

THE SEA CANOEIST

NEWSLETTER

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DEEP WATER RESCUES - Part II KAYAK RE-ENTRY

As was said in the last newsletter, deepwater rescues constitute the single most important safety and survival skill for sea kayakers and it is getting the paddler back aboard the kayak once it has been emptied of water, that is the real skill in deepwater rescues. When sea kayakers gather, there is usually much discussion on solo recovery techniques, particularly paddle-float systems, yet, as I pointed out last time, if you take pains to keep the cockpit volume as small as possible; keeping water aboard to the minimum, re-entry is the only problem in a capsize and subsequent failure to roll. It has been my experience that solo paddling is uncommon, so the most useful techniques are those involving more than a single kayak. The two-boat systems are probably the best to learn to use well. That is, the rafted re-entries should be the focus of your attention rather than the solo re-entry techniques. Of the recovery techniques discussed last month, the 'Lift & Flip', 'X' and the 'HI' rescues are the most useful. For re-entries I suggest you concentrate your efforts on the 'Face-up rafted re-entry'.

RAFTED RE-ENTRIES

THE CLASSIC RE-ENTRY:

The most commonly illustrated re-entry technique in a deep-water rescue is to have the swimmer approach his rafted-up kayak from the stern and, face down, wriggle his way up and along the back deck until he reaches the cockpit rim. At this point the swimmer can sit up, astride his kayak, bring his feet forward and into the cockpit. He then has to slide down onto his seat to complete the task. Derk Hutchinson's book 'Sea Canoeing' 3rd paperback edition

1988 shows this on page 187. It is a technique that works okay on calm water with kayaks without rudders - not the conditions normally encountered under most sea kayak trip conditions. To start with, there is excessive weight on the rear deck that can stove in the deck of most glassfibre or plywood kayaks unless the boat is very heavily built. Secondly, the swimmers spray-deck usually catches on the point of the stern of the kayak and slows up progress. Lastly, with kayaks with rudders, you can damage the rudder fittings and/or the swimmer becomes entangled in the rudder control gear. However, by far the biggest problem is that the weight of the swimmer astride the kayak is too high and threatens to capsize the kayak, particularly with any sort of sea running.

FACE-UP RE-ENTRY:

This variation was introduced to me by English kayaker Dave Shell in the mid 1970's and is probably the most commonly used in NZ now - it works well. With the rafted up group of kayaks after an X, XT or HI type of kayak recovery the swimmer approaches his kayak from the rear between his kayak and one of the rescue kayaks. He moves up between the two boats until with one hand he can firmly grasp his own cockpit rim, and that of the rescue boat. Leaning back in the water, keeping as much of his body in the water, he lifts his feet into the cockpit. With a heave he can, in a single motion, seal-launch himself into his cockpit, pulling the two kayaks together beneath his body as he goes - illustrated over the page.

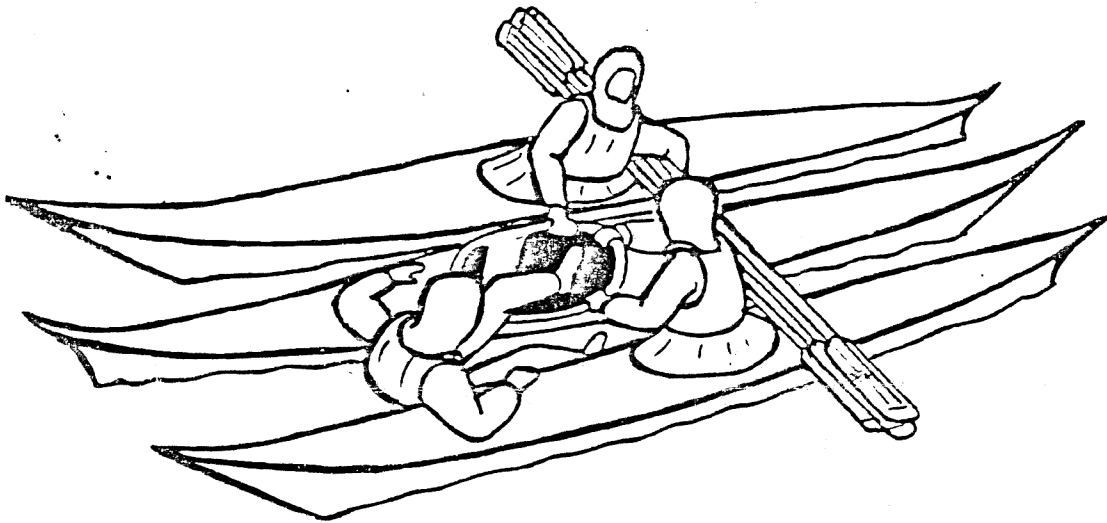
SIDE RE-ENTRY:

An uncommon method also illustrated over the page, is the side re-entry. Here the swimmer approaches the rafted kayaks from the side and wriggles, face-down, over the back deck of the rafted group, then sits up as he slides his feet into the cockpit of his kayak. It suffers from needing a good deal of effort from the swimmer, and sitting up, lifts the weight of the group high and therefore is as unstable as the 'classic re-entry'. I don't think it has much going for it compared to the face-up re-entry.

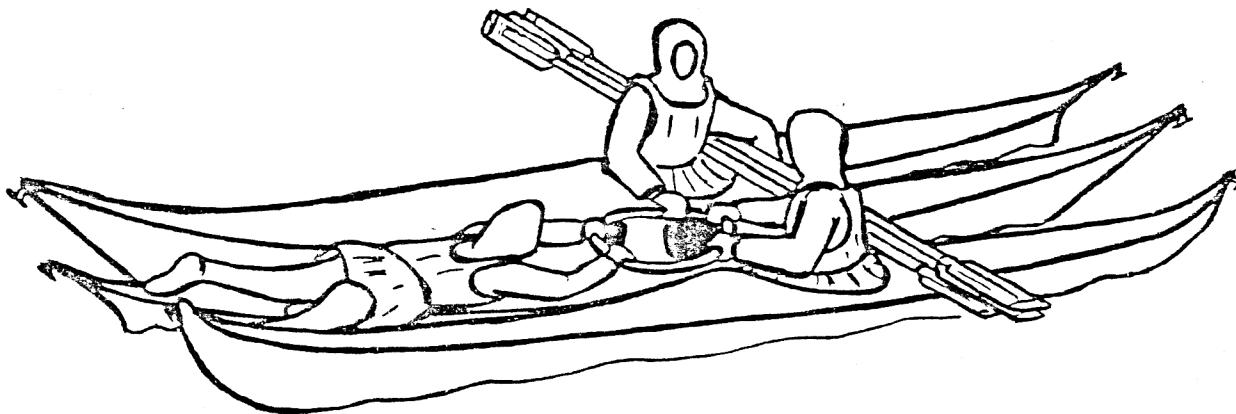
STIRRUP RE-ENTRY:

The North American paddlers introduced this to us a few years ago and is well illustrated in Randel Washburne's book from which I unashamedly stole the accompanying illustration. This works well with a tired, hypothermic, weak, or obese kayaker. The cockpit of the rescued kayak is encircled with a loop of rope or nylon webbing. The end of the loop closest to the rescuing canoe is pushed down between the kayaks and a paddle is placed through the loop as a sort of toggle. The illustration in Washburne's book shows a 'larks-foot' hitch around the paddle shaft, but in fact this is not required at all. The out-board end of the loop is used as a step for the swimmer to regain his kayak. Needless to say, the tripler of the group needs to carry such a loop of suitable size pre-tied to the appropriate size for the kayaks in the group. It is a good idea where teachers are taking students kayaking, or on guided kayak trips - probably not worth considering for a group of experienced paddlers.

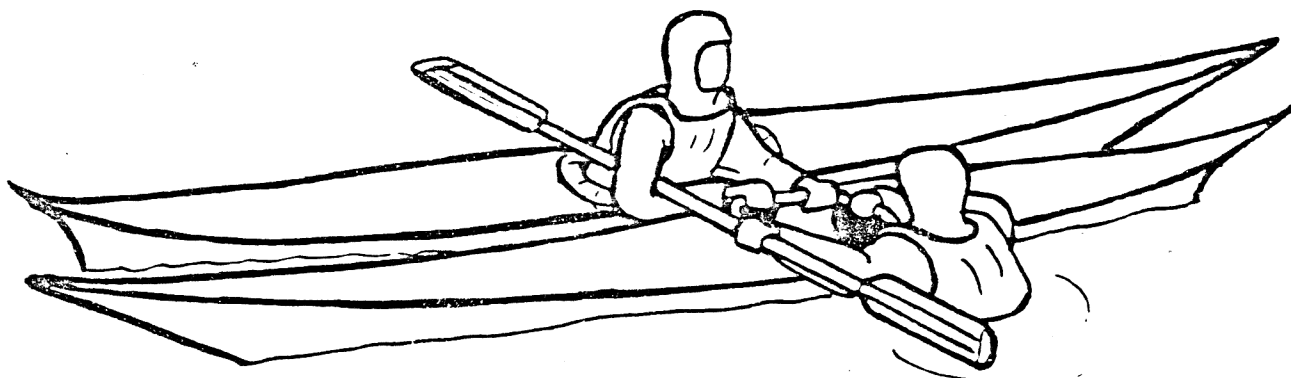
RAFTED RE-ENTRIES



Face-up Re-entry

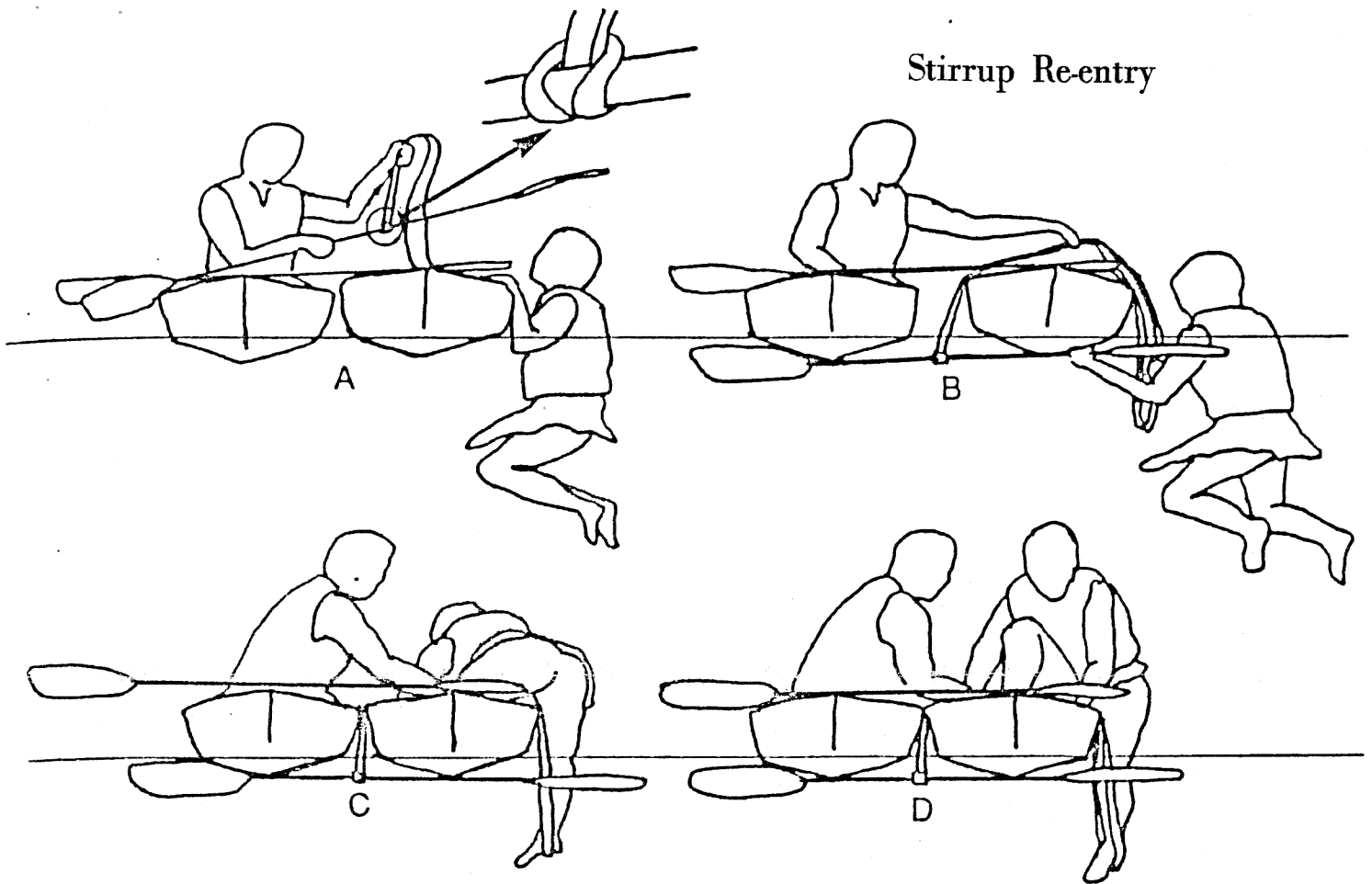


Classic Re-entry



Side Re-entry

Stirrup Re-entry



UNDERWATER RE-ENTRIES:

The underwater re-entries involve re-entering the cockpit while the kayak is either fully, or partly capsized, and then hoisting top-side the kayak with the paddler in the cockpit. From this point the paddler can then either bail out the water, or if the kayak has a low-volume cockpit, replace the spray deck and paddle on. The technique requires a kayak with either bulkheads, or ample buoyancy to keep on-board water to the minimum. The underwater re-entry consists of two techniques - re-gaining the cockpit followed by the hoisting technique.

WET RE-ENTRY:

While the rescue boat stands by ready for the second part of the underwater re-entry procedure, the swimmer floats beside his capsized kayak facing aft, grasping each side of his cockpit rim - the hand of the shoulder against the kayak grasping the far side of the cockpit rim. Leaning back, the paddler brings his feet up and into the cockpit as if he were doing a feet-forward flip over a bar. The flotation provided by the swimmer's life-jacket will mean that the kayak will turn on its side during this part of the technique. Once seated in the cockpit, still in a capsized

position, the rescue boat moves in quickly for an eskimo rescue where the victim can grab the bow of the approaching boat and hoist himself topside, bail or replace his spraydeck. This is potentially the most dangerous part of the process as a wave can fling the rescue boat against the paddler or the capsized boat and cause damage.

That is the general concept, but it works a bit different in real-life. The sea kayak seldom floats upside-down; generally on its side. The paddler with his life-jacket finds it difficult to get 'under' his boat in the re-entry phase, and the time-lag in re-entry and the eskimo rescue is such that more than a single attempt may be needed as the victim generally runs out of air. This is all solved by a minor variation. The swimmer holds onto the bow of the rescue boat and together they paddle the swimmer, feet-foremost, into the cockpit of the swamped boat. The momentum assists the swimmer righting his craft and seldom does the swimmer have his head underwater for more than a few seconds, if at all. The rescue boat then backs off as the rescued paddler fits his spraydeck. You will note that this whole process is pointless if the swamped boat has insufficient flotation, or is without bulkheads, as the water will still lie in the boat and

make it unstable - you need minimum-volume cockpits for these techniques.

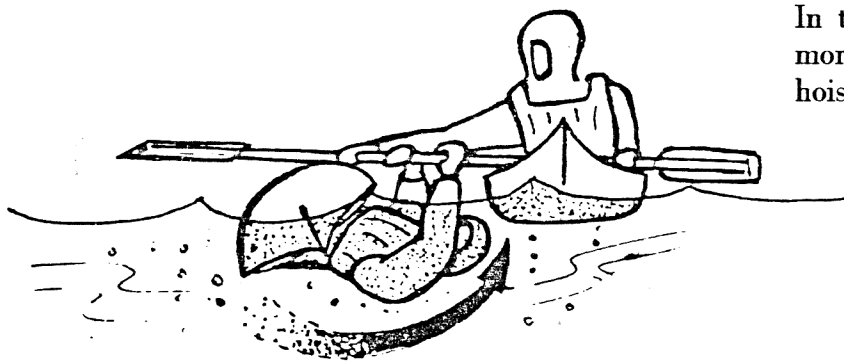
WET RE-ENTRY AND ROLL:

This is a solo technique - that is, does not need a rescue boat. However, if a paddler is swimming then his roll wasn't up to much in the first place and may not be up to a re-entry and roll technique either. The theory is that the swimmer re-enters his kayak as described above and instead of using an eskimo rescue to get topside, rolls up himself - a Pawlata Roll tends to work better than a Screw Roll with a semi-swamped boat. In real life, the best use of this technique is when you have a trip leader with a reliable roll and a capsized paddler who may be cold and needing to be got out of the water in haste, or perhaps your group is in a vulnerable position and you need a super-fast rescue to continue moving.

In this event the trip leader rafts up with other members of the group and has the swimmer climb out onto the decks of the rafted group. The trip leader then swaps places with the swimmer, swims to the capsized canoe and does a re-entry & roll. The group can then continue moving with an exchange of boats.

Eskimo Rescue

In this case using a paddle, but more often the capsized kayaker hoists himself using the rescue kayak.



SOLO RE-ENTRIES

THE STABLE BOAT:

This is a technique that can generally be done only with a very stable (wide) boat although I have seen Paul Caffyn demonstrate it with a Nordkapp! Paul's technique was to swim up to his boat and seal-launch himself, face-down over his aft deck. With arms over the kayak and in the water on one side, and feet in the water on the other side, the Nordkapp was quite stable. Now comes the tricky part! Paul would pull himself around on the back deck until he could get his feet into the cockpit - still face-down on the aft deck he would wriggle his way down into the cockpit until he could quickly roll over and sit up on the seat.

PADDLE ASSISTED

In this technique the paddle is used as an outrigger to add to the stability of a 'stable-boat re-entry' technique as described above. The paddle can be shoved under the bungy cords on the back deck to give added stability to the boat.

PADDLE FLOAT

Here the paddle assisted re-entry is made more stable by adding flotation to the outer end of the paddle. You can add flotation with custom made inflatable or foam floats - some paddlers have seat cushions that double as a float. My preference is to carry a spare buoyancy-vest with bungy cords added to hold it in place on the back deck, or onto the paddle blade. A spare buoyancy-vest can always be used to advantage on a trip!

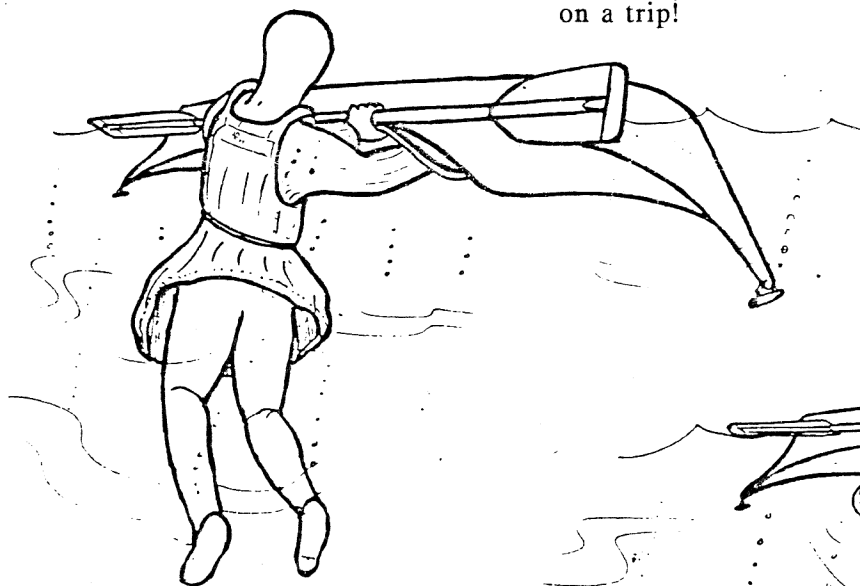
Paddle float techniques are as varied as are the floats themselves. Once the boat is made stable with its outrigger you can use the Caffyn technique, or you can use the paddle shaft like a rafted kayak and use the face-up re-entry as described at the beginning of this issue. Place your back to the paddle shaft, lean back and get your legs into the cockpit before heaving yourself up and into the cockpit. The critical part to paddle-float techniques is to have the paddle fairly rigid on the aft deck to create the outrigger. Have your system worked out long in advance of your trip to ensure it works IN ROUGH WATER!

References: The following books are worth looking at for deep-water rescues and re-entry techniques:

SEA CANOEING - Derek Hutchinson (3rd Edition)

CANOEING HANDBOOK - British Canoe Union Edited by Geoff Good (1981 edition)

THE COASTAL KAYAKER'S MANUAL - Randel Washburne (1989 Edition)



Wet solo re-entry

