

# CASE STUDY

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## Sea Kayaking Incident - “Freak” Wave August 2022

### Introduction

Many incidents reported through British Canoeing’s Incident Reporting Online Form contain significant events and key learnings. From time to time and with permission of those involved we will create a case study from an incident. Case studies enable us to share others’ experience with the wider paddlesport community to help raise awareness of paddling safely.

### The Incident

In August 2022, a group of eight people set out on a sea kayaking trip during which two individuals were harmed by a “freak” wave while stopped for lunch at a bay along the coastline. It is believed that this “freak” wave was caused by a passenger ferry passing by at approximately two nautical miles out to sea.

The group had stopped for lunch and placed their kayaks above the tide line on a pebble beach. Whilst sat on the beach the group noticed a ferry passing by followed by a slightly larger wave than the previous pattern. This started to move one of the boats and then a second wave began to lift several boats. Three members of the group including one of the leaders ran to retrieve the boats, however, the waves became stronger and more frequent. The boats were dumped down over and against the paddlers causing two of them to be trapped against or under boats and dragged into the pebbles.

At this point the other leader ran to aid the paddlers out of the water and took control of the situation by directing them towards the cliffs for shelter. At the same time the first leader attempted to rescue the boats but another strong wave train occurred. The boats were dragged out in the backwash and the leader was knocked over which prevented the boats from being secured. Over half of the group’s boats were pulled out into the bay and partially submerged, leaving loose equipment and personal belongings in the water.

The stronger wave pattern diminished and the sea returned to flat calm conditions. All paddlers were checked for injuries, some of which required first aid, and boats and equipment were gathered and brought back to shore. The remaining equipment was distributed between each of the boats and paddlers were launched one at a time back onto the water. The group initiated their evacuation plan and decided to return to their starting point rather than continue the paddle. The rest of the trip was uneventful.

## **Key Learnings**

The group were adequately prepared for the trip and carried sufficient safety and spare equipment. Subsequently, the group will use this incident as a case study for any in-house training. The incident has highlighted the importance of carrying appropriate safety equipment, having trained first-aiders, and having an emergency plan in place in case things go wrong. The group realises that the aftermath of the incident could have been much worse had these safety measures not been in place. The incident will also provide support for future discussions around the significance of taking sufficient safety equipment.

## **Good Practice**

Sharing good practice is a key part of learning from incidents. This incident brings to life the need to:

- Have a good understanding of where you are paddling.
- Take extra care when operating near other vessels.
- Appreciate that wash can be created by vessels even from a distance.
- Ensure kayaks are moved well away from the water when having a rest stop.
- Carry out a dynamic risk assessment of the conditions and assess the geography of any stops for any indication as to whether they might be unsafe.
- Carry sufficient safety equipment and have procedures in place in case things go wrong.

## **Conclusion**

Learning from incidents and near misses is important for the future safety of the sport. To report an incident or notable event to British Canoeing please go to:

<https://www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/go-canoeing/access-and-environment/access-to-water/incident-reporting>

For any questions or support please email: [safety@britishcanoeing.org.uk](mailto:safety@britishcanoeing.org.uk)