

Launching

Once you are properly geared, being prepared goes beyond equipment and clothing. Virtually any paddling trip should be regarded as a serious (and fun) outdoor pursuit. The paddler must be adequately prepared for the type of paddling trip he or she is taking. Knowledge of the waterway, length of the trip, weather, water conditions, and a realistic assessment of the skill level of everyone on the trip is key to a safe and enjoyable outing. Whitewater, wilderness waterways, open ocean, and cold weather paddling all require special preparation and skills. Also, keep in mind that a day or afternoon of paddling can demand strenuous physical exertion.

Keep in mind that exploring rivers with significant current will require you to place a car at the take-out (final destination) before driving to the put-in (starting point). Always take care to protect the car keys. Many paddlers have made mistakes such as leaving the keys for the car positioned at the take-out in the car at the put-in, or even worse, losing car key while on the water.

Once you arrive at the put-in, take care while unloading. Remember to lift with your legs so as not to strain your back. Since you should always paddle with a buddy, you can help each other with unloading and carrying.

While you're at the put-in, remember to also show respect for others around you. Other sportsmen and neighboring property owners are likely seeking the solitude and purity of undisturbed nature. Don't hinder their experience by littering, playing loud music, changing clothes in public, or other potentially offensive actions. Plus always get permission in advance if you want to cross private property in order to access a particular waterway.

The next step is actually getting in the boat and beginning your journey. When launching from a steep bank or dock, place your boat in the water alongside and parallel to the shoreline, and hold on to it. Squat down next to your boat and carefully shift your weight over the centerline while holding the top sides of your boat and quickly kneel down. You can add stability by holding your paddle perpendicular across the top of the boat and leaning on the blade resting on the shore or dock. Tandem paddlers should board one at a time and stabilize the boat for each other. When launching on the shore or shallow shoreline, you can wade into ankle deep water and continue the process as above.