

Getting Back in the Boat

By Aryn Hayden



Rachel (left) and myself (right) in the inflatable kayaks.

I volunteered on the morning of June 22nd to take out one of the inflatable kayaks for the day, forcing any fears and uncertainty to the back of my mind. Never having kayaked before, Erin Hestir instructed me on the basic dos and don'ts such as always hitting everything head-on with the nose of your kayak and that no matter what you never let go of your paddle. "Your boat will eddy out downstream and we can retrieve it if you fall out," she explained, "but if you lose that paddle we are literally up a creek . . .". After donning our helmets and PFDs, Rachel and I headed out into the river after the rafts deployed. Some time later we approached another rapid and a rock that I hadn't noticed suddenly loomed before me, partially hidden by the rushing water. I hesitated, trying to decide what to do, when the river made my decision for me. My kayak wrapped around the rock and dumped me into the swiftly flowing water. As I surfaced, gripping my paddle, I realized that I was in the worst position possible with my feet behind me (upstream) and belly down in the water. I smacked a few rocks as I tried to swing my body around but a blow to my knee shocked me and I released my paddle. At this point I

panicked and waved for help. Somehow I grabbed my paddle again, whether by my own design or through the help of Dr. Mount who had kayaked over. He held my boat as I got back in, definitely not in a graceful manner. Not ten minutes later, floating through relatively gentle water I found myself perched on a rock. Not only did I feel like a drowned rat in this boat but now I was stuck! After what seemed like forever of rocking back and forth, I leaned back and the rear of my boat tipped back, ever so slowly to dip down into the water and I was back on the water. I caught up to Rachel, paddling her boat like a pro and followed her lead for a while.

After stopping for lunch and a survey at Wildcat Creek, my kayaking went smoothly and I was counting birds along the way and having philosophical thoughts about kayaking and life. Then, we approached a bend with the river flowing to the left and the right bank was a wall of solid rock. I followed where the rafts were headed until I noticed Ann, a guide rowing an oar boat that day, motioning frantically that I should go in the opposite direction. My frantic paddling was too belated and I was swept into Ann's boat. I ducked as I approached to avoid being brained by an oar and my boat swept into hers. From all outside accounts I was swept under Ann's raft. My first concern, did I still have my paddle? Yes, I did, and I wasn't letting go this time! When I surfaced on the other side I grabbed on to some rigging, swinging my feet out in front of me. I was hauled into the boat, once again not gracefully, and Ann offered to stay let me stay aboard and not return to the kayak. I instantly declined and hopped back into my boat to finish my adventure. A long afternoon of paddling and reflection followed and I decided that this experience was very applicable to my life. I almost didn't take this class because I was afraid that the resulting twenty unit quarter would be too hard. Had I made this decision and played it safe, I would have missed out on many incredible experiences, just as I would have missed out if I had listened to my fears and decided not to kayak. I was also reminded that I need to hit everything head on without fear and hesitation and in so doing I would actually be more likely to succeed and not get hurt. Above all, there was always the possibility of falling out of the boat, but if I remembered to hold on to my paddle and not to panic, everything worked out. As long as I got back into that kayak I lost nothing from the experience, but instead had some fantastic stories to tell my friends back home.