Water Awareness and Charge Certificate Manual

Module 17: River Rescue Techniques

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Module Contents

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Module 17: River Rescue Techniques	Initial Release	1.0	3 Jan 2010
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Module 17: River Rescue Techniques	Outcomes added	1.2	4 Sept 2018

Outcomes

After completing this module, the certificate holder will:

- Cross rivers safely.
- Ensure their own safety in a rescue situation
- Be able to execute swift water rescue techniques

1 RIVER RESCUE TECHNIQUES

1.1 Introduction

In order to be able to take scouts down a river, charge holders need to have the following skills:

- Pay attention to those around you - if someone is struggling, ask if you can help.
- The buddy system must be strictly enforced and you have a responsibility to him or her. Do not get separated and keep track of where he or she is at all times.
- Know the paddling skill of your group and do not let anyone attempt an obstacle that you, as the charge holder, don't believe they can run successfully

Hopefully these precautions will relieve you from ever having to implement the techniques discussed in this chapter.

1.2 Your Own Safety

The most important thing to consider before attempting a rescue is your own safety. As a charge holder and leader of a group, always work on the principle of SGV: First ensure your own safety, tell you group to move to the bank and make sure they are safe, then tend to the victim. In too many cases, the situation is worsened as the would-be rescuer becomes a victim of a badly planned or badly executed rescue.

1.3 Crossing Rivers With Ropes

Getting a rope across a river is often a necessary, but tricky job. It is best to use a kayak to carry the rope across, but is circumstances do not permit that, someone has to swim across. The swimmer must carefully gauge the current against his / her swimming ability. Rather start too far up stream than risk entering the trouble spot. Preferably, the swimmer should not carry the rope – rather heave it across afterwards.

Once the rope is across the river, belay it securely to trees or rocks on both sides. The rope can then be used as a guide rail and safety line for crossing the river. Always harness yourself to the line before crossing

1.4 Crossing Rivers Without Ropes

Even where the current is too strong for one person to stand unsupported, it is still possible to walk across the river. Not on your own, obviously, but in a group of 3 or 4. Known as the 4-man walk, a group can safely cross a strong current.

Each person must a have a strong grip on the people to either side of them. Get a solid grip on the lifejacket of the person – do not hold hands or clothes as neither are strong enough. Enter the river as a group and proceed until you approach the strong current. From this point on at least 2 people must stationary, while the others can move. The stationary people act as anchors and support for those that are moving. Once the movers have gone as far as they can, they must find a firm footing and the roles are reversed, with anchors becoming movers and vice versa.

In this way the group can circle across the river.

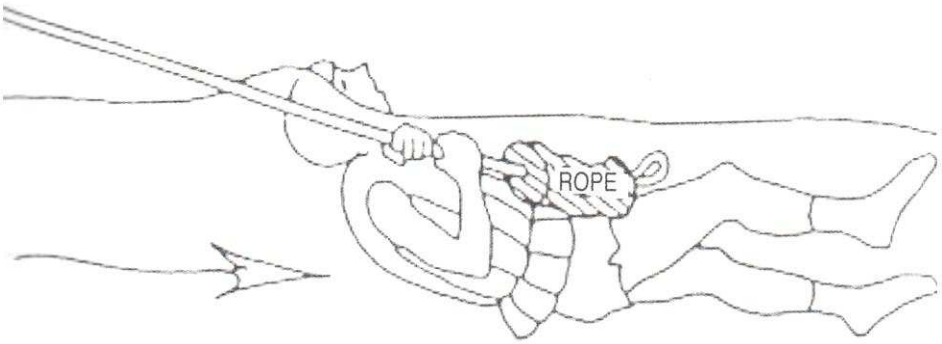
1.5 Using a Throw bag

A throw bag should consist of a minimum of 20 metres of non-sinking rope and a brightly coloured buoyancy bag which is weighted to maximum of 200 grams. Always keep it readily available.

Using a throw bag effectively in moving water requires good technique and practice. Before using a throw bag, make sure you have got a firm footing and something or someone to brace against. Also check for anyone on the bank down stream of you as they are likely to be pulled into the water as the rope is pulled taught.

To use a throw bag:

- Open the throw bag and take hold of the throw line in the non-throwing hand, about 1m from the end.
- Pass the bag behind your back to your throwing hand, so the line is around your waist.
- Alert the victim with a loud call "Rope" and use a forceful underarm motion to throw the bag towards the victim in difficulty.
- Take hold of the rescue line with your throwing hand and brace yourself against a solid object. If there is no object available, or if the victim is considerably bigger than you, ask a fellow paddler to stand behind you and brace you by holding your shoulders.
- Instruct the victim to grab the rope (not the bag) and wait as the person will be swung to the side of the river.



As the victim momentum is transferred onto the rescue line, a lot of strain is transmitted to the rescuer. The rescuer must be aware and practiced in dealing with this.

After use, repack the line by holding the bag open and putting the rope over your shoulder. Feed the rope into the bag in an 'S' pattern. Do not push it in. Shake the bag to settle the rope and close the bag with the attached strap.

1.6 V-Raise and V-Lower

V-raises and lowers are used to get a rescuer safely to a victim in a dangerous position. In both cases you need a line across the river. The rescuer is harnessed to the line and then moves out into the river, to line up with the position of the victim. The rescuer must be harnessed to a fixed point on the line, so the line moves with the rescuer, passing from one bank to the other and the line forms a V where the rescuer is harnessed, hence the name. The rescuer should always have a knife or a quick release harness in case the rope becomes caught.

Once the rescuer is in position, he walks up / down stream towards the victim. The rescuers holding the line, move up / down stream with the rescuer, supporting him.

It is always worthwhile to do a quick dry run of the rescue on the bank before entering the water. These few seconds making certain that everyone knows what to do can dramatically increase the speed and efficiency of the rescue.

1.7 Pins

When running a tight technical river with a sharp pointed kayak, it is possible for the kayak to be pinned in between rocks. The river current will exert so much pressure that the kayak will be held fast in this position.

As long as the kayaker's head is above water, this is not a really dangerous position, although the trapped kayaker will not be able to bail out.

If the pin is not too deep it is possible to free the front by paddling up to the kayak and pulling the pinned kayak free using the fore handle. In the case of a strong current or deep pin, the only way to recover the kayak is to attach a line to the aft handle and pull the kayak upstream using a block and tackle arrangement.

1.8 Foot Entrapment

Foot entrapments are by far the most dangerous situations on flowing water. Foot entrapment occurs when a swimmers feet drop below the surface of the water and get stuck under a rock. The swimmers feet are trapped under the rock, while the current presses the swimmers body forward over the rock. It is very difficult for the trapped swimmer to keep their head above water and the current is normally too strong for the swimmer to free his legs.

In an event like this, quick action is required to save the victim from drowning. Begin by getting a line across the river, downstream of the victim. Belay the line above the victim and tighten across the victim's chest. Tighten the line further to pull and hold the victim's head about water.

To free the victim's legs, run a second line under the water to catch, or use a V-raise to bring a rescuer to the victim.

1.9 Wrapped Kayaks

Recovering a wrapped kayak is a very physical exercise. A fibreglass kayak will weigh several hundred kilograms when full of water and you have to move this against the current.

To start the recovery, attach a line around the fore section of the wrapped kayak. The fore section generally holds less water and has left resistance against the current. If the kayak has handles, feed the line though the handle, then around the hull, as the handle alone will not hold against the forces involved.

If available use a winch or tractor to pull the boat free. If there is no mechanical force available, a block and tackle, using a large rock or tree as a belay, will be required to allow sufficient force to be applied to the wrapped kayak.

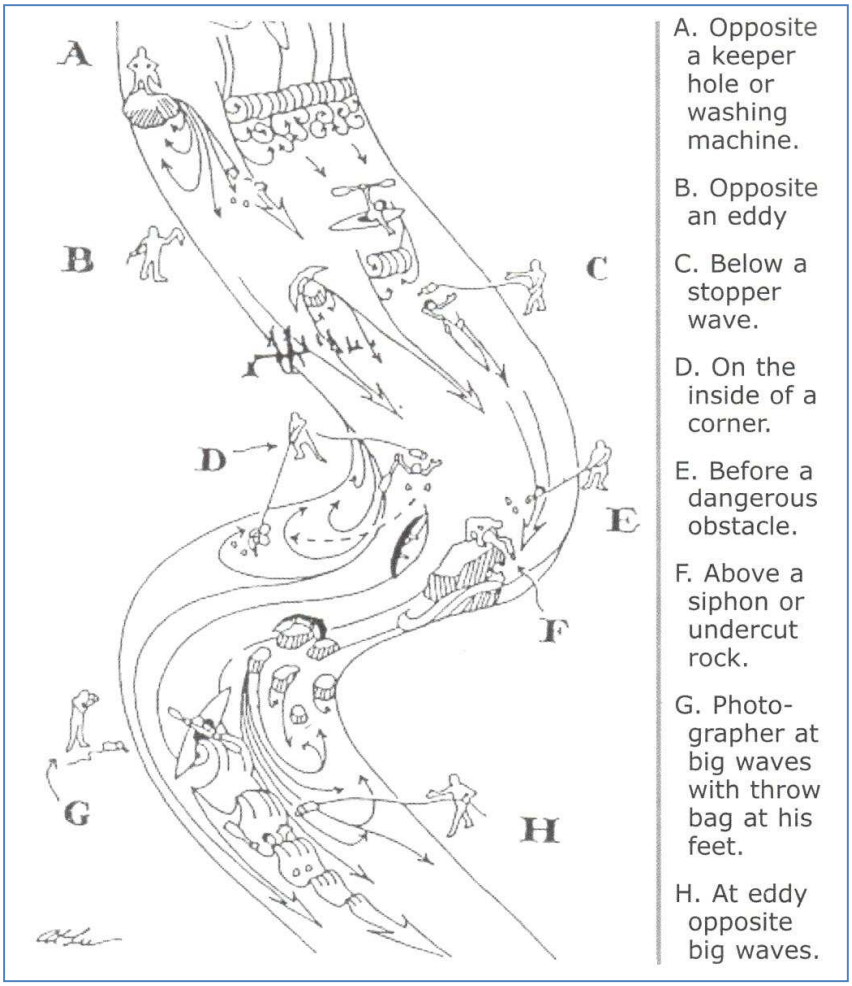
Once free of the obstacle, use the current to float the kayak close to shore where it can be safely handled.

2 BE PREPARED

When attempting any major obstacle, prepare your safety beforehand. Brief all members of the party and station rescue personnel at hazardous points. If man-power permits station a back-up with a throw line further downstream just in case.

Practice your rescue techniques with simulations in a safe environment so that you will be able to act quickly and effectively should the need arise. Remember you only have about 3 minutes to prevent someone from drowning.

A boat full of water weighs up to half a ton and trying to pull a patient out from a pinning situation will require teamwork, speed and strength.


A
B
C
D
E
F
G
H
A. Opposite a keeper hole or washing machine.
B. Opposite an eddy
C. Below a stopper wave.
D. On the inside of a corner.
E. Before a dangerous obstacle.
F. Above a siphon or undercut rock.
G. Photo-grapher at big waves with throw bag at his feet.
H. At eddy opposite big waves.