



Thoughts on Leading Paddling Trips

Paddling together is the heart of our sport. That doesn't happen unless someone does something—as simple as calling a friend or as complex as organizing an expedition. At some level, every outing is 'lead,' particularly with paddling clubs. Here are some thoughts on how to do that successfully.

Actually, there is only one rule—**please yourself**—and a couple of corollaries. Don't lead a trip *you* wouldn't go on. Go to a place you love, or that you want to explore. Go when and for as long as you like. Take people you like, and the number you like. Select participants. If you don't like paddling with novices, don't. You'll do both yourself and them a favor. Happy leaders make happy trips, whether its day trips, over-nighters, or two-week expeditions.

The first corollary is that **you have to know what you like**. That may take some thought and experimentation. How much organization and decision-making are you comfort-

able with? The more people you have, the more you'll do. And the more accessible your trip, the more people you'll have. An easy paddle in sheltered waters on a Sunday afternoon in July can be anything but relaxing for the leader who isn't ready for the variations of ages, equipment, and expectations that show up.

What kind of paddling do you most enjoy? Any paddling is good paddling, but we all have a specialty. What's yours—surfing Rhode Island beaches, island camping in Maine, messing about on tidal rivers? That's the kind of trip you should lead. Look to your equipment for hints. Every boat does something best. How many tents do you own? Plan a trip around your specialty and stick relentlessly to it. Paddling is about quality, not quantity. There is no correlation between your value as a person and the number on your trip. Three people having a blast are better than thirty who aren't.

The second is that **people will**

self-select. The trick is giving them the right information to make a good decision. Some descriptive adjectives in the newsletter or magazine notice when coupled with the usual where, when, and what information is often enough for day trips. For longer trips, consider an information sheet for prospects. In either case, some information is important to accurate self-selection.

Specify skill level. The traditional 'novice', 'intermediate', 'expert' labels will eliminate the novices from the expert trips, and vice-versa. Specifying equipment—'no open cockpit boats', 'compass and self-rescue gear', 'cold-water protection', 'four season tent'—or specific skills—'combat roll'—will help the intermediates sort themselves out. Specify miles paddled and weather parameters. '15 miles, rain or shine' draws a different crowd than 'five leisurely miles, rain cancels.' On camping trips, specify who cooks and camping conditions. 'Leader cooks' and 'camp ground' is one

crowd. 'Shared cooking' and 'primitive camping' is another. Leaders who sell their trips with glowing descriptions ('enchanted' is particularly dangerous) and lie about the bugs get what they deserve—marooned on an island with twenty-five pissed off paddlers in the rain. Those that tell the truth, maybe exaggerating the difficulties slightly, always paddle with people they like.

Clark Bowlen

Coming Events

- **September 10, Falkner's Island.** A return to Falkner's Island after the nesting season. Meet at 10am at the East River ramp in Madison. Register with leaders Jim & Kim Gass, 421-4476.
- **October 8, CONNYAK Paddle and Picnic at Bluff Point State Park.** Season closer. Jay Babina 481-3221.
- **Wednesday, September 20, 7:30pm. ConnYak Meeting.** Manchester Community-Technical College, Alumni Auditorium (the building with covered handicap ramps. It is next to the 'A' Building to the south.)

EDITOR'S APOLOGY

We changed meeting to the third Wednesday of September because your newsletter editor couldn't get it (the letter) out in time to announce for our usual second Wednesday. You will also get this after Jim and Kim's Faulkner trip. Sorry, my school start-up took more time than I anticipated.

Clark Bowlen



CONNECTICUT SEA KAYAKERS
131 East Center Street
Manchester CT 06040