**Launching and retrieving the skiff from Wormit slipway**

Here are some points for coxes to think about when launching and retrieving skiffs from Wormit slipway.

**1. Starting out:** Our skiffs are stored in the boat park on road trailers. Possible difficulties and dangers result from uncontrolled trailers colliding with the crew or parked cars on the level area and rolling at speed down the slipway itself. Thereafter damage to the boat, and injury to the crew, can occur when strong tide or wind pushes the boat onto the slip or into the trailer during launching or retrieving.

In winter, the cox should consider whether the parking area and slip might be too icy for safe launching. Also think about whether seaweed cover on the slipway might make it dangerous to launch a skiff.

Who makes up the crew – are they physically able/strong enough/competent enough to launch and retrieve the boat in the current conditions? **If not, then cancel the row – don’t be afraid of disappointing the crew.**

Take a slipway barrier key with you – there is one available in the clubhouse for each boat. Close and lock the barrier behind you when launching and when retrieving. After the row don’t leave the key in the boat, return it to the clubhouse.

Take control of the moving, launching and retrieving processes: have a plan in your mind about which crew member is doing what activity; tell the crew what you want and when you want it; make sure that they are all concentrating and listening to you. Make sure some of the crew have wooden chocks to hand to put in front of the trailer wheels just before the trailer reaches the water. If the tide is coming in make sure that the trailer is moved high enough up the slip so that it is still out of the water when you return from your row.

Last chance to check that all crew are wearing life jackets!

**2. The launching or retrieving process:** How you launch and retrieve can be affected by the tide and wind. A strong tide will push the boat across the slip as it enters or leaves the water. A strong wind blowing onto the slip may create waves that could turn the boat side-on to the slip.

**2.1 Launching in calm conditions**

If the tide/wind is not too strong so that one or two crew can hold the boat in position then it may be OK to get the remaining crew into or out of the boat safely and launch or retrieve without problems.

If there is a current coming onto the slip at an angle the stern of the boat should be positioned pointing directly into the current, which will reduce sideways movement of the boat while the crew get on board. If there is current flowing across the slip then the boat can be launched with this current over the side of the slip, making sure not to crash the keel on the slip edge as the boat departs.

Make sure that the crew are listening to your instructions! Get the crew in and out of the boat one at a time but as quickly as possible. Choose a bow rower who is agile enough to climb into the boat after pushing off, and to step out of the boat quickly when the boat returns to the slip. The bow rower should be strong enough to hold the boat steady against any tide/waves during launching and retrieving.

When launching, the cox takes their seat first and fixes the rudder/tiller in place. Then the stroke and No. 3 rowers are invited into the boat one by one. They should get their oars into the water quickly so that they can backwater to move the boat away from the slip as soon as the No. 2 and bow rowers have sat in their seats. The No.2 and bow oars can then be deployed, and the foot plate positions adjusted before commencing the row. If there is no tide, wind or swell then all four rowers can get their oars and foot plates in position before the boat moves away from the slip.

**2.2**  **Retrieving in calm conditions**

When returning to the slip the cox will turn the boat so it is approaching facing into the tide. Aim for the centre of the slip and make sure the crew are all listening to the cox’s instructions. Tell the bow rower when you are near the slip so that they can jump out of the boat immediately and hold it in position. If conditions are calm the bow rower can leave their oar in place for the No. 2 rower to bring onboard. If there is a swell that might push the bow oar off the thole pin then this should be brought onboard before the bow rower exits the boat.

After all the oars are onboard, the cox instructs the remaining rowers to leave the boat one at a time, with each one helping to hold the boat in place. The cox brings the rudder/tiller on board then exits the boat. If there is no swell/tide then two rowers can hold the boat while the others bring the trailer down the slip to the boat. If the boat is being moved by swell/tide then all five rowers should together carry the boat out of the water onto the slip before the trailer is brought down.

It is much easier to use the winch to pull the boat onto the trailer than to physically lift it. Place wooden blocks either side of each wheel, if you don’t have four blocks then place two in front of the wheels. Get the rowers to lift the nose of the boat as the winch operator pulls the boat onto the trailer. Make sure that the rollers under the boat are in the correct position, otherwise they can press against and cause the hull planks to split.

* 1. **Launching with a strong tide and/or in windy conditions**

If there is a northerly wind blowing onto the slip then this will produce onshore waves that will turn the boat side on in relation to the slip and might push the boat over onto its side. **If the wind is strong and/or the waves are large then consider cancelling the row before you launch.**

If it is windy but the wind/waves/tide are not too strong and your crew is sufficiently able, you might consider tying the boat to the side of the slip (the side that is most sheltered from the tide/wind) and embarking/disembarking the crew one at a time onto/off the boat.

Get two crew members to hold the stern and bow ropes. Hang the fenders outside the boat to protect it when rubbing against the slip. Push the boat into the water so it is fully floating and use one of the ropes to pull the bow away from the edge of the slip, then get the rope holders and crew to guide the boat alongside the slip. Tie both ropes using loops onto the mooring rings located along the slip. With several crew holding the boat steady the cox will enter the boat and attach the rudder to the stern. Then the bow rower will enter the boat and both the cox and bow rower will be given the retaining ropes, still looped onto the mooring rings, to hold while the remaining crew get into the boat. Once everyone is seated, the outside oars (facing away from the slip) will be deployed.

The cox will then release the stern rope from the mooring ring while the bow rope will remain attached to the slip mooring. Under instruction from the cox the two outside rowers will backwater while the bow rope is still attached to the slip. This will cause the stern of the boat to swing out into the water, to be perpendicular to the slip. The two other oars are then deployed, the bow rope is released from the mooring ring and all four rowers backwater to move the boat further away from the slip. The fenders are then brought into the boat and the cox directs the rowers to begin rowing normally.

* 1. **Retrieving with a strong tide and/or in windy conditions:**  For retrieving, the cox will move the boat to the most protected side of the slip, deploy the fenders and then slowly bring the boat in at a 90 degree angle to the slip aiming for a mooring ring. Be ready to order the crew to hold the boat so that it does not crash into the slip. The bow rower needs to be physically capable and willing to rise from their seat, step to the bow of the boat, reach out to keep the boat away from the side of the slip, then fix the bow rope via a loop to a mooring ring. The starboard oars are brought into the boat. Then the port rowers row normally while the bow remains attached to the slip. This will bring the starboard side of the boat up against the slip. The cox should use the boathook to catch a mooring ring and then fix a loop of the stern rope through it to pull the boat close to the slip.

The port oars are brought into the boat and the stroke and Nos. 2 and 3 rowers carefully exit the boat, followed by the bow rower. The cox should bring the rudder/tiller into the boat and then step out onto the slip. Once all five crew are safely on the slip the stern, and bow ropes are removed from the mooring rings but firmly held by crew on the slip. The boat can then be carefully pulled into the river past the end of the slip so the keel avoids the edge of the slip. Manoeuvre the boat onto the slip using both ropes, then get the crew to lift it from the water and onto the slip. Winch the boat onto the trailer as already described.