

Bottoms up -- NOW WHAT!!!!

By Larry Kline

The last newsletter had a discussion about learning to roll your kayak. I agree with its statement that rolling can be another skill in your quiver. Yet many, I suppose, think of it as the ultimate safety arrow....Here are my thoughts on NOT rolling.

A kayak guide friend of RMSKC member Frank Bering says that if you have to roll you have already committed one error—you are out paddling by yourself. The second error is flipping over in your boat. Thus, while rolling may give you confidence and add another skill, it may not be the safety item some suggest.

I believe that paddlers are more secure/safe if they know how to affect an assisted recovery. Notice I say recovery and not rescue. A rescue is needed to remedy an unforeseen event. A recovery is needed to remedy an expected event. In sum, each of us needs to understand that flipping over in our boats is a part of the sport and is NOT a catastrophe requiring a rescue. Thus, I believe each of us should follow the principle of not paddling alone AND being able to assist our fellow paddler in the event they flip over.

The common thought, albeit a misguided one from my perspective, seems to be to let your fellow paddler recover using the paddle float reentry. Everyone is on their own. It is best to not approach kayaking with this Lone Eagle mentality. Assisting our fellow paddlers is key to our sport. For this reason I have often voiced the concern that the club spend a good deal of time teaching its members now to effect the assisted reentry.

Basically, an assisted reentry involves the upright paddler bringing her boat along side his flooded boat - her bow to his stern. Then she takes both their paddles and places them across the cockpits of both boats and leans over his cockpit holding onto the cockpit ring with both paddle shafts jammed under her PFD. Meanwhile he treads water along side his boat and then lunges up and over the stern of his boat whilst she steadies his flooded boat. He belly flops onto his boats rear deck and then scoots feet first into his cockpit. She continues to hold on to his boat while he pumps his boat free of water. Voila!!!



This maneuver has the effect of providing a wide and thus stable platform for the recovery and eliminates the precarious perch he would otherwise have once seated inside his waterlogged boat if he had done a paddle float self recovery.

In a rough sea, where a flip is most apt to occur, it would be difficult to execute either a paddle float reentry or a roll. I have not heard of anyone in the club who has practiced a paddle reentry or roll in rough water. On the other hand, an assisted reentry is more easily accomplished because it provides a stable platform to effect the reentry. To convince yourself of this stability factor, the next time you are paddling in 1 foot waves just go stern to bow, lean over and hold onto your fellow paddler's cockpit ring and notice how your stability increases.