



PPCA Newsletter

April 2022

Introduction

Welcome to April's Newsletter. This month, Terry gets defensive, Clive makes an unexpected purchase and Doug attempts to improve our sofa skills with some advice on hand positions.

Editorial

There is a school of thought that says you don't make mistakes, you just have happy accidents. Doug, more realistically perhaps, terms them mishaps. Back in the days when I paddled those funny little boats with a double-ended paddle, I seem to remember having more mishaps than most and very few of my accidents could have been described as happy. I never seemed to be able to grasp exactly what the coaches were on about with the recovery strokes when they were described to me on the water so something like Doug's articles on skills would have been really useful. I'm not saying I'd have mastered the skills or avoided the mishaps but at least I would have had a better idea of what it was I was incapable of doing.

Ivor Jones

Newsletter Editor

Next Committee Meeting

Please forward any items you would like considered at the next committee meeting to secretary@ppca-canoe-club.org.uk. They will go to the secretary.

Next Edition

There is no specific deadline as such for contributions but please bear in mind my general sloth and indolence and let me have anything time-sensitive well in advance.

Contributions

Please send any contributions to newsletter@ppca-canoe-club.org.uk

Acknowledgements

As ever, I have plundered Facebook for the cover photos - my thanks to all concerned.

Easter Paddle Saturday 16th April by Terry Calcott

It has been a few years since we have managed to have a club Easter paddle, hopefully this year we can come together and have some fun and food as a club.

The club Easter paddle will start and finish at Mount Batten this year.

Meet at the slightly later time of 10:30 ready to paddle. It is a PPCA tradition that paddlers dress themselves or their kayak in some form of Easter theme.

We will also have a communal shared Easter feast of savoury and sweet food for those that wish to partake. Details of what to bring will be posted on the forum and Facebook nearer the date.



Features

It's Got Nothing to Do With Helga by Clive Ashford

Welcome to my first story of 2022. This little effort starts off a bit educational before turning anecdotal, after which it degenerates into a dreary conclusion filled with pointless self-pity. I can already sense that you have found something more interesting to do but I haven't, so I will write on regardless of my ever-dwindling audience.

So, let's start off with the educational bit. Those of you that do not participate in our whitewater activities can be forgiven for thinking that this winter progressed in a normal fashion. There have been days on end when it has never got properly light and when the air has been filled with a miserable drizzly mist. There have been other days filled with spectacular downpours of rain coupled with various Met Office weather warnings. The non-river paddler will be surprised to learn that river levels have been generally very low and that the 2021-22 whitewater river season has been deadly dull. Drizzly mist does nothing to swell our rivers and downpours simply result in a huge surge in water levels that can be quite dangerous before quickly dissipating. Our session leaders have had to be very creative in order to keep our river season going but it has been difficult and the opportunities for our experienced paddlers have been limited to say the least.

The next bit of education is once again aimed at the non-river paddlers reading this. (As if.) When running rivers, it is normal to get on a river and to congregate in an eddy. The group then paddle down a rapid and congregate in another eddy to check that everyone is OK etc. before proceeding down the next section of river and to once again congregate in a convenient eddy. Sometimes we will get out and inspect features from the bank before paddling them, and occasionally we have to re-unite people with their kit. This continues down the river until we reach a point adjacent to where we had left the cars containing (hopefully) our dry kit. We then proceed to tell each other what a good time we had (or not as the case may be) get changed, retrieve the cars from the top of the river and disperse, usually wearing silly grins.

On to the anecdotal bit. Things changed a bit in mid-February. There was a downpour overnight on 12 – 13 and the following week was what forecasters call unsettled. River paddlers like unsettled but the freakish nature of this winter's weather once again reared its ugly head by throwing storm Dudley at us. Not satisfied with one storm, storms Eunice and Franklin followed in quick succession. If they are going to give storms names then why not give them appropriate names? Instead of Dudley, Eunice and Franklin why not use something like Doomsday, Exterminator and Frightful? But I digress, back to the anecdote.

16th Feb is Joy's birthday. As you are no doubt aware I am a romantic old fool who knows exactly how to treat a lady, thus on the morning of the 16th myself, Tony and Bekky congregated on Harford Bridge gazing at the river as it flowed beneath us. Confusingly this particular Harford Bridge spans the river Tavy at Peter Tavy, a spot that marks the end of a section of river that is referred to by paddlers as the Middle Tavy. The Middle Tavy runs from Hill Bridge to Harford Bridge and is my favourite river. I am always a bit wary about describing any particular river because one man's "easy" is another man's "cor blimey missus." So, to slope shoulders, UK rivers guide tells us that the Middle Tavy is *one of the best continuous Grade 3 paddles*, so if you disagree take it up with UK rivers guide. The result of all our gazing was that we declared that the level was low but paddleable (if that's a word) and that we would need to get on with it because the level was dropping fast.

We did the changing bit, the tying boats onto different cars bit and then drove to Hill Bridge where we did the getting onto the water bit. Our predictions about the dropping river levels proved to be uncannily accurate so we set about launching in short time, but not before we had made the acquaintance of Phil and Dan. These two chaps were looking to paddle but felt a bit uncomfortable paddling as just a pair, so asked if they could join us. That very nice Tony agreed, and so there were five intrepid paddlers gracing the rocky rapids on the Middle Tavy. Phil was a big chap who paddled an equally big Dagger boat. Dan was paddling a white-water canoe (I refuse to call them open boats) that although small in terms of a canoe was never the less a big boat.

Let me tell you some things:

- The thing about the Middle Tavy is that it is a small river.
- The thing about small rivers is that they produce small eddies.
- The thing about small eddies is that when you have a group of five paddlers, one of whom is paddling a big Dagger boat and another is paddling a white-water canoe, the eddies simply aren't big enough. We very rarely managed to congregate together in the same eddy.

Our new companions were competent enough so the five of us made good and enjoyable progress in a generally downstream direction. (Always a good thing.) Dan in the canoe got his craft broached on many a rock but being a canoe that can be dealt with by simply jumping out and lifting the boat over the rock. On one occasion I witnessed Tony lending a hand. A kayaker helping a canoeist? Whatever next. I'm sure there are laws against that sort of thing.

Those that paddle with me will know that I don't wear dry trousers, instead I wear a fleecy all in one. (Think giant baby grow.) This means that if I get water in my boat then I know about it very quickly. In one of the last pools Tony and I did a practice roll. (That's one each, not one between us, in case you were curious.) At that stage my boat was nice and dry but on the very next rapid I hit a rock rather hard and I felt myself getting wet. Once we arrived at Harford Bridge we egressed the river where an inspection revealed not one but three splits in my boat. (That doesn't include my spare split paddles.) So, a most enjoyable paddle didn't end well.

The afternoon was spent in the garage with a dremel, odd bits of plastic, a blow torch and a roll of flashband. I affected what I hoped would be a repair.

Next day Tony and I launched into the altogether more fearsome Upper Dart at a friendly low level. Things were going OK until the end of the easy bits when I felt myself getting wet. Tony wasn't surprised and I must confess that neither was I, but the question was what to do? Should we carry on or should we walk back to the start? We still had maybe 75% of the river to run but walking out would be unpleasant. I said "Let's just blast down as quickly as we can." which we adopted as our plan for the day.

In bird terms my boat would start off floating like a duck and I would keep paddling until it was floating like a cormorant, at which point I would stop and empty out, restoring the boat's duck-like properties. The gaps between stopping were getting shorter and shorter the further we went, but we did manage to paddle all the way. In between bailing out I was sealed into the boat by a spray deck and a dry bag. As the water entered the boat air was forced into all available nooks and crannies, causing my spray deck to bulge upwards and my bag to take on the look of a Michelin Man. Apparently this was all very comical if you were there and if you were called Tony.

Debbie Rowlands always buys yellow equipment. Had I followed her fine example I could have made a little jest about paddling a yellow submarine, so that's another comic opportunity missed. (Oh no it isn't.) However, it's an ill wind etc. and I can report that if you are transporting a boat flat on your roof rack and that boat has three splits in it, then by the time you get home all the water has drained out of it.

I abandoned all hope of affecting a serviceable repair and purchased a new boat.

So, on to the promised dreary conclusion. The next day storm exterminator arrived. I drove out to Noss Mayo to walk around the coast and to experience the elements first hand. On the way my car developed a puncture, the repair of which involved replacing the tyre. On the same day my TV decided that it no longer wanted to either show me any pictures or make any sound, which being a TV isn't very useful. It had proved to be a very expensive few days.

The astute reader will have noted that this little missive omits any mention of Helga, making the title both highly accurate and completely irrelevant at the same time, which you may well surmise counts as normal service for one of my stories.

Until next time, happy paddling. (Oh no, there's not going to be a next time is there?)

Plymouth Sound Snippets #3, The Bridge by Terry Calcott

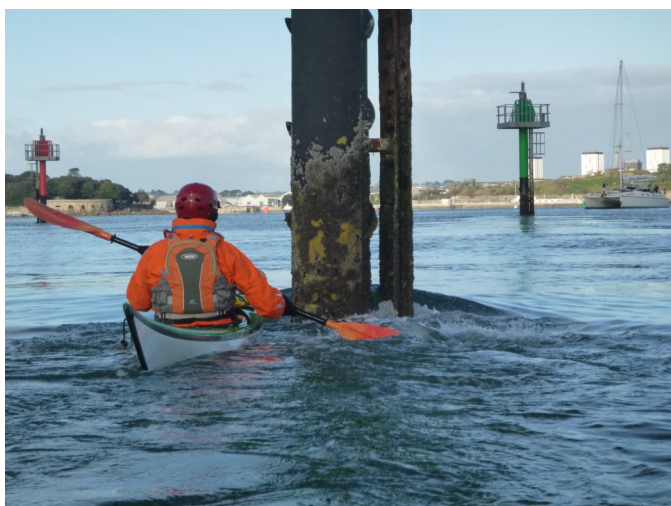
Not to be confused with the Tamar Bridges. The Bridge is an area of Plymouth sound to the southwest of Drakes Island extending to Mount Edgcumbe.

It is what remains of the land bridge when Mount Edgcumbe was connected to Drakes Island. Midway along the reef there is a narrow navigable channel through the deepest part, indicated by four marker poles. The Bridge is also one of the most exciting and dynamic areas in the Sound. The local underwater topography includes a steep drop of over 30 metres into Barn Pool to the north and a smaller drop to the south. This combined with a strong tidal flow forced through the narrow gap which causes a standing wave at peak times. With some wind against tide, it can make for some exciting, confused water. I have paddled across the Bridge 100s of times and every time is different.



The Bridge

The Bridge is also littered with the remains of defensive works from WW2. The narrow channel was covered by a boom defence which would have been supported by some of the metal structures still visible on a low tide.



The Bridge on an Ebb Spring Tide

The most interesting remains are closer to Drakes Island and known as the Sharks Teeth. These are made of reinforced concrete and covered at high water. They would have been a deterrent to fast attack craft and submarines trying to break through the gap in the shallower water (Dragons Teeth are land based defences).



The Bridge on an Ebb Spring Tide

There used to be an isolated concrete column (see photo) which was probably something to do with the boom defence. It was removed several years ago but was a favourite place for the club to practice bow rudders, hanging draws and low brace turns.



The Concrete Column Near Drake's Island

Thanks to Stephen Johnson of Cyberheritage for the aerial photograph of The Bridge.



The Sharks' Teeth

Mishaps by Doug Sitch

Mishaps are best avoided – it goes without needing saying, doesn't it? However, there are ways of avoiding many possible mishaps and coping with unexpected upsets without resulting in any time upside down ☹️

Mishaps vary widely - a lack of concentration (of balance) perhaps? A sudden gust of wind catching you unprepared? An unexpected feature/rock/wave when paddling in between rocks?

Then there are those caused by waves in all their forms... Maybe it was the unexpected broken wave (white on top) that caught you broadside. Were you 'rock hopping' in between rocks on a day with choppy seas? Or was it a day on open water with bigger waves coming broadside (or from behind) and one broke on you?

Maybe you survived all these risks through skill and careful choices.... But what happened when you were landing on a beach? If there are waves breaking on the beach, do you simply not land? Or did you attempt a landing, only to be suddenly turned sideways to the waves and capsized? (See last month's newsletter)

Then there are all the pitfalls of white-water paddling... For the beginner the basic moves of breaking into the flow and breaking back into the eddy present plenty of opportunities for mishap. Then there are rocks (again) and waves (again) that might try and tip you in. The increased speed of the water also increases the possibilities. Surfing also presents many opportunities for capsize (and fun!).

But it is not all doom and gloom 😊 You don't have to pack up all your paddling gear yet!

First Defence: You need to get used to how you and your boat moves – how to keep your balance – you need to become 'one' with your kayak – it is not just something you sit in! Throw it and yourself around – see how it feels. Find the limits of your balance – understand how the primary stability of your kayak feels. Make sure you have adjusted the footrest and backrest and added padding at the hips (as needed) to stop you sliding sideways and generally made the kayak 'fit' you.

Second Defence: Understanding the water and the conditions and what choices you have to avoid mishap. Anticipation of wind gusts & waves, spotting the rocks to avoid, watching for larger incoming waves. Using your paddling skills in defence of the conditions – choosing the place to be (or those not!), paddling into oncoming waves, finding the safe routes and understanding the risks of other routes.

Third Defence: Learning the skills that will help prevent a capsize. These commonly used skills are 'low recovery' and 'high recovery'. They used to be called 'low brace' and 'high brace', so you will find that I use the terms interchangeably.

The **low brace** recovery skills can be used to correct a minor imbalance or provide stability when needed. The **high brace** can be used to prevent capsize and provide recovery in more significant events, such as large waves, impacts with subsurface rocks and wind gusts.



A High Recovery in Defence of an Anticipated Capsize

I can't emphasize enough how useful these skills are. With practise they can become instinctive – they need to be instant, not requiring any preparation. With these recovery skills, the chances of a capsize reduce dramatically, and along with that the need for Eskimo Roll or rescue.

Fourth Defence: Learning the skills to 'Eskimo' roll yourself back upright immediately after a capsize. You could argue that this is **Self-Rescue**, but I see it as defence against continuing hazards such as rocks, waves and anything else that you might get swept into. Always best not to delay to minimise the time spent with your head underwater, but there are a few times when the water is confusing, working against you and it can be best to allow things to settle for a second or two before rolling.



I encourage everyone to increase the level of their defences. But fear not, there are ways we can 'cope' with mishap (capsize) without too much difficulty.

If defences aren't enough, then there is 'rescue'.

Rescue 1: The first requires you to stay in your kayak (upside down) and 'ask' for assistance from nearby fellow paddlers by banging on the hull of your boat and waving your hands out of the water. If there is another paddler near enough, then they can provide assistance for you to pull yourself upright (still in your kayak) by various means such as Bow Rescue/Eskimo Rescue/T Rescue/Paddle Present Alongside and similar. This method is relatively easy to learn, but does need a little practise to gain confidence. A useful skill to have – practise it. However, I will remind you that it does require another paddler to be close by, so is not always applicable.

Rescue 2: In the event that your defences were not enough to prevent a capsize, you don't have an Eskimo Roll, and there is no possibility of Eskimo Rescue (or similar), then that usually means getting out of your kayak. It is very important then to grab & HOLD your kayak & paddle as soon as possible. Any wind/current will separate you from your kit making any rescue much more difficult. There are a number of rescue methods (some self-rescue) but most involve the help of other paddlers (or a swim to shore). I won't go into details of rescue techniques here, but suffice to say that being able to rescue others and put them back into their kayaks is a key skill and often practised on club sessions. Practise on being rescued and able to get back into your kayak is equally important too!

Conclusion: Sometimes things will go wrong. Be prepared and practised with rescue methods and techniques for the day when you need to cope with a mishap (yours or a fellow paddler). The more defences (see above) you have, the less likely that mishaps will occur. The defences are like layers, the better skills you have, the less often is the next layer required. Personally, I have a lot of experience (defence layer 2) but as important, I have very strong support strokes (both low & high brace) (defence layer 3) such that I rarely need to Eskimo Roll.

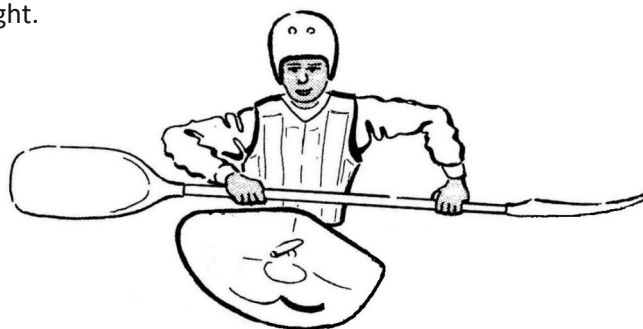
Recovery Skills by Doug Sitch

For me these are the key skills for adventurous water activities such as white water & surf, but also to remember that the calm conditions on the sea can lead to an unexpected event that can put you off-balance and heading for a capsize! Preventing capsize has got to be a good thing? Right?

Low Recovery (low brace): I described last month a low brace skill allowing a paddler to 'lean' on an incoming wave at a beach to provide the support needed to stay upright. This is the same technique, the very same posture without any need to lift the edge of the kayak. Here we can use the low brace position to manage a small loss of balance and use it to rectify that loss and push us back upright.

The picture here shows the basic posture to adopt. The key features are:

- 1) Use the back of the blade to **push down** (on the right of this picture) at right angles to the kayak
- 2) Hold elbows high – try and get the paddle near the body (shoulder over paddle) – forearm near vertical.
- 3) Reach out a little to that side to gain more leverage.



- 4) **Push** down through the back of the paddle and use the resistance to get your body/kayak back in balance.

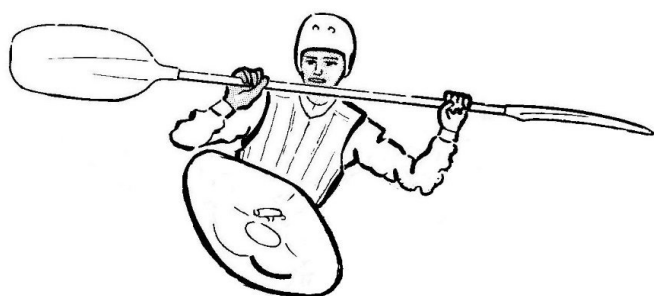
It is important to keep the paddle flat to the water and not to twist it. You will find that to get the paddle back to the surface after a low brace that it will need a twist, but not until the brace has finished!

The low brace position can be modified a little by the paddler turning their body towards the paddle and placing the paddle a little further to the rear. It allows a longer 'reach' and become especially useful when the kayak is moving forward – providing a trailing support stroke – giving more support for longer.

Why Low Brace? I get asked – “Why learn low brace? It is weak and won't stop a capsize. Isn't a high brace better?” The low brace is very good at 'small' stuff and correcting minor imbalance issues. It has an advantage over the high brace in that the paddle is usually very near to the right position in normal forward paddling. So, there is only a short distance to go to get it to work – that means it can be used very quickly. Yes, the low brace is no good for big waves & major upsets, but it is a good skill to have. In the high brace by comparison, the paddle is nearer to shoulder height and twisted round to get the paddle face downwards. This takes time and is no real use until the kayak (and paddler) is significantly off-balance before it can 'reach' enough of the water to affect the recovery.

High Recovery (high brace): The high brace is a very powerful tool in preventing capsize. When practised & perfected, it can be used for moderate balance loss all the way to when the body & head hits water becoming a 'half roll'. It is also the second half of many Eskimo Roll techniques.

The paddle position is much higher than in the low brace taking longer to set up and not becoming effective until the paddler is off balance.



The picture shows the posture to adopt. The key features are:

- 1) Use the face of the blade to **pull down** (on the right of this picture) at right angle to the kayak
- 2) Hang below paddle - elbows low – the paddle near the body – forearm vertical.
- 3) Reach out a little to that side to gain more leverage.
- 4) Pull down on the paddle and use the resistance to get your body/kayak back in balance.

Note: When learning this stroke, the paddle must be held in front of the body at all times (and not over the head) and that the extended arm should not be locked straight, but always bent a little. This is important to reduce the risk of shoulder injury in the event of an unexpected capsize.

The high recovery can be made when on the move, provided that the blade face is flat to the water. A slight lift in the leading edge can help it to 'plane' on the water, providing support for longer.

The high brace position on the 'off' side (the Left side for RHP) (right-handed paddlers = RHP) can appear difficult to get the paddle flat to the water initially. It requires that the paddler is twisted back and up by the hands without changing the grip held by the right hand (RHP). Persevere. You can do it!

If the kayak (and the paddler!) is a long way off balance, then the recovery stroke needs to be effective – the flatter the paddle is to the water, the better. In the picture the paddle is as low as possible. Avoid the temptation to lift the non-drive hand – keep it as low as possible – see pic. I find that the paddler can be set up into the recovery position during the capsize event such that by the time my body hits the water, the paddle is ready – on the surface – for a recovery stroke.



When the kayak is a long way off balance, it is very helpful to be able to use a hip-flip to get you up. Drive the kayak up first, whilst keeping the body in the water, and then follow with the body. It makes it much easier 😊

It can make the recovery easier by leaning back a little. However, the paddler must avoid the tendency to reach back with the blade as well. The paddle needs to be kept at right angles in the middle of the kayak – not forward, and NOT to the rear. Leaning back should generally be minimised if possible as it can also weaken the hip-flip (photo left courtesy of Kay Wilson).

Practice: The recovery skills need to be practiced if a paddler wants to 'keep' them. They require confidence, technique and muscle-memory. Avoiding practice through a lack of confidence simply means that a paddler has already lost those skills. The only way to keep the skills up, strong & instinctive is to use them regularly and practise them at all opportunities – every time you are on the water! Then you will be ready for the unforeseen!

Practice of low recovery can be done at home or anywhere on dry land. All you need is a paddle (no kayak). Sit on floor, carpet, lawn, beach.... You will find that you can adopt the posture and then use the paddle to return you upright as you lean on it. Remember – back of the blade downwards and elbows up!

High recovery can also be practised at home. Again, sitting on the floor holding the correct paddle posture (paddle face down, elbows beneath paddle) and resting the paddle on something 10-14 inches (25-35cm) high. Anything sturdy will do. I find that the sofa is a good height! You can then practise leaning over, whilst hanging under the paddle and restore yourself upright using the paddle. Keep legs straight avoid leaning back or forward. You can take this all the way to shoulder on the floor as required (remember to keep paddle in front of body).

Both of these recovery techniques can be practised in shallow water such as at the beach – you only need enough water to float. This reduces anxiety of possible capsize with the fall-back plan of pushing off the bottom in recovery. The best method is to practise well within your skill (small steps), and do it over & over 10's, 100's of

times. You will naturally progress so don't rush it!

Hand Positions: It is very, very important that you use the same hand grip/positions for all your practise work. These have to be the same ones that you use when paddling forward. If something goes wrong unexpectedly, then there won't be time to change them!

For a right-handed paddler then the right hand has ONLY ONE position – their left hand has only TWO positions – these can be found by looking at your left hand when forward paddling. These are 1) supporting the paddle whilst paddling on the right (doing anything on the right) and 2) the correct grip for paddling on the left (anything on the left). When paddling on the left the forearm should make a right angle with the paddle shaft AND the blade. The RIGHT forearm should always make a right angle with the paddle shaft AND the blade.

For a left-handed paddler then the left hand has ONLY ONE position – their right hand has TWO positions (only two!) – look at your right hand when forward paddling. These are 1) supporting the paddle whilst paddling on the left (anything on the left) and 2) the correct grip for paddling on the right (anything on the right). When paddling on the left the forearm should make a right angle with the paddle shaft AND the blade. The LEFT forearm should always make a right angle with the paddle shaft AND the blade. Confused? I am!!

It is a common to hold the paddle wrongly when practising recovery skills. It is tempting to make things easier – often paddlers are usually not aware of it! Check just after you have finished a bit of practise – deliberately 'freeze' your hand positions – look down - are they the same as when you forward paddle? If you make a grip 'correction' after practise then you have not been holding the paddle correctly in your practise – it could defeat your efforts!

Exchange and Mart

Discount Available at Millets, 38/40 New George St, Plymouth PL1 1RW

One of our members works in the Millets store (Big 'Thank you' to Lee McKenzie!) on New George Street, Plymouth and has negotiated with his Manager a great discount of 15% on production of your PPCA club membership card. Usual T's & C's apply, e.g. goods already discounted/sales items might be excluded.

Discount Available at Kayaks and Paddles

Kayaks and paddles offer discount to local kayak and canoe clubs. The PPCA and Tamar Canoe club can get a discount up to 10%. This is an offer not a right for the person that is making a purchase, so please do not go upsetting Kayaks and Paddles employees as this discount might be taken away.



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