Canoe Poling has been around forever. It’s part of southern swampland boating and trap-line running. It’s also used by new Englanders for going up rapids and for white-water stunts. There are You Tube videos showing how. Well, now here’s a new way to pole! Yes, it’s also great for shallow water speed, both upstream and down. I’d never heard of it here in Michigan – I had to figure it out for myself. I’ve since put up a few “You Tube’s” of my own!

Poling is one of those things that just occurs to you. I bet that even trappers don’t always think to try poling until the moment they need it, then *eureka* it pops into their head that it would be good to stand up and get a long stick for pushing around. And they’re right!

I stumbled onto poling first. I’d been paddling on our local river one autumn. The water is low, often less than a foot deep, and paddling doesn’t hardly work: the boat throws up big waves and just bogs down, which is why it’s called “suck-water” and disliked by paddlers. But our local tree color was amazing. As I was sitting there I wanted to see more scenery. Sitting down low, I just felt trapped. So I just stood up!

Now, I was paddling a tippy, narrow flat-water Kelvar racing canoe, a beat up old 1982 Wenonah Advantage, 166”, 30 pounder. When I stood up, I found that I could balance easily! I jumped out, whittled a 12 foot maple sapling about 1.5 inch in diameter, hopped back in and took off like a rocket. No more suck-water! Gorgeous views and more speed...I was hooked.

I discovered stand-up canoe paddling the same way. I was out canoeing on a pond with my wife and she wanted to just lay back and read so I just stood up and started paddling us around like we were in a gondola. I was already hooked on poling, but the water was too deep for that. Yet I felt I needed more power than just sitting down would give. I couldn’t stop from wanting to stand up! So I did...And I was able to really make that boat glide. (I did have a rather long paddle.)

Sitting and paddling can seem so confining once you’ve learned how easy it is to stand.

We’re taught it’s not safe to stand in a canoe...Malarkey. Just try it in shallow water until you’re used to it.

I’m sure that, like poling, stand-up canoe paddling has been done for eons. I’ve heard natives in dugouts do it. It’s a Maine guide skill, too, for getting more height to read a river farther ahead. But just plain stand-up canoe paddling wasn’t in any media that I could find. I needed a much longer paddle to make it really work right
and nothing was available at that time.

You might have seen or heard about SUP surfing — stand-up paddle surfing. It’s REALLY big these days. Heck, there are two magazines out there now dedicated to it, and it’s online everywhere. Yet there’s no mention of doing it in a canoe! But you can see photos of any number of celebrities doing it on boards. Nowadays there are dozens of websites offering long paddles. But nothing was available when I first started trying to find one. I’m sure today’s store-bought paddles are better, but I needed something thrifty for testing purposes, so I made my own 66” paddle by splicing another shaft onto a hollow-handled paddle that I had.

Of course, a surfboard just isn’t right for many uses. Lots of water has no surf, for one thing. And not all of us WANT to surf! And a canoe can haul people and cargo. Plus it keeps things dry. And many people already have one!...And they can be faster than almost any board.

Yeah, some of us like to go fast, to explore a lot of miles in an outing. To me, hunting, trapping or camping out of a canoe, and race-canoeing are all part of the same continuum. Even if you don’t want speed, a light, fast boat lets you go upstream efficiently. Upstream paddling in a standard barge-like canoe isn’t hardly possible. When I go canoeing I rarely use a shuttle: in my fast boats I go up a few miles then back down. If you haven’t tried upstream paddling, then there’s another new thing for you! (Keep to the sides of the river where the current is slowest.) Canoe racers are crazy, but everyday paddlers can learn from them. (Here are a couple of other tips: Paddle with straight arms and rotate your torso for power; also, use a foot-brace and press with your foot when you take a stroke after “winding up” with your torso. Luggage positioned right can work as foot-bracing. These tips double your efficiency!) Fast old Kevlar or woodstrip canoes can be had cheaply secondhand. Even some aluminum boats are fairly fast. You don’t need anything too new or exotic, like carbon fiber.

What should we call the new stand-up canoeing sport? I’m hesitant...Stand-up Canoeing...SUC? Lord help us if we start using kayaks, too!

What’s It’s Like...

Stand-up has so many things going for it. You get a much better view of the water and scene all around. I was amazed at how much more fish and aquatic life I saw while standing up. It was like floating in air down the river. You also see much farther across the water and farther beyond the riverbanks. Reflections on the water also seem crisper — sky, clouds, trees — all nicer from this new “big picture” angle. But don’t forget your polarized sunglasses! They’re a ‘must’ for canoeists.

Stand-up is like riding a bike: when you’re moving, you’re stable. Actually, it’s a little like a lot of sports. It’s like snowboarding and windsurfing — with the footwork and body English that you can do. You can lean, bank, and cut a small canoe around obstacles. I also found it to be like cross country ski skating. I can get my whole body into it.

Now, with poling you get a lot of support just from leaning on the pole. You can put your pole in toward the bow and snub your speed or spin your boat around. Stand-up paddling is indeed tippier, since there’s nothing to lean on outside the boat. You have to keep your weight in the boat — no leaning too much on the paddle — but you can use powerful bracing strokes for support.

Sure, I got wet at first, but mostly it was just my feet. When you lose balance you usually just kind of step out (maybe bark your shins a bit). When you tip over while sit-down paddling, you usually get a whole lot more wet. Getting back in is easy, too: just step back in. In fact, getting in and out for obstacles is a breeze. I even enjoy a wade-stroll in a too-shallow section of river, leading the boat by the bow-painter like a dog.

It’s surprising how warm the river water is up here until November. I never get chilled during my shallow-wade strolls. I used to quit paddling in this colorful time of year because it was too shallow, so these stand-up modes really extend my season for “fun time in the water.”

Where there’s a lot of blowdowns, and you’re in and out of the boat a lot, I call it
Boatocross” or cross country paddling. But it’s easy to just hurdle the obstacles. It’s amazing how much easier it is than standing up and getting reseated every time you get in or out.

What’s fun is how when you encounter shallow obstacles while poling, you can stay in the boat much of the time. You just put your weight on the pole, unweight your feet and hop-skotch the boat over that washed log in one shove – shades of pole-vaulting, eh? Or you just move aft a bit, ram the boat over the log a way, trot to the front and see-saw the boat and pole/paddle away.

While stand-up canoeing on our local river, the leaf canopy is noticeably lower. It’s interesting now having my head halfway between the scenery and the water, rather than down close to the water. The river seems more like a trail to me, a lane through the forest.

One thing I haven’t mastered is stand-up paddling in waves. The SUP dudes do it, of course. And I even tried SUP on a board once and did okay. But standing in a canoe in waves is my next challenge. Of course, since there’s a time and place for everything, maybe it’s smarter to just sit down and keep the weight low when in the waves!... Or maybe I’ll learn to surf my canoe!

**What To Use For A Pole...**

Long paddles can be bought in many places now. But real canoe poles are off the chart unavailable, it seems. So make your own! Sadly, a real-deal aluminum pole is a very nice thing, indeed, but they just aren’t produced anymore. I have one and I’d hate to go back. But I’m sure you can get good results from quality wood poles or even a sapling.

There’s “googleable” info online on making a wood pole from either a closet pole or from a clear ash or spruce board. Or from a sapling, if you need help there. (A sapling will last longer and work better if you whittle off the bark and let it dry and air harden. You can fire harden the thick using-end.) There’s also online info for making an aluminum pole. You need to use a tempered, drawn grade, close to 6061-T6 structural metal, 1.125” dia., 0.58” wall – which, if you can find it, costs about $5/foot – probably $70 in materials when you’re done (two mailable 6-foot sections, coupler-sleeve, rivets).

There might be a couple places in New England where you can still buy pole-ends, (here’s one: http://nwwoodsmam.com) but you can make your own out of a copper pipe cap, hanger-bolt (wood thread on one end, nut-thread on the other), washer and nut. Some pole-ends have a ‘duck foot’ that spreads to keep a pole from sinking too far into mud. They collapse on recovery. The other end of a ‘real’ pole usually has a short rock stud for purchase on rocky bottoms. I find that Michigan river bottoms aren’t too muddy or rocky. My old maple sapling held up just fine ‘naked’. My aluminum pole is just plain pipe.

**Poling Technique.**

For both poling and paddling I tend to position my feet akimbo, snowboarder style. This lets me easily make dynamic shifts – and if I ram into something I won’t lose balance. The official poling and SUP style has the feet side-by-side – I’ll do that in more stable conditions.

I stand up tall and reach forward and plant the pole. When I’m really going for it, I shift my weight to my forward left foot and get the weight out there. Then I collapse onto the pole, drop my butt, and shove to the rear.

Poling with a sapling is rather one-sided. A sapling has a taper and is used thick end down, so it’s also one-ended. If it has a curve, it can be good to hold it so the curve lets you plant the pole further under the hull – this helps you go a bit straighter. I mostly use a strong right side, with left foot forward, but I can switch my feet and side, no problem. When poling ‘strongside’ on the right, I grasp the pole with my right hand at its balance point. Left hand about 3 feet higher, maybe 2 feet down from the top end. I don’t let go of either hand. After shoving, I recover, stand up tall, and do it again. When I’m going great guns, I push through with my right foot to get more distance and shift all weight to it. (I’ve also squirted the boat out from under me doing this.)

I brace my shin against the seat thwart, which I cover with a foam pad. The boat is trimmed a bit to the stern because I stand behind the seat of my solo boat – this keeps leaves from snagging on the bow.

For straighter tracking when poling one-sided, I stand in the right side of the hull, leaning it to the right, for right-side poling. This lets the curve of the tumblehome offset the overpowered right-side nicely. Combined with the light bow, a shove pushes you quite straight down the river. Even so, you often have to give a left-side push to keep going straight. To do this, I leave my feet and hands where they are and swing the pole over the front of the boat. As I plant, drop and shove, I often let go of the now impeded right hand and finish poling with the left hand alone.

I also have a “real” two-part aluminum 12-foot canoe pole. No
taper, so it works best with a windmill technique, swapping end-for-end as I pole along. I sometimes let go of the lower hand to get a longer push.

You use your weight more than your arms to scoot along. You "hang" from your hands. Keep elbows low and tucked in as you put the power on. The human shoulder is weak and prone to injury when elbows are high or extended.

I find that poling is as fast as race-paddling, when in shallow water. It's faster going upstream and a bit slower downstream.

When I hit water over 5 feet deep, I just paddle with the pole – it works well enough just swooshing it through the water. I usually also have my stand-up canoe paddle with me and switch to that for long deep sections.

It's fun trying various poling methods. Going hand-over-hand on down the pole is a good one. I occasionally do baton twirling when faced with overhanging branches that get in the way. Each style has its place.

I can really exercise the old arms, legs and torso with canoe-poling. One shove sends me maybe 12 feet down the river.

Compared to regular paddling, stand-up paddling has a longer stroke and slower cadence. I haven't timed it for speed yet.

It's not like I've given up on sitting down paddling, but even when I'm out just paddling", it's nice to occasionally stand up, stretch, and work the legs awhile! So I usually bring all three paddling tools along: pole, paddle, and long-paddle. The ones I'm not using get tucked out of the way.

Standing up in canoes, for paddling and poling, added a whole new range of motion and experience for me. I'm sure glad I stumbled onto it!

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With 1500+ titles

HANDY FISHING KINK

A New Fishing bob that does not roll off the boat seat or into the water, is made of a piece of soft wood about an inch square and about 3½ inches long. The sides are whittled to a tapered end. The small end is notched for the line. A loop

knot is made as shown anywhere on the line as required, the bob placed in the loop and the knot tightened. When the bob is to be removed, pull the knot loose, take out the bob and pull the line, the knot disappears.