

Group Sailing

Following on from the other day, with questions I get regularly asked. And this one is, what's the best way to sail 3 or 4 rafted up canoes? Well this article won't totally answer that question, as I don't think there is a BEST way, But this is ONE way that I like to teach and I feel it uses the least amount of specialist "sailing only kit" and is simple and quick to set up.

Step 1 – Make a Diamond Raft.

The basis of a good rafted up sailing system is a solid Diamond Raft. Most set ups don't work too well, as the raft is tied too loosely, or the canoes aren't in the right position. As you can see in the picture, the canoes are set so the curves all match up and tessellate nicely. Less gaps, means less places for waves to be squeezed between. Also, most people tie it totally on the land, then when they get afloat the raft moves and sits differently and the ties become loose. Do the basics on the bank then put it afloat to tighten up the knots. From the pictures, you can see the outer canoes ends are tied to the middle canoes seat. The centre of the canoes are tied together by their thwarts and the centre canoe's end is tied to that too.



Step 2 – make an A frame. There are so many ways to do this and they all work to various degrees of success, but mostly they are fiddly, time consuming, require lots of wrapping and usually slide down one of the poles making the A frame less rigid and less successful at sailing.



To solve this common issue, I use a throwbag to tie the poles together and to act as the front and rear stays (the ropes that hold the A Frame up). You will see in the pictures that the A frame has a throwbag over the top of the two poles, and then a loop of rope running forwards and the remaining rope heading to the back of the raft.



To achieve this, you need to be able to tie a clove hitch.

Poles side by side. Pop empty throwbag over the end of the two poles then tie a clove hitch around the bag. This does a few things. Ties the poles together and the bag onto the poles. Creates a loop to hang a karabiner in to act as a pulley to raise and lower the sail. And is the start of the forestay.

From this clove hitch make a loop that is the length of the poles and back to the bag. And tie another clove hitch. Now you have the rigging pretty much done.

Poles into the spaces either side of the seats in the middle two canoes. The Big Loop tied down to the centre thwart of

the front canoe. The tail end tied off to the end of the back canoe. If you use a 20m or 25m throwline to do this, you will have plenty to hang off the back of the raft as a "swim line"



When tightening the stays for the A Frame, ensure the A frame is slightly leaning backwards, as the force of the wind in the sail will pull the poles forwards a little bit. Leaning back to start off with will counter this. Also, the Front stay wants to be to the centre thwart so that the sail can be free to fly in front of it.



Step 3 – The sail

Take a normal tarp and clip the eyelets together on one side. This will create a spinnaker shape and work perfectly. This way you take a tarp, which is useful to camp and for lunch, but also as a group shelter also becomes a sail. Less kit to buy and carry. Allow the sail to be above the forestay, so it can fly high, that way you can see under it to be able to navigate, and it also wants to pull the front of the raft up, rather than drag it down. Using rescue tapes, attached to the two bottom corners you can control the sail and get some power on.

