

CIVIL SERVICE CANOE CLUB: ORGANISING A CLUB TRIP

This note is intended to provide guidance (and some “rules”) for those organising Club trips (and some “rules” for those taking part in them). The degree of organisation required can vary considerably. A major trip, involving a number of beginners, lots of boats etc, and a new venue, may require you to consider many of the issues. A few experienced, self-contained people going back to a well-known site, there is little one needs to think about. There is therefore no point in trying to set down precise guidelines. This note attempts to be a comprehensive guide to lessons learnt from past trips – but much will only sometimes be relevant.

Key points

- A “Club trip” is defined for this purpose as one advertised in the Club’s calendar (or widely promoted by word of mouth, e-mail etc), open to all Club members (and guests etc) subject only to any competence requirements. This is distinguished from purely private trips, organised between groups of friends, which are not widely promoted etc.
- As organiser of a Club trip, you do so on behalf of, and in the name of, the Club. Trips should be organised *professionally* and prudently – participants should be well informed and well briefed. The trip should reflect credit on the organiser and the Club: financial, legal or other liabilities or disputes must be avoided if at all possible!
- Your primary concern is to ensure that canoeing takes place safely, within the skills of those both leading and taking part, and in accordance with insurance requirements – and that those involved enjoy themselves and are encouraged to develop their skills.
- Keep your plans sufficiently flexible – the one thing you can be certain about, is that it won’t work as planned! People always change their plans at the last minute, rivers run dry, or it blows a gale when you want to go surfing!
- You need to confirm any access issues in advance – if in any doubt, contact the Local Access Officer (by post) or tour organisers in advance. You also need to plan ahead to ensure that water levels/conditions will be suitable – watch the weather forecast a week in advance to check on rainfall and/or wind etc, and if need be, check with local contacts.
- Be clear whether people have “committed” themselves to going, or are just “interested”. Let people know beforehand if the trip is likely to offer more or less difficult conditions than they expected. Give people enough guidance on what to bring, where to meet etc.
- Plan what Club equipment you need, and make sure it’s in good condition.
- Ensure that people are properly briefed on hazards etc, and that any non-members have signed the necessary disclaimer before going onto the river. Ensure that proper arrangements are made for leadership and group control on the river.
- Any income owing to the Club, or expenditure incurred on its behalf, must be properly accounted for to the Treasurer. You should not spend money out of your own pocket. Any deposits you have to pay out in advance should be paid by the Club, or reimbursed as soon as possible by the Treasurer. The only exception is in the case of minor payments made in the few days immediately preceding the trip. Where significant expenditure may need to be incurred some time before a trip, the Treasurer’s approval must first be obtained.
- Finally, make sure someone agrees to write up the trip – and does it promptly! And complete the trip report form and send it to the Treasurer as soon as possible afterwards.

RULES FOR PARTICIPANTS – CLUB SAFETY POLICY

- The organiser of a trip (acting on behalf of the Club) has the right not to permit an individual to take part in activities – whether because of water or weather conditions, personal competence (including swimming ability) and experience, availability of suitable equipment (whether Club or personal), behaviour, medical conditions, or otherwise.
- The trip leader has the right to exclude anyone regarded as behaving irresponsibly, or to require him or her to modify their behaviour.
- Anyone acting against the recommendations of the trip leader does so at their own risk.
- If a participant is unable to swim 50 metres, they must notify the trip leader, and will only be allowed to take part at the discretion of the trip leader.
- Anyone suffering from a medical condition which might be relevant to their safety (diabetes, heart conditions, asthma and epilepsy are obvious examples) must ensure that the organiser is aware of the condition, and any medication which may be required to deal with it (including where such medication is carried and how it is to be administered).
- Buoyancy aids must be worn on all Club canoeing activities.
- Suitable helmets must be worn on all white water canoeing activities. In the event of any doubt as to whether conditions require the use of helmets, those concerned are deemed to accept the risk if they choose not to wear helmets, particularly if advised to do so by the trip leader.
- Members should be aware of the particular risks posed by weirs and other man-made constructions, and by moored or fixed obstacles in tidal waters.
- The Club is not responsible for loss of, or damage to, any personal possessions or equipment. Using equipment belonging to someone else involves accepting responsibility for it.
- The Club will not generally charge members in respect of any loss of, or damage to, Club equipment, but reserves the right to do so if it is considered that the user has not taken reasonable care. This includes making arrangements to secure (by cable and lock) Club boats whilst not in use. Members should be aware that the Club does not generally insure its equipment whilst in use.
- All members should be aware of the risks of contracting Weil's Disease and other illnesses associated with canoeing. They should contact their GP and the Club if they become ill after a trip. Whilst on the water, appropriate precautions should be taken, such as the wearing of plasters over cuts.
- Members must appreciate that motor transport is statistically more dangerous than canoeing. All drivers must realise that they are responsible for the safety of their passengers, for the loading and securing of equipment both within and on their cars (and on any trailer), and for the general safety aspects of their cars, such as tyre pressures, effective lights and so on.

DETAILED GUIDANCE

Planning access etc

1. You need to ensure that access to the river is not a problem. Ensure you have details of relevant access agreements, permits held by the Club (including "boat numbers") etc.
2. If in any doubt about details (inc. access/egress points), check with the BCU's Local Access Organiser (LAO) (see BCU Yearbook) – in general, LAOs should be contacted, by post, with SAE, sufficiently far in advance (remember, they're all volunteers).
3. If it's an "organised" trip (ie it's in the BCU Touring Calendar or has been advertised in the magazines), confirm that the published date is correct. Check the position on paying for/booking tickets. Think about the need to do so long enough in advance.
4. There may be "shared" use of the river involved (eg at the Tryweryn): check what limitations this may impose.
5. If the venue is a competition site, it may be worth making sure that there are no competitions planned which might hinder the Club's proposed use. Wild water races would impose some time constraints over the whole river, around which one could probably work; slalom (or rodeo) competitions, however, might in practice preclude use of a whole section of river. This may be particularly relevant to Thames weir trips. The BCU yearbook (or specialist competition yearbooks) are a likely source of information.
6. Check what information there is – guidebooks etc – on the chosen river. David Pearson has a useful library of guidebooks; many people have copies of the Terry Storry and Alan Fox guides. The local access officer may have produced some notes on access/egress points, hazards etc: check if the Club has a copy.

Weather/conditions

7. You should ensure that water conditions are likely to be suitable. This means thinking about the weather forecast: try to catch the Sunday lunchtime forecast (11.55am) the previous weekend (if need be, tape it or ask someone to do so). Although not always reliable 6 days ahead, this forecast can give a useful guide to weather patterns in the latter part of the week before the trip. Try to check again with the Wednesday forecast at lunchtime or at 9.30pm on BBC1 – this is often (but not always) pretty accurate.
8. For a river trip, you are principally thinking about levels of rainfall – will there be enough at the right time (ideally, Thursday/Friday all day before drying up for the weekend!)? Remember there can be too much rainfall as well as too little! If really in doubt, check local information with the LAO (if you can reasonably contact them), local Clubs, retailers etc. There may be a recorded telephone information services available.
9. For a coastal trip (touring or surfing) plan ahead as to whether wind strengths and directions will be suitable. There is a "surf line" recorded phone service and a range of Internet sites with access to information on sea conditions. Good surf conditions usually depend on steady winds over a wide area (eg over the width of the Atlantic) whereas coastal touring generally require settled conditions over several continuous days.
10. Think about alternative/fallback plans; surfing may well be an alternative for river trips. Bear this in mind when watching weather forecasts – check for wind strengths/directions at the relevant time. Thames weirs are also an alternative, as are places like Symonds Yat, Holme Pierrepont and the Tees and Northampton slalom sites. Information on weir conditions may be available from Whitewater at Shepperton (phone no. in magazines)

etc), or from Playboater Magazine (on their web site); for Symonds Yat from Wyedean canoes. For the artificial sites, Thames weirs, Tryweryn or Symonds Yat, conflicting competitions are the obvious thing to be checked).

11. For a coastal trip, check tide times: surfing is usually best at low tide. David Pearson can generally provide an estimate, and there are web sites. For coastal touring trips, thought may need to be given to currents as well: David Pearson can advise.

Accommodation

12. Check whether people wish to camp or B&B – and whether they will be staying both Friday and Saturday nights, or just Saturday.
13. We have an ongoing (though not up to date!) list of places we've stayed in the past, including in many cases, directions, phone numbers etc (check with David Pearson). If you find a new worthwhile place to stay, let David know the details so it can be added. If we know nothing, the local Tourist Information Office may be the best place to start: they can sometimes book accommodation for you. It's sometimes useful to mention that you're a canoeing group (you may get a discount), but worth emphasising the adult, civilised nature of our groups! With village/farm B&Bs in particular, if the first place you try is full, ask if they can recommend somewhere else: there are often "networks".
14. Increasingly, we've found that "Good Pub Guides" are a useful place to find somewhere to stay. Prices tend to be slightly higher than for B&Bs, but you have the convenience of being able to turn up late on Friday evening and know that they're likely to be still up – and almost certainly still serving drinks! And if you can eat there on Saturday evening, it saves driving or walking. "Ramblers' Association" guides can also be a useful source.
15. We've also increasingly found that looking for accommodation right next to where you're canoeing can be restrictive. Travelling 5-10 miles away – provided it's on good roads – often opens up a wider range of possibilities.
16. When booking, check how much the accommodation is likely to cost, and if in doubt, make sure that people are willing to pay! B&B accommodation should not normally cost more than about £15-18 per head.
17. Think about whether anyone will insist on a room to themselves. Don't plan on anyone sharing a bed unless they want to! Don't assume that "couples" wish to share a room or a bed: if in doubt, check whether or not they want a twin or double room.
18. You often don't need to book with campsites, but at busy times it can be useful.
19. If you expect to arrive late, ensure the landlady knows. Anyone delayed en route should, out of courtesy, let the landlady know. It may be feasible to get other Club members to stay up till you arrive, rather than getting the landlady to do so.
20. If people are planning to camp, or if sleeping bags or bedding are needed (usually with self-catering or bunkhouse accommodation) ensure that everyone knows what to bring.

Catering etc

21. If you are planning to eat out on Saturday night (and you know where), it can often be helpful, particularly if the group is large, to book in advance.

22. If you are in self-catering accommodation, ensure that people know what food to bring with them: it is often best to ensure that only one person does all the initial shopping for eg breakfasts for the weekend.

Equipment

23. Check which boats people intend to paddle – particularly where Club boats are involved. You may need to juggle boats a bit to keep people happy; there may be scope for swapping during the weekend. Private boats (and/or paddles) should only be used with the explicit agreement of the owner. The Club Europas should not be used on anything other than gentle whitewater.
24. In the case of boats that use airbags as their sole buoyancy, it is important to ensure that the airbags are properly inflated before every use. In other cases, one or more airbags should be used if they are available, particular for beginners' boats.
25. Ensure that spraydecks appropriate to the boats and conditions are taken (check sizes!). Ensure that the right sizes of buoyancy aids are taken. Select decent paddles; make sure that any left-handed paddlers are properly catered for. Check what other Club equipment people need: some people have all their own kit apart from the boat.
26. Don't forget to ensure that things like split paddles, air-bags, throwlines and first aid kits are taken (and, during the trip, carried by appropriate people).
27. Ensure that beginners are properly catered for. Some may well not know what to bring. They may well be lacking personal equipment such as wetsuits, boots, fleeces, cagoules etc. You should think about borrowing kit for them, or directing them to someone they can approach to borrow kit.
28. Think about bringing enough genuinely spare kit – what if people bring the wrong size of spraydeck or buoyancy aid? Lose paddles, helmets etc during the course of the trip? It's been done – and you should be in a position to sort it out!

Transport

29. Identify those who have cars; consider what boat carrying capacity they have. Find out when they can/want to leave (this has implications for accommodation bookings too). Consider whether those sharing cars get on well together! You may also wish to check whether drivers' insurance means they want a specific "second driver" with them.
30. If it looks as though the trailer is likely to be required, check (early) with the Equipment Officer, to ensure that it is in serviceable condition. There is a driver with a towbar?
31. Ensure that those taking Club equipment make arrangements to collect it, from the pool or from Chiswick as appropriate. If it's coming from Chiswick, do they have keys?
32. It may be helpful to beg or borrow a large scale map of the area: many libraries hold 1:50,000 maps, and David Pearson can sometimes raid the DETR map library for photocopies of material produced by the Ordnance Survey.

Communicating arrangements to those going

33. It is helpful for everyone to know what's going on: who's going; what the plans are; what equipment is involved; details of transport arrangements, accommodation, meeting places and so on. If there are costs involved (eg for river tickets on Tours) make sure that those going know what the costs will be – it shouldn't come as a sudden shock.

34. BCU members may need to be reminded to bring their membership cards with them, in order to obtain “discounted” river access tickets on Tours or at dedicated sites.
35. Beginners will need greater guidance in terms of what to bring (including what to do about packed lunches, drinks etc), where to go (photocopied maps can be useful, as well as precise instructions where these are well known). People might be reminded to bring eg walking boots if that seems appropriate.
36. In any case, it is vital that unambiguous meeting place(s) and time(s) are arranged, and that everyone knows the details.
37. If people are staying elsewhere, or with friends or relations *en route*, it can be helpful to have a phone number for them, in case plans change before/during the weekend.

Organisation during/after the trip

38. Ensure that you have a “trip form” with you if any NON-MEMBERS are taking part in the trip (copies on the wall or in the folder at Chiswick). **They must, without fail, sign the form before being allowed on the water. This is very important to ensure that, as “guests”, they are covered, as temporary Club members, by the Club’s BCU third party insurance cover.**
39. Ensure that on-site behaviour is acceptable: this includes thoughtful parking etc. Noisy or disruptive behaviour, careless parking or changing etc can give canoeing a bad name.
40. Where a self-contained trip is planned, you should consider leaving word with someone not taking part, as to where you are going and when you expect to return. This should normally be the case where a sea trip is planned (the Coastguard is one option – if you let them know of your trip, it is **vital** that you confirm your safe arrival!
41. Relevant safety equipment should be carried on all trips. A First Aid kit should always be carried. Flares should be carried on all sea trips. Mobile phones are more likely to be useful if carried rather than left in the car – but an acceptable signal in many canoeing areas is the exception rather than the rule (if in doubt, head uphill out of a river valley!).
42. If you are challenged by eg landowners or fishermen regarding your right to be on the river, you should be able to show them whatever permissions etc you hold. If the trip is not covered by a specific access agreement, you should use diplomatic skills to defuse any possible incidents. If in doubt, you should generally give way, and leave the river quietly, as instructed by the landowner. Any significant disputes or challenges should be reported to the LAO after the trip.
43. If any equipment is lost, make reasonable efforts to find/recover it. If unsuccessful, consider notifying the LAO and local police – largely, so that they know that people are not missing if the kit is found washed up. Notify Club officers of any losses.
44. Ensure that all Club kit is returned promptly to store (this includes things like throwlines, helmets, spraydecks etc which can find their way into car boots!). Any supplementary airbags that may have been used, should be removed from boats and left out to dry (flat rather than folded, please), or put back into the cupboard. Return Club First Aid kits to store and ensure that they have remained watertight and dry. Make arrangements for replenishment of any supplies that may have been used. Notify the Equipment Officer of any maintenance needs that may have been identified.

Administrative and financial aspects

45. In most cases, the Club's only financial involvement in a trip is in respect of charges for temporary membership (in the case of non-members) and/or for the use of Club equipment (remember that a charge is made for temporary membership even if a guest has all their own equipment).
46. However, in other cases, a greater financial commitment by the Club can be involved. Access may need to be booked and paid for in advance. Deposits for accommodation may need to be paid. There may be a risk of financial loss in the event that a trip has to be cancelled or re-arranged, through lack of interest or inappropriate weather.
47. In such cases it is fundamental both that the organiser of the trip should not spend money out of his/her own pocket (and is not, in turn, at risk if an event has to be cancelled), and that financial transactions on the Club's behalf can be seen by the Treasurer (and in turn the auditors) to have been properly managed. The organiser should be seen to be collecting money on the Club's behalf, not on a personal basis.
48. Deposits or pre-payments on behalf of the Club should, wherever possible, be paid by Club cheque. Where this is not possible, the organiser should immediately submit details to the Treasurer and obtain reimbursement. The only exception to this should be in the case of minor deposits (eg for accommodation) paid in the few days prior to the trip. Because of the risk to the Club, it is vital that, if significant expenditure may need to be incurred some time before a trip, the Treasurer's approval should first be obtained.
49. It is perfectly proper for the organiser to include, within the costings for a trip, any significant expenditure incurred, eg postage, telephone calls, or petrol costs for delivering/collecting equipment.
50. Where deposits (particularly for accommodation) have to be paid in advance, it is usually appropriate to obtain deposits from those intending to go on the trip. It must be made clear that it may not be possible to refund such deposits in the event that the person decides not to go on the trip.
51. If the organiser is considering cancelling a trip (eg through lack of interest, inappropriate weather conditions or access difficulties), it can often be helpful or reassuring to consult colleagues, particularly those with greater experience. If the decision to cancel is taken then every effort should be made to minimise any losses. Accommodation deposits should be recovered if at all possible, and it may be possible to obtain a refund or credit for access charges paid in advance but not in the event used (for example, on the Dart, a credit may be obtained for unused tickets returned before the booked day).
52. If a trip is cancelled, the Club may, at its discretion, decide to underwrite any losses incurred. It is normally appropriate to write off any access fees which have been pre-paid some time in advance (ie in order to confirm river space so as to include a trip in the Club's calendar) and cannot be recovered. Whether or not access fees paid shortly beforehand (eg tour tickets), or prepayments for accommodation should be borne by the Club centrally, or by the individuals concerned (and whether any deposits paid by individuals should or should not be refunded), is in practice likely to depend on the circumstances. If the booking is a contingent one ("a gamble") it is more likely to be right for the Club to bear the cost; if a booking has been made on behalf of a specific group of people planning to go on the trip, it is likely to be right for them (rather than the Club) to bear the cost. If necessary, the Committee may be asked to rule in any given case. Organisers should therefore seek to minimise the Club's exposure to risk. If financial liability is likely to arise it is particularly important that a decision to cancel is taken in consultation with colleagues.

53. Where deposits have been paid by or on behalf of the Club, then the organiser should be able to demonstrate adequately to the Treasurer (and in turn to the Club's auditors) what money has been spent, and how it has been offset against money collected. It is also important to have a clear record of who was present on a trip, and what (if any) money they paid for temporary membership and/or for using Club equipment. This helps the Club maintain attendance records, and could be necessary evidence in the event of any incident or third party insurance claim.
54. The trip organiser is not necessarily obliged to collect all the money "on the day" (though it is helpful, whenever possible, to do so) but rather, to ensure that the Treasurer has full information as to what he/she needs to collect.
55. In all cases, the Club's main concern is to account for all income/expenditure passing through the organiser's hands on behalf of the Club – accommodation costs paid direct to a B&B or campsite are of no concern to the Treasurer unless deposits have been paid.
56. A proforma has therefore been produced (details of the Club's charges should be printed on the reverse), designed to help organisers to record:
 - a. names of all those attending (together with details of how many days they paddled) – this is primarily for attendance statistics;
 - b. details of charges levied (collected and/or outstanding) for use of Club equipment and for temporary membership;
 - c. details of deposits paid (access fees, accommodation etc);
 - d. details of organisers' expenses (or other, eg towing costs) charged to participants;
 - e. details of monies charged to participants (collected from and/or outstanding).
 - f. details of accommodation used (phone numbers, directions etc) – to help update the Club's central records for future organisers' use.

Write-ups etc

57. Arrange for one or more people to do/contribute to a write-up for the Club records and for the newsletter. This should be done promptly, so that things don't become stale.
58. Style/content is very much up to the author – but make sure that everyone involved gets a mention; give an appropriate indication of what the water/weather conditions were; ensure that highlights/lowlights are covered but try to ensure a balanced report, so that we don't scare off newcomers by implying that everything was huge!
59. Write-ups should wherever possible be supplied on disc or by e-mail – Word format preferred, but any common word processor format (PC not MAC) should be acceptable (if in doubt, supply a printed copy and an ASCII text file as well).
60. You may wish to check whether anyone is taking an "in boat" camera with them – if not, then consider borrowing one eg from David Pearson. Anyone taking pictures should be encouraged to get them developed as soon as possible after the trip, and to let David Pearson have sight of anything useful for the newsletter.

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