

## OPEN CANOE RESCUES ON FLAT WATER

### GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Recently whilst coaching I have become aware that canoeists are not often conversant with sufficient knowledge of flat water rescues to deal with every situation.

What I have tried to do with this article is give some ideas on how to perform the rescues and give some hints for making them easier. To ensure that it does this I have practiced the rescues with several novices, intermediate paddlers and coaches.

#### 1.A) Climb back in – Solo

- For this to work the swimmer must reach as far across the canoe as possible. If the swimmer tries to get in where there is a thwart this will be easier as there is more to hold onto. (c)
- Think about the environment as you do this. If the water is rough then get in on the downwind side, the canoe is being blown onto you and the canoe will not swamp as easily from the waves, as they are being pushed onto the hull not into the canoe. If there is a slight breeze getting in from the upwind side may be easier as the wind will flatten the canoe as you pull down on it.
- Try and make the re-entry one smooth action and don't get your buoyancy aid caught on the gunwale.



- If a solo paddler is struggling with this then it may be possible to make life easier for them if they are carrying a barrel or dry bag. Attach the bag/barrel to a thwart by means of a very short length of rope, throw this out of the boat and re-enter from the opposite side. The bag/barrel will act as a counterbalance (a and b).
- A stirrup can also be used by tying the sling to the centre thwart whilst the bag/barrel is still outside the canoe (c).



(a)



(b)



(c)

### 1.B) Climb back in - Tandem

Once the paddlers are in the water, one person holds onto one side of the canoe whilst the other person reaches as far as they can across the canoe from the opposite side and pulls/kicks themselves into the canoe. Once in and settled, the first person in, can lean the opposite way and/or support stroke whilst the second person gets in.

### 2) Deep Water Rescue

The deep water rescue of another canoeist can be done in several different ways but essentially can be broken down to:

- As above to get both people into one boat and then rescue the other boat.
- Rescue the boat first whilst the paddler is still in the water and then get the swimmer back into their canoe.

The decision on which order to do this may depend on several factors;

- What the weather conditions are like
- How far the boat and swimmer are apart
- What the swimmer is wearing, bear in mind that today's canoe clothing is much better at protecting the paddler from the environment than previously when the priority may always have been to get the swimmer out of the water first.
- How long the swimmer has been in the water.

### **A) Rescuing the boat**

#### 1. The curl

- Get the swamped boat next to your own boat
- Break the seal by lifting one edge of the capsized canoe just back from the end
- Lift the top gunwale of the canoe in both hands, (this may be done kneeling or standing depending on the rescuers anatomy). Remember manual handling techniques; lift with a straight back and bent knees and hips.
- Once the capsized canoe is empty of water, flick it back into the water keeping hold so it doesn't float away.
- Place the swimmer back into their canoe.

If the casualty is still in the water they can assist by holding onto the rescuers boat on the opposite side to the capsized boat. They will be out of the way of the moving capsized canoe and out of the way of the rescuer. If they have already been rescued they may assist in the lifting of the capsized canoe.

#### 2. X rescue

- Get the swamped boat next to yours
- Break the seal by lifting one edge of the capsized canoe just back from the end.
- Pull the end of the canoe onto your gunwale and slide the capsized canoe across to the other side of your canoe. Dipping the rescuers gunwale may help.
- Roll the rescued canoe back up the right way
- Either rescue the casualty from the water now (the casualties boat acts as a stabiliser and allows a stable platform to get swimmer back into the rescuers boat) or get them to step into their canoe from yours if you have already rescued them. Or slide the rescued canoe back onto the water and then place the casualty back into their own boat.
- The casualty may be out of the way if they are left in the water as long as they are not going to suffer further from continued immersion. If the swimmer has already been rescued they can help with the rescue of the capsized canoe but the two people need to communicate well to prevent injury from trapped fingers or whilst rolling the canoe back over.

### **B) Rescuing the swimmer**

If the casualty has been left in the water whilst the rescuer sorts out the canoe they then have to be placed back into their own canoe.

- Hold onto one side of the rescued canoe
- Tell the swimmer to swim to the opposite side of the canoe to you.

- The swimmer then reaches across their canoe and kicks/pulls themselves in whilst you support their canoe.
- If the swimmer is struggling then use a stirrup. A stirrup is a length of tape sling (a), which can easily be carried in your buoyancy aid pocket. One end is tied around the rescuers thwart and then the other end has a loop tied into it at the appropriate place so that the swimmer can place their foot in the loop to stand up and get themselves back into the canoe (b). If the sling is long enough a second loop can be tied half way across their canoe so that they can use it as a hand hold as well (c).



### Ladder Rescue

Use a swamped boat at right angles to the rescuers boat. Casualty can then get into swamped boat and 'walk' up the 'ladder' to the rescuers boat. Then use the curl or X rescue for the casualty's boat, as explained above.

### 3) Dealing with an incapacitated swimmer

This is a lot more difficult, particularly without assistance. I have seen people swamp the casualty's boat and then float them into the swamped boat and empty the casualty's boat as much as possible. This works to some extent but the swamped boat is very unstable. It is also very hard to get the casualty into the rescuers boat.

A method, which does work, is to

- Attach the casualty to the side of the rescuer's boat, with the same sling that has been used as a stirrup, so that they float with their face out of the water (a and b).
- Then rescue the casualty's canoe in an X rescue.
- Whilst the rescued boat is still on top of the rescuers boat, tie it to the rescuers boat with a sling, bit of rope or a goolie thong (monkey's fist attached to shock cord). This will form a very stable platform (c and d).
- Now the rescuer can drag the casualty out of the water and into their boat. First Aid etc can be administered and then if necessary tow the casualties canoe to shore.



If all else fails simply tie the casualty to the side of the rescuer's canoe and paddle them to the bank.

#### 4) Swamped Rafts

The other problems that may be faced are swamped rafts. It is difficult to flip a raft in the first place but if it has occurred there will possibly be a few people in the water and/or quite rough conditions to have caused it in the first place.

- Attach a flip line to re-right the raft (d).
- Stand on one side of the raft and pull it back up (e).

- If the boats are equipped with airbags then it will be possible to climb back into the raft and then empty by bailing them out so remember to carry bailers (f).
- If the boat does not have airbags or buoyancy blocks then once righted the raft will be so swamped that it is nigh on impossible to bail it, especially if the conditions are at all rough.



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)



(f)



(g)



(h)

## 5) All in Rescue

For an all in rescue the first thing that is needed is some planning and communication so that people know what to do and someone takes charge.

Firstly you need to get one canoe the right way up and empty of water.

- Roll one canoe the right way up whilst swamped
- Push another canoe onto it as in a X rescue( dipping the gunwales of the swamped canoe may help)
- One person climbs into the swamped canoe
- Roll the rescued canoe up the right way.
- One person climbs into the righted canoe, a second person could also do this if it helps. Paddle/push the righted canoe off the swamped canoe.
- Rescue other canoes by curls X rescues etc as before.
- If lots of boats are in the rescue, this process could be going on a few times simultaneously.



## **SUMMARY**

The first thing to remember when doing all rescues is not to endanger anybody including yourself. If you are using ropes or ropes are loose in the canoes always have a knife at hand. Think about your body, if you are working with a novice group in a small sheltered location do you have to do all the work? All canoeists should be conversant with a wide range of rescue techniques and should be able to use them efficiently in a variety of situations.

Canoeists could swim/wade the boat to the beach and empty it there by rolling it over or bailing out if they can't get it right out of the water, the key is do it slowly so that only the canoe is lifted not the water as well.

The rescues outlined above will hopefully enable the reader to sort out most open water problems.