

Winter... A time for reflection and action!

By Steve Smith - Manukau Manager

During winter it's easy to hibernate. The weather isn't predictable; the water is much cooler and motivation is probably low. But while there are fewer people on the water, you have a great opportunity to practise and develop your skills. In summer you'll then have more paddling options and a whole heap more fun .

With this in mind, the crew at Canoe & Kayak Manukau put together a comprehensive 'Winter Skills Course' programme for leaders and club members who aim to become leaders. We would identify areas for improvement and work on them, covering the theory and practical aspects of rescues (additional to the usual paddle float), towing, white water paddling, river reading, surf management, rolling, and group leadership. The result would be a group of skilled, motivated friends.

The programme was held over 16 weeks with classroom and pool sessions each week. We had two days in Taupo learning about white water paddling; surfing sessions at Orewa and a weekend trip to Whananaki. More weekends away were planned, but the weather got the better of us. The course proved a perfect opportunity to get to know fellow clubbies better and escape from daily grind.

Although I've been paddling for more than 5 years, my time on-water has recently been limited. Having always been a sea kayaker I wanted to enjoy surfing and white water. The sessions at Orewa were hugely rewarding. 7.30 am on a Sunday morning, my first trip out, a sizeable wave bore down on me. I knew "I'm about to have a swim here" and

memories of a dumping that I took at Cook's Beach four years ago were clear. That occasion had been a good case for investing in some sunny straps and a tighter fitting cap!

Now, after half an hour of coaching I knew what had caused me to take a swim. I had an ineffective low brace and was incorrectly positioned in my boat. By the end of our day I was racing down wave faces, huge grin intact. When waves caused my kayak to broach I felt invincible. The satisfaction and sense of achievement was huge. I now look at surf and think 'bring it on!'



The group wait in anticipation for the day to start.



Tony showing us how it's done.

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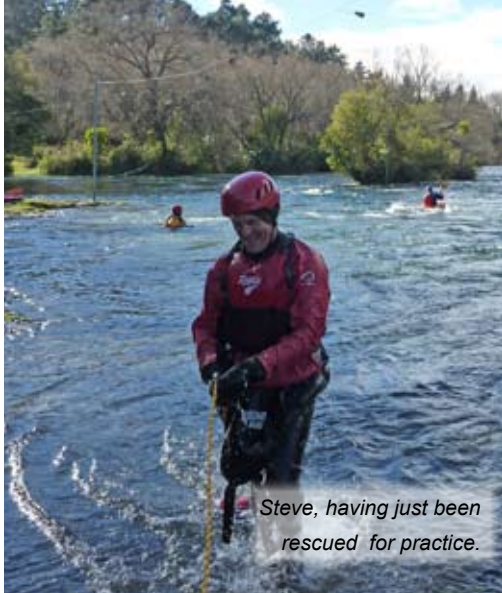
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Then we had two days in the 'White Water Development camp' at Taupo. If, like me you haven't experienced paddling a river, it's a 'must do'. What a contrast to the open ocean. It was a huge learning curve. The boat wouldn't do what it usually did for me. There were eddies that I suddenly had to think about, white water, ferry-gliding, s-turns and more. Surprisingly, some sea kayaking habits that I had picked up didn't apply in this new environment.

I've found that my sea kayaking has taken a huge leap through increased water confidence and better boat control. I now know what to look out for. When the swell sucks my boat through a narrow gap in the rocks I'll be fine. I know what to do. I can't wait for some rock-gardening.



Steve, having just been rescued for practice.

In any kayak club the skill level and paddling ability of our newest club member will differ greatly to the most seasoned Yakity Yakker's. An experienced paddler who spends time with new clubbies, helping to lift their capabilities, inevitably finds passing on knowledge



Jane's having a great time!

hugely rewarding. New clubbies feel looked after and benefit greatly from the coaching and the club grows from strength to strength.

'We never stop learning' is a familiar phrase that is so true with kayaking. There's always a new trick or two to learn. So next winter, when you're sitting in front of the TV with grey skies outside, why not dust off the kayak, call up a club member and get out to practise your paddle floats, wet exits and paddle strokes. How about a surfing session or two?

I'm certain that we will repeat the course next year. Do come along and be part of something cool!

This winter has been a blast!

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