

MDCC GUIDELINES FOR TOURING PARTICIPANTS

Mallaig & District Canoe Club runs a number of kayak trips which are published as a Touring Calendar for members and posted on the Touring page of the club website www.mallaigcanoeclub.co.uk/touring.html. While the trips are organised for the benefit of members, a warm invitation is extended to paddlers who haven't been before. Hopefully you will enjoy the trips so much that you will join the club!

Calendar Trips

Touring Calendar trips offer you the opportunity to experience some of the finest sea kayaking in the world in the company of like-minded people. It is an opportunity to gain experience, explore new areas and meet new people. As with any outdoor pursuit there is an element of risk, so it is important to study the information below, understand the basis of your participation and not put yourself or other paddlers at risk.

BCU awards

The club does not require members to hold any awards in order to participate in club events. However, members are encouraged to gain awards if they so wish and this can be a useful way to measure one's ability and to become involved with club coaching activities. Details of the awards scheme can be viewed [here](#).

Trip Gradings

In order to give you some idea of the type of trip and conditions you might experience, trips are graded Pre-A, A, B or C. They can vary from a short paddle on a sheltered inland loch to the exposed headlands, cliffs, crossings and tide races among some of Scotland's rugged coastline and islands. Complete beginners should attend club pool sessions (if any being run), club rescue days, pre-A trips and/or some training with a qualified professional or outdoor centre before attending club trips of grade A or above. The club may run bespoke beginner coaching sessions in the summer (Pre-A grade). Please ask the Coaching Secretary or Committee Member for more details. The next step is to go on some Grade A trips so that you can judge your capabilities against other paddlers and minimise the risk to yourself.

Grade Pre-A paddles are for you if you haven't paddled before or have just done some sessions in the pool. Pre-A trips will involve learning and developing skills on a short paddle and will usually take place on a weekday evening in the Mallaig area while the nights are light.

Grade A paddles aim to be in sheltered water with no long open crossings. You should be capable of paddling 20km (12 miles) per day in Force 2/3 conditions and have previously paddled as a member of a group.

Grade B paddles are in more challenging waters and may include tidal streams, exposed headlands, sections where no landing or escape is possible and open crossings. Participants should be capable of paddling 25km (16 miles) per day in up to Force 4 conditions with waves up to 2 metres in height. You will be confident at self rescue and rescuing another person and have some knowledge of navigation, trip planning, map reading and generally what you may be expected to encounter.

Grade C paddles include all the elements of Grade B and in addition may have long sections where no landing or escape is possible and/or long open crossings. Grade C trips are often multi-day trips with overnight camping. You should be capable of paddling 35km (22 miles) per day in up to Force 4 conditions on consecutive days and have the skills to cope with Force 5/6 conditions should they occur. You should be confident in breaking waves, surf and stronger tidal streams and be willing to paddle in the dark if necessary. You must have your own personal safety equipment ([see RECOMMENDED LIST](#)) and know how to use it. You should be an independent paddler with all the skills required to be a valuable group member.

If the trip involves overnight kayak camping (not single day trips from car based camping) the grade will include an asterisk i.e. A*, B*, C*.

Bear in mind that Trip Gradings are only an estimate and that changing weather and sea conditions can very quickly increase the seriousness of the trip.

MDCC TRIP ORGANISERS (see also TRIP ORGANISATION)

Trip Organisers are volunteers who give up their time, free of charge, to act as a contact point for paddlers who are interested in paddling in a stated area. Organisers are not accepting responsibility for other paddlers or for instructing them as part of the trip. These are NOT guided trips run by qualified instructors.

- Organisers will generally issue details of a meeting place and time and a suggested route from their knowledge of the area. Tidal conditions and distances involved make it important to be ready at the correct time. If you are late don't expect other paddlers to wait for you.
- Be aware that the organiser may have to change or cancel the trip due to weather conditions or for other reasons, so check nearer the trip that it's still on.
- Please be aware that Organisers may refuse to let you come on a trip because they are unsure of your competence/fitness/equipment or because the trip is oversubscribed.
- Participation is always at the discretion of the organiser.

Communicating with the Organiser

- If you want to join a trip and don't know the Organiser, please let them know what experience and/or paddlesport qualifications you have, as well as any medical issues that may affect your paddling or become relevant in case of an emergency. If possible refer the organiser to an experienced paddler who can comment on your abilities.
- We don't have a requirement for participants to be qualified, so it is important that a trip is within your capabilities.
- If you are interested in a trip please contact the organiser beforehand to get joining instructions. Do not leave it to the last minute as trips may be changed due to impending weather or other reasons.
- Please do not turn up for a trip without having previously contacted the organiser.

Your Responsibilities

The Club places the highest priority on running trips safely. It is your responsibility to be properly equipped (clothing and safety kit) for safe paddling. Training in rescue procedures is essential and we urge everyone to practice this at least annually. Most sea kayaking fatalities (fortunately very rare) are due to hypothermia caused by immersion and are mostly on dry land post immersion. Unless conditions are very benign, you should wear either a drysuit or dry cag and dry trousers or a wetsuit and cag. In calm, warm conditions when T-shirts are in order, you should carry immersion clothing, as conditions can change quickly.

Be aware that an Organiser may refuse your participation on a trip if you turn up without adequate immersion clothing.

See **FULL LIST OF KIT REQUIRED**.

On trips you are responsible for making your own decisions and for your own safety. You are responsible for judging if any medical problems you suffer from may affect your safety on the water. If you have any doubts consult a doctor. Weather and water conditions will affect what you can cope with at your own skill level and physical condition. You should do your own planning, listen to the weather forecast, check tides and make sure you are happy to do what the other paddlers want to do.

On the water

Each paddler on a trip is responsible for their own safety first, the safety of the group second. Do not paddle knowingly into danger expecting that someone else on the trip will sort your problem out. All paddlers go on a personal journey, but when in a group, that journey is shared with others. Everyone on a paddle should get used to looking out for each other and act in a way that enhances the safety of the group. It is inevitable that on club paddles, levels of experience will vary. We should all therefore help and encourage less experienced paddlers and demonstrate responsible behaviour ourselves.

There are a few basics:

- Always let the trip organiser know your intentions; if you wish to take a different route, okay this first and agree a meeting point. Everyone is responsible for everyone else.
- Keep a check on the group, count heads, alert others if you think there is a problem - maybe they haven't spotted it. The more challenging the conditions are, the closer together we need to paddle.
- We should always be in communication distance whatever the conditions. In calm weather, this could be by radio only but agree this in advance.

Other sources of information

You will find guidelines for trip planning, kit recommendations and much more on the club website at

<http://www.mallaigcanooclub.co.uk/planning.html> and <http://www.mallaigcanooclub.co.uk/contacts.html>

Please familiarise yourself in particular with what is recommended to wear and to take in the way of food, drink, clothing and safety equipment on a trip. If you come unsuitably equipped you may not be permitted on the trip.