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Lessons Learned from Sea Duck Rocks Incident
Current Concepts – Kayak Handling published in Ocean Paddler Magazine
Fun on a Photoshoot
Coastal Camp Apostles – A Participant’s Review
Ocean Paddler Article Published



Upcoming Events

- Ocean Camp Great Lakes - May 23, 2013
Cumberland Island Contact Us
Circumnavigation - November 2, 2013
Ocean Camp N. California - January 24, 2014
Coast of Georgia Expedition - March 1, 2014
Cumberland Island
We prefer to be paddling, but need to dry out every now and then. Therefore, we have a paddling blog.
Cumberland Island Surf Camp - April 5, 2014
Ocean Camp Georgia - April 12, 2014
Coastal Camp Georgia - April 19, 2014
Categories:
Adventures
Boats & Gear
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Course & Camps
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Skills



Lessons Learned from Sea Duck Rocks Incident

November 28, 2013 Ryan No Comments Course & Camps, Course / Trip Reports, Skills

In my 18 years of outdoor leadership as a guide and coach, I've managed to prevent injuries to my students beyond scrapes, minor cuts, bumps and bruises. Good fortune has certainly made its' contribution as injuries can take place under watch of the best leaders. While not one to avoid risk (those who've been with me on expeditions and advanced courses know this well), a preventative philosophy and experience as an outdoor leader has allowed me to manage risks to provide effective and adventurous experiences. However, a recent incident during Geneva Kayak's Ocean Camp Maine has spurred reflection which I'd like to share. My hope is that other leaders and coaches can learn from the experience.

The incident from which I'll reflect is described in the review I wrote for Ocean Camp Maine. The course is designed for advanced intermediate sea paddlers who are working on their sea kayak skills, knowledge and leadership in the open water environment (seas 3-5 feet, surf to 5 feet, winds to 25 knots and tidal races and overfalls). The incident involved an exercise in which students launched from a rocky island in swell and is described in detail in that post. While the final result was not more than facial bruising and scrapes, damage was done to the student's boat and equipment. Fortunately, she was okay and happy to paddle the next day (and six days after). You could say "all is well that ends well", but as the potential for harm was greater, I don't look at the incident in those terms.

Archive

- December 2013 (2)
November 2013 (3)
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The Cloud

- AK
Alaska
Alaska Kayak School
American Canoe Association
Apostle Islands
Bay of Fundy Sea Kayak Symposium
Cackle TV
Chris Lockyer
Committed to the Core Sea Kayaking



All is well that ends well?

What I Feel I Did Well

- Progression** – I feel our group had spent a significant and sufficient amount of time paddling and playing near rocks leading up to the exercise. Starting with small waves (less than two feet) for surfing and rock gardening and working up to larger (3-4 foot waves) had been the progression from our first day on the water to the third. This landing and launching exercise would be the fourth time we'd transition from water to rock and back and I felt a majority of the students were showing a good level of comfort and skill near the rocks.
- Differentiation** – Even the best attempts to match students' competency results in a range. But still, I felt we had an acceptable range of skill, and instructor to student ratio, to all be in the environment together. That said, there were stronger/more experienced students and those working towards that level. As written in the report, a larger set came through during the landing portion of the exercise and I moved two of the lesser confident/technically skilled students to the lee side of the island to land and launch. This would result in two sites of different challenge level for students to work in.
- Reaction to Incident** – Once the swimmer was caught between the rocks and boat, I was able to effectively enter the water and manage both her and her boat without putting myself in a position to be injured. Leaders made correct choices and we effectively moved the group(s) back to Jonesport.



What I'm Still Wrestling With

- Site Selection** – I still ask myself if I kept the challenge to competency ratio within an acceptable range. Could the more advanced students have had as effective of a learning experience if I'd moved everyone to the lee side? The chosen spot was a sloping rock slab where swell was dispersed as it slid up shore. The immediate spot presented little risk but in close proximity was a more vertical face, which presented a higher level of risk. What should have been a fun and challenging exercise definitely did not result in fun. That said, there was an acceptable level of challenge for some in the group and I will wrestle with whether I should have eliminated the potential risk for those who were capable.
- Student Assessment** – Easily identified were the two students for who the level of challenge was too high on the windward side. I know the student involved in the incident well. I've seen her perform well in much more challenging environments over the years and respect her high level of skill. She is both a whitewater and sea kayak instructor and has successfully paddled on expeditions (in advanced conditions) both as a competent member of a group and solo. That said, we all have bad days and she had displayed signs of being off of her "game". Her landing did not go well and she had left a drysuit relief zipper open resulting in a suit full of water.. Failure to address the psychological status of the student was a contributing factor.

Cumberland Island

Expeditions

Geneva

Geneva Kayak Center

Homer

Instructor Certification

Instructor Training

Jamie Sharp

Justine Curvengen

Lake Superior

Level Six

Long Boats in Current

Matt Nelson

Menominee River

Misicot Falls

Nick Cunliffe

Okefenokee Swamp

Paul Kuthe

Phil Clegg

Port Chatham

Rescues

Rough Water Sea Kayaking

Rowan Gloag

Ryan Rushton

Sea Kayak Camps

sea kayaking

Sea Kayaking UK

Surf

Tiderace Sea Kayaks

Tides

Website

Yurts



Consider a position that allows the paddler to be at the bow and the coach to (1) talk with student (2) watch the sea (3) allows a clean launch

What I'll Do Differently

- **My Positioning** – I lacked consistency (from student to student) in my position and have since adjusted my approach to teaching this skill. While all situations are different, a coaching position at stern of the kayak OR at the bow on the opposite side of the student, provides a view of both the student and the sea. It also puts the student at the bow, an ideal position for holding the kayak in position, making the decision when to launch, and pushing the kayak away from the rocks.
- **Reinforce Teaching** – I used a directive approach in teaching the skill and two methods were described in detail. One method is the paddler tethering themselves to the kayak's deck line with their tow line, sending the kayak away from the rocks and swimming to the kayak for an unassisted re-entry. The other involves timing the incoming swell and speed launching from the shore for a scramble into the cockpit. Students were given the choice which method to practice. After the demonstration by the first student to launch, I should have reinforced main points with the next students. A simple chat with each student would have showed cognitive recognition, especially in light of the signs of stress reaction of the student involved in the incident.
- **Delegation**– Although I was confident in the student who launched first to (1) demo an effective launch and (2) aid any paddlers on the water, in hindsight I would have put the assisting coach on the water first. While the student who performed the demo is a coastal kayak instructor, level of responsibility as a student is different than that of the assisting coach

My goal as a paddler and coach is to keep improving. I hope that by sharing my reflections from the incident, other coaches/leaders can learn from what went well and what did not go well. Later in the week, we returned to Sea Ducks Rocks to practice the same exercise. While the sea state was lesser on this day, it was good for the student involved in the incident to revisit the site and launch successfully.



SpeedLaunchPractice

from [Ryan Rushton](#)

04:38



HD

[SpeedLaunchPractice from Ryan Rushton on Vimeo.](#)

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About the Author

Ryan Rushton is the founding owner of the Geneva Kayak Center and has been paddling whitewater and sea kayaks for the past 14 years. Ryan holds awards in both the ACA and BCU in both the sea kayak and swiftwater rescue disciplines. Ryan has lead paddling expeditions in Alaska, Canada, Maine, Georgia, Florida, Wales and the waters of Lakes Superior and Michigan. In addition to his role as operator of Geneva Kayak, Ryan is a sales agent and brand ambassador for Tiderace Sea Kayaks and a member of the "Wrecking Crew" for Lendal Paddles. Ryan is a regular contributor to Ocean Paddler Magazine. In 2010, Ryan became a L5 Advanced Open Water Instructor Trainer and is a voting member of the ACA's Coastal Kayak Committee. Learn More at: <http://www.genevakayak.com/about-us-2/meetteam/ryan/>

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Saturday: 10- 5pm
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