



Introduction to Kayaking

By Richard Clark

So, you've signed up for next year's Coast to Coast? Or maybe some other equally exciting event in a moment of fleeting self-confidence. Have you got time to prepare? Being outside your comfort zone through under preparation is one of the worst feelings you can have as a first-timer in a multisport event. The earlier you start preparing, the easier the transition from non-kayaker to competent kayaker. Most of us benefit from a gradual learning curve. The sink or swim mentality works for only a small percentage of people. If you feel in control of the situation, then you will enjoy kayaking and all the new experiences that it will bring.

Before you get out there paddling it will pay to have a lesson. Starting with some idea of the correct paddling technique is far preferable to developing bad techniques, which become ingrained and difficult to correct. Your first lesson should come from a qualified instructor preferably with a multisport background. It is important to get appropriate instruction for the type of paddling you intend to pursue. Just because someone is a good paddler doesn't necessarily mean they will be a good teacher. Sometimes advice from other paddlers only confuses the new kayaker. A

well-structured lesson will be of great benefit at this early level. The lesson should be on flat water with the new kayaker in either a sea kayak or entry-level multisport boat. You are better to borrow or hire at this stage before you make the all-important first kayak purchase (which I will cover in depth in the next article).

YOUR INTRODUCTION LESSON SHOULD COVER THE FOLLOWING:

- Setting up the kayak and your position in the boat.
- Safety considerations, PFD, airbags, bulkheads, etc.
- Basic paddle technique - wing or conventional.
- Introducing the basic paddle and support strokes you will need to practise - sweep, low-brace, etc.
- Turning the boat using a combination of rudder, rail and sweep strokes.
- Understanding of primary and secondary stability and their importance.
- Some basic drills you can use in your training routine to modify your technique.

As an instructor, I am always amazed at the improvement that can be achieved in a two-hour session. The transformation from nervous paddler with no technique to confident paddler with a grasp of the basic technique is satisfying to observe. Kayaking is all about confidence so a grasp of good technique coupled with practice is a great way to gain this. Remember - it's easy to slip back into your old ways so a follow-up lesson with a good instructor will help curb this tendency. It is also a good time to look at a more specialised wing paddle course to brush up on this skill as well. It is through our paddle technique that we get stability in the kayak - the blade acting as an outrigger. But this only works if the paddle is put in deep and hard. Work on technique on flat water will pay off big time when you progress onto moving water.

With this series of articles I will cover areas such as: choosing the correct kayak and paddle for you, choosing a good Grade Two certificate provider, river paddling, where to train, training programmes, specific kayak exercises, plus stepping up to the next level of paddling and what is required.

Any questions? Don't hesitate to email on theboatshed@xtra.co.nz