



Calgary

Bow River a chilly training ground for Calgary team headed to annual ice canoe race



The team has been racing since 1968

[Sarah Rieger](#) · CBC News · Posted: Jan 20, 2020 3:01 PM MT | Last Updated: January 20

Members of Calgary's ice canoe team practise on the Bow River Sunday as they prepare for Carnaval de Québec. It's a race the team has taken part in since 1968. 1:00

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One, two, three — and the five-man team is off, boots and cleats crunching the packed snow and their metal canoe skittering across the thick ice, the water of the frigid Bow River shining in the distance.

They're practising for Carnaval de Québec where, as for the majority of the last 51 years, they'll likely be the only Western Canadian team to compete.

- **Watch above to see Calgary's ice canoe team scramble over the ice-covered Bow River**

Team captain Barney Mcilhargey has raced for the last 28 years.

The former rugby player says you have to be a little bit crazy to get into the sport.





Barney Mcilhargey is the captain of the Calgary ice canoe team. (Helen Pike/CBC)

"We've lost people through the ice in Quebec and had to pull them out by their hair, I got ejected out of the boat one time ... it could have gone really south," he said.

He's geared up not just for -20 C weather, but with pads to protect him from constantly being hit by chunks of ice.

- ***Watch a clip of Team Calgary practising for the race in 1985***

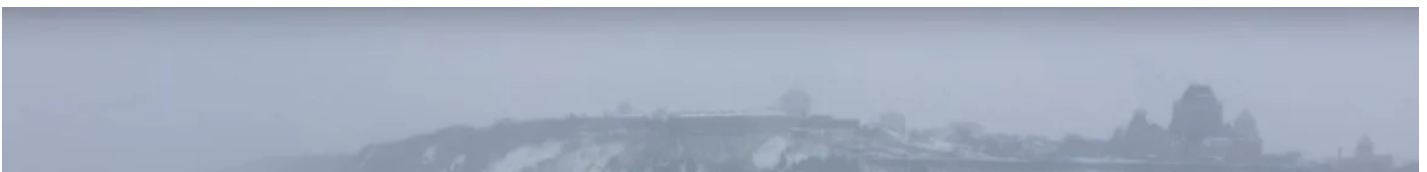
A team from Calgary enters the frozen-river canoe race — the carnival's most-watched event. 1:11

But despite the risks, which can include broken bones or even death, Mcilhargey said he loves the intensity of ice canoeing.

"It's quite a challenge ... it's something that's not done anywhere in the world outside of Quebec," Mcilhargey said. "The reception we get when we go there is amazing."

One key technique is scootering — manoeuvring the canoe across the ice with one foot in and one foot out — something the team was keen to practice.

A race can take anywhere from 30 minutes to a few hours, depending on the river's conditions and just how many ice floes there are to traverse.





While the team practises on Calgary's Bow River, the conditions are wildly different on the St. Lawrence River in Quebec City, as can be seen in this still from a video from the team from 2015. (Barney Mcilhargey/YouTube)

Charles Gauvin said while the Bow makes for good training grounds, he knows the terrain will be wildly different when he actually competes in a few weeks.

"The conditions are obviously unique to Quebec City because of the St. Lawrence River, the tide, the current, the team and all the other boats. Here, it's good practise, we get to have water — we don't have much water today though because it's been so cold this week," he said.

Dozens of teams will face off [in Quebec City](#) on Feb. 9.

With files from Helen Pike

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