



Towing without a line: Contact tows

It was dark with lively seas. A brisk south easterly wind, powerful swell rebounding off the cliffs south of Sydney heads. My kayak was rafted to my buddy's completing an assisted rescue. I knew that a secondary capsize was a real possibility so I insisted on keeping the raft until the electric pump had done its work. Meanwhile the seas and wind nudge us closer to the cliffs, the rebound intensifies. Rob, the trip leader, paddled over to check in on our rescue as I was monitoring the distance from the cliffs and considering a separation plan. Rob was not sure how the rescue was progressing and yelled out "contact tow". So I acted. "Bob, grab and hold onto the front of my kayak". Once I knew Bob had a good grip I reversed paddled. The rafted kayaks provided extra balance as I felt the rise up and slap down the steep sea waves. After about ten strokes, Bob communicated his cockpit was empty and he was ready to paddle solo. We broke the raft and paddle out to sea. This was the first time I had ever used a contact tow other than in practice. It was remarkably effective, providing time for a largish flooded cockpit to be emptied while keeping a distance from further hazard. Although the cliffs were still a good distance away another capsize would have resulted

in the need for a rescue complicated with a tow line. The further away from the cliffs, the less rebound, and the less chance of another capsize. If a rescuee is able bodied, in their cockpit and responsive to commands a contact tow is quick to set up. I recall the first time I reversed paddled in lively conditions, I capsized due to being more unstable as the waves behind are experienced before they are seen. The two kayak raft provided stability that a tow line wouldn't. Another advantage

would be to use the opportunity to turn the kayaks into a safer direction for release. Contact tows can be done in various configurations. Contact tows bow to stern, stern to bow, bow to bow, reverse paddling, forward paddling. In addition to maintaining a good grip, the rescuee can use edging and foot pressure to help keep the kayaks together. I was appreciative of having prior training and practice in milder conditions and recommend that sea kayakers get out on the water and test what works. ■



Mine's ham and tomato, what have you got?



This is my usual reply to people who enquire about my roll. I took up paddling six years ago. Due to an onocular knee replacement, I had to give up a promising career and future in football. I searched far and wide for a substitute sport.

I came across an ad in the National Parks magazine, for a paddling day on Lane Cove River. After that first day I knew I had found an activity that would be satisfying. It seemed like bush walking on water. You could stride out or hang back and have a chat.

I bought a sea kayak from eBay (formerly belonging to George Jessup) and joined a flat-water kayaking club. Where they taught me the basics of paddling. I spent the next two years paddling up and down the Hawkesbury with my new-found friends, who showed great patience with my inability to remain upright in my boat for any length of time. I became very proficient in wet exits and assisted rescue.

The club put on a rolling class which I flunked and was banished from the pool with the instructors words ringing in my ears "you will never roll". About this time I teamed up with a very gung ho fellow club member who suggested we join the New South Wales Sea Kayaking Club.

Now, I had heard of the club and in fact had visited the website prior to joining the flat-water club. But the website scared the xxx out of me and I quickly moved on. With a lot of prodding from my gung ho friend, I joined the NSWSK club.

I am still a member of the flat-water club and I enjoy paddling with my very good friends. People I regard as a very significant part of my paddling family. I turned up at Clontarf where I met Owen, Adrian and the OANDORA Paddlers. Up until this time I was not game enough to paddle past Grotto point. As a matter of fact I did not know where Grotto point was.

After 4 years I can now paddle past Grotto point. Within the club, rolling seems to be the starting point in the search for the Holy Grail. If I wanted to find the Holy Grail I had to push the memories of my past experience with rolling to the back of my mind and brace myself with a good pep talk in front of the mirror. I then signed up for Adrian Clayton's rolling course. After a year and even with Adrian's encouragement I still had not been able to master this elusive exercise. This one failure does not overshadow Adrian's many successes in teaching rolling and I thank him for his patience and the time that he so selflessly gave me.

We all seem to need reference points and with my birthday looming I thought a good goal would be to perform a roll before that day arrived, so at Rock & Roll this year, with the encouragement and help of two of my fellow Oandorians, Brian and Geoff, I was determined to execute a roll! I was on the water, relaxed and in position. Brian said "keep it simple". Over I went, bent forward swept the paddle and all of a sudden I popped up the other side. I had done it! I had rolled!! I did it again to prove it wasn't a fluke. Yes!!! And again. And again. Adrian's instructions had finally sunk in and he won't have to mark me down as a lost cause.

Now, when I remember that instructor saying "you will never roll" I smile the smile of accomplishment, or as it is more commonly known the 'up yours smile'.

Plus, I had achieved the other goal, I had rolled before reaching my birthday, my 71st birthday. Tick one off the bucket list. I need no longer brush off questions about my rolling with those moronic bread roll jokes. I can now nod my head and speak knowingly when the conversation around the campfire turns to the finer points of rolling. As a postscript; I would take this opportunity to thank all the club members for their fellowship, generosity and hospitality. I have found that paddling has given me the same camaraderie that I had experienced in my 25 years of playing rugby league and the following 30 years of touch football. I think it may be from being a member of a team facing a common foe, in this case the sea and her many moods. ■



Dennis upright