

Safe Kayaking

by Pete Townend



Over the years I have spent a huge amount of time focused on making kayaking safer. It has been a passion, or obsession I suppose. Often I have been criticised, when the safety issue appears an overreaction.

Some years ago, though it seems like yesterday, a senior paddler was angry. "Pete, what right do you have to alter a natural obstacle?"

We were on a river used for instruction. I thought the log that we removed with ropes, saws and two hours of team work was a potentially fatal trap. He insisted it was useful in showing paddlers how to deal with danger.

Our differing opinions on safety were akin to teaching swimming. Some parents support a beginner in shallow water, and then supervise practice until the child can face the ocean alone. My critic was perhaps more inclined to throw the child in and rescue when necessary. Both methods have been used for generations, but with decreasing enthusiasm to 'throw the boy in' at the first opportunity. Why? Avoiding a negative outcome requires a dash to the rescue. And the supervisor's attention can wander.

For years kayaking safety has been taken seriously by Canoe & Kayak Centres who have sold kayaks, taught and then 'supervised' kayaking activities. We often hear comments that there is nothing to it, anyone can kayak. True, but it is wrong to assume that anyone can fix every small problem that may become big without some training and the correct equipment

The Industry now expects all commercial operators to have at least one working form of communication wherever they go. This means that in an area in which cell phones don't work a PLB (Personal Locator



Tony & Dan practicing their stern deck rescue.

Beacon), a satellite phone or mountain radio is required. At sea, a VHF Radio to communicate with Coastguard or other vessels should be carried.

This begs the question, what does a recreational kayaker need to carry? My thoughts are to question, why would you go boating without your cell phone in a proper waterproof dry bag? Why not have a VHF Radio to call for help from other boaties or the Coastguard? Is the main reason cost? If so, what would you think of someone in trouble who lacked the equipment with which to call for help? Obviously an estuary paddle, or playing at the local beach with parents supervising the kids, requires less back up, but kayak fishermen out on the reef or exploring the coast are alone and need more. Adventurers covering long distances, anyone paddling in a busy harbour or in extreme weather, need to kit up with all the bells and whistles.

However, adventure contains a challenge, excitement, novelty and inevitably involves risk.

A friend said to me, "I've tramped for more than twenty years and never taken anything with me. Why should I start now? I tell someone where I'm going, when to expect me back and I'm off to explore and pitch myself against the elements." Like my tramping friend I know, when I'm paddling in big surf and my heart rate is up, I depend on my skills to get through.

I am concerned with safety, but why? Well, I suppose as a youth I spent a fair amount of time doing risky things that were considered normal for my age. But I would be mortified if my children tried some of these. I have seen many accidents that were totally avoidable.

In the outdoors, we all need to balance exciting gains with risk. The risk is easily minimized by taking basic safety precautions.



Kayaking in a group is not only safer, but fun too.

To enjoy kayaking and adventuring the following pictorial illustrates some the equipment you'll need to enjoy the outdoors. Skills to learn should include rescue techniques and paddle strokes.

Cheers and safe happy kayaking. Peter Townend

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PFD (Personal Flotation Device, also known as a Buoyancy Aid) If I'm swimming is it robust enough and will it stay on me? The PFD contains the most important emergency equipment I carry. Then when I'm sitting on the beach contemplating why my Eskimo roll did not work I can expect someone to find me before it's too late.

Missing from the picture above is the cell phone also in a drybag and in my PFD. (below)



The Take Five Form - Personal Gear List and Group Check List is used as a final reminder to be discussed at the pre-launch briefing on the beach.




TAKE 5
Kayaking Check list

As a group talk through all these issues

<p>EQUIPMENT LIST - Buddy up & check</p> <p> Helmet (rivers & surf) Beanie / hat Thermals Paddle Jacket PFD Spray deck Booties Water & food Kayak & paddle High Vis Gear Sunscreen/ Insect Repellent Group - Oceans & Lakes Pumps & Paddle Floats Group - River Throw ropes Pin kit & saw Electronic Communications e.g. VHF radio, mobile phones, PLB </p> <p>In case of emergency: Dial 111 VHF 16 - May Day Check in person Ph: _____</p>	<p>Group Gear</p> <p> Split paddles Repair kit Fire lighting Cooker/thermos Spare thermals Tow system 1st Aid Kit Flares Compass Charts / Maps GPS (optional) Knife (cut rope) Emergency Shelter </p>
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_____ Mobile
 _____ Work
 _____ Home



TAKE 5
Kayaking Check list

As a group talk through all these issues

Trip plan
 Latest weather forecast
 Conditions match skills?
 Hypothermia (hot) & Hypothermia (cold)
 On & off water safety
 Environmental concerns
 Emergency Procedures include emergency get out.
 Working communication devices
 Specific safety issues for this trip
 Participant list
 Any medical conditions
 All participants keen to proceed?

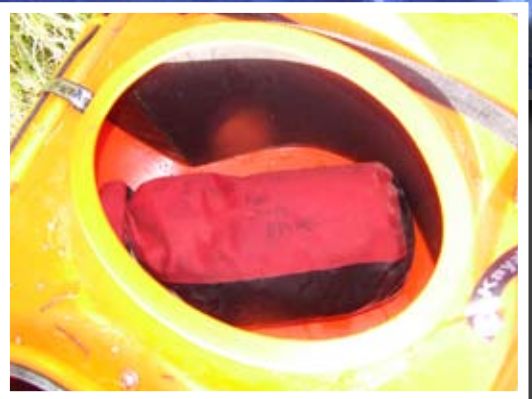
Trip Plan/ 2-minute form lodged with check in person.

Appropriate wind conditions to run trips:
 Novice - no significant surf or swell, wind under 15knots
 Intermediate- surf or ocean swells less than 1.5 meter or wind under 25 knots.
 Advanced- any condition that is suitable to the trips aims

At conclusion of trip or activity:
 Contact check in person (See overleaf)
 Group Debrief.

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Gear in my emergency dry bag.



I carry two dry bags. The red one with my emergency gear and the blue with more spare polypro (you can never have too much) towel and tarp. The tarp has so many uses. A ground sheet, emergency shelter, sun shade and even a sail. The pump is stowed on deck in the bungies.



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