

SUNSHINE COAST CANOE JOURNEY

SAFETY PLAN (Draft 1)

Introduction:

Purpose:

The purpose of this Sunshine Coast Canoe Journey Safety Plan is to ensure that all participating canoes, crews and skippers are aware of and prepared to deal with any conditions that may be encountered while paddling West Coast tidal waters during this Canoe Journey.

Event Overview:

The Sunshine Coast Canoe Journey will take place from June 13 to 18, 2017, and will involved 10 to 12 large canoes. It is expected that most of these canoes will be traditional Voyageur style canoes of between 25 and 29 feet in length, and at least two canoes will be traditional West Coast Salish style canoes. Depending on size, we expect between six and 12 paddlers in each canoe.

The Journey will commence at Egmont, BC, with canoes and crews arriving on June 13th, and camping overnight. Over the following five days, the canoes will travel from Egmont, through the Skookumchuck tidal rapids into Sechelt Inlet to the village of Sechelt. From the top of Sechelt Inlet the canoes will be portaged to the Salish Sea (formerly Georgia Straight), then paddled on to Gibsons, BC, and then further on to Ambleside Beach in the Municipality of West Vancouver, for a total distance to be paddled of approximately 150 km. There will be camping at two other locations along the route, with two nights at each location, and two days being spent exploring local islands and features.

Camping & Stops:

- Back Eddy, Egmont, BC (Camping)
- SSC Properties, Sechelt, BC (Camping)
- District of Sechelt (for Portage)
- Town of Gibsons, MacDougal Park (Camping)

General Safety Requirements (adapted to Sunshine Coast Journey from Fort Edmonton Canoe Brigade Safety Plan):

All participating canoes are to have on board at all times:

- Spare paddles – minimum 2
- *Approved PFD for each paddler. Paddlers are required to wear their PFDs at all times when on the water.*
- A sound making device, commercial air horn preferred
- A minimum of two manual bailing devices – buckets or hand pumps. Two 10-20 litre buckets and a hand pump are recommended.
- A first aid kit
- VHF Radio (waterproof) and a working cell phone
- A minimum of two 15 m Throw Bags of floating 10 mm line. Normally one bag shall be secured at one end to a grab loop, and the second shall be immediately available mid-canoes for rescue work.
- 4 (four) locking carabineers, two with each throw-bag
- Flashlight and spare batteries
- “grab loops” near each end of the canoe for attaching rescue lines. These grab loops must be strongly secured and capable of taking the full weight of the canoe when swamped.
- At least One “re-entry” strap per canoe

Specific Safety Aspects of the Sunshine Coast Canoe Journey:

This entire Canoe Journey will take place in tidal waters of the Pacific Ocean. While much of the route is on fairly protected waters, there are some stretches that are exposed, and may be subject to high winds and wave action. In addition, tidal action, which could see more than 15 feet between low and high tides, must always be a consideration. For safety and assistance in case of emergency, the various local RCMSAR inflatable vessels will be on the water, within sight of the canoes, for the entire journey, as will local police departments, with details still to be worked out. **Wearing of a PFD (Personal Flotation Device) at all times while on the water is MANDATORY for the entire Sunshine Coast Canoe Journey.**

Following are aspects of this Journey that require specific attention of canoe skippers and crew leaders.

The Skookumchuk Narrows and Rapids:

These tidal rapids are located near the starting point of Egmont, and will be encountered immediately after the start of the journey. These tidal rapids are caused by a large volume of water being forced through the relatively narrow entrance to Sechelt Inlet, which includes two other large contributory inlets. These volumes of water will flow into the inlets on a flood tide, and drain the inlets in the opposite direction on an ebb tide, resulting in some of the fastest tidal waters on the entire West Coast.

During full flood or ebb tide, these waters are extremely dangerous, and must be avoided by canoes at all cost. A relatively short period of calmer waters does occur during the change of tides. The window of calmer waters, during which canoes can safely navigate the Narrows, lasts for approximately one hour, depending on the height difference between low and high tides. We will start during the slack just before the flood tide.

Consequently, timing for all canoes to safely navigate through these narrows is of critical importance. It cannot be over emphasized, that all canoes participating in this journey MUST be ready to depart at the exact optimal time. Being five or ten minutes late is NOT an option. Any individual or crew not ready to depart at the established time, will be left behind, and will have to make their way to the campsite on land. The canoe will be pulled from the water and towed to the campsite.

Furthermore, it is essential that all participating canoes will travel as a flotilla, not more than ideally three or four canoe length apart. There will be a lead and a sweep canoe, both being local, Sunshine Coast canoes, whose skippers have knowledge of local waters. This will be the protocol for the entire journey; but is particularly important for travel through the Skookumchuk Narrows. At no times should any canoes be in front of designated “Lead” canoes or behind designated “Sweep” canoes.

The skipper of the “Sweep” canoe will in charge of the pace of the fleet, as he is in the best position to decide when the lead canoe must slow down. There will be NO opportunity to stop or rest while negotiating the rapids.

There will be a briefing for skippers and crew leaders on the evening of June 13th, during which various aspects and requirements will be discussed in detail. All skippers / crew leaders will receive a copy of this safety plan.

Radio Communication:

The common mode of communication on West Coast tidal waters is by VHF Marine Radio. This provides a means of not only communicating between participating canoes and escort vessels; but also includes a direct link to Canadian Coast Guard radio stations via an uncluttered emergency channel.

Canoes and escort vessels participating in the Sunshine Coast Canoe Journey, will be operating on a specified channel (to be identified). A VHF Radio will be supplied on loan to each canoe that does not have one. It should be emphasized, that these radios are not for idle chatter; but are to be used for the primary purpose of safety, and conducting the business of the journey. It should also be noted, that the person operating the radio in each canoe, should NOT be the skipper, as the latter must be able to have his hands free, and not be distracted when having to deal with challenging or dangerous water conditions.

Dangerous Weather Conditions: High Winds or Rough Seas and other Potential Hazards:

The designated Safety Officer and Lead Organizers of the Sunshine Coast Canoe Journey, in consultation with RCMSAR and other on water emergency responders, will assess the weather and water conditions on an ongoing basis. **Any conditions that are perceived to endanger the lives or well being of journey participants, may result in a decision to alter, delay, or even cancel a predetermined segment of the route.** Such decision will be made in conjunction with skippers and leaders of various participating canoes families.

At the same time, there may still be situations, where bad weather, sudden wind, and dangerous water conditions arise suddenly, without warning. Even a larger motorized vessel, passing carelessly in close proximity of canoes, may cause dangerous, sudden waves. There may be dangerous rocks just below the surface at lower tides. To this end, skippers and crews must be vigilant at all times, in order to be prepared to take appropriate action to

prevent a capsize. Skippers must ensure that all crews are familiar with basic paddle strokes and techniques, such as the brace, to prevent capsizing.

It should also be noted, that skippers, who are not familiar with paddling in rough water conditions, should not hesitate to seek advice from other skippers who have experience in handling a canoe in such conditions.

Inclement Weather Gear:

While in June temperatures may be in the low 20 degrees C, heavy rain and wind, and lower temperatures are a distinct possibility. Therefore **it is imperative that all participants, especially crews, are equipped with good quality rain gear, and carry a dry bag with a change of clothing.**

Note: The dry bag needs to contain only gear required for on-water travel. For the Sunshine Coast Journey, it will not be necessary to carry overnight gear in the dry bags, as all camping gear will be transported from site to site by road crews on land.

In the Event of Capsizing:

Because of the flushing action of tides, ocean waters in most areas of the coastal areas travelled during the Sunshine Coast Journey will remain relatively cold. The risk of hypothermia exists, even if submerged in these waters only for a short period of time, and even if the air temperature is warm.

In the event of a capsize, it is important that crews remain with their canoe. Help from other canoes and support vessels is nearby, and crews will not be in the water for any length of time; however, it is essential that a change of dry clothing is readily available from crew member's dry bag. It is important that each individual dry bag be rolled tightly, to remain waterproof, and that each bag be secured to the canoe. Rescue efforts will be directed by attending RCMSAR personnel, and in case of their absence, by the designated Safety Officer.

Skippers of **Motorized escort vessels** assisting in the rescue, are reminded to **slow down** when approaching the canoes, and avoid creating dangerously high wakes.

Flat Water Rescue: (Adapted for Sunshine Coast Journey from E.C.B. Safety Plan)

Flat water rescue is problematic, the conditions (wind and waves usually) that necessitate rescue also make it difficult to effect a safe rescue. The victims from a swamped canoe must attempt to remain with their canoe. The canoe is the most visible item for rescuers to locate. Since all participating canoes must follow the required protocol of remaining in close proximity of one another as a flotilla, rescue vessels in the form of other canoes, or RCMSAR or Police vessels should be close by. However, in case of unexpected circumstances, all participating crews should be familiar with the following accepted rescue methods and drill:

Under most mild condition the quickest rescue is for the rescue canoe or boat to help stabilize the upset canoe, and one or two paddlers clamber in and begin to bail the canoe dry. As the gunwales lift additional paddlers can climb in to help with the bailing. This assumes that the canoe does (as it should) float with the gunwales above the water line even when swamped.

If conditions are not too severe a rescue canoe, one or two rescue canoes may try to effect a T-Rescue. Rescue canoes should approach the upset canoe from the down wind side. If two canoes are effecting the rescue they may raft up to form a more stable platform. **Paddlers must be given first consideration**, and should be removed from the water if they appear to be suffering injury or hypothermia. Two paddlers near the middle of the rescue canoe should be directed to assist victims into their canoe. Other middle paddlers can change position to help with boat stability, and may either brace to the side away from the attempted entry, or grab the second rescue canoe to stabilize their own boat. A “T” Rescue may require as many as four strong paddlers in the rescue canoe to attempt the lift-and-drag of the swamped canoe across the rescue canoe’s gunwales. Unlike tradition T rescues, the upset canoe may have to be first lifted from an oblique angle due to the upturned ends. The stern paddler of one of the rescue canoe, who should have the best view of the rescue attempt, should be the paddler in charge of the rescue attempt and coordinate all activities. Bow paddlers are to assist with control and stability of the rescue canoe.

If conditions are too severe for a T-Rescue, or a “pump-out”, then a towing rescue may be considered. Under more severe conditions the swamped canoe will have to be abandoned. And under the most severe conditions the

rescue canoe may only be able to assist the swimmers to shore by towing them, either off the side of the rescue canoe, or on a rescue line behind.

Note: A T-Rescue should be attempted only as a last resort, as it is difficult and can be dangerous, especially with the larger canoes.

If a larger rescue boat is available, the rescue attempts should be from the side of the boat, towards the stern. Consideration must be made for the location of the propeller on the rescue boat.

During Travel and Rest stops:

Crew leaders and crews should be aware of the following safety related points while travelling with the canoes:

- **Rest Periods:** Under normal conditions, sufficient rest periods, either at a suitable location on shore, or by stopping and rafting canoes, will be inserted to give a break to crews. These rest periods will be initiated by the Brigade Leaders. **DO NOT initiate a rest stop on your own**, as an individual canoe, as this will result in the break up of the tight travel formation, which is necessary for safety of the fleet. If a specific situation in your canoe requires an urgent stop, communicate this to the lead canoe and the escort vessel(s), so that appropriate action can be taken.

- **Caution when Rafting Canoes:** Paddlers must exercise caution when other canoes come alongside during the rating exercise: Make sure your paddles are up, to avoid injury to crews of the incoming canoe. Avoid having your fingers crushed between the gunwales of the two canoes.

- **Paddler fatigue:** There may be circumstances, such as fighting a head wind or strong tidal currents, when such rest periods have to be delayed for extended periods. This will be a test of endurance for the paddlers. As an individual paddler, simply stopping and taking a break on your own, is frowned upon, and not fair to other paddlers. For this reason, it is important that participating paddlers are physically fit and conditioned, and able to endure longer periods without a break.

- **Seat Breaks:** In order to allow crews to have a brief rest, while continuing the forward progress, canoe skippers may initiate short (2-3min)

seat breaks for their own crews, one seat at a time, rotating from bow to stern.

First Nations Protocols:

While not specifically a safety issue, this is mentioned here for benefit of those who are not familiar with the West Coast First Nations landing and departure Protocols, when maneuvering in tight spaces and close proximity to other canoes will be required. Protocol is required to be followed whenever coming ashore and departing from traditional First Nations territory.

Elders or spokespersons from the local First Nation will be on shore at the intended / predetermined landing area. Arriving canoes will line up or raft close to shore, facing the welcoming party, with paddles up. Depending on wind and tidal action, some maneuvering may be required to keep the canoes from drifting off. A spokesperson from each canoe will ask for permission to come ashore. All canoes will remain until all canoes have been granted permission. Staring from one end, canoes then will back up and turn 180 degrees, and then back onto shore, stern first. This is important, for it is considered the peaceful way of coming ashore in friendship.

A similar protocol takes place when departing. Canoes will launch, turn around facing the First Nations party on shore, and ask for permission to leave, thanking the hosts for their hospitality. Then turn around and depart.

In all this, some caution is required to avoid canoes bumping into each other, and to ensure that none of the crews get their fingers caught between gunwales of the canoes.

Other Safety Information:

- Inflatable Royal Canadian Marine Search and Rescue (RCMSAR) vessels will be aware and monitor this journey, and be in contact via VHF Marine Radio.
-
- RCMP and other Police Departments along the route will be informed, and may have police vessels on the water.

- **First Aid and Medical Emergencies:** Trained Medical Personnel
Jim McFarland, MD
- Jim Gibson, Paramedic

- Main Event organizer: Jerry Rolls.
- Safety Officers: - Fred Stark (604-230-5231) June 13 – 15
 - Ed Hill – June 16 – 18

- **RCMSAR:**

- Ida Koopman, Halfmoon Bay Station Leader: (604) 740-0972
- Steve Matthews, HMBay, Events Coordinator: C: (604) 594-2676
- Scott Smith, West Vancouver Stn. Leader: (604) 506-6582
- Jason Van Der Valk, Regional Office:

*Prepared by: Fred Stark
Ph: (604) 740-9873; Mobile: (604) 230-5231
E-mail: fstark@telus.net*