

Some Safety Tips for Open Boats on Moving Water

by Matt Ellis



In the last year there have been some tragic deaths of adult paddlers while recreational canoeing on middle grade rivers. Many of the hazards associated with Open Canoes on moving water are well documented in canoeing publications (see refs), but others have been less well known.

Perhaps most talked about hazard is the 'Bear Trap' (Bill Mason, *Path of the Paddle*), where a paddler who has capsized becomes pinned between a canoe and an obstacle such as a rock. The forces generated by the water pressing on the boat can be the equivalent of 2 Metric Tonnes (the weight of a landrover).

References

Mason, William. *Path of the Paddle*, 1980, Key Porter Books
Mason/Scrivner. *Thrill of the Paddle*, 1999, Cordee
Farrero, F.
White Water Safety and Rescue, 2006

Authors notes

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Three other equally serious and potentially fatal scenarios:

Rope Snare - Ropes and moving water are always a potential hazard and care must be taken to minimise the risk wherever possible. Boats need to be set up differently for moving water than for flat water journeys. Painters and tracking lines should be stowed effectively: daisy chained or bagged at the bow and stern. Where dry bags, barrels and bailers are tied in with a long leash (perhaps so they can be moved easily), ask the question, 'is this a tolerable hazard' 'should I lash it in tightly?' Am I carrying an easily accessible knife?'

Preacher Pin - Many touring canoes were not designed to be paddled in a kneeling position. The distance between the seat and the hull is too small to allow the lower legs and feet to be freed quickly and easily. If a boat wraps round an obstacle and starts to crumple the lower legs can very quickly become trapped by the seat or kneeling thwart. Many experienced coaches carry a readily accessible heavy duty pruning saw (as well as a knife) for exactly these situations.

Thwart/Yoke Jam - If a canoe hits an obstacle and stops suddenly, it is possible for a paddler kneeling behind a thwart or central yoke to be thrust forward with considerable force and for their knees and thighs to become wedged underneath.

There will no doubt be other issues that people discover over time as boats and boat usage evolve. Please share the knowledge we have with others who work and play in Open Canoes so we all become aware of these often overlooked potential hazards.



Rope
Snare



Preacher
Pin



Thwart
/ Yoke
Jam

