

BASIC ELEMENTS OF CANOE CONTROL

It's early in the year. Now is the perfect time to hone your skills and enjoy your best paddling ever.

How do you keep a canoe under control, and what basic skills are needed to enjoy canoeing? If you can make your canoe GO, TURN, STOP, and KEEP FROM TURNING OVER, you can do about anything you like. Let's examine some basic elements to maintain control of your canoe.

■ PADDLE STROKES

Effective canoeing has little to do with the boat and everything to do with the paddle. Using a canoe paddle is a pretty simple action. You place the paddle in the water and either PULL or PUSH to move the boat. Your canoe paddle has only two surfaces—one for pulling (defined as the “power face”) and one for pushing (the “back face”).

How do we apply this to moving a canoe? Simple. Determine where you want your canoe to go, then either pull or push it in that direction. For example: Slide your canoe sideways toward a dock. If you are paddling on the side toward the dock, place the paddle out to the side and pull on it. Your end of the canoe moves toward the dock. If you are paddling on the side away from the dock, place the paddle next to the canoe and use it as a lever against the gunwale to push your end toward the dock. We call those two strokes a “draw” and a “pry”—but they really are just pulling and pushing strokes.

■ PADDLE ON OPPOSITE SIDES

This will help you stay upright and give you better control. Further, if both paddlers are paddling on the same side, the canoe feels unsettled and inefficient. Try it. Do you feel the boat lurch sideways with each stroke?

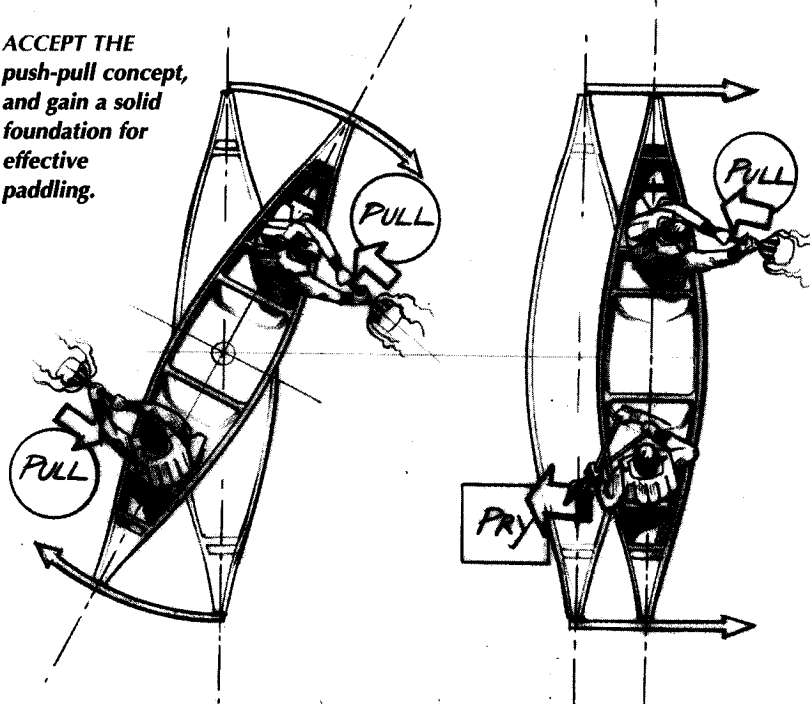
■ PADDLE IN SYNC

The bow person sets the cadence. The stern can see his partner's stroke rate and match it. After gaining some experience together, you won't even need to watch your bow partner.

■ SWITCH POSITIONS/SIDES

This is good to practice. You'll learn not only how to handle the other end, but

ACCEPT THE push-pull concept, and gain a solid foundation for effective paddling.



also how your partner thinks. Pay attention to the trim of your canoe. Most of us have a favorite paddling side, but it is good to be proficient on both sides.

■ RELY ON CORRECTIVE STROKES

Ever watch a first-time canoe paddler? He takes a couple of strokes on one side, switches to the other side, then flails back to the first side. His partner does the same thing, with no coordination between the two. The boat bucks and turns. Bent-shaft paddlers do switch sides, but they do so in a coordinated rhythm. When learning to paddle, stay on one side and learn to harness the various correction-stroke tools to keep the canoe headed in the direction you want.

■ CANOEING CAN BE PRACTICE

We paddle for a myriad of reasons: travel, relaxation, birding, racing. To grow your skill, pay continuous attention to how your boat reacts to your paddle strokes and the current water conditions.

■ NOW TO PRACTICE

Pulling and pushing strokes are effective tools to keep your canoe under control. Notice how each stroke affects half of

your boat, then look to see how the whole canoe responds by combining the actions of both paddlers. Imagine two scenarios. If both partners pull (or push) on their paddles, the canoe should spin around its center. If one partner pulls and the other pushes, the whole canoe will slip sideways to one side or the other. (We use the term “sideslipping.”)

You can practice spinning and sideslipping in any puddle of water large enough to fit your canoe. These two actions help you turn your canoe around at a dead end, or slide your canoe sideways when you want to avoid an obstacle. Spin so the canoe does not move off a center pivot point. Sideslip so you can slide perfectly sideways without moving forward or back.

Paddle slowly and gently when you are practicing. Paddling a canoe is far more about technique than strength. Discipline yourself to paddle easily and watch your control and efficiency increase greatly. Water is your friend, not an opponent. Caress the water; don't kill it. Good paddling!

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