



BEFORE YOU GO

An Outline of Considerations before you go Out on the Water

Paddling in Northeastern America (New England and the Canadian Maritimes) is a sea kayaker's paradise. Thousands of islands, an intricate coastline, and four ecosystems offer us the chance to turn our adventuring dreams into reality – if we are responsible. We can experience lighthouses, pelagic birds, marine mammals, remote islands and wild pocket beaches as long as we plan, prepare and paddle as Darwin would advise. We are captains of our ship, both legally and morally. We are responsible for ourselves, even when traveling with skilled paddlers. We are responsible for our impact on the islands and the rural communities we travel through.

Are you prepared?

All planning and preparation enhance your day on the water.

The following tips and ideas are not meant to be a complete and total statement on the elements of a good trip. Successful expeditioning, whether for a month or a day, results from the sum of our life experiences. If you have reasonable questions about your preparations...do more. Regardless, do prepare.

Competent, coastal kayakers know that their Judgment, Knowledge, Experience, and Skills determine their readiness to prepare an appropriate route based on the three big variables: Environment, Equipment, and People. This is **Seamanship**: the selection of an appropriate course for your vessel with due regard for your crew, weather, and sea states.

So be realistic, be serious, and remember it's about fun ... all of this is possible.

PREPARATION AND PLANNING

Analyze the Group. Know your groups' physical skills, emotional and medical limitations, paddling abilities, and personal expectations.

Chart Realistic Routes. Determine routes appropriate for your group's abilities and interests considering commitment, safety and exposure to the sea and the weather. Choose several routes for your group's realistic experience and abilities, while leaving safety margins appropriate for that particular journey.

Resources. Use resources including navigational charts, topo maps, cruising guides, etc. to identify possible problem or danger areas, emergency evacuation options, safer alternatives, and key decision points.

Access. Research parking, put-in and take-out options, and determine public and private coastlines and islands, so you can land legally without being hassled or challenged.

Landings. Be clear what coastlands are open or restricted access, bird nesting islands, seal haul-outs, wildlife restrictions, traditional local use areas, or have other reasons to be avoided. Identify possible emergency landings for each leg.

LNT. Layer in appropriate Leave No Trace policies to your intended journey's launchings and landings.

Contacts. Write out, in a waterproof format, emergency phone numbers, relevant VHF channels, local marinas, search and rescue personnel, sheriffs, emergency rooms, poison control, bird and marine mammal rescue organizations.

Communication. Determine best methods of communication and pinpoint low-receptivity zones.

Re-Provisioning. Figure out possible fresh water refilling spots, grocery options, as well as relevant landings for rest, re-provisioning and camping.

Forecasts. Study relevant marine, offshore, and land forecasts for your area to determine the range of weather and sea states you may encounter.

Weather and Sea States. Know the anticipated water and air temperatures, tide and current statistics, dew point, wave height and period, and anticipated wind speeds and direction for each leg of your journey (and be ready to adjust the timing or route for actual conditions experienced).

Leadership and Decision-making. Discuss and agree on your group's personnel, methods and model for decision-making. All paddlers should know of the danger areas or zones where critical crux moves and possible turn-around points may change the float plan. Determine leadership with relation to particular tasks.

Equipment. Test all gear and practice packing into the actual boats. Plan for needed visibility, communications, landings, re-supplies, launchings.

- What is packed where?
- What do you need daily access to?
- Do you have compasses, even if you have a GPS?
- Food and water?
- Visual Distress signals?
- Sound signals
- Clothing appropriate for the water?

Float Plan. Prepare one. Leave a copy with a trustworthy individual and another on the dashboard of your vehicle, if its in a public area.

BEFORE YOU LAUNCH

Paddling Skills. If you haven't previously determined the following, develop a realistic portrait of each group members' skills and comfort: their stroke ability, bracing, rescue techniques, and their application to the anticipated conditions.

Possible Courses. Be certain all paddlers know the intended route, the options - including danger and safety spots, crux decision/bailout points, possible rest spots, campsites, distances of each leg, contingency plans, and safe landings.

Safety Practices. Consider what on-water patterns may be required in relation to the landscape, and the groups' ability to conform.

- What problems are anticipated?
- Who can handle which problem?
- What are the communication options between the group and with outsiders that will work in the anticipated conditions?

Emergencies and Rescues. Do members know what to do in various emergency or rescue options? How do you handle a lost person, on land? on the water? Can you perform rescues in the conditions you are planning to paddle in? How many are geared and trained to perform effective tows?

Leadership. What method of decision-making works for your group? How will daily route decisions be made? Is someone in charge in a true emergency? Will the group accept forceful leadership in a true emergency? Who can be counted on for what? Sea State and Landforms. Everyone should know the basics of anticipated tides and currents. Leaders should anticipate effect of the sea floor and landforms on the wave and swell shape, the changes due to tidal currents, and possible landings within these changes.

Outfitting. Are chosen boats and gear a match for the conditions? Determine each paddler's available safety gear. Who can effectively use which tools? Determine seaworthiness of each boat and paddler.

Chart Work. Are planned legs and anticipated conditions available and acceptable for all? What are transit times per leg? Headings? Decision points? Options? Safety zones? Exposure areas? Are you able to start off gently while group loosens up and checks itself out?

Launching and Landing. Do all paddlers have the skills to launch and land in anticipated conditions? Are boats safely packed, trimmed and sealed up carefully.

WHILE ON THE WATER

Position on the Water. Plan to cross navigational roads appropriately. Understand the basic Rules of the Road. Choose an applicable group pattern for various obstacles, going around points, crossing a channel, running a tidal race. Be ready for rescues and emergencies.

Communications. Pre-determine communication methods and signals when voices don't work. Know how to use your VHF marine radio, paddle signals, hand signals, whistles, and fog horns.

Navigational Charts. With info from your Pilot, Cruising Guide, other Aids to Navigation, are you skilled enough with your Chart and Compass to avoid danger areas and determine rescue options? Be able to superimpose the real world weather and sea state onto your route on the charts.

Equipment. Know what tools are available from the cockpit. What works when? Does the on-water journey require special outfitting?

Weather. Know what the wind is going to do to the waves, their size and from what direction they'll arrive. Understand probable effects of approaching weather. Be able to

read the clouds and wind direction shifts. Know about and watch for approaching fronts. Will fog or thunderheads be an issue?

Sea State. Understand how waves and swells may change in respect to landforms and the tidal depth. Know how waves build in force. Anticipate reflecting and refracting conditions.

Safety Areas. Each trip leg should optimally begin and end in an area of less exposure, a more protected spot, so your group can evaluate its ability to move on.

The Plan and its Alternatives. Remember that Destination Disease can be fatal. Be realistic about using your planned turn-around and crux spots to maintain the overall group purpose and safety. Don't be afraid to halt the trip and head into safety. Remember that paddlers tire more quickly later in the day when winds are often higher.

Hypothermia. Lower body temperature arises from the three factors of cold, wind, and wet. If your route plan eliminates 2 of the 3, your group will probably avoid this constant companion to paddling in the Northern latitudes. Hydration and quick sugar foods keep the furnace cooking.

Medical Needs. Since you should already know your group's medical variables, you need to be attentive to changes displayed in individuals' actions and personality. You should be useful in dealing with sea sickness, hypothermia and hyperthermia, blisters, sunburn, low blood sugar, cuts, torn muscles, tired minds.

Landings. Remember that many coastlines are private or restricted access due to ownership, bird, or mammal breeding. Be clear of your options. Only if it's an emergency should you land where you lack permission.

Island Ethics. Your journey will be more rewarding if you are sensitive to the nuances of the coast and islands you are traveling through. Is the island appropriate for landing? For overnighing? Are there seasonal restrictions due to bird nesting, seal haul-outs or flowering vegetation? Have you considered the impact on the thousands of critters under your feet between the tide lines? Do you appreciate that rocks without lichens or short grasses may be better to sit on than pine needles or delicate ferns? Practice Leave No Trace principles.

Tune into your day and try to make it your finest.