

Chapter 1

Introduction

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Introduction

Bodies of water, great and small, are a formative feature of the human experience on our blue planet. At every corner of the earth, people have been drawn to live near these sources of life. This connection between humankind and the seas, oceans, and rivers that we call home is reflected in a seemingly universal reaction to not just live by and immerse ourselves in water, but also find a way to float on its surface.

Simple watercraft, the technological step beyond swimming, are a fixture in the history of the human experience. Dugout canoes, reed rafts, framed boats covered with bark or animal skins, and simple wood-plank boats exist in as many varied forms as the unique bodies of water they float on and the myriad tasks they have been built to accomplish. Be it carrying a passenger to a far shore, collecting fish on a flowing stream, navigating the swell of the ocean, or traveling great distances on a flowing river, simple craft of simple means have existed for millennia in cultures around the world. These simplest of boats all share a core concept: a buoyant craft, a paddler or group of paddlers, and their paddles, allowing people to travel where feet, wheels, or hooves will not carry them. There is a fundamental joy in conquering our natural inability to move across the waters'

surface, a joy that never gets old. Paddlers of these craft the world over connect in this wonder, and most cannot help but smile at the sight of any type of paddled craft drifting into shore at sunset, shooting down a rapid in flood, or charging through an ocean swell.

The draw of the simplicity and universality of the paddle, paddler, and boat is an important part of the story of canoeing as a sport. However, the more specific story of competitive canoeing and kayaking traces its history through the canoe's part in the foundational myth of modern North America. Understanding the story of canoeing necessitates an understanding of the canoe itself as part of the protracted, and fraught, process of cultural contact between North American indigenous people and the European settler society. The names *canoe* and *kayak* themselves reflect this Euro-centric mindset of "discovery" of these indigenous craft and their peoples, with the words we have today emerging through the process of European languages wrestling the indigenous names into European vernacular. Christopher Columbus is credited with first encountering the Haitian word *canaoua* as a name for the dugout-type canoes of the island of Hispaniola, and bringing the term into Spanish as *canoa*, which came to the English as *canoe*, while the Greenlandic Inuit word for "small boats of skins," *qayaq*, returned to Europe with the Danes as *kajak*, which became *kayak*.

From the earliest stages of cultural contact, the unique adaptation of indigenous paddle-driven craft to perform in the waters of North America was quickly obvious to those who were arriving from across the ocean. This was especially apparent on the inland waterways of the continent, where the major rivers, now known as the St. Lawrence, Ottawa, Hudson, Ohio, Mississippi, and Missouri, and their hundreds of smaller tributaries served as highways of canoe travel. It became clear to the European colonizers, explorers, and traders that adopting the light, repairable, and maneuverable canoes they learned to build and paddle from the Mi'kmaq, Wendat, Haudenosaunee, and others was the only efficient way to travel the expanses of the North American landmass.

The canoe became a critical feature in the life of any European looking to travel beyond the salty waters of their continent's shore, and indeed was a foundation in the process of exploration, expansion, and eventual domination of the North American landmass by European settlers. Canoes took Lewis and Clarke across the American continent and

carried David Thompson on his lifelong mission to map what is now the Canadian West. Meanwhile, for over 200 years the fur trade of beaver pelts, which was the backbone of the economy of British North America, operated using a variety of sizes of canoes and a vast network of routes. The Hudson's Bay Company, deeded by the British Crown to carry out this trade, and its eventual rival the North-West Company, used canoes to carry information, supplies, and furs across thousands of kilometers of rivers and lakes from present-day Montreal to the Rocky Mountains. For two centuries ending in the mid-1800s, being a professional paddler, or *voyageur*, was a viable career in New France and British North America for European, Aboriginal, and Métis men and women alike (Figure 1.1).

With this history and the mythology around it, the canoe holds heavy significance as a cultural marker for North America. The silhouette of the classic canoe, with its upturned stern and bow, is an iconic image associated with wilderness, exploration, and indigenous people. It is important to think critically about this significance and the cultural



Figure 1.1 A *canot du maître*, the large canoes used in the North American fur trade to travel major river routes.

place that the canoe holds not just for North America generally, but for Aboriginal peoples specifically. The mythology of the canoe can be a point of friction in the relationship between settler society and indigenous North American culture. There is no doubt that a debt of gratitude must be given for the gift of these ingenious North American boats to the world, and respect for the beauty reflected in their varied designs, refined for the landscape they were developed in through the ages.

By the late 1800s, the fur trade in North America was well past its prime. Rail lines stretched across the continent, and the highways of water were supplanted once and for all by these ribbons of steel. Along with Europe, North America was changing. The industrial revolution had fundamentally altered the economies on both sides of the Atlantic, and a new lifestyle awaited those who emerged through these changes as the middle class developed. With population shifts to cities, a wider distribution of wealth, more young people seeking education, and fewer hours needed for manual labor, the widespread concept of leisure time and recreation took off. Most major traditional sports we recognize today were born during this era. For the team sport and rule-minded athlete, baseball and football developed in North America while soccer (football) was rapidly gaining popularity in Europe. For those craving speed and modernity, there was the new sport of cycling. There was rowing, a mainstay at collegiate levels, and certainly the more technologically advanced of the water sports. Yet for those who sought to connect with water, but in a simpler craft, there was the sport of canoeing.

In America, where the mythology of the rugged paddlers of the era of exploration and the fur trade was strong, canoeing offered a connection to a nostalgic past. The living experience in cities like New York, Montreal, Ottawa, and Washington less and less resembled this conception of a wild and heroic past linked to generations gone by. Weekend trips to a lake or river to go canoeing became a popular chance to bridge the gap with the imagined past, feel authentically rugged, and enjoy the natural landscape increasingly distant from city life. Some sought out quiet lakes for sunset cruises, while others searched for the whirling rapids of the spring-time melt. New canoes based on those of the fur

trade and traditional Aboriginal designs, but updated for speed, whitewater, or comfort, were created using new materials and techniques, yet the core simplicity of boat, paddle, and paddler remained. For Europeans, canoeing was an activity that got them out of the city to float on country rivers, and the ponds of city parks. But it was also a chance to experience a piece of an “authentic” North American-style adventure, to feel a connection to the stories of the wilds of the continent across the ocean, and to re-create that imagined, idealized simple life of the Aboriginal peoples that they would read about in adventure novels. The style of boats being produced for purely recreational purposes in North America were brought to European waters, and they proved popular with the newly conceived figure of the weekend warrior who would flee the city on precious days off for some country air and a vigorous paddle.

On both sides of the ocean canoe clubs sprang up, founded by canoeing enthusiasts. These clubs were more than just boathouses in which to store canoes. By offering members access to boats, they provided the opportunity for a wider public to experience the sport, and out of this camaraderie the clubs became social hubs for their members during the summer months (Figures 1.2 and 1.3). These early clubs would be instrumental in the genesis of canoe racing we know today. In England, the first formal club was the Royal Canoe Club on the Thames, founded in 1866. It was home to the formative pioneer of canoe design, touring, and competition, John “Rob Roy” MacGregor. The first club in the United States, the New York Canoe Club, followed in 1870, and in Canada the earliest canoe club was built in this same period at the entrance to the Lachine Canal on the Island of Montreal. Soon, other clubs sprung up both in England and in Eastern North America, and before long the competitive spirit of these clubs’ members, and the pride in their home clubs’ colors, began to take effect. Races were organized, and over time competitive rivalries evolved. By the turn of the twentieth century, these clubs and early races had sparked formal national associations that went on to publish rule books, designate officials, and hold annual regattas. The sport of canoe and kayak racing as we know it today at the international level was born (Figure 1.4).



Figure 1.2 The packed docks and deck of the Rideau Canoe Club on Regatta Day 1906 illustrate the popularity of canoe clubs as social as well as sporting hubs at the turn of the twentieth century.



Figure 1.3 Although dominated by men, the earliest stages of organized, competitive canoe racing included women. War canoe racing in Canada, circa 1909.

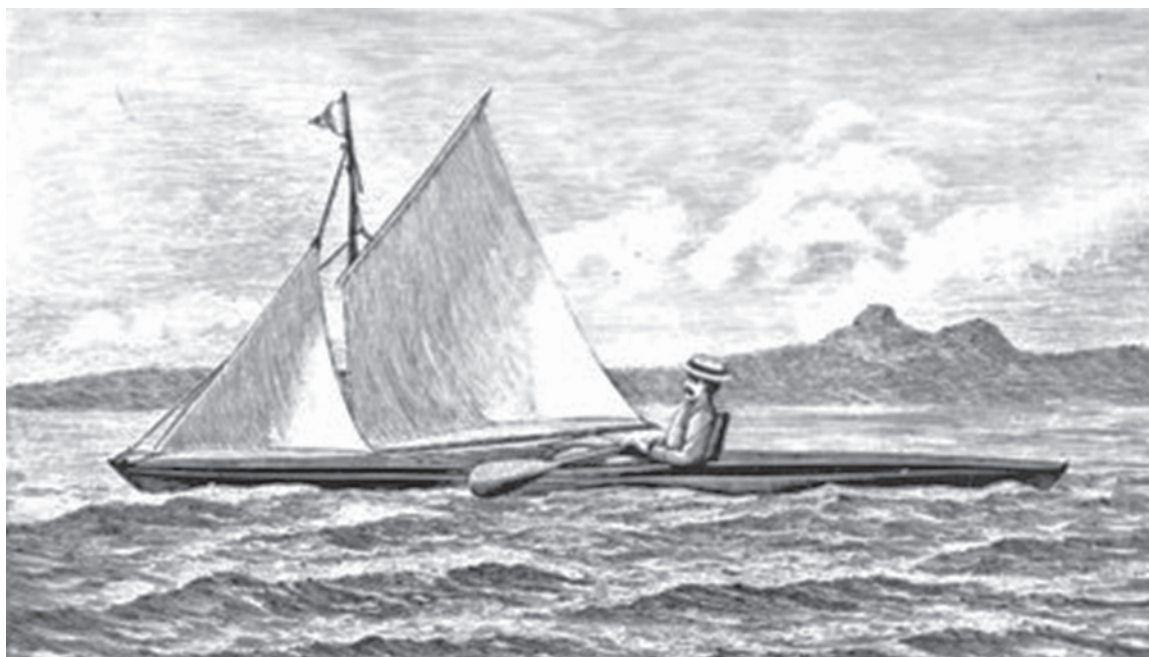


Figure 1.4 John MacGregor, founder of the British Royal Canoe Club, in the *Rob Roy*.

Internationalia Repräsentantskapet for Kanotidrott (IRK)

In the early 1900s, with the rapid expansion of canoe clubs and the increasing popularity of the activity, there was a need for structure, not just to organize international competitions but also to advise the public on items such as touring, sightseeing, international signs for maps, safety, and so on. In January 1924, representatives from four National Federations (Austria, Denmark, Germany, and Sweden) met in Copenhagen at what was the First Congress. They formed the IRK and adopted statutes that established the purpose and vision of this organization:

- To form links amongst National Federations and organize international competitions in canoeing and sailing.
- International categories were established for competition paddling canoes (single-seat kayak: maximum length 5.20m, maximum width 0.51 m) and sailing canoes. Dimensions of the Canadian

canoe were deferred until the American Canoe Association could be consulted.

- The international paddling races were from 1500 to 10000m, and the sailing competition was on a triangular course of a minimum of 10km, with one side facing the wind.
- To promote touring, including sightseeing, accommodation, and maps.

In the early years of the IRK, the focus was on providing leadership to the sport in terms of equipment like tandem kayaks and folding boats, and promotion of activities such as international canoe camping tours. Canoe clubs flourished and became gathering places for canoeing as well as social activities.

Competitive canoeing developed with each International Canoe Federation (ICF) Congress. Canoe slalom was established in 1931 on Lake Hallwyl in Switzerland by Max Vogt, and the first wild water slalom followed in 1933 on the Arr River. The first World Championships were in Geneva in 1949. Gradually, as the different disciplines evolved and established a competitive

presence with individual regattas, the ICF recognized each one at a Congress. Technical committees were established, rules published, championships announced, and the world of canoe sport evolved, all under the guidance of the ICF.

The initial Flatwater Championships took place in Vaxholm, in the Sweden archipelago, in 1938. Athletes competed on the ocean, and accommodation was nearby in tents (Figures 1.5–1.7).

Canoe sailing dates to the very early days of the nineteenth century with John McGregor in the United Kingdom. The first ICF World Championship was in 1961 and is held every three years. Long-distance paddling has an extensive history, and both marathon and wildwater canoeing grew from these distance races. Classic wildwater canoeing had its first World Championship in 1959; Marathon

was recognized as an official discipline by the ICF in 1984, and World Championships for it were introduced at that time. Canoe polo became popular in the mid-twentieth century, and the ICF published the rules for this sport in 1986; the first World Championship took place in 1994. Dragon Boat was added to the list of sanctioned disciplines in 2004 and has World Championships each year. The ICF recognized Freestyle as an official discipline in 2006, and the first canoe freestyle World Championship was held in 2007. Ocean racing was a natural extension of marathon and involves long-distance surfski and Va'a competitions. Ocean Racing is the newest discipline in the ICF, bringing the current number to 10.

In 1964, at the Congress in Tokyo, a Sport Medicine Committee was established, and two years later doping controls were initiated. This was the second International Federation to realize the importance of medicine in sport and to recognize the potential problem of drugs in sport. Since that time, the ICF has had a zero-tolerance policy toward doping in sport and has mandatory educational programs prior to competition.

The growth of the ICF was slow until the 1990s, when development programs were funded to introduce the sport throughout the world. The initial Congress had 4 National Federations, and even at the 50th Anniversary of the ICF in 1974, only 31 Federations attended the Congress. However, the growth in the last 30 years has been rapid, and, at this time, 167 National Federations in 5 continents hold membership in the ICF.



Figure 1.5 Announcement of the first ICF Flatwater Championship in Sweden, 1938.

Canoeing as an Olympic sport

In the year that the IRK was founded, there were demonstration races in kayak and canoe at the eighth Olympic Games in Paris. The International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Organizing Committee contacted the Canadian Olympic Committee, who sent competitors from the Canadian Canoe Association and the Washington Canoe Club to participate in six events. Races in singles, doubles, and fours, in both canoe and kayak, were incorporated into the Olympic Rowing regatta on July 13



Figure 1.6 Regatta site near Vaxholm.

and 15, 1924. Although this would seem to indicate that canoeing would be admitted to the Olympic program, such was not the case. Applications to the IOC were rejected for the 1928 and 1932 Games, largely because of the small number of National Federations. Dr. Max Eckert, the President of the German Canoe Federation, was elected President of the IRK at the 1932 Congress in Vienna. At that meeting, all efforts were directed toward a strategy that would lead to the admission of canoeing to the 1936 Games in Berlin. A decision was made to hold the first European Championship in Prague in 1933 to place canoeing on the international stage; nine nations participated. Races were held for men over 10000 and 1000m in kayak singles, folding singles, and folding pairs, and Canadian canoe singles and pairs. For women, there was one kayak singles race over 600m. It would be a long, upstream battle for gender equity in canoe sport.

All National Federations that were part of the IRK were encouraged to apply to the IOC, through

their own National Olympic Committee, for inclusion of canoeing in the Berlin Games. However, the IOC again rejected the application in 1933, and the Fédération Internationale des Sociétés d'Aviron (FISA, the international rowing federation) President was instrumental in this decision. Representing the opinion of many rowing federations, he was concerned that canoeists would compromise the freedom of lakes and waterways with the new influx of small craft. His argument against inclusion in the Olympics was that canoe racing was too young and not a competitive sport, nor was it prepared for such a great event. Not unexpectedly, the IRK responded with strong arguments to the contrary and launched an appeal to the IOC that was put on the agenda of the next IOC Congress in 1934. Finally, on May 16, 1934, the IOC agreed to accept the application from the IRK under the official Olympic name "Federation Internationale de Canoe" (FIC). There would be nine canoeing events in the 1936 Games in Berlin, but no women's race (Figures 1.8 and 1.9).

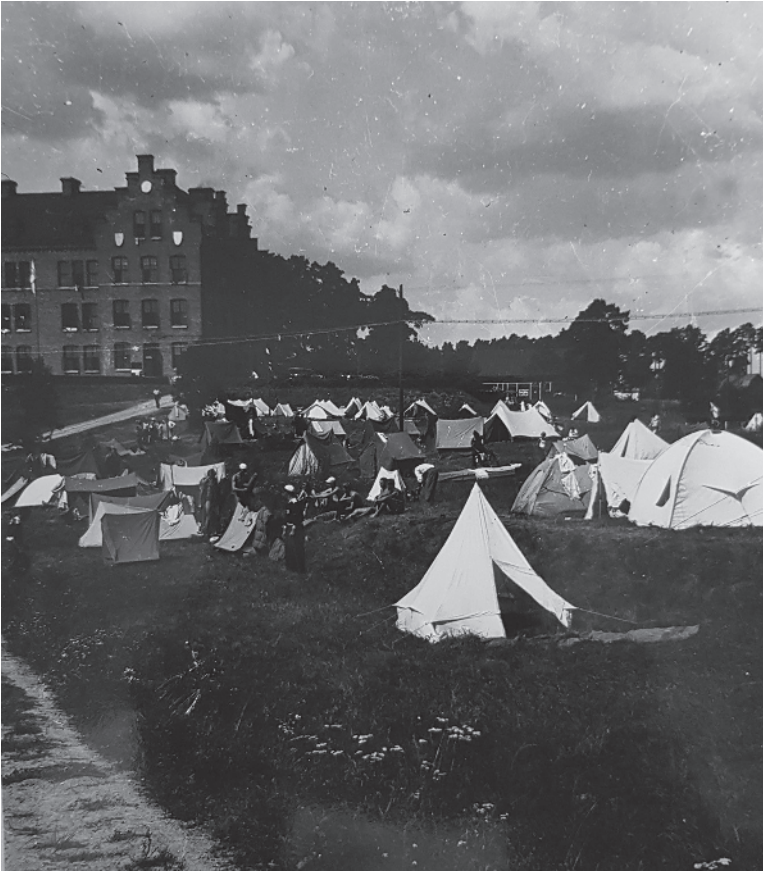


Figure 1.7 Tent accommodation near the regatta venue.



Figure 1.8 Competitors in the 1936 Olympic Games. This is a 10000m kayak folding-boat double event.

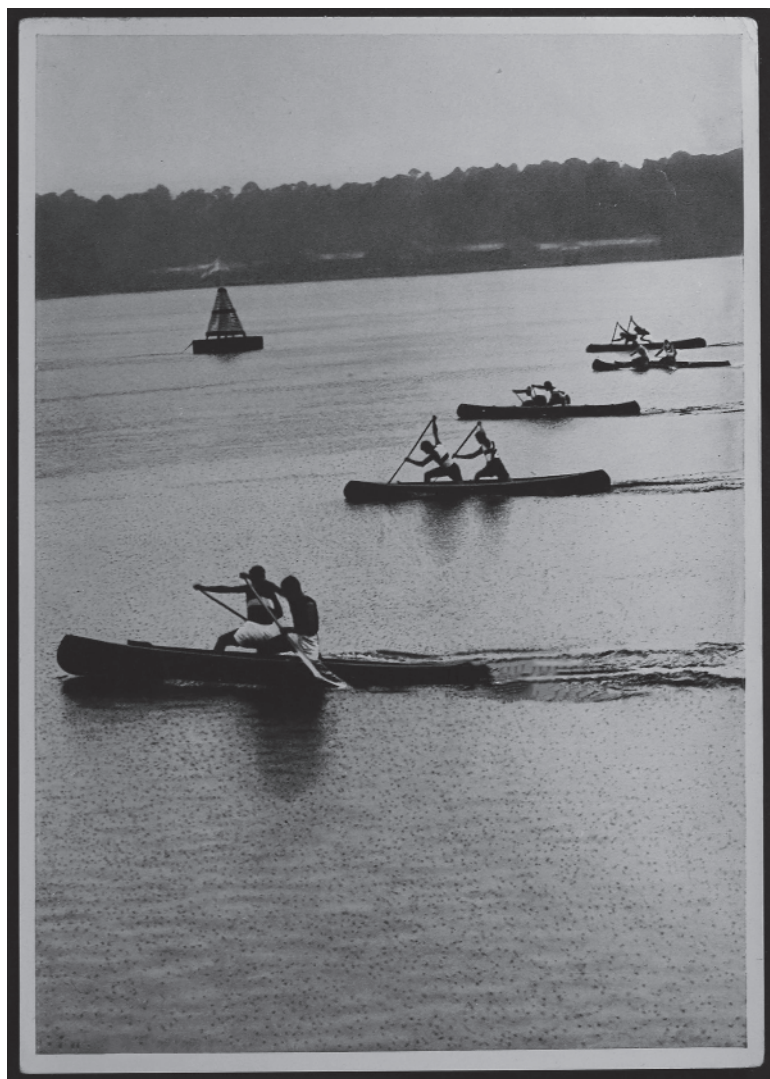


Figure 1.9 Start of the 10000m two-person canoe (C2) event at the 1936 Olympic Games.

Table 1.1 Slalom Olympic program.

	1972	...	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
C1 M	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
C2 M	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
K1 M	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
K1 W	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
C1 W									X
Number of events	4		4	4	4	4	4	4	4

1, One-person; 2, two-person; C, canoe; K, kayak; M, men; W, women.

Table 1.2 Sprint Olympic program.

	1936	1948	1952	1946	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
Sprint Olympic program: men																				
K1 200m																		X	X	X
K2 200m																		X		
K1 500m									X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
K2 500m									X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
K1 1000m	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
K2 1000m	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
K1 10000m	X	X	X																	
K1 4 × 500m relay					X															
K4 1000m						X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
K4 500m																				X
K1 folding 10000m	X																			
K2 folding 10000m	X																			
C1 200m																		X		
C1 500m									X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
C2 500m										X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
C1 1000m	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
C2 1000m	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
C1 10000m		X	X	X																
C2 10000m	X	X	X	X																
Number of events	8	7	7	7	5	5	5	5	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	8	8	6
Sprint Olympic program: women																				
K1 200m																		X	X	X
K1 500m		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
K2 500m					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
K4 500m											X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
C1 200m																				X
C2 500m																				X
Number of events	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	6

1, One-person; 2, two-person; C, canoe; K, kayak; M, men; W, women.

Table 1.3 Past and present ICF Presidents.

1924–1925	Franz Reinecke	GER
1925–1928	Paul Wulff	DEN
1928–1932	Franz Reinecke	GER
1932–1945	Max W. Eckert	GER
1946–1949	Jonas Asschier	SWE
1950–1954	Harald Jespersen	DEN
1954–1960	Karel Popel	TCH
1960–1981	Charles de Coquereaumont	FRA
1981–1998	Sergio Orsi	ITA
1998–2008	Ulrich Feldhoff	GER
2008–	Jose Perureno Lopez	ESP

After these Games, there was a large gap in competitive canoe sport, largely because of the war. The next Olympic Games were in 1948 and included a one-person kayak (K1) 500m race for women. In 1960 a two-person kayak (K2) 500m event was added, and in 1984 the four-person kayak (K4) 500m race was added to the Olympic program in Los Angeles. The Olympic program remained unchanged until 2012, when all four men's 500m races were eliminated and replaced by K1, K2, and one-person canoe (C1) 200m men's events, and a women's K1 200m event. This schedule was maintained for the 2016 Games in Rio; however, further changes are planned for the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo. This will result in an equal number of races for women and men in both

slalom and sprint competitions (Tables 1.1 and 1.2), including women's canoe.

The ICF has been fortunate to have capable leadership (Table 1.3). This has been necessary and instrumental in guiding the sport through periods of rapid growth and diversification. As canoeing remains one of the fastest growing activities in the world, guidance and governance remain high priorities.

In the twenty-first century, our view of the world of canoeing is constantly expanding. There are infinite varieties of paddling with their own rich stories and histories, all shaped by their own geographic region, type of water, and cultural and historical perspectives. Yet what unites all types of canoeing is that simple core concept of boat, paddler, and paddle. This shared simplicity of paddling a watercraft, and the unique feeling and wonder at pushing off from shore and paddling across the waters, is continually being reinforced.

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