



Kayaking 101

INFORMATION

Fast kayaks tend to be unstable. Most people can become confident in an unstable kayak after 4 or 5 sessions, but it is foolish to attempt the course in an unstable boat without practice. It is also very selfish as damaged boats have to be fixed later by volunteers.

Adjust the seat (and if necessary the footrest) so that your knees are very slightly bent. Your legs should not be totally straight, nor should your knees be way up in the air.

Get in by placing the paddle across the boat and on the bank. Hold the paddle and the centre of the cockpit in one hand and on the paddle towards the bank with the other. Paddles are strong, they won't break. If there is a strong current, you should get in pointing upstream as it is easier to control the boat that way.

If you find the kayak too unstable, take the seat out and sit right on the bottom. Lowering your centre of gravity by a few centimetres makes all the difference. Be sure though to jam the seat well back under the rear deck and tie it on, as seats have no buoyancy and will be lost if you capsize.

A kayak paddle is the right length when you stand it up and can just loop your fingers over the blade. For right-handed paddles (and although there are left-handed paddles many left-handed people learn to use a right-handed paddle), you hold the paddle firmly in your right hand and let the left hand slip. Keep your grip shoulder-width apart.

For kayaks with rudders, steer by pushing the rudder in the direction you want to go. Note however for the rudder to work you have to be going faster than the water, so don't rely on it in rapids.

Paddling downstream, stick to where the most water is going. Always go for maximum flow. In rapids, either go through the waves, or better still skim past just off the side of the main waves. Don't get caught in the eddies on the side of the river.

In rapids, keep your paddle low and be ready to push off the surface of the water with the flat side of your paddle. You are not just relying on balance – think of your paddle as a temporary outrigger. Slow down as you come into the rapid so you can see what you have to do. If in doubt, keep straight and be decisive – a crunch is better than going sideways into a rock or tree. Never try to grab a branch – just rely on your paddle.

If you are crossing a current, lean downstream. Almost all capsizes are upstream.

If you capsize leave the kayak on its back trapping the air inside and quickly go to the bow or stern and tow it to the bank. Don't grab the centre or cockpit rim as that will cause it to fill with water and become hundreds of kilograms heavier. Try to keep hold of your paddle too if you can.

All kayaks should have buoyancy front and back. Paddles also float.

Almost any hole can be fixed temporarily with cloth tape. You should always carry some. You will have to wait a few minutes to let the area dry so the tape sticks.

Many of the Katherine kayaks have been repaired many times, and so have the paddles. They still work Ok though. Lightness is more important than beauty.

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