

Newsletter article (for immediate release)

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TEN TIPS FOR SAFE COLD WATER BOATING – *Stacking The Deck In Your Favor*

by T.J Hittle

Kansas Canoe Association (KCA) - Past President

former ACA Central Division Safety-Education Chr.

former Kansas Canoe Association Safety-Education Chr.

(785) 539-7772 / tjhittle@kansas.net / P.O. Box 83 - Manhattan, KS 66505-0083

When you plan a cold water outing on a river or lake, are you “stacking the deck in your favor or are you stacking the deck against yourself?” On Tuesday, March 10, 1998, Kansas City area kayaker, David Grizzell, stacked the deck against himself and paid the ultimate price with his life. Rescue authorities found his body, clad in a light jacket, blue jeans, and sneakers, in Lake Winnebago, located in Cass County, MO. According to South Metro Fire District assistant chief, Phil Brillhart, “David Grizzell was not even wearing a life jacket.”

Thursday, December 6, 2001, the body of Timothy Michael Bennett, 19, Kansas State University (KSU) freshman in environmental design from Kansas City, Mo., was found wearing a life jacket, floating in Tuttle Creek Reservoir, Manhattan, KS. His two roommates, Kyle David Chapman, 17, freshman in computer science, and Christopher Nathan Shipley, 18, freshman in animal science, both from Olathe, Kan., are still missing after an intensive search on the reservoir. They had gone out to sail on the waters of Tuttle Creek Reservoir.

From 24 years of cold water paddling and over 7,000 river miles of river running experience, here are a few tips to help you stack the deck in your favor:

- 1) *Avoid paddling alone.* Your fellow paddlers and support craft are the most direct link to your degree of safety. Three boats are generally considered the minimum safe number under adverse conditions. Through your participation in a winter boating trip, you are placing your life in the hands of others. Consider the advantages of groups as you plan your adventure. Make sure that others know your itinerary. Once on the river or lake, you should always be keeping an eye out for the “other boater” in front and in behind you. On river trips, always consider the level of expertise of your lead and sweep paddler. David Grizzell was boating alone.
- 2) *Carefully consider the weather and water conditions.* The combinations of weather and water conditions can be overwhelming. David Grizzell launched his kayak in a snowstorm and high winds. Monitor the wind and weather conditions prior to your launch. Reconsider when water levels are high and weather conditions are marginal. The level of difficulty under adverse conditions changes dramatically.
- 3) *Know the signs of hypothermia. Take action immediately.* Hypothermia is subnormal temperature within the central body. There are signs for mild, moderate, and severe. Know the conditions, the signs, and the preventative treatment of hypothermia. Recognize these signs in the actions and words of your boating partners and act early to help prevent the inevitable and insidious results of hypothermia. These signs can include: cold, pale skin, intense shivering, slurred speech, rigid muscles, disorientation,

and eyesight problems. Remember that a great many hypothermia victims will resist your initial attempts to help. As insidious as hypothermia works, a victim often responds by saying, "I'm fine, I'm alright. Lets keep going", while shivering and stuttering as they speak. Don't miss those signs. Take action immediately. Have the right gear along to help prevent mild hypothermia from becoming more acute. Have a plan ready in case of the need to initiate treatment for mild hypothermia. Understand and be aware that hospital treatment, specialized equipment, and professional medical care will be needed for treatment of advanced and severe cases of hypothermia.

- 4) *Wear appropriate cold water clothing and paddling gear. Bring water based safety gear.* This means taking precautions against hypothermia by wearing insulated dry suits, or wet suits and all the latest clothing that we have available to us now. In addition, strongly consider adding these items to your clothing list: warm head gear, helmet liners, neoprene gloves or pogies, nylon pile neck gaiters, additional layers of nylon pile dry-suit liners, polypropylene underwear, three layers of polypropylene socks, and neoprene booties. Keep your hands, feet, and head well covered. Remember that 30-50% of the body heat is lost through the head and neck. Under NO circumstances should you wear cotton clothes. David Grizzell was found wearing a light jacket and a pair of blue jeans. Last, each person should take an extra set of winter wear with you in a quality water proof bag as back up for himself/herself and for others in case of accidents. Always bring such standard water based self-rescue gear, including a good First Aid kit, a rescue throw bag, and a rescue whistle.
- 5) *No Alcohol!* Alcoholic beverages should be avoided because they promote heat loss by expanding the blood vessels that carry body heat to the skin.
- 6) *EAT, EAT, EAT.* You should store little high-energy snacks in your gear. Your body burns up a tremendous amount of calories just staying warm. Give your body a chance to recuperate by snacking at regular intervals. At lunch, try a good well-built sandwich, fruit, and more high-energy snacks. Don't forget to drink water. Dehydration can still threaten during any cold water trip. If there is room in your boat, a stainless steel thermos with a quart of hot coffee or hot chocolate is a GREAT addition.
- 7) *Wear your PFD.* It should go without saying that a Personal Flotation Device (PFD), formally known as a "life jacket" is not an option; it is a MUST WEAR piece of equipment. David Grizzell was not wearing a PFD when he was found. Although many states have laws that require a PFD in a boat, few states actually require them to be worn. Kansas requires only those individuals, ages 12 and under to wear their PFD. Don't make that fatal mistake! Always wear your PFD.
- 8) *Should I swim for shore?* Heart failure is the usual cause of death when the body core temperature lowers to the 85-degree range and lower. The body loses heat to the water about 30 times faster than in air. Immediately get on top of an over-turned boat in large water bodies. Well conditioned swimmers have been able to swim up to .5 mile in 50 degree water. Others have not been able to swim 100 yards before hypothermia paralyzed the muscles. Do not swim unless there is absolutely no chance of rescue and you are absolutely certain you can make it to shore. On a river, carefully consider a swim only if you are confident that you can make shore with ease. Use your boating group to enact a water based boat rescue. Here again, a good experienced group of boaters, capable of self-rescue, may be your best ticket to safety.

- 9) *Be prepared with the skills necessary for the water you are paddling.* Boat within your skill level and work towards the skills necessary for more difficult conditions. Expert kayakers are often seen making Class III maneuvers on Class II water and Class IV maneuvers on Class III water to gain experience under adverse conditions. Make yourself an asset to the group by paddling within your skill level. Furthermore, be the best boater you can be by making yourself aware of the “paddling group” and the “river conditions”.
- 10) *Join a boating club and increase your skill level.* The benefits of a well-organized club are nearly limitless. Many clubs offer trip schedules, skills classes, safety classes, trip planning classes, etc, etc. When you join a club, you have just made a giant step towards stacking the deck in your favor. For more tips on paddling rivers in Kansas, see the Kansas Paddler Home Page at:
<http://www.kansas.net/~tjhittle>

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