

SUP knowledge —

Get the C.L.A.P

With summer here lots of you will be thinking about heading out on group adventures. You may or may not do this as a club or group and you may or may not have done any SUP or paddle leader courses and gained any qualifications. Leading a group is fine till something goes wrong. So here is a guide line, to the corner stone's of leading a group. What you need to be thinking about before and while you are out on the water.

C.L.A.P

No, it's not what you are thinking. C.L.A.P is the acronym we use to remember:

**Communication,
Line of Sight,
Awareness and
Position of most usefulness.**

If you are really leading a group then you are responsible for the safety and wellbeing of the group. You are providing the guidance of where, when and why you are going to paddle. If anything goes wrong then you will be the one that will be held accountable for the consequences of your decisions and the directions that you have given others in the group. You will also be held responsible for the actions of others in the group that you didn't give instructions to do what they did.

You are also responsible to make sure that everyone in the group enjoys the paddle. Making sure that the route, the water types, the group will experience is within the ability level of the paddlers in the group. Being a leader is a real balancing act of decisions.

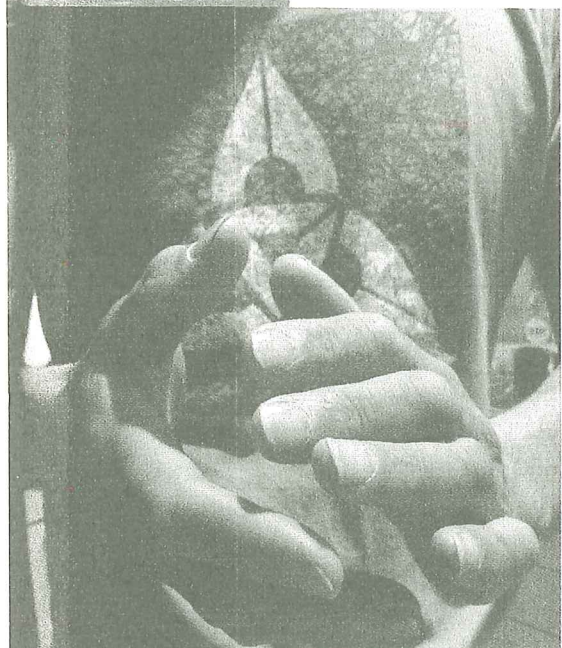
We all hope that our leisure paddles stay that way. But when the muck hits the fan and it all goes bottom up and it ends in tears. Then as a leader you need to have covered all the bases, for answering difficult questions of an inquest is no easy task.

So what is C.L.A.P all about?

Communication

How a leader gets their directions and information across to members of the paddle group. Verbally, pre, during and post paddle briefings. Visually, maps, hand signals while on water. Sound, whistle blasts for alarm and distant attention gaining.

A pre paddle briefing is a great idea, this helps inform everyone on the paddle Where you are going, What you are expecting and When. This helps everyone in the group understand what is going on, Where it is going on and When. It is really important for a paddle leader to get this information to everyone as then the paddle group knows what is going on and expects the same outcome from the paddle. If you don't do this then you will have one part of your group doing one thing and the other half doing what they want.





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Don't be afraid to communicate that same briefing content and update it throughout the day, or paddle. As you will certainly find that some members of your group in the euphoria of the moment forget your briefing instructions and drift off as the paddle unfolds.

The information that is contained in paddle briefings will have come from the issues that have risen from your risk assessment of the route. i.e. that two-metre weir at the mill. The trees overhanging the river blocking paddle lines. That weather to expect on the paddle. i.e. wind strengths, max/min temperatures, just a few examples.

Line of sight

As a leader the person in charge, the one carrying the responsibility for the group, it is important that you have line of sight of everyone in your group. That way you can be fully aware of everything that everyone in the group does while they are in your responsibility. This may seem a little bit much for just a fun friendly paddle but sadly if you are in charge, making the decisions, planning group stops and breaks, then you need everyone to understand, follow and abide by them. Staying together allows people to get the right information at the right time.

If you are on the river/lake somewhere and a group has got ahead because one of the paddlers at the back has a problem and slowed down then it is very easy to go out of sight or communication distance of the leader at the back with slower paddlers who need support and assistance. How do you get a message to them to stop/slow down? They are now out of earshot, a whistle or a loud shout may not be heard over wind or indeed just distance. This is where our next heading comes in.

Awareness

There are another couple of A's that go with Awareness and they are Avoidance and Anticipate. If you are aware that a paddler at the back is slowing down you should also be aware that the others in the group will be moving away from the slower person. You need to anticipate this creating a problem for you. So to avoid the problem you may call a paddle break to help the slower paddler catch their breath, or just an excuse to get the entire group together to remind them that they all need to stick close together.

All these A's can be dealt with by good paddle planning and a good through risk assessment of the paddle. *"Whoa! What do you mean risk assessment? We are just going for a paddle around the point to a cute little bay, what could possibly go wrong?"* Exactly, what could go wrong?

If you have thought about all the things that could go wrong on the paddle then when the weather changes you will already have a plan for that situation. When you have someone that is starting to slow up you have spare food or a tow line to help them along or a cunning plan to call the group together whilst not drawing undue attention to a slower paddler and saving them the potential embarrassment of holding up the group.

Being Aware, of water types (at all levels) you can expect on the planned route and knowing the abilities of the people in your group is a great start, it is a great start to help you avoid the issues arising on the paddle and being able to pre plan or anticipate situations that may arise on the paddle trip.



POSITION OF MOST usefulness

This is a really interesting one. So what on earth is the position of most usefulness?

Is there any point to being the leader of a group, paddling down a river, getting so far ahead of your group that you are out of sight around the bend? Yes they can all now follow your lead and your line. You clearly can't communicate with anyone, visibly with signals, and you may be able to whistle to them. But there may be wind so you can't rely on that. Is that really the position of most usefulness for you or the group? Is it at the back of the group watching over everyone, where you can see all? But can they see you? Can you communicate to everyone which direction you need to take from the back, probably not?

Is it in the middle where you can see the more confident paddlers in front, the weaker less confident paddlers behind you and with a slight turn of your head they being able to see you clearly and copy or follow your lead? This sounds a good idea. But you can't see that they are up to all the time, they could be really struggling with difficult water, or dropping behind in the wind as you and the rest of the group dig deep to battle into the headwind.

Truth is: it's all of these. It's hard to be in the right place all the time. The more your paddle group is spread over distance the harder it is for you to get round your paddlers and to lead your group effectively. Short paddle sections with regroupings is very effective at keeping everyone together but can be tiresome for some. It may make you unpopular as well. But then again it will make you popular with others.

What makes a good leader? Someone who is aware of the risks of the paddle, has created a paddle plan to reduce, minimise and/or avoid the risks that could feature on the paddle and has anticipated likely outcomes if the paddle doesn't go as planned. Someone who is aware of each person in the group, their level of paddling and how they are paddling in the group during the day. That controls the group's momentum to the best interests of all that are in the group, and if it doesn't work out, takes it on the chin, doesn't hide behind false statements, but openly discusses what went wrong, why it went wrong and works out how it could be done better in the future. This is the way you learn, grow and become a great leader.

Enjoy your group paddles this summer, stay safe and paddle wisely.

