

Backcountry Trip Planning:

Choosing a Paddling Route and Preparing for a Trip

By Lewis Williams

Factors to Consider:

1. **Purpose** of the trip
2. **Time** available
3. **Participants:** - number
 - physical and mental condition
 - experience
 - interests
 - affordability
4. **Transportation:** -type of watercraft & number available – need to rent?
 - logistics of getting to access point
 - mode of tripping- canoe, kayak, stand up paddleboard
 - need vehicles to pull boat trailer and for transport of people and personal and group gear
 - municipal permit to park trailer on residential street
5. **Location and Route:** -proximity to location
 - desirability – research various route options- on line, books, word of mouth, <myccr> website
 - special features eg, wildlife, history (Indigenous, settlers logging, etc)
 - recent familiarity with area, route
 - max # people/campsite (prov parks- 6, 9, more?)
 - preferred # hours paddling/day
 - emergency egress route and location nearest hospital with emergency room

- reserve campsites 5 months in advance (for popular dates)
on < www.Ontarioparks.com>
- canoe paddling rate- approx. 4kph depending on wind and waves, time paddled, frequency of breaks, the group
- navigation-map and compass and GPS skills

6. Terrain: - portages- examine topographic maps, books, talk to experienced paddlers

- see #9 below
- campsites- size (# tents), ease of access to water and firewood, amount of flat tent sites, trees for shelter, marked campsites, presence of thunderboxes

7. Leadership:- min 3, experience guiding, first aid certified, designate beforehand

- complete required paperwork
- ensure appropriate group gear
- practice and prep needed beforehand, eg. swim test, stove lighting, nutrition & menu planning, time for practice canoe paddling,
- navigation skills needed- map reading and compass, GPS
- ensure participants are attended to and safe and enjoying themselves

8. Weather:- monitor for about 3 days prior to trip, assessing weather trends,

- consider precipitation, wind velocity, high and low temps. Check Environment Canada, Weather Network apps etc
- Be Flexible & Stay Safe. Revise location and route if weather will be unsafe with high winds, storms, lightning and heavy precipitation, reported dangerous animal encounters, water levels too high or low

9. Portages: -rate of walking portage with gear- approx. 10min for 500m IF portage trail is well used, free of obstacles like fallen trees, swollen streams etc, with minimum elevation gain or loss

- consider obstacles, elevation change, portage accessibility, length, number/ day, marked portage trails
- more time required to unload and reload canoes if there are several boats
- # trips of a portage- recommend 2 trips carrying gear with 1 return trip empty handed (=3 trips each portage)
- ensure main portage trail is marked with paddle/pack if side branching trails
- consolidate gear into minimum # packs. Avoid loose gear and small bags etc, including food bags. If not included or attached to a large pack, items can get forgotten and left behind

10. Safety:

- emergency communication device- SPOT, In Reach, sat phone, cell phone
- first aid kit(s) including field manual. Items for multiple injuries of multiple casualties
- methods of water purification for drinking and cooking and sanitizing dishes in camp kitchen
- variety of methods of cleaning hands, especially around food, eg. soap, hand sanitizer
- 2 or more leaders trained in wilderness first aid
- risk mgt- assess all risks prior to trips and ways to mitigate them
- crisis mgt- establish crisis response protocols for various incidents
- distribute emergency contact names and numbers to those at home
- determine medical (physical, mental, emotional) concerns , dietary alerts (any participants with life threatening allergies- all participants

including leaders)

- assess physical fitness of participants

- accurately announce beforehand the challenges involved in the trip so participants can determine if they are able to participate

- create repair kit

- awareness and treatment of bites of ticks and wild animals, and poisonous plant protocols

- carry an accident reporting form and retain if used

- PFD policy- suggest everyone wears one. Scouts Canada and school boards also state one is to be worn in or near the water

11. Trip Costs:- calculate including mileage (research current practice at \$/km and modify) plus food, gear rental, campsite fees, consumables (stove fuel, dish soap, toilet paper, bug spray, etc)

12. On Land Activities:- plan eg, cards, art, music, campfire activities eg ghost stories, stationary games – relevant to age group, journaling, bannock over fire