

Canoe Slalom

Imagine you're at the start for an international slalom in the heart of the Alps.

Several tonnes of water thunder past you every second, and you are in a boat weighing barely 9 kilos.

You're thinking only about the 18 gates that you must not miss.

5 beeps from the electronic starter. At the 5th, you're off!

The first part of the course has been designed to tear your arms off. On the bank, your supporters are going crazy - but you can hear nothing. You haven't cleared one gate before you focus on the next.



Half the course done. So far, no touches. Your arms are getting pumped, your body is steaming despite the chill of the river. Now, total concentration. One slip will destroy you. Triumph or disaster is here, and you know it.

You push harder still, though your arms are nearly paralysed.

You must stay focused... You must stay focused...

So, what is Canoe Slalom?

Slalom is paddling down the river, between hanging poles, as fast as you can.

How does it work?

The aim is to run a rapid river course marked by "gates" fast, and without touching.

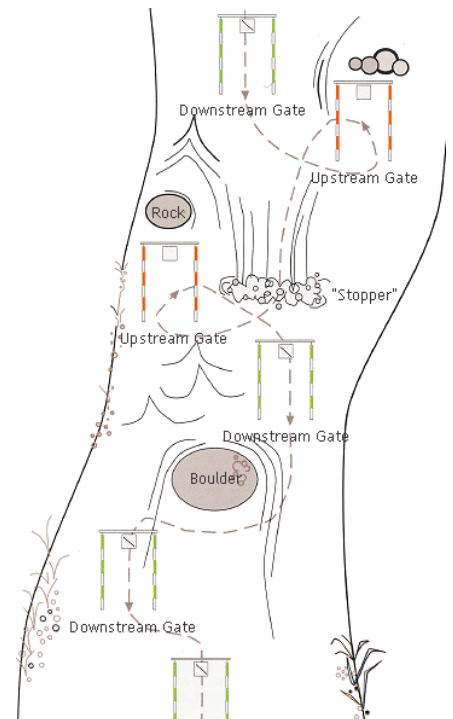
A "gate" is two poles, that hang over the river. Green and white gates are paddled through in a downstream direction.

Red and white gates are paddled through in an upstream direction.

The gates are placed so that you'll make exciting cross-river moves and feel the thrill of the waves.

You need to pass through all the gates in number order, and in the right direction - red ones upstream, green ones downstream.

If you touch a pole with anything - paddle, boat, buoyancy aid, helmet or any part of your body - a 2 second penalty is added to your time. If you miss a gate out, or go through in the wrong direction or upside down, the penalty is 50 seconds - a wipeout in serious competition!



The aim is *fast and clean*. Each competitor takes two runs, and the best run of the two counts.

In Division 4, where you start, it won't be too hard - a rush of water from rapids, or moving water in a stream.

In Division 1, if you get there, it will be wet and tricky!

What equipment do I need?

To race at Oughtibridge, you don't need any equipment. You just the clothes you'd normally wear for kayaking, a warm change of clothes, a packed lunch and a drink.

You'll be able to borrow boat, paddle and buoyancy aid from the club.

How hard will the Oughtibridge course be?

If you've been down the rapids with cubs or scouts, then you'll be good enough to have a good go at the course.

The course at Oughtibridge is definitely better for your beginners' skills than the Alps!

How many people will be competing?

It depends on how many competitors turn up. Previous events have attracted over 100 paddlers from Nottingham, Halifax, Bradford, Matlock.....

Can mums, nans, dads, sisters or any other family members have a go?

Yep – pretty much everybody can have a go.

But I'm so young (or so old), how can I compete?

Age isn't important. Your spirit of adventure is. You can have the right spirit aged 8 or 108 or any age in between. However, competitors will compete against others in their own age category. Usually there'll be winners & runners up for each age category.

To know which category you're in, you just need to know how old you were on 1st January this year:

- 9 or younger, you are in the **J10** category
- 10 or 11, you are in **J12**
- 12 or 13, you are in **J14**
- 14 or 15, you are in **J16**
- 16 or 17, you are in **J18**
- 18 to 22, you are in **U23**
- 23 to 34, you are in **Seniors**
- 35 or older, congratulations! You can claim **Master** status.

What does 'Div 3/4' mean?

Most sports have divisions. Each division contains competitors better than the one before.

Canoe slalom has 5 divisions. The Premier Division is for the very best competitors. Next comes Division 1, followed by 2, 3 and finally Division 4.

Division 4 is for everyone who's just beginning slalom.

When paddlers compete, they earn points. Earn enough points and you get promoted to the next division.

Canoe slalom is different to many sports as there's no limit on how many paddlers can be in each division. If enough paddlers get enough points, the divisions grow to have more competitors.

Division 4 courses are set up to be safe but exciting for beginners. Premier Division courses are very hard and are where the Great Britain Olympic slalom athletes compete.

Go to canoeslalom.co.uk to check out the rankings for each division and for loads more info.

Have any paddlers from 150th ever been promoted?

Nope... So, you could be the first!

The slalom is two days. Why's that?

The gates are moved so it's a different course on Sunday.

This means you can compete on Sunday too.

The best score on each day will count towards promotion from Division 4, so you could get promoted even faster!

Alternatively, don't worry about that and just have fun!

Thanks/Credits

canoeslalom.co.uk (where most of this info is taken from)

Sheffieldcanooclub.co.uk (the home of the Oughtibridge slalom course)

Picture credits:

- Liverpoolcanooclub.co.uk
- ukriversguidebook.co.uk
- canoeslalom.co.uk