

RIVER SIGNALS

Ribble Canoe Club has always had a long history of introducing people paddling, with a strong emphasis on moving water. This has only been possible because more experienced paddlers have put their time and experience into organising and supervising events. There are many ways to build up the experience to safely guide and coach a group in an environment that can often contain many hazards. Usually it's a combination of formal training, personal skills, previous experience and a bit of theory from books and videos.

However no matter what the skill or experience of the trip leader one of the most important things is that the people attending such trips have an understanding of the environment and their responsibility. This personal responsibility takes many forms from wearing suitable, safe, clothing and using serviceable equipment to taking the time to add a bit of theory to your practical experience.

A very important bit of theory that needs to be put into practice early on is that of river signals. This article is an attempt to introduce a few regularly used/needed examples into your days paddling. The object of a signal is to provide as much useful information as possible in a quick, unambiguous way, when talking is not possible. A good signal system should be simple, allow two way 'conversation' and have a built in safety mechanism.

The signals presented below are suggestions, whatever signals are used, always check before needing them that everyone is reading from the same page. Whatever signals are used is it generally agreed that if you don't see or recognise a signal then stay put. Ideally signals are carried out using only the hands, any variation to this is given. Obviously when using hand signals you will need to let go of the paddle, **ONLY REPLY IF SAFE TO DO SO, IF NOT GET CHANGE POSITION UNTIL YOU ARE.**

NO SHOW/NOT SURE then NO GO, this is the safety mechanism mentioned above, if you don't see a signal or get a response from those you are signalling then stay put, or if possible approach by foot to clarify the situation.

STOP!

Common examples: tree blocking river, dangerous weir, or route requiring inspection. Following its use a further signals will need to be displayed to explain the next action.

Description: 1 arm raised, palm forward.



GO THIS WAY THIS WAY (LEFT/RIGHT/CENTRAL)

Common example: indicating a safe route down a rapid that is within the group's ability.

Description: arm and pointing finger, left/right or centre, statically, indicating the direction required. Never point at a hazard the signal always indicates the safest route.



GO THIS WAY QUICKLY or EXTREMELY

Common example: indicating that the safe route requires a 'quick' move in the indicated direction, or a need to be 'extremely' left or right, i.e. to pass through a narrow gap. This emphasis of the direction signal is only really relevant to leftward and rightward signals.

Description: arm and pointing finger, left/right or centre, indicating the direction required. Emphasise urgency by repeating the gesture with more vigorously. Use a pointing finger to emphasise that accuracy is required.



ARE YOU OK?/OK/ACKNOWLEDGE OR CONFIRM RECEIVING A SIGNAL

Common example: checking a paddler is 'OK' following a swim, or if they are 'off' route. Part of the same signal is used to answer receipt of a signal, confirming. This signal is an ideal confirmation signal following any specific request such as 'get out and walk', 'come to me', it assures the signaller that the message has been received.

Description: identify individual by pointing and ask if 'OK' with a raised thumb. Answer by pointing at self followed by 'OK' with a raised thumb (see following '**IDENTIFY AN INDIVIDUAL**'), or 'NOT OK' by thumb down.



IDENTIFY AN INDIVIDUAL

Common example: you need to select an individual from a group or be sure that an individual is receiving the signal.

Description: make eye contact and point with a finger at the individual. If you think you are the recipient, point at self to return the question 'DO YOU MEAN ME?' Signaller can confirm with thumb up/yes or down/no.



COME TO ME ONE AT A TIME

Common example: to safeguard paddlers, one at a time as they paddle a challenging route.

Description: get the individuals attention (see previous '**IDENTIFY AN INDIVIDUAL**') and pat an open palm on top of helmet twice. Reply if safe to do so by pointing at self, and repeating signal, two pats on helmet.



THE WHOLE GROUP COME TO ME/RUN THE RAPID

Common example: route is obvious and within the group ability to route find from the boat.

Description: get the groups attention and raise a clenched fist or vertical paddle above the head height and rapidly lower and lift several times.



GET OUT AND WALK

Common example: the route is too complicated to explain with signals alone or the route contains a hazard such as dangerous weir that needs portaging.

Description: Use appropriate signals to stop the group or individual in a safe place then follow this with first two fingers pointing down doing a 'walking' action. Answer by returning signal or getting out.



YOU NEED TO LOOK

Common example: the route or hazard is too complicated to explain with signals alone.

Description: Use appropriate signals to stop the group or individual in a safe place then follow this by pointing up at the eyes with first and second fingers in a 'V' sign.



WHISTLE

The whistle can be used to get attention if all other methods are failing, use 3 blasts followed by a 5 second pause. Repeat until successful.

LINE OF SIGHT

At all times you should aim to have a line of sight between the front and rear of the group. Line of sight also refers to a clear view through a rapid to the next safe stopping point, from where another line of sight can be taken.