

Bideford Canoe Club Risk Assessment: grade 4+ river trips

Canoeing is 'an assumed risk', 'water contact' activity however serious accidents are very rare. More people drown whilst cycling than canoeing. Accidents can be avoided by a combination of training, based on the accepted code of technique and safety; and experience gathered over a number of years, where techniques are acquired and practiced under the shadow of a leader.

Accidents can be placed in three broad categories:

- Lack of knowledge – as the saying goes 'fore-warned is fore-armed'. You can never know enough.
- Over-estimation of ability – common with inexperienced canoeists.
- Carelessness – may affect both novice and expert. Ensure you have sound knowledge of the skills, techniques and equipment you are using by undertaking adequate training and practise.

Grade 4+ river trips are more typically run as a group of friends, rather than as a formal club outing. Therefore, everyone is considered to be responsible for themselves and as such no "responsible club member" is referred to in the risk assessment.

Significant hazards	Persons at risk	Severity 1-5	Likelihood 1-5	Rating	Controls/Actions required
Risk of drowning as associated with water sports	All	5	2	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The club to promote first aid training across all members to ensure people are well prepared for the river • Participants to follow (at least loosely) the BCC "Route into White Water" river progression to ensure suitable competency • Where numbers are high, 1 large group should be split into 2 or 3 smaller groups to ensure safety is manageable
Banging head and other body parts or trapping limbs whilst swimming	All	3	2	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helmets to be worn by all paddlers at all times • All paddlers to have practiced defensive swimming technique • Inspection and bank safety should be used as appropriate • Groups to carry a first aid kit, mobile phone and ideally a map of the river they are on
Weirs, stopper waves, drops and siphons as consistent with grade 4+ rivers	All	5	2	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound and dynamic river leadership practiced throughout the group • Throw lines carried and paddlers trained • Inspection and bank safety used as appropriate

					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals encouraged to make their own decisions regarding challenge • Groups should have an understanding of the state of a river (regarding level) before they get on and should be aware that river levels can change whilst they are paddling
Pinning	All	5	2	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Club to promote an understanding of rescue techniques across all paddlers to ensure people are prepared for the river
Fallen trees and strainers etc.	All	5	2	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caution exercised on new rivers and after periods of rough windy weather or spate flows • A folding saw should be carried
Extreme cold weather and hypothermia	All	5	2	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate clothing should be worn to match weather conditions • Group should carry spare clothes and a bothy
Slippery banks	All	3	2	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to use suitable points for access and egress

SEVERITY: 1 – minor injury; 2 – injury needing medical attention; 3 - injury needing 5 days off work/school; 4 - Serious injury/long term sickness; 5 – fatality.

LIKELIHOOD: 1 – impossible; 2 – unlikely; 3 – even chance; - 4 – likely; 5 – certain.