



Care and Feeding of the Wood Canvas Canoe

Your canoe was made using naturally rot-resistant cedar and specially treated mildew-resistant canvas. The canvas is filled and sealed from the outside, then coated with marine enamel paint. The interior is sealed with UV resistant marine spar varnish. The wood canvas plank-on-rib hull uses traditional methods dating back to the late 1800's and is a direct descendent of Native American birch bark canoes.

- Scratches do not pose a problem and they will occur with use – don't fret over them, they are the mark of a canoe that enjoys being used.
- Gouges that go through the paint and filler to the canvas need to be addressed. If you can see the canvas it means water will penetrate and eventually rot it (plus you have a slow leak). Seal the exposed canvas with ambroid glue and spot-paint as soon as possible.
- Holes or cuts in the canvas obviously need immediate attention. Long trips into remote areas require a patch kit including duct tape (seriously, it will work for a while), ambroid glue, and some canvas scraps for patches.
- Bare wood that has lost its varnish for whatever reason needs touch up using spar varnish (please don't use polyurethane – it's not compatible and will flake off).
- Cracked or broken ribs, thwarts, or gunwales need immediate attention since they are the structural components of the hull. These can be braced and/or spliced to keep the boat in service until it needs new canvas at which time they can be replaced. (Thwarts obviously can be replaced at any time since they bolt in.)
- Sand is your enemy. Keep it out of the canoe as much as possible. It's an abrasive on the varnish and works its way down between the planks becoming trapped between the canvas and planking adding weight and lumps.
- Water inside the canoe also works its way down to the backside of the canvas where a certain amount gets absorbed. After heavy or prolonged use this absorbed water may cause small pimples to appear in the paint along the planking seams (these will disappear once the moisture evaporates). If possible leave the canoe out in the sun upright (after dumping it out) so that the moisture has a chance to evaporate out the same way it got in. Turning it over will trap it, bake it, and take it longer to evaporate.
- Long term storage should be out of the weather if possible and certainly off the ground. Even varnished wood will absorb moisture if left in contact with the ground. If outside storage is your only option the boat should be supported upside-down off the ground on two level sawhorses or preferably anchored T posts, covered with a tarp, and tied down to keep the wind from flipping it up in the trees.

Depending on how heavily it's used and how it's stored the canvas should last between 10 and 20 years before the boat needs to be re-skinned. Typically the gunwales take a lot of abuse from paddles, roof racks, fishing poles, dogs, etc. All it takes to renew them is a light scuff sanding and recoat with spar varnish. Kids and dogs can put a good deal of wear on the interior (but canoes love little feet and paws). Surface scratches are cosmetic and will not affect the protective qualities of the varnish (4 coats). Touch up bare wood with spar varnish. If left exposed the cedar will turn gray and absorb water under the surrounding finish resulting in blisters. When the touch-ups become numerous it's time to plan a fall weekend spent sanding and varnishing between football games. If you've been good about touching up to protect the wood all you need to do is lightly sand, apply a couple of coats of spar varnish, and you'll be good for a few years. If you let it go and you're faced with bare wood, stains, and peeling varnish the only real solution is to strip the old finish, bleach the wood, sand, seal, and re-varnish. It's a nasty labor-intensive job that us builders avoid like the plague. Since you really don't want all those chemicals soaking down into the canvas, stripping is best done in conjunction with re-canvassing the hull. A little preventative maintenance every other season will prolong the life of your boat and avoid costly repairs. Even a heavily used boat will last for generations with proper care.