

River Technique *by* Steve Fisher



In previous issues I've addressed different methods for taking on waves and holes. This issue covers using the clean shoulder of a hole to help make a turn or a ferry. Here's how this could be useful:

'Using the Shoulder'

It's often tempting to avoid holes completely, in order to give yourself plenty of room for error. As your paddling improves, you'll find that you don't need to be miles away from obstacles. By clipping the edge of holes or breaking waves, you can use them to turn your kayak either to the left or right. How does this happen? The water in a foam pile is either stationary or moving way more slowly than the green water moving past it. So basically if you poke a buoyant end of a kayak into the foam it will slow down while the rest of the boat moves downstream. Therefore, the boat has turned with little effort or time wasted.

'Using the Shoulder' is very helpful in creeking where tight, quick turns are needed, or in running big water in larger volume boats. It's not as important in small boats such as the one I'm paddling in the demonstration below, since playboats are easy to turn regardless, but it's crucial for the old-school long boats that can be difficult to turn.

In the examples below, I need to paddle hard to river left to avoid hole #1. There is then very little time to turn and ferry to the right to avoid #2. After that I'd like to get back to the center of the current. I need to apply this Using the Shoulder concept for both holes.

Here is a step-by-step -

- As you approach, make sure you're actually going to miss the hole with your body
- Lean downstream and do a brace on the back of the wave
- Turn your brace into a draw stroke, and then into a bow rudder that catches the slower water behind the hole.
- Don't forget to lean downstream as the boat passes 180 degrees to the current. (If the water is really slow behind the hole, you may need to lean upstream for a second as your bow penetrates this slack water or eddy.)
- Once you've turned all the way to the angle that you want, put your head down and get paddling towards your next line.
- In the second sequence take a look at the second freeze frame. I'm actually pointing downstream already missing the hole. I've decided that it would be better to point to river right first and clip the hole with my stern in order to get back to river left quickly. Strange, but true!

Remember that you can use the back of a lot of holes to help with a ferry. In a sense you eddy out in the slower water behind the hole. Be careful if it's a really retentive hole. Give this idea of 'Using the Shoulder' some thought and figure out how it would work best. Then, the next time you scout a rapid put these ideas into your quiver of options for making a tough line.

Steve Fisher is sponsored by Riot Kayaks, Seven 2 Paddles, Stohlquist, Snapdragon Designs, Teva, and Red Bull.



HOLE #1



HOLE #2

Words – Steve Fisher : Photos – Desre Pickers