

Paddling Etiquette – A Guide for Watersides

Let's start with a few fundamentals.

- Canoeing is a non contact sport.
- Paddlers must race in a fair manner at all times.
- It is the duty of overtaking craft to keep clear of others at all times.
- If you see any crew in safety related difficulties it is your absolute duty to help them.

Right, we have these basics and added to this is the Watersides principle that no paddler is more or less important than any other. So, how do we apply this ?

On the water.

Faster paddlers should think and look ahead.

Slower crews should expect to be overtaken and thus paddle "off centre" to allow a bigger space on one side for crews to pass.

If passing a crew then it is perfectly Ok to ask "Move left K2" or advise them "Coming past on your left" or whatever. You find the form of words. If you are able to find the breath, it should include a "Please" and certainly a "Thank You" afterwards. This should be done in a friendly, non aggressive manner.

There will be times when there are 2 or 3 or more boats across the canal. On these occasions, the fast boats will need a little patience and must not barge through. In general, the slower crews want to be helpful and will make room. But remember, their skill level is not as great as yours so don't expect rapid instant responses. Indeed, your wash might cause them problems.

All crews should avoid paddling alongside other crews, perhaps even chatting and not noticing what is going on around them. This severely limits the space available for overtaking crews. If you are doing this then make sure there is a bigger space on one side to allow crews past, with minimum inconvenience to both you and the overtaking crew.

If you are going to approach a portage at the same time as slower paddlers, the faster paddlers should slightly inconvenience themselves and get out early or slow down a little. They should make allowances and not expect the slower crews to "get out of their way". You are faster and "better" so adapt. This also applies to other features such as low bridges and narrow bridges.

Slower paddlers need to be aware of what is going on around them. Where possible, steer a straight line and don't zig-zag across the canal. If asked, please move across to allow crews to pass. If you are having difficulties then politely advise the others of this.

All crews should have checked their boat and ensured it has a working rudder. Unless you have broken it on that race lamely saying "our rudder doesn't work" and crashing into other boats is not acceptable.

Moving Water.

Although the Watersides are on a canal which is essentially stationary water there are times (Waterside B) when river sections with significant flow are encountered. On these occasions thinking ahead is essential for all paddlers. This is because things happen faster on the moving water.

Downstream paddlers should aim to keep in the middle. Upstream paddlers should aim to keep close to the bank.

Paddlers going in Opposite Directions.

Waterside B is unique in that crews pass each other going in opposite directions due to the out and back nature of the course. This means that there will be a lot of wash and sometimes confusion. The river rules of downstream in the middle, upstream at the sides apply.

In addition, all paddlers need to think ahead to ensure they are in the right place at all times, especially going round corners and bends. Know your boat and be realistic about your boat handling skills. Act and steer accordingly.

Portages and Portaging.

The On the Water rules described above can equally be applied to portages. In this case it is more important to be aware of what is happening around you. It's quite easy to see what's in front but harder to know what is coming from behind. If you are able, a slower crew should have a quick glance behind when coming in to a portage. Then you'll know if a fast racing snake is going to rush past. Talk to those around you. If two boats approach at the same time, the one behind might say "you go short, we'll go long". Don't leave it too late to utter this though. Should a crew mess up a little on this, there is no need to clamber over a crew to get out.

Some other pointers for portaging:

Once at the bank, as quickly as you can, get out, get the boat out and move away. Do not linger with the boat in the water - you are blocking others from getting out.

Keep your paddles close to the boat. Do not leave them across the towpath. They could get trodden on and broken or trip someone up.

If you need a rest before walking/running to the other end, then do so in an out of the way position.

When running or walking the portage, NEVER stop on a road. Get across the road to allow the traffic to flow.

Faster crews should shout polite warnings if passing others when running. For example "fast boat coming through on the right" is useful if the slow crew has the boat on their right shoulders and can't see you. Always say "thank you" or "cheers guys" or some such afterwards.

When you get to the other end, reverse the getting out process. Put the boat in and get in it as quickly as you can and then move away.

If you are stopping for a rest, food or drink before getting in then make sure your boat, paddles and support crew are not obstructing anyone. Do this away from the canal edge.

All paddlers should make every effort to avoid contact with other boats, paddles, paddlers and support crew.

Never put the boat in and then step away or stand having food and drink. You are blocking others from using the portage. (And your boat might drift off.)

Please avoid putting your boat in, getting in and then sitting there having food and drink. If there is lots of space this may be permissible but if the get in is limited then don't do it.

Faster crews should not expect others to instantly “get out of the way”. The faster crews should adapt. Actually, the very good crews are able to do this naturally and do not have problems or later complaints about their behaviour.

Some pointers for Support Crews.

Keep the support crew numbers down. You only need 1 person to feed 1 paddler. Perhaps 1 person to be at the get out and run/walk with the crew and then the 2 feeders. The rest should remain away from the action.

Unless the towpath is very wide do not run alongside your crew. This could block the space available for an overtaking crew.

Never get between your crew's or any other crew's boat and the water at the get in of a portage. The result is normally a wet supporter.

Be very aware of what is going on around you. You need to avoid blocking the towpath at all times. In particular, faster crews are not expecting you to be standing in the way. That said don't make sudden unpredictable movements to get out of the way. If you do accidentally find yourself in someone's way it is safest for everyone if you stand still and allow the fast people to go round you.

Know your crew's speed and plan your support accordingly. Do not arrive at a portage and set up an elaborate picnic 30 minutes before your crew is due to arrive. You'll be in someone's way.

If you have a basket, tray, carrier or just bottles and are not going to stand holding them put them down out of the way so they do not get trodden on.

Don't assume where your crew will be able to get in – you may need to adapt.

You can feed your crew as they run/jog or as they get in. You need to find the system that works best for them. What you must never do is get them to put the boat in and then stand for ages chatting and nibbling. Indeed, when thinking about DW, this is where significant time is lost.

Feeders should wait near the get in away from the canal. You should be looking in the direction your crew will come from. This way you can see other crews coming and make sure you are not in their way. Only step forward when your crew actually arrive. Feed, then move back out of the way.

If your crew must rest or feed out of the water then stand out of the way.

Keep the noise down.

Park legally and considerately. If this means walking further so be it. Provided you have planned ahead you'll have enough time to get to the places to support.

Know the course – get the right maps and study them.

Minimise the number of cars in your support team. You can support DW non-stop with 1 car. 2 vehicles are probably better but not 4 big 4x4s. Even the very fastest crews can be supported on Watersides successfully with 1 car.

If supporting on a mountain bike, then be extra careful. You could be blocking the portage for others. Trying to feed someone sat in a boat whilst standing over a bike isn't easy and might result in an injury to you, your paddler or others.

Never support with a dog.