

ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, MAY 30, 1891.

MANAGING A CANOE.

HANDLING THE CRANKY CRAFT IN AND OUT OF WATER.

Good Advice from an Expert—The Birch Bark Canoe and How to Treat It on a Long Journey—The Art of Paddling—Working With Two Paddles.

A canoe is a dangerous thing for a greenhorn to meddle with, but a very safe thing in the hands of an Indian or an expert. The first rule of safety is to keep your own weight and the weight of your load close to the bottom of the canoe. If this caution is followed few accidents need happen; for the lower the weight-centre of the cargo is kept below the water line the more will the buoyancy and lightness of the craft tell in favor of seaworthiness; she will ride the waves like a duck. The birch bark canoe is the model of all open paddling canoes, and one who has become thoroughly at home in that ship of the woods may safely trust himself in any other.

The ordinary birch bark canoe, such as is made by the Indians of Maine, that home of canoeing, is about twenty feet long, and will carry two paddlers with a couple of hundred pounds of baggage. It can be bought for \$15 or \$20, fresh from the stocks; a few years ago \$10 or \$12 would buy a small one, but as the bark gets scarce and long journeys have to be made to get it, the cost increases. Let us suppose we have one of the beautiful pieces of handicraft, finished only yesterday, and delivered this morning in your riverside dooryard. How shall we get the most pleasure out of it and keep the frail thing taut and neat for four or five years, the extent of a canoe's life?

First, while the shining yellow cedar ribs and lining are fresh and clean, give the inside, the bars and the gunwales, a good coat of raw paint oil. This may be renewed at mid-summer, and each spring thereafter.

The outside may with advantage be given a coat of oil, varnish and drier, mixed in equal proportion; this will preserve the small eyes of the bark, and effectually keep the bark from getting water soaked on a long journey, as old canoes are apt to do. The rosin for mending seams and leaks should be melted with about one eighth its bulk of clean lard or paint oil. The exact proportion can best be learned by rule of thumb, as it must vary with the season; in hot weather more rosin will be needed to keep the mixture from melting in the sun after it is applied, while in cold

weather more grease will be needed to keep it from cracking and chipping off through brittleness. In all cases it must be put on as hot as possible, with a sliver of wood, and care must be taken to have the cracks or eyes perfectly dry when it is applied. Now if our canoe is ready and tight from stem to stern (as you can easily see by putting a couple of buckets of water



POLING THE CANOE.

in her, and watching for any drops to leak through) let us have a first lesson in paddling.

To get our vessel to the river, stand by the canoe as she rests on her keel on the ground, grasp the middle bar close to the gunwale with your right hand, and at its center with your left hand; raise the canoe to your knee and give it a flip as if you were throwing a rail across your shoulder; let the middle bar fall into its place on the thick muscle between the neck and the bony point of the right shoulder, at the same time letting go with the left hand and shifting it to catch the gunwale a couple of feet in front of you on the left hand side extending the arm far enough forward to give you command in balancing the load; the right hand may now be shifted from its hold on the bar, and the gunwale grasped with it (the fingers on the inside of the canoe) about a foot in front of you. You will now find the canoe resting lightly on your shoulder, the middle bar extending across the hollow of your right shoulder and out onto the muscle of the right arm. If you are strong, a little practice will enable you to carry the canoe, using the right hand alone; you may stop and pick up your paddle with the left, and march off.

Then when we come to the water; you must set her afloat lightly from some landing place, taking care not to let her touch bottom anywhere while loading. Place the load as low as possible, and mass it amidships as far as is convenient. Let your bowman get in and sit down on a cushion on the bottom of the canoe, with another cushion at his back. Upon no account allow him to kneel up against the bar or to sit on his heels; this rule is imperative; the Indians never violate it unless perhaps in racing. More accidents occur through the bowman kneeling up than any other way. It looks clumsy and top-heavy and is always dangerous.

In stepping into a canoe never stick your paddle in before you and lean on it; lay it across the gunwales in front of your place; put a hand on each side of the canoe and stop in properly. You are now in the stern where the canoe is just wide enough to allow you to kneel sitting on your heels, with your toes together, close back against the end bar. A thin cushion under your knees if you wish; a thicker one under your instep will give most comfort. The gunwales of the canoe ought now to come close to your waist just above the hips, and should fit so snugly (without perhaps actually touching you) that you can by a twist



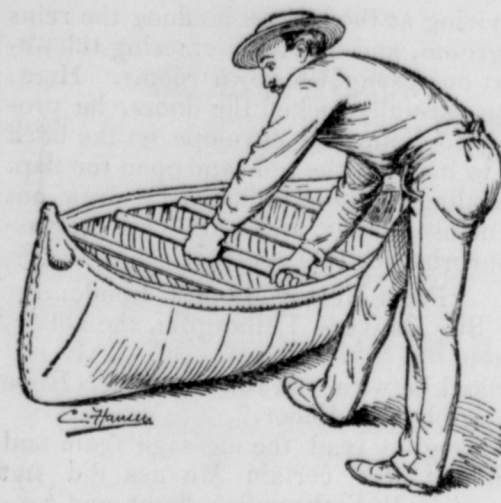
WORKING WITH TWO PADDLES.

of your body control the rolling of the canoe in a sea. When you become thoroughly at home in the birch you will find this a great help in climbing the shifting hills.

Now, for the paddle. It is made of rock maple. The older it is, the better, for it will be dry and light and springy. A new paddle is apt to be good for a couple of hours only; then the blade twists, and the spring will all be gone out of it. But an old stager, brown with age and oil, is a treasure to be guarded. The paddle cannot

be oiled too often. As to size it should be the length of the paddler, though some prefer a short handle. It should balance in the hand when held just where the blade joins the haft.

When you are seated in the canoe, with the paddle lying across the gunwales in front of you, I will suppose you are to begin work on the left or port side, your bowman, of course, paddling on the star-



LIFTING TO THE SHOULDER.

board. Take the paddle in your left hand at the thickest part, just above the blade, the fingers and thumb uppermost; the right hand may be placed in the same position on the upper end, or flat handle, or it may be shifted a little so that some of the fingers go over the end of the paddle; lift the left a little, swing the right into the air a little back from the face until it is somewhere in front of your right eye; let the blade go sharply into the water, taking hold as it cuts down; pull hard back with the left, letting this lower hand just clear the water; push ahead with the right; keep your back hollowed, and the stroke is half done. Then comes the curl at the end, which enables you to steer. Evidently when paddling alone, if a single bladed paddle is used, every stroke on this left side will drive your craft to the right, but the effect is counteracted constantly by the twist of the paddle. By turning your wrists, turn the outer edge of the blade forward until the back or rear side of the paddle is so completely turned as to catch the water and act as a rudder. This you will do more easily by pressing down and to the right with the right hand, and (at first at least) allowing the haft of the paddle just above the left hand to come against the gunwale, giving the right hand a leverage in steering. This turn of the paddle is the only difficult thing to learn; once mastered the rest is easy; it should be begun when the stroke is half through, and should be done so instinctively that absolutely no halt is made in the stroke from beginning to

end. The paddle should be swung out of the water at a small angle; the right hand well down, the point of the blade skimming the water, and the left hand carrying the haft swiftly forward again. The thumb of the lower hand need not be placed around the handle unless it is rough weather; then it is necessary or you may have your paddle knocked out of your hands.

The bowman makes the same stroke as the steersman, except that there is no twist in it, as he has nothing to do with keeping the course of the canoe. Whatever you do, don't lean over the side towards the paddle. The only motion of the body must be fore and aft, throwing its weight into the end of each stroke.

You can tell a white man from an Indian a long distance off by the difference in the paddling. A white man paddles more with his arms and less with his body than an Indian.

Here is a test of good paddling. When you think you are thoroughly proficient, watch your blade as it goes into the water; if it makes a single tiny eddy as it comes aft in the stroke, you have not reached perfection. In a year or two you will see it cut the water without a ripple, and fairly sing and swish as you drive it down.

The best canoeing clothes are a woolen shirt, woolen socks, red leather or canvas



THE CARRY.

shoes and trousers of homespun or corduroy.

In smooth water you may kneel up, resting against the bar or you may even sit upon it with your feet out ahead of you, but in rough weather the place for you is low on your heels as I have described; for

you thus have far greater control over your craft.

On landing at night at the end of a day's journey, after unloading the canoe, lift her out and turn her over to rest on one gunwale and her two bows, or better still turn her over a couple of old logs resting evenly on both gunwales. In the day time when in camp if it's hot and the rosin is in danger of melting, the canoe may be left in the shade resting on her bottom among the small bushes or on the grass. She will come to no harm so long as no weight is inside her.

As to trimming a canoe, the load should be so placed as to make her a little heavier aft than forward, or she will not steer, but will yee-yaw about in a most aggravating way. In running down a rough stream, however, where a pole has to be used, it will be found necessary to have her loaded slightly by the head, or else the current will catch the stern and slew it round unmercifully.

In poling a canoe up rocky streams, through rapids, a "setting pole" of spruce is used. This should be about ten feet long, and about an inch and a half diameter at the thickest part. Poling is very hard to learn, but when once the art is required it is a delightful exercise. You may pole, as you may paddle, on either side. If it is to be the left side again, where we began our lesson, stand erect in your place in the stern, facing almost square out over the left gunwale. Take the pole in your left hand about four feet from the top, thumb to the front and clashed about it, allowing the lever end of the pole to trail overboard towards the stern; raise the left arm and swing the lower end of the pole forward and out over the water to bring it in a curve up to a point a few inches from the side, a couple of feet ahead of where you stand, at the same time grasping the pole with the right hand about a foot below the left; the right hand now does the business of driving the pole down to a firm setting on the bottom, the left hand sliding up for a new hold near the top of the pole; next the right hand is shifted above the left and the weight of the body thrown on the bending white spruce, while the canoe trembles and springs ahead up the steep foaming track. To steer her is difficult; if you wish to go to the right the end of the pole must be set well under the bottom of the canoe and you must draw yourself and the stern of the canoe towards the pole as you give the last push; to alter the course to the left, the pole will be set sloping down from the canoe, some little distance from the side, and you will push the stern away from the point where the pole is set, thus driving your bow in the desired direction.

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1891.

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1891.

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