

2017

# Member's Handbook



## NORTHWEST VOYAGEURS CANOE AND KAYAK CLUB

Edmonton Alberta

[www.nwvoyageurs.com](http://www.nwvoyageurs.com)

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## SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Northwest Voyageurs Canoe & Kayak Club! We hope you will find the information in this handbook helpful when paddling Alberta's rivers with the NWV. It is not intended as a list of do's and don'ts but like many outdoor recreation pursuits, a little knowledge and skill can go a long way towards helping you enjoy this relaxing and/or exciting sport, while minimizing the inherent risks.

The requirements for different trips will vary, depending on the type of trip (e.g. easy day trip, wilderness canoe camping or whitewater challenges), the class of river, the water level, the skills of the participants and the preferences of the trip coordinator. By familiarizing yourself with the contents of this handbook, you should have a better idea of what to expect.

The Northwest Voyageurs Canoe and Kayak Club was formed in 1964, when a few like-minded people got together to organize trips on the rivers of Alberta. There was minimal choice of equipment and the smaller rivers were virtually unknown, so many trips were exploratory. Many of the recommendations in this book are the results of these and later experiences, and we are very grateful to members for all their help over the years. If you have any other suggestions about its contents, please contact one of the current executive.

The NWV Club Objectives, as reflected in our By-Laws, are to:

- Bring members together to enjoy paddling Alberta's rivers and lakes;
- To improve member's skills;
- To increase river safety awareness and practices;
- Promote appreciation and respect for our river heritage.

From time to time, the club offers courses to improve paddling skills. In addition to the information and suggestions found in this manual, there are numerous books and videos, available through bookstores and libraries, on all aspects of canoeing and kayaking.

For more information about the club and our activities go to our website at [www.nwvoyageurs.com](http://www.nwvoyageurs.com)

**HAPPY PADDLING !**

## SECTION 2. BEFORE THE TRIP

### 2.1 Requirements

All scheduled trips are listed in the current trip schedule published on the club website, (usually from March on). Courses, when offered, are also listed on the website, as well as any changes to the trip schedule. If you wish to participate on a trip, the Trip Coordinator indicated should be contacted no later than Wednesday prior to the weekend the trip leaves. If not available, contact the Executive Trip Coordinator.

There are different types of trips. Trips may be part day, full day, weekend or multiday. They may be flatwater, gentle rivers, challenging white water or the ocean. Most weekend and multiday trips include wilderness camping.

Every paddler is expected to be familiar with the following information:

- River Class and Skill Level required
- River Signals
- Safety Code

Most of this information is also contained in this manual. It is important that you choose a trip within your skill level; if in doubt, it is better to underestimate it, as Alberta's rivers are very cold and you could be a long way from help. But if you feel ready for a challenge, discuss it with the Trip Coordinator beforehand. If you have never paddled with the Club before and the Trip Coordinator is unsure of your skill level, it might be suggested that you try an easier trip first.

For any trip, you should be comfortable in and around open water.

As a member of the NWV, you should have signed and dated a waiver form (and had it witnessed) when you paid your membership fee. If you have not signed the waiver form before going on the trip, you will not be allowed on the trip. This is necessary to avoid liability claims against the Club. Parents must sign the waiver for their children, under 18 years. Guest must also have signed a waiver form.

Make sure that you have the necessary equipment for the trip, again depending on the type of trip and boat which you will be paddling. (See Section 4). Your boat and equipment should be in good repair before starting on the trip. Test new and unfamiliar equipment before relying on it in a difficult situation.

### 2.2 Contacting the Trip Coordinator

Participants should contact the Trip Coordinator early to show interest in a trip – but must contact the Trip Coordinator no later than the Wednesday before the trip. If you are interested in a trip but need assistance locating a partner, you should contact the Trip Coordinator at least 10 – 14 days before the trip. The Trip Coordinator may have suggestions as to club members interested in similar trips or may connect two single paddlers interested in the same trip.

The Trip Coordinator may require information as to what sort of equipment you have, what might be required for the group, and about you and your partner's skill levels. You are expected to make your own transportation, partner and boat arrangements; the coordinator may be able to help

with suggestions. The coordinator may also require information on your vehicle size, and roof rack availability, as you might be asked to help with the vehicle shuttle.

The Trip Coordinator will give you detailed instructions about time and place to meet the group, and any other information required. It is important to be at the meeting point on time and ready to leave with the group for the river.

### 2.3 Sources of Information

For more information on a particular river, the following are available:

- Talk to Club members who have done the trip before
- Canoeing Alberta by Janice MacDonald (1985) (Out of print but available at libraries and used book stores)
- Mark Lund's books on paddling Alberta rivers.
- Canadian Rockies Whitewater by Stuart Smith (1994) (Southern Rockies and Central Rockies) Back Road Map Books series.
- Topographical maps are available for viewing or photocopying at the Main Library in Edmonton. Maps are available on-line through many e-tailers as well as the Government of Canada.
- It is also possible to purchase mapping software that contains topographical maps, e.g. SoftMap or E-Topo.
- Club Archives also have some maps and river descriptions, obtainable from the club member in charge of the Archives.
- Stream Flow Facts with river flow rates in CMS (cubic metres / seconds) and hourly water levels can be obtained on-line at <https://rivers/alberta.ca> and follow the links. It is useful to compare water levels for a few days before the trip to track a trend in the water levels. The rivers website will have information on high water warnings issued for Alberta rivers.
- Safe Boating Guide published by Transport Canada. This free publication can be viewed online at [www.boatingsafety.gc.ca](http://www.boatingsafety.gc.ca) or call 1-800-O-CANADA (1-800-622-6232) to obtain a printed copy.

## SECTION 3. ON THE RIVER

### 3.1 Car Shuttle

Make sure you arrive at the right place at the right time. Logistics of car shuttling are often complicated and an extra boat / car arriving unexpectedly or late can really make things awkward for the rest of the party. The trip coordinator accepts no responsibility for late arrivals.

For shuttles, vehicles should have a full tank of gas and be in good repair.

If you are traveling in convoy to access points, especially on forestry roads, always make sure that you keep track of the vehicle behind you; wait at intersections until they can see you turn.

Always make sure you have a set of keys on you before leaving your vehicle. The set should include car keys plus any other locked device within the vehicle. If leaving a spare set with the vehicle, make sure that you tell someone where you left them.

### 3.2 Trip Briefing

At the put-in, when you are preparing your boats, make sure that all gear is securely tied in, with no loose ends or slack rope. Pack your water bottle, sun screen, lunch and rain gear where they are easily accessible.

The Trip Coordinator will get everyone to introduce themselves, and will identify the river lead and sweep boats and rescue coordinator where appropriate.

The rules of the river, safety precautions, river signals and features of the river should be reviewed as appropriate.

### 3.3 Rules on the River

An experienced paddler will be designated as the lead boat. Do not pass the lead boat. Always follow the lead boat down channels and around islands, to prevent becoming separated from the group.

Make sure you always observe the boat in front, to check their route, especially in braided sections; kept the boat behind also in view. If the boats become too widely separated, use your whistle to attract the attention of the boats in front, so that they can wait for you to catch up. The sweep is the last boat in the group – make sure you don't lose track of the sweep either.

In rapids or rough sections, do not follow too closely behind each other. Leave room for the boats in front to maneuver (e.g. back-ferrying) so that if they get into difficulties, you can avoid crashing into them or are in a position to help them. Wait in the first suitable large eddy to regroup.

When practicing eddy turns, the first boat into the eddy has the right of way. But it should move out of the way quickly to allow others in to play too; either draw further in, if there is enough room, or do a quick in-and-out turn.

If practicing surfing, or other whitewater techniques, don't hog the best spots; let everyone take turns, if they want to. A boat already riding a wave (surfing) has right of way, but must yield to a boat coming downstream.

On large lakes, keep near the shoreline, where feasible. Sudden violent winds may spring up. Groups should stay together to avoid losing contact. This also applies sometimes on very large

rivers.

If camping overnight, pull your boat well up on shore and secure it. Heavy rains upstream, or water releases from a dam, can raise the water level considerably. You don't want to wake up in the morning and find that your boat has disappeared!

### 3.4 Running Rapids

Running rapids can be a challenge, exhilarating and very rewarding. Risks must be assessed, depending on the difficulty of the river and the skill levels of not just yourself, but of the group as a whole.

Scout rapids which may cause difficulty. Look below the rapid and around the bend, for further difficulties and/or gathering places.

Check out the real risks (e.g. log jams, holes, sweepers) not just the apparent ones. Identify the clearest and safest route and discuss other maneuvers that you might wish to try. Make sure, if you have a partner, that you both understand exactly what is supposed to be done.

Remember that you are not obligated to run the rapid. If you do not feel up to it or it is beyond your skill level, tell the leader that you intend to line or portage round it, where this is possible. YOU are the person responsible for the decision to run it or not. No one has ever drowned on a portage.

### 3.5 At the End of the Day

Check that you have left nothing behind and that you have all your own or rented equipment.

Make sure that you know the way home or if going in a convoy, check that everyone has their car started and is ready to go so no one gets left behind.

## SECTION 4. EQUIPMENT

Following are recommendations for equipment which may be needed for our trips. Requirements will vary, depending on the type trip, boat, and skill level. If in doubt, please ask the Trip Coordinator, before going on the trip.

### 4.1 Types of Boats

Open boats for easy trips (Class 1, 2-) on the river should preferably be river canoes without a keel, which are easier to turn. Floatation may be in closed bow and stern compartments, additional floatation is optional.

Open boats for whitewater (solo or tandem canoes) should have more rocker (curve on the bottom) for more maneuverability, but will have less directional stability. Floatation is required in bow and stern and/or centre and must be secured (custom floatation bags or truck inner tubes can be used).

Closed boats (kayaks, C-1, C-2) should all have floatation bags in bow and stern for whitewater.

There are innumerable varieties of canoes and kayaks available. For more information, consult manufacturer and paddling resource websites for reviews and specifications.

Boats, with paddles and PFDs are available for rent to club members, for club activities, at reasonable rates – see the website for details. Equipment is also available for rent from several Edmonton area retailers such as Mountain Equipment Co-op or Totem Outfitters.

### 4.2 Required Equipment

There are several pieces of equipment required by Transport Canada regulations that are mandatory to have on board when on the water.

- Approved PFD (Life Jacket). Must be worn on all club trips
- Signaling device such as a pea-less whistle
- Spare paddle (should be secured, but readily accessible)
- Bailer(s) or pump & sponge
- Throw bag with 15m (50') of buoyant rope
- Waterproof flashlight (if paddling after sunset)
- Helmet if in Class III or greater water

### 4.3 Suggested Additional Equipment

In addition to the equipment required by regulations, the following is a list that is by no means exhaustive but will help make your trip more safe and enjoyable.

- Sheath Knife (sharp, accessible to free entangled ropes, etc.)
- Clothes (warm when wet: such as wool, synthetics, polyester fleece)
  - Avoid cotton it drains heat from your body and can cause hypothermia to set in faster
  - Avoid clothing that is restrictive when swimming
- Wool, synthetic or neoprene socks
- Water shoes or neoprene booties
  - Avoid boots as they may drag you down when swimming
  - Avoid sandals which may get tangled in equipment or river debris
  - Avoid canvas shoes as they can result in cold feet due to heat loss when wet
- Wind proof jacket, paddling jacket and rain jacket and pants
- Sun / rain hat
- Safety strap for glasses
- Sun glasses
- Sun screen
- Spare set of warm, dry clothes in water tight container, must be tied into boat.
- Water bottle / thermos
- Insect repellent
- Toilet paper
- First aid kit
- Matches (in a waterproof container) / lighter/ fire starter (solid fuel, candle)
- Repair kit
- Wet suit or dry suit when water temperature is below 15C
- Knee pads (if boat not equipped)
- Spare rope for tying gear in to the boat
- For Canoes
  - Painters, bow & stern (5 – 6 metres) Should be secured but readily accessible
  - Extra floatation or spray cover (for Class III or IV) release should be instant, not entangling
- For Kayaks
  - Spray skirt
  - Rescue harness if on whitewater
  - Paddle float (if trained in self rescue)

### 4.4 Group Equipment

For group equipment, the trip coordinator should ensure that the following are adequate for the group:

- Maps & compass
- GPS (optional)
- Cell Phone - for emergency use only (optional)
- Repair Kit
- First Aid Kit
- Carabineers (> 2) and rope for rescues

## 4.5 Camping Equipment

- Tent (weather proof!) with fly, poles, pegs, etc
- Sleeping bag (synthetic fill recommended)
- Sleeping pad (closed cell or inflatable, with patch kit; not foamies – they are good sponges!)
- Extra clothes, camp shoes/boots
- Stove and fuel, cooking pots and utensils
- Food supplies
- Water container (fill before leaving)
- Water filtration or purification system
- Biodegradable soap, toiletries, small towel
- Flashlight
- Plastic bags (assume everything is going to get wet)
- Barrels, Duffle bags, packs or other waterproof bags/containers for all gear

## 4.6 Group Camping Equipment

- Group equipment as above, plus the following: Tarp (large or 2 small)
- Fire grate (optional)
- Axe and/or saw
- Survey tape (to mark take-outs or directions)

## 4.7 Repair Kits

These are dependent on boat material and individuals should be responsible for their own requirements; some suggestions:

- Duct tape (essential for many patch-up jobs)
- 2-5 minute epoxy; fiberglass patch kit (cold resin better; regular automotive resin does not harden at cooler temperatures)
- Screws, 4" nails (for major splint repairs) mechanics wire (6 – 10 feet) Vice grips or pliers; unidriver and assorted bits
- File, honing stone

## 4.8 First Aid Kits

The following items are suggestions for a paddler's first aid kit. You should customize your own as you see fit. The kit should be reviewed at the beginning of each season to check for items which need to be renewed or replaced.

For day trips with easy access, a simple kit may be all that is required, but for more remote wilderness or camping trips, you are strongly encouraged to become more familiar with first aid requirements.

### 4.8.1 Personal

Update Tetanus immunization as necessary. If you haven't had a booster shot in the past 5 – 10 years, you should probably check with your public health nurse.

It is a good idea to carry identification of significant medical conditions on your person in the form of a bracelet or necklace.

Look after your own personal medications.

Those who have known severe allergies (e.g. insect bites) or other medical problems (e.g. diabetes, epilepsy) which could lead to an acute medical emergency, should be prepared, and should inform the trip coordinator beforehand.

#### 4.8.2 Non-medical

- Waterproof container (for the first aid kit contents)
- Pencil and paper – to record times and symptoms
- Change for a phone, and a list of emergency numbers
- First aid instructions
- Scissors Tweezers Razor blades Sewing needle Safety pins
- Surgical gloves (when handling open wounds and exposure to body fluids)

#### 5.8.3 Dressings, etc.

- Band-aids (assorted) and/or strip of elastoplasts (6.3 cm x 0.9 m) which can be cut to size
- Moleskin – for chafed areas (before they become blisters)
- Gauze (absorbent) and Telpha (non-stick) dressings, assorted sizes
- Rolls of ½” tape, (surgical and/or waterproof)
- Butterfly closures – for use as sutures Pressure dressing
- Roll of 2 – 3” wide gauze bandage
- Triangle bandage
- Tensor bandages.
- Wrist or elbow support bandages are often useful for paddlers

#### 4.8.4 Non-Prescription Medications

Note: these should be checked and renewed on a regular basis. It is better to have a few familiar medications in your regular kit, than a lot of specialized ones. For longer wilderness trips, a more comprehensive selection will be required, obtained at the time.

- Betadine (antiseptic) and/or alcohol swaps (these may dry out if old) Disinfectant ointment – e.g. Bacitracin, Polysporin
- Pain killers – Tylenol, aspirin
- Anti-inflammatory – ibuprophen (Motrin)
- Antihistamine – Caladryl (topical calamine lotion/antihistamine) Benadryl (internal or topical antihistamine preparations)

## SECTION 5. RIVER CLASSES AND PARTICIPANTS' SKILLS

### 5.1 International River Rating System and Suggested Skill Requirements

The international rating system is used to classify river difficulty. The difficulty can change dramatically with the seasonal flow variation. If an overall rating is applied to a river, you may expect to encounter occasional rapids at a higher class. If in doubt – SCOUT!

The skill levels suggested are a guide to help you decide the class of river to paddle.

River Class	Description	Skills Suggested
I	Passages clear except for minor obstructions. Small, regular rapids. Easily navigated passages	Knows the basic strokes and can competently handle the boat in smooth water. (Beginner to Novice)
II	Most passages clear, though they may be narrow. Fairly frequent rapids. Regular, medium-sized waves, low ledges, sweepers & log jams may be present	Requires competent maneuvering. Can effectively use all the basic strokes, ferry and eddy in smooth flowing water. Knows the basics of reading water. Developing rescue skills. (Novice to Intermediate)
III	Rapids, numerous. Waves high, powerful, irregular, exposed rocks and strong eddies. Prior inspection may be required.	Can negotiate fast, turbulent waters which require complex sequences of maneuvers. Can give assistance to swamped boats (Intermediate to advanced)
IV	Long stretches of difficult rapids. Waves high, powerful and irregular; dangerous exposed rocks, boiling eddies; ledges, passages difficult to scout	Powerful and precise maneuvering required. Preferably run with a previously experienced leader (Expert only)
V	Very difficult. Considerable risk.	(Teams of experts only)
VI	Extraordinarily difficult. Portage mandatory.	

Many Alberta rivers are very cold, skill levels should not be overestimated; hypothermia is a very real danger.

These guides are for river paddling. A beginner is not a paddler who has stepped into a boat for the first time, but one with knowledge of the basic paddling strokes. Skills shown are those preferred for a certain class of river. If you would like to try a higher classed trip, discuss it with the trip coordinator beforehand.

In tandem canoe paddling, the team must be able to maneuver the boat as required, but both paddlers do not necessarily have to be equally skilled.

River classes are given for normal flow conditions. Very high or very low water levels may markedly affect the difficulty, in either direction, so marginal skills may be inadequate under certain conditions.

For wilderness canoe-camping or extended trips, all paddlers should be thoroughly competent in the skills required for that class of river. The group should also have related camping, first aid

and survival skills.

## 5.2 River Signals

On the water, verbal commands are often difficult to hear. Below are some signals that are to be used if verbal communication is not effective.



## SECTION 6. RIVER HAZARDS AND SOME SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

### 6.1 Dangerous River Characteristics

Many of Alberta's rivers are extremely cold. Avoid prolonged immersion and/or wear suitable clothing. Watch for signs of hypothermia, and stop immediately to warm up. (See 6.2 below)

Avoid fallen trees, sweepers and log jams, which allow the current to sweep through them, but could trap a boat and occupants under water.

Beware of outside bends on sharp fast corners; sweepers are often found there or undercut ledges, which can trap a paddler.

Weirs and souse holes with keepers (stationary waves with aerated surface water going upstream) may trap floating objects between the drop and the wave. To escape, try to swim out at the end of the wave or dive below the surface to where the current is flowing downstream.

Inspect all rapids etc. from land if you are unfamiliar with the river and cannot immediately see a clear passage through them. Note that a dark line may indicate a ledge or waterfall – stop immediately and inspect.

Rivers in flood can be dangerous. Heavy spring run-off causes our rivers to be swift and cold and they can be dangerously obstructed with debris (trees, logs, etc.) visible or invisible. Log jams and sweepers come and go from year to year – be prepared for them.

### 6.2 Stages of Hypothermia

STAGE	SYMPTOMS	TREATMENT
Mild	Decreased coordination, poor judgment. Shivering, becoming uncontrollable.	Find shelter, remove wet clothes, give warm fluids (not alcohol) or huddle together.
Moderate	Lack of coordination, slurred speech, slow reaction time, apparent exhaustion & drowsiness.	Find shelter, remove wet clothes, place in a sleeping bag or huddle. (Handle gently to avoid cardiac arrhythmia)
Severe	Unconsciousness. Decreased respirations, heart rate and blood pressure. Apparent death.	Find shelter, commence CPR if necessary. If more than 15 minutes from hospital, do not attempt to rewarm – death does not ensue until body is rewarmed; continue CPR until transfer to medical care.

### 6.3 Self-Rescue

Everyone paddling on the rivers sooner or later goes for an unintentional swim. Kayakers do it all the time and are prepared for it, with their wet-suits and rolling skills; canoeists who often have their boats full of gear, will tend to be more cautious, but should still be prepared for the inevitable. The following are some basic instructions for getting yourself out of trouble:

Hold on to your boat if possible, which gives you more buoyancy, and a better target for rescue. Always stay upstream of the boat – you do not want to be caught between a rock and a boat full of water. Hang on to your paddle as well, if you can.

Swim (float) on your back, feet first, so that you can avoid obstacles with your feet, not your head. Never put your feet down until you are sure that you are in quiet shallow water; if your foot becomes trapped between rocks, the force of the water can push your head under the water.

Angle towards the quietest shore, and use the water to help push you there. If in danger separate from your boat and swim for the shore.

If you should be swept towards a log jam or sweeper, turn on your front and give a last minute strong kick and haul yourself up on top of it, so that you do not become swept under and caught.

If a rope is thrown to you, hang on to it but do not wrap it round any part of your body – it could drag you under.

### 6.4 Rescuing Others

There are three basic rules when executing a rescue

- Rescue people before equipment.
- Never endanger yourself or others to help an accident victim.
- Listen to the rescue coordinator.

## SECTION 7. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

As part of our mandate to promote greater awareness and appreciation of our natural heritage of rivers and lakes, we endeavor to have minimal impact on our surroundings. This means, among other things:

Carry out all your garbage. This includes orange peels, cigarette butts, half burnt foil and tins from any fire pits.

When going to the toilet, go well back from the river (> 100 metres). Make a small scrape and bury feces with topsoil, etc. Carry out toilet paper, feminine sanitary products, etc.

If lighting a fire, use existing fire pits, where possible. If making a new fire pit, put it on a gravel bar, or if placing it in the trees, make sure the top duff is removed to the mineral soil level, and surround it with rocks. Do not cut down live trees; limit the amount of disturbance to live vegetation. Before leaving, MAKE SURE THE FIRE IS COMPLETELY OUT! Be aware that underground tree roots may continue to smolder. Use lots of water on the fire and its surroundings, so that you can put your hand in the ashes. Finally remove all traces of the fire and restore rocks and logs to more natural positions.

Burn food residues and scraps completely or pack them out. If burning garbage on a cooking fire, be courteous and wait until all cooking is finished. Do not burn plastic bags or containers, as they produce toxic smoke.

Use biodegradable washing materials wherever possible. Wash dishes away from the river.

When camping, keep food away from tents and string it up in trees at night. There are many hungry animals out there, large and small.

Avoid churning up access points with your vehicles; you may want to come back again! Park your vehicle so that they do not obstruct others' access.

Respect other people's property and always close gates behind you.

Try to avoid chasing wildlife down the river; give them time to escape. Some banks, low sandy or grassy areas or gravel bars, may be shore bird nesting sites or prime fish spawning areas. Watch how you go!

Respect other river users and give them room for their activities.

***See you on the water !***