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DONEGAL CANOE CLUB

A General Handbook for Members

Safety, Rules & Guidelines

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Introduction

It is recognised that having a few rules will not prevent accidents. Safety is an attitude, a frame of mind. The rules and guidelines below if observed and promoted by all members of Donegal Canoe Club, will go a long way to keeping our members safe and accidents to a minimum.

Canoeing is an adventure sport which by its very nature presents what some might see as unnecessary risk. Setting new personal challenges and overcoming fear are perhaps the very essence of what being human is all about. For some this might be a quiet paddle across a lake while for others it may be more extreme such as launching off of a 10 metre waterfall.

The Donegal Canoe Club has no wish or indeed authority to 'police' individuals, but we will try wherever possible to make you aware of the risks and help you to try and assess those risks properly to prevent accidents.

This list is by no means exhaustive; in addition to canoeing proficiency, coaching and rescue courses that you will be made aware of by the club, other information on water safety is available from the Irish Canoe Union, the RNLI and from the Irish Water Safety Association.

Please also find other relevant information relating to equipment hire, pool sessions and paddling for junior members in this guide. At the back of this handbook you can also find our membership policy statement and disclaimer.

Basic Safety Principles

1. **You must be able to swim.** You do not need to swim vast distances but the ability to remain confident in the water is vital. All canoeists should normally be able to swim 25 metres.
2. **Always wear a Buoyancy Aid** and ensure that there is adequate buoyancy in your boat.
3. **Never paddle alone.** Always paddle in a group of three people or more, remember the golden rule – "less than three must never be".

General Rules and Observations

1. All those holding a level 2 skills award are permitted to paddle in a group of at least 3 provided that all members of the group hold at least a level 2 skills award. This applies to flat water (e.g. Lough Gartan).
2. No person of level 2 skills standard or below is permitted to paddle fast flowing water (e.g. River Leannan, River Finn) without having the appropriate number of competent experienced senior paddlers for safety.
3. No club member, instructor or affiliate can accept liability for you on the water. Members will endeavour to keep you as safe as possible but nobody can predict what will be round the next bend on a river or what the weather might do out at sea.
4. **Club paddles** – these are trips organised by the club committee such as the Wednesday evening paddles and various weekend trips throughout the year for senior members. Mostly but not always these trips are aimed at all abilities.
5. **Peer paddles** – these are trips arranged by any member of the club and as such are not an organised club trip. The organiser may advise of the trip via the club website or ask the club communications officer to send out an email or text message to the membership. The club has no responsibility for these trips so you need to ensure yourself that the trip is within your capabilities.
6. **Junior paddles** – these are sessions or trips arranged especially for under 18's. Junior's can sometimes join senior club paddles as long as their parents are of competent ability themselves to take responsibility for their children while on the water. If in doubt parents should seek advice in advance of any trip, they may need to arrange additional support from other competent members too. Consideration must also be given to trip leaders who may be concerned that looking after juniors may compromise the safety and/or the enjoyment of the rest of the group.
7. If you are invited on a paddle trip with the club or peers and are then asked not to paddle at the last minute, please do not get offended or take it personally. If members believe that conditions might be too challenging for you, they are only concerned for your safety. The group leaders may also be concerned that looking after you will compromise the safety of the rest of the group.
8. Donegal Canoe Club insurance does not provide personal accident cover. As injury is common place, even for experienced paddlers, we strongly recommend that you take out suitable sports insurance to cover loss of earnings and injury.

Trip Preparation

Before you set out on any trip, whether it be a multi-day island trip, a river trip or just a Wednesday evening paddle, you must make sure that your canoeing equipment is in good working order and that you have adequate safety and back-up systems in the event that the trip does not go as planned.

1. Ensure that someone knows where you are going and what time you are expected back so that they can raise the alarm if necessary. This person should have contact numbers for other club members that are not paddling in case they need to seek advice.
2. Check that your kayak / canoe has floatation adequate to ensure it will float when full of water, supplement it with airbags where possible. Check that all screws and bolts are tight. Ensure that centre walls and other safety features have not been compromised by modification. Have you got a repair kit to carry in the boat with you?
3. Check that your roof rack system is rust free and properly fitted and that your canoe straps are not frayed or worn.
4. Ensure that any trailer that you are using is roadworthy. If in doubt get it checked by a competent mechanic. This should include lights, hubs, brakes, tyres, hitches, safety chains and all doors and hatches.
5. A mobile phone can be a very useful to have in emergencies. If you have an old mobile that still works well but won't matter if it does gets wet, then swap your SIM card into it and take it with you in a suitable dry bag.
6. Have you checked the weather forecasts, tide and tidal flow charts?
7. Consider whether you need Ordnance Survey maps, a compass, head torches, strobe beacon, GPS, Radio's and flares and are they all in suitable dry bags.
8. Bring a snack and a drink, you may get hungry or thirsty and a trip may last for longer than expected. A warm drink is best for cold days.
9. Make sure you have sunscreen and use it even when it isn't sunny.

Before Getting on the Water

1. You must wear appropriate clothing and equipment for the weather conditions and the trip length and location: i.e. suitable wetsuit and cag or dry clothing. A thermal base layer must be worn under dry clothing. If you intend to wear gloves make sure they don't prevent you from being able to release your spray deck.
2. You must wear suitable safety equipment, as a minimum this includes the following
 - CE approved Buoyancy aid or Life Jacket
 - CE approved watersports helmet*
 - Suitable footwear (runners or booties)
 - Suitable spraydeck for the conditions.

****Note: - Although helmets are not mandatory for most flatwater and seapaddles we strongly advise that you wear one or at least have one with you for all trips, especially sea paddles that may take you near to rocks in large swells.***

3. Operate a "Buddy System" to check each other's gear before you get on the water. Check zips on dry suits. Check fastenings and adjustments on buoyancy aids, helmet straps. Check spray deck release cord is free and not trapped between cockpit and spray deck.
4. Carry a Throw Rope and know how to use it as both a rescuer and rescuee.
5. Carry a first aid kit with you and know how to use it.
6. Have you got enough collapsible paddles (splints) for your group for the planned trip?
7. Stow food and drink as described in Trip Preparation.
8. You must arrange to have dry clothing to change into at the end of the trip. Ideally you should also carry spare dry clothes with you, especially a woolly hat.
9. Know the conditions before you set out. Always paddle within your abilities.
10. Finally be honest with yourself, are you really fit enough for the trip? If in doubt do not paddle. This might include a recent injury, medical condition or drinking the night before. You could be about to embark upon some serious strenuous exercise especially if things go wrong. Are you really up to it for this trip?

When on the Water

1. Check spray deck release cord is free and not trapped between cockpit and spray deck.
2. Operate a “Buddy System” to look out for each other while on the water.
3. You must remain within the group for the duration of the trip, never break away by yourself and make sure to notify your group immediately if you cannot keep up with them.
4. A group should not move faster than the slowest paddler.
5. Always try to avoid trees, bushes and obstacles where you could get snagged.
6. All canoeists are obliged to help another canoeist who is in distress if it is possible and safe. Rule 1 of rescue is that you never make the situation worse than it already is by endangering yourself.
7. If you capsize, stay with the canoe. If you are in strong current or white water, float on your back with your feet going down river first and the canoe ahead of you.
8. While capsized, if another experienced paddler offers to rescue you, hold the back of their boat first and then let go of your own boat. Try to keep hold of your paddle. The rescuer won't be able to get you to safety on their own, you will need to assist them by using your legs and free arm to help swim and get the both of you to safety.
9. Do not drink alcohol before or while canoeing. Alcohol affects balance, coordination, and judgement.
10. Weirs should be considered *highly dangerous* at all times especially the concrete sided type. Unless you are absolutely certain that the weir is 'paddle friendly' you should portage it. Also note that even friendly weirs such as the one at Ramelton can change character at high water levels and become very retentive.

Equipment Hire Rules for Club Paddles

When hiring equipment for Wednesday evening paddles and club trips please observe these simple rules and respect those that give up their own time to get you paddling.

1. If you are going to attend a Wednesday evening paddle you must text the Equipment Officer on the Monday before to request equipment.
2. If you have requested equipment and can't make the Wednesday paddle please text the Equipment Officer to cancel the hire as soon as you know you can't make it.
3. Each week 2 regular members will be made responsible for handing out and booking back in equipment. They will make themselves known to you by the van and trailer.
4. You will need to pay for your equipment when you take it. Please pay the Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer or the nominated person.
5. You will need **6 items** of equipment to paddle - boat, paddle, buoyancy aid, cag, spray deck, and helmet.
6. Once you get to the paddle destination go straight away to the van and trailer to collect your **6 items**. Put them all in your boat and take them away from the van and trailer to avoid confusion. ***CHECK THAT YOU HAVE 6 ITEMS!***
7. Please take responsibility for the equipment that you hire. If you loose any item you pay for that item.
8. Each week 2 people will be made responsible for rinsing out buoyancies, cags and spray decks if fresh water is available. Please take your turn.

Equipment Hire Rules for Peer Paddles

Use of equipment is subject to approval of the club Equipment Officer and the guidelines below must be adhered to at all times. For arranged trips and groups, a nominated person must be made responsible for the collection of fees and as a single point of contact for the Equipment Officer.

1. Contacting the club Equipment Officer and advising what equipment is to be used and when the equipment will be removed and returned.
2. Collection of hire fees and payment to the Treasurer or the Equipment Officer.
3. All equipment must be returned washed and undamaged.
4. Where equipment is damaged or lost the item must be replaced or repaired at the hirer's cost.
5. Equipment must be put back in the correct place in the club store.

Pool Sessions

These are usually run from October until March at the Letterkenny Pool. The sessions are from 10pm until 11pm and members are asked to be in the lobby by 9.45.

1. Please remember to sign in on the sheet in the lobby.
2. Please pay for your session before entering the pool.
3. Please note that use of own boats in the pool is subject to approval and inspection by the club Equipment Officer. Boats must be spotlessly clean. The airbags must be removed as these hold leaves and other foreign bodies that must not find their way into the pool.
4. Please completely empty club boats of water at the end of each session. This makes it much easier for those that lift and stack the boats after the session.

Junior Paddling Guidelines

These guidelines are for parents/guardians, junior members and Donegal Canoe Club members that take junior paddling sessions. The Donegal Canoe Club provide Junior paddling sessions on the basis that responsibility for juniors is a joint partnership between the child, parent/guardian and the Donegal Canoe Club.

1. ALL participants have to complete a Donegal Canoe Club membership form, which **MUST** be signed by a parent or guardian before they can be allowed on the water.
2. The Donegal Canoe Club will provide a Kayak, Paddle, Helmet, Buoyancy Aid (a type of life jacket), Cag (a type of rain jacket for paddling), spray deck, for a cost (see current price list) per session.
3. Junior participation in the sport is subject to the individual's size. Minimum acceptable age is 10 years old but this does not mean that every 10 year old is physically big enough to paddle. The Donegal Canoe Club reserves the right to postpone membership until the child has grown. We will endeavour to do this as tactfully as possible so as not to hurt the child's feelings.
4. Parents/Guardians should be aware that the Donegal Canoe Club Junior sessions are not an activity where you can drop off your children and come back for them later. To meet both Safety and Child Protection* guidelines we can only be responsible for a child while on the water. This means that we cannot come with them if they are cold and want to leave the water and we cannot assist them with drying and dressing themselves. This is the responsibility of the parent/guardian. *Note:- The Donegal Canoe Club adheres to the [ICU Child Protection Policy](#) which is available from the Irish Canoe Union website www.canoe.ie
5. All regular participants should ideally wear a wetsuit and wetsuit shoes or booties or water shoes. Cotton and heavy fabrics that hold the water should be avoided in preference to layers of thinner man made tight fitting garments. Participants may be asked to leave the water if they look fatigued or cold.
6. Participants that do not behave within reason will be asked to leave the water.
7. All participants **MUST** wear a safety helmet and buoyancy aid at all times.

The Environment and Canoeing

Pure clean water is the most vital necessity of life. Ireland has plenty of water and it is our duty to ensure that future generations get as much pleasure from it as we do. Canoeing as a sport also depends upon the availability of clean water and as canoeists we should always follow the...

Clean Water Code

- Dispose of all rubbish responsibly and do not drop litter or waste anywhere and especially not in the river or the sea.
- The river or lake you paddle on may also be the water supply for your town.
- Influence others to be aware of the hazards of pollution
- Future generations have the right to enjoy clean waterways.
- Notify your local authority of any pollution you may observe.

Wildlife

All wildlife including animals, birds and fish must be protected. If an animal such as a seal has to move from the beach to the water because of your presence then you are probably too close. Respect their space and enjoy them from afar.

Policy Statement

Donegal Canoe Club is fully committed to safeguarding the well being of its members. The club wishes to ensure that all those taking part in canoeing are able to do so protected from harm both on and off the water. In an activity such as canoeing, safety and keeping people safe is all about risk assessment and minimising the risks involved at all levels of participation. All members are expected to abide by the club's safety rules and guidelines.

It is also expected that every member of the club should, at all times, show respect and understanding for member's rights, safety (both on and off the water) and personal welfare.

The principles of Donegal Canoe Club's policy are based on the moral and ethical duty to ensure that our junior members' can also enjoy canoeing in a safe environment and as such they reflect current best practice as contained in the Irish Sports Council's and Irish Canoe Union's Child Protection Policy. All club members should make themselves aware of the information contained in these booklets, which are available for reading at www.donegalcanoeclub.com or the ICU website www.canoe.ie or on request from a committee member.

In Donegal Canoe Club we believe that the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility, particularly when it comes to protecting children from abuse. Everyone in the club can help – administrator, club officials, coaches, parents, friends and children themselves. We strongly recommend that you read the following;

The Code of Ethics & Good Practice for Children's Sport ((The Irish Sports Council)

Irish Canoe Union Child Protection Policy

Disclaimer

Canoeing/kayaking is an adventurous sport, which by its very nature involves a degree of risk of personal injury or even death. Donegal Canoe Club (the Club), a voluntary organisation, cannot ensure your complete safety at all times.

Members must accept these risks and agree to be responsible for their own actions and involvement. Members must accept that the Club cannot be held liable for any injuries caused to them or caused to others or their property by them, due to their participation or involvement in this sport howsoever arising. Members must understand that they are advised to take out Personal Accident Insurance to cover any activities as a member of the Donegal Canoe Club.

This applies to all members of Donegal Canoe Club and they confirm that upon becoming a member they will not hold Donegal Canoe Club, its members, its staff, its trustees, its affiliates or any person so connected to be liable for any accident caused while participating in any activity connected with the club. Members should note that they remain personally responsible for their own actions and the Donegal Canoe Club is indemnified entirely for any damage, loss, claim, injury, accident, or any other matter caused by their participation in these activities howsoever arising.

A GENERAL HANDBOOK FOR DONEGAL CANOE CLUB MEMBERS

Safety, Rules & Guidelines



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