

Nevis Canoe Club Risk Assessment



Purpose

This risk assessment sits within the Nevis Canoe Club (NCC) safety framework. This risk assessment examines, and identifies, the potential hazards associated with the activities carried out by the Nevis Canoe Club, such as water conditions, weather, equipment, and participant experience levels.

Paddle Scotland, in their Standards for Deployment, Appendix 1, provide examples of different types of Club Activity <https://www.paddlescotland.org.uk/resources/standards-for-deployment> . At the time of writing (February 2025) the activities of NCC sit, predominantly, within the category of a Collaborative Club Activity (buddy groups on river or sea trips). In a Collaborative Club Activity there is no designated 'person in charge'. Participants are **ALL** responsible for managing safety, enforcing/following club guidelines and making decisions in response to changing conditions or emergencies. Individuals are all responsible for their actions and must make their own decisions as to whether their experience, their craft and equipment and they, themselves, are equipped for the trip. At the same time, there is an expectation that NCC paddlers will share their varying experience to assist others. All individual participants are expected to behave as a cohesive group during a Collaborative Club Activity.

It is important that all paddlers are familiar with the risk assessment and it should, therefore, be published on the NCC website. It is recognised that the document will need to be updated regularly and this will be the responsibility of the nominated Safety Officer. As a minimum the risk assessment will be reviewed:

- After the Annual General Meeting by the new committee
- After any accident or 'near miss'
- When any member identifies a significant hazard not already mentioned in the document

Date:	18.02.2025
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Assessors Name:	Elizabeth Stevenson	Review Date:	2026, following the club AGM or sooner, if indicated
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Description of assessment	Sea Kayaking in and around Lochaber
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What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	Risk level	What are you already doing to control the risks?	Review comments and further actions required
Loading and unloading kayaks from vehicles				
Passing Traffic	May injure participants	High risk of serious injury	Choose unloading area away from traffic. Unload on side away from traffic. Post a guard to warn of passing vehicles.	
Heavy lifting	Can cause back strain	Medium	Work in pairs. Use boxes or steps which are stable. Use correct lifting techniques.	
Poor roof rack equipment and/or tying on.	Risk of serious road traffic incident or injury	High	Driver is responsible for using appropriate equipment and technique See Paddle UK Paddle Safer Guidelines (2024) for more information:	
Launching and landing				
Tidal height and flow	High water covers hazards Low water – could be a long walk or struggle over rocks etc			

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What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	Risk level	What are you already doing to control the risks?	Review comments and further actions required
Slips on jetties and seaweed covered rocks	Risk of broken limb, hip, wrist etc	High	Choose a sandy or fine shingle beach, if possible. Avoid steep loose rocky banks or rip rap. Use paddle for support. Slide boats, if possible, or use trolleys.	
Launching or landing in challenging conditions; strong winds, swell, waves, surf or rocky beaches	Risk of capsize, possible head or limb injury. Damage to boats/paddles	High	<p>Try to plan safe landing spots. Use correct technique. Launch or land one at a time and assist others. Carry spare paddles, pump, repair kit, portage straps.</p> <p>Have an alternative site as back up.</p>	
Weather				
Weather: the conditions and forecast	Weather conditions will impact on a planned trip and often change, significantly, throughout the day	Medium - High	<p>The latest relevant general, and local forecasts, are readily available. These forecasts will be used to inform planning; prior to the planned paddle, as a core component of the risk assessment, and considered as part of the dynamic risk assessments undertaken throughout the trip.</p> <p>All members to be aware of the weather forecasts, and to be involved in decisions around the trip taking into account their level of skills, experience and confidence.</p> <p>The Coastguard service: can be contacted by Telephone 01851 702013 or VHF 16 or Emergency 999. The Coastguard service issue regular forecasts via VHF, CH 16, then down working channel, every 4 hours.</p> <p>Met Office inshore forecast; this is updated every 6 hours</p> <p>https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/specialist-forecasts/coast-and-sea/inshore-waters-forecast</p>	

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What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	Risk level	What are you already doing to control the risks?	Review comments and further action required
Offshore wind/gusting wind/strong wind/wind direction	Paddlers drifting offshore, capsize, exhaustion, difficulty continuing, low morale.	Medium - High	Carry emergency communications; VHF radio, mobile phone, PLB, flares. Note that VHF radios are line of sight; mountains etc will obstruct signal reception. Awareness of the capabilities of group members in advance. Awareness of weather forecast in advance and amend trip if needed. Carry emergency communications; VHF, mobile phones, flares, spare clothing/shelter. Carry spare paddles, towline and pumps. Identify escape routes. Seek shelter, keep group close together and encourage weaker paddlers. Tow, if required.	
Large waves and/or swell	Paddlers at risk of capsize, drowning, injury, loss or damage of equipment. Group become split up/less visible. Difficulty continuing. Possible fear and low morale.	Medium	Check weather and sea state before setting off. Keep group close together, raft up to rest if required/possible. Support weaker paddlers. Carry spare paddles. Carry emergency communications; VHF radio, mobile phone, PLB, flares. Modify or abandon trip if necessary. Inform shore contact/coastguard if trip is altered. Training in capsize rescue procedures	
Deteriorating weather	Participants become cold, tired, demoralised and at risk of hypothermia. Difficulty communicating and group may split.	Medium - High	Maintain awareness of weather forecast throughout the trip and modify or abandon trip if necessary. Inform shore contact/coastguard if trip is altered. Ensure group clothing is suitable. Support weaker paddlers	
Hot weather	Sun/wind burn, dehydration	Medium	Apply sun block, wear hat and drink extra fluids. Ensure extra water is carried.	

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On the water				
What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	Risk level	What are you already doing to control the risks?	Review comments and further action required
Immersion in cold water	Drowning, hypothermia, shock, panic.	Medium	<p>Ensure group are familiar with capsize and rescue procedures.</p> <p>Ensure suitable clothing for conditions and spare clothing should be carried.</p> <p>Group kit should include a survival bag, group shelter, hot drink and food.</p>	
Capsize in shallow water/immersion in cold water	Paddler may be at risk of drowning, hypothermia and panic. Difficulty exiting kayak due to depth.	Low	<p>Ensure group are familiar with capsize and rescue procedures; righting and emptying kayak. Carry a pump.</p> <p>Paddlers to wear suitable clothing for kayaking and spare clothing should be carried.</p>	
Capsize in deep water/immersion in cold water	Panic, hypothermia, drowning, loss of boat, paddle and deck hatch	Medium	<p>Ensure group are familiar with capsize and rescue procedures.</p> <p>Carry spare paddles, pump and towline.</p> <p>Paddlers to wear suitable clothing for kayaking and spare clothing should be carried.</p>	
Multiple Capsize Immersion in cold water	Potentially increases the time paddlers are immersed in the water, hypothermia, drowning, group drifting apart, loss of boats, paddles etc.	High	<p>Ensure group are familiar with capsize exercise and rescue procedures. Carry spare paddles, pumps and towline.</p> <p>Keep group together/raft up when back in boats.</p> <p>Head for shore, if appropriate.</p> <p>Carry emergency communications; VHF radio, mobile phone & PLB.</p>	

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What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	Risk level	What are you already doing to control the risks?	Review comments and further action required
Tides	Wind/swell against tide can cause tidal races and very choppy seas. Capsize, drifting off course and inability to make headway	Medium	Be aware of HW/LW times and tidal rates as part of trip planning. Knowledge of topographical features; islands, headlands and tides. Ensure group are familiar with capsize and rescue procedures. Modify plan if necessary. Support weaker paddlers; tow if necessary/possible. Carry spare paddles and towline. Practice manoeuvres in currents, ferry glide, entering and exit from eddies.	
Rocks	Capsize, injury and potential damage to equipment.	Medium	Alert group to rocky areas. Wear a helmet; paddling among rocks requires an additional risk assessment. Carry first aid kit and repair kit. Ensure group are familiar with capsize exercise and rescue techniques. Use of tow line to move capsized paddler from danger.	
Overhanging branches	Capsize and entrapment especially in a current.	High	Avoid places where this is likely and paddle midstream.	
Incorrect paddling technique	Damage to, and strain on, body	Medium	Demonstrate and practice an effective and efficient stroke technique in sheltered waters.	
Tired Paddler	Capsize, falling asleep, panic, drowning	Low	Be aware of anyone falling behind and have someone experienced accompany them. Tow if required, encourage, take breaks, eat and drink.	
Injury/Medical incident	Paddler is incapacitated, injury or illness may prolong time out, possible worsening of condition	Low	Check if any known medical conditions before setting out and carry appropriate medication if required. Carry first aid kit and emergency communications; VHF radio, mobile phone, PLB, spare clothing and emergency shelter. Contact emergency services if	

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	Remote location may delay the arrival of emergency services.		necessary/possible. Contact shore based emergency contact	
What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	Risk level	What are you already doing to control the risks?	Review comments and further action required
Badly fitting boat or equipment	Damage to body, difficulty exiting kayak, lack of stability in rough water, discomfort, panic and drowning	Low	Check fitting of boat, foot rests, thigh grips, hatch covers, spray deck, buoyancy aid before setting out. Make sure spray deck handle is outside the boat. Regular checks and maintenance of equipment.	
Night Paddling	Paddling at night increases risk	Medium - High	Journeys must be well planned with get out points identified before setting off. Navigation lights should be attached to your boat and/or body. Follow navigation rules regarding positioning your kayak on the "correct side and in the right place". Paddling is strongly advised to take place in groups. Night paddlers to wear high visibility clothing and to have reflective tape on their equipment.	