CHAPTER THREE

THE PRACTICE OF SEA KAYAKING

Having got this far and discussed the history of sea kayaking and the necessary gear that we might use for this activity I am now at something of a loss, as to how to take my book forward. Other subjects that I discuss later are easy to package and label such as navigation, meteorology, charts and buoyage.
I now want to touch on a variety of detail that does not fall under one precise heading. In other words, if it does not appear elsewhere in my book it just might appear here.

BASIC SKILLS

Several years ago paddlers came to sea kayaking from a variety of canoeing disciplines undertaken on inland waters. The over-riding advantage was that most sea kayakers had a good knowledge of basic kayaking skills and had a fair idea of their limitations.

Today this is not always the case. Sea kayaking is attracting a lot of people who have never paddled inland waters. It is too easy to wander into a large outdoor pursuits retail outlet and walk out a fully equipped sea kayaker. Like a lot of outdoor sports it is not that simple, to disappear over the horizon without first having a good idea of how it is done. In other parts of the world organised coaching is difficult to key into and paddlers have 'learned as they have gone on', with, on several occasions, tragic results.

I believe that in this country, the British Isles, we have been fortunate in having a well developed coaching scheme to guide us along, in fact the Coaching Scheme, overseen by the British Canoe Union (founded in 1936) National Coaching Committee has been the very back-bone to recreational and indeed competitive canoeing. The whole country is divided up into regions, overseen by an Area Coaching Officer and the regions are again divided and have a District Coaching Officer. Together they form the local coaching panels all being represented by their Area Coaching Officer on the National Coaching Committee. Together all these people have developed and fine-tuned a coaching scheme for a graduated personal system of tests and awards leading to coaching awards which in turn qualify the taught to teach. These tests and awards have been modified so they can be used by sea kayakers and I shall say more about these tests near the end of the book. For a long time the B.C.U. COACHING HANDBOOK has been the "bible' for aspiring canoeists. In my view our excellent safety record enjoyed by sea paddlers is due in no small way to this well organised coaching scheme. Wherever one lives it is possible to readily find training and assessment courses for all levels. Some may say it is simple 'paper-chasing'; that is bureaucracy interfering with freedom. For some, may be it is paper-chasing, and so what!. Awards do not come lightly and paper-chasers often make excellent instructors. As for bureaucrats interfering with freedom, - well hardly as there is no enforcement, you can take it or leave it. Fortunately many paddlers take it and we have remained safe whilst enjoying the adventure to the full. Enough about, the B.C.U. Coaching Scheme. Let us look at some of the skills that go to making a competent paddler.

Let us start right at the very beginning. You have your kayak or canoe and necessary gear including spray deck and paddle and you fancy paddling over the horizon. There are several ways forward. Join a local club; contact the British Canoe Union (address at the back of this book) and ask them to nominate a local club, an instructor or their own Regional Officer who lives near you. There is no shortage of opportunity or guidance. Then there is the wonderful ***world wide web***. A quick search will reveal all.

For the sake of this chapter I am going to assume you have come along as an absolute novice. My intention is to describe, step by step, all you need to know to pass the B.C.U. Sea Proficiency Awards. If, like most of us, you are using feathered paddles you will almost certainly have a controlling wrist. If you are right handed this will normally be the right wrist. The controlling wrist hand permanently holds the paddle whilst the other hand acts more as a pivot for the paddle; that is, the shaft turns freely in this hand. It is the controlling wrist hand that actually rotates the paddle.

LAUNCHING AND EMBARKING

"The kayak must be floating. Balance must be maintained. The paddle must remain within reach. If paddle is used for support, the hands should not hold the loom outside of the gunnels. Paddle at least 50 m offshore into deep water -well out of depth". So reads the guide notes. I do not think it really matters how you launch, so long as it is the safest way under the available circumstances and it puts the least stress on equipment. At sea ''Three Star' level we are talking of fairly calm conditions. A confident walk to the waters edge complete with kayak and paddle, the kayak being placed in the water, the paddle being placed across the front of the cockpit ready for use is the ideal. If there is a shallow bank then lay the kayak along the bank, one hand on front of cockpit, the other on the bank. One foot in cockpit, lean across towards the kayak or you will push the kayak out and end up doing the splits!! At the same instant allow the other foot to enter the kayak and keep going until it reaches the foot rest. To achieve this, you must bend the other knee and let your 'bum' hit the seat. (See Diagram 12). A little practice is needed and of course this method will not work in very small cockpits, your knee will jam as you sit down preventing it from joining the other one within the kayak. The small, particularly the small round cockpit, requires that you sit on the rear deck behind the cockpit and slide your legs in first. To achieve this without capsizing, it is necessary to balance the paddle across the rear of the cockpit and the shore and holding the paddle shaft and back of the cockpit with one, or even two hands to balance the kayak as you slide into place.

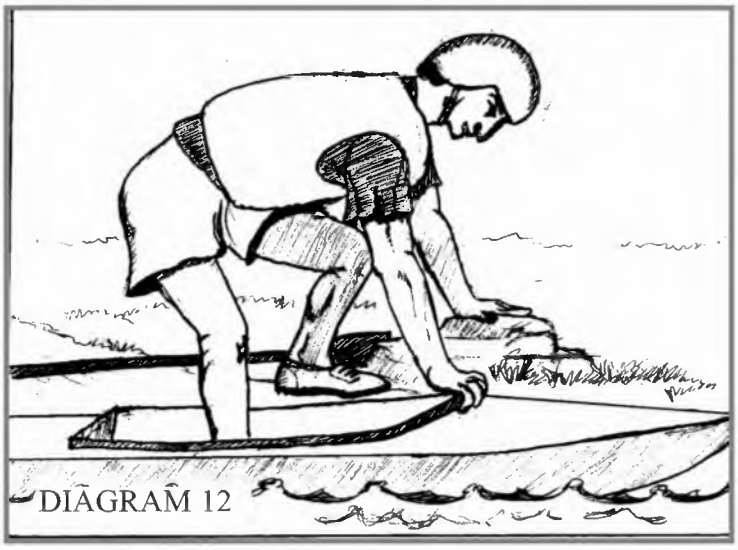


DIAGRAM 12

Often there is not a convenient bank or rock to provide assistance with getting into your kayak. More often than not you will be faced with a gently shelving beach. If this is the case, then place the kayak bows first directly into the prevailing waves and wind so that you can just get in without getting your feet wet (perish the thought). Once in, fit the spray deck around the cockpit and using either both hands or one hand on one side, and the vertical paddle on the other, push up and forward to launch and away. Keep your bows up into the waves, fail to do this and the waves will push you round and back up the beach.

Text book launchings are fine in 'text book' conditions. Sometimes difficult launchings can be thrust upon you. For example, you make a reasonable landing the night before but during the night the tide has shifted and the wind has risen and in the morning you have to get underway. Scout around for the best place. Quite often one end of a beach may be better sheltered than the other. Seal launching may be one answer, ideally a sloping grassy bank is presented a few feet above the water. Recently seal launches have become popular and dizzy heights are leapt from. Again the bows face the water, in you get, fasten the spray deck, make sure you have a firm grip of the paddles and push off.

Big surf can be a problem. I once saw three sea kayaks backwards loop in unison, a pretty sight like ballet in the surf waves; but hard on paddler and kayak.

Usually surf is easy enough to paddle through. If you put your head down and paddle hard you can penetrate most big surf. The upper arm curled across the face shields it from the blast of a falling crest.

FORWARD PADDLING

Reams have been written about forward paddling. Technically it is a difficult stroke to get absolutely right so that maximum speed is achieved in relation to the effort expended. This is not the place to dis- cuss trunk curl, blades close to the kayak, clean exit and entry of the blades etc. as this really relates to racing kayaks. Sea kayaking calls for an efficient stroke that is achieved with much less energy. To help in this, longer paddles are usually employed. These have the effect of lowering the 'paddling gear' a few notches. Much of the power should come from the back and shoulder muscles. These big and powerful muscles, once developed, will keep your kayak going all day (and night if you have a mind!). Sit upright, using a support at the small of the back. If necessary, lean' slightly forward when placing the blade in the sea and let the arms act mainly as a link as you pull the blade through the water, towards you to propel the kayak forward, effectively pushing the kayak past the paddle blade in the water. The feet will help. When pulling on the right and pushing forward with left hand let the right foot push on the foot rest. This ensures the maximum use is made of the back muscles. I am tempted to discuss the need to rotate the trunk (trunk curl) when paddling in order to maximise the reach and unwind everytime we propel the kayak but I suggest you talk to sprint paddlers and ask them about the most efficient forward paddling stroke and then work back to achieve the most comfortable and enduring paddling technique for sea kayaking. In short if it feels right it is right.

The B.C.U. guide lines read, ***"The examiner will look for correct dynamic seating position, correct entry and exit of the blade, ability to keep the kayak straight, sufficient power in the stroke to paddle against wind and tide (clearly this precludes the fast tides -up to 8 knots -that can be found in places round our shores), trunk rotation, correct width of paddle grip"***. As for the final factor, the position of the hands on the shaft. Start by holding the paddles as though ready for action. Hold the paddles above your head and check your elbows are at right angles. (See Diagram 13) If you find it more comfortable to readjust your grip on the paddles -no problem. If it feels right, it is right.

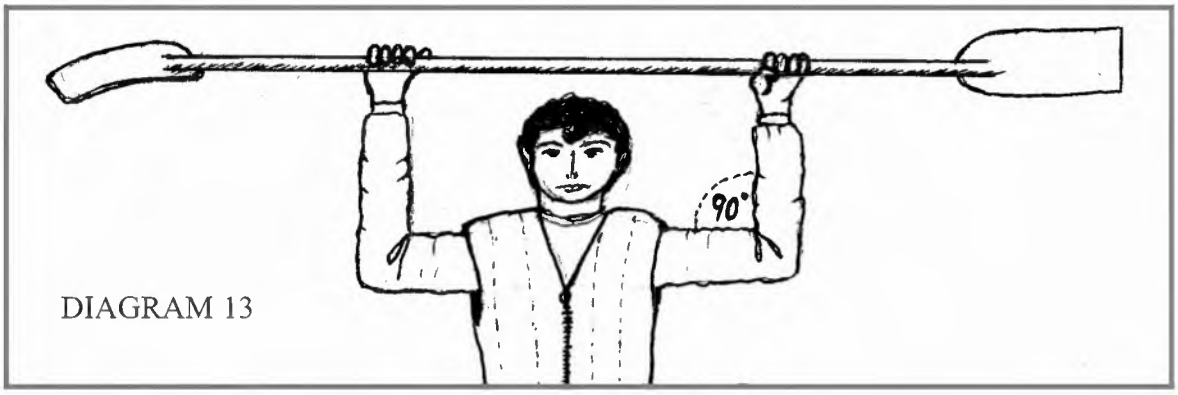


DIAGRAM 13

I always advocate holding the paddle in the correct and constant position for forward paddling no matter what paddling technique your are using. Whether forward or backward paddling, whether breaking in or out, whether rolling or supporting, what ever. This way you always know you have the paddle ready. On the other hand there is nothing against moving your hands up and down the paddle shaft to achieve improved leverage; there are quite a few paddlers who shuffle their hands on the shaft when undertaking extended turns of the kayak especially when combating a side wind. Some say that this is a standard technique.

Mind you, beware of the paddle edging its way one side or the other involuntarily so that a lot more paddle shaft projects beyond one hand or the other. Many years ago a German slalom paddler startled us all with his technique of purposefully and continually shifting his paddle grip to one end or the other of his paddle shaft; we called it the BREMMER SHUFFLE after his name and he used it to good effect in

competition.

PADDLING BACKWARDS

Easy! The reverse of paddling forwards. Just a few other points. Practice, as it is not easy to keep a direct course, As paddling backwards brings into play other muscles it can be tiring. I remember having to paddle backwards for ages to please the sadistic tendencies of an instructor. "My way of compensating for the flat and calm conditions", he explained. "Give you something to think about". He was right. You do have to think about it. Keeping a direct line, even in a sea kayak, does take practice. Always keep an eye on where you are going. If under assessment turn your head round and be seen to look where you are going. A backward glance every alternate stroke or so is usually sufficient. Finally, do not turn the paddles round so that you paddle backwards using the drive side of the blade doing the work in the water. In fact there is no need to shift your grip on the paddles once you are set up for forward paddling. Whatever you want the kayak to do can be done using the paddles in the normal paddle grip including screw rolling -of which more later.

In case you are unclear about the drive and non-drive side of the paddle, - the concave surface (some paddle blades are simply flat) should face you as you insert it in the water. It is so shaped that it 'grips the water and is simply known as the drive or power side of the blade. When instructing, make sure your students understand this from the onset, as you will be referring to the angle and face of the blade quite often. Flat blades may well have to be clearly marked to help the paddler be sure he is using the drive side of the blade.

TURNING THE KAYAK

The guide lines say, ***"Turning the kayak 360 degrees in both directions, by using alternate forward and reverse sweep strokes, Paddle blade just covered, reaching out to full arm extension, elbow slightly bent. Paddle drawing well into the stern with the forward arm pushing across the body. Body turning to place the paddle in the water at the stern of the kayak. If the kayak is fitted with a rudder it must be turned again in both directions, this time steering with the rudder only".***

In case you are in need of clarification of all this, here goes .....

Sit the kayak upright, lean forward, place the blade close to the hull as far forward as possible without straining, Start to lean back and move the paddle in a wide arc, as wide as you can, whilst still keeping the kayak upright. This is where trunk rotation plays an important part. Keep the paddle moving round until it almost reaches the hull at the rear and lift it clean out of the water. (See Diagram 15) Repeat, this by moving this same blade through the air and leaning forward to place it again in the water as close to the hull and bows as you can without over stretching. This is the FORWARD SWEEP STROKE and repeating it eventually will turn the kayak 360°. The REVERSE SWEEP STROKE is simple enough in that you sit the kayak upright, place the blade in the water as far as you can reach behind, drive side of the blade towards and close to the hull.

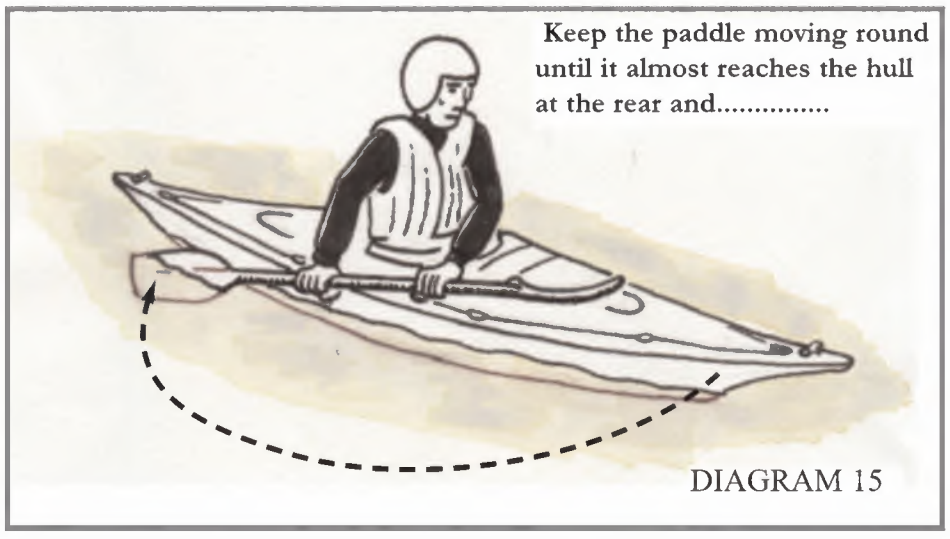


DIAGRAM 15

Move the blade in a wide arc until it reaches the front of the kayak and remove it before clouting the hull. Lift the blade through the air, turning the hips to allow you to again place the blade close to the hull behind you and repeat the process. And there we have a REVERSE SWEEP STROKE. A few of

these and the kayak will eventually turn through 360 degrees.

Let me talk you through the sequence of the combination of the forward and reverse strokes, as this will turn the kayak through 360 degrees in a fraction of the time, and in a much tighter circle. Simple


Photo A


Photo B

enough. Go through the forward sweep as described above, lift the paddles clear of the water, swivel on your hips and turn behind you on the other side to place the other blade in at the stern of the cockpit and away you jolly well go to complete the reverse sweep stroke.

Remember to keep upright, not to lean into the stroke. If you do you will end up by pulling some of the upper hull, even deck, through the water which obviously increases the resistance of the kayak to the turning motion. Do not confuse **LEANING**, which is body displacement, and **EDGING** which is the art of tilting the kayak using the hips.

You must also bear in mind that we are discussing the 'text book' approach to basic kayaking skills. In reality you will be leaning, swaying, drawing, sweeping, edging and paddling forward all at the same time as you, your kayak and paddle respond to the waves and wind.

Obviously, a forward sweep on right and reverse on the left turns the kayak anti-clockwise. Going for a forward sweep on the left and reverse on the right will shove you round clockwise. Elementary but give it some practice.

EMERGENCY STOPS

When I first learned to drive my instructor told me the most vital pedal was the brake. Before you learn to go, first learn to stop. Makes sense of course. Off you go in first gear for the very first time and suddenly you have to stop. Where, how, what, - bang! Jump in the kayak and paddle off furiously; and suddenly there is a swimmer bobbing up and down in front. How the hell do you stop in a hurry?
The guide lines say ***"Emergency stops, forwards and backwards. Reverse direction should be in evidence within 4 strokes"***. This might be difficult to achieve on a fast tidal stream, but let us have a go. Get up some speed and suddenly get the impulse to stop. You simply jab the paddle in a little to the rear of the cockpit on one side and then immediately on the other. Do this a couple of times and by the second or third jab, you should have come to a halt. I do not necessarily want to see the kayak moving in the opposite direction. A well controlled stop is all that is needed. Try to maintain the kayak in a straight line as you stop. The jabbing motion on both sides of the kayak, in rapid succession, should achieve this.

A quick tip - if your paddle blade is not vertical but instead is angled to the water with the lower edge

forward, you can 'screw' yourself over and under. An emergency stop in four strokes dissipates a great amount of kinetic energy. Get it wrong and you swim!

DRAWING THE KAYAK SIDE WAYS

The guidance notes say, ***"Drawing the kayak sideways in both directions. Top arm high, blade deep. The boat must keep a straight line sideways through the water in both direction"*** There are several methods of drawing the kayak sideways. I will start by describing the straight forward draw stroke.

Start by sitting the kayak upright, the paddles held in normal paddling position. We will assume we are going to draw the kayak to the right. Place the right blade, drive side parallel to and on the surface of the water. Then move this paddle into the water and towards the side of your cockpit at the same time pushing across your body with the left arm so that your left elbow is adjacent to your nose. This means your left hand will be well over to the right side of the kayak and as a result the paddles will be quite vertical. (See Photo. C). Ensure you do not 'trip over' the blade

Photo C

At this juncture, take stock. You are sat upright, kayak is upright, right blade is drive side towards your hips and close to the cockpit in the water, elbow in front of nose, paddles vertical. Your trunk will be rotated towards the direction you intend moving (i.e. right). Effective curling of the trunk allows for an improved reach. Now, keeping the left or top arm still, elbow fixed to nose, - in other words using top hand as a fulcrum, - turn the right wrist to angle the blade in the water so that the drive side faces bows. This places the blade at right angles to the kayak. This allows the blade to cut through the water as the right or bottom arm stretches to push it away from you.

When you have reached the maximum distance, whilst still remaining in the upright position, turn the right wrist so the right blade is now drive side towards you. (See Photo. D)

Photo D

Now pull the kayak towards the blade (or the blade towards the kayak, -it amounts to the same thing). By moving the right blade, which is of course submerged, a little to the right or left, you will keep the kayak moving towards the blade in a parallel course. When practicing this stroke you will find the kayak will turn one way or the other. Eventually you should draw the kayak side-ways so that it remains facing in one direction only as it moves to left or right during the draw stroke.

Remember this is a text book technique. Keep your elbow in front of your nose, throughout the stroke. Let your bottom arm do the work, the top arm remaining still to act as a fulcrum. A couple of points. Go steady as you first practice, as the paddle blade in the water may try to continue to travel under your hull and if you insist on hanging onto the paddle with the upper hand, you could just conceivably capsize. Practice this draw stroke on both sides, left and right. Remember the early sequence, paddles in normal forward paddling position, lie the paddles low across the cockpit so that the blade on the side you intend to draw is drive

side down on the water, kayak and body upright, elbow of upper arm in front of nose. Once I have a group mastering this stroke, I get them to put it to practical use by rafting up with each other, assuming their position in the raft by draw strokes.

There are two other draw strokes. The sculling draw stroke and high draw stroke. Before I describe them, let me say that a firm grip on the paddle shaft is essential. Not a ' grip of death' but a good firm grip with fingers properly curled around the loom. Often I have seen the bottom hand, the one doing the work, come loose so that the paddler looks as though he or she is holding a pen rather than a paddle. An unexpected wave or gust of wind will whisk your paddles away unless you have a reliable grip on them.

THE SCULLING DRAW

The sculling draw stroke takes a little more skill. The blade in the water describes a figure of eight. Start by placing the blade on the water, drive side down, and again move this blade towards the cockpit to within 6 inches or so of the cockpit which means raising the other arm so that the kayak, yourself and the paddle is vertical. Turn your lower wrist so that the leading edge of the blade angles away from the kayak. Move this blade forward as far as you can without straining then twist the wrist so that the other edge of the blade is angled (at about 30°) away from the kayak and then move it towards and beyond your body, again as far as you can whilst remaining fairly comfortable.

At this point readjust the blade so that the leading edge is angled away from the kayak and again move it sideways through the water as far as you can. Repeat this movement several times so that the blade describes a tight figure of 8 movement about 6 or so inches away from the side of the kayak. The angle of the blade is critical. Get it wrong and the kayak moves in circles. Get it right and at the same time as you are describing a figure of eight you should be able to pull the kayak towards the paddle in a steady parallel course. You may have a problem translating all these instructions into practice. Try enumerating each step, sit on a bench feet up and take a paddle (make sure you have a high ceiling) and away you go step by step. Get the sequence right in your mind and then get on the water and give it a go for real.

THE HIGH DRAW

The high draw stroke is an extreme stroke. Imagine you are paddling down a fast moving river, suddenly you see a rock protruding right in front of you. Miss it you must, if you are to avoid crunched bows or perhaps even getting caught broad side on to it with possible disastrous consequences. Lean right out, in fact throw yourself to one side and use your blade to support and draw you sideways at the same time.

Taking this stroke from the stationary position, sit upright, paddles held in normal way. Throw yourself to the right whilst lifting the paddles high, bring the right paddle down on the water, drive side towards the water. The blade should enter the water slightly behind you. At the same time you must support on the paddle to avoid a capsize and pull the kayak vigorously through the water towards the blade. It looks a dramatic stroke as indeed it is, and it may save you trouble one day as you use it to draw to one side or the other of an obstacle. Unlike the other two draw strokes, this one entails the kayak being leant right over on its gunnels.

There is a way to do this progressively. Place one blade out as far right (say) as you can, drive face down. Slap the water gently. Now place the other blade out to the other side and slap the water gently. Repeat, and on each repetition, lean further over. There will come a moment when you know that to succeed in regaining balance you must raise the arms high above the head and reach out as far as possible and instead of slapping the water you must lunge the blade into it and pull it inwards and down. A smooth rhythm can soon be attained, this way, that way, each recovery being the start of the next stroke. Your shoulder points alternately go into the water. It is impossible to state where this high draw action becomes an extreme recovery stroke and vice-versa. That is an advanced paddle action yet novices can do it straight away. Essentially this is a powerful draw applied to a running kayak

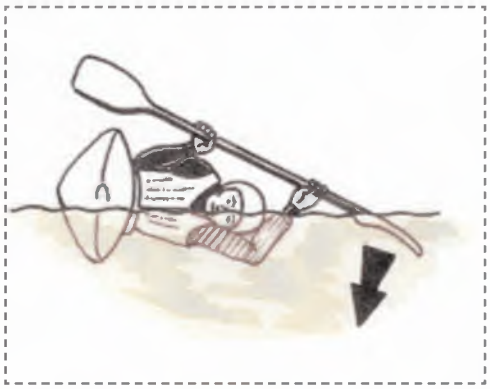
Now for a re-cap. So far we have embarked and launched and paddled away, done an emergency stop, paddled backwards, done another emergency stop. We have turned the kayak around in a circle clock-wise and anti-clockwise and we have learned to move the kayak sideways. By now, you should have concluded that you, the kayak and paddle are as one unit. You should fit the kayak, 'bum' squarely on the seat so that you do not slip around, both feet firmly on the foot rest with knees slightly bent. A good, though not deathlike grip on the paddle and with a little practice you should feel as though kayak and paddles are an extension of your very body. Feel the spray, the wind, rain, waves rocking your kayak, sky and clouds above, -do not tell me that life is always a drag, it has its' moments!
I digress. We still have some more strokes to cover.

RECOVERY (SUPPORT) STROKES
The B.C.U. guide lines say, ***"High and low recovery strokes to be performed on both sides. For high braces the water must reach the paddlers waist, with a strong pull and associated hip flick to recover"***. Let's take a look at this. First to say that I am not a fan of the low recovery stroke as it calls for a rather unnatural positioning of the paddles and the use of the back or non-drive side of the blade.

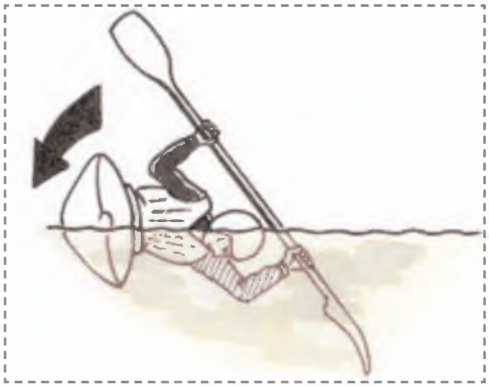
In my view there are only three strokes where the convex or non-drive side of the paddle should be used as the power side; viz. paddling backwards, forward emergency stops and reverse sweep stroke. Some do teach beginners recover and even scull using the back of the blade. To achieve this stroke you need to get the arms so they are above the paddle. Your elbows are high and facing the drive side upwards, you use the back of the blade on the water. Here is an explanation in a little more detail.

LOW RECOVERY STROKE
Feel a capsize coming on, - then simply use the drive side of the blade on the surface of the water to correct. Like every other technique, it is worth practicing. As a beginner, sit upright and then tilt the kayak whilst getting some support from your paddle on the surface of the water. Practice on both sides, particularly your weakest side (assuming you have one -most of us do). Then try this on the move. Then try paddling forwards and inserting a recovery stroke as part of your forward paddling. Racing inherently unstable 'Kls' often requires subtle support strokes to be inserted as part of the forward paddling. Done correctly and efficiently an observer would notice nothing other than forward paddling strokes being employed. It is just a matter of slightly altering the blade position in the water. I must tell you, though, that too many support strokes 'inserted' whist paddling hell for leather for the finish will not win you any races. Everything, but everything, must go into the forward motion and support strokes, subtle or otherwise, are not moving you forward. Just thought I would throw this in. Pretty obvious really. In ocean paddling we use this self same technique -a combination of forward paddling and support strokes -when in rough seas. In fact we combine these strokes quite subconsciously, not even aware we are doing so

HIGH RECOVERY STROKE
Here the elbows are below the paddle. Start by sitting upright. Turn the wrist upwards so that the drive side of the blade faces the water. Place this blade on the water. Now lean over and feel the pressure of the blade on the water. Many years ago we used to describe this stroke as 'splash support'. We would lunge sideways and crash the blade on the water to create a nice big splash. Looks a little dramatic, but a quiet and purposeful placing of blade in or near the water still allows you to go into a total capsize position and recover, in fact we can describe a good recovery stroke (or high recovery stroke), as the final stages of a screw roll, hence the need for an effective hip flick as you will recall from the B.C.U. guide lines above. The following series of illustrations show the procedure for effectively completing half a roll by using nothing more than a recovery stroke.



With yourself and kayak upright, prepare to place the drive side of the blade on the surface of the water



Let the kayak and your torso go over by 90 degrees so that you are partially submerged

Here's where you start to put pressure on your hips (hip flick) to start 'twisting' the kayak back upright.

Now, with a combination of hip flick and a downward pressure on the blade in the water, like magic, you spring back upright again. Well, that's the theory! !

THE HIP FLICK

What is a **'hip flick'**? The best way to describe it is to ask you to get afloat in your kayak and to grasp with both hands a fixed fitting (a bar at the side of the swimming pool, a jetty) which is about cockpit height. Make sure your grip is secure, and then lean yourself and kayak right over so that kayak is on its gunnels and your head and trunk is in the water, so that your face is facing skyward and clear of the water. NOW KEEPING YOUR TRUNK AND HEAD IN THIS POSITION, use your hips to twist the kayak as upright as far as you can. To do this you are flicking or twisting your hips. You will need to be 'at one' with your kayak so that you are fairly tightly, but comfortably, secure in your kayak. Your feet on the foot rest and as you go over on your side your uppermost leg helps the righting of the kayak (NOT YOUR TRUNK AND HEAD, WHICH REMAINS WHERE IT IS), by attempting to straighten as you twist or flick your hips. Now bring the kayak right over on its gunnels as you 'un-twist' your hips and KEEPING YOUR TRUNK AND HEAD IN THE WATER -YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE MOVED, level the kayak once more. This is the hip flick and if you think about it, an extreme recovery stroke,

where you really go right over with trunk, elbow and back of the head submerging is the starting point for recovery from our practiced hip flick.

When you have righted and lilted the kayak a few times when practicing the hip flick, you will need to come back upright. Think about this. Bring the hips up first, then your lower trunk, then your upper body and finally your head, all the time leaning backwards (or forwards if you are really clever). It is rather like an unfolding action. You need to resist the temptation to bring your head up first which means you are likely to come up bolt upright, i.e. stiff from hips upwards. This of course means you have a harder fight to beat the force of gravity and your hip flick is likely to be less effective.

Going back now to the high recovery stroke. You have gone right over and have a few seconds of support on your paddle before slowly continuing round into total upside down position or accomplishing a high recovery stroke. At this decisive moment you go into a hip flick. Instead, of holding a bar where you have time to think about it you are balancing on the paddle which is only going to give you a second or two before slowly sinking. Remember to "unfold' and lean backwards (or forwards) as you come upright.

When you really feel confident with this high recovery stroke try actually capsizing so that you disappear under water completely and then roll back up again by bracing on the paddle and hip flicking, - virtually a roll only you are coming up on the same side as you went over.

TURNING THE KAYAK ON THE MOVE

So far we have explained stationary stroke; that is, strokes that can be completed whilst sat quite still on the water. This stroke demands either moving water or you moving on the water, i.e. it is a moving stroke. If you try putting this stroke into execution whilst remaining stationary on the water you will in effect, be executing a high recovery stroke. Immediately this should give you lots of clues as to how this stroke should be accomplished, let me talk you through it. As always, sit upright, hand in normal paddling position. Paddle forward fairly rapidly. When you have a good head of steam up' do a good sweep stroke on, say the right. This gets the kayak starting to go to the left. Lean out to the left, tilting the kayak to the left (to assist the turning), place the right paddle out and to the rear of your left side drive side down. (See Photo. E) Now support on this left paddle and you will sweep around in a left arc. Once round as far as you need to go, indeed can go before capsizing, regain stability and continue paddling. This whole manoeuvre is much more readily accomplished in a short kayak with a rockered hull so do not expect to swing around to the same extent in a sea kayak.


Photo E

This paddling stroke can likened to running up to a lamp post and swinging round it by the hands while your feet come off the ground. For lamp post read paddle in that you should feel as though the almost upright paddle is being used to swing around. It does not have so much application to sea kayaking being most often used to break out of a fast stream, that is, breaking out from fast to slow water. You are 'bombing' along and want a rest or need to study the way ahead before continuing. You see a protruding river bank or boulder with calmer eddying water behind it. If you get your timing right and go for this high support type stroke you should end up neatly behind the boulder

facing upstream ready to take stock. It is necessary to get the timing right, as too late and you will overshoot and be swept on down too early and your bows will 'react' with the boulder and you will be swept down stream. It is worth practising. We practice this stroke on the Solent, the stretch of water between the Isle of Wight and the main land. The tides run fast past the buoys. We paddle fast with the tide so that we zoom past the buoy and at the critical moment we brace high to position ourselves neatly on the 'down tide' side of the buoy, bows up against the buoy. All good clean fun.

SCULLING FOR SUPPORT

Sculling for support is well worth practicing. It improves confidence, technique and 'hip flick'.
Here's how to do it. Refer back to Page 43 and my description of a sculling draw stroke. Take this stroke to an extreme position; i.e., instead of drawing the kayak sideways with the blade submerged at the side of the kayak, lean out and perform the figure of eight manoeuvre on the surface of the water as shown in Photo. F.

Aim to get at least your elbow wet (See Photo. F) and then your head. Then go over completely and come back into upright the upright position by using a combination of roll (to start you back up) and sculling strokes. You will have completed half a roll from the submerged position!!

Photo F

STERN RUDDER

The B.C.U. guide lines say '***The paddle blade should be placed in the water upright well back to the stern. Candidate should be able to keep the kayak running straight, downwind on small waves, with the paddle kept on one side of the boat***'. (See Photo. G)

Photo G

Let me explain this. In fact it is quite a simple stroke. Again it is a moving one that is only effective as the kayak moves forward. You can practice it easily enough. Start as always, sit upright with paddles in normal paddling position. Rotate your trunk and take one blade and place it close to the gunnels at the rear of the kayak so that the drive side is vertical and facing the kayak. This is the position for achieving the stern rudder. To

appreciate this stroke you need moving water preferably a wave that picks you up and carries you forward. On such a wave your kayak will usually broach or slip broadside to the wave and this could even lead to a capsize unless you counter by leaning into the wave and supporting with your paddle on the face of that wave.

To prevent this broaching, go into a stern rudder as the kayak propels forward. Lean back in order to place the blade most effectively, and lean forward when you need to make constant adjustments to trim as when riding the front of a wave. . The stern rudder will keep you running straight before the wave. If it fails, you have two choices. Either lift the blade clear and place the other blade on the other side of the kayak and stern rudder. Your other choice is to simply leave the paddle on the one side and change its angle. Angle the topside away from the kayak and your stern will move towards the blade, angle the top edge of the blade towards the kayak and the stern will move away from the paddles.

REPAIRING A KAYAK AT SEA

Many years ago, I took a trip across the English Channel with a few others, - well quite a few actually! Thanks to the fairly high number of paddlers and the interest of others in this crossing since we accomplished it, it has gone into the 'legend' of modern sea kayaking stories. I particularly remember this expedition for being the first time (there have been others) I was nearly run over by a hovercraft. Dangerous things; they appear in a mist of spray making a frightening roar and you cannot tell in which direction they are moving until it is almost too late to take avoiding action.

Avoiding action was impossible on this occasion, as I was repairing my friends kayak. A neat hole below the water line. caused by the pointed bow of a North Sea Kayaks-needed 'a patch. No need for anyone to get wet. The victim' clambers on the front or back of the 'repairers' kayak and once the holed kayak is across and up-side-down over the 'repairers' cockpit, a fairly good stable platform is achieved. The trick now is having the right material handy to effect the repair. Most commonly we use DENZO TAPE which sticks to a wet kayak and will hold fast until you can effect a permanent repair with GRP.

Just another quick story to illustrate the need to be ready to repair a kayak, in final preparation for a long crossing I was packing my kayak down on the beach. I had inadvertently included a full roll of denzo tape rather than the small amount I carry in my repair kit. I could not be bothered to return to my parked car so I threw it in the back of my cockpit. How fortuitous this turned out to be. Halfway over our open water crossing we stopped for lunch. The kayaks bounced together as we rafted in a sloppy sea. We had just set off when a shout alarmed us to one of our members sinking rapidly. His kayak (which had been badly made) had split at both front gunnels. It was only my full roll of denzo tape that saved the occasion. We had to wind it round the complete kayak to effect a repair to allow us to continue our journey. Now we always check the sea worthiness of each others kayaks before embarking, though modern sea kayaks rarely produce this sort of problem.

CAPSIZE DRILL

You may be surprised, at how even the most experienced paddlers are reluctant to capsize. Certainly beginners find it quite an experience, particularly if it comes unexpectedly. It is therefore best to purposefully capsize so that you find out that the worst that can happen is that you get wet and perhaps lose a little dignity. Before capsizing ensure the cockpit is large enough to allow you to tumble out (it needs to be pretty small to prevent this), that the release strap on the spray deck is accessible and ready to pull in order to remove said spray deck, and that you make a resolution to retain your paddles.

Here is what the B.C.U. guidance notes say, ***'Perform capsize drill, followed by deep water rescue with partners. Take charge of a rescue and then act as a capsized patient. Any sign of fear or panic and failure to retain the kayak during the drill will automatically result in failure of the test (Sea Proficiency Test -Kayak). The capsize must be 'accidental' with spray deck in place -either whilst paddling or in an attempted recovery stroke or sculling for support'.***

Let us go through the drill. First, understand that there is nothing wrong when you feel a little 'gripped' at the thought of purposefully turning over. There is merit in practicing in a warm swimming pool, of course, when clearly there is much less associated fear. Sit upright, ensure the release strap of the spray deck is readily attainable. Place both hands on either side of the cockpit, ideally having the paddle lying along the kayak between your arm and body. Now alter your centre of gravity by leaning right over. If you are retaining your paddles go over on the side you have the paddles. Lean forward and let your head almost lead the way as though you were diving in the water. This way you avoid a slap across the side of the face as your head hits the water with some little force.

Once you are completely upside down hang there for a count of 3 (slow count). This slow count emphasises that there is no need to panic and ensures you are hanging fully upside down ready to execute a 'clean exit'. Removing the hand not retaining the paddle from the cockpit side use it to pull the release strap of the spray deck. Replace the hand and, leaning forward, push with both hands. This way your upper body is pushed neatly out of the cockpit followed by your legs, which have not had chance to become stuck.

Many capsizing for the first time fight instinctively for the surface instead of hanging upside down. This means they are wriggling, often frantically, out of the cockpit parallel to the water surface whilst the kayak is trying to lie in the inverted position. As a consequence, legs often get stuck in the kayak as the paddler struggles free. Worry not, even this undignified exit usually works out with little more than a few minor bruises to the legs.

Having made a nice clean exit from the kayak, it. is simply a case of grasping the cockpit with one hand, retaining your paddles with the other, and breaking surface. Ensure the kayak is not disturbed as you grasp the cockpit. A good clean exit as described above means there should be little water in the cockpit. Should you try to right the kayak at all, then water will immediately flood into the cockpit making rescue and re-entry so much more difficult.

Here you are bobbing up and down by the side of your kayak. At no time have you lost control of your kayak and paddle. Now what?

Your option will be evident! If the shore is close by, simply swim to the bows, grab the toggle and swimming on your back, keeping paddles alongside the kayak, make for the shore, clamber out and proceed to empty kayak and re-embark. If you are some way from the shore, but other kayakers are with you, then wait for deep water rescue. This is described shortly.

On the other hand, you may be miles off shore and on your own. Your chances of survival, depend on your ability to effect a solo re-entry and roll. Comparatively easy in a swimming pool, dodgy in a rough sea that probably capsized you in the first place. Only once have I been in this position, kayaking alone along the Kirkcudbright coast of SW Scotland. I crossed from Balcarry to Silloth on the Cumbria coast (the Solway is one of my favourite areas) which takes in Drumroof Overalls. The Overalls presented as a noisy and "troubled' sea, nothing to worry about. I stupidly decided to don my cag. It had started to rain and blow a little. Over I went just as I was tangled up in my cagoule.... ..it was one that had to be fitted by pulling on over ones' head. Out I came and having broke the surface (with with paddle and kayak in control) I first had to overcome a "fit of the panics'. Soon I was swept out of the Overalls and into calmer seas and

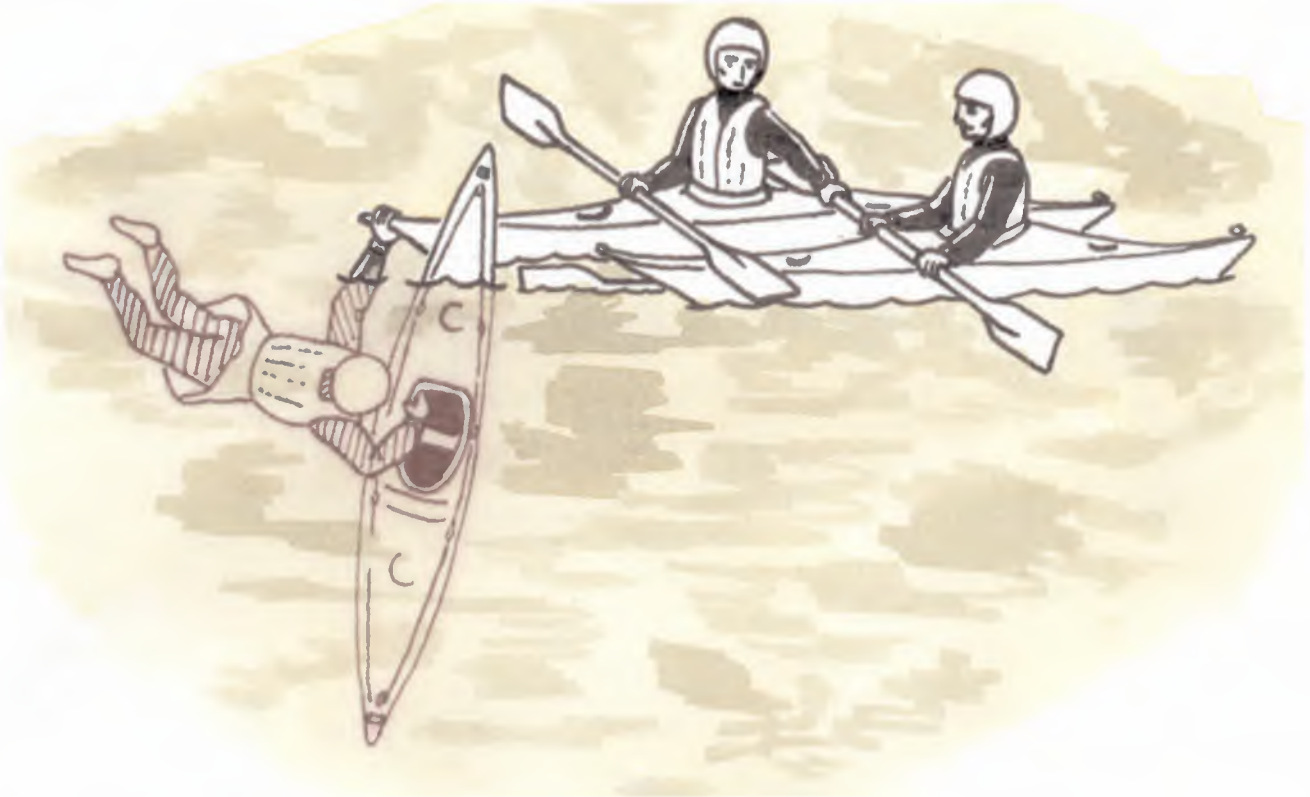
managed to re-enter the cockpit, roll up, pump the cockpit dry and paddle hard to warm up. A sobering experience and one which made me grateful for the many practice sessions I had previously undertaken.

DEEP WATER RESCUES

Deep water rescue techniques are fine in fairly reasonable conditions. If a strong group finds itself in really rough conditions then I can tell you that it is either a self rescue by rolling or a very chancy business. I have just returned from paddling Isle of Mull, West of Scotland. Our final days paddle was a five mile stint back to Oban on the mainland. We set off in windy conditions. Soon we were hit by a continuous run of squalls that blew up to Force 8 and 9, (not our estimate) and I can tell you that no amount of technique would have pulled us out of this incident had we actually had one!

Having said this, deep water rescues have their place. Just do not rely on them absolutely to get you or your group out of trouble should you get into really rough condition.

Modem sea kayaks are unlikely to ever get waterlogged. Efficient bulkheads and hatches will ensure that only the cockpit can take in water. Should your kayak ever become that full of water that an end sinks downwards and the other end points skywards, then your have a 'Cleopatra's Needle' which looks like this.....



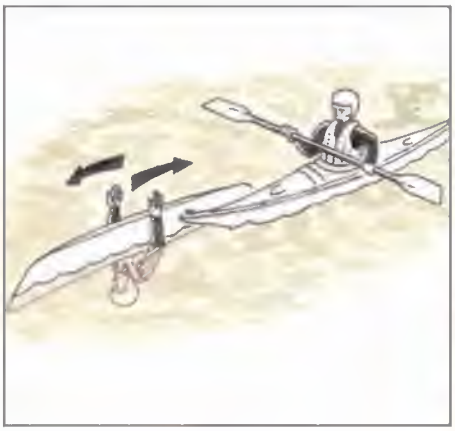
ESKIMO RESCUES

The early Inuit kayakers used to often work in pairs. Even in large groups they were usually paired up, constantly ready to assist each other. One form of assistance was that given to a capsized kayaker. It was imperative that he remained in his kayak, indeed, it was often very difficult to extricate him from the cockpit, he being so tightly wedged in and clad in his kamilaika (water proof cag from head to cock-pit coaming). Under these restrictions the capsized kayaker would hang upside-down and slowly move his arms above water level to and fro in the hope of attracting someone's (usually his partner") attention. His companion would quickly present the bows of his kayak to the capsized kayaker so that he could grab the bows and lift himself upright.

The rescuer has to approach the capsized paddler at a fairly acute angle to prevent spearing either the upturned kayak or the kayakers wrist. The capsized paddler will feel the bows of the rescue kayak with

the hand on that side. He should then bring his other hand over, and by using both hands and employing a 'hip-flick' he rights himself. The rescuing kayaker may well have to paddle gently forward during the rescue to prevent being pushed away. I have just described the bow-presentation.

Another way is to come alongside the upturned kayak and kayaker, place his paddles over his cockpit and upturned hull of the capsized kayak and reach for the hand of the capsized kayaker in order to place it on the paddle shaft. The capsized kayaker will bring his other hand over and uses both hands to bring himself up. This can be shoulder dislocation country so be careful.

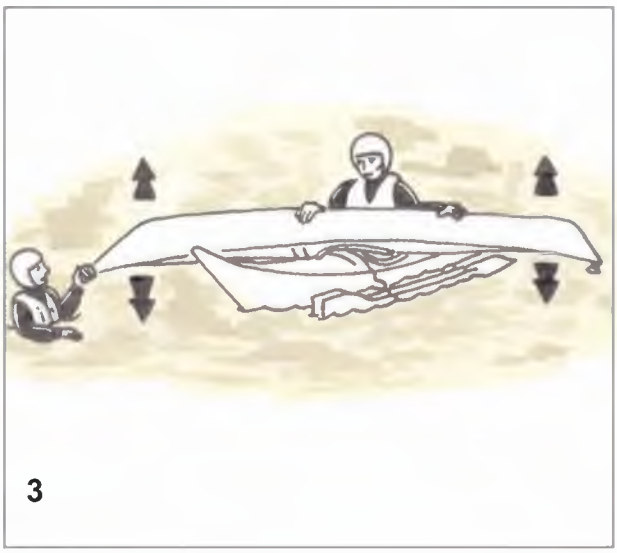


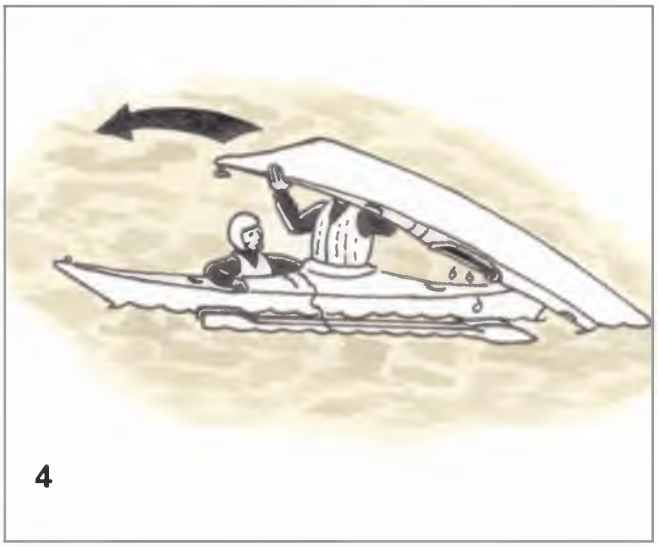
Photographs by Christian Gabard

THE 'X' RESCUE

Let me talk you through this simple Rescue, known as the 'X' rescue because at one stage during the rescue the two kayaks form an 'X'

You are presented with an upturned kayak and a swimmer, hopefully both still in contact with each other. Grab the BOW end of the upturned kayak and have the swimmer/kayaker, henceforth to be called the "patient', hold on to your bows. Hopefully he will still be retaining his paddles. You need a firm grip on the patients upturned kayak so your paddles should be safely stored in your paddle park. Failing this, give them to the patient to take care of, but only if you can trust your patient to truly hang on to them. I prefer to have them handy in a park in case I need to roll up from a capsize myself. Once you have a grip on the kayak you are relatively stable as it should help to provide a more stable platform. Swing the kayak round so that it presents at an angle of 90 degrees to your kayak. Lift the bows gently and carefully. This should spill water out of the cockpit as it is flushed down, getting no further than the rear bulkhead before spilling out. Now pull the kayak over yours to form the 'X' referred to just now. I always right the kayak as I pull it over mine. This means I am putting a smooth hull over my spray deck and cockpit rather than a deck full of fittings and perhaps even gear.





Having got the kayak balanced on mine, I then reach over for the far side of the cockpit and invert the kayak ready to rock it empty of water. If the rear bulkhead is close to the cockpit you should not have to pull the kayak over yours. Simply lifting the bows to spill the water and righting the now empty kayak should be quite sufficient.

Having emptied the kayak, place it alongside yours, stern facing the patient (your bows). Instruct him or her to hand across his paddles. Using both sets of paddles to straddle both kayaks to form a stable platform, have the patient place an arm over each kayak and move forward between the kayaks. As he approaches his cockpit he should be told to lean back as he brings his feet up to guide them into his cockpit as he continues to lean back (to keep his centre of gravity low) and shuffle forward to eventually lift his backside up and into the cockpit.

All this time you are holding the two kayak platforms steady. To do this you should hold both sides of the patients cockpit coaming so that both sets of paddles lie across both kayaks and under your arms. In extreme circumstances you should lie low over the patients cockpit with your arm that is on the other side from the patients' kayak used to twist over and under the paddles as you hold the nearside coaming in such a way that you lock securely together patients kayak and both sets of paddles. This really does provide a strong platform. Be sure you do not obstruct the patient as he clambers aboard. Words of encouragement are well in order when undertaking this procedure for real. A capsize and rescue can be quite an endurance when it comes unexpectedly, even in relatively calm conditions.

A word of caution. It is my experience that if rough conditions are responsible for capsizing a member of your party then these same conditions will almost certainly capsize him/her again after a rescue. A couple of capsizes and rescues are enough to un-nerve anyone and you should be looking for a way out. If the group are of similar ability you often have several capsizes once you've have had one. It seems a psychological problem emerges once the first capsize occurs. “Union capsize. One out, all out”(Geoff Blackford)

Later in this book I will describe how deep water rescues can be practiced in quite life-like circumstances in a swimming pool.

Remember that when you are the rescuer you are in charge and should therefore know what you are doing and be concise in your instructions to the patient.

RESCUING A WATER LOGGED KAYAK

You may have to rescue a water logged kayak. This can be tricky. With the kayak alongside yours, lift the cockpit with both hands so that the kayak slowly spills water. The trick is to keep the kayak horizontal. The water in the kayak has a tendency to flush to one end or the other, so that the kayak sinks at one end and rises at the other. Water then actually enters the kayak and you could be fighting a losing battle. The patient can help by either holding one end of his kayak as he hangs onto your bows or he can swim round to the side of your cockpit to hold your kayak to counter the weight of his kayak as you slowly pull it clear of the water.

Having got most of the water out you then go into the X rescue as described above. Rescuing a sea kayak with a water logged bulkhead is a real problem.

Whilst undertaking a particularly long crossing many years ago with a friend, I noticed he was slowing down. His rudder attachments were leaking and his rear hold was full to the extent that even his rear deck hatch was virtually under water. He had to take a swim whilst both of us struggled to pull his kayak over mine. Only a freak wave at a critical point allowed, us to achieve this. We removed the hatch, turned the kayak over and rocked the water out. It was a close call. We turned back and had to stop every 20 minutes to sponge the rear hold to prevent a re-occurrence. The point of this story is that we should be ready to deal with a whole range of unforeseen incidents.

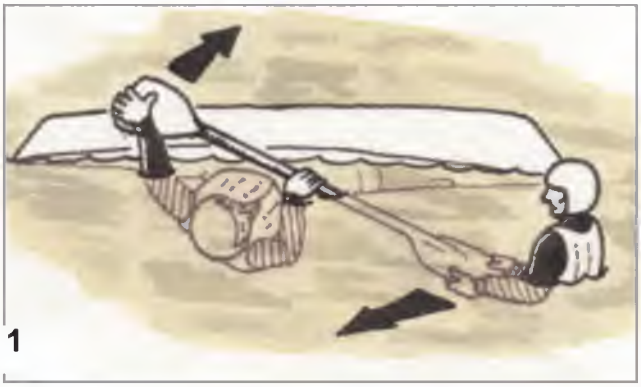
There is great emphasis these days on preventing back injury/strain by employing effective lifting techniques. Lifting a heavy weight from the sitting position can be fraught. Use slings when possible and always try and get assistance.

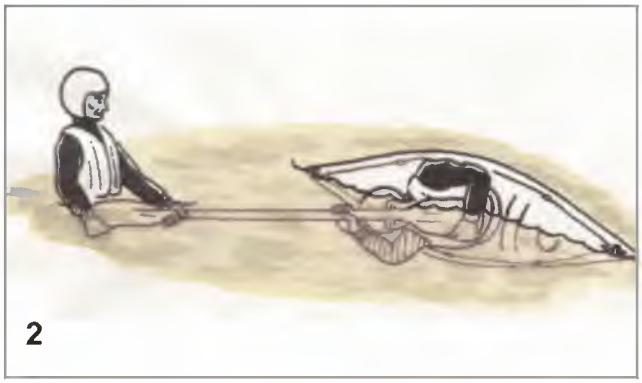
THE ROLL

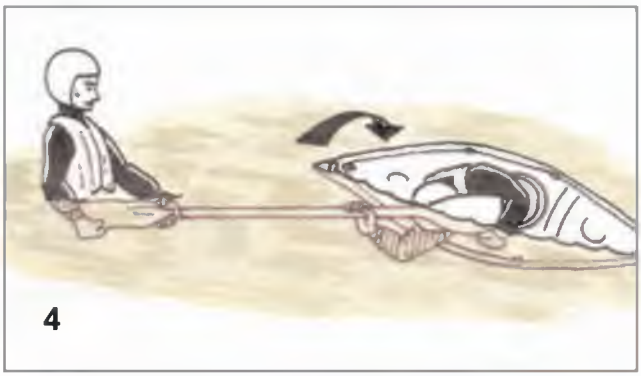
Clearly this is the finest self rescue at sea. The Innuit developed the roll purely for survival purposes and sea kayakers have perfected it for this same purpose. I remember being invited to take part in my first long crossing. "Can you roll?" asked the leader "Yes", I replied. "First time, every time?" he pressed. Again I replied, "Yes", but with much less confidence. In fact I was beginning to wonder whether long crossings were for me. ***'First time, every time'***. This must depend on the prevailing circumstances. No problem in a pool but in big breaking seas being beaten by high winds, then can you be so sure? I wonder!! Fortunately I was never put to the test and we had a comfortable crossing.

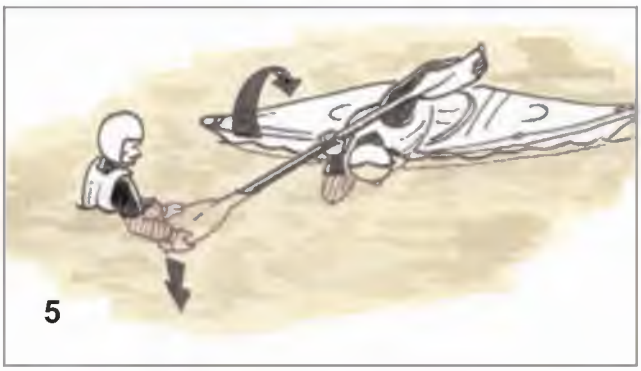
I refer you back to my description of RECOVERY STROKES and my explanation of the HIP FLICK. I spent some time on this technique and recommend you master it before trying for a roll.

Here are a series of illustrations showing how to start the process off when teaching another to roll for the first time. You need to be in water deep enough to stand up in whilst instructing/assisting but also deep enough to allow the kayaker to roll without clouting his head on the bottom of the pool or getting stuck in the mud! Before you have got to this stage you will have spent some time on the correct wind up position the paddler needs to adopt and also on how the hip flick is achieved. I like to use the edge of the pool. The student uses this edge instead of paddles whist he/she flips the kayak over and back again using their hips.









The Roll is certainly worth practising in a pool where it is comfortable, safe and possible to see and be seen in the clear water.

THE WIND UP

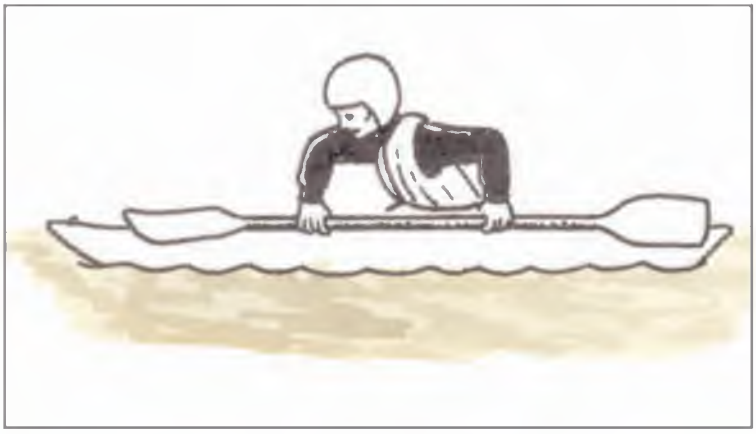
The wind up for the roll is the next step, once you have mastered the HIP FLICK, in teaching the PAWLAWTA ROLL. I used to teach the wind up for the roll by asking the student to hold the paddle in the extended position. If right handed the left hand would hold the very end of the blade and the right hand hold the shaft just short of the mid-way point.

Now I go straight into the screw roll, which entails holding the paddle in the normal paddling position. If my student is right handed I get him to roll to the left. See the Photo J

Photo J

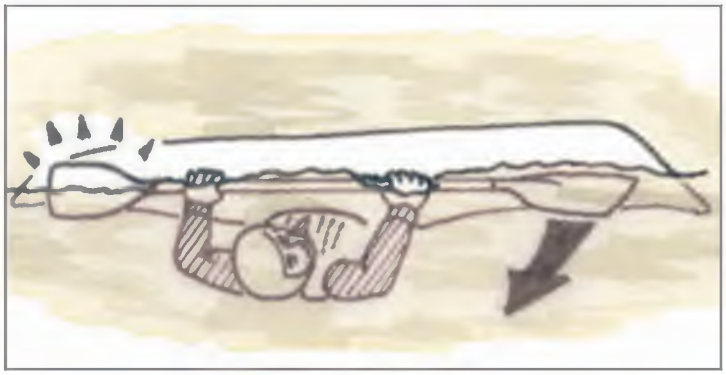
Here is a step by step account: -

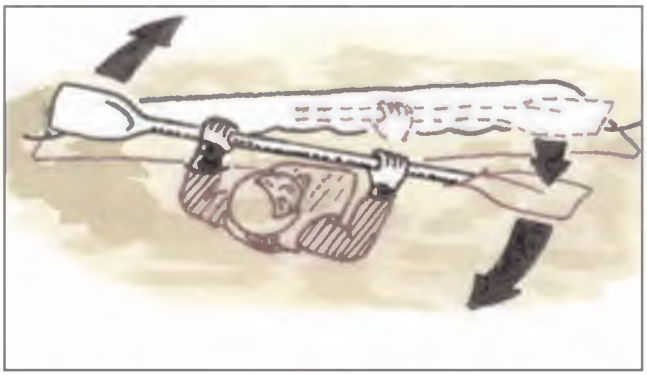
1. Sit upright in the kayak with feet firmly on foot rest and knees just slightly forced against the upper deck. Spray deck in place.



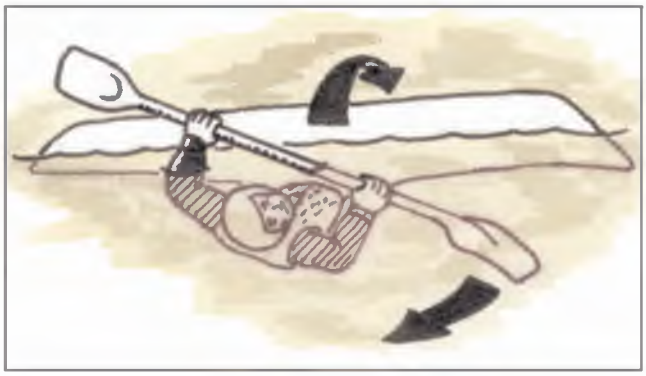
2. With hands on the paddle shaft, as though ready to paddle away, move the paddles to your left side so they lie along the top of the left side of the kayak. The blade in front should be drive side up and parallel to the water surface. The rear blade is at right angles to the water surface, drive side facing away from the kayak as it lies fairly tight against the gunnels, to the rear of the kayak. Now "cock' your right wrist by turning the hand inwards. This helps to ensure the blade unwinds correctly as you start the roll up. This is the wind up position.

3. Lean forward and capsize, making sure you retain the wind up position. Most go wrong at this stage because they let the paddle 'wander' and fail to remain locked into the wind up position. The paddle blade at the rear gets fouled up on the kayak and the blade at the front starts to wander and drop deeper in the water. As a consequence the opportunity to perform a sculling action across the surface of the water to bring you back up again is lost.



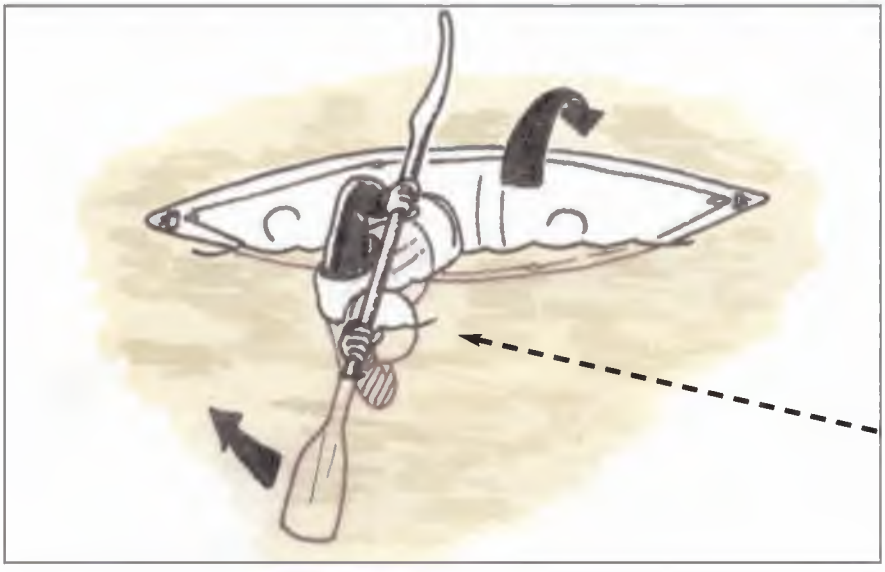


4. Once up-side-down the paddles are, - looking down from the roof of the swimming pool, -on the right side of the up-turned kayak. Push the right arm up towards the hull so that the right blade breaks the water surface. Bring the right arm rapidly downwards. Looking from the pool roof the blade will have been seen to lift clear of the water and slap the water surface. You should feel lots of resistance. If so, you have the paddle blade in the correct position to start the roll.



5. Now unwind to roll up. To achieve this let the right hand move the blade across the surface of the water, or close to the surface of the water in an arc. The blade needs to be angled so that it retains its' height In the water. If it is angled incorrectly (leading edge down), it will sink and make the roll at best difficult, at worst fail. Now you should understand the need to cock your right wrist and slap the water surface as described in the paragraph above.

6. Simultaneously with 5 above pull with the right arm and go for the hip flick. Before the blade is at right angles to the kayak you should have rolled up right. It all happens so much easier if you are leaning forwards or backwards over the deck of the kayak. This lowers the centre of .gravity and less resistance is provided by kayak and kayaker against the water.



7. What about the left hand, arm and blade? Do not worry too much about these. Suffice to push slightly away with the left arm to prevent the left blade becoming "tangled' with the kayak. Otherwise concentrate on getting everything correct on your right and let you left end follow through.

Watch for shoulder dislocation; keep arm/paddle shaft in front of face. Try thrusting forehead into crook of arm.

Peter Bray performing a rolling demonstration ***Photos are numbered in sequence***

I have made the roll sound easy, particularly at paragraph 6 above. Once you have mastered the roll you will realise just how simple it is to complete. Like learning to ride a cycle. You may fall off a couple of times but soon you will forget how you had to learn and keeping balance on your cycle becomes the most natural thing. I do not wish to make it all sound as easy as falling off a log. You are up-side-down and totally immersed in water, both highly unnatural positions. You need to re-orientate your brain and do so in a limited time before you run out of air

Life becomes so much easier with one to one instruction. I usually grab my students' right blade and guide it through the water for him as this is the bit that often lets the student down. He will fail to move the blade in the right direction and/or will let it sink. The business of pulling with the right arm and hip flicking up is purely a matter for the student to understand and achieve.

THE REVERSE SCREW ROLL

This roll is the one to use in heavy surf. If you get it right, the force of the surf wave does all the work. All you need to do is adopt the right position and up you come. Well, this is the theory!

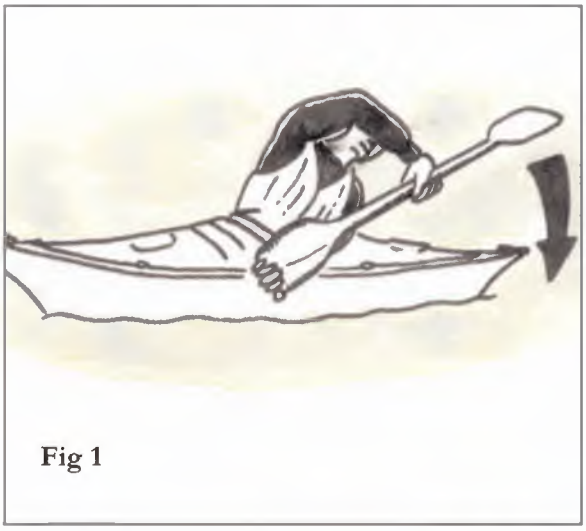


Fig 1

I have illustrated the paddler using the extended paddle position as he prepares to go for this roll. In 'real life' there would not be time for this and the roll would be effected with the hands on the paddle shaft in the usual paddling position. So, it is a case of leaning back, cocking the wrist on the paddle shaft ready to unwind. The drive side of the rear blade is facing upwards. over you go and .....

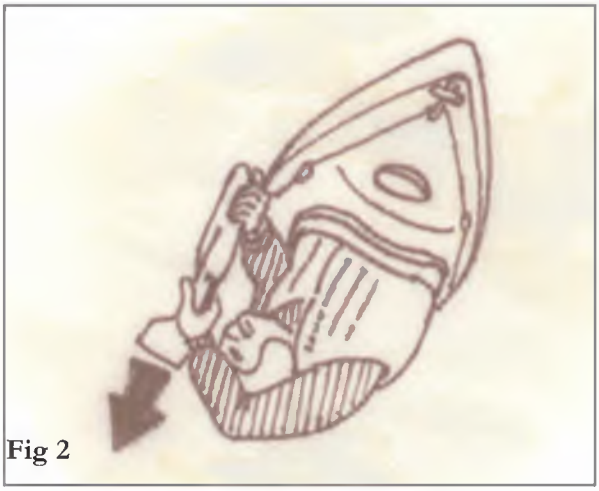
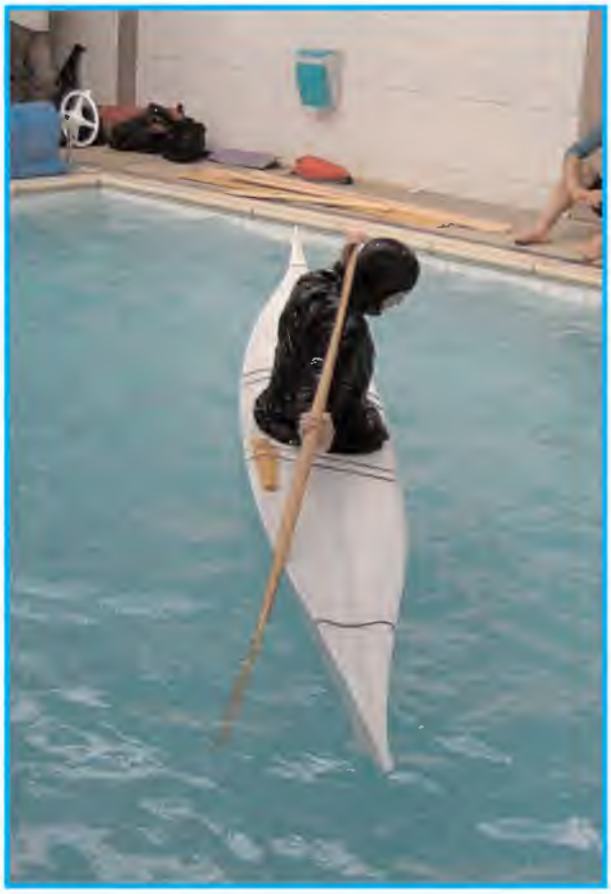
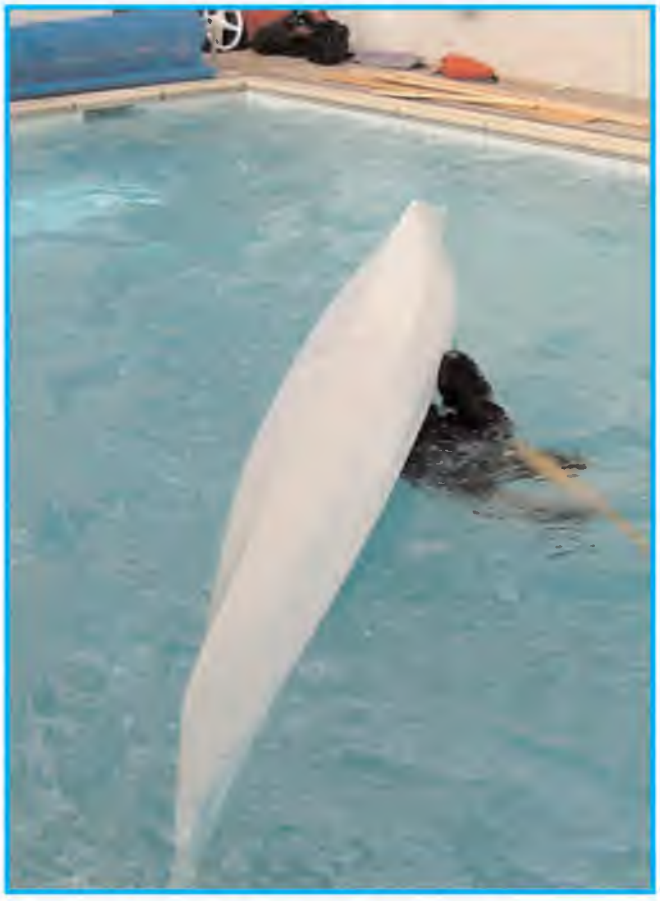


Fig 2

..... keeping everything locked into position until completely upside down you should ensure that the paddle blade is ready to scull across the surface (or close to the surface) of the water as you prepare to unwind your body whilst at the same time going for the hip flick.





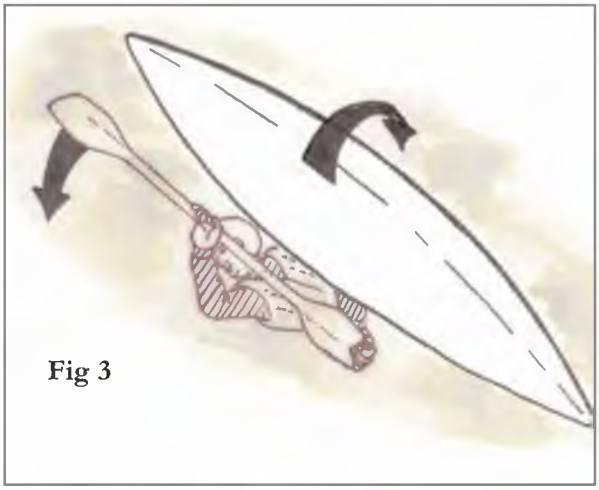


Fig 3

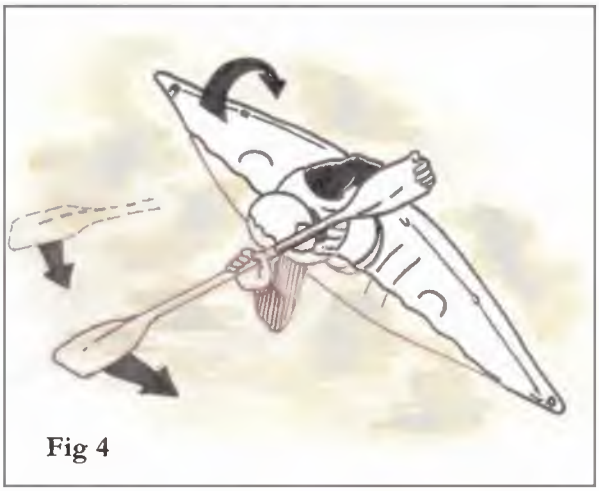


Fig 4

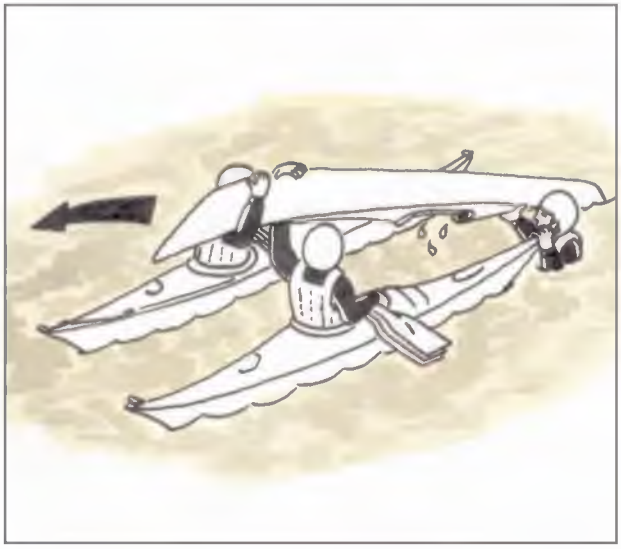
OTHER RESCUES

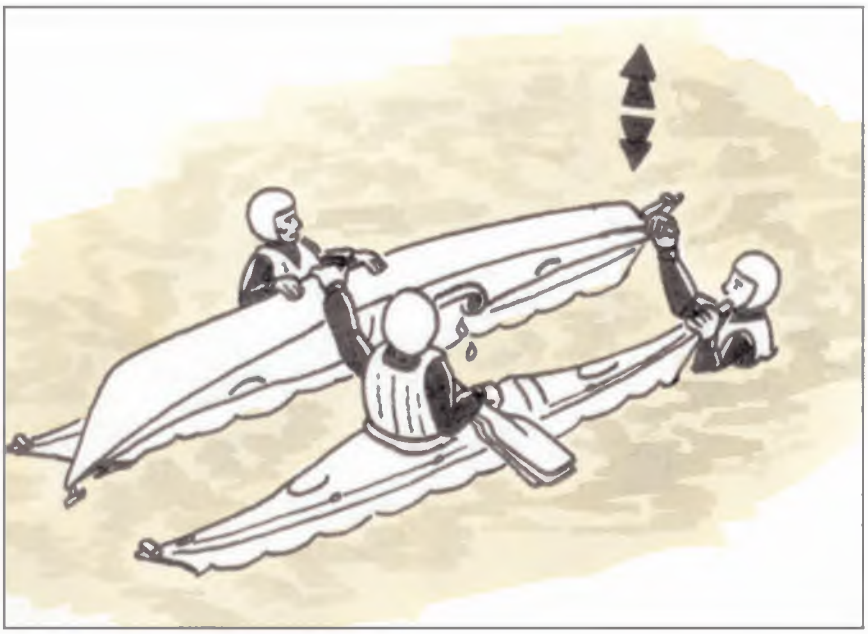
There are other deep water rescues and these are more fully explained in other sea kayaking books. The X rescue is in my book, the only one worth completely describing. It is effective, relies on you alone to complete and is quite easy.

For the record there is the rafted X rescue. Here two kayaks raft together before rescuing a third. There is no requirement for a raft. If the conditions are rough any extra stability provided is more than offset by the likely damage done to the two rafted kayaks as they bounce together.

I recall stopping for lunch in the middle of the English Channel. One of the party had a home made slalom type touring kayak. When we broke the raft on completion of lunch he discovered the deck and hull had parted company from cockpit to within six inches of his bows. This was caused by weak joins between hull and deck and by the knocking the kayak received during the rafting up for lunch. If I had time I would tell you how we extracted ourselves from the predicament but his is another story.

There is also the 'HI' or Ipswich method of deep water rescue. Again - for the record - it consists of two kayaks coming to within 1 or 2 ft of each other, parallel and facing the same way. They place their paddles and those of the patients across both their cockpits and draw the upturned kayak between them and over the paddles, rock the kayak dry before turning it right way up and having the patient come up between his and a rescuers kayak to enter his cockpit. This rescue can place undue stress on the paddles, particularly if there is a lot of water in the capsized kayak and maintaining a split raft as described can be difficult in rough seas.





The H rescue is called such because an 'H' shape is formed by the kayaks during the rescue. The verticals of the 'H' being the rescue kayaks with the middle or horizontal being the capsized kayak. This rescue can be useful for righting and emptying double kayaks which are increasing in popularity. I believe it has limited application. Doubles rarely capsize and apart from which, completing such a rescue in rough seas can be very difficult. The rescuers themselves have to be careful not to capsize as they lift their end of the upturned kayak.

'ALL IN' RESCUE

For the 'ALL IN' rescue situations all have capsized. Assuming there are three in the party. One must take immediate charge and shout clear and concise instructions. Let us call each kayak by a letter of the alphabet -ABC -with 'A' taking charge.

'A' must first decide who should be the first to be rescued. It might have to be the one suffering from hypothermia. It should really be the most competent, because he has to enter his kayak virtually unaided before proceeding to rescue his friends.

I shall take it that 'A' will be the first to enter his kayak.

Immediately on capsizing, all three must come together with their kayaks, or the prevailing conditions may well and truly separate them.

1. 'C' stays at the end of 'B' s kayak and holds the three sets of paddles and his own kayak.

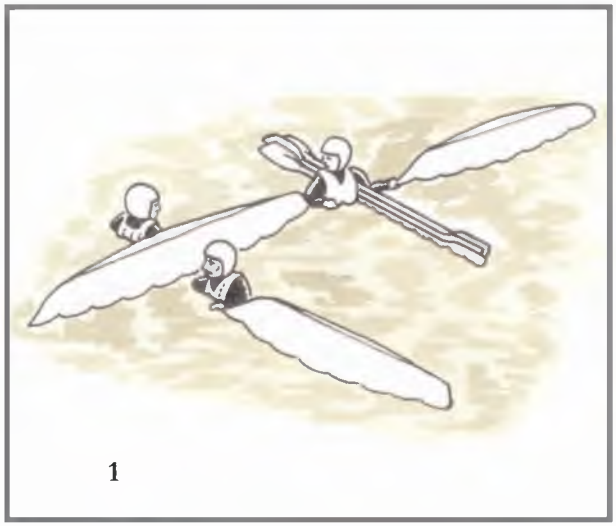
2. 'A' and 'B' carefully pull 'A's kayak over 'B's. They both grab 'B's upturned kayak by the side of the cockpit furthest away from them, which effectively locks the kayak in the inverted position. 'A' will then, using a free hand, pass his upturned kayak over the top of 'B's upturned hull so that 'B' can reach it to pull it right over. Between them they pull the kayak as far as necessary to allow it to see-saw and empty of water.

3. Once empty, it is righted, and placed alongside 'B's upturned kayak. 'B' comes in between the two kayaks (all the time 'A' is hanging onto the end of 'B's kayak), puts an arm over both kayaks to hold them steady and lock them together.

4. 'A' will come between the kayaks whilst ensuring he does not force the kayaks apart and out of the control of 'B'. He will do this by placing his arms over either kayak close to the bows, leaning back and lifting torso and legs clear of the two rafted kayaks in order to 'feed' himself into his cockpit.

5. On goes his spray deck and he immediately goes into an X rescue of ''B and his kayak.

6. At this stage 'C' is now hanging onto the end (ideally bows) of 'A's kayak. As soon as he is in his kayak, efforts are concentrated on 'C' and his kayak.



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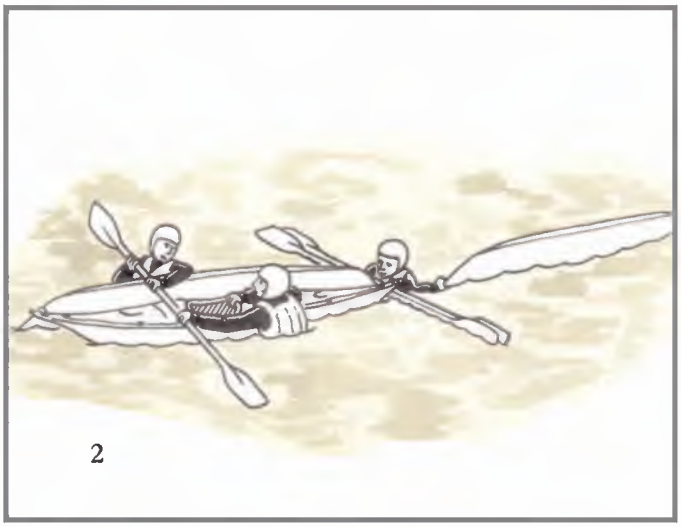

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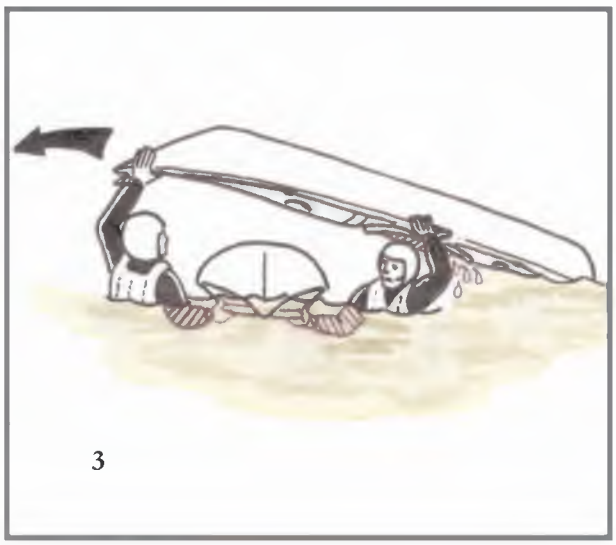

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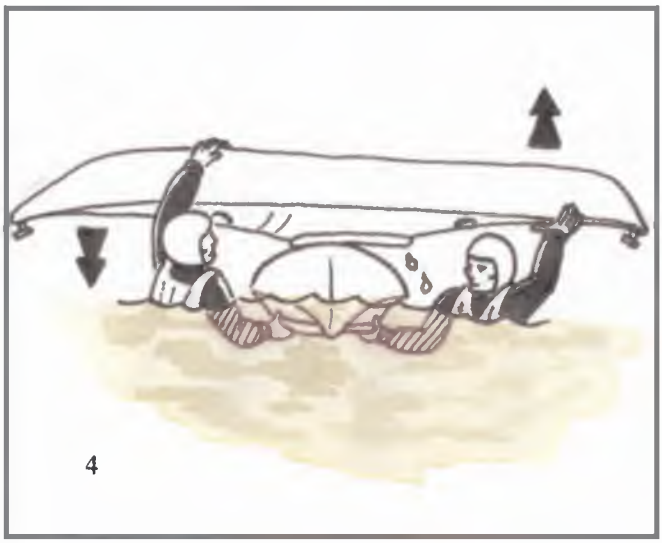


4

RE-ENTRY AND ROLL

As an alternative to the rescue involving third parties, several methods of re-entering a righted kayak have been described over the last few years.

Success of any method depends on little water getting into the cockpit during capsize. A clean exit as the kayak remains continually upturned should ensure this. Having righted the kayak the hand pump or a sponge may have to be used to rid excess water should you have made an 'untidy' exit.

One method first described several years ago involved removing the buoyancy jacket and securing it to a paddle blade. The kayak was righted and the paddles laid across the rear of the cockpit so that they lay at right angles to the kayak forming a cross so that the blade with the buoyancy rested on the water. Your position is facing the side of the cockpit so that the buoyant paddle is behind your right shoulder.

With the right hand holding the rear of the cockpit and paddle shaft together and the left hand holding the front of the cockpit you pull yourself over the cockpit by kicking hard with your legs and pushing down with your arms to thrust the cockpit under your chest.

Now place your right foot over the buoyant paddle. You should be virtually clear of the water. Replace right foot with left foot over the stabilising paddle whilst letting the right foot straddle the rear deck. Your trunk and head are now facing the bows as you lie over the cockpit. Clearly you have had to reposition your hands during this final manoeuvre so that they are now either side of the kayak. You are now effectively sitting on the rear deck with the paddles immediately in front of you. Now

comes the tricky bit!! With legs in the water to aid stability, take the paddle and extend the blade with its buoyancy jacket so that it acts as an out-rigger to keep you stable as you feed your feet, legs and back-side into the cockpit.

Pump out any remaining water, remove buoyancy jacket from paddle and put it on

I once heard that Derek Mayes from Plas y Brenin successfully tried out this technique in calm conditions and then decided to put it to the test out at the Skerries on an ebbing tide. From what I heard he was washed out a few miles west of the Skerries before getting it to work, much to the consternation of the watching Lighthouse Officers (it was manned in those days) who were unsure about raising the alarm.

It was always considered bad form to remove the buoyancy jacket and this solo re-entry method was frowned upon until SEA-TREK (Bob Licht) bought out the paddle float. This neat heavy duty plastic sleeve is small enough to keep handy and when an out-rigger arrangement is required it is slipped over the paddle blade and blown up via a one-way valve. Once so positioned and blown up it becomes securely fastened to the blade.

Bob Licht makes easy work of a solo re-entry:
The Paddle Float keeps on being discovered every few years or so but Bob Licht and his friend Will Nordby have finally given respectability to this method of rescue.
The Paddle Float, which is slipped over the paddle blade is simply a soft, strong plastic bag but because the walls of the bag have an inner and outer skin, these walls can be orally inflated. The Paddle Float can be carried in the pocket of a life-jacket.
Once the float is in position on the end of the paddle blade and inflated, it can not be removed until the air is let out again.

If you are really clever there is no need for any buoyancy arrangement on your paddle. You simply scull with the paddles to provide the support you need.

Finally, I am going to describe the re-entry and roll method of solo rescue that a lot of us prefer. You are in the water alongside your inverted kayak. You grab both your cockpit sides with either hand so that your right hand grabs the far side and your left hand the near side. In this position you are tending to face towards the stem. (See Fig. 1) Your paddles lie alongside the kayak on the inside of your left arm.

Now you roll your head. and chest backwards having taken a lung full of air. This action rolls your legs and backside neatly upwards and into the cockpit. (See Fig. 2)

If you can, replace spray deck before rolling up.

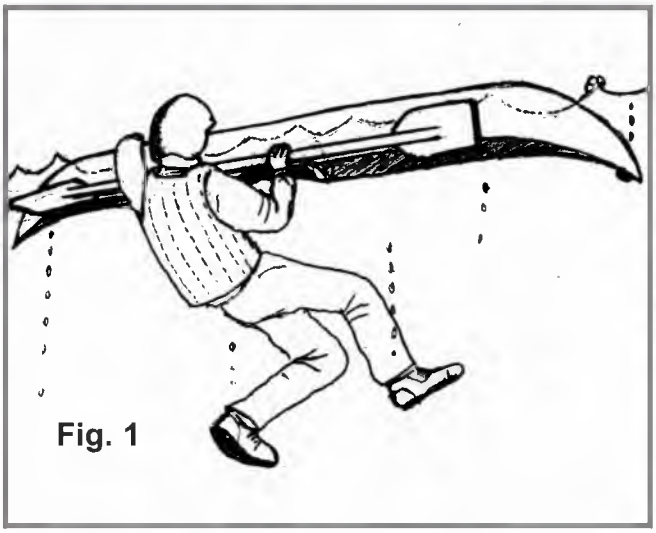


Fig. 1

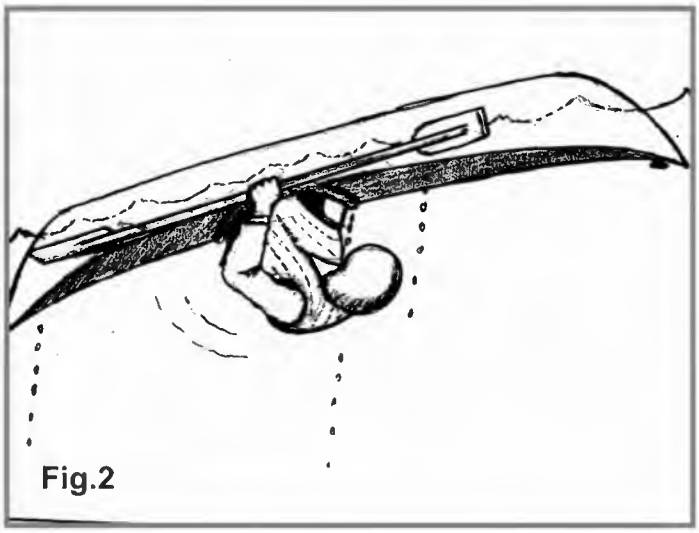


Fig.2

There is no doubt about it, these solo re-entry methods are worth practising as they do provide that extra confidence. But, and this is a big BUT, do not let this confidence lull you into a false sense of security. If you are an experienced paddler and you have allowed yourself to be caught out in a storm that has turned you over and sent you for a swim, unless the storm suddenly passes straight over leaving calmer conditions in its wake, I can tell you that any skill derived from frequent practice becomes purely academic. Either you capsize and roll or you need assistance.

There are other techniques worthy of practice. One is quite fun to try out. Two kayakers raft together, facing the same way. One leans across and holds the others cockpit to stabilise the raft. The kayaker not doing the stabilising lifts himself free of his cockpit and shifts himself onto the rear deck of his partners' kayak, sitting up tight against his back to keep as much weight over the centre of the kayak. (See Fig.3) The paddler in his kayak will pass his partner his own paddle (his is in a paddle park or is also handed to his partner), with the suggestion he uses it extended on the opposite side to the empty kayak to scull for support should this be necessary. The paddler still in his kayak now moves the empty kayak round so he can grab the bows. Now he can pull the empty kayak over his cockpit and repair it, adjust an internal fitting or whatever. The kayaker perched on the rear deck of his friends kayak, can if he is clever, keep his legs and feet dry by lying them along his partners kayak. Alternatively he can dangle them either side of the kayak in the water thus improving stability for his friend.

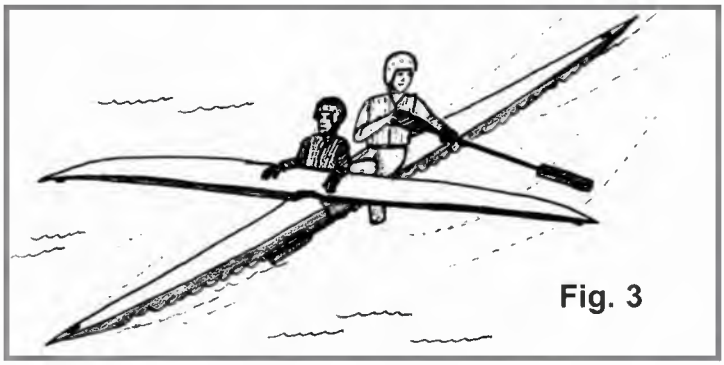


Fig. 3

SWIMMER TO KAYAKER

Here a kayaker has overturned, remained for whatever reason in his kayak and is rescued by a swimmer who reaches over the upturned hull, grabs an arm or life jacket, pulls hard and rights his patient.

Too hard a pull can cause dislocation of the shoulder. This may be prevented if the upper arm is grabbed as opposed to the forearm. Speed is essential, and a dislocated shoulder will heal, whereas drowning is irreversible. At least be careful when practising. This rescue is just as readily achieved by another kayaker who parks alongside the upturned, hull and reaches well over to grab clothing or buoyancy jacket, hauls up and rights the capsized paddler. When practising these rescues the victim should behave as though unconscious. Oliver Cock, our ex-Director of the B.C.U. Coaching Scheme once acted as a victim for a coaching award at Plas y Brenin in North Wales. We were paddling along the lake at Plas y when, without warning, over he went and we all sat there waiting for him to roll or come out. Wen he did neither, it occurred to us he was expecting to be hauled up and this was part of our test. He must have been hanging up-side-down for ages and by the time one of us did eventually pull him upright he was somewhat blue and gasping for air!! Good old Oliver, one of the real characters of canoeing.

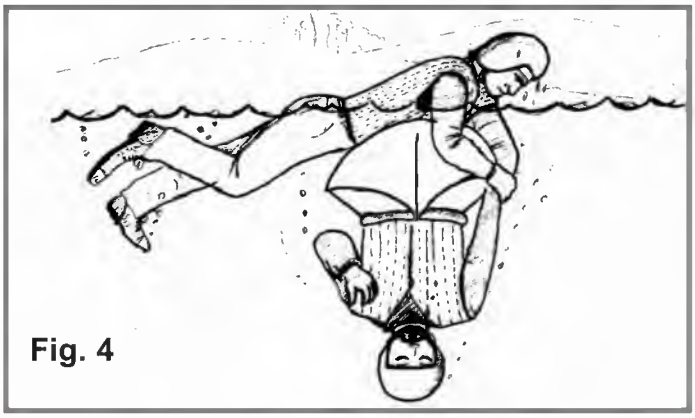


Fig. 4

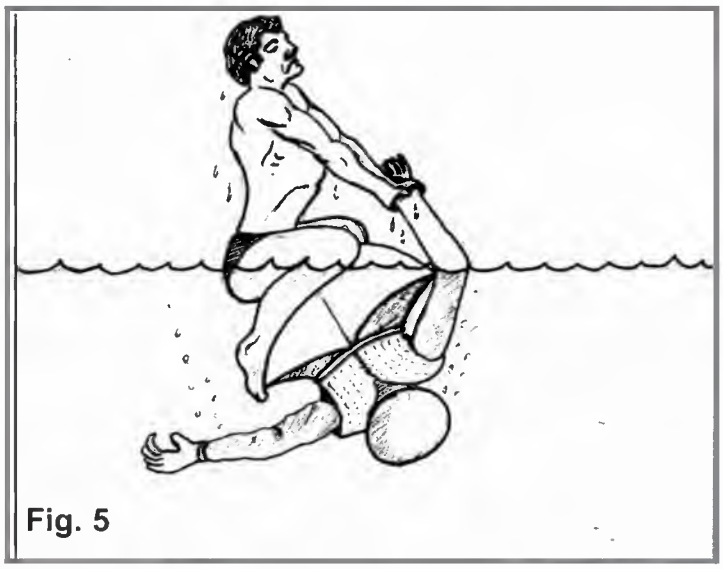


Fig. 5

KAYAKER TO SWIMMER

Often kayakers get asked to help at sponsored swimming events which entails some distance swimming across open stretches of sea. The classic is the Portsmouth to Isle of Wight swim which I know is assist- ed by Portsmouth Canoe Club. So it is not beyond the realms of possibility that you may have to rescue a swimmer. In calm seas when swimming events usually take place, then inviting the swimmer to climb aboard or hang on the bows of your kayak is easy enough. I much prefer the swimmer being in the front where I can keep an eye on him/her. The swimmer completely out of the water is probably his preferred position, in which case he would be draped over front or back deck as illustrated. The most effective rescue consists of the swimmer simply hanging on to your bows. The swimmer would need to climb on to your deck from the very rear of the kayak whilst you, the paddler, sculled hard to maintain stability and the upright position.

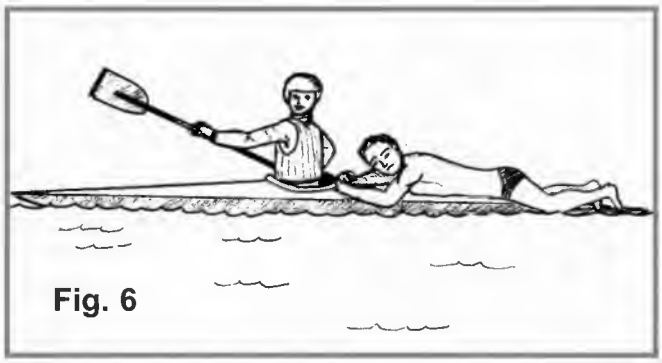


Fig. 6

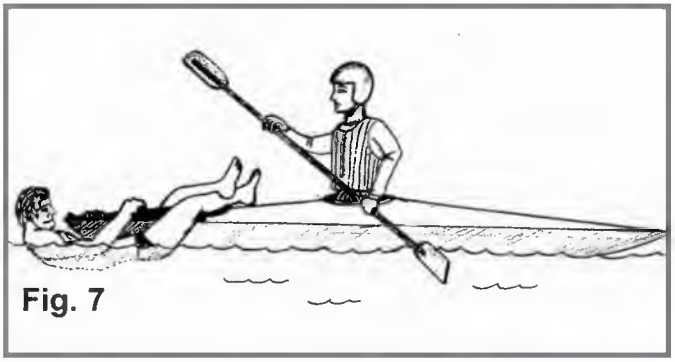


Fig. 7

On the other hand, rescuing a swimmer from heavy surf demands care as it is very easy to 'spear' your swimmer with the bows as you involuntarily surf forward at some speed. Best to paddle backwards in the surf waves and be ready to paddle forward hard as a wave overwhelms you. You will be in better control and should approach the swimmer with less danger.

TOWING

Hopefully this is a technique you will rarely have to employ in anger; but when you do it may well be vitally important you get it right first time. Hence the need to practice fairly frequently and why towing features high on the list during B.C.U. Advanced Proficiency Assessments. If you are 'in charge', or leading a group, indeed if you are simply a proficient member of a group, an effective tow may well play a vital part in any escape from a difficult situation.

Let me briefly look. at some likely 'difficult situations'. Most are fairly obvious. A tired, injured or sick paddler. A slow paddler holding back the group when time and tide demand speed. It may be that a paddle has broken and there are no spares (tutu tutu!!) or an inexperienced paddler is unable to control his kayak. It maybe that a capsize and swim has occurred not far from heavy seas breaking on the rocks. The ensuing rescue operation is in danger of drifting onto the rocks. It should be possible to tow the righted kayak, with swimmer hanging onto the stern of the tower's kayak, well away from danger, prior to commencement of the deep water rescue operation. On the other hand it may be best to attach a tow line to the rescuers' kayak as he undertakes the deep water rescue and so keep the swimmer and rescuer away from the rocks.

There are two sorts of circumstances when a tow may be necessary. The first concerns the need to tow a still fairly active paddler who is able to assist both with some forward paddling and, even more essentially, with keeping his kayak on course. The second scenario is a sick or injured paddler who needs full assistance both in terms of towing and constant direct care.

The first situation is simple enough, you secure a tow line, instruct your 'passenger' to paddle as much as possible, but putting most of the effort into keeping his/her kayak on course behind yours. Clearly the second situation is going to be much more demanding and will call upon a team effort if the casualty is going to be safely towed to shore.

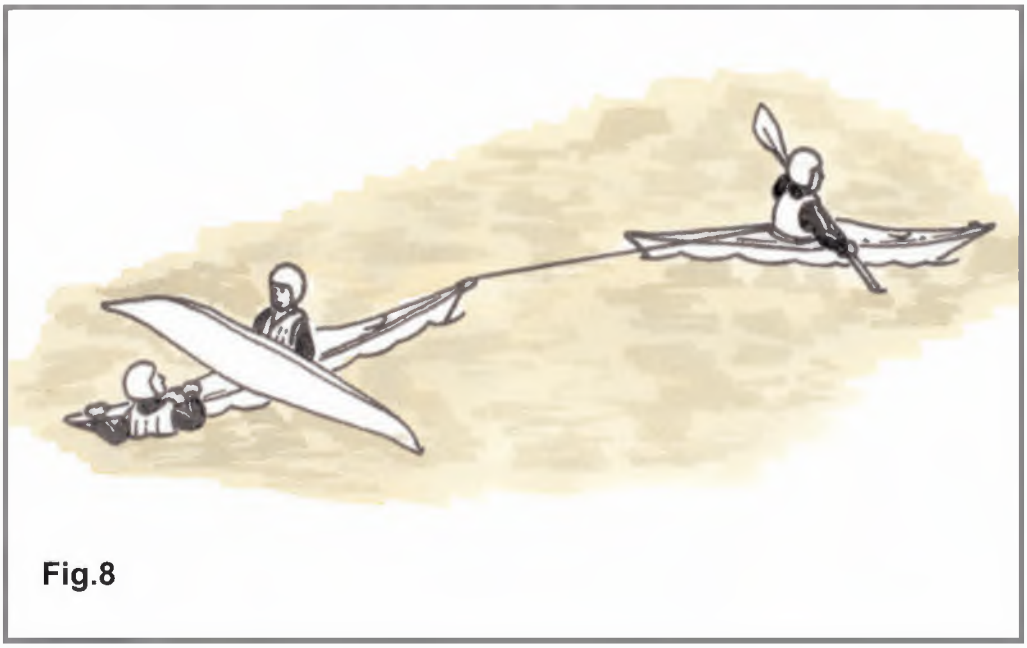


Fig.8

Both situations demand a common list of necessary standards and I will start by looking at these. First your towing arrangement should have been tried and tested so that you are confident it works first time every time.

You know it works well if it is quickly and effectively secured to the kayak to be towed. We will look at a few systems in a moment. You must be able to release it from either yourself or your kayak whichever is your point of tow, even more rapidly. A capsize followed by an entanglement in the tow line could mean an attempted roll, a swim with you ending up as a casualty. A quick-release arrangement could

well avoid this embarrassment. Finally use a tow line that floats, that can be thrown if necessary and can be readily stored when not in use.

So how can we meet all these requirements? First let us look at the attachment to either you or your kayak. Some modern buoyancy jackets incorporate a tow line that is attached to a belt two inches wide that secures the bottom of the jacket around the body. It can be readily released by pulling a toggle which undoes a jamb cleat fixing. When not in use the line is stored in the bottom left front pocket of the jacket. The FOSTER ROWE jacket certainly incorporates these design features and is ideal in these (and other) respects.

Some paddlers prefer to have a separate arrangement which allows them to actually don a webbing strap either diagonally over the upper body or around the waist. Clearly the belt must not be able to slip so that it tightens or becomes undone.

Others prefer to tow from the kayak. Mechanically the best position is from immediately behind the cockpit. The problem with this is the potential to foul up with anything you may be carrying on your rear deck and the difficulty you may have in twisting right round to release the line. The way out of this is to have the point of attachment behind but to one side of the cockpit and for the two line to be led through deck fittings to the stern of the kayak. If using a deck fitting type low line it is worth having it as a permanent fixture. A cam cleat is a popular fitting for the quick lease mechanism particularly one with a fair lead.. A simple pull to yank the line out of the cleat will release it.

It is necessary to incorporate a length of 5 or 7 mm marine shock-cord into the end of your tow line which fixes to the casualties' kayak.

When stored on your kayak this elastic shock cord will help to keep it taut. Of course the main purpose of the elastic shock cord is that it should act as a shock absorber when actually towing

From the point of attachment just behind and to one side of the cockpit the line will run down one side of the rear deck through the stern loop and back up to the rear of the cockpit where the end to be attached to the towed kayak is kept taut by the shock cord and ready to detach and secure when the need arises to the lowed kayak. The length of the rear deck need not be a limiting factor to the length of tow line you wish to use. By chain coiling the line you can have it as long as you like. How long should you have a tow line? Ideally it should be adjustable as the length actually used during a tow depends on whether you are towing into the wind and prevailing waves, in which case a relatively short line is best, or you are towing with the wind and waves where a longer line is best so preventing the towed kayak leaping forward on the waves and bouncing off your stem. I have consciously avoided recommending determinate lengths of your tow line as trial and error in practice is the best way of finding the answer. Too short a line and that is it, a longer line can always be shortened. The alternative to storing your line on your kayak rear deck or on your buoyancy jacket is to keep it neatly coiled in a nylon bag and then to keep the bag either on or in your kayak or on your person ready for immediate use. If you are asked to tow a kayak on an assessment you will almost certainly lose points if you are unable to make an immediate attachment. Be prepared.

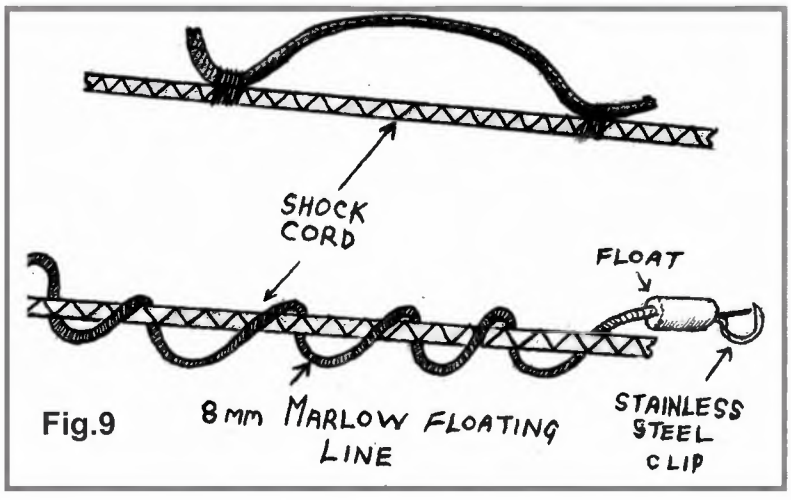


Fig.9

To recap, use a line that floats (6/8 mm braided polypropylene or Marlow Marstrom line is OK), has a float and stainless steel snap link in the working end and is plenty long enough (maximum 12 metres). However, stow it when not in use, but it must be readily available and detachable from your end.

Before moving onto the types of towing methods that are worth practising a few more general remarks.

To be towed is often seen as a form of humiliation and leaders are often reluctant to tow for this reason. I am one of them. There must be several people around who have been towed, maybe prematurely, by a well meaning instructor and have consequently not returned to paddle again. Often words of encouragement are sufficient to get a slow paddler to move faster. Paddling with such a paddler rather than leaving him/her well behind is certainly a better inducement to paddle that bit faster.

On the other hand do not wait until your slow paddler is too exhausted to even assist whilst he is being towed. It is a fine balance. Towing a laden kayak weighing up to 150 kg or so places a lot of strain on the system, particularly the point of attachment to the towing kayak. The shock cord incorporated into the end of the tow line will help enormously. You should also consider using extra fibre glass to strengthen the area of deck where you intend fixing the cam cleat.

TOWING METHODS

At the start of this section on TOWING, I said there were essentially two sets of circumstances when a tow becomes necessary. One where the 'patient' can still assist with the tow and the other where he or she is too indisposed and requires constant support. When the 'patient' is particularly fit, has maybe lost a paddle or only requires a tow over a short distance, then you can go for the RAFTED TOW. Here the 'patient' can provide some self help in that he may use his/her hips to steer the raft. (See Fig. 10).

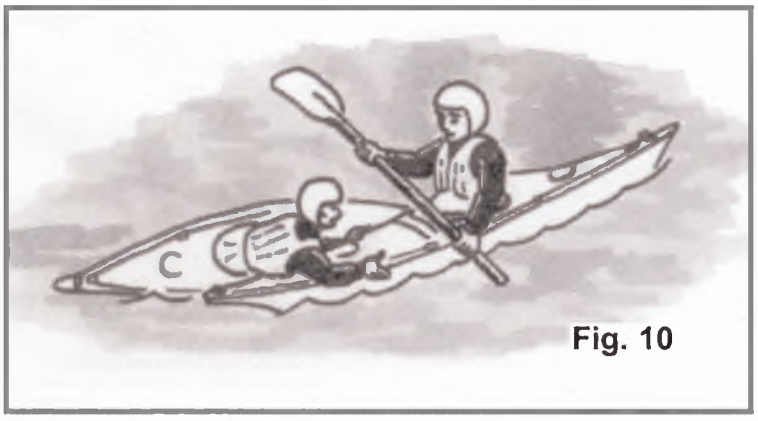
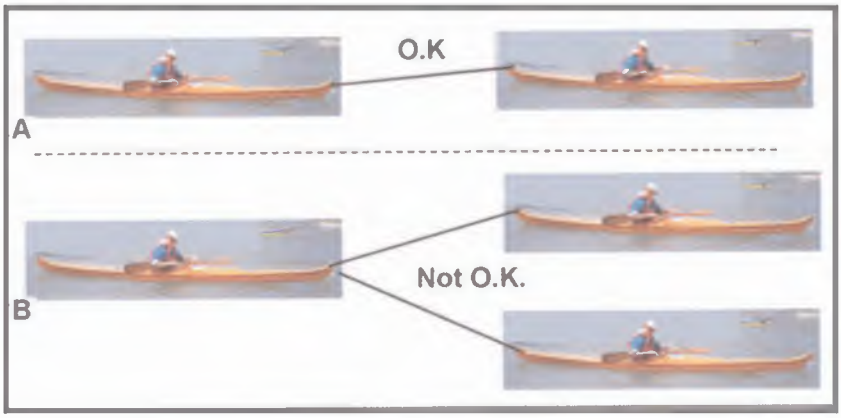


Fig. 10

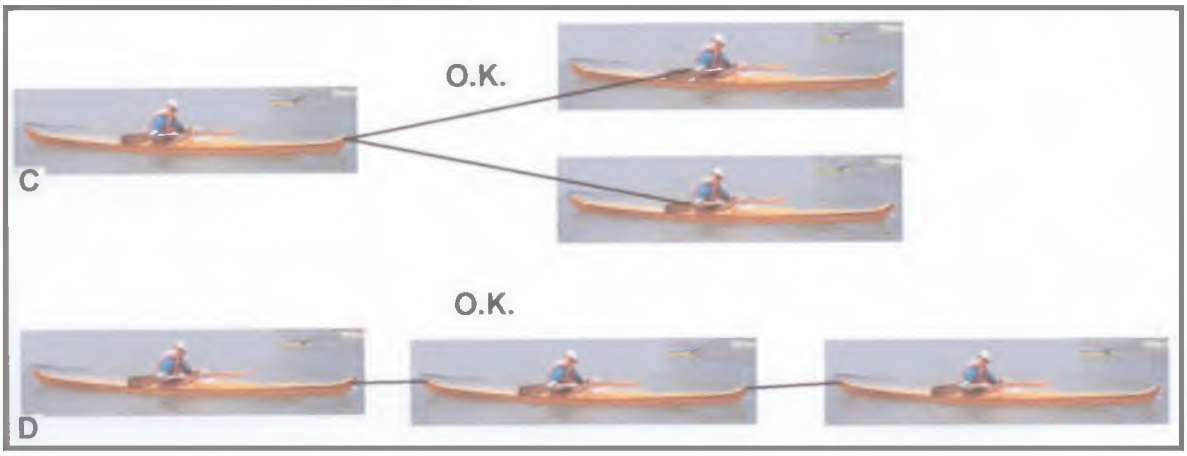
In the event of an inexperienced paddler capsizing in a disturbed sea, once he/she is rescued there is every chance are he will capsize again, -and again and again. An assisted or rafted tow becomes necessary. The first situation is a lot easier to deal with. You simply hitch up and go. Keep a regular eye on your patient, better still, have someone else paddle alongside. Your greatest problem may be keeping course as the kayak being towed pulls your stern from side to side. A long enough line helps to avoid this. There are a variety of towing systems to choose from if you have several fit paddlers with you and you have a fair distance to cover. One system is to simply delegate the task to another, while you are free to keep an eye on the overall situation. A multiple towing arrangement can be employed. Here two or three paddlers attach themselves to the patients' kayak to form a fan shape. Here the point of attachment to the towing kayaks becomes important, because it is impossible to tow keeping course if you are towing at any sort of angle.

In 'B' the two towing kayaks will constantly feel their stems being pulled together and consequently their bows heading away makes keeping course quite difficult.

By altering the point from which the lowing kayaks tow from, the stem to the rear of the cockpit, this problem is largely overcome. See diagram 'C'



There is obviously a computation of multiple towing systems. Apart from the fan, there is the tandem system where several kayaks line up one behind the other as in 'D' below.

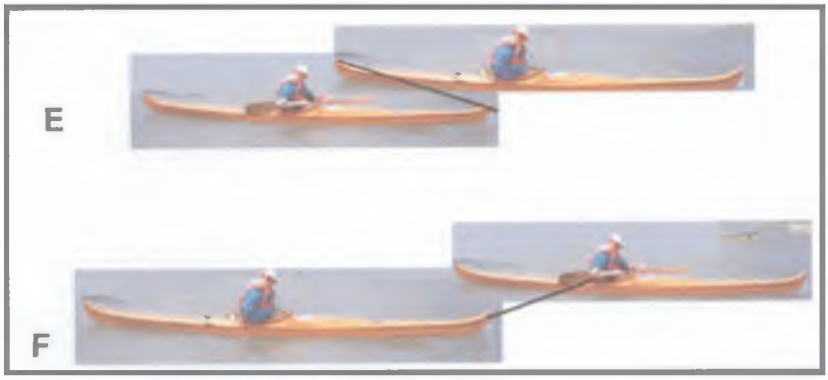


Let me warn you of the difficulties in setting up these multiple towing systems in rough conditions. Manoeuvring into position and attaching a line requires disciplined practice, - often.

In my examples at 'C" and "D' above I have shown two kayaks assisting one. Other kayaks can also be employed. At 'C' the third one would be in the middle so that he was towing from the stern and in the front so that his stern remains out of reach of the other two towing kayaks. These multiple tows are useful if there are several kayaks to be towed, that is, a raft of kayaks.

This leads us neatly into the tow where the patient requires constant support from another paddler and consequently we end up by having a raft of two or more kayaks to tow. Clearly this tow is successful for short distances only and rough seas can make it difficult to execute.

Another form of rafted tow consists of the use of a very short line which attaches patients' kayak by bows or stern to the front (usually paddle park point) of the rescuers cockpit.



The rescuer paddles over, as it were, the rear of the patients kayak to push the raft along, or, as in the case of 'F' the rescuer pulls his patient along using the short tow. In both 'E' and 'F' the patient is going to have to help with steering. If the patient is unable to make any contribution at all he must be included in the raft itself and then the whole raft is towed using the multiple tow system already described.

Should you be towing a casualty, have your plans well in mind for when you make land fall. Your tent up, stove on and casualty into dry tracksuit and sleeping bag and then a hot drink, may suffice. If you land on a beach by a road and/or close to medical aid you may wish to assist the casualty ashore, place him/her in an exposure bag then using the kayaks to form a wind break whilst waiting for help to arrive in form of inshore life boat or ambulance.

I have rather laboured this section on towing. Your efficiency at this technique depends on an effective system and on practice. As I said at the beginning, when you do need to tow, it is often to prevent a bad situation deteriorating and getting it to work first time may be vitally important.

COASTAL KAYAKING

There are the two sorts of trips that are undertaken by kayak, -the coastal and the open water crossing. Most trips are a combination of both as you rarely follow a coast for long before having to paddle a fair distance from one headland to another. Coastal kayaking involves, as it suggest, simply following the coast. It is here, where sea, air and land meet, that special dangers can occur and where special interest abounds.

Usually the sea shallows as it meets land and breaking waves, rolling unbroken waves, Overalls and strong tides can result. I shall be discussing these later. Bird life is richest along the coast especially by estuaries. In fact sea birds swooping low are often first signs of land on long open water crossings, when the approaching coast is low lying.

Sea caves, cliffs and stacks are a particularly interesting feature of coasts and our coast here in Britain is very well endowed with these. The west coast of Scotland, Anglesey on North Wales, the Farne Islands on the NE coast of England. Flamborough Head on the east coast are some examples of where sea kayaking is quite spectacular along the coast.

OPEN WATER KAYAKING

Again there are two sorts, the lengthy open water crossing which entails being out of sight of land once you are away from the coast of departure until you come within sight of the coast of your destination. There are several such crossing around the UK coast that are popular with kayakers. The Wash crossing from Boston to Hunstanton; the English Channel from Dover to Cap Gris Nez; (A word on the English Channel, the French Maritime Authorities forbid launching, indeed coming within 3 miles of their coast. They also forbid you leaving their coast beyond a mile. Certainly the British Coastguard and the B.C.U. do their utmost to dissuade sea kayakers from undertaking this crossing. They rightly point out that the busiest shipping lanes in the world pass through the English Channel, this situation being compounded by ferries, including the very fast moving hovercraft, to-ing and fro-ing across the Channel.)

On one occasion, three of us stopped for lunch half-way over the Channel, not a ship in sight, we being between the shipping lanes. Just as we were getting stuck into our sandwiches, the three of us looked up in unison to see the bows of a ferry looming down upon us necessitating a hurried scurry to get out of her way. All that sea and she decided to use our bit!

St. Georges Channel from Scotland (Port Patrick or Mull of Kintyre) to Belfast in Ireland; The Bristol Channel to take in Lundy Isle; St. Bees Head on Cumbria coast to Isle of Man, the possibilities are endless.

The other open water crossings are those undertaken as part of a coastal trip when paddling from one headland to another. Some of these crossings can be quite lengthy. The difference between these and the crossings referred to above are that you can usually see land continually on the landward side and certainly you can see the headland you are aiming for. As far as paddlers are concerned the major difference is the navigating involved, of which more later.

NIGHT PADDLING

THE HARBOUR-BAY WAS CLEAR AS GLASS,
SO SMOOTHLY IT WAS STREWN!
AND ON THE BAY THE MOONLIGHT LAY,
AND THE SHADOW OF THE MOON.

THE ROCK SHONE BRIGHT, THE KIRK NO LESS,
THAT STANDS ABOVE THE ROCK!
THE MOONLIGHT STEEPED IN SILENTNESS,
THE STEADY WEATHERCOCK.

AND THE BAY WAS WHITE WITH SILENT LIGHT,
TILL RISING FROM THE SAME,
FULL MANY SHAPES, THAT SHADOWS WERE,
IN CRIMSON COLOURS CAME.
Samuel. Taylor Coleridge (The Rime of the Ancient Mariner)

Night paddling provides a whole new experience, even for the most proficient. I used to include a night paddle in my weeks' course I staged for several years in SW Scotland. We would set off from Wigton at midnight to cross Luce Bay to the Fleet Isles at the mouth of the R. Fleet estuary, where we would bivvy until dawn, when we would complete our journey up the R. Fleet to Gatehouse and our base camp. Once on the water we all followed the glimmer of a chemical light strapped to the hat of our lead paddler. One such trip got a little out of control when we all became scattered, some, including me, losing sight of our leader. When we eventually arrived at the Fleet Isles, I was very relieved to discover we were all accounted for.

Its worth quickly recounting an epic night paddle with a group of inexperienced paddlers off the coast of Vancouver Island. There were two of us leading a British Schools group of twelve. We set off from a camp up river with a good weather forecast and in calm conditions and with a full moon. The plan was to paddle down the river estuary and cross the fairly wide stretch of sea to land on the far side and breakfast and recuperate before paddling on. As we arrived at the estuary the weather deteriorated with clouds blocking out the moon light and I had a real difficulty holding the group together. Eventually, as the conditions worsened, I managed to get everyone together and heading up into the waves and wind. All we had to do now was hold our position and wait for day break so that we could sight a suitable landing beach along what was a hostile coast. It took forever before the light crept up over the mountains allowing us to identify a landing spot. We came seriously close to losing a paddler or two that night and I swore I would never lead another night journey. In fact I have led subsequent night trips but I have never been quite so complacent.

Obviously visibility between night paddling and long open water crossings, is that at night lights are visible for many miles. On one occasion I was completely flummoxed by a flashing light that was not shown on my chart. After it had caused me a lot of concern because of the circumstances at the time (a long story), it turned out to be a road with a bend - as the cars took the bend their headlights flashed across the bay.

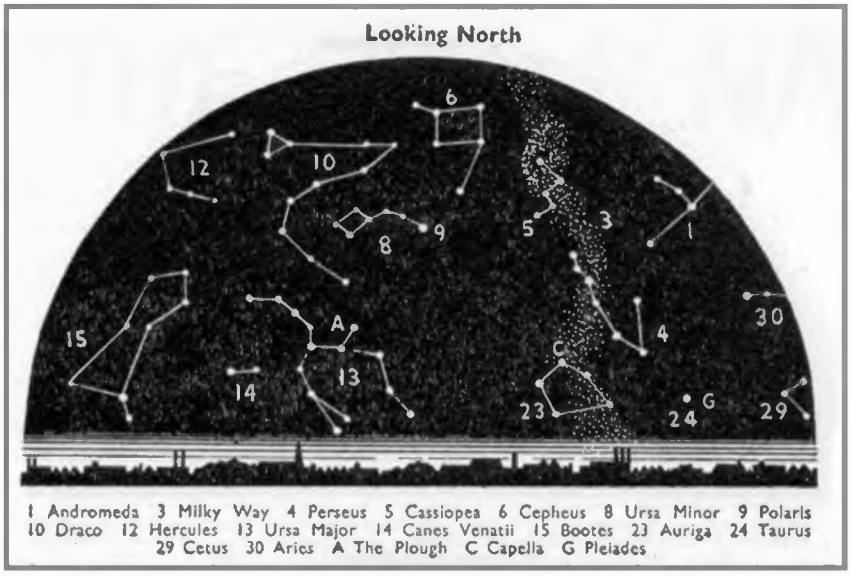
A knowledge of navigational and buoyage lights is more than just useful, it is essential. Is the ship whose port and starboard lights are seen ahead, bearing down or bearing away? Is the quick flashing light, a north or south buoy? I shall be saying more about navigation lights in my chapter on buoyage.

Sound seems to travel better at night and waves crashing on a shingle beach often feels uncomfortably close.

Stability can also be effected when a rough sea is encountered at night, particularly if the sea is agitated rather than enduring a regular wave pattern. Recently I assisted with a course on the Devon coast. We set off in increasing winds, late one evening, to head for a campsite whose access was limited to a narrow break between the cliffs. The rebounding waves off the cliffs, the sound of the waves breaking on the rocks and our navigators' increasing uncertainty about the location of our one and only campsite, was a decidedly unnerving experience.

But night paddling has its rewards. The darkness introduces a whole new dimension which is easier to experience than to describe. The stars on a clear night are just fantastic. Away from background light the Milky Way shines out bright and clear, the whole night sky is alive with a myriad of lights. I shall never forget a night paddle in the high Arctic with a full moon shining and the Northern Lights providing a spectacular display of one of Mother Natures' wonders. The sea is not only lit by the moon but also by the luminescent sparkling from the water itself as thousands of little points of light dance around among the sea and spray as you disturb the water.

The stars are also a reliable aid to navigation at night. Once you have identified the major constellations and the North Pole Star (in the Northern Hemisphere of course) and you have set your course you can let the stars guide you.



Although there is no fundamental difference between night paddling and day paddling I believe that any kayaker who sets out to kayak at night would be wise to put in a few hours of late evening paddling as dusk is falling and get used to the idea of dark coming on. It can be quite different as you adapt to not being able to see very far and sights and noises take on a different hue, as it were. Even if you do not anticipate paddling at night, circumstances may dictate that you will and being prepared and having some experience might make all the difference. When you have done a few late evening/early night excursions you will be better prepared and this is an important consideration. I know you will not feel patronised when I remind you that humans tend to be afraid of the dark. Most of us will feel morale fall as dusk approaches and our anxiety level rises accordingly. This is natural enough, we are not nocturnal animals and only those who have been trained or who have trained themselves will feel at ease in the

dark. This applies as much on land as at sea which in daylight looks great when the sun is shining, but sombre and menacing under a grey sky. At night the waves seem bigger as they slap against the kayak and of course it is not easy to anticipate the direction and speed of the waves which during the day you compute with ease and counteract without thinking as you sway and ride the waves.

Strange seething and hissing noises raise doubts in your mind and you begin to think of the cold depths beneath the thin skin of your kayak. Yet in reasoned thought you know full well that your kayak and equipment remains unchanged and that you are as buoyant as ever you would be in day light. There is nothing to fear, unless, perhaps, it is one's own inexperience.

Preparation is the key.

As with any day time trip or voyage (with respect to Eric Totty who once insisted that there is a difference), preparation is the key to ease of mind as well as to safety. The first thing is to have a clear understanding with your kayaking companions about clear methods of communication and who will take the lead and for how long. Who is to be in charge of navigation and who is to be back marker. How will you check to ensure the well being of all party members.

The first obvious mistake is to dash from work on a Friday evening with all the mental and physical exertions of preparations and then get on the water when both brain and body will be tired and well short of their best condition to cope with the night. It makes every sense to prepare in good time and grab some sleep before setting off. Accessible snacks and hot drinks from a vacuum flask are common sense provisions for the night paddle.

Navigation ensures you get there.

As with day time trips, navigation must be pre-planned. You will study the chart of course and plot out the likely sequence of events: when you can expect to cross the shipping lane, when buoys may be encountered and what their characteristic lights and/or sounds will be, location of any isolated rocks (which you will probably hear before you see as the waves bounce around them) and what the tide action is hour by hour. I do not want to give a dissertation on navigation, only to indicate some of the more obvious differences between night and day paddling.

One of the most worrying sights on a night trip is a gaggle of fishing boats as they move in uncertain direction in front of you. Ferries have a clear course which can be readily detected but fishing boats are not so obvious in their intentions. Have a white flare handy in case you are likely to get run down.

You should, of course, be carrying a white light which can be attached to the kayak or your person. Either way it should be within reach so that you can turn it off when not required to save on battery power and it should not be shone so that it disturbs your or your fellow paddlers night vision. A chemical light which shines quite brightly at night is useful when displayed on the lead kayak or kayaker so that everyone has a distinctive mark to follow. A small light to illuminate your compass is essential if you are setting the course for others to follow, a red or orange light is least likely to affect night vision. You should have what you need for comfort and course finding handy either on the deck or in the pockets of your buoyancy jacket.

Plan to take breaks at regular intervals when you can arrange to raft up if the swell is not likely to damage kayaks. Following breaks there could a change of leader and of course it is an opportunity to check on everyone's' well-being.

I used to run courses some years ago when I included a night paddle. There would be up to ten or a dozen of us and keeping a check on everyone relied on each of us having a number and reciting this

number when asked. There was always someone who would make me wait for his/her number and my heart would miss a beat as I pondered on the thought of having to find them in the dark. On a recent Raleigh sea kayaking exped. one of the young people was deaf and I had let this fact slip my mind and then wondered why we were one short!

There some real attractions of night paddling, the chief amongst them being the phosphorescence that sparkles off your paddles like a million little lights. Your senses are heightened and noises seem louder, particularly when paddling close inshore and the waves are bouncing off a shingle beach. And the stars. These are something else when viewed out at sea with no other artificial lights close by to spoil the sight. The Milky Way is absolutely fantastic, as though you can reach out and touch it. You feel so small against it all. The shooting stars and the constellation is a free firework display.

The darkness, on the other hand, affects not only your direct visibility but also one's judgement of spatial relationships and ones' sense of time. You may be running down a familiar creek and you feel sure that it must be hereabouts that the channel turns to port, yet careful checking suggests that your instinct is premature. It is very difficult to judge distances at night. The dark trees or banks of a channel are reflected in the water and make the shore seem much closer. Beacons or withies are hard to spot, even in bright moonlight, though their reflections may show up quite well. Unlit buoys are hard to find as well and rarely turn up when you feel they should.

I recall being quite confused by a flashing buoy that was distinctive and yet should not have been there. I could see no reference to it on the chart. It turned out to be the headlights of cars as they came down a road heading towards the shore before taking a right hand bend and disappearing from sight.

Following a compass heading can be difficult and here a distinctive star can be used to give a bearing. The obvious one, if heading north, is the bright North or Pole Star in the northern hemisphere. In the southern hemisphere look for the Southern Cross. You cannot use the same star for too long before checking with the compass for another aim.

One thing, it pays to keep an occasional eye on where you are coming from, remember to keep a look out astern. Ships can appear from nowhere and you can bet they have you right in their sights!

The Weather 'whether or not'

Whether or not! It goes without saying that you would not set off without a 'good' weather forecast: strong winds or bad visibility are the last things you want on a night passage, especially if it is your first. In fact, the winds are generally lighter at night, even though the lows and highs beloved of meteorologists are still in their expected locations. As a knowledgeable harbourmaster once said, "Like everybody else, the wind goes to sleep at night". No, not always of course, but more often than not.

If you have a VHF radio then a 'TR' to the local Coastguard should be made as you leave the shore, -this also checks that your radio is working.

And landing -soft or hard!

One of the joys of night paddling is watching day break as the light creeps over the horizon and the seascape lights up and all comes clear. On the other hand you may expect to land in darkness and you should be prepared. Surf running can make landings interesting in daylight and doubly interesting by night. You might be surprised at how much noise surf makes as it crashes on to a shingle beach.

Have you landed at your pre-selected destination where you know there is egress and perhaps a camp site? Have you put up a tent in the dark? I occasionally train young people for expeditions and for fun

have them blindfold themselves and then put up a tent. I once camped on the edge of some cliffs along the Great Ocean Road in western Australia to find next morning that we were in the middle of a ships crew graveyard. I had slept right over the top of Sydney Jones who died by shipwreck in 1887.

FINALLY

It is inherent in us to be afraid of the dark, though what we really should fear is our own fatigue through over-loading. Tiredness is more of a danger than most people think and can quite easily lead to hallucinations. The right course is to plan ahead.

One final anecdote on night paddling to leave you with; a thought to caution. I set off at about 1 am with a bunch of young paddlers down an estuary with clear skies and a good forecast. The moon was up and we had good illumination. We were on a British Schools exped. in British Columbia. All goes well 'till we make the open sea where we to cross to land a couple of miles the other side. Squalls came in from the SW. Up comes a confused sea which starts to separate us. Communication became difficult and I felt in real danger of losing control. Eventually we came together and settled down to paddle into the wind and waves to await the dawn and sufficient light to make land fall. By now the moon had gone and it seemed like an age before the dawn inched its way over the top of the local mountains and we were eventually able to land, camp and catch up on some zzzzzzs'. I could only thank my fortune that we had not had a major epic. It can so easily happen.

USE OF DOUBLE KAYAKS

These are becoming popular. My first encounter was with a TORPHINO designed by Mike Necker in the States. It looked very wide and clumsy. In fact it was neither in use. Even this beamy double did not exceed 3 feet (.9 m) at its widest and this was adequately compensated for by its length of 21 ft (6.3 m)

In the UK Howard Jeff s has designed a double which he calls the Aleut Sea ll. Easy Rider in Seattle has produced the Eskimo Expedition Double that comes apart to be carried by air liners as luggage.
Many of the advantages of double kayaks are obvious. A novice paddler will feel a lot more confident when partnering an experienced paddler. Husband and wife teams become possible when one partner is new to the sport. Howard Jeffs has a nice picture of his children aboard his double in his promotional material.

The author beaching an Aleut Sea II with Frank Goodman in the stern

Taking photographs, adjusting your position or clothing, taking a rest whilst your partner paddles and stabilises, kneeling up to have a pee (make sure you are down wind!) -all this is readily possible when sharing a double.

Longer trips become more viable if this is your interest, -the safety/comfort margin does increase - except rolling a double is not as easy or as certain as rolling a single. Having said this it will take fairly horrendous conditions to turn a double over. Even a racing K2 is difficult to capsize if one paddler is clever with support strokes.

A double sea kayak can be unwieldy when being handled and transported unless it is a folding or collapsible type (like the EASY RIDER). The Aleut Sea II is almost 22 ft (6.6 m) long and this needs to be considered when storing and transporting.

GREENLAND PADDLES

To finish this chapter I am going to add a paragraph or two on the use of Greenland Paddles.

The length of the Greenland paddle, given that it is tailor made for you, is the width of the span of your out-stretched arms, finger tip to finger tip plus a cubit. A cubit is the distance from your elbow to your finger tip and this measurement was used a lot by the Inuit when building their kayaks and paddles. The length of the actual blade is governed by the length of the shaft and this is the length of the distance from your hands when they are hung loosely by your sides. These paddles are often shuffled from one side to the other to acquire greater leverage (for such as rolling, sculling and maneuvering) and to do this one hand grips the shaft by the base of the blade and the other grips the end of the blade itself. Consequently the width of the blade is also tailor made to fit the hands of the owner. Of course this technique of shuffling the blades from one side to the other and moving your hands to different positions on the paddles is in contrast to the way we paddle with European paddles when all paddling techniques are accomplished with hands always on the shaft in the normal forward paddling position. Some of you may remember the 'Bremmer Shuffle' named after a German paddler who successfully shuffled his paddles around to get better leverage when competing in world class slalom. He had some good results and we were led to copy him but this practice did not persist .....at least it didn't with most paddlers.

We have the correct length and width. Now for their use. First, the grip. These paddles are symmetrical, ie. They are both angled on the shaft in the same plane and so there is no 'grip hand' with associated wrist action and 'pivot hand'. You use both hands on the paddle by loosely gripping the paddles where the shaft meets blade by curling thumb and forefinger around this area of the paddles allowing the fingers to wrap around the base of the blade itself.

As for the actual use of these paddles. Hold them in front of you by stretching arms forward and the upper edge of the blades should angle a little away from you. This is how they should enter and leave the water. The blade is fully immersed in the water (hope you don't mind wet hands!) about opposite your knees and is pulled back further to exit a little behind your hips. The paddling style is relaxed and little or no splash is made as the blades enter and exit the water. There is less trunk rotation and forward lean as with European paddles. Of course there is little wind resistance to narrow blades, particularly from beam winds that can get below a feathered large blade, and far less chance of teno synovitis as no feathering of the blades is required.

Here we can discuss the principles of forward paddling which are relevant to both types of paddle such as the pull and push of the arms and the push of the feet in turn on the foot rest so that the paddling effort is supported from foot, leg, trunk and torso. The body remains slightly more forward with head facing forward with less side to side action.

I have always thought the Inuit made their blades narrow because they were governed by the available drift wood but now I am sure they chose this shape because they were more efficient.

In summary I feel fairly sure that, with the right technique - and this seems to come naturally - these Greenland paddles provide more reward with less effort. I am hoping to persuade Chris to make me a pair if only to help me keep up with Duncan next time we paddle together.
