

BOOF CULTURE

ARTICLE & IMAGES BY SIMON WESTGARTH

Want to avoid that sticky hole at the bottom of a drop? Need to land flat because of a shallow landing pool? Then you need a 'boof' stroke, my friends. To help you hone your technique and to have

you boofing like a bad boy, BCU Level 5 Coach, Simon Westgarth, explains this commonly used, but often misunderstood river running skill...

Boofing is a method by which a whitewater paddler projects the boat off the lip of a drop, out

and beyond the awaiting dangers below, often landing flat on the hull, thus creating a "boof" sound.

Born out of necessity by early creek boaters in 1970's America, boofin' has radically changed the modern method of river running on steep runs, where horizon lines and powerful stoppers are now hazards to be paddled, instead of portaged.

Boofin' as a technique requires a precise sequence of paddle strokes, executed with exact timing in the right location. For the experienced paddler, after consideration, this sequential process can be performed at most horizon lines. Whereas for the developing paddler, with so many aspects in play in order to perform the boof correctly, the

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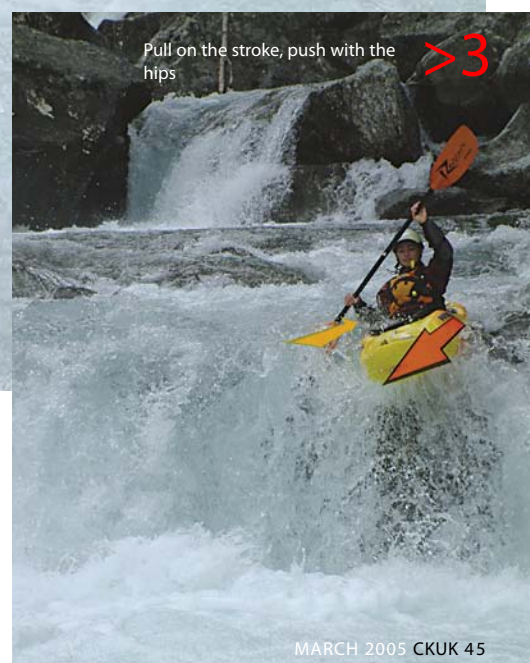
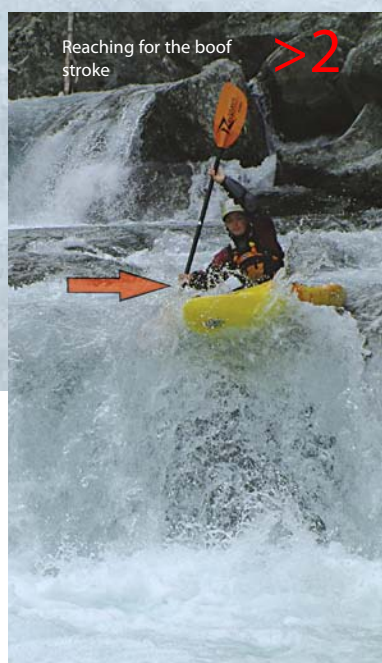
tendency is to focus on one or two key points instead of the move as a whole. In the description below, five steps to successful boofin' are explained and woven together, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the skill.

Boof lip: a clear edge that the water falls from

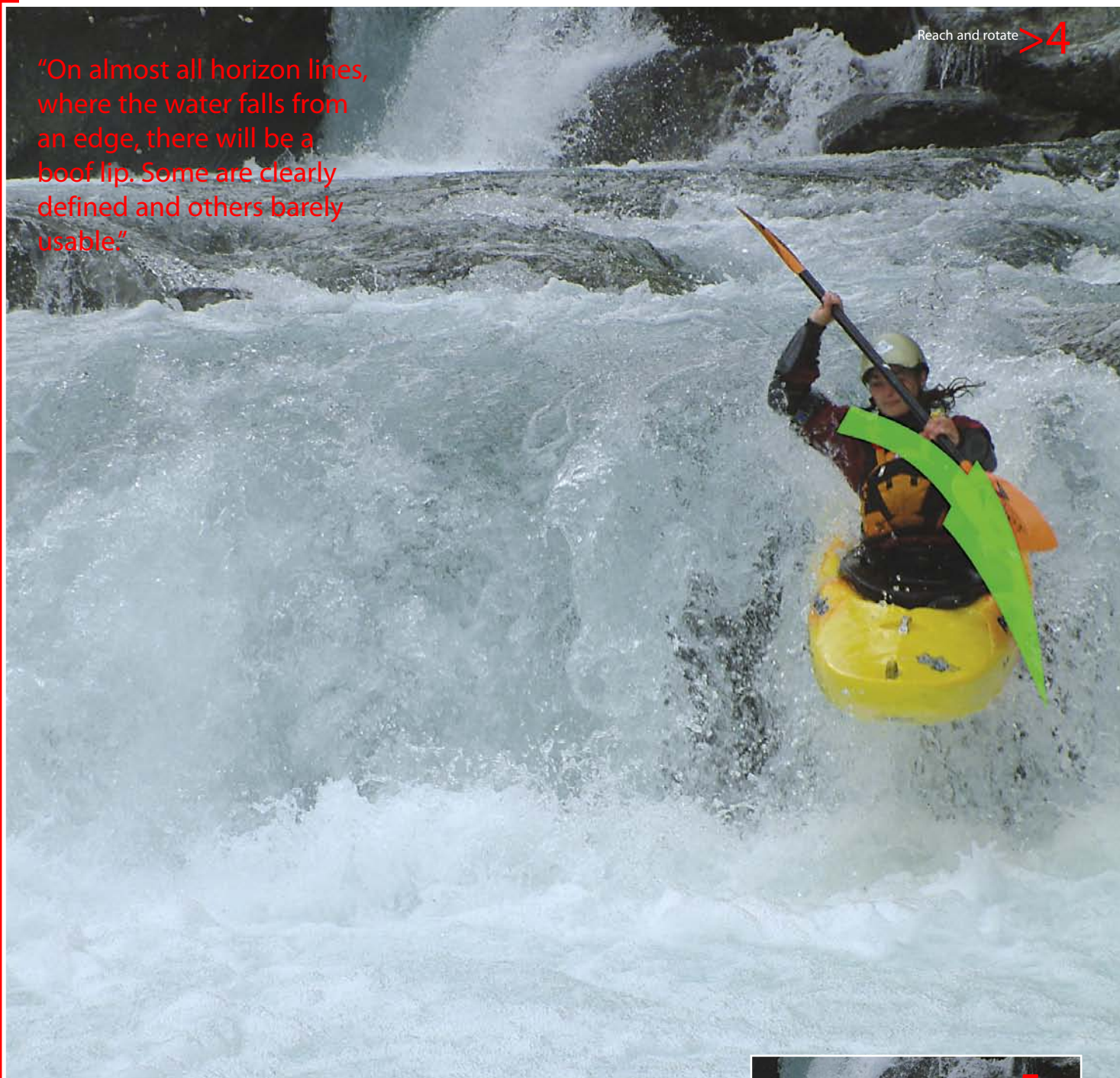
On almost all horizon lines, where the water falls from an edge, there will be a boof lip. Some are clearly defined and others barely usable. To begin with the paddler must be able to recognise what a boof lip looks like and where to find one. In the boof Lip image (above right), the yellow box indicates a relatively clear and clean edge from which to boof. The water falls from this edge in a clear 90° step. From the image sequence with the green boat (on page 45), the boof lip is also well defined. However, instead of a straight drop off, the lip is on a sloping angle across the drop. The method for boofing off either of these drops is the same, yet the driving path of the boat and amount of edging in order to boof are different.

On the straight edge, the approach can be straight on, with the kayaker needing to lean a little to get more purchase off the boof stroke. In the sloping edge, the path of the approach needs to be an arc from river left to right, with the paddler required to lean both the body and boat aggressively.

The paddler's clarity of vision for identifying boof lips, and how to use them, comes from



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experience and experimentation, i.e. practice with evaluation, best done with a coach or with video analysis.

TIMING

The boof stroke is best executed by reaching over the boof lip on approach. The all important boof stroke is often a singular focus for paddlers about to boof. Implementing this stroke is often rushed, or carried out too early. This may be because the paddler is about to enter into free-fall, which can be quite exciting to experience, and so overrides the need to be focused on the task at hand. Still it's a question of what the paddler focuses on, and consequentially this distinguishes the successful outcome of running the drop.

The boofin' kayaker should be aiming to project the boat out from the boof lip. This can be visualised by understanding that the whole timing issue of the boof stroke is like being a pole-vaulting athlete. On approach, the paddler builds speed, focusing on the boof lip. As the boat

nears the edge, the paddler reaches forward in anticipation, planting the paddle blade over the lip, as if to pole vault up and over the drop. The boat's bow should pitch up and project out from the drop. It is important to anticipate this timing and even wait for a moment to place the boof stroke, instead of rushing it. Common mistakes are reaching for the boof stroke too early or missing the boof stroke entirely.

BOOF STROKE

Pull back on the paddle and push forward with the hips. Effective boofin' is a combination of pulling on the boof stroke whilst driving the hips forward. This allows the boat to continue its momentum forward, instead of rotating in free-fall. As the paddler reaches forward for the boof stroke, the upper body should extend forward. The paddle blade is placed near vertical, close to the bow, and the stroke is started. As the blade is pulled through, this initiates the hips being pushed forward.

It is often the case that the paddler puts all

Stay compact and support if

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The following sequence shows good boof technique utilised on a sloping angled boof lip



their effort into pulling back on the forward stroke, tilting back their upper body in order to keep the bow from dropping down. This is especially the case with smaller paddlers and those just learning this skill. There is little wrong with this, as long as the boat continues forward in the boof and the upper body posture moves back upright during the free-fall.

By using either a boof stroke or hip push, it's still possible to boof, yet the probability of it always being successful is questionable. Therefore, try to balance the pull of the boof stroke with the pushing forward of the hips for the best results. Common mistakes are all pull and no push, or too big a boof stroke, which rotates the boat as it falls, probably landing in the awaiting stopper sideways!

ROTATE

Continue the boof stroke, to have the upper body balanced over the lower body. As the boat starts to free-fall the paddler should rotate the upper body forward to land pitched over the cockpit. This rotation is gained by following through with the boof stroke, and by reaching forward with the next paddle stroke whilst falling. In addition, rotating forward for the next stroke should help retain the forward momentum on landing, allowing the paddler to avoid the stopper at the bottom of a drop. Furthermore, by being forward on landing

the paddler can brace for support if it is required. Getting forward on or before landing keeps the paddler in control. When the paddler's body is leaning back, weighting the boat's stern, the boat often stalls on landing making it more difficult to get through the hole.

COMPACT

Land pitched forward to absorb and thus control the energy from falling. As the body rotates from the boof stroke into the next stroke on landing, the upper body should be pitched forward into the landing. This compact position is by far the best in terms of controlling the transition from free-fall into forward momentum. If the kayaker sits upright, the energy from impact could be absorbed through the back and, in the most extreme cases, compress the spine!

Other important considerations for boofin' are the size of the drop, the depth of the landing zone and whether the water is aerated. All these have a huge influence of whether you should boof or not, where to boof and whether or not to pitch the bow down during free-fall. Whitewater kayaking is an experience-based sport, and only through the correct experience and the development of natural attributes, like balance and co-ordination, can the aspiring become the fully accomplished kayaker they wish to be.

The boof stroke and many more advanced whitewater river running techniques are featured in G17's latest DVD release 'Genes - Advanced Whitewater Technique'

