

# kayak fishing safety

WORDS & IMAGES: Derek Hairon of Jersey Kayak Adventures  
[except where stated]



Photo: Mark Rainsley

*“ Kayaking and fishing go together - go out for a paddle and bring home some fish for your dinner... ”*

The massive growth of kayak fishing using sit on top kayaks is resulting in many people taking up kayaking with little knowledge of key safety skills.

That's the theory. The reality is different. Whether you are a competent kayaker or angler by linking the two sports together you create a lot of issues which impact upon your safety afloat once you start fishing from a sit on top kayak. The massive growth of kayak fishing using sit on top kayaks is resulting in many people taking up kayaking with little knowledge of key safety skills. Forget the marketing hype that portrays the kayak as an easy craft to fish from. Ditch this idea and any thoughts that you can simply transfer shore or boat based fishing skills over to the kayak without modification. A kayak is not like any boat you may have fished from. The contrast between a kayak and a boat is like the difference between a motorcycle and a car. You need to adopt

new skills if you are to use the craft safely. Do not assume that just because you are an experienced angler or paddler that you can simply go out and start fishing.

Before you consider kayak fishing ensure you have a good foundation of basic kayak skills. I see far too many sit on top anglers who are learning the hard way when a bit of training would have fast tracked their development and enjoyment. Sign up for a sit-on-top kayak safety clinic or kayak fishing course. That way you can learn quickly and safely and avoid making potentially costly mistakes when selecting equipment.

If you are kayak fishing on the sea enrol on one of the new British Canoe Union coastal navigation and tidal planning courses. Not only will you learn about the sea, you'll also gain a better idea of how to identify some good fishing spots.

## >>> CLOTHING

Dress as if you expect to get wet. Once you start to fish you will not be moving much. Even on a warm day you can end up feeling cold. Carry a paddle jacket and take along some extra clothing.

If you need to put on or remove clothing go ashore to do so. A capsize with your paddle jacket over your head is a frightening experience.

### WHAT YOU WEAR WILL DEPEND ON THE WEATHER AND SEA TEMPERATURE



Full drysuit



Summer clothing



A wetsuit and cap combination

Dry suits are increasingly becoming a popular option for anyone fishing in cooler waters from a sot especially now that the cost is becoming more affordable.

anglers often do with a fishing waist coat or jacket) you also create snagging points which will make it harder to climb back on board when you take a swim.

Wear a personal floatation device (PFD /buoyancy aid) at all times. It is easy to fall in when you are focused on fishing. Manufacturers like Palm are now making fishing specific buoyancy aids.

Wear a hat and glasses to protect you from a snagged hook and weight flying into your face as a line becomes un-snagged.

Do not fill the PFD pockets up with lots of fishing gear. This reduces its buoyancy. If you fill the PFD pockets with fishing gear (as

Wear appropriate footwear. Remember - on a sot your feet are laying about 90 degrees to the sun and the skin on the top of your foot burns easily.

## >>> THE KAYAK

Forget all the images of kayaks rigged for fishing with GPS, fish finders and an array of angling gear that make the sit on top kayak look like a commercial fishing boat. Keep it simple.

more gear you add the heavier the kayak gets. Most kayaks have recommended weight ranges and you can easily push your kayak over its optimum weight limit when you add extra fishing gear.

If you really want to load yourself down with lots of fishing kit, buy a boat!

If you use rod holders make sure they are positioned so they do not restrict your paddle strokes.

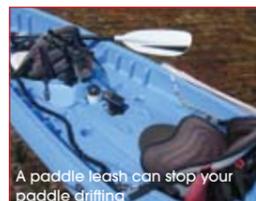
There is no need to rush out and buy the latest angler version of a sit-on-top kayak with rod holders, bait box, fish spotter mounts or other extras. Wait until you have got hooked and know just what you need before you part with your cash. Check out kayak fishing forums for some handy hints and advice. They are a friendly place and your paddle sport experience will be welcomed.



Badly fitted rod holders can hinder your paddling

Ignore the images of people standing up to cast from a sit on top kayak. They were probably being photographed in shallow water. Would you ever consider casting from a boat tender standing up? Stay seated and keep your balance. You can always drop the line and quietly drift away from the lure.

Paddles are easily lost overboard while you are baiting up a hook and many paddle holder systems are prone to accidentally unfastening when you least expect them. Experiment with a paddle leash to fasten your paddle to the kayak. Hand paddling to retrieve your paddle, even in a light wind, is extremely difficult.



A paddle leash can stop your paddle drifting

Buy from specialist kayak stores. They should have a pretty good idea of what you need and can provide advice, information and even let you try out a demo kayak. What initially seems just right may over time start to feel like a barge.

Consider if your sit-on-top is suitable for the type of fishing you have in mind. Just drifting about in a small bay close to shore, just about any sit-on-top will do. Head off further out to sea or along the coast, then larger and more directional sots will enable you to fish more comfortably. Bear in mind that the

## >>> GET TO KNOW YOUR KAYAK AND KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Learn to move about on your kayak before you start to fish from it. This will teach you the balance points and give you more confidence. It is surprising just how many capsizes happen when you reach for an item that has just moved out of reach behind you. Often it is easier to rotate 180 degrees to reach an object behind you.



Learn to move about on your kayak

On my courses I try to give paddlers the opportunity to experience more challenging conditions than they might normally go out in. Knowing your limits is crucial to developing a safe attitude when fishing.



Know your limits

If you ever find yourself having drifted around a headland or in situations where the conditions have changed because you have become too focused on fishing you will have some previous experience to draw upon to help get you out of trouble.

## >>> WHAT TO FISH WITH

If you want to fish with more than one rod buy a boat. I see far too many sots loaded down with rods, nets and tackle boxes. These are major hazards when you capsize and create a tippiest kayak.

Ready to fish but are they ready for the capsize? Note the use of an anchor system on the left - keep it simple



Think about what you need to fish with very carefully. Do you really need all the gear manufacturers are keen to sell you in order for you to catch fish? Often it is easy to leave most gear ashore in the car and

just take afloat a minimum amount of tackle. You can always go back ashore and collect extra items. If this is not possible stow it in the hatch to create less of an obstruction on deck.

Every extra item of kit you carry on the kayak is an extra item to get caught up in. Carry a knife in case you need to cut yourself free from lines during a capsize.

Just trolling a line with a few lures can often be very effective especially if you invest in a paravane type of system which will hold the line at a constant depth as you paddle.



Para-vanes keep you line at a constant depth while you paddle

Just what you will do when all four rods have hooked that shoal of bass is also worth considering.

On safety clinics most paddlers are shocked at just how hard it is to flip over a sot with fishing rods attached to the rod holders. Ditch the rods if you have to right the kayak. This is a good reason to avoid taking your best rod and reels afloat. It also means that your best gear will not get crudded up with salt water.

Be prepared to ditch your fishing gear



Keep the amount of hooks used to a minimum to reduce the risk of hooks landing in you and not the fish. Use easy to change tackle rigs with snap links or carry hook removers.

If you are going to make big changes to your fishing set up go ashore to sort things out. When paddling secure hooks so they will not swing about. Woman's hair grips or large plastic bull-dog clips fitted onto the rod and over the lures make good retainers.

Take a piece of cloth and catch bag with you to use when you catch fish. Hook disgorgers are a good idea or else aim to cut or unclip the line and switch tackle to reduce the risk of hooks landing in your hand.

Think about how and where you are going to store your catch. Keep a count of how many fish you dump into the front hatch. It's not much fun to open the hatch the next weekend to find a rotting and very smelly fish you had forgotten was still in the kayak.

## >>> ANCHORS

If you need to use an anchor to stay over a good fishing spot it is probably not a safe place to anchor because it means the current or wind is causing you to drift. Imagine a capsize when at anchor. As you come up and swim to the kayak you realise the current is flowing against you. The kayak slips into the distance while you exhaust yourself and drown.

If you fall in at anchor be on a leash or hold on tightly to stop drifting away from the kayak



Anchors are hard to pull up over the side of a kayak and reflect a mindset that thinks a kayak is like a boat. No boat pulls an anchor up beside them unless they want to capsize. Again, most people who try out anchor systems on my safety clinics quickly spot the many disadvantages of their use.

Anchors always get snagged in the most challenging places



Fit a trip line to the anchor so that it will release if it gets stuck. A small piece of wire or even a couple of sandwich ties creates a weak link to allow the anchor to trip and be hauled back in

Note the small bit of wire which will act as a weak link



## >>> CAPSIZING

Never paddle alone. A message on a kayak fishing forum will often reveal just how many kayak fishers are also searching for others to go out and fish with and there is more fun in sharing the one that got away story with a few other paddlers. When fishing and when with others keep in sight of each other.

It is no use fishing with others if they are 300m from you and looking in the opposite direction.

Assisted rescue



Rescue techniques have been covered in previous editions of this magazine. When fishing you must make time to practice your rescue techniques of righting the kayak when you have fishing gear on-board. Practice with old fishing rods and gear you will not worry about losing or getting damaged. This will allow you to assess just what sort of problems you may be faced with if you fall in when fishing.

Practice falling in with fishing gear on board



Kayak fishing is fun and a great way to catch your supper. Take time to learn the limitations of fishing from a kayak.

Kayak fishing forums are a good source of information and provide you with the opportunity to meet up with other like minded kayakers.

[www.northwaleskayakfishing.co.uk](http://www.northwaleskayakfishing.co.uk)

[www.kayakfishingstuff.com](http://www.kayakfishingstuff.com)

[www.kayakfishinguk.net](http://www.kayakfishinguk.net)

[www.anglersafloat.co.uk](http://www.anglersafloat.co.uk)

[www.kayakfishing.co.uk](http://www.kayakfishing.co.uk)

[www.whitbyseaanglers.co.uk](http://www.whitbyseaanglers.co.uk)



Derek Hairon is a BCU level 5 sea kayak coach with over 40 years experience of sea kayaking. He is a Director of Jersey Kayak Adventures Ltd. He runs kayak safety clinics and introductions to kayak fishing classes using sit-on-top kayaks as well as closed cockpit sea kayak courses and tours around the coast of Jersey and to offshore islands.

He is the author of Sit-on-top kayak, a beginner's manual. Published by Pesda Press <http://pesdapress.com/>

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