

GET ACTIVE. STAY ACTIVE.

CANOEING – GET STARTED AND KEEP PADDLING

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Those of us fortunate enough to live in Michigan are blessed with wonderful rivers and small lakes, suitable for all levels of canoeing experience. Locally, our Huron River has access sites and routes to entice us out of doors for a day of relaxation and recreation.

A few simple guidelines can ensure that you have a fun, safe and pleasing experience:

1. Learn the basic strokes. It is frustrating for paddlers to expend effort paddling and not being able to go in the right direction. The person in the stern (back) is responsible for steering, while the person in the bow (front) supplies the power. As such, the person in the stern needs to know how to do a sweep stroke, rudder and J stroke. The canoe rental personnel should be able to give an adequate 5 minute lesson to any beginner. Paddling on opposite sides of the canoe ensures efficiency and helps the craft go straight.

2. Lighter is better for extended trips. Equipment made of strong, lightweight materials can protect you from fatigue and keep a smile on your face. If you are going to be portaging (carrying) your canoe, a 45 pound Kevlar canoe will feel better on your shoulders than an 80 pound aluminum one. Carbon graphite paddles weighing less than a pound will save your shoulder muscles during repetitive paddling. With lighter equipment, at the end of the day you will still have the energy to enjoy the campsite.

3. Keep your eyes open. Wildlife and plant life abound on the banks of any river. Great blue herons stalk the shallows, turtles bask in the sun on logs and water lilies bloom everywhere. The quieter you are, the more you will see.

4. Take water, if nothing else. Even for a 2 hour trip, you can dehydrate. You don't want to be thinking "water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink".

5. Take breaks. Stop at least every ½ hour to 45 minutes. Long sitting in a Canoe can put undue stress on your lower back and prolonged paddling can fatigue shoulder muscles. Get out and explore. You will arrive at your destination happier and healthier.

Louise Austin, PTA, has extensive canoeing experience. She and her husband have explored remote wilderness areas in Quetico Provincial Park, Killarney Provincial Park and many parts of our local Huron River.