



How to Paddle A Canoe

When taking your canoe trip to the BWCA or Quetico Park, you'll need to be able to paddle a canoe. Flat water canoeing is one of the easiest situations available to learn the proper paddling techniques. Patience and time will ultimately sharpen your skills. Having some paddling skills prior to a wilderness canoe trip is certainly helpful, but not essential. Many of the visitors to our wilderness area are novice canoeists with little or no canoeing experience.

To get a good start, make sure that the person sitting in the front has enough leg room. Normally the person in the front paddles straight forward, while the person in the stern not only paddles forward, but is responsible for steering the canoe and not tipping it.

MOVING FORWARD

The forward stroke is the same for both bow and stern paddlers. Begin by kneeling or sitting in the canoe facing forward at either the stern or the bow. If you're canoeing solo, you should sit or kneel in the middle. Hold the paddle with your inside hand on top and your water-side hand about two to three feet down with your knuckles facing out. Insert the blade of the paddle completely into the water at least two feet in front of you, or as far forward as you can reach without lunging your body forward. Push your top hand forward and pull your bottom hand back, drawing the blade through the water. Make sure you keep the top of the paddle handles lower than eye level. Now pivot your shoulder to draw the blade straight back. Do NOT follow the curve of the canoe. Pull the blade back through the water as far as your hip. Now lift the blade out of the water and turn the blade parallel to the water to carry it forward to the starting position.

TURNING

To turn the canoe, the stern paddler can do one of two things. The first is a forward sweep stroke which will turn the canoe toward the side opposite the one you're paddling on. To do this, you reach the paddle out in front, but instead of pulling it down alongside the canoe, you reach out the blade in the water, making a "C" shape as if stirring a huge cooking pot. Pull the paddle in as far behind you as you stuck it out in front, then lift it out and do another if necessary. The second is quicker: the reverse sweep. It's based on that same "C" shape in the water, but is done in reverse so that the paddle is moved toward the bow. If done with enough force, it's necessary to do this only halfway. Just remove the paddle from the water when the arm holding the throat of the paddle is fully extended, in the middle of the stroke.

A canoe being paddled forward will veer to the side opposite the side on which the stern paddler is paddling. The simplest way to avoid this is to have the paddlers switch paddling sides every five or six strokes.

MOVING BACKWARD AND STOPPING

To reverse or stop a canoe, turn in your seat, and paddle the opposite direction. You can also use the backwater stroke. This is simply paddling backwards. It will stop you, but not extremely quickly.

Please note that this is a very basic overview of how to paddle a canoe. If you would like more information, please let us know.

ROUTING

Tentative routing is usually done on small-scale maps prior to the start of your trip. Having information about the type of trip you desire on file in our office is very helpful. The following is information that our staff will commonly request from you; number of people & days, canoeing experience, amount of travel & layover days preferred, and any interest in fishing, scenery and wildlife. Then we can offer suggestions based on that information. The actual routing and orientation takes place once you arrive at our base. Large-scale maps, marked out with the best campsite, fishing spots and points of interest will be gone over before you head out on your wilderness adventure.