

SEA  
KAYAKING

# Beginner Kayak Course



Written : Cathy Mills / Design : Claudio Peng

*Just in time ...*



**So** there I was... I had just bought a kayak and had been waiting to get in on the water. The weather was perfect, the time was right. I was grinning ear to ear.

Unfortunately, to my surprise, I realized that I didn't know how to kayak. I was that person with the shiny new gear (only the boat and spray skirt were second hand) - looking at it, thinking - how does this go together (i.e., where do I hook up the safety gear)? Let's not worry about the fact that I also had no idea how to use the safety equipment (although I had seen a

picture of someone doing a self rescue - so and was pretty sure I would be able to fake it).

I got my boat off of its storage rack (as water fell out of the cockpit soaking the bottom of my pants- I guess it rained the night before). I got everything organized, and was ready to go. At this point I confirmed the fact that there is no way I could lift my kayak on my own (if you want a mental image - I lifted it to my waste and shuffled sideways for 10 ft - aka 200 ft short of the water and set it down again). I walked up to a nice person who was washing down a boat and asked her to help. We walked the boat down to the beach. She smiled and said have fun...

I was super excited - and forgetting everything I knew about how to balance myself upon boat entry... I stepped into the (far more tippy than I remember) boat. Wobble wobble - oh no! I quickly adjusted my technique - before making a big splash. So, there I was - sitting in my boat,

at the beach... trying to put on my spray skirt. This took me a while, and, before long my boat had turned sideways to the beach, with waves splashing into my boat in 15 sec intervals... I paused and laughed at myself for a moment... Then, at a more motivated pace I continued to work on the spray skirt. Phew - got it. Nice. I was ready to go (I thought)... it was then I realized, the reason I felt more stable, is that the waves had pushed me up onto the sand. I was beached. <make sure you have a good image of that before I continue>... The last thing I want to do was take the spray skirt off and start over... so I shifted and moved and leaned and pushed with my hands until I was free.

Wow, that was tough - ok, I thought, I was ready to go. I started to paddle - and remembered with excitement, I had a rudder! I pulled the toggle, with no response. I pulled it again. Nothing. I thought for a moment - I remembered Jack mentioning something about a clip - Oh, yes, the clip that keeps the rudder from flapping when



you're traveling with it. Nope, I didn't undo it before I got in the kayak. So - I went without (not that I would have gone straight even with the rudder). At this point I was a little less confident about going for a big paddle - so I headed out for a quick paddle and came back.

I landed gracefully, got out of the boat gracefully, and then looked around thinking - how the heck am I going to get this back to my storage spot. I didn't want to ask for help. I decided to carry it - I could do it! Heave, puff, strain... shuffle shuffle shuffle...

15 ft. NOT going to happen. This time, I decided to be more strategic in asking for help - and found a cute guy that looked nice... He looked at me less than excited, but responded - "uh, sure"... I made some small talk on the way to the boat "sure is nice out" I said in a chipper voice, "Yeah." he grunted <pause> "tough to kayak on your own eh?" he said - I look at the boat without a response. We lifted the boat "\*!#@ this weighs a tonne" he said <long pause> we get it back to the storage spot "thanks for your help" I said (note to self - the wheels I bought to get the kayak from car to storage are going IN my boat!!!).

What an afternoon it had been, and while I enjoyed my little paddle - something

had to change! I drove home, went online, and signed up for the SKABC beginners course. A week and a half later, along with seven other excited newbie's, I met Joan Mercier, Graham Lorimer, and Rob Leeson, our mentors for the weekend. With a wealth of information and a passion for paddling, they led us through a three day course to get us on our feet (or in our boats).

The first night we learned about the parts of the boat, cool ways you can modify your boat, clothing, safety gear, and most importantly, we learned that we would have to learn self control in order to stay within some sort of budget. Thus began the ongoing theme of - if you can't afford it (the paddle, boat, or gear) then don't look at it too close - because you will want it!



things, so this was fine! But now how do we get back in? This part was not as easy - or as graceful... The first time I flipped my boat upright, put the paddle into the paddle float and clambered up onto the boat. Quite proud of myself, I paused on top (picture a baby bear who has wrapped herself around a log - I had my cheek on the boat with both arms wrapped around it, my feet are in the cockpit - with my butt sticking straight up... ), in retrospect maybe not the best position to pause in. But, I was happy to have reached this point - and all I had to do is spin my body around to slide into a sitting position in my boat... As I began to turn around, a thought flashed through my head - they said something about which way to lean,



what was it? wobble, wobble, oh \*!#@, splash, as I got a mouth full of water I remembered - lean towards the paddle float! I started over again... and this time I had more success. With a bit of practice we all successfully completed a few solo rescues and learned how to do an assisted rescue. The afternoon was filled with more information on navigation, tides, and weather... The take home message being, I need to sign up for more of the great courses offered by SKABC !

Rain was initially in the forecast for Sunday, but to our delight - the day was perfect. The water was like glass and the temperature was just right. We spent the morning learning and perfecting our strokes and enjoyed a lovely afternoon paddle. As we were paddling back at the end of the day I reflected on the weekend. My goal had been to learn how to do a solo rescue and understand tides and weather so I could head out paddling on my own. I can definitely do all of that now. But, more importantly, I realized I had made 10 new friends who were as excited about paddling as I was... and I was now feeling part of a club with hundreds more "friends-to-be"... While I am now self sufficient, the chances of me not being able to find someone to join me for a paddle are slim! Not only do I have a network of people to go paddling with, but I also have many courses and mentor trips to keep me busy for the entire summer !

*Happy Paddling !*