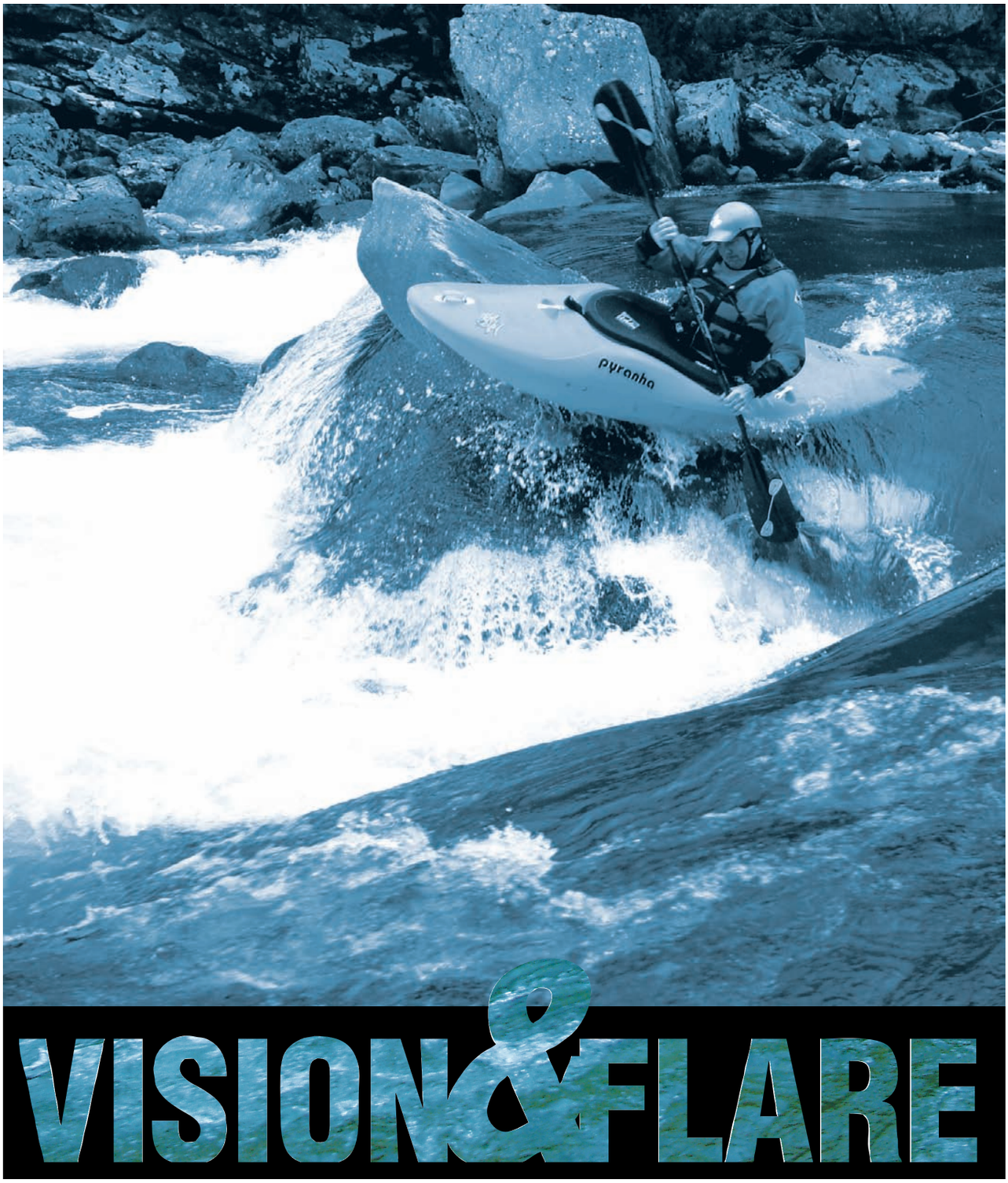


VISION & FLARE

Article by Simon Westgarth
Images by Simon Westgarth and Deb Pinniger

Fed up of bashing down rapids? Want to really 'go with the flow' of the river using its every feature to create the best lines possible? BCU Level 5 Coach, Simon Westgarth, explains the concept and technique of Flares, a new way of looking at drops and river features, and how to run them...

INTRODUCTION

Much has been discussed about new school paddling, the debate mainly centring around whether the ideas are new or not. Well, the evidence is quite clear cut. In the past ten years there has been a considerable advance in whitewater boat design and this has been accompanied by major technique developments to paddle the shorter modern kayaks with their harder edged hulls.

For the sharp end of river running, the development of 'boofing' is by far the most recognised from this period. Driving the boat through rapids and using curling waves to boof out from a drop is dynamic, and the very essence of new school kayaking.

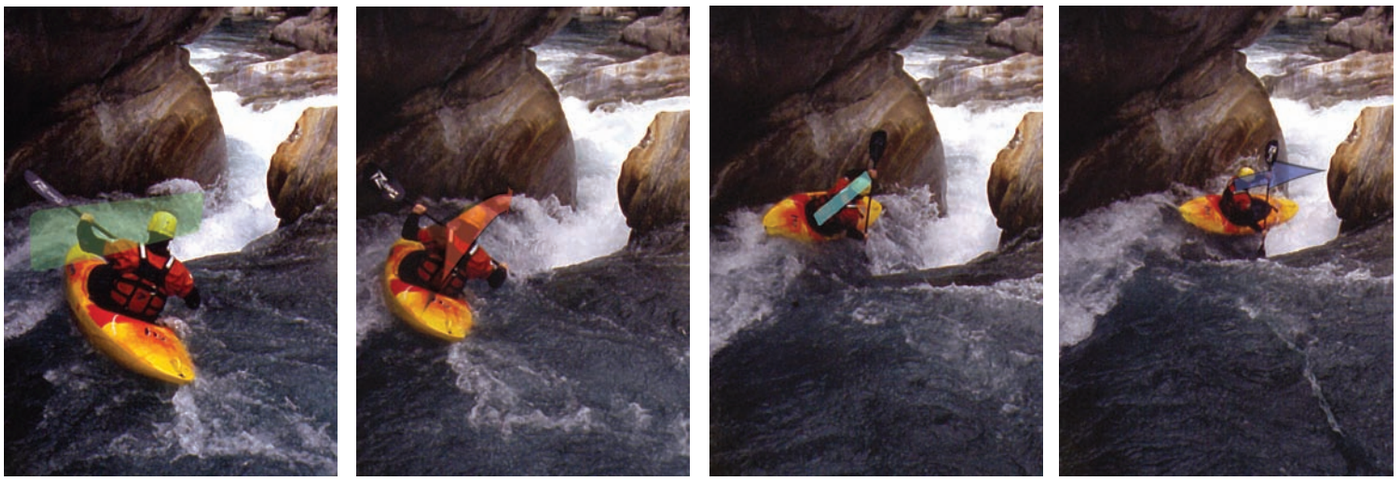
Flaring the boat is a way to be able to run cleaner lines. It's an application of an everyday technique to increase and improve paddlers' use of river features. This skill requires an understanding of the following criteria...

1. Shapes and surfaces
2. Modern kayak design advantages
3. Application of technique

SHAPES AND SURFACES

Rapids by their very nature are formed from numerous facets of water and rock creating different surface shapes. By looking for these surface structures in the whitewater, the modern kayaker can begin to see more possibilities for different lines and new outcomes. This is best described by using the examples below.

From the image sequence it is clear to see the water curling off the river left wall and dropping into a tight slot on river right. The first image shows a translucent green box indicating the sloping surface of the curling wave. The water on this sloping surface



is flowing from river left to river right. In order to flare the boat, the paddler is required to lean the boat sufficiently enough that the flat hull sits on this sloping surface. By doing this, the kayak can be driven across the sloping surface, riding high, ready to land off the end of the curling wave into the river left side of the slot. The outcome of flaring the drop in the images is that the paddler avoids the nasty, potentially dangerous, inside of the slot and continues on smoothly to an awaiting eddy.

If the boat has no speed, but sits flat to the sloping feature, the kayak will simply slide off the curling wave with the falling water into the river right side of the slot. Alternatively, if the hull is not at the same aspect as the curling wave, the outside edge of the hull will dig into the falling water, and be pushed right into the slot earlier than the paddler wishes.

As with the example, on most rapids there are numerous possibilities. It's just a matter of developing good vision!

"You don't need eyes to see,
you need vision." Faithless

MODERN BOATS WITH NEW POSSIBILITIES

Modern river boats, with their flat hulls and hard edges, turn faster and accelerate quicker than any of the old school kayaks. This has allowed paddlers to take up greater and more difficult challenges in the whitewater environment, with infrequently run sections of Class 5 now becoming regular after-work blasts! In addition to kayaking new runs, pioneering paddlers have also been able to experiment with new lines on regularly paddled rapids. Because of these developments there is now a far wider scope of water features accessible for dynamic paddlers, where, for instance, rocks' surfaces are now used to the kayaker's advantage instead of being avoided.

APPLICATION

Flaring is fundamental in any gravity sport. Activities such as mountain biking or BMX, where cyclists bank their bikes through a turn, or snowboarding, where free riders access a slope surface by pitching their body weight into the fall line, both combine dynamic momentum and gravity. In whitewater kayaking, flaring is in essence the banking of both the paddler and the boat into a turn, often following the momentum of the river's flow.

In the following sequence, the paddler uses the sloping surface of the rock to nail a new line

KEY STEPS FOR FLARING:

1. Approach

Once the line has been seen and chosen, the approach to the drop is often an arc travelling laterally across the river, normally accessing the main flow.

The sloping surface plane is clearly visible ahead of the kayak's bow.

2. Lean

As the boat rides onto the sloping surface of the curling wave, an active blade in the water holds pressure on its driving face, giving the paddler some initial support as they lean into the turn,

3. Pitch

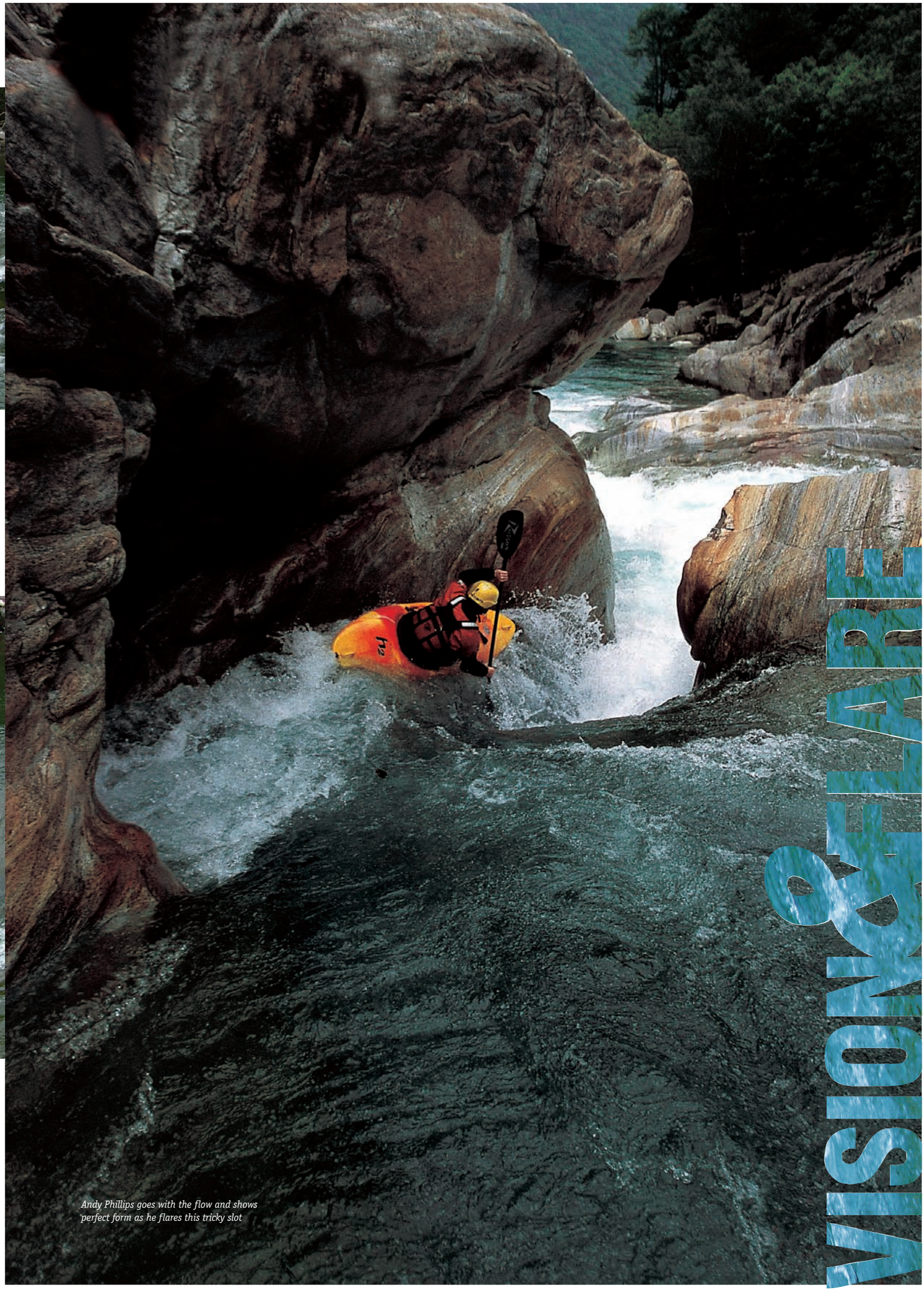
The paddler pulls the bow up in order to land the boat flat on the surface or hole below.

During the descent, the active blade is released when the paddler's weight is pitched forward. The momentum gained from the forward stroke is used to pull the paddler out of the lean to sit up right on landing.

So there we have it, look at rapids with new eyes, practice on easier grade runs and you'll soon be paddling the river with new flare.

Flares and many more advanced whitewater river running techniques are featured in G17's latest DVD release Genes – Advanced Whitewater Technique.
To order a copy call 01242 539390 or visit **www.gunnpublishing.co.uk/shop**

Simon would like to thank the following for their support. Gene17kayaking, Palm Equipment, Dagger Europe, Pyranha Mouldings, Sweet Protection, Rough Stuff Paddles and KAVU



VISION & FLARE

Andy Phillips goes with the flow and shows perfect form as he flares this tricky slot