

Overview

Water expeditions provide a way of increasing the scope of adventurous activity as well as extending access to other areas in Bermuda. The Expeditions Section recognises three modes of travelling on water - paddling (canoeing, kayaking), rowing and sailing, and since they take the form of journeys by the participants' own physical effort, they are all very friendly to the environment. They cause no pollution or erosion to our waters and are silent in operation. Water has the great advantage that it does not wear out, unlike many of our overused areas of the island.

The Award encourages diverse modes of travel to enable those with canoeing, sailing and rowing skills to use their expertise and resources as an alternative to traditional expeditions on foot, as well as encouraging those who have little or no experience of water activities to seek fresh challenges. The Award is all about providing new learning experiences and the excitement of new challenges.

Water expeditions provide an opportunity for those with mobility problems to participate and, though the expeditions are demanding, participants do not have to carry their equipment on their backs. Participants who have experience in handling canoes, kayaks, rowing boats, sailing dinghies or yachts can be ambitious in their planning. Teams with little or no experience should not be deterred from the challenge of water expeditions but would be wise to limit their ambition. Participants with access to canoes, kayaks, rowing boats, sailing dinghies or yachts and suitable water on a long-term basis should consider the advantages of undertaking water expeditions at all levels, so that they have the opportunity to build up their skills and experience progressively in the same way as those who carry out their expeditions on foot. Tall ships and large training vessels may not be used for expeditions within the Expeditions Section.

- Water Expeditions in Bermuda can be practical for young people.
- Identifying suitable water and facilitating canoeing, rowing and dinghy sailing will be needed.
- Operating Authority - who have suitable resources for training is an advantage.

Successful Water Expeditions

The keys to success in water expeditions are a well-chosen aim, the appropriate water, suitable craft and a sufficient number of the right companions.

The participants' proximity to suitable water, and the craft available will play a decisive role in the mode of travel, but other factors need to be taken into account. It is more in keeping with the spirit and philosophy of the Expeditions Section for a team to travel unaccompanied, be self-sufficient and dependent on their own resources on less demanding water with visits from their supervisor and assessor, than to be in inlets, coastal waters or open sea where the presence of a supervisor is mandatory.

Select Water within the Team's Capability

The Award regards all modes of travel as of equal merit, but it is in the team's own interests to select water and craft, which give an excellent chance of bringing the expedition to a successful conclusion.

Water should be selected which is suitable for the craft involved and well within the level of skill of the team. Expeditions will normally be unaccompanied and self-reliant unless the expedition takes place in inlets, sheltered coastal water or open sea. Participants must be able to train and carry out practice expeditions on water of a similar degree of difficulty so that they become proficient and experienced in coping with any problems that may arise. Where the water is within the participants' competence, there is less chance of adverse weather or environmental conditions affecting the journey, which ensures a more predictable outcome to the expedition.

Further Advice

Having decided on suitable craft and located the appropriate water, the following advice should be considered when planning and preparing for water expeditions:

- Allow more time to plan, train and prepare than would be necessary for a land-based expedition unless the previous qualifying expedition used the same mode of travel.
- Incorporate greater flexibility into the planning and execution of the expedition.
- Build alternative back-up dates into the planning in case of unsuitable weather.
- Involve experienced, adaptable supervisors and assessors.

More time to plan and prepare

In teams where all the members have had previous experience in their chosen mode of travel and have access to suitable craft, the time taken to plan, train and prepare will be very much the same as for a foot expedition. If the participants have little or no experience in the chosen mode of travel and are having to learn new skills from scratch, more time must be allowed. Where the mode of travel at Silver or Gold level is different from that at the previous level, extra practice journeys will be needed.

Incorporate greater flexibility into planning and execution

Weather affects all expeditions on land or water, but the effect on water expeditions is greater and more immediate. The impact of a headwind, no wind or a strong current may decrease or increase the distance travelled by a considerable amount, so it is essential to plan with this in mind. Where expeditions take place on inland waters, alternative campsites should be considered to accommodate the varying distances travelled. Planned starting and finishing times may have to be changed at the last minute to meet changes in water or weather conditions. If this is the case, the supervisor and assessor must be informed of the changes.

Build alternative back-up dates into the planning

Even with the greatest flexibility in planning and execution, there comes a time when an expedition cannot take place or has to come to a premature end because of weather or water conditions. Gale force winds or no wind at all, may prevent the activity from taking place. All who engage in outdoor pursuits or activities have to come to terms with this reality sooner or later. There has to be a philosophical acceptance of this in return for all the pleasures and excitement the pursuits engender. At least one back-up date should be arranged for all qualifying expeditions on water, as the probability of expeditions having to be postponed or aborted is greater than on land. More than one back-up date should be considered for expeditions on inlets, coastal waters and the open sea.

Involve Experienced, Adaptable Supervisors and Assessors

All the flexibility on the participants' part and several back-up dates are of no avail unless the supervisors and assessors can adapt to the needs of the team and their expedition.

Local pre-expedition checks are probably even more important for water expeditions, especially where crafts are being delivered to the starting locations. Local pre-expedition checks are advisable at all levels to ensure that equipment and training is to the required standard.

Safety Afloat

Water is a very exciting and challenging environment, so it is inevitable that it will also be a very demanding one. The mountain scene can vary rapidly but it never changes as quickly as conditions on water. Situations can change with frightening rapidity. Safety must always be a vital consideration for all who engage in expeditions on water, or people responsible for caring for others. The Common Training Syllabus applies to all expeditions which take place on water. Particular attention should be paid to those aspects of basic first aid concerned with resuscitation and the ability to recognise and treat hypothermia/hyperthermia. Resuscitation is included in the syllabus for all expeditions at Bronze level but not the recognition and treatment of hypothermia/hyperthermia; for water expeditions this must be included.

Participants should be able to administer resuscitation on and in the water, as well as adjacent to it. Due to water's ability to drain heat from the body, the probability of succumbing to hypothermia is greater on water than on land. Hot weather brings its own problems. Participants need to be aware that prolonged exposure to the sun on water can lead to illness.

The safety of Award expeditions afloat depends on the following factors:

- The participants should be water confident.
- A buoyancy aid or lifejacket and suitable clothing and footwear must be worn.
- A craft with adequate buoyancy must be used.
- A practised and predictable response to sudden immersion.
- Proficiency in capsize and recovery drills, or man overboard drill.
- Appropriate qualifications or equivalent levels of competence.
- The ability to assist each other in difficulty.
- Training for an expedition and not just in the technical skills.

Situations arise where the participant's water confidence or ability to swim is not sufficient in itself to ensure safety. All participants must wear a buoyancy aid or life-jacket when on or close to the water. The type of buoyancy will be determined by current custom and practice relating to the type of craft being used. Inflatable lifejackets are notoriously difficult to keep in good order. Do not trust anyone else with your safety. There is only one way of ensuring buoyancy aids are sound and that is to test them.

Water, far more than wind, drains heat from our bodies so hypothermia is always a concern for those who engage in water expeditions, whether one is soaked on top of the water or immersed in it. Suitable dress for a particular activity should be determined by current good practice. Clothing must give protection during the activity and when immersed in water, and yet must not hamper movement. It is not always necessary to wear wet suits, though they do provide very good protection. Traditional clothing can be very effective in reducing heat loss when immersed in water and modern synthetic materials give very good insulation without absorbing as much water as the more traditional materials.

Protection of the extremities, head, hands and feet is most important; the head in particular can be a great source of heat loss. A thermal hat provides cheap and effective protection for the head, especially when supported by a waterproof anorak hood. Buoyancy aids and life-jackets provide high visibility in the event of an emergency; brightly coloured headwear or upper body clothing can add to this visibility. Gloves, or paddle mitts, are a great comfort against blisters and the cold when completing water based expeditions. Protection from the sun is very important in sunny weather, especially as light is also reflected from the water – sunglasses should have UV protection. It is usually difficult to change position or posture, and frequently impossible to find shade; severe burning may therefore occur if the skin is not adequately protected, either by clothing or blocking creams. Feet should always be protected; deck shoes, plastic sandals or old trainers are a necessity for all water expeditions to avoid cuts from broken glass, abrasions and the possibility of infection.

Adequate Buoyancy

All craft should have sufficient built-in buoyancy to stay afloat and support all the occupants. If the buoyancy is not built into the craft, then it must be firmly secured. As with life-jackets, this should never be taken on trust – even the best regulated establishments have been known to fall down on this vital provision – the buoyancy of all borrowed or hired craft should be tested by the users. In the event of a capsize the golden rule is ‘always stay with the boat’. It is much more visible than a head bobbing up and down in the water.

Practiced and Predictable response to sudden immersion

Sudden immersion in cold water is an inevitable consequence of taking part in water activities. All training must take place with this in mind. The effect of sudden immersion may result in unpredictable responses, even from the young and healthy. Occasionally heartbeat irregularities occur with the possibility of dire consequences. Hyperventilation occurs and nearly always there is an involuntary gasping for breath which may lead to the ingestion of large quantities of water. It would be most unusual for people to be able to hold their breath for more than twenty seconds in cold water. Suitable clothing may go a considerable way to reducing this shock. This should not discourage anyone who wishes to participate in water activities, but it is essential that all participants know how they will react if they are suddenly immersed in cold water. Thousands of people fall into water everyday during the summer without any ill effects. It is possible, by progressive training, to become accustomed to falling into cold water and lose one's fear of sudden immersion.

Confidence on the water can be greatly increased by being at home in and under the water. In the Service Section of the Award there are the life saving qualifications, while the Physical Recreation Section has relevant options such as swimming and personal survival. Any of these would be most helpful in establishing personal competence and confidence in the water and would increase the ability to help other participants and the public in general. These options make excellent supporting choices for all those engaged in the Award who wish to carry out expeditions on water.

Proficiency in capsize and recovery drills

The importance of recovery drills is obvious, yet they are frequently neglected because of the reluctance on the part of participants to get wet due to low water temperature. When it is too cold for the participants to remain soaked for long, an intensive period of capsize and recovery drill should always come at the end of the training session.

The operative word is ‘drill’. Capsize should always bring about a predictable response to sudden immersion. Practice can bring about an automatic reflex response which does not involve conscious thought; only then can one be confident that, no matter how great the anxiety or stress, panic will not ensue. Capsize must be followed by recovery which may range from swimming or dragging a canoe to the bank. The end of a training session should provide an opportunity to practise these drills and to test the ability to swim out of doors (not in a heated swimming pool) without a buoyancy aid.

Qualifications or Equivalent competence or experience

It is important that regular practice be spread over a period of time for it is all too easy for participants to give the appearance of competence and respond in the correct manner, yet still lack the depth of experience and confidence to cope with emergency.

Water Expedition

Version 2017.10



Being able to assist each other when in difficulty

The Expeditions Section is all about a team working together for a common aim, and the efforts of each individual is essential for the success of all. Participants depend on each other and should have the requisite skills to help other members of the team, including the ability to use a throwline accurately, right an upturned boat and administer resuscitation.

The skills related to the activity and to survival are vital, but they are not sufficient in themselves. Confidence in each other can only come about through training and practising together until the individual members come together into a team - which takes us back to the beginning: plan, train and prepare for water expeditions a long way ahead so that there is adequate time to become an integrated team sharing a mutual confidence in each other's skill.

Training for an expedition

Training should be directed towards the completion of a journey on water and not just the mastering of a number of technical skills related to handling a particular craft. Technical skills, though vital, are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. The training must lead to an awareness of the environment in which the expedition takes place and any potential threats or unexpected hazards which the surroundings may present, whether this involves the removal of fish hook barbs or the everpresent water pollution which is always a problem in our ocean.