

## RESCUE TECHNIQUES

# for Sit-on-top KAYAKS

by Derek Hairon

## PART TWO: Solo Rescues



**A capsize when you are alone is potentially one of the nightmares of sit-on-top kayaking.**

Solo paddling is much more risky and should be avoided. If you paddle solo then you must be prepared to handle incidents on your own.

While it is not a good idea to paddle solo some advice may enable you to learn how to stay safe. Practising solo rescues will improve your assisted rescue techniques. You will also learn how difficult solo rescues are. I know of at least one kayaker who having practised solo rescues vowed never to go out alone again.

All the difficulties of getting back on a sit-on-top are compounded because you have to counterbalance the kayak. You have no one help to balance the kayak or pull you out of the water as with the assisted rescue.

Stay well within your comfort zone. Build in a big safety margin if you decide to paddle alone. Paddle well below the conditions you might go out in with friends.

Staying close to the coast does not mean it will be an easy swim ashore if you fall in and what looks like a short swim can be very hard work.

Carry appropriate safety equipment. Ensure your base contact knows your plans and return time.

It is easy to underestimate how quickly you can drift away from a paddle during a capsize. Try letting your paddle drift away for 1 minute and paddle by hand to it. You will be surprised at how difficult it is to retrieve. Consider a paddle leash as an essential item for solo paddling. This is a means of attaching the paddle to the kayak by a long length of cord or elasticated cord.



Nobody will be around to retrieve the paddle if it drifts away.





## >> FAST SOLO

How to tip a kayak over was covered in part one last issue.

This is a fast rescue that requires agility as you are sitting quite high as you get seated.

Stuart pushes down firmly with the right hand to counterbalance the kayak and kicks strongly with his legs. This helps propel him on board. A firm grip is maintained on the paddle as he does not have a leash.

Once onto the kayak roll onto your bottom to sit upright. Be quick as you will be quite unstable.



## >> STABLE METHOD

Larger paddlers often prefer this option as the centre of gravity is low.

The aim is to keep yourself as low as possible until a brief moment when you swivel upright and onto the seat.

- > Kick hard with the legs.
- > Keep a very low centre of balance. Lie along the kayak.
- > Now swivel upright and let your legs hang into the water. This gives you more stability.





## >> PADDLE FLOATS

Paddle floats are sometimes recommended as aids to help you get back on board. They provide an outrigger float for your paddle. Some like them. Others think they are a waste of time. Practice with a paddle float to decide whether they work for you.

Remember, if you attach the paddle and paddle float to the kayak to stop it moving about, you may find it hard to release it quickly.

You can make a simple float out of swimming floats

with elasticated shock cord under which you slide the paddle. Alternatively you can buy self inflating floats. These slip over the paddle and are inflated by a gas bottle or by manual inflation.

Try using a paddle float in choppy conditions as they can be quite fiddly to put together if you have never practised when waves are slopping into you.

If a paddle float is your only method of coping with a capsize then you are probably paddling outside of your safety margins and experience.



Deck lines can hold the paddle float in place. Some people design specific methods to attach the paddle float to the kayak.



## >> CLIMBING BACK ON BOARD

This is much harder when you are alone. Most people opt for the side entry.

The stern re-entry is sometimes recommended. This



Kick with the legs to propel yourself onto the kayak. Push downwards with your far hand to counterbalance the kayak. Note the use of a paddle leash.

method can be difficult if you have lots of kit on the rear deck, or the pockets of your buoyancy aid are full. Most of the craft is out of the water so the kayak is often very unstable. Backrests often get in the way. It is good to try and discover if it works for you.

## >> CONCLUSION

Practising solo rescues is an essential task. At the very least it teaches you how difficult getting back on an upturned sit-on-top can be. Most paddlers then realise why paddling alone is not a good idea.

Make time to learn how to deal with a capsize as a way of discovering your limitations. Practice with other paddlers on the water in case things get difficult.

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