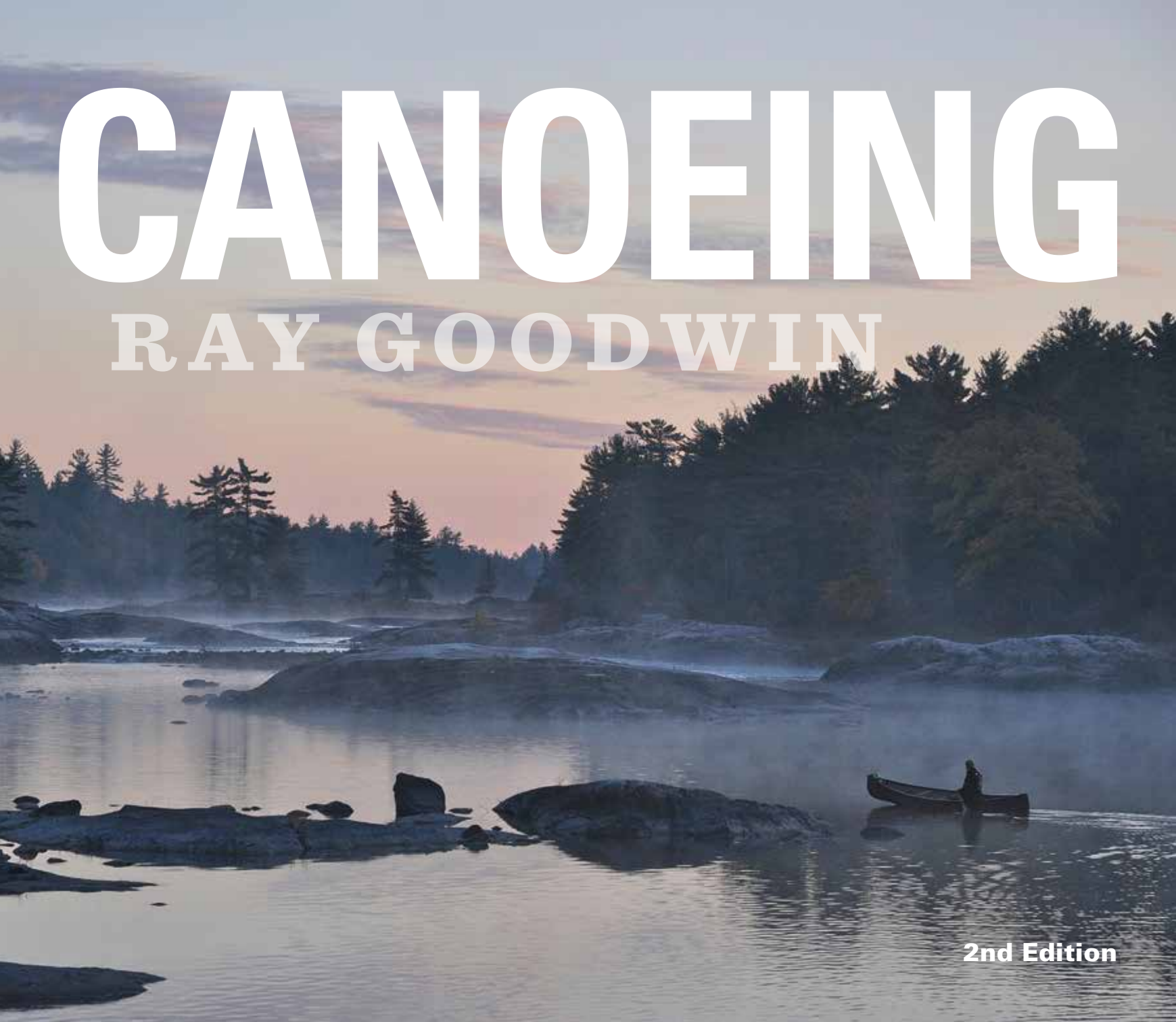
CANOEING

RAY GOODWIN



2nd Edition

Dedicated to my Mum,
Freda Rose Goodwin 1921–2007,
and my daughter, Maya Rose

RAY GOODWIN

CANOEING

Cover photograph: French River, Ontario.
Photographer: Ray Goodwin.

First published 2011
Second edition 2016

Published in Great Britain 2016 by Pesda Press
Tan y Coed Canol
Ceunant
Caernarfon
Gwynedd
LL55 4RN

ISBN: 978-1-906095-54-3

Printed and bound in Poland, www.lfbookservices.co.uk

Contents

Thanks and acknowledgements

Geoff Warren introduced me to the world of the outdoors when I joined the Venture Scouts. I climbed my first mountains and paddled my first rivers under Geoff's leadership. With good friends Steve Palmer and Tony George, I had many fine adventures on the hills and rocks of Britain and further afield. In my 30s, Bob Llewellyn introduced me to the adventure of kayaking rivers and the sea. That continued with Roger Ward and then Loel Collins with the latter introducing me to the canoe.

Coaches I have worked with or have been coached by have influenced me greatly, notably Robert Egelstaff, Loel Collins, Martin Dutton, Franco Ferrero, Colin Broadway, Leo Hoare, Nigel Garrett and Dave Luke.

From North America I would thank the following: Harry Rock, Mike Cichanowski of We No Nah and the inimitable Cliff Jacobson.

Numerous people have been behind my camera when the opportunities for good photos arose but special thanks are due to Lina Patel, Bob Timms, Dave Luke and Steve Chaplin.

A chance meeting with Stuart Bell left me inspired to carry out many adventurous journeys in Scotland. Some trips have been instrumental in forming, challenging or confirming ideas and I thank the following for sharing them with me: Andy Hall, Martin Dutton, Alun Pugh, Jamie Ellson, Tim Bird, Graham Rowe, Dave Howie, Chris Charlton, Tony Howard, Mike Hazelhurst and Alan Pinnington. Special thanks are due to Rob Egelstaff for sharing his concept of a canoe circumnavigation of Wales.

Ray Mears started the process of enriching the manner in which I interact with the boreal forest. That has been ably continued by the work I have done in the UK and Canada with my friend Paul Kirtley of Frontier Bushcraft. Thanks also to

PGL staff for assistance and hospitality and the staff of Gwersyll yr Urdd Glan-Llyn, a Welsh-speaking outdoor centre on the shores of Llyn Tegid. 'Diolch yn fawr' for all the support over the years.

Huw Evans and Whitewater Consultancy supported me with Mad River Canoes for many years. Huw died far too young and I will miss his grin at the production of this book. Thanks to Richard Bennett of Outdoor Active for his support over the last years. Also thanks to Jude of Downcreek Paddles and Graham Mackereth of Venture Canoes and Pyranha for their help and use of their products.

Jen Somogyi gave me confidence to write in my own style. Having seen my pain while writing articles, she always swore she would leave me if I wrote a book. We parted many years ago but have remained friends; she would not have been disappointed in the angst and dithering.

A big thank you goes to all my customers from the absolute beginners to people that should be considered experts in their own right. The questions you have asked, the way you look at things so differently and the expertise you have shared have all contributed to my knowledge.

Julian Fulbrook looked over my work with a critical eye coupled with support and enthusiasm. I have taken some of his ideas on board and the book is richer for that.

I would like to say an especially big thank you to my partner Lina Patel who has now recovered from the trauma of the first edition and even encouraged me to write more.

Finally I must mention my daughter Maya Rose who was born in 2010. She has added a wonderful new dimension to my canoeing.

Ray has paddled extensively in Europe and his British canoe trips include the Circumnavigation of Wales and the Irish Sea Crossing. In North America he has canoed the Rio Grande in the South and paddled as far north as the Arctic Circle, as well as doing two kayak descents of the Grand Canyon. In addition to being a British Canoe Union Level 5 Coach in Canoe, Inland and Sea Kayak, he holds a Mountain Instructor's Certificate and has led ice climbs on Kilimanjaro, Mount Kenya and in the Atlas Mountains.
He runs his own coaching and guiding business.
www.raygoodwin.com

Introduction

This is a book that is primarily about canoeing techniques; the aim is to suggest ways in which they can be applied skilfully. Just as with canoe design, so canoe techniques can have infinite variety and adaptation. The theory is useful, but even more important is the application of the right technique at the right time in the right place. As a canoe coach I have tried to teach not just the essential technical points, but also the judgment necessary to know when to put those methods into practice. Some of this judgment comes with personal experience, which often has to be acquired 'the hard way'. But, as one of Oscar Wilde's characters points out, 'Experience is the name everyone gives to their mistakes'. However, it is useful to learn from the experience of others rather than have to find out everything for yourself.

In canoeing, the leading text for the last 30 years has been the excellent *Path of the Paddle: An Illustrated Guide to the Art of Canoeing*, first published in Canada by the incomparable Bill Mason in 1980. Although updated by his son in 1995 and supplemented considerably by Paul Mason's collaboration with Mark Scriver on *Thrill of the Paddle* in 1999, there comes a point when there is a need for a fresh approach. Although Bill Mason was a superlative film-maker and photographer, printing and

publishing have moved forward and some of the black and white photography of *Path of the Paddle* looks increasingly dated. Gary and Joanie McGuffin took the Bill Mason format and, with the help of excellent photography and colour printing, produced *Paddle Your Own Canoe*. Although the McGuffin manual is a visually stunning book, it deals with only a relatively narrow range of canoeing techniques. The masterly Cliff Jacobson has produced a series of books on a wide range of canoe topics, including his excellent *Expedition Canoeing*, but does not attempt to deal extensively with technique. Bill Mason of course always happily acknowledged that he was an author 'who believes there is no such thing as the last word or the last photograph on the subject of canoeing'. My attempts therefore to 'see a little further' is most definitely by 'standing on the shoulders of giants'.

By introducing some of the latest canoeing performance skills, based on what I have discovered through decades of coaching and guiding, I hope to inspire a new generation of paddlers. In particular I hope to show you, through the use of photographs acquired over many years of paddling around the world, some glimpses of the reality of canoeing: sometimes gritty, but always enthralling.

Cartoon by Bill Bentall.

Early morning brew on the Mississagi.

Canoe Country

"Well so much for the Wilderness! For months Lina had spoken of little else in relation to the trip. No mention of the river or lake; It was all about her first floatplane trip.

The outfitter dropped us off at the floatplane base on Red Lake for our pending flight to Artery Lake. Bad news awaited us: the cloud base was far too low to fly as the 55 mile flight had to cross a ridge. In the spare time suddenly available, we got sorted and weighed both the gear and ourselves in readiness for any clearance.

Late in the day we were in with a chance and so our spirits lifted, but we could not cross the ridge. Our pilot was much younger than the Norseman he was flying (not unusual with these northern flying workhorses). Our only chance of getting out that day was to follow the circuit of lakes that swung around the ridge. It was a bit hit-or-miss, and if the cloud dropped we would have to turn back.

The take-off was the usual floatplane smooth transition from water to sky. Soon the novelty wore off for Lina and the incessant rhythmic droning of the aircraft had her asleep with her head on my shoulder in minutes. So much for the excitement! We flew just below the clouds through the occasional curtain of rain. Both the pilot and myself were following the route on our maps.

Lina woke up before we landed and watched in wonder and amazement. We arrived over Artery Lake, and a quick fly-through located a possible campsite and checked out the landing area for obstructions. Within minutes we were ashore and unloading; the pilot wanted out of there quickly before the weather closed down.

The Norseman taxied away down the lake. The sound of high revs accompanied the plane as it came back in view while lifting into the air. Shortly after, it returned for one last fly-by and then was gone. Only an hour before we had left the small town of Red Lake and now we were in the wilderness. I looked around at the others. They stood in silence suddenly aware that we were totally alone and committed to the journey ahead.

'Canoe country' speaks to me of wild or semi-wild country such as is found in North America, Scandinavia or even to a degree in parts of Scotland, where you are totally dependent on your canoe as a means of transport and your outdoor skills for shelter, warmth and food. The further you are into a wilderness the more serious any incident will be. Poor planning, the loss of a boat, a cut from the careless use of axe or knife, a broken bone or general illness will have far greater consequences. Caution and care should be our watchwords in this environment.

Planning a Wilderness Trip

The further we are from help the more self-reliant we must be. Careful planning and preparation are essential.

Guidebooks will vary considerably in detail. While on a 360-mile trip which included the Bonnet Plume River in the NW of Canada, our guidebook provided a page and a half of information. It gave details of the major rapids and their location but left the majority of the decision-making to the paddlers. At the other end of the spectrum is Hap Wilson's guide to the Missinaibi: a whole book to describe one river. In Hap's book every rapid has a detailed map with information on its lines and problems. A lot of environmental and historical detail was also included. Both treatments have their advantages but you have to be aware that things can change; trees can block a rapid and higher water will increase the difficulty. On a trip on the Bloodvein in Manitoba the water levels went ballistic; grade 2 rapids became massive grade 4s and portages became longer and harder.

Left: compass orientates the map to north.
Centre: compass used to paddle on a bearing.

On trips we need ***maps*** as well as guide books. The map is housed in a waterproof case. On this trip the guidebook information has been transferred to the map.

In darkness or mist or perhaps on a very large lake a compass is vital. We can paddle on a bearing in poor visibility, or to work out the angle of a section of river or shoreline to help place us. We can use it to orientate the map (by aligning north of the map with the north of the compass), making it easier to work out places and directions.

> *In the late 1980s I organised a kayak trip down the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. I sent for information by letter, waited for stuff to go back and forth across the Atlantic, responded to it and then eventually arranged the last details by a very expensive phone call. It didn't help that the outfitter had the slowest Midwest drawl that I had come across and I spent minutes willing him to get through a sentence. Fortunately, credit cards were available so I didn't have to carry wads of cash or travellers cheques when I eventually met the outfitter.*

Outfitters are now to be found in many parts of the world. This makes life much easier as it is possible to hire canoes and source all your needs locally. In North America, decide where you want to paddle and then put the name of the area or river plus the word outfitter into an Internet search engine. This will get you details of the various outfitters and the services they provide. This is what they do for a living and the service tends to be good. They can arrange for canoe hire, permits, fishing licences, cooking gear, food and even camping gear if you want. Typically, they also arrange shuttles or even book floatplane flights if the trip starts with a fly in. If it is a flat-water area, then take the option of hiring a lightweight Kevlar canoe. Portages are easier and paddling is a delight. On the steeper river of the Canadian west, it is possible to hire canoes with full spray covers that are necessary in the bigger volume and waves.

It may be worth putting a brief résumé of the rivers you have done and the experience you have. This will make it easier for the outfitter to advise you. Contact can be by email and VoIP (Voice over inter protocol e.g. Skype).

Scandinavia has similar services, although the canoe designs tend to be a bit basic and designed for beginners on flat water.

In England and Wales, gear hire tends to be for very easy rivers like the Wye. Scotland has a number of outfitters who can arrange boats and shuttles.

Communications

The world and its wilderness has become a smaller place. Until relatively recently, once you paddled off you were on your own. Any accident or delay, and you had to sort it out unaided. Most of us now don't think twice about carrying a mobile phone in more accessible places, but these will not work in the remote areas of the world.

Relatively simple accidents can, in a remote setting, prove fatal so the ability to alert the outside world in an emergency could be a lifesaver. One solution is to carry a ***satellite phone***. Few of us will own one but they are easy to hire from online companies. In North America many canoe outfitters will rent them to you. Normally there is a per-day charge plus a deposit for any calls made. They are expensive to use but because of the two-way nature of the call, rearrangements of shuttles, emergency aid or even the ability to talk directly to a doctor make them very versatile. These phones are now a reasonable size and weight. Because they communicate via satellites it is possible to call from almost anywhere, but they will not work in deep canyons or even under dense tree cover.

EPIRBs (emergency position-indicating radio beacons) have long been in use with sailors operating offshore. These have not proved popular with land-based adventurers, however. Now there is a recommended alternative with a ***PLB*** (personal locator beacon) that is for personal use and intended to indicate a person in distress who is away from a normal telephone emergency service. They are so effective that, in Australia, some National Parks have issued them to hikers.

PLBs also rely on satellites. They are about the price of a top-quality buoyancy aid, plus an annual subscription that is only slightly less. The best models have a range of responses. They can allow others to track your progress and even show your GPS location on an online map; an OK button allows you to send a pre-programmed message along with your GPS position to selected contacts; a Help button notifies others that you need assistance that is non-life threatening; and, finally, a SOS button can alert others to a critical emergency. Both the Help and SOS buttons should have a protective cover to prevent accidental alerts.

There are PLBs now that will link to a smart phone and can send emails or text messages. This technology continues to move on quickly and makes the advice given very time sensitive, so keep an eye on developments.

A Spot Messenger: an example of a Personal Location Beacon.

The Bloodvein is a classic river of the Canadian Shield flowing westward from Ontario into Lake Winnipeg. The rocks it flows through are amongst the oldest on earth but have been ground low by numerous ice ages giving a relatively low relief. No grand mountains or deep canyons here. Some 10,000 years ago the gigantic Lake Agassiz formed over the entire area, its water dammed by the retreating ice sheets to the north. It is only in the last 8,000 years that this area of low lying bog, forests and lakes took on its current shape.

Pictoglyphs at the eastern end of Artery Lake.

"The start of our trip was accessed via floatplane from Red Lake in Ontario. An hour-long flight dropped us on Artery Lake and our first camp. An early start allowed us to make the excursion to the pictoglyphs at the eastern end of Artery. The positioning of the pictoglyphs on a steep rock wall overlooking the water is fairly typical and seems to mark an important junction between various worlds. Amongst other things they show a shaman with a radiating power line coming from the head and holding an otter pelt medicine bag. Below the shaman is a well-manned canoe.

We were to take a total of fourteen days to paddle, portage and line our way down the eighty or so rapids and falls on this trip. We were treated to two nights of spectacular thunderstorms so close that flash and bang were almost simultaneous. Then on one night we got lucky and were treated to a spectacular display of the Northern Lights.

Threading the stoppers on Lagoon Run Rapid.

Class 3, the whole river squeezes through a tight slot.

Moose.

Threading a line.

Storm.

Northern Lights.

Water was higher than the previous year and so many rapids that we had previously lined became really fun paddles. At all times the criterion for running stuff was a low risk to boat. A boat wrapped around a rock would leave us with just two craft and six people, necessitating a satellite call to the outfitter to see if another canoe could be flown in. We often did not bother to lash kit down into the canoe. Most rapids ran straight out into still or slow-moving water, so boat and gear could be easily retrieved in the event of an upset.

Just before reaching Bloodvein village and Lake Winnipeg an all-season road crosses the river. Some groups finish here but it lacks a sense of completion and we travelled downriver to finish in the lake.

Baker Tent, photo courtesy of Ray Mears.

Living in Canoe Country

The canoe fits into the landscape so perfectly you would be forgiven for thinking it was designed by Mother Nature herself. As adventurers and visitors to such landscapes, we should aim to fit into it with the same perfection and integrity. We are only the brief custodians of these environments; it is essential that the utmost respect and care is taken if they are to survive for future generations. We need to learn how to live in those surroundings rather than merely exist. Our kit will have a profound impact on our experience.

The right choice of kit is important for comfort in the environment we travel in. You may want a large ***tent*** to provide a base while, at other times, the length of trip and portages will dictate the need to go small and light.

The Baker Tent is a modern version of the classic campfire tent made famous by the late great canoeist, artist and filmmaker, Bill Mason. This traditional design features a wide front opening with a large overhead canopy, enabling you to enjoy your surroundings to the full while warmed by the fire and sheltered from the elements above. In poor weather, the side panels can be fastened across the front of the tent. For Bill this seemed to be an ideal solution when filming or painting in the same spot for a period; however, it is very heavy for those on the move.

A most un-wilderness campsite. Sometimes you just have to take the only possibility. We had pitched camp in the early hours of the morning on the first available spot along the Shropshire Union Canal after the city of Chester. Arwel had spent the night worrying about rolling into the water and the local kids heading to school woke all of us.

In some locations we will need a degree of ingenuity. Free-standing tents that do not depend on pegs may be best in areas where the only clear ground tends to be sand or rocky. Mosquito nets are a necessity wherever there are mozzies, midges or the myriad of other bugs sent to torment. In bug season, care is needed when entering the tent. Turning the torches off just before getting in at night seems to attract less bugs.

Tarps (see next page) make for a great shelter on trips; sleeping under a tarp allows us to be part of the environment in a way that a tent does not. In poor weather, they provide an agreeable social area as long as the mosquitoes or flies are not too bad. In such conditions you can use tents as bedrooms and the tarp as a living area. It makes for a greater group harmony, as folk can sit and chat. Kit can be dried rather than left damp in the corner of a tent. When putting them up, it helps if you have plenty of cord and a touch of imagination.

On the Bloodvein we had decided not to take stoves. The tarp sheltered the fire or we would never have managed to cook in the poor weather. Being on rock, we used a tripod to hang the pots.

A lean-to on the banks of the Bonnet Plume. A central hang point stops the middle being blown towards the working area. Attachment points allow for versatility in creating a shelter. Photo courtesy of Tony Howard.

The Missinaibi after a thunderstorm. The forest had suffered a fire some years before and the undergrowth was so dense that we were camped on the shore. An A-frame was constructed using driftwood and the tarp hung from it. The edges were fastened to the canoes and rocks were used to guy the whole thing out. We weighted the canoes to stop them being blown around.

Cliff Jacobson is often credited with inventing the Tundra Tarp for the far North of Canada, where the flies and mosquitoes can be horrendous. Netting hangs from the sides give respite from the small beasties. Photo courtesy of Paul Fulbrook.

For convenience, the front of the tent had been put under the tarp.

Good company and a blazing fire.

A small firebox needs dry wood so, in wet weather, wood will need to be cut and split to get at its dry heart. Larger fireboxes work well.

Bacon and pancakes. By raking embers from the active fire under the grill, temperature can be controlled to a degree.

Fires and Cooking

The wood was dead and the fire was built on sand. The embers and ash were cleaned away the next morning. In some areas of North America, it is a requirement to use a fire tray to prevent the ash mixing with the sand. Any large pieces of charcoal are either taken with you and relit the next day or treated as waste and carried out; it is normally advocated that the fine ash is disposed of in the river. Some areas are being trashed by people using wood fires, so care is needed in the choice of site and wood.

Generally I carry either a small gas stove on a short trip or a liquid fuel stove on longer ones. Stoves can be an issue when flying with commercial airlines. Gas cylinders are out for safety reasons but security people have a dislike of any liquid fuel stove, regularly confiscating those that have a fuel tank. Even washing the fuel tank out with soapy water beforehand does not seem to appease them. Flying with an axe or a knife in hold luggage does not seem to be an issue, however.

Some people use Dutch ovens for baking on a trip but they are heavy. A modern lightweight alternative is this Outback Oven. Sitting on the gas stove is a heat spreader to prevent a burn spot in the pan. The pan has a lid and, to the left, a cover to go over everything. The cover spreads the heat all around the pot. Pizzas, cakes and bread can be baked.

A tripod is formed with the tie being a thin green stick that has been twisted to form a flexible withy. This is knotted around the tripod with a section dangling below. A fork has been left at the foot of the withy to hang the pot. The same can be achieved using a length of light chain with a hook at the end. If you want the pot higher, you bring the legs of the tripod inwards. The fire in the photo is on bare rock.

Another effective method is to use a sloped arm and a separate pot hanger. The hanger has been notched with a series of downward points. The sloping branch has been trimmed at the end and a small hole left for the points of the pot hanger. This is a very adjustable and elegant method.

Kelly kettles produce hot water quickly with a fire tray below, chimney with a hollow cone-shaped interior and a jacket filled with water on the outside. Once alight, wood is added through the central chimney. It is critical that the attached cork is not in the water vent when the water is heating, as the pressure will easily burst the seams.

The fire risk can be horrendous with the forest one giant area of tinder. A cigarette end or someone burning toilet paper started this[1]. It quickly spread and ate its way into rotten logs and tree stumps. This one was stopped with a desperate effort. Wet towels were used to beat the flames and water was carried to the site. Logs had to be split open to check for the fire smouldering away.

A fire should be on sand, damp soil or rock if possible, but not tree mould. Do not burn a forest down. At times you are better off not lighting a fire. In many countries there are total fire bans at the driest times of the summer, so don't head for the wilds of Canada in August believing you are going to be cooking on wood fires.

Knife and axe can be used to create feather sticks for fire lighting, rather than carrying firelighters.

Finishing a bannock (traditional unleavened bead) by turning it towards the fire. It will be eaten for the next day's lunch along with a selection of jam, cheese and treats.

1

Fishing is a great way to supplement the diet on a long trip. Most places, wilderness or not, will require a licence or permit. Photo courtesy of Mike Hazelhurst.

I recommend the book *How to Shit in the Woods* by Kathleen Meyer ISBN 978-1580083638. It tells you far more than is suggested by the title.

Water is the most basic commodity, but in many places water will need to be purified. There are lots of methods but here we are using a filter pump. On longer trips I use either a pump or boil some water on the fire. Various chemical treatments are readily available, but read the instructions carefully in every case. For example, iodine (which is very effective) should not be used for more than a few weeks each season; it can cause thyroid problems with prolonged use.

Disposing of Waste

Wilderness areas are precious and the impact we have on them must be kept to a minimum. A conscious judgment must therefore be made on our own presence and any waste. I have walked into the forest from a number of well-used wilderness campsites only to find it (to my disgust) encircled by piles of human excreta decorated with bunched up toilet paper. This is totally unacceptable, leaving me to wonder if I am really sharing these places with like-minded people.

In some heavily used North American national parks, each wilderness campsite will have a simple privy toilet installed. This is a necessary strategy employed to eliminate the situation described above. In more remote places, it comes down to us to be responsible and to follow local recommendations. On a desert river it may be a requirement to pack out all solid human waste as the soil is too poor to break excreta down. In woodland areas, a small hole some 20cm deep can be dug and the material buried. Toilet paper should be buried at the bottom of the hole, burnt in the campfire or packed out. These burials should be a minimum of 60m from any water source. Female hygiene products should not be buried and should be packed out or disposed of on a campfire. Recommendation and regulations will vary from place to place and there are many variations.

Cans, glass and plastics should be packed out. In fact, some North American parks do not allow cans or glass to be taken on a trip. It's simple: if you packed it in then you pack it out.

Washing yourself or dishes should be done with a minimum of biodegradable soap and the grey water disposed of the same 60m from water sources.

Portaging

Portaging is very much part of canoe culture. The ability to portage the canoe across the Canadian Shield made it such a versatile journeying tool. To this day, portaging is a vital element in this most evocative of canoe landscapes.

"You meet a better class of person once past the first portage. Because of the work involved, they are probably going to be like-minded people." *Anon*

On a river the start of a portage may be difficult to find or even very close to the waterfall or rapid you are going to walk around. In swift water it is best to be cautious and pull in early. Judge the water levels; in high water show far more caution. There may be a sign to indicate the start of the trail. In the days of the Voyageurs, a pine tree could be ring barked and its branches stripped to provide a marker at the portage start. Finding the next portage on a lake may require detailed navigation. In North America, guidebooks will give details but elsewhere river guides are generally written for kayaks and will you need to make your own decisions.

Take kit across the portage first, then you know what the track is going to be like with the canoe. Many portage trails are maintained in North America, but there may be new trees down. Many will double bag the carry: one heavy sack and a second on top, packed with the light but bulky items. Paddles are best strapped together to make one bundle. Be organised: it is so easy to put something down and lose it.

In a wilderness situation, whether at the start or end of a portage or leaving a campsite, it is best that the last person does a 'paranoia check'. Assume that you have left something and have a good last look around. It will save losing that vital piece of gear.

The going is not always easy. Portage in pairs: the 'spare' person acts as the eyes of the carrier and prevents them walking into anything. It is easy to swap over on long portages. The carrier stops and slopes the stern of the canoe to the ground. The other person comes under the front and holds the canoe up with straight arms. The carrier can then step out from under and take over holding the front up. The other then steps under the yoke and the portage continues. Know when to double up to carry: both you and the canoe need protecting. In a wilderness environment a heavy fall on bad ground with a weighty canoe could be a serious matter.

In Temagami Jamie is portaging a Kevlar canoe; the trip was on lakes so we had no need of a heavy whitewater boat. The portaging was a pleasure.

Bears and Other Beasties

There is an apparent calm and profound beauty to be found in any wilderness; however, you will be sharing this with many others, both minute and massive. Some of these encounters will enhance your experience, whether the presence of the majestic stag or soaring eagle in Scotland (and maybe soon the shy beaver) or the magnificent moose, bear, beaver and otters in Canada (all of which are backed by the wailing lament of the loon). Some of the experiences we share are downright unpleasant, but even the experiences which we do want to encounter have their issues. Preparation and understanding is therefore paramount in order to limit the discomfort and problems you can be faced with when travelling in and sharing this wonderful environment.

Midges are bad enough, but mosquitoes can be a torment. In the middle photo[1] the horizontal welt is from a long portage with wet boots. On a hot muggy evening I was encased in bug-proof clothing; this paddler was not. After-bite remedies and anti-histamine are worth carrying to reduce the itching.

Lina's eyelid has become swollen from just one bite[2]. If you know you react badly to bites, then extra care should be taken. Many women who wilderness travel carry a Shewee so they do not have to drop their trousers in mosquito-infested areas. The company that manufacture them say that the Shewee 'is a moulded plastic funnel that provides women with a simple, private and hygienic method of urinating without removing clothes'. Enough said. Some carry a bug net which can be used as a portable latrine tent.

Bug repellents come in many forms. Citronella, one the many natural products available, is reasonably effective. Others are based on a solution of Deet; this is a fairly harsh chemical and is not advised for use with young children. I have tried all sorts of 'bug dope'; while most give some protection, when the bugs get really bad nothing stops them.

Keeping the bugs at bay

1

2

In the UK midge nets are readily available to go over just the head. In Canada I have a bug suit for bad conditions. The trousers have cuffs that fit into the boots to protect the top of the ankles. The mesh on the hood is zippered so that you can still eat. Check for the times when the flies are at their worst because there are definite seasons.

Other beasts are a bit bigger. I have yet to have a bad encounter with a bear, but I have always followed local and expert advice. Food is never stored in the campsite and, when possible, it is hauled up to hang from a branch at night. Avoid smelly food unless it can be vacuum packed and eaten in one go. Waste (in particular fish waste) is burnt or disposed of a long way from the campsite. In the more popular areas, bears can become habituated to humans and can see our packs as a food source. Some parks in North America have installed metal bear-proof storage boxes in wilderness campsites. Bear attacks on humans are fortunately extremely rare, but find out the local advice and follow it.

I have yet to paddle so far north that we are in polar bear territory. This bear is a totally different ball game, as it will actively hunt humans. Everyone I know that has travelled in such areas has taken a gun. This is well outside of my experience so seek advice.

I have carried pepper spray on some Canadian trips. The bear has got to be very close before you can direct the spray at it. Cliff Jacobson has a yarn about some German tourists who mis-read the instructions and treated it like bug spray. They duly anointed each other with pepper spray.

So far all of my own bear encounters have been trip highlights. On the Bonnet Plume, a Grizzly reared up a short distance from the river. Head raised, it sniffed at the air trying to decide what these strange canoeists were. It was the start of the trip and the river was shallow and narrow. Our strokes had a quiet deliberation in the execution. Breath was held as we sped on with the current. One corner later, we were laughing and babbling out our excitement.

Leave only footprints, just like the bear.
Photo courtesy of Tony Howard.

Pont d'Arc, River Ardèche.

In the greying light of morning and with a thin mist, we left Pont D'Arc and its improbable bridge of limestone. We slipped quietly downriver and into the mouth of the Ardèche Gorge.

Within hours this would be a crowded cacophony of paddlers in their brightly coloured plastic fleet, but for now everyone else was still tucked up asleep.

As we turned the first corner the water sped up. Lina's keen eyes spotted the first beaver tucked into a corner. As ever, I would have slid on by without noticing. At Trois Eau, in the chill of the morning, we took the easy shoot river right as we didn't want to take on water in the more fun rapid to the left. We had turned into the depths of the gorge, and the splendour of the limestone walls began to tower above us.

The mist began to burn away as we past rapid after rapid. All the lines were easy and none disturbed our quietness. I even spotted two beavers without Lina having to point them out.

The acrid smell of feral goats alerted us to their presence long before we saw them. Their nonchalance at this early morning intrusion was astounding. Light was reflecting up into the cave at Echo corner. We pulled in and Lina could not resist climbing up into its roof. A short paddle across the river took us into the sunlight and a beach of granite cobbles. It was time for breakfast: out came the coffee along with the croissants and pain au chocolat.

We paddled past the bivouac sites of Gaud and Gournier. There was only one person in sight at the latter. A raised hand in greeting and we were past and alone again. It was here that we had so often seen wild boar, but not today.

Rapids were just gentle interludes between quiet stretches of water. No playing today; the routes were chosen for speed and dryness. Even so, we were reading the river and enjoying the efficient lines.

Lina taking it easy on the Ardèche.
Canoeing can be tough.

We stopped briefly for a leg stretch. A small granite cobble, one among many others, caught my eye with its perfect roundness. It was speckled white-brown and pink, and worn smooth from its journey through the limestone gorge from the mountains many miles away.

At each bend, spectacular rock architecture rose to the rim 300m above. And at each turn we swung back and forth from shadow to full sun. The bottom of the gorge would be baking by midday, but we would be well gone by then. Black kites circled above the river.

The river made its turn towards Saint-Martin and the flat lands beyond. Finally, there was another paddler on the water. He nodded a greeting to us, the early birds. In silence we shared the companionship of the canoe and the warmth of the morning sun. ”

CANOEING

RAY GOODWIN

This book covers all aspects of the open canoe, from design to wilderness travel. What really sets it apart is its focus on canoeing techniques.

Ray Goodwin is the UK's best known and (many would go so far as to say) foremost canoe coach. By introducing some of the latest canoeing performance skills, based on what he has discovered through decades of coaching and guiding, he sets out to inspire a new generation of paddlers. Through clear language and the use of photographs acquired over many years of paddling around the world, he shares some real insights of the reality of canoeing; sometimes gritty, but always enthralling.

A thoroughly modern book on the traditional open canoe.

New in the 2nd edition:

- New section on 'vision pattern', a method for creating a mental map of a rapid.
- New solo rescue technique.
- Expanded and re-written chapter on canoeing with children.
- More techniques for improvised sailing.
- More on advanced lining and tracking.
- Inspirational canoe expedition examples.

ISBN 9781906095543

9 781906 095543

www.pesdapress.com
www.raygoodwin.com