



LowCountry Paddlers Club

Trip Leader Handbook



The purpose of the LowCountry Paddlers (LCP) Club is to promote safe paddling with our friends on the water. We are a social paddling club that enjoys paddling the coastal waters, rivers, creeks, swamps, and lakes of the South Carolina Lowcountry. Experience levels vary from Beginner to Expert while boats range from Sit-on-Tops to Expedition Sea Kayaks.

All scheduled trips will have an LCP Club trained Trip Leader to lead the paddle. These people share their favorite paddling places with others in the club while providing leadership and safety coordination for the paddle trip. In an effort to encourage safe leadership and boating skills, we have developed these Trip Leader Guidelines.

Besides outlining the responsibilities of the Trip Leader, the guide is an accumulation of many practical tips which we would like to pass on to all trip leaders - both new and experienced.

The goal of this guide is to put the Trip Leader policies, guidelines and suggestions into one document that our Trip Leaders can reference at any time and can be used to train new Trip Leaders.

In no way do we intend for this to include everything that one needs to know to be a good Trip Leader. We encourage members of the paddling community to pass on their suggestions for improvement and changes to the information presented in this guide to any LCP Club Officer or Coordinator.

Types of Trips

- **LCP Club Planned Club Paddles**
 - The Trip Planning Committee plans trips for the Club for a 6-month block at a time. The trips will be listed on the LCP webpage under the heading Club Paddles. These trips will have at least one LCP trained Trip Leader to lead them.
- **LCP Club “Show-N-Go” (SNG) Trips**
 - The “Show-N-Go” trips can be posted on the LCP website by anyone. Whomever posts the trip is usually the Trip Leader. These trips are not planned by the LCP Trip Planning Committee and are not covered by the ACA Paddle America Club insurance program. They may also not have any LCP trained Trip Leaders to accompany the participants.



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Pre-Trip Planning and Communication

- Scout the paddling route. It is assumed that you are leading the trip because you like the area and are familiar with the route, distance and time, but if you are not, a scouting trip to familiarize yourself with those details is required.
- Double-check tides, if applicable, and the advertised length of the trip. Adjust the times and distances as necessary.
- On or before the Wednesday prior to a weekend trip, send out an email via the LCP Club's Yahoo Group and confirm details about the trip and giving everyone the opportunity to ask further questions about the trip.

Day of the Trip

File Your Float Plan

- Leave a "Float Plan" with a responsible party, preferably with someone who knows you and will know at what point help may be needed should you or the group not check back in with them within the allotted time. This plan should include, but is not limited to:
 - Launch/Put-In and Take-Out sites
 - Destination and route
 - Number of people in the group
 - Approximate description of group and boat types
 - License plate number of car left at landing

Pre-Launch Group Discussion

Before launching, gather your group together and review all of these things with your paddle group before starting.

- **Liability Release Form**
 - This is for non-American Canoe Association (ACA) members. Give them the time and opportunity to read it before signing. Make sure that they understand that it is liability release form not just a sign-up sheet. The form must be given to the LCP club treasurer after the completion of the event.
- **Trip Participant Guidelines**
 - Review that everyone is aware of the Trip Participation Guidelines and make sure all participants understand them – have a copy of them for review if necessary.
- **Safety Responsibility**
 - First the Trip Leader must decide if participants have the necessary skills and equipment to make the trip – this should already be established through the pre-trip communications. Once the participants are accepted for making the trip and the trip details are explained to them, the participants must decide for



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themselves if they feel the trip is safe for them and must let the Trip Leader know if they are uncomfortable with any part of the trip. If they are in doubt, they should not make the trip.

- **Trip Difficulty**

- Discuss the trip length, difficulty, water and weather conditions, any known obstacles, and then ensure that everyone feels comfortable with the trip.

- **Equipment**

- Trip Leader Equipment

- The Equipment List Guidelines outline the general needs for all paddlers, however, in addition to these, it is recommended that the Trip Leader also have the following:

- Basic First Aid Kit (ensure others in the group know where it is kept in your boat)
- Communications Device - Cell phone and/or VHF radio – trip dependent
- Spare Paddle
- Spare clothing in a dry bag for yourself plus one paddler
- Waist-mounted Tow Belt
- Rescue Stirrup/Strap
- Navigation Device – A local map or chart with a Compass or GPS if you are not familiar with these waters.
- Extra Water, Sunscreen and snack

- Examine boats for seaworthiness. Do the boats meet the minimum requirement for your trip? Are there bulkheads, secure hatch covers, deck lines, float bags, foot pegs, a working skeg or rudder? These requirements will not apply to all trips.

- Safety Equipment All Paddlers Must Have

- PFD - WHEN ON THE WATER, EVERYONE MUST WEAR PROPERLY FITTED AND ZIPPED, COAST-GUARD APPROVED PFD'S ON ALL LCP CLUB PADDLING TRIPS.
- Whistle - Preferably attached to their PFD.
- See note about Inflatable PFDs.*

- **Sufficient Rescue/ Paddling Skills**

- Ask lots of questions. Do much of this during the RSVP stage.

- **Paddling Skills**

- For paddlers unknown to the Trip Leader, inquire about the paddler's skills to know which will be the stronger paddlers. Confirm that participants understand the skill level required for the paddle and that each paddler asserts that he/she has appropriate skills - as defined in the LCP Clubs Self Assessment Guide.



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- **Minimum Rescue Skills**
 - Ensure that everyone knows how to do a wet exit.
- **Medical Conditions**
 - Ask if there are any special medical conditions which may be a concern and be sure to invite participants to talk with you privately about any medical concerns or conditions that they may not want to air in a group setting.
 - Ensure that any required medications are available and carried by the user prior to launch. Learn where the paddler carries the required medications: Is it in the boat or on the paddler?
 - Consider assigning a paddle buddy to anyone requiring medication while paddling.
 - Identify paddlers who are hard of hearing. Make sure these paddlers can see you clearly while you are giving instructions, either on land or on the water as they may be relying on lip reading. Confirm with them that they understand the instructions.
- **Refusing Trip Participation**
 - The Trip Leader is ultimately responsible for safety; he or she may decide that a trip is not appropriate for a participant. The Trip Leader may ask the person not to participate in the trip or may alter the trip to make it an easier trip to allow the person to participate. If the person refuses to comply with the request not to participate, the Trip Leader should obtain two LCP members as witnesses and inform the person that they will not be allowed to participate on the LCP club paddle. While we cannot prevent them from paddling where and when they want, they will not be considered part of the LCP Club paddle for which the Trip Leader is responsible.
- **Stick Together During Paddles**
 - Insist that the group "stick together" during the paddle and at the very least have a paddling "buddy" present with them. This generally means within appropriate and effective communication distance of one other. This allows the more experienced paddlers to provide assistance to other paddlers. The keys to this are:
 - **Selecting the Proper Lead Paddler**
 - This paddler will set the pace for the entire group. If the group starts to separate consider a slower paddler for the lead spot. The lead paddler should plan to stop about every 20 minutes and allow the group to collapse on the leader (avoiding a strung out paddle group). Once the group catches up, allow time for the last paddlers to rest before continuing.
 - **Get Permission before Leaving the Group**
 - Anyone leaving the group must get permission from the Trip Leader before leaving. If someone needs to return to the put-in, send a



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rescue-experienced paddler with them since a person should never paddle alone.

- **Select Asst. Trip Leaders**
 - Assign tasks to other experienced paddlers on the trip. If the need arises you can ask another paddler to watch over any inexperienced paddlers.
- **Keep All Paddlers in Sight**
 - The Trip Leader can move about the group if needed to check on paddlers and keep everyone in sight.
- **Split Leadership of Large Groups**
 - If your group has more than 10 paddlers, consider splitting it into groups. Have an experienced Trip Leader be in charge of each group.
- **Name and Identify Your Sweep**
 - Paddler responsible for being at rear of group and “sweeping” the group together.
- **Review Paddle Signals**
 - Refer to page ...
- **Keep Hydrated**
 - Ensure that everyone has plenty of water.
- **Emergency Signals**
 - Ensure that everyone has a whistle or signaling device (required by the Coast Guard).
 - Discuss signals for “forming-up” the group while on the water (e.g. three blasts on your whistle followed by your paddle raised vertically in the air).

On the Water

- **Check on Your Paddlers**
 - Watch how ALL of your paddlers are doing and frequently ask people how they are doing during the trip.
- **Take Breaks**
 - Depending on the conditioning of your group, take sufficient breaks for water and rest.
- **Problems during the Trip**
 - Many different problems can occur during a paddle. We suggest that you refer to “Trip Leader Tips & Tricks/ Lessons Learned”. If a paddler refuses to follow the Trip Leader’s directions during the trip, we suggest that you take the paddler aside, with two LCP members as witness, and reiterate the importance of adhering to Trip Leader directions and of the paddle group sticking together.



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After the Trip

- Please mail, email or bring the Liability Release Form and trip signup sheet to the LCP club treasurer within a reasonable amount of time after the trip (not to exceed 4 weeks).
- Incidents during the trip should be reported after the trip to the Safety & Training Coordinator who will talk to the LCP President about the incident. The purpose of reporting incidents is to identify where issues may exist either with trip itself or participants on the trip and to pass on that knowledge to other Trip Leaders. Examples of incidents which should be reported are:
 - Note if any paddlers could not keep up with the group (outside their ability to paddle).
 - Any rescues needed and their outcome.
 - Any other issue pertinent to the safety of the group.

Liability Insurance Coverage & Policy

Please refer to the American Canoe Association's (ACA) Paddle America Club (PAC) Agreement and Insurance Procedures document found both on the LCP Club website, www.lowcountrypaddlers.net, and on the ACA website, www.americancanoe.org.



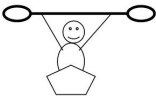

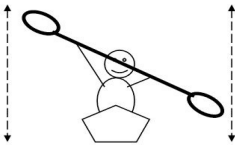
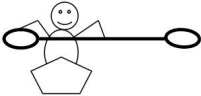

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Paddle Signals for Use on Trips

Often times on trips paddlers cannot hear directions from the Trip Leader. Therefore, it is helpful to have paddle signals which communicate to the participants on the trip.

| Command From Trip Leader | Paddle Signal | Graphic of Paddle Signal |
|--|---|---|
| Stop (Stop momentum) | Paddle held horizontally |  |
| Go (Go forward to designated location) Gather Here – If seen after 3 whistle blasts | Paddle held vertically |  |
| Back Paddle/ Slow Down (Slow down if used while touring, paddle backwards when in surf zone) | Paddle held horizontal with ends moving up & down alternately |  |
| Paddle to right or left (Go in direction leader's paddle is pointing) | Paddle pointing upward to the right or left |  |
| Emergency/Gather-up (The speed of the wave changes from emergency (fast wave) to gather-up (slow wave)). | Paddle pointing upward and moving from side to side |  |



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Tips, Tricks and Lessons Learned

The purpose of this list is to transfer the hard learned lessons on the water by Trip Leaders to a written list which can be used as a learning device for other Trip Leaders. This should be a combination of things to do or avoid doing while leading a group of paddlers on a trip. They are not listed in any order of importance so familiarize yourself with all of them. We will never be able to cover everything which could happen out on the water, so please contact the LCP Safety & Training Coordinator to add to this list or alter it.

Trip Planning

- Try to have a safer, alternative trip in mind if the weather does not allow you to launch on open water (e.g. a river which is close by).
- These trips are not about YOU, they are about the paddlers having a fun, safe and positive experience on the water.
- Consider the environment you're going into and prepare for it.
- Always keep to the side of caution.

At the Launch Site

- The wind and waves are always worse out on the water than they look from the shore.
- When the wind is going against the tide, expect choppy water and breaking waves.
- Deciding if you should launch is the most important decision of the entire trip. If in doubt, don't launch. Remember death is permanent; you can't just say you are sorry or take it back.
- A great Trip Leader rarely has to rescue people because of the planning and decisions made before launching.
- Don't be afraid to tell someone that "you don't feel comfortable" with them going on a trip either because of skill level or equipment. Steer them to an easier LCP club paddle.
- A Trip Leader is in charge of the trip. Be diplomatic when possible. Be dogmatic when necessary.

On the Water

- If a paddler strays from the group, either exploring on their own or paddling too far ahead, talk to them and ask them to stay with the group. Give them specific things to do, like assisting less able paddlers.
- Keep your better paddlers "busy" by asking them to assist the paddlers who need help.
- Between the Trip Leader and Asst. Trip Leader, they should be able to view the entire group.



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- A good Trip Leader will have their “head on a swivel” keeping alert to possible danger or sights for the group to enjoy. Think of yourself as a roving problem-solver.
- Keep the trip light hearted and fun.
- Use your resources on the trip. Use the paddlers who have a lot of experience in paddling or local knowledge of the area in which you are paddling.
- If one person says they are tired or having trouble with the conditions, there are most likely others who feel the same way.
- If someone capsizes, the Trip Leader must consider the entire group. Suggest that the Trip Leader:
 - Ask the Asst. Trip Leader or other capable person to effect the rescue.
 - Assign a designated person to “hold” the rest of the group together.
 - Give directions to the rest of the group to stay close.
- A group of paddlers is most likely to “fall apart” when put under stress. This can happen if the weather worsens, a medical condition occurs or someone needs to be rescued. This is the time to gather your paddlers together and to start giving “orders” not requests.

A Note About Inflatable PFDs

- LCP’s Position - The Coast Guard states that inflatable PFDs are acceptable as flotation devices as long as they are worn (not just on the boat). However, because the Trip Leader is responsible for safety on his/her trip, the Trip Leader may determine if inflatable PFDs are acceptable for his/her trip. LCP Trip Leaders who do not want inflatable PFDs on one of their trips should state this clearly in the pre-trip communication with the participants. The Trip Leader might also consider bringing an additional regular PFD if someone should come to their trip with an inflatable PFD.