

River Technique *by*



Steve Fisher

Damage Control

Much has been said on how to correctly run waterfalls in different ways. In fact, I've written two KS columns on how to boof and how to plug a waterfall. But let's say you're off the edge of a waterfall and things are turning horribly pear-shaped...you intended to plug it but you're dead flat and headed for a back breaker. I was recently on a waterfall huckspedition in Iceland with Ben Brown and Jared Meehan and the subject came up a few times. We couldn't quite determine a foolproof remedy but here's my take on the matter.

Once you've left the lip of a waterfall and you're going to land flat there are basically two things you can do to bring the bow back down. After laboratory testing I've found that while both methods work, they are each aimed at specific situations. The wrong method on the wrong drop can actually have the opposite effect...and each has its pros and cons.

Method 1 assumes that you've taken off in an aggressive forward body position (as you should). Now you're flying flat through the air. At the right moment, close to your landing, you quickly thrust your body upright, which will automatically push your feet (and your bow) down. The upside of this method is that you can dip the bow by up to 45 degrees very quickly. This makes it good for small drops or last second saves.

The downside to this method is that if you do still land flat, you're now sitting upright - the worst-case scenario for your subsequent vertebrae compression. The other thing I've seen on bigger drops is that the bow often comes back up as the paddler returns his body to a forward position. Remember too that if you've been pushed onto the back deck on takeoff you've got nowhere to go but forward - leaving you only with method 2. It's for these reasons that I only use this method on really small drops and generally favor Method 2:

Method 2 requires a quick and aggressive reaction. You're simply throwing your weight forward and laying on the front deck but it's the pulse of the weight shift more than the weight actually being forward that starts the boat's reaction.

When I'm in big trouble on a big drop I stubbornly hold my forward position and resist the urge to sit up at all. This has saved my back many times even on flat landings. The idea is that if you still land flat, at least your back is curved forward and absorbs the shock better than a straight upright spine does. In addition, the actual blow is your head and body as it slams against the boat...a head ache ...yes, but you get to paddle another day.

The trade-off with committing to this method is that the boat responds more slowly than with Method 1 - so huck it early. If the drop is tall enough there's time for the bow to drop but if it's not very high you can still end up landing quite flat. To me I'd rather land a bit flat with the right body posture than risk landing with a straight spine.

Now have a look at the images below:

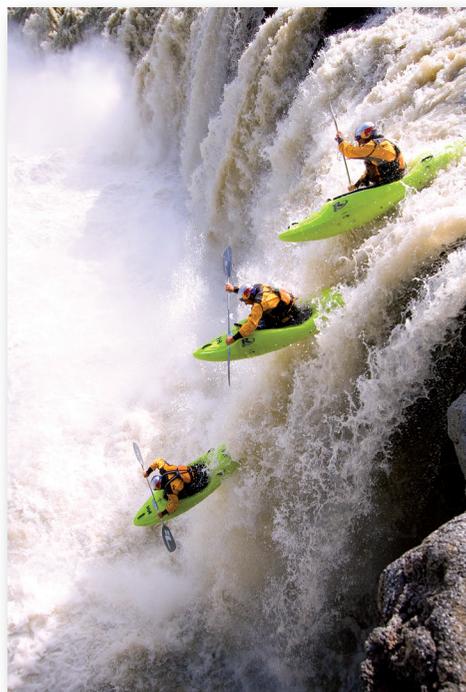


Image sequence 1 illustrates a quick reaction and throwing my body forward as described in Method 2. What's interesting to note here, is that in the first frame I'm taking a boof stroke that causes the problem in the first place. On this particular drop I had anticipated that I'd scrape rock on the lip, which can cause you to go over the handlebars. As a preventative I decided to intentionally do a slight boof and then fix the problem on the way down. It worked. Unfortunately the fourth frame is missing which would have shown my body posture on landing. That brings us to the second image:



In image 2 I needn't explain the right body posture for landing as I did that in a previous article. This is however a good illustration of the right posture for landing a waterfall. Here I've protected my back, my skirt, my face, my paddle (shoulders) and am positioned to take a stroke on exit. Study and try it and you'll find it works great.

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