skills & Knowledge
 - Stern Steering skills: ruddering, standing draws, forward sweeps, "J" stroke
 - Appropriate calls for assistance from the other paddlers in the canoe.
 - Taking leadership in self rescue, and rescue of other canoes.
 - River Towing rescue (may be done with a swamped tandem canoe, or an upright, partially filled big canoe)
 - Management of a canoe crew for day and/or overnight tripping. Including gear selection, packing and loading the canoe.
 - Maps, GPS, charts - one of
- Evaluation: by an instructor of steering abilities under various appropriate (easy) conditions, observation of canoe management over the course of a day's program. This normally ends in a "debrief" of the Crew Chief candidates.

Instructor

Overview

- A program to prepare instructors, who have normally completed the above programs, to teach the Paddler and Canoe Chief Programs.
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Prerequisites:

- a number (6 -10 days including prior programs) of big canoe trips on various regionally appropriate waters, including lakes and either easy rivers or tidal waters. Participation to include an increasing leadership role on these prerequisite trips. A background in physical skills pedagogy.

Time: (6-8 hrs) - normally two sessions, one on flat water, one with current and a debrief

Detail

- Demonstration of reading currents, river or tidal
- Demonstration of pedagogical skills with a group of novice paddlers, flatwater skills including basic the rescue skill of tipping & reentry, appropriate easy river or tidal skills
- Maps, GPS, charts

- Evaluation: normally by an IT shadowing the Instructor candidate through a “Paddler Course.”

Instructor Trainer

Overview

- A means to provide ITs in the various regions of Canada
- Initially ITs will be approved by the executive of the CVBS from that pool of experienced big canoe paddling educators who have participated in a number of brigades or training programs of the society, who have recognized pedagogical skills

Detail - to be developed

Moving Water supplement

Overview

- A supplementary program for the skills & knowledge required on rivers for paddlers and Leaders.
- Doing long portaging
- Going upstream, Lining, polling, going upstream
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Detail

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Tidal Water supplement

Overview

- A supplementary program for the skills & knowledge required on tidal waters.
- With an appropriate tidal water site, the whole of the “paddler” instruction can be taught on the same water. Do the initial still water and rescue work at slack or very low current and then work the moving water skills when the tide is running.

Detail

- Navigational aids and marine charts
- Paddling steering with both waves, and swell.

Trip / Brigade Planning / Leading supplement

Overview

- A supplementary program to look at the larger scale aspects of organizing a group trip up to a multi-canoe extended expedition.

Detail

Definitions & Examples

Easy Lake Water - sheltered body of water with a fetch of less than 1 km, but more importantly for the teaching session winds of less than 10 km/hr, and waves of less than 15 cm. No breaking waves.

Easy River Water - stream at normal (25-75%) summer flows, rapids Class 1 or less, current of 5 km/hr., wind less than 15 km/hr Eg.: North Saskatchewan River below Genesee Bridge,

Easy Tidal Water - sheltered body of water with a fetch of less than 1 km, but more importantly for the teaching session winds of less than 10 km/hr, waves of less than 15 cm or swells of less than 30 cm and current less than 2 kn (4 km/h). No breaking waves.

Supplementary Materials - unique to Big Canoes

- All other common paddling skills and knowledge are to be “referenced” to recently published paddling manuals... ideally no more than three.

Boat Management for Canoe Chiefs:

- Pre-start safety and trip review,
- If you are the boat Chief **Talk Loud** if you want people to hear your instructions and follow them. It is a long way to the front of the boat and there may be quite a bit of wave, people, environmental noise to be heard over. Use your “teacher” voice.
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Changing/Switching Sides:

- Look at [Tracing the Columbia Time: 00:51](#) This is the Red Rogues at Hood River in a windstorm doing an excellent change.

- Why change sides?
 - It will reduce the chance of repetitive stress injuries. If you paddle a long period of time on one side, especially in cold wet weather, you risk having an acute, chronic or permanent stress injury to your body. So switch sides and give the other side a rest. :)
 - Paddling long periods on one side you only used half your body. Those muscles become progressively more tired and less effective. So switch sides and have more power to move ahead, play or respond to emergency situations.
 - This is a truly important skill if you are paddling a distance. If all you are doing is floating around a lake for ½ an hour it does not really matter. This skill is seldom taught due to fear of tipping. However it turns out that almost all crews learn this in less than 10 minutes and will then demand frequent changes.
- What a terrific switch looks like: See the trailer for “Tracing the Columbia”
- How to change sides (assuming 6 people and 6 seats):
 - Seat 5, the caller, (second from the back) in a loud clear voice calling in time with the paddling of the bow person calls: “Ready” on stroke 1, “Set” on stroke 2, and seats 2, 3, 4, 5 all flow across to the other side on the the unspoken third stroke.
 - Seat 2 person moves across smoothly and predictably
 - Seat 3 person moves at a rate that counterbalances Seat 2
 - Seat 4 person moves at a rate that counterbalances Seats 2 & 3
 - Seat 5 person moves at a rate that counterbalances Seats 2 & 3 & 4
 - Seat 1 would normally switch paddling sides on that same unspoken third stroke and keep going without missing a stroke. However Seat 1 might be busy steering or doing something else and would often be sitting centered enough that their sideways body movement would have little impact on lateral balance.
 - All try Seats work to miss as few strokes as possible. It is possible for everyone to miss no strokes. That is to slide across and get in the next (fourth stroke) on time. In order to do that the whole team must have mutual confidence and move quickly.
 - Stern person changes sides any time they want to optimize steering. The stern if there is concerning water coming up may tell the caller not to switch.
 - How often to change:
 - Recreational: usually every 1 to 3 minutes is a good period. Once a team has paddled with switching for an hour or so, they will get grumpy if the calls are less frequent than 3 minutes.
 - Racing: On truly long marathon races of 8 or more hours 2.5 minutes works well. On races of 20 min to 2 hours, 45 sec to 1 minute is better. Changing sides in a 500 M race is not useful.
- Teaching/coaching learning to change sides:
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Loading, Keeping in stroke, Stroke coaching a Big Canoe:

- When you are the canoe chief:
 - Balancing the crew: Very often, for the first few hours with new crew you will have to repeatedly have to tell them where and how to sit. Get them to move even as little as 2 cm left or right to level the boat.
 - Being in stroke: Lookat [Tracing the Columbia Time 00:19](#)
 - If the whole boat is “in stroke” with each other, the boat will not wobble from side to side (saves energy), not rock front to back less (saves energy), allow people to focus on padding forward

Dump and self-rescuing:

- PUT IN URL to previous written material: Safety plan? Web site CVBS resources?
- Resource: [HowToRollBoonaThe29FootVoyageur.pdf](#)
- Topics:
 - Do it in a lake, do it on a river, do it tidal
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Demonstration of reading River Current, Lake water:

- Can you predict:
 - Where the current will be turning to at the furthest point ahead you can see?
 - What the ripple and wave patterns on the water surface is telling you about water depth, current direction and hazards.
 - Can you cross that eddy line, play in that wave or turn behind the upcoming rock or bridge pier safely?
 - What the vegetation on the shores tells you about current, depth and dangers for each 100 to 200 m section for the next km?
 - What geology shows and what the geology or topography of the shore tells you about dangers, current and water depth into the distance.
 - Where the deepest, safest water is for the visible upcoming bends in the water.
 - How the map you have relates to where you are on the water and where to go to for emergencies at escalating levels of severity.
 - Where to land for lunch or a bio-break easily and without getting excessively muddy?

Demonstration of reading the Tides/Current:

- Can you predict:
 - Where the current will be taking you?
 - Are you on a collision course with the oncoming traffic. Hint: if the back ground behind the oncoming craft does not move or change you are on a collision course unless it is going away. :(

- What the wave and swell patterns telling you about water depth, beach steepness, current direction and hazards.
- Can you cross that eddy line, play in that wave or turn behind the upcoming rock or pier safely?
- What the vegetation on the shores tells you about current, depth and dangers for each 100 to 200 m section for the next km?
- What geology shows and what the geology or topography of the shore tells you about dangers, current and water depth into the distance.
- Where the most sheltered shore is for the visible upcoming water.
- How the map you have relates to where you are on the water and where to go to for emergencies at escalating levels of severity.
- How long will it take you to cross the channel, how long will the weather hold and can the how paddling group stick together safely?

How to do a “wiggle gate”:

- The wiggle gate is a manoeuvring pattern that thoroughly exercises a canoe team’s ability to steer forward and backward.
- Doing part of all of the wiggle gate can be a valuable exercise and evaluation tool.
- Diagram of patterns 1, 2, 3,4 goes here [Get PDF from Mark Lund](#)

Big Canoe Strokes - requirements, errors

Stroke & Skills	Must be demonstrated	Errors to avoid
Forward Stroke		
Brake / Back Paddling		
Basic Draw		
Forward Sweep		
Reverse Sweep		
Low Brace		
Pry		
Cross Draw		
Stern Rudder		
Sculling Draw		

Changing Sides		

Wild things - a parking lot for future considerations

Overview

- We are not going to write this up.

Detail

- How to win voyageur in Yukon River Quest
- How to paddle St. John River's Reversing Falls
- How to paddle/trip the Yukon, Stikine, MacKenzie, Albany, Ottawa, ... big northern rivers

Originally prepared by M. Lund & T Bentley, July, 2018

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