

River Technique *by* Steve Fisher



We are all in between swims. Last spring in Quebec, I took two swims. Naturally, I analyzed the scene to figure out why. The one featured below was a result of 'going over the handlebars' while running a slide into a vertical drop – one of the more difficult of types drops to nail every time.

Running a Slide to Vertical Waterfall

Assuming that we're talking about bigger 'slide to vertical' drops where your landing actually matters, let's look at what can go wrong. What you are ultimately looking for is a controlled slide so that you can have a good take-off at the lip of the drop. The definition of a slide is simply sliding on rock – not floating. This means that the rock itself is playing a significant role. There are typically three bad scenarios:

1. You are sliding along, the rock ends sooner than expected, and the bottom drops out from under you. You fall through the curtain and either land super flat or go over the bars depending on whether your weight was back or forward at the time.
2. The rock slows you down and you leave the lip going too slowly. You go over the bars and swim like I did below. You're ejected from your upside down kayak on impact. In my case, the drop was partly man-made resulting in a rough jagged rock surface that makes it difficult to maintain speed or stay in control.
3. You are aware of scenario 2, so you over compensate with speed and land flat.

So how do we solve this? To be perfectly honest, I haven't fully figured it out yet. When I run these drops, I always boost my safety set up and prepare to tuck way forward if I'm landing flat. That said, simply knowing the possibilities will help us to better evaluate the drop. Look at the rock type and study the actual take-off zone well. Then break the drop down into its two basic elements: the slide and the waterfall.

Referring back to two of my previous articles, think about how to run each element:

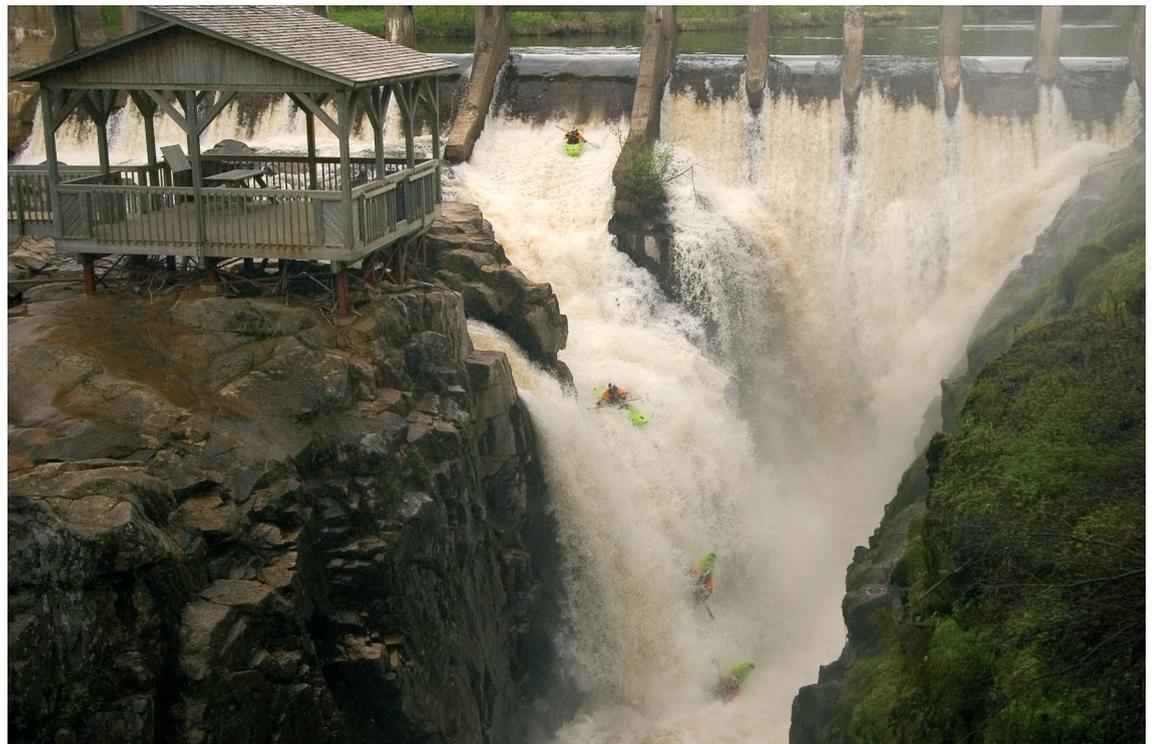
'Sliding on plan A'

- Stay in an offensive forward posture position (but not all the way forward).
- Most importantly, use wide forward sweeps that start near the bow of the boat. Bow rudders, stern rudders and backstrokes don't really work here.
- Go slightly faster than the water. On rough rock this may require a bit more effort.
- Generally be aggressive not defensive. You're doing something agro, and therefore you need to behave as such.

'Waterfall posture'

- As you approach the lip of taller falls, get the boat moving just slightly faster than the water.
- Steer the boat until the last possible moment, keeping paddle contact with the current.
- Sit upright in a normal neutral paddling position (posture) as you leave the edge, and be ready to throw your weight forward if the boat starts to flatten out.
- Tuck at the last second, at the moment of impact – diving as opposed to doing belly flop.
- Maintain control after landing. With your paddle at 45 degrees across your deck, you have reduced the impact on the paddle and enabled yourself to brace under water.
- Scout thoroughly and be sure that you're capable of maintaining full presence of mind with quick instincts throughout the run.

All we can go with is what we know. Knowing the above techniques will certainly help, but I think that big slides into big vertical drops will always be sketchy. So scout these drops with extra care and perhaps add a notch of conservancy before deciding to go for it. In the meantime, I'll work on perfecting a technique and I'll let you know as soon as I do...



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

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