

About.com: Paddling

Canoe and Kayak Launch Etiquette

The Dos and Don'ts of Launching a Canoe or Kayak

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Without canoe and kayak launch sites much of the waters that are paddled would otherwise be inaccessible. While many of the paddling launches are on public lands, there are a lot of right-of-ways firmly located adjacent to private property. It is therefore no surprise that water accessibility is routinely threatened due to the interests of private and commercial land owners.

Public or not, certain etiquette should therefore be observed when launching your canoe or kayak for a paddling trip. The consequences for not observing these basic courtesies could be as severe as loss of water accessibility on both private property who allow it and on public property where the towns pass ordinances against paddlers. Here are five things to watch out for in and around paddling launch sites.



Photo © by George E. Sayour

Don't Litter

This is really a no brainer. Paddlers generally love the environment. It is therefore shocking that so many canoe and kayak launch sites are absolutely littered with zip locks, energy bar wrappers, plastic bottles, and cigarette butts. Of course launch sites are frequently used by locals who often don't share the affinity for the environment that paddlers do. Still, paddlers can and do make a mess which reflects poorly on canoeists and kayakers. So obviously, don't litter. Put your trash in your boat if you have to. And here's a suggestion for you. Why not plan seasonal clean up days for your most frequented canoe or kayak launch sites.

Observe Parking and Traffic Laws

Parking at launch sites can be a complicated undertaking. There is often not enough parking to accommodate boater traffic. Also, each town has their own parking and traffic laws and the local law enforcement is not always boater friendly. Parking on private property is a sure way to tick off a local land owner. In a small town, this can mean the death of a launch site that breeds repeat offenders. So, observe all traffic signs at launch sites. When it is not obvious and you need to park on the side of the road, be sure to park facing with traffic, not against it. When possible, do your research by going to the local outfitter or online to find out the ins and outs of parking for your paddling excursion.

Keep Your Clothes On

It is not uncommon for kayakers and canoeists to arrive at the launch site not dressed for paddling. Similarly, at the end of a long day of paddling nothing feels quite as good as changing into warm dry clothes. Finding an adequate place to make the transition into and out of paddling attire is rarely an easy task. There is always the car, of course. But as paddlers are not a shy bunch, out in public is routinely the avenue taken. This, as one can imagine, can pose a problem with the launch site is on a town road. There could be kids around, and people going about their day-to-day lives really don't want to see the brighter side of paddlers' bodies. Try to change prior to arrival at the launch site. When that is not possible, look for a secluded place when the canoe and kayak launch is very public.

Don't Trespass

While it might save you time and effort to utilize a put-in that requires going onto private property, resist the urge to do so. Again, ticking off the locals is a sure way for all boaters to lose out. This includes not observing property setup for commercial paddling and rafting operators' designated launch and parking sites. The raft, shuttle, and paddling companies' generally have pretty sweet accommodations and while it would be nice if they shared with the rest of us, they often don't. Fighting this will only make things worse for the rest of us. In summary don't go on the property of people's homes and businesses and if

commercial paddling enterprises don't allow you to use their launches or park on their property obey it, even if regretfully.

Watch the Noise and Avoid Profanity

It is just common courtesy to watch the noise level, either in secluded or in town settings. In nature, others enjoying the outdoors are generally there to get away from the commotion of life. In neighborhoods, people don't want to be disturbed in their homes. Some towns even have noise ordinances. So while it may be your preference to blast some music from your car stereo as you are loading and unloading gear, it isn't always appreciated by others. The same goes for yelling and horseplay. And of course, watch the language also. Families are often hiking with their kids or playing by the water and they don't need to hear inappropriate things out on the trail.

Conclusion

In most cases, paddling can boost the local economy. Gas stations, convenience stores, restaurants, and paddling outfitters all benefit from the business canoeists and kayakers bring to an area with paddling access. But, there is a point where the disturbance and inconvenience caused by violations of the tips listed above outweighs the benefits of making accessible an area's waterways to paddlers. So, the idea is to preserve launch sites and paddling access for the rest of us by making our presence a pleasant one for the areas where we paddle. Observing the five tips above will help this cause.