



photo: Island Escapades

Finding Your Edge

by Dan Lewis

I was out paddling close to an exposed shoreline the other day in three metre seas. I really had to be on my toes as the huge waves rolled in on a diagonal. Every now and then I would feel a shadow, and look up to see a wave face careening in towards shore. The only way out was to edge hard, and carve an outside-leaning turn up the face of the wave, a position from which it would be easy to flip over towards shore. I felt a little rusty in my boat, which was not at all surprising—I just don't spend as many hours in the boat in winter, even here in sunny Tofino.

Like anyone, I needed to spend more time tooling around on still water, just playing around in the boat and getting comfortable up on edge. Edging is the key to intermediate and advanced paddling, and it is the gateway to a world of paddling beyond rudders.

First, let's define some terms. **Leaning** is locking your knees onto the inside of the kayak deck, and leaning your upper body out over the water, tilting the kayak with you. Now, most kayaks are pretty stable. The only way to tip one over is to get your head overboard, out over the side of the kayak. Leaning accomplishes this, so when you lean a kayak, eventually it will tip over. Of course a capsizes can be prevented with a low, high, or sculled brace, so this is a good way to practice bracing.

Edging means locking your knees into the boat, then twisting your hips to tilt the boat up on edge, leaving your upper body safely balanced over the kayak. While edging can feel a bit precarious at first, with practice it comes to feel very solid, and after a while your body will start to crave the feeling!

Both of these techniques have important applications. Leaning is used in surf. Edging is used more on flat water, and especially for steering in wind waves.

The reason for edging the boat is to create a new hull. When a sea kayak is sitting down flat on its keel, it is typically designed to track, in other words to go straight. When the boat is cranked up on edge, the ends of the kayak (including the keel at bow and stern) lift clear of the water, making for a shorter hull. Also, many sea kayaks are rather wide, and when put on edge, this width translates into **rocker**. Rocker is the curvature of the hull from bow to stern. Whitewater kayaks have highly rockered hulls—viewed from the side they are reminiscent of Grandma's rocking chair.

So long, flat hulls track, and short, rockered hulls turn. Many sea kayaks have the ability to smoothly transition back and forth between these two hull types, if the paddler has the skill.

How does one develop this skill? Like anything, it can be broken down into baby steps, which can be learned, practised and mastered. Before learning to edge your boat, you might want to check with your local outfitter for bracing workshops.

Find a sheltered bay—with no wind, waves, currents, or boat traffic—in which to play. Make sure you fit snugly in the cockpit. Adjust your foot-pegs one notch tighter than usual, and add padding for your hips and knees if necessary. Make sure your spraydeck fits snugly to keep water out, and practise releasing it. Try a wet exit if you've never flipped over before—it just might happen while playing around. Dress for immersion.

There are two steps to edging a kayak. The first one is subtle, and can't really be observed—it happens inside the boat. You want to shift the weight in your butt, such that all your weight is resting on one cheek. This will tilt the boat slightly. Hold it there, balancing on one cheek. The key to being comfortable in a kayak on edge

is this weight shift—when you focus on feeling all your weight on one cheek, you feel solid in the boat, balanced.

Edging will work all kinds of magic on a hull that is moving. The boat will begin to carve a turn, turning away from the direction of the tilt—tilt left, turn right; tilt right, turn left. It is like pushing a rudder pedal—the boat begins to turn immediately. This degree of edging is sufficient for flat water turns without a rudder—I urge you to try it!

After the weight shift, the second step is to pull up with the opposite knee. Both knees are gripping the inside of the hull tightly at all times while edging, but now you will begin to actually pull up on the kayak deck with the opposite knee. For example, to edge to the right, first shift your weight to the right cheek, then pull up with the left knee. By pulling up on the opposite knee, you run the risk of edging too far and flipping over. Tilt your head back over the boat, and be ready to brace.

Once you have a feel for this, try it while moving. Initiate a turn with a sweep on the side you are tilting towards. You can continue sweeping on the outside to add stability and actually accelerate through a tight turn. Work your way up to edging in bigger and bigger waves. Soon you'll be carving up the face of waves and cranking big turns right on the crest when both ends of your kayak are out of the water!

You don't have to be a Tsunami Ranger wannabee to learn to edge your kayak. Every paddler can benefit from playing with edging. It is fun, and you will develop better hip control and balance, which could one day prevent a capsizes. So get out there and play in your kayak! ⚓

**ALBERNI
OUTPOST**

VANCOUVER ISLAND'S LARGEST KAYAK CENTERS
NANAIMO PORT ALBERNI NANOOSE BAY

CALL TOLL FREE TODAY TO BOOK A TOUR!
1 866 760 0011

KAYAKS • BIKES
LESSONS • SALES
RENTALS and more

Come paddle with us!
Vancouver Island's Premier Outdoor Stores!
www.albernioutpost.com

aquabatics.com
PADDLING IS OUR PASSION

Wilderness Systems-Necky
Aquabound-Werner-Kokatat
Astral-Extrasport-Perception
North Water-Kokatat-Dagger
Seaward-Native and More!

On-line Catalogue-Tours
Courses-Youth Programs
Calgary, AB & Smithers, BC
1-877-440-9283

"We know our stuff"

Ocean River sports
getting you out there since 1981

A Proud "on water" Delta Kayaks dealer

DELTA KAYAKS

1824 STORE STREET VICTORIA, BC. PH 250.381.4233 • TOLL FREE 1 800 909 4233
WWW.OCEANRIVER.COM