

Leading Your First Paddling Trip

Becoming a trip leader is stepping into the role of organizer - to plan ahead so things go smoothly and your cohorts can enjoy themselves on the trip. You do the legwork in planning ahead for river/lake conditions (e.g. maneuverability issues), safety and equipment requirements, and needed camping reservations or meal plans.

If practical, you should paddle the trip ahead of time to know there are no serious log-jams or obstacles, and to determine how long your trip actually takes in minutes and miles. Unless you acquire current information on the trip from an outfitter or someone who has paddled the river or body of water very recently, you do need to go out and paddle your trip. By **traveling to your destination ahead**, you can plan for the best shuttle route, and may find out a problem (e.g. road construction) on the way to the put-in, from the take-out, or even on that shuttle route. By **paddling the route ahead** of the trip date, you can figure out the best lunch stop, and may find out about bug levels and poisonous weeds to avoid on the shoreline. However, with recent gasoline prices, we do not expect you to travel more than 100 miles just for scouting purposes. And of course, if this is going to be a Lake Superior or Lake Michigan trip do not attempt to scout alone.

An easy trip to start with is one on a quiet body of water that the club does every year, such as an evening paddle on a local lake or a short day trip. Check out the many good "river guidebooks" out in the stores. You can also talk to fellow paddlers. **Before leading a trip on your own, co-lead a trip with an experienced trip leader.** You can also visit the MCP website for ideas, and definitely check out the Trip Leader and Waiver forms. After checking out the forms check out the scheduled trips and ask the trip leader about the possibility of co-leading a trip with him/her.

Remember that a river can change after a storm, so establish a good network of people to call right before the trip for current conditions. Better yet, follow the suggestions above and scout it out yourself! Learn about the USGS real-time water data site <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis/rt>. Check water levels from this system 1 month in advance, and weekly/daily as you get closer to your trip date. Become knowledgeable about your planned trip geographic area, provide maps, and study them beforehand. Have a communication device such as a cell phone or marine radio (if boating on big water) available for your use – if you don't have one, ask who on the trip does. Thinking through your plans for handling possible emergencies is a good idea for any paddle trip leader.

Know about the weather possibilities in the area. A summer storm can come up fast on a summer afternoon. Take into account the possibilities of both hyper and hypothermia, and a need for first aid. Provide some shade (like paddling a shady stream) when temperatures are in the 90's. Make sure paddlers change into dry clothes immediately if they get wet on a cooler day. It makes a difference in their energy level and clarity of thinking by the end of the run, and if not paid

attention to, could present a situation which could adversely impact other trip participants. Check to see that all paddlers bring plenty of water, and have extra yourself.

Planning a trip requires logic. Think about possible obstacles and devise a plan to overcome them. Verify parking is available at both the put-in and the take-out. You can check for road construction here:

<http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/travel/road/workzones.htm#top>. [Note: This site will only show state and federal highways. It does not cover county highways or local roads.] Finally, plan on an alternate take out for paddlers that may not want to do the entire paddle, and how you will handle the shuttle. As our motto is "Paddle Once, Eat Twice", if you plan on dining somewhere after the trip; verify the establishment will be open to the public and inquire about reservations.

As a trip leader, I agree to:

- Not lead trips that I have not paddled previously, unless I inform members of that fact PRIOR to the trip.
- Provide fair and realistic advice to paddlers about their participation and the skill level required for my trip; and provide information for both the suggested and/or mandatory gear for the trip.
- Assure that all paddlers have a usable PFD and other appropriate safety gear in their possession, and encourage good judgment in their use.
- Make sure that a suitable first aid kit is available, in the hands of someone able to use it appropriately, and perhaps plan for a 2nd kit if the group participation is large enough.
- Know and understand weather and current water conditions well enough to help all participants exercise good judgment.
- Know the location and the area well enough to assist members that have never paddled the area, and provide maps and other information as necessary.
- Make sure that lead and sweep boats are designated as necessary.
- Ensure that the number of participants at the end of the trip matches the number from the beginning of the trip.
- Inform members of a central meeting spot and caravan plans as needed, and put in details that will allow them to easily join the trip en route.
- provide contact information so members can let you know they plan on participating; and get contact information from them, so you can provide any last minute information if necessary.
- Reserve campsites as needed, help participants plan menus and cooking duties, or attend to other logistical details as needed.
- Assure that all participants have signed an MCP waiver form and file it with the Membership Director; or accept their waiver and file that as well.
- Do my best to use good judgment on and off the water, and assist others on my trip to do the same.