

Signal Devices For Kayakers - Part II

By Athena Holtey

USING YOUR PADDLE AS AN EFFECTIVE SIGNALING DEVICE

To communicate with other paddlers, especially during a group kayaking adventure, your paddle can be effectively turned into a signaling device.

We were landing in strong surf conditions on the rocky North Maui Coast. We'd been paddling for six hours, were tired, hungry for "real food" and no break in the shoreline or safe landing could be seen from sea; but Tom had put-in there on a previous trip and knew of a safe cove with fresh water. He gave us instruction that he would go in through the surf, land, and wave the "All Clear" paddle signal from shore where he could direct us to the cove. He used the common paddle signals familiar to our local kayak club, unfortunately, we now know, not every group recognizes the same signals. One by one we came in through the surf, but many of our group paddled right straight to him, instead of going left into the safety of the cove, as he directed with his paddle, capsizing and having to drag their loaded boats up over the rocks to safety.

Some groups have devised elaborate codes for giving instruction on the water, but the most universally understood paddle signals are below. (art by Mike Altman, copyright 1998, From [Sit-on-top Kayaking, A Beginner's Guide](#))



Stop (Move paddle Up & Down)



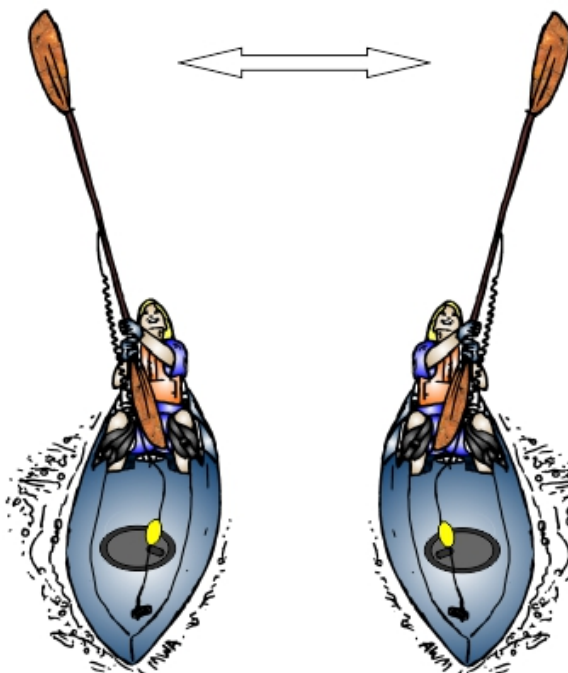
Go This Way.....



One or both arms overhead: I'm OK...Are You OK?



Gather - come to me (Hold paddle straight up)
On a river it can mean:
"Go straight ahead" to Whitewater Kayakers



Attention! or Help! ~ Universal SOS Paddle Signal ~ Held High -Waving Paddle (when possible)

Whatever paddle signal codes you decide to use, they will be useless if only a few of your group understands them. Be aware that high wind conditions can compromise your safety in using your paddle this way and their effectiveness not only as a signal but also as a paddle! Therefore, always review at launch the simple codes you will use to communicate between paddlers with a caution for being reasonable in their use. Be sure and read Part I.