

A person wearing a red shirt and a red cap is seen from behind, paddling a red kayak on a river. The water is clear and blue-green, with ripples and small waves. In the background, there are green hills and a clear sky with some clouds. A large green curved banner is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the chapter title.

Chapter 7 Canoeing/Kayaking

Canoeing covers a wide and diverse range of disciplines including sea kayaking, white water kayaking, surf kayaking, polo, slalom, marathon, sprint, freestyle and touring.

A **canoe** is a lightweight narrow **boat**, typically pointed at both ends and **open** on top, propelled by one or more seated or kneeling paddlers facing the direction of travel using a single-bladed paddle.

A **kayak** is a small, narrow boat which is propelled by means of a double-bladed paddle.

In this Code of Practice, the term **canoe** when used also refers to a kayak.

There are a number of basic safety precautions that should be applied to any canoeing activity, regardless of its speciality.

7.1 Training

Undertake a recognised training course in the correct use of the specific type of canoe you wish to use. Be completely familiar with relevant rescue/recovery drills, self-righting techniques, e.g. Eskimo roll, etc. Practice such drills with fellow members of your group. Canoeing Ireland have a comprehensive training and accreditation scheme, which covers river, sea kayaking and open

canoes (see Appendix 9 for details of course providers).

7.2 Prior to entering the water

- Ensure you are a competent swimmer and capable of surviving in the water in the areas you operate in.
- Undertake a First Aid course and a life-saving course.
- Never operate alone, always canoe in company.
- Do not operate a canoe if under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Inspect your craft and equipment thoroughly. Check it is fitted with adequate buoyancy material and that such buoyancy is correctly distributed and secured within the hull.
- Ensure that the bung is fitted correctly.
- Do not use the canoe unless you are certain it is watertight. Boats with temporary repairs should not be used.
- If carrying additional equipment, ensure that the canoe is never overloaded.
- Use a spray deck, with quick release where relevant, and be completely familiar with its use.
- When using a spray deck, ensure that the grab loop is in good condition and is within reach.
- Always ensure that your name/contact address are permanently marked on the hull.



The addition of strips of retro-reflective tape to the hull is recommended.

- Check the hull is fitted with grab loops/towing lines. Kayaks over 270 cm in length should have decklines fitted fore and aft. Kayaks less than 270 cm in length should have cowtails fitted.
- Ensure that a responsible person is aware of your intended departure, locations and return details.
- Ensure that you carry a mobile phone or Marine VHF radio in a suitable watertight cover for use to summon assistance in emergency situations.
- Open canoes are not suitable for the sea.
- All kayaks should have suitable footrests.

7.3 Personal Safety Equipment

- PFD/lifejacket (see Appendix 5).
- The PFD should be fitted with a whistle to attract attention, be in a Hi-Visibility colour and fitted with retro-reflective strips.
- Ensure you are suitably attired for the type of activity, area of operation and time of the year.
- Be aware of the dangers of hypothermia when wet and exposed to the elements.
- If paddling where the risk of head injury exists, a suitable helmet should always be worn.
- When making descents on remote rivers of Grade 3 and



higher, and while sea-kayaking, you should carry a registered Personal Locator Beacon (PLB). This will enable early alerting of the rescue services in the event of an emergency.

7.4 Sea Kayaking

Sea kayakers should observe the following additional precautions:

- Be aware of the weather forecast and sea area forecast. Only operate within your limits and ability. Canoeing in a windforce 4 or above should only be considered for the very experienced.
- Be aware of the tidal conditions for the areas that you are operating in.
- Be aware of the effects of interaction between wind and tide on sea states.
- Carry a chart for the area of operation. These can be laminated and attached to the kayak deck.
- Carry a hand held compass.
- Ensure a nominated person ashore is aware of your itinerary, departure and return times.

- Have a passage plan and alternative emergency plans, e.g. safe landing area down wind, etc.
- Do not operate alone – kayak in company.
- If capsized and floating outside your craft, remain with it. It offers a better target to rescuers and has a high buoyancy factor. Do not attempt to swim for shore unless adjacent to the shore.

The following additional equipment should be considered:

- Flares
- Towrope/throw bag
- Torch
- Suitable knife
- Portable waterproof VHF radio
- Portable GPS unit
- Personal EPIRB
- First Aid Kit
- Spare food/drink
- Paddle float/leash
- Sun cream and sun hat.

Essential equipment should be carried on the person or in an easily recoverable buoyant grab bag.

7.5 River Kayaking/Canoeing

River kayaking ranges from touring on slow moving Grade 1 water in either open canoes or recreational kayaks, to the more extreme white water river running, which can include whitewater rapids, waterfalls and features such as



stoppers and undercuts. Freestyle kayaking is at the more extreme end of the canoeing spectrum. Trained and competent persons only should attempt this activity.

In addition to the basic safety precautions mentioned previously, operators should observe the following additional checks and advice:

- Hulls are examined for damage each time prior to entering the water;
- Potential courses should be studied for hidden dangers, snags, currents, etc., prior to putting boats in the water;
- Boats should never operate alone on a stretch of water;
- In extreme and difficult locations, shore based rescue/recovery personnel should be in attendance, trained and equipped in the rapid recovery of persons in distress;
- Contact numbers for medical assistance/rescue authorities/lockkeepers should be available on site;
- Kayaks should have adequate buoyancy;
- Get First Aid training and carry a First Aid Kit on river trips;
- If carrying a throwbag, also carry a knife;
- Depending on the difficulty of the river, consider carrying some of the following:
 - Split paddles;
 - Webbing slings and carabiners;
 - Duct tape;
 - Dry clothes;
 - Group shelter;
 - Food and money;
 - Matches/lighter.
- Be aware of the river's grading and of the water level before committing. The different grades are listed in the Table on the following page.

Grade I: Flat Water	Water is stationary or extremely slow moving and without any obstructions.
Grade II: Moderately Difficult	The way down a river is clear but simple obstructions do exist. Small stoppers and small drops can be present. There are places where the flow accelerates. There is a choice of routes.
Grade III: Difficult	There is a route that is easily recognisable from the water. Waves can be irregular. Boulders and obstructions can be numerous. Stoppers and small eddies exist. Inspection is advisable.
Grade IV: Very Difficult	The route is not always clear and inspection is advisable. Rapids are continuous and breakouts are few and small. Stoppers are powerful. Continual manoeuvring with precise control and good decision making is required.
Grade V: Extremely Difficult	Inspection is essential because serious dangers can exist. Large drops, narrow passages, very complex boulder fields, ever changing water and difficult holes are characteristic of this grade. Difficulties are continuous.

The Canoeing Ireland website has more detail on the levels of river grading (<http://canoe.ie/river-grading-and-area-definitions>).

- Be particularly cautious during flood water conditions.
- Inspect unknown drops before running them; be aware that drops may change or that new hazards may have formed (e.g. fallen trees, etc.). Set up bank based rescue, where appropriate.
- Consult Waterways Ireland Marine Notices and lockkeepers for local information.
- Kayaking groups making descents on remote rivers of Grade 3 and higher should carry

registered Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs). This will enable early alerting of the rescue services in the event of an emergency.

- In rivers of a high flow rate, with extended periods of rapids, it is recommended that kayaking groups should consider using waterproof radios to allow communication between group members when line of sight is not possible.

7.6 National Association

Canoeing Ireland is the national association for canoe and kayak based activities in Ireland (see Appendix 10 for contact details).