

River Technique *by* Steve Fisher



Earlier in my series of instruction, you'll recall us covering how to cross a diagonal and how to punch under a hole (Tuck and Duck). What happens when you can't cross over the diagonal and the hole next to it is a no-go zone? The reason you find that you can't break over a diagonal is either that you aren't able to set up a charging approach (you can only approach parallel to it) or it's just too big to get over the top. So when you find yourself in either situation, there are a number of defensive techniques to avoid flipping over (being back looped) or being surfed into the hole.

Acting by Reacting - Diagonal Waves

Here are three types of defensive approaches for three sizes of diagonal waves:

Small diagonals (boat height): To get across these diagonals, I position myself parallel to the diagonal, lean upstream, and do a sweep stroke on the upstream side. Just as my hull climbs onto the diagonal I lean downstream and do a draw stroke on the downstream side of the diagonal. It works best on diagonals formed off small pourovers.

Medium sized (up to your armpit): Once again I'll approach parallel to the wave. As I come up to the wave, I lean towards it and brace with the paddle face down. Just as I get to the wave, I reach over the crest of the wave and turn the brace into a draw stroke on the backside of the wave to get my bow pointing farther downstream. Hopefully the boat ploughs through the wave at this point.

Large (over head): This is where you need to punch your paddle through the face of the wave (Tuck and Duck). Then lift your upstream hand up so that the paddle changes from a horizontal brace into a vertical draw stroke. At this point, hang onto that stroke; it's a brace and a power stroke. It will pull you through or over the wave. Throughout the process, your kayak and your weight all need to be leaning aggressively downstream. Remember when dealing with a diagonal wave this big, always lean way forward and keep your elbows down.

The images below show me taking on a large diagonal cushion wave. There's no way I can break over this diagonal and I'm approaching from river right. Generally, I'd point at it, climb over it, and then turn and travel along the back of it. In this case I have to do the opposite. I'm hoping that it will let me punch through or at least surf me to the window where it meets the hole on my left. With the right defensive technique I'll prevent it from flipping me over or surfing me into the hole.

Pic 1: As I approach, I adjust my angle so that I'm totally parallel to the diagonal.

Pic 2: I lean into the wave and punch my right blade into the face. (Tuck and Duck)

Pic 3: In this instance I'm lucky; it's allowed me to go through it. I reinforce this by hanging onto a bracing draw stroke on the backside of the wave.

Pic 4: In the clear and back to attack mode.

When you're at the mercy of the river, you can take defensive action and turn your run into something that at least looks planned. Ultimately the idea is to get to the bottom of the rapid with the plastic bit on the bottom and the human bit on top.

Photos by Desre Pickers

