



Paddling Practical

Adventure racing is like doing a triathlon in the bush, right? Not quite. Sure, often there is an open water swim, a mountain bike leg and an off-road run but the adventure doesn't stop there. One skill you will need in your bag of tricks to successfully navigate your next adventure race is paddling. Champion paddlers Tim Altman and Jarad Kohlar are here to guide you through the waters with the first of our series on paddling technique.



Just as you wouldn't ride your roadie or TT down a mountain trail, you wouldn't paddle a river craft in the ocean. So, when paddling for multi-sport (or paddling in general), your first consideration is where you'll do most of your paddling – flat water, ocean or river? With this in mind, your choice of craft will be made easier.

What Craft to Paddle?

Fortunately, paddling craft adaptable to most conditions are available. They may not be as fast as specific boats made for particular conditions, such as the K1 for flat water, but they are generally good in all conditions. It's also a lot cheaper than owning several different craft. A kayak instructor or retailer can give good advice for the most suitable craft for the type of paddling you are going to do. See www.wepaddle.com.au or www.peakadventure.com.au.

high-tech and potentially go faster, it is likely to be quite unstable. It's best to take a more conservative approach in the beginning. If you're comfortable on a craft, you can put effort into gaining speed rather than spending most of your time trying to balance it or getting back on after tipping out. This is definitely the case if you only intend to paddle occasionally (once a week or less). If you plan to paddle more regularly, then you may consider starting on a more challenging craft and taking some time to get used to it, rather than outgrowing a more stable, but slower craft within six months.

Paddling in Different Conditions

Just as conservatism is required for initial craft selection, it is also necessary for assessing the conditions in which you begin paddling. We will discuss details on the how-to of varying conditions in later articles in

and the exhilarating world of downwind paddling. Follow the series and to make your paddling learning experience fun and safe.

Always paddle with someone else (preferably a more experienced paddler or instructor) when learning just in case you encounter difficulties.

rough and shallow conditions as the conditions require more stop-and-start techniques and the need to regenerate speed.

Discuss your paddle needs with an instructor, kayak/paddle retailer or manufacturer as you would for selecting a craft. They can also give tips on the best clothing for paddling. It generally

Tips for paddling in different conditions:

- **White water** – start in gentle (grade one) rapids rather than trying to shoot through the Grand Canyon. Negotiating submerged rocks and water moving in many directions takes time and experience to master.
- **Ocean** – begin paddling in a bay or a protected cove less exposed to wind and swell.
- **Lakes and/or the ocean** – keep close to shore so you can get to safety quickly if conditions change or you encounter difficulty. In the ocean, however, try to keep out beyond the break so you don't get hit by waves.
- **Rivers (flat water)** – investigate the rules of the river (ask the local kayak club or council). In Australia, this generally means sticking to the right hand side of the river and paddling with lights on the front and back of the craft when it's dark.

Tips for selecting the most suitable craft:

- For white water or very shallow conditions – use a craft with a trailing rudder (off the back of the craft). It needs to be spring loaded so it can flip up when it hits rocks or the bottom of the river or lake.
- For rough water such as white water or the ocean – use either a craft fully sealable by a spray deck (cover over the cockpit) or a sit-on-top kayak.
- For all conditions mentioned above – use multi-sport kayaks, sea kayaks and sit-on-top craft (such as molded plastic craft and ocean skis).

A high performance craft or one designed for a specific type of paddling is not always the best option for a learner paddler. While it may look

this paddling series. There will be tips for ocean and surf paddling, including negotiating the surf, paddling in choppy ocean conditions

Paddles and Clothing

So you have your craft and you're about to hit the water. Before you do, you'll need to choose a paddle and get kitted out in the right outfit.

When paddling for multi-sport, the propeller paddles are the most common and the best. They're used by beginners through to Olympic level paddlers. It's best to get a paddle with an adjustable shaft so the length can be changed to suit the conditions. As a general rule, paddle length should be longer in flat, deep-water conditions where the craft will run and you can generate more speed. Paddle length should be shorter for

depends on temperature and conditions – thermals, wetsuits (not too thick as they restrict movement) or kags (plastic-style paddling tops) are the go in the cold. When it's hot, it is best to wear either long or short-sleeved rash vests, compression tops or similar tight fitting clothing for sun protection. The same applies for shorts – wet baggy clothing tends to sag or stick and hinders movement. It can get quite annoying!

A life jacket or PFD should be worn by beginners in all conditions (especially white water and the ocean). While they are not exactly fashionable, it is a requirement



for all paddlers (no matter what their experience) that they be worn in most multi-sport races, so you may as well get used to wearing them.

Technique

Now you're all kitted out, let's learn to paddle. So, what is the most efficient way to paddle? It's best to get some lessons initially to learn the correct technique right from the word go. It's far easier this way than trying to correct poor technique down the track.

This is a general introduction to paddling for

the aspiring multi-sporter. In future articles of this paddling series we'll also cover aspects of paddling in more detail including:

- Surf paddling
- Downwind paddling
- White water paddling
- Equipment and accessories
- Paddling safety
- Programming for paddling races
- Weight training and stretching for paddling
- Advanced paddling technique and how it varies in differing conditions. **TMSM**

Tips for efficient paddling technique:

- The stroke should roughly resemble a rectangle with four phases:
 1. down phase to put the paddle in the water.
 2. pull-back phase with the hand closest to the blade in the water at a constant height or depth.
 3. exit and lift of the paddle out of the water.
 4. forward-back phase where your top hand moves forward as the alternate hand pulls back, also at constant height throughout.
- The catch – where the paddle enters the water – should be as far forward as possible while keeping the body relatively stable during the stroke (body movements forward and

back will rock the boat and slow you down). Aim to put the paddle in the water at the level of the toes or slightly in front of them, and as close to the side of the boat as possible. The front of the stroke here is far more powerful than back at your hips.

- For the pull-back – get your balance then use your shoulders, hips, back and abs by rotating your whole torso to support your arms. It's a much stronger movement than using your arms alone and will allow you to get more power from every stroke. It'll also save your forearms from getting very sore or 'blowing up'.
- The blade should exit the water between your knees and hips – beyond

Catch



The catch should be as far forward as possible while keeping the body relatively stable during the stroke.

Setup



The paddle should remain at shoulder-to-eye height between strokes.

- the hips, your balance will be thrown out. Bend the elbow up and out and lift the paddle to shoulder height.
- The paddle should remain at shoulder-to-eye height (set-up position) between strokes.
- For the new stroke, place the paddle in the water by dropping your front hand down like driving a stake in the ground, or spearing a fish.
- Try to delay the forward movement of your top hand and shoulder in the new stroke until the blade has entered the water at the catch and your bottom hand has started to pull. Remember, paddling is a pulling exercise, not a pushing one.



Jarad has infinite energy and enthusiasm for adventure racing