

STANDING WAVES

Safety on white water starts before we even go paddling.

“Prevention is better than cure”

OUTFITTING

Time spent outfitting your boat before hand can help you out on the river. For example if your legs go to sleep due to a tight footrest or over padded seat then are you still going to have good control over the boat? Lack of airbags can lead to loss of boat altogether not to mention how difficult it is to move the kayak to the side of the river.

The following is not an exhaustive list but certainly starts you thinking and will go a long way to make yours and your rescuers life a lot easier.

- ❖ Take time to sit in your boat in your normal paddling clothes and adjust all aspects of the boat as required.

Footrests - Fullplate / foam / footbag. Make sure these are fixed in and allow you to stretch your legs so as to keep blood moving.

Seat - Adjust the seat as to have an even balance point of the boat. This is generally when you sit in the boat on flat water there is an equal distance between the water and the bow as there is on the stern. Be careful of padding the seat to much as a ridge on the underside of the thighs can cause numbness in the legs. However having some form of pad there prevents slipping on the seat and adds to the overall comfort.

Hip pads - Make sure that your hip pads don't impede on a wet exit and are firmly fixed in place. Hip pads are a great way to help transmit energy into the boat which aids greater control of your boat. Having even a thin piece of foam is better than nothing at all.

Backrest - A poorly fitting backrest is one of the biggest problems people have with there boat so time spent on this saves loads of time on the river. Your backrest also aids keeping your posture correct which in turn helps keep greater control.

Thigh or knee grips - Make sure that when you are sitting in your boat the knee or thigh grip is giving you grip so as when you lift the leg you are using the grip to maximum effect. Having a thin piece of foam on the point where you are applying the pressure helps with the comfort and the control. Again make sure that it doesn't impede you on wet exiting.

Make sure you have padded conservatively to allow some movement inside and also so you are not hindered in wet exiting the boat.

- ❖ The use of airbags in the back of the boat is very important in helping the rescue if you do have to swim.
- ❖ Take time to kit the boat out for you so you know where you will pack your kit. Can you locate your throwbag in a hurry? A lot of boats now have a drinks bottle holder in between your legs which can make excellent holders for your throwbag and allows you always to get it in a hurry. Make sure your throwbag has a good closure on it as 15-25mtr of rope floating about inside your boat will not make an easy wet exit.

Outfitting your boat is not enough by itself. You should also look at your other equipment, especially your Buoyancy aid.

Do you have a knife handy that can be reached and operated easily, preferably one handed?

Does your PFD allow you to carry a sling and krab as well?

Do you have a chest harness? There is no requirement for everyone to have a chest harness on their buoyancy aid but all should be aware of the limitations of not having one.

Safe River Running

“The art of staying out of trouble”

When paddling any river there must be some clear and flexible ideas on how a group of paddlers is going to get down safely and in control. This is clearly going to depend on; the size of the group, the groups' ability levels and the nature of the river. With this in mind the following mnemonic is helpful for the group while river running;

C. communication

L. line of sight

A. avoidance is better than cure

P. position of maximum usefulness

- ❖ **Communication** - The important factors with this are that everyone within the group is aware of what signals are being used and that they are kept simple. Any more than five signals and things are going to get complicated.

Safe river running seems to break down most due to lack of signals or poor signals.

Signals are a two process and work best when they are reciprocated i.e. you receive the signal, you return the signal.

- ❖ **Line of sight** - Everyone should have a good line of sight within the group. This can help avoid someone heading of around an unknown bend. Signals are better when you can see each other. As a general rule of thumb you have to keep the person in front of you in your line of vision.

- ❖ **Avoidance is better than cure** - The over riding principle in safe river running is the art of staying out of trouble. To help achieve this we need to know what the hazards are and where to find them. We then need to spend time working on our skills so we can position ourselves in such a way to avoid those hazards. Ultimately we can always walk a rapid as it will always be there another day.

- ❖ **Position of maximum usefulness** - As river leaders we need to strive to find the position where we can be of most use to the most amount of the group for the most amount of time. This is not only important when protecting a rapid but also when paddling. For example do want to be at the front to lead the way and be out of position if someone got broached, or if you are at the back the front paddler might lead you all through a stopper. There are undoubtedly compromises that need to be made. Following this rule will save time and effort if and when a rescue is needed.

Following this mnemonic will help you as a leader focus on leading safe trips and will provide a framework for the day. This is not meant to be THE way to a run a river, it's A way.

Scouting Rapids

“Never go where the mind hasn’t been before”

“Think there = Look there = Be there”

An area that perhaps doesn’t get mentioned a lot is inspecting or scouting a particular rapid. When looking at rapids there seems to be two camps; those who can instantly see the line and those who need a lot of time, chat and thought over the proposed route. To help those who are in the second camp and also river leaders or those who are coaching then the following mnemonic can be particularly helpful.

S. section

C. current

O. obstacles

U. understanding

T. training

❖ **Section** - When scouting a rapid it is important to break the rapid into manageable sections. To do this we start at the bottom of the rapid and work back upstream. This allows us to see where we want to end up and will start to dictate where we enter the rapid from.

❖ **Current** - What is the current doing? Is it going to help or hinder us? By asking these questions we start to have an understanding of what our options are. Is that a cushion wave?

❖ **Obstacles** - What are the obstacles that I have to avoid? Are there any blind spots that I could of missed?

Once we have decided on what obstacles are in the way then we can start to have an understanding of the route down the rapid.

❖ **Understanding** - Once the above have all been determined then we have to make sure that;

1. I have an understanding of what I am going to do.

2. My group have the understanding of what they are going to do.

We might need to repeat some of the above if the understanding is not there.

❖ **Training** - Again once we have gone through all of the above then it comes down to ours and the groups training. Do they / I have the skill to complete the route. It might be that I do but not today! Has the group got the skill to make that line or do we need to go back some stages to re-assess the line.

Following this guide will help you as the leader or group member have a clearer picture of what’s involved to paddle that particular rapid. It can confirm that you can OR can’t paddle it. It is a brilliant tool for new river leaders.

It is a good idea to take your paddle and throwbag with you. The paddle is great for pointing, stability and a reaching aid while your throwbag is ready in case someone slips in or to speed up setting up safety.