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CREEKING

Smear it to Clear it

Advanced Creek Boating Technique
– Smearing a Drop

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Steep creeking is technical kayaking at its most enjoyable. Think of your dream creek, mine has clear water, blue skies and drops that fall away into the distance like a giant staircase. We're all searching for the perfect boof off perfectly formed ledges, or a sweet flare dropping into the next convenient eddy.

Back on real creeks though and we find many drops have neither perfect ledges to launch a boof from or perfectly placed spouts and eddies for a smooth ride, so what do you do when there's no obvious clean line? The solution might be the 'smear'.

What is a smear? Well for me it's the word I use to describe using rock features to travel across a rapid, some paddlers call it a grind, but I suppose I've always thought of a grind like a skateboard move, using a rail to ride down. So for me grinds are a fun move on rocks moving with gravity and the flow of the water rather than across it.

In a kayaking dictionary this might be the entry under smear:

Smear (Vb): Lateral travel on a rapid, using a rock feature.

Whatever you want to call it, and it's up to you, here's why you need to know about this move, and how to do it!

Ride High and Keep Dry

You can use the smear when there's no discernable lip to boof from, or on a fast gradually sloping drop with an ugly hole where you'd struggle to stick a traditional boof. So if you absolutely must stay on the surface and there's a convenient rock ramp the smear might be the only way to stay on top of things. In these cases it's a great way to clear a hole or avoid nasty landings, and it can be particularly useful in pinched narrow drops, spouts and slot drops.

It's also a fun move that you can throw in plenty of places on the river. For example ride a rock to land high in an eddy or just throw it on the way downstream; it's all good practice for bigger things. Take care picking your smear rocks and it's a great freeride move for creek boats.

The smear is a natural progression from flaring and uses exactly the same kind of edge transfers. Flaring uses a roll-on, roll-off technique where the kayak 'rolls-on' to meet the pitch of the water or fall line (like a skier leaning down into the slope) and then makes a transition to 'roll-off' to level the landing. For smearing your boat will need to make the transition onto the rock ramp and then again to drop off it and back into the water.

Whether you're desperate to nail the line on a big drop or just having fun and styling your home run, the technique for the smear stays the same.

To Smear or Not to Smear

Every drop is different and smearing can add an extra element of risk, because riding rocks and fast moving water make for a tricky combination! If you're unfamiliar with the drop or aren't sure, spend some time checking out the suitability of the smear rock and the landing first. You'll need a nice piece of rock with a friendly angle, typically a rock with a good-looking ramp up and a clean slab to slide down. Also make sure it's angled right to help you smear or it'll kill your speed. Some rocks are just not suitable for this; you don't want to be pinned just above the drop, right? Last of all remember to check the landing!

Approach

The real key to smearing a drop is lateral momentum: your momentum across the flow. It's how you get the speed to drive your boat up and out of the water to attain the ramp. Often the best



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way to do it is to drift wide, upstream of the smear rock and then charge at it across the flow, make sure you time your charge correctly to attain the rock ramp, and give some serious thought to your angle of your approach. Too much angle and you may not make it all the way to the smear rock, too little and it may not be possible to attain the slab once there. Every smear’s different so change your angles and speeds to suit the move.

Attaining the Slab

As you reach the smear rock you’ll need to pull the boat up the ramp. Use a powerful forward stroke on your downstream side with plenty of rotation just like a boof. Combined with your momentum it should lift your bow and drive your boat up onto the rock. The timing of your last stroke is crucial to attain the slab, miss it and you could fall off the slab early or even piton into the rock!

Riding the Smear

Smearing a drop is like riding a half pipe, but in a kayak! Just like flaring you need to match the fall line of the rock (the roll-on). If the rock slab slopes down then you need to adjust your boat’s hull to meet flush with the rock. If you try too hard to keep it upright you’re going to wobble or trip on the edges.

Here the last stroke that you made onto the rock can be sustained in the water to maintain your angle during the smear, it’ll give you extra stability. Be careful not to lean onto the paddle though, it’s not a substitute for good body form, so treat it as a rudder rather than a support stroke.

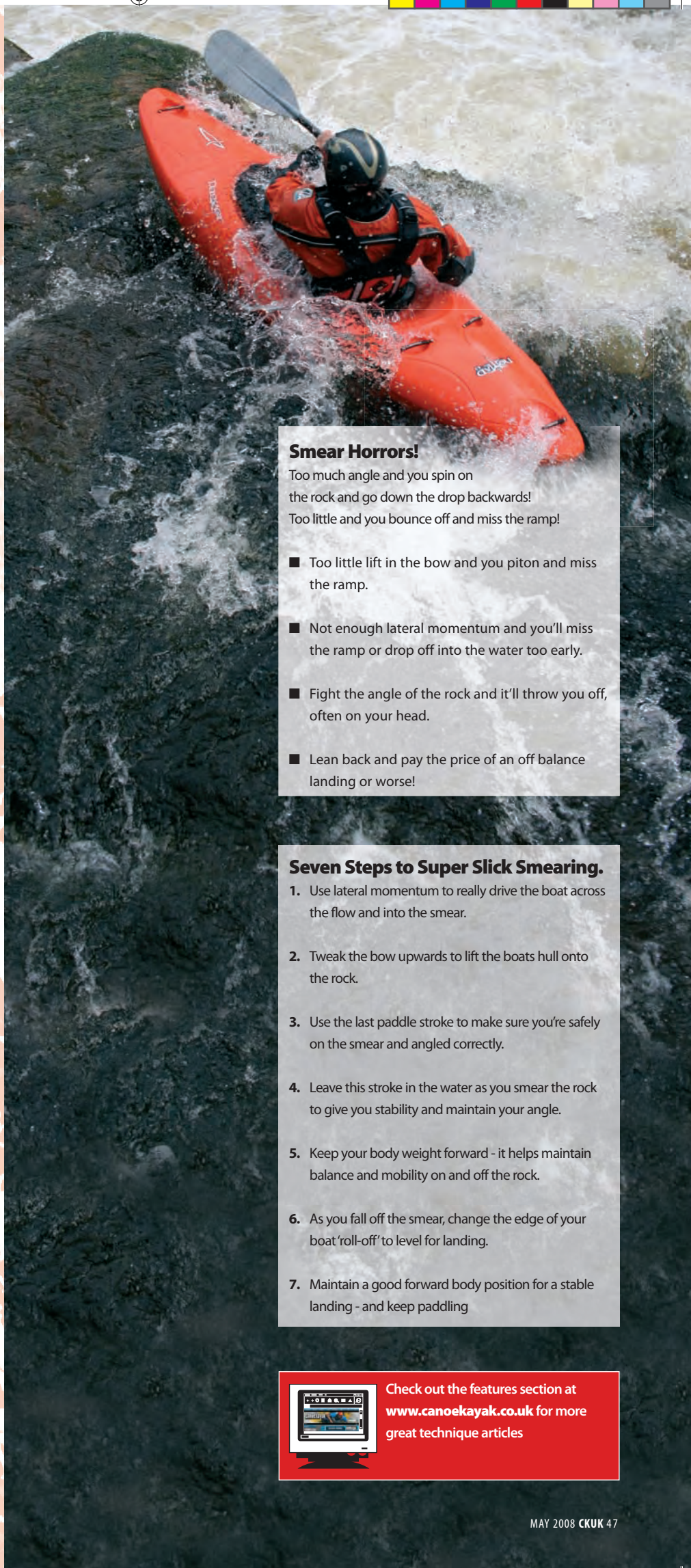
Remember to keep a good positive body position throughout the smear. Attaining the rock can often knock you back, so get your weight into a positive slightly forward position for the ride. It’ll help you ride the smear and also absorb some of the impact on landing.

The Drop Off

Your roll-off is what’ll make or break your landing, because it’s how you get your weight back over your boat to stay stable. It’s easiest on slabs that drop off before the landing, because you’ve got that fraction of airtime to get your weight over the front deck and get ready to land. On rock slabs that carry on all the way to the plunge pool, you need to anticipate the exact moment to level off your boat and do it in a quick, decisive movement.

Landing

When you are landing don’t brace with your paddle it’ll just kill your speed. Instead prepare your body for landing by keeping your weight slightly forward but leaving room for movement to absorb the impact just like a boof. This is easiest to remember if you get ready for the next forward paddle stroke. This also maintains your speed ready to pull your boat safely into the eddy. Happy landings! **CKUK**



Smear Horrors!

Too much angle and you spin on the rock and go down the drop backwards!
Too little and you bounce off and miss the ramp!

- Too little lift in the bow and you piton and miss the ramp.
- Not enough lateral momentum and you'll miss the ramp or drop off into the water too early.
- Fight the angle of the rock and it'll throw you off, often on your head.
- Lean back and pay the price of an off balance landing or worse!

Seven Steps to Super Slick Smearing.

1. Use lateral momentum to really drive the boat across the flow and into the smear.
2. Tweak the bow upwards to lift the boats hull onto the rock.
3. Use the last paddle stroke to make sure you're safely on the smear and angled correctly.
4. Leave this stroke in the water as you smear the rock to give you stability and maintain your angle.
5. Keep your body weight forward - it helps maintain balance and mobility on and off the rock.
6. As you fall off the smear, change the edge of your boat 'roll-off' to level for landing.
7. Maintain a good forward body position for a stable landing - and keep paddling



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