

# **ROWING TOUR MANUAL**

- ONTARIO TOURING GROUP -

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## INTRODUCTION

This manual is intended to provide recreational rowers with the basic information required to undertake touring safely.

Touring is different from rowing in racing shells. First and foremost, you will not be rowing on your “home turf”, but on unfamiliar water. This water must first be scouted to ensure the safety and enjoyment of the tour group. The scout must be alert for potential problems and hazards, and be prepared to deal with them.

On tour, you will probably not have a motorboat “shepherd” to rescue you. Moreover, any safety equipment normally carried by your club’s coach boat must be on board your touring shell. Your low-level club dock will not be available to facilitate a fast and safe landing should the weather turn nasty. You must know how to make a beach landing, how to deal with a rocky shore, and how to come alongside a dock higher than the boat’s riggers and oars.

The main purpose of this manual is to provide guidance and recommendations designed to prevent accidents, and help you cope with problems, which may arise despite good planning.

This manual is based on Dr. Claudia Mosner’s translation of “*The Captain and the Cox*”, the manual of the *German Rowing Association*, Hannover, 1992. It has been shortened and modified to reflect the reality of touring in rowing boats in Ontario – we seldom row on canals, and few of our rivers have heavy commercial traffic. We also do not have any boater operated locks on our waterways, so the (lengthy) instructions on lock operation have been omitted.

We invite touring participants to suggest improvements and additions to this manual, which is regarded as a “work in progress”. Meanwhile, we hope that Canadian rowers who participate in touring will find it helpful.

Touring is highly enjoyable. It is an opportunity to meet rowers from other clubs and row with – rather than against them! You will row hard, and for hours on end, but not under pressure. You have the time to make lasting friendships with people you would normally only encounter briefly at a regatta.

Touring in rowing boats is much like canoe tripping – except for the speed. You will experience the natural world, and may be able to sneak up on wildlife. *And you will **LOVE** powering past canoes struggling against a headwind!*

Do join us!

Peter Bursztyn, Barrie, April. 2000

**NOTE: The Touring Group subscribes to the anti-harassment policies of the ORA and CARA.**

## TOURING EQUIPMENT

1. Boat(s) must be in good condition. Check boats, blades & riggers before taking a boat on tour.
2. Obtain maps, charts, or detailed written directions before setting out on an unknown body of water. One copy should be aboard each boat in a transparent waterproof (zip-lock) bag.
3. One life jacket must be carried for every participant on a tour.
4. Take tools (for riggers, oarlock pitch, seats, tracks, plus pliers) and parts (rigger nuts, footstop bolts, washers, spare oarlocks, oar collars), duct tape for repairs. You should know what spares your boat needs.
5. One (two if using hatchets) spare blades should be taken on each trip. These can be carried by simply tying them on top of the riggers of one of the boats.
6. One bailer or pump, one whistle (or other signaling device), a mirror, a bowline and a stern line must be on board each boat.
7. One first aid box must be taken on each trip: containing disinfectant, bandages, sunscreen, insect repellent, anti-histamine cream, etc.
8. Each boat should have a paddle and a boathook to help maneuver near a dock or lock wall.
9. All participants are responsible for packing appropriate clothing and for ensuring that this is packed so that it remains dry in case of rain or capsizes.
10. **Bring along your sense of humour ☺**

**NOTE (1): Check your equipment to ensure that it complies with Canadian Coast Guard requirements.**

**NOTE (2): A Cellular Telephone may be useful, but find out if there is service in your area.**

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE BOAT

On a tour, there are three levels of command:

1. The **Tour Leader** is in charge of the overall planning and organisation of the trip.
2. The **Boat Captains** are in charge of their boats, equipment and safety. The Tour Leader need not be a **Boat Captain**.
3. The **Coxswain (Cox)** is in charge of steering a boat. The Cox need not be a Boat Captain. Indeed, the position of Cox is likely to change through the trip, and even several times in a day.

The Tour Leader shall choose the Boat Captains before the trip begins. The Tour Leader is in charge of the trip and its participants, but does not command individual boats. The trip route, maps, charts, instructions, weather forecast, rendezvous locations for participating boats and for accompanying vehicles, plus emergency landing sites are all the responsibility of the Tour Leader. The Tour Leader is responsible for ensuring that the Boat Captains understand all of the above and have maps/instructions in a waterproof pouch.

Boat Captains are responsible for choosing their Coxies, but volunteers are usually most welcome. The Boat Captains are ultimately responsible for the actions of their Coxies, and must be prepared to ask them to carry out manoeuvres. The Boat Captains take responsibility for their boats and their crews.

The Cox is responsible for maintaining the course of his/her boat and for issuing rowing commands to the crew. The Cox must operate under the general guidance of the Boat Captain.

\*The Tour Leader and Boat Captains can only have responsibility if the command structure is adhered to. A Tour is not a naval squadron, and commands are not normally issued in a commanding tone or even sound like commands, however, *crew are expected to obey their Boat Captains and Coxies*.

## SAFETY

**The first objective** of every rowing trip is to return safely.

**The second objective** is to return the boats to the boathouse in good condition. Both are the responsibility of the Coxswains, Boat Captains, and of the Tour Leader.

**The third objective** is almost as important as the first two: **to have fun ☺**

In order to achieve these objectives the Tour Leader's authority must be respected. In the boats, the Cox must have authority, and the respect of his/her crewmates.

### Safety Regulations (Coast Guard)

Under the Canadian Coast Guard regulations, **a rowing boat is considered to be an un-powered craft and treated in the same way as a sailboat**. The rules state:

- i. power boats give way to unpowered boats
- ii. **both** power and unpowered boats must give way to large craft which can only operate in a shipping channel
- iii. unpowered boats give way to other unpowered boats on their starboard quarter
- iv. when approaching head on, two boats should steer so as to pass each other to port

NOTE: The above is a condensed summary of the *Coast Guard Regulations* as given in the "Safe Boating Guide", which change from time to time. ***It is the responsibility of the Tour Leader & the Boat Captains to ensure that all vessels under their command comply with Coast Guard Regulations.***

No licensing exists for un-powered craft in Canadian waters. However, every cox should understand how motorboats and sailboats operate, and to steer the rowing boat so as to give other boats "sea room". In particular, the cox must understand that:

- (a) the sails of a sailing boat often restrict the view of the helmsman
- (b) the course of a sailing boat are largely dictated by the wind – leave them room to tack!
- (c) the course of a personal watercraft is **totally unpredictable – give them lots of room!**
- (d) large boats (cruisers, etc) tend to keep a straight course (*maneuvering might upset their gin & tonic*)
- (e) large motorboats & sailboats require deep water and may not be able to avoid you if doing so would force them out of the main channel

## Common Sense Rules

1. The Tour Leader **MUST** know how to read a marine chart and/or a topographical map when venturing onto unknown waters. The tour leader **MUST** have a detailed chart for unfamiliar waters or a less detailed map, but with directions from people who know the waters, warning of specific dangers (shallow water, deadheads, rocks, etc.).

The Tour Leader **MUST** scout out the route of the tour and have plans in case of bad weather or other problem, including emergency landing beaches/docks. If there is a **shore party** with vehicles/trailers, a meeting point and emergency plans must be agreed with them too.

2. It is dangerous to travel on unknown waters, and the Tour Leader **MUST** brief the coxies/captains of participating boats about the day's course before setting out. On their part, the *coxies must allow the tour leader to lead*, particularly over potentially hazardous parts of the day's course.

3. "Coxless" boats should allow a coxed boat to lead them through shoal waters or other hazards. In fact, there is no such thing as a coxless boat. In a rudderless boat or one without a Coxies seat, **the bow rower takes on the responsibility of steering**. Since it is hard to read a map while rowing, a coxless boat should follow a coxed boat at all times – not only through hazards.

4. When several boats participate in a tour, the Tour Leader should keep the boats together (within sight or hailing distance of each other) at all times. If the boats are likely to travel at very different speeds, they should be arranged into "buddy pairs/groups" which should agree to stay together. The Coxies of each boat must be told of this arrangement and to ensure that their boats remain close enough to assist each other throughout the trip.

5. Trip participants should make certain to bring appropriate clothing for the trip and this should be put into a waterproof compartment on the boat or bag to be stowed in the boat.

## PREPARING TO ROW

The Boat Captains and the Trip Leader should do the following:

1. Make sure that a sealed transparent plastic bag (eg: zip-lock) containing a map and/or route instructions is on each boat or in the hands of one of each "buddy group".

2. Obtain a recent weather forecast for the area and be prepared to change or cancel plans if the weather is likely to be bad.

3. Assign the crews to boats. Try, if possible, to accommodate the crew's wishes. However, make sure that the **crews are roughly balanced as to strength and skill** so that some boats will not surge ahead while others lag behind. **Each boat should have at least one crew member who is highly skilled and experienced in touring**.

4. Ensure that each crew checks their riggers and other equipment prior to launching. The Boat Captains or Coxies must repair or report any breakages or problems to the trip leader.

5. Order each crew to launch their boats, alone or with help from other crews, depending on the launch site. Do not launch if motor boats are making waves – wait for calm water.

6. Supervise putting in the life jackets, oars, rudder and other equipment. Supervise the loading of the boats with whatever baggage is to be taken. Make sure that baggage is sensibly stowed, and does not overload the boat.

### **Launching a Touring Boat**

Touring boats are heavier than racing shells. Accordingly, boats are not launched by pressing them overhead and then lowering into the water.

Most boats have neither a fin keel nor a rudder protruding below the hull. So they can be laid directly on the ground (**not on rocks please**). The absence of a fin allows them to be launched by sliding the hull directly into the water.

Of course, you must never do this from a rocky shore. From a rocky shore, the crew carries the boat right side up by its gunwales and walks into the water carrying the boat. Under these conditions, it is preferable to have at 6 or more people on each boat in case someone loses their footing!

### **Getting In and Setting Off**

As in a racing shell, before you embark, **all of the blades must be installed and their gates closed**. In addition, any baggage must be stowed before people begin to get in. Occasionally, when embarking from a high dock, one person may have to embark first to stow baggage.

You get into a touring boat exactly as you would get into a racing shell. However, you often do not have the luxury of stepping off a low level dock! You generally embark as from a beach launch – standing in knee deep water.

**Occasionally, you may have to embark from a rocky shore, or from a very high dock. Both situations are quite difficult and must only be attempted under the direct guidance of an experienced person.**

If the dock is suitably low, the entire crew can board simultaneously. Otherwise, board one at a time. Take great care. As baggage is loaded and people embark, the boat sinks in the water. **Make sure that the riggers never support the boat's weight**. You may have to protect the riggers by moving the boat away from the dock to complete loading/embarkation.

If boarding is from a beach, board one at a time with the rest of the crew steadying the boat. Once each rower has boarded, they must hold the boat steady with their blades for the next crew member.

Check that the course is clear before starting to row. Move the boat to the end of the dock until the bow rower is clear to row, **or**

Push the bow of the boat away from the dock until the bow rower is clear to row. **The bow rower may use his/her dockside blade to push off and then pull away from the dock, while the rest of the crew steadies the boat.**

**Avoid setting off stern-first because the coxie cannot steer going backwards!**

## **STEERING – BOAT MOVING**

Always ensure that the steering rope is stowed under your feet and never wrapped around you in any way. Ensure that, if the boat overturns, you will not be in danger of being tangled in the steering rope.

Pull the steering rope on the side of the boat towards which you wish to turn. The rudder is moved to that side, pushes water towards that side, kicking the stern of the boat to the other side.

Except in emergencies, course corrections should be gentle. Move the rudder 10°–20° only. Greater rudder deflections slow the boat unnecessarily. It is preferable, but not essential, to move the rudder during the recovery stroke and not the power stroke.

**Note that the boat cannot respond to the rudder unless it is moving through the water!** The faster the boat is moving, the better it will respond.

## **STEERING – BOAT STATIONARY**

If the boat is stationary, drifting, or moving very slowly it can only be steered with the oars. The Cox must give the appropriate commands. Pull with the starboard blades to move towards port, and vice-versa.

In an emergency, steering and slowing can be accomplished simultaneously by holding water on the side towards which you wish to turn.

In a bow coxed boat, the Cox steers by asking for more power on one side or the other. Pull on the side away from which you wish to turn. In an emergency, the Cox will ask the crew to hold water on the side towards which they must turn.

The Cox should be prepared to **act without hesitation** in an emergency. Of course, an alert Cox will experience few emergencies, giving the crew a peaceful run!

## **DOCKING OR LANDING**

It is generally best to come to land/dock facing into the wind and/or the current so that the boat will stop when rowing stops. If the current is against the wind, come to land **against the current and with the wind** so that the boat can be steered (making way through the water) when not actually moving.

## **BEACH LANDING**

**Approaching a beach, watch for rocks or dead heads that might damage the boat.**

Do not run the boat up the beach – *there may be rocks you haven't noticed!*

Have one or two crew disembark **before the boat grounds**. Let them guide the boat in to the beach.

If there are waves, **never allow the boat to pound the shore**. Put it “high & dry”.

## **DOCK OR LOCK WALL LANDING**

Approach the dock at an angle of about 30°. Gently brake with the waterside blades. This should bring the boat parallel to the dock or wall

Make sure that the riggers will clear the dock        OR

Approach standing off far enough so that the riggers do not hit.

Bring the blades parallel to the boat while docking. Use a paddle to complete the docking procedure.

All crew to fend off the dock - **never allow the riggers to take the first shock**

**- never allow the hull to strike the dock!**

- If crew disembarks onto a low dock in calm water, all can disembark together

- If crew disembarks onto a high dock, **disembark one at a time** with the rest of the crew holding the boat.

## **STORING THE BOATS ON SHORE**

Touring boats are designed to rest safely on their flat keels. **Of course, the boats cannot be turned upside down without first removing the riggers!**

Make certain that the boats are pulled up, well out of reach of waves **or any changes in water level, which may be caused by opening or closing dams.**

If you expect a heavy rain overnight, the boats should be stored upside down. If the boats fill with water, the weight of water inside could split the hull. Upside down storage can be achieved by resting the gunwales on supports (such as logs) to ensure that there is *no pressure on the riggers*. If this is not possible, remove the riggers. **Do not support the boat on life jackets**, which compress under the weight of the boat.

## **HAZARDS**

### **Rowing on Rivers with a Current**

A current can be both useful and dangerous. Beware! Unless you are interested in extra fitness training, always try to seek out the slowest current when heading upstream and the fastest current when heading downstream. However, row in a current only if it is **totally safe** to do so!

When trying to cross a flowing river, use the current where possible. If the current is strong enough and you are able to place the boat appropriately, turning around may be achieved by the action of the current alone.

Rowing upsteam, row close to shore, then with the waterside oars holding water, allow the bow to turn into the current so that the stern (hopefully) swings into still water near the shore. The current may then carry the bow right around without another stroke.

Likewise, rowing downstream, aim the bow into calm water near shore while the stern is in the current. The current should now carry you around with out another stroke.

Take care that you do not inadvertently execute one of these manoeuvres when drifting downstream in a river! When drifting, try to keep the bow pointed ready to row at all times. Always avoid drifting downstream broadside.

**Never drift downstream through a narrow passage. Always keep the boat moving (relative to the water) so that steering control is maintained!**

**Remember:**

The current is generally fastest in the middle of a straight stretch of river.

On bends, the current is generally fastest on the outside of the bend.

On bends, the calmest water on the inside of the bend *is likely to have very shallow sandbars.*

The current tends to accelerate in shallow water.

## Rowing on Large Lakes

Lakes are potentially hazardous because a wind may spring up and rapidly raise large waves. Always watch carefully for signs of changing weather and developing storms. If convenient, keep close to shore.

**Windward** is the direction **from which** the wind is blowing.

**DANGER!** The wind blows onto a Windward Shore.

**Leeward** is the direction **towards which** the wind is blowing.

**CALM & SAFE.** The wind blows from a Leeward Shore

**Avoid rowing near a windward shore because:**

- i. The wind tends to blow you onto the shore – its force may be hard to counter!
- ii. The water will be much rougher off a windward shore than a leeward shore!

***NOTE:** When sailors refer to a “lee shore” they are referring to the shore to the lee of their boat! We are not sailing but rowing. “Naming” a shore according to the boat’s orientation to the wind could be confusing to rowers for whom the wind is a minor preoccupation! I have chosen to refer to the shore just as a land based observer might do.*

## Whitecaps

Whitecaps are caused by winds above Beaufort Force 3 (above 20 kmph) blowing over open water. Whitecaps do not form on narrow rivers or small lakes unless the wind is very strong indeed. Waves take time (and distance) to form. A Force 5 “fresh breeze” could take 15-20 minutes to create whitecaps over open water.

Whitecaps should be avoided. Whitecaps accompany waves which tend to splash over the riggers and into the boat. The occasional wave will simply sweep over the gunwales. Clearly, under such circumstances the boat will gradually fill, ride lower in the water, so filling more rapidly, and eventually be swamped.

If whitecaps begin to appear, the boat(s) should first be rowed to the nearest leeward shore, and then to the nearest available landing site until the wind drops.

## Lightning Storms

Lightning can kill. Do not take any chances. Row for the first available landing site at the first sign of lightning. If no safe landing site is available, keep close to shore where trees will attract the lightning away from you (hopefully not the tree sheltering you!).

Even if the lightning is far away, take care. Lightning storms often generate strong winds suddenly. These winds may (on open water) create waves that can swamp the boat(s).

## **Fog, Darkness**

In the event of fog thick enough to obscure the shore and/or other boats, row for shore immediately! Similarly, as soon as it becomes too dark to see the shore, rowing must stop. In fact, the cox should have seen the fog coming, or been planning a landing long before dark!

## **Dams**

Dams create several hazards. Where dams exist, water levels may change without notice. The (damn) dam operator has an agenda completely divorced from rowing (or any other water sport). They may spill or accumulate water changing its level by as much as a metre. (Generally, they are not allowed to alter water levels massively without consulting other stakeholders, *but they may not have your phone number . . .*)

Immediately above a dam, the water may appear smooth and calm, but there may also be an invisible current washing over the spillway (particularly over low weirs). In Canada, these are generally well marked with signs and a floating boom.

Below a dam there are often rapids and fast water. However, these are almost always easy to see and avoid.

The water above a dam is potentially dangerous. Canadian dams are usually marked with a line of coloured buoys. This is generally well upstream of dangerously fast water. Some wilderness areas may not be so marked, but consult your chart - you should never row in wilderness areas without a map or chart to guide you.

Avoid rapids. You cannot row fast enough to maintain steering control. You may not be able to row at all because of rocks. You risk smashing the boat, not to mention the hazard of injury or drowning for the crew.

## **Locks**

**Locks present a set of hazards to rowing boats for which racing cannot prepare you! A boat going through locks MUST ALWAYS have an experienced rower WHO HAS GONE THROUGH LOCKS BEFORE on board!**

**The water level changes rapidly by 5 – 15 metres.**

**When a lock is filling, strong currents are often generated.**

**You *MUST* hang on to the lock wall or another boat while the dock is filling or emptying.**

**You must ship oars on one side of the boat. This makes it unstable! Be very careful.**

Canadian locks have vertical rubber covered cables extending from the top of the lock wall to the low water line. **To use a lock confidently, you must have at least one boathook on board.**

Row into the middle of the lock and approach the wall. The bow person should be the first to grab one of the cables. The cox should have their boathook available. If the docking manoeuvre was performed properly, the cox should be able to grab a cable with the boathook and pull the boat to the wall. Then manoeuvre the boat forward or back to leave room for other boats along the wall.

When entering a lock in the upstream direction, two people must hold the boat, one at the bow and one at the stern. **Never, ever tie the boat!** – Otherwise the current caused by filling the lock can sweep the boat away from the wall and damage it.

Note that when travelling downstream there is little or no current and one person can hold the boat, but it is always better and safer for two people to hold the boat.

In boats rigged for sculling, it may be possible to hold both bow and stern cables by hand, but a boathook makes this far easier.

Sweep riggers have a broader span than sculling riggers. Moreover, *sweep blades often cannot be angled parallel to the boat due to the backstay!* The wall-side blades may have to be removed before the boat can approach the wall! Even if this is done, sweep boats can only hold one cable by hand; the other **must** be held with the boathook. **It may be safer and more comfortable for a sweep-rigged boat to hold on alongside another boat** with its blades overlapping the other boat. If the locks are fairly full, several boats may have to lie alongside each other rather than the wall.

**Always respect the power of the current filling the lock**

**Always take great care to hold the boats securely and thus avoid damage**

**Watch out not to catch the riggers or blades on the ladders, or get them caught on cracks in the wall**

**Never, ever tie the boat to anything in the lock!**

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NOTE – ALL COMMENTS (NEGATIVE OR POSITIVE) ARE WELCOME – DON'T BE SHY!!!

Peter Bursztyn,  
Barrie Rowing Club  
phone (705) 734-1577  
fax (705) 734-0547  
e-mail bursztyn@infinity.net