



SEA AND SURF

When on the sea it is important to remember that even though you may be paddling in a tiny sheltered bay, you are connected to and affected by a vast body of water.

The beach is an excellent place to enjoy using your sit-on-top. Popular bathing beaches often attract small surf which is an excellent place to play and to develop new skills.

The surf zone

Whether you need to land or want to do a spot of surfing, keep clear of other beach users. Avoid landing in the safe swimming areas that are marked on many beaches.

After a great trip there is nothing worse than to arrive back at a busy beach loaded with fishing gear and a great catch and to then experience the embarrassment of a capsize as you land through the surf. Your pride takes a tumble as you emerge wet and sand-covered in front of the family. You also risk damaging kit, yourself and others as the kayak is flung onto the beach. An out of control kayak can be likened to a tree trunk. Anyone in its path is going to get hurt. If you find yourself in this situation, stay clear and avoid getting caught between the incoming kayak and the shore.

Never underestimate the power of even small waves.

Practise in small surf well clear of other users. Secure and stow away loose kit and make sure any leashes or attachments will not become entangled with you.



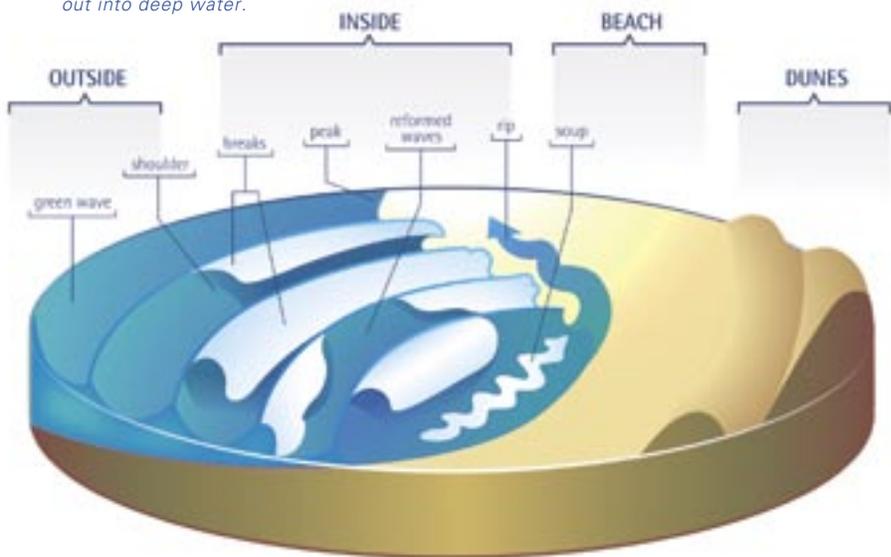
Rip currents may pull continuously or may suddenly appear or intensify.

Rip currents can aid your departure through the surf but also can sweep swimmers out into deep water.

Generally, the more open a bay is to ocean swells then the more likely it is that you will get surf. Beaches that are very flat may be prone to large surf. The presence of surfers is a good indication that the beach is a surf beach. The sides of the bay frequently have smaller surf, as do areas where the currents run out of the bay. If there are strong **rip currents** then landing may be hard. Rips are often a sign of beaches that get a lot of surf.

Rip currents

As waves spill onto the beach water is piling up there and has to flow away. It will sometimes do this around the sides of the bay or by a rivermouth. These currents away from the beach are called rips and are not always obvious to spot.



This effect may be caused by a rising tide. Conversely, a falling tide can lead to surf decreasing.

On some beaches, strong offshore currents across the mouth of a bay can block out the waves. Only as the current decreases will the waves be able to reach the beach and create larger surf. This is sometimes the reason why surf can intensify quickly.

Landing and launching in the surf

TIME SPENT OBSERVING THE SURF PATTERNS OR ASKING SURFERS FOR LOCAL KNOWLEDGE IS RARELY WASTED.

Landing through surf can be fun or a pain. A lot depends upon whether you want to ride the waves or not. If not, consider whether the beach you launch from may have surf when you return. As you look at the launch site you will spot places where the surf is likely to be smaller. If the bay is used by board surfers then check with them where the surf is usually smaller.

Controlled landing

Rather than ride in with the wave pushing you from behind the aim is to land just behind the wave as it surges up the beach. This keeps you in control.

If you find the next wave rearing up behind you, paddle hard backwards. Once you are over the wave try to stay just behind it as it surges up the beach.



Grab and drag other kayakers higher up the beach where they will be able to step off without being buffeted by the waves.





Above – ready to perform a low brace as the wave approaches. The low brace is very useful when landing through small surf.

Surfed landing on a low brace

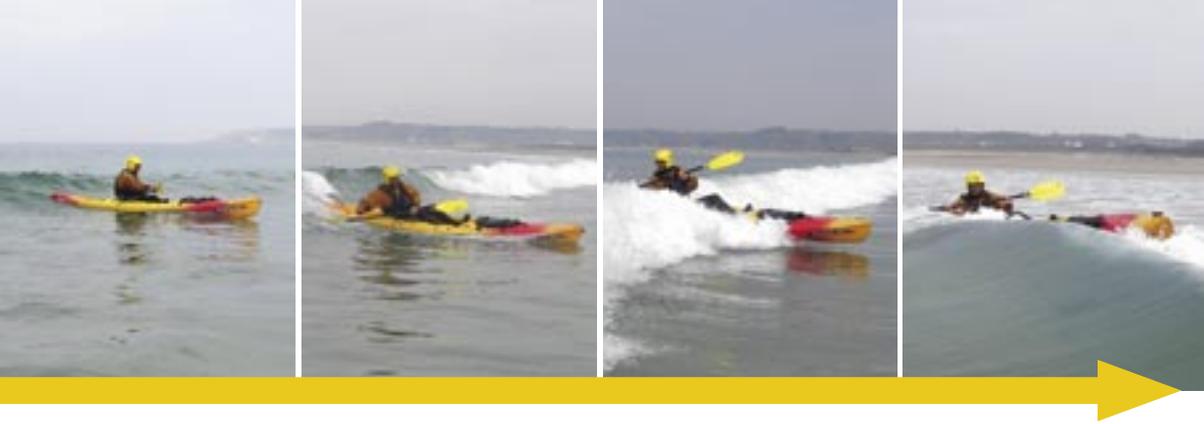
Expect to get wet and wear a helmet if you have one. Shorter kayaks will be easier to control while surfing than longer kayaks.

- The low support is ready just before the wave hits.
- The paddle is placed onto the top of the wave crest while you lean toward the paddle.
- When hit by a wave lean toward the wave to avoid a capsize.
- You will slide/bounce sideways on the wave toward the shore (sometimes called a 'bongo slide').



Just leaving the blade horizontal on the surface of the water will provide support in case a wave catches you unaware.





With practice, learn to enjoy the exhilaration of surfing your kayak and performing manoeuvres.

Thigh straps will enable you to maintain better control and prevent you becoming separated from the kayak.

Surfing it up

For a dynamic surfed landing use a stern rudder on either side to keep your bow pointing toward the shore. As the wave breaks, expect to be turned sideways and be ready with your brace.

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- As the wave builds behind you start to paddle forward.
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- Once on the wave use the stern rudder to steer.
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- As the kayak starts to turn side on to the wave lean toward the wave and brace.
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If you plan to launch or land on a steep beach, expect it to be difficult. Look around the beach for any spots where the slope of the beach is less steep. Consider a different spot if you think that the surf is likely to start to dump.



A helmet can really pay for itself in this potentially violent situation.

Dumping surf

Some beaches have an obvious steep slope. This indicates that the beach is liable to experience heavy breaking surf that rears up and crashes onto the beach. Given the chance it will grind you into the beach. Worse still there will often be a strong pull back by the wave (an undertow) as it recedes from the beach before the arrival of the next wave. This will pull the legs from under anyone trying to stand up or scramble up the beach.

If you need to land or launch in dumping surf ensure all kit is stowed away, and land following just behind the wave as it advances up the beach, paddle fast to drive your kayak as far up the beach as possible. Be ready to jump off quickly and grab the kayak before the wave starts to recede. Otherwise you and your kayak will be pulled back into the next wall of water.

Padding out through surf

If you can find an easy place to launch then use it. Surf can be powerful and gear can easily be washed away. Remember that the surf may be bigger on your return.

Surf waves come in sets. You might typically get two or three small waves, followed by two or three medium waves, followed by two or three larger waves, then the cycle repeats. Sit on your kayak afloat and wait until the sets of waves seem to be smaller then make your paddle out beyond the breaking waves.

Lean forward and put the paddle into the water as the wave is about to hit the bow.



- Paddle quickly toward the oncoming waves.
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- As the wave is about to hit the bow lean well forward and dig the paddle in deep.
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- As soon as the wave hits your body make another deep paddle stroke on the other side, to pull you through the wave.
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- Paddle fast until you are well clear of the break. You may need to vary your speed to time your way out through the breaks.
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