



So You Want To Run a Canoeing Program, eh? How to Manage All That Gear Without Losing Your Sanity

by Jim Hartwick

Introduction

When I told my friend Geordon, a Scout leader and paddling partner, that I was asked to write a canoeing article for the *Leader Magazine*, he suggested that what leaders would find most useful would be to share my ideas on how I organize, store and transport all the gear I use in my canoe courses. So that is what I will cover in this article; tips about tricks I have developed during ten years of conducting canoe courses for Scout groups. I will also cover equipment and some important aspects of proper training, safety and skills.

Equipment

Since Scout groups and their leaders cover an infinite spectrum of styles, needs, and experience, this is in no way meant to cover all possible facets of canoeing equipment. This is based on many years of observation and direct involvement as a canoe instructor and a Cub or Scout leader and is aimed primarily at groups doing lake water paddling.

Canoes

A trailer load of six shiny, new, identical canoes is great and eye-catching but really not necessary and can be rather costly. Perfectly good used canoes can often be found in classified ads, through canoe clubs, rentals for sale, or canoe dealerships where they have taken older canoes on trade. Having a variety of canoe styles can give leaders and youth a chance to become familiar with different performance characteristics.

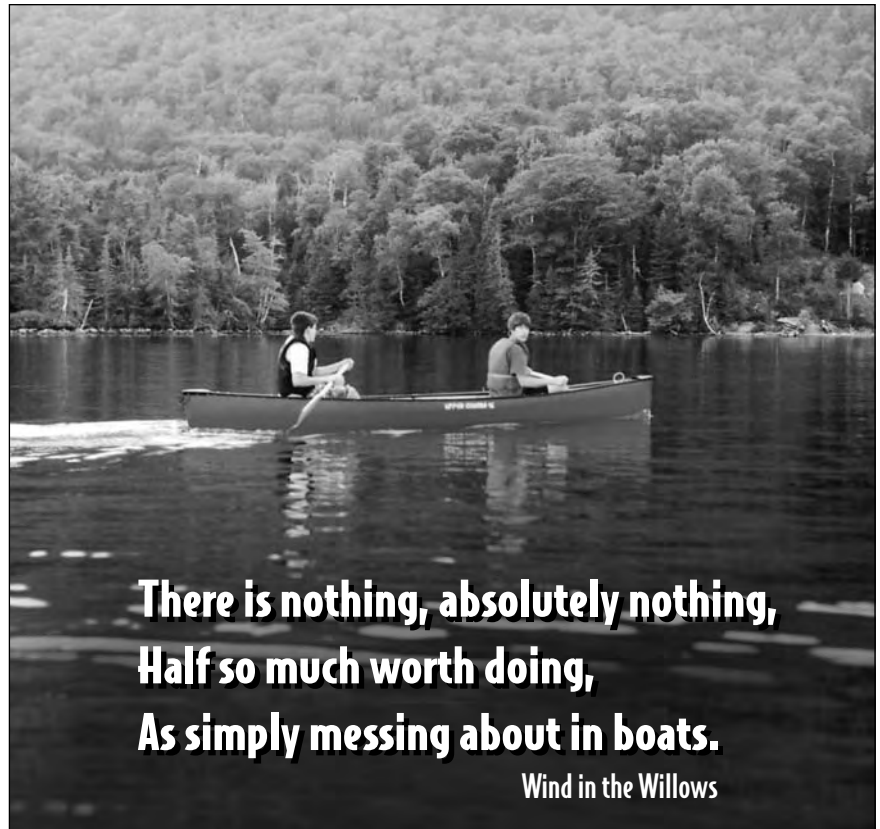
Acceptable used canoes can be found for \$100 but expect to pay at least \$300 to \$500. This would be about half the cost of a new fiberglass canoe. A word of caution though, there are some rather awful canoes out there. These include canoes that are falling apart, poorly designed, too small, too large or way too heavy. If you are not sure about what makes a decent canoe, do some research or take a knowledgeable friend with you.

Canoes are made from a wide variety of materials these days but the most common and probably the most economical ones are made out of fiberglass. They are also the easiest to repair if the need should ever arise (and it probably will).

Storing a number of canoes can be a challenge. Probably the best solution is a canoe trailer. This will save a lot of time and labour in loading/unloading and tying/untying. To help prevent theft be sure to secure the

B.P.&P. SECTION 10000

In *Bylaw Policies and Practices*, section 10000, it states that at least one leader or adult has successfully completed recognized training appropriate to the activity or has demonstrated equivalent attitudes, knowledge and skills appropriate to the activity. Many leaders will seek training from course providers to gain canoeing skills and experience. However, some course providers require participants to sign a waiver as a condition of participation. Scouts Canada is not prepared to take on the potential risk of others or jeopardize the rights of our members through the use of waivers. Anyone who enrolls on such a course does so as an individual at his or her own risk and expense.



**There is nothing, absolutely nothing,
Half so much worth doing,
As simply messing about in boats.**

Wind in the Willows

Photographer: Garth Holder

canoes to the trailer with cables or chains and secure the trailer as well. If a trailer is not an option then the canoes should be stored on racks or saw horses preferably out of the weather and definitely out of direct sunlight. Sunlight fades the gel coat and can cause the fiberglass to deteriorate.

Paddles

Paddles can often be found second hand at thrift stores, garage sales, and classified ads. New paddles can often be purchased from outdoor stores at substantial savings if you are buying in bulk, and they may give your Scout group a discount as well. You will need more paddles than you think. This is because you need to have a good selection of sizes so that each person can have a properly sized paddle. This is very important for efficient, comfortable paddling, youth included. Also, don't forget about the spare paddle that each canoe needs to have.



Photographer: Jim Hartwick

TIP: Storing and transporting a large number of paddles can be frustrating and cause unnecessary damage. A simple solution is to use a tall canvas or nylon duffel bag. This keeps a dozen or so paddles in one, easy to store, carry and transport package that also helps to protect them. To store, stand the full paddle bag in a corner or even better, hang it from a sturdy hook.

Wood paddles are the most common type to find used and have the advantage of often being quite inexpensive. They also come in a wide variety of sizes and styles. Their main disadvantage is that they require a fair amount of maintenance and repair.

Worn spots need to be sanded, cracks glued, and most will need to be varnished every year. If you have an active Scout or Venturer group this can actually become a positive, as paddle maintenance makes a good winter project. The youth then have a personal investment in the group's equipment and will probably be more inclined to take care of it. A natural

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progression from paddle repair is to paddle making. One of our Scouts thought his hand-made, wood-burned, decorated paddle was too nice to use and kept it mounted on his wall!

Paddles with plastic blades and aluminum shafts are great for groups as they are almost indestructible, practically maintenance free, and economical. Some brands tend to be on the heavy side and have the shaft housing bulging from the side of the blade in a very un-streamlined manner. In my humble opinion, one of the best of these types of paddles is the "Mohawk" brand. They are light, strong, streamlined and have a fairly comfortable "T" grip.

TIP: Don't worry too much if you can't buy a wide variety of lengths of aluminum/plastic paddles as they can easily be shortened. The grip can be removed by gently heating it with a heat gun first. Cut the shaft to the desired length with a hacksaw and file it smooth. Seal the shaft with some spray-in foam and then reinstall the grip by pounding gently with a wooden or rubber mallet.

PFD's

Personal Floatation Devices (PFD's) are important and mandatory equipment. Each person in a canoe will need to wear a properly fitting PFD.

Economical PFD's can be found at thrift stores, garage sales, and classified ads if the following conditions are kept in mind. PFD's must be labeled to show that they are certified by the Ministry of Transport (MOT). They must be in good physical condition; any repairs voids their certification.

Better PFD's have more than one fastening system; don't trust zippers alone as they are usually the first thing to malfunction on a PFD. Your group will need a lot more PFD's than the number of people paddling. This is because you need a wide variety of sizes to accommodate all participants. If you don't, then people will try to "make do" with PFD's that are too

small or too large for them. That could prove to be dangerous and make you liable.

Storing and transporting a large number of PFD's can be a real hassle and they can take up a lot of space. I've tried plastic bags, boxes, tying them together, and a very large mesh bag. They all had various problems. One of

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the main problems is that PFD's are often wet or damp when put away. If they can't dry out this can lead to mold or mildew problems, which can quickly destroy a PFD or at least make it unpleasant to use. So they always have to be hung up to dry before being stored.

Miscellaneous Gear

A bailer and a buoyant heaving line (a throw bag is the best type) are legally required to be in each canoe. A sponge is a nice extra to have along, as is a foam pad to kneel or sit on. Multiply all of this by six canoes and you have at least 24 items, not counting spares.

I think all leaders taking youth canoeing should take some canoe training.

TIP: Here is a simple solution that deals with all three problems at once. I thread all of the PFD's onto a 5' aluminum tube (a wooden dowel or pole would work too). They are secured by a cord that is tied to one end of the tube, passed over all the PFD's and is then tied to the tube again. This whole unit is carried to, and thrown into my vehicle. When done for the day, it's hung up on rope loops in my garage to air dry and await its next adventure.

TIP: Pack all of these items into a large 3' mesh bag and they will be ready to go when you are. At the end of the day, hang the bag up or even store it on a large shelf and they will be dry and ready for the next time they are needed.

Training

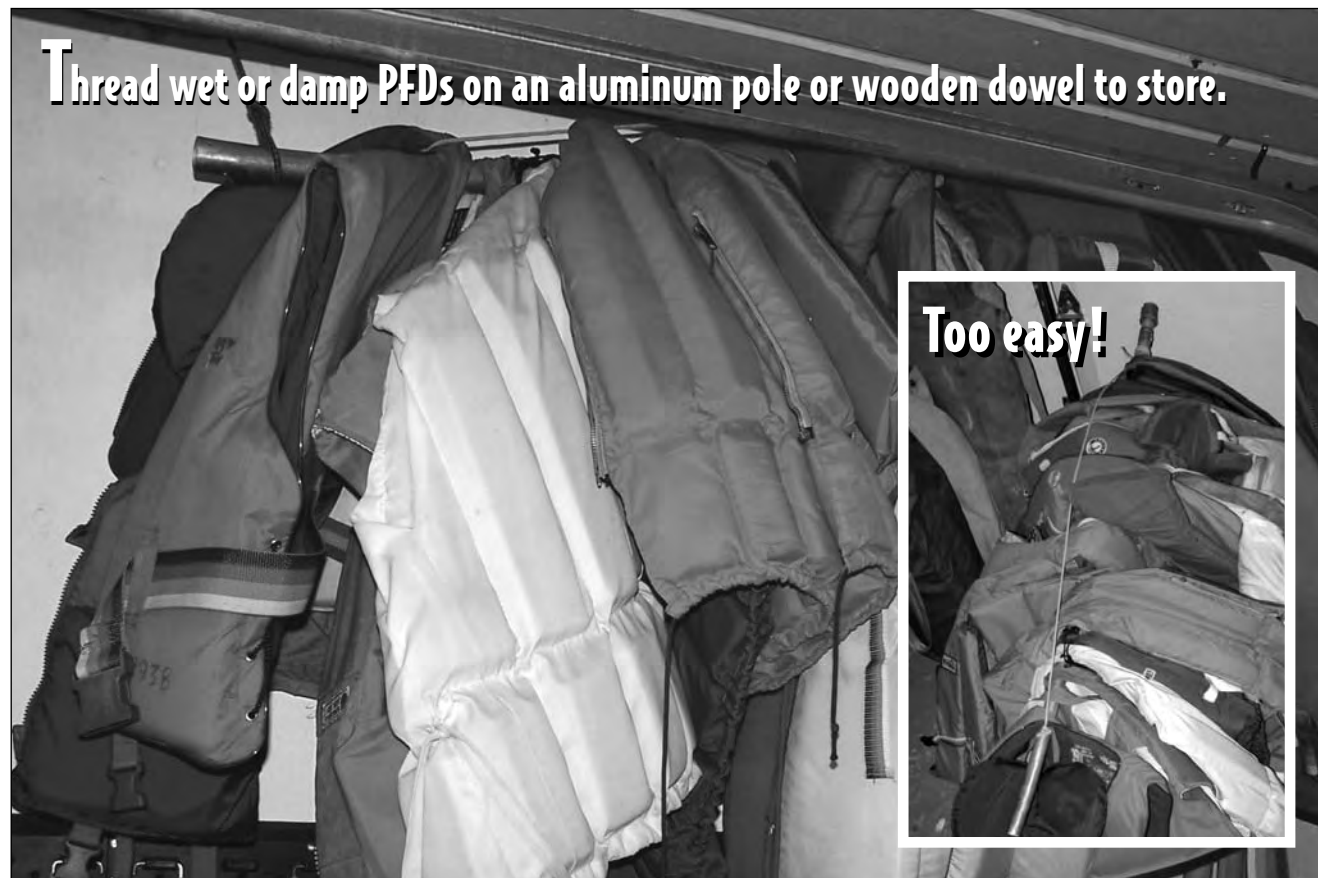
I think all leaders taking youth canoeing should take some canoe training from a certified provider no matter what their previous experience

might be. (This is consistent with Scouts Canada's Bylaw, Policies and Procedures, section 10000.) I know, I can hear the squawks of protest already, but let me explain why first.

- 1) Many years ago, as a Cub leader, what first sparked me to start instructing Scout groups and leaders other than our own was that at Cub Camps I saw leaders who would have really benefited from training, taking kids out in canoes.
- 2) Training ensures that all leaders taking youth on the water have at least the basic knowledge of canoe skills and safety practices and that this knowledge is realistic and at an acceptable level of competency to be responsible trip leaders.
- 3) Leaders need to have the appropriate skills and knowledge for the level or type of canoeing that they are planning. For example, knowing how to paddle a canoe on a lake does not necessarily mean one has the skills to do whitewater canoeing or even a weeklong canoe trip.

Who should take training?

My first choice would be to only instruct the leaders. Second choice would be to instruct youth and leaders together. My reason for this is as follows. Training leaders results in a trickle down effect as these leaders



Photographer: Jim Hartwick

take their new training to their youth. In this way I can reach more youth, albeit indirectly. Of course this only works if the leaders have gained competency with their new skills and knowledge to be comfortable passing it on to their youth.

Being trained to a higher level than your youth is also important because it is usually beneficial if the leaders know more than their youth, at least some of the time. Hah!

TIP: When paddling with your youth, take along a small sports bag filled with soft inflated balls, Frisbees™ and foam throwing toys. After the youth have gained some skills, are comfortable in their canoes, and when their attention is lagging, bring out these toys for a fun, free-for-all game of Keep Away or Canoe Basketball. I am constantly amazed that only once have I had a canoe tip during one of these games, but I always play them close to shore just in case.

Well, I hope this article will make running a canoeing program easier for you as leaders, more fun for the youth and a bit safer for all. X

– Jim Hartwick is a Lake-Water canoe instructor certified by the Recreational Canoeing Association of BC. He operates Hart Canoeing, a canoe instruction business that specializes in courses for youth and leaders. Jim was a Cub and Scout leader for 12 years. He can be reached at hartcanoeing@shaw.ca or through his web site at <http://members.shaw.ca/hartcanoeing/>

Linking to Strategic Direction #1.

When paddling with your youth, take along a small sports bag filled with soft inflated balls, Frisbees™ and foam throwing toys.



Photographer: Jim Hartwick

Canoe Links

- *Fieldbook for Canadian Scouting, Chapter 12, page 271*
- *Office of Boating Safety – Safe Boating Guide, www.tc.gc.ca/marinesafety/tp/tp511/menu.htm*



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