

ISK Classes with Ben Lawry 2014

ISK members had a chance to work with Ben Lawry again this year in classes the club offered from July 9 – 14. Ben teaches around the world, at symposiums all over the US, and offers private instruction and kayak camps. He's been coming to ISK to teach in July for the past few years.

Having helped organize each year's classes, I've enjoyed seeing the improvement in participant skill levels from year to year as club members have taken advantage of a variety of opportunities to grow their skills, and Ben commented on the same thing this year. It's also been fun to observe how Ben has adapted his teaching and classes to continue to challenge us. We've tailored the course offerings each year to match the interests and skills of the club, providing options that bring newer paddlers into the pipeline and others that more experienced paddlers will find appealing.

2014 Classes

Forward Stroke 1 and Core 1: Ideally, these two courses would always go together, as they complement each other. In Forward Stroke 1, Ben breaks down what's happening in our forward strokes. Starting with a number of exercises on land, we can feel for ourselves how changes in how we sit in the boat affect balance and power. We discover where we're effectively applying power to move the boat, and where we're just doing work that doesn't accomplish anything. We explore how subtle changes in grip, wrist, elbow, and shoulder positioning affect the safety, comfort and effectiveness of our strokes. We get a feel for how to apply power to use our core to drive the boat. On the water, we break the stroke down into parts to start seeing how we might be able to modify a complex movement that we've done tens of thousands of times to make a better forward stroke. It's a lot of information to take in, and I have to say that I was able to absorb much more the second time I took the class than the first. I also find that every time I assist at this class (or any of Ben's classes), I learn new things.

Core 1 uses a similar experiential teaching approach, but explores other strokes – sweeps, reverse, rudders, etc. Like the forward stroke class (and all of Ben's classes), it evolves every year and changes based on the participants in the class and as Ben tries new teaching approaches.





Forward Stroke 2 and Core 2: I've been working on my forward stroke since 2009, when I saw myself on video doing a push/pull with my arms with my shoulders hunched up to my ears. Based on this year's Forward Stroke 2 class, I'm still finding things I think I'm doing that I'm not, and things I don't realize I'm doing that I don't want to be doing.

This year we offered a Core 2 class for the first time, which is really an advanced boat control class. A storm was blowing through just as class was beginning, so we moved to Lake Harriet and started the day in the bandstand while we did some work on land. Once we got on the water, a stiff breeze allowed us to work on boat control in wind and waves. Even the small wind waves found on Lake Harriet offered a challenge when we tried to hold a solid edge through a turn. We explored which turns work upwind and which work downwind, worked on both pries and draws, added some linked strokes, and ended the day slaloming through the buoy field.



Rescues and Incident Management: I've watched Ben teach Rescues and Incident Management for 3 years on the Chain of Lakes, with many people taking the class every year. Each year the format and content have been different. This year the no-wake rule on Lake Minnetonka gave us a chance to hold the class on a different venue. We launched from North Arm, which was a bit less familiar to most of the group and provided more of a navigational challenge. The warm and sunny July Sunday brought out far more powerboats than we see in early spring and late fall. Ben had everyone in the group take turns leading (while various incidents somehow happened along the way), and the traffic provided a bit more stress as the group had to observe and plan routes around the boats. The wind offered a chance to work on holding position, using ranges, and managing a group that the conditions were trying to move and separate. For those of us who normally only see the big lake in early spring or late fall, it was interesting to see it with its summer inhabitants. The only downside to the day was that we got back about two hours late, but nobody seemed to mind.



Moving Water: We also offered Moving Water 1 and Moving Water 2 classes. These courses are fun in and of themselves, showing us new ways to play in our boats on local rivers. They also let us start to build skills that can transfer to bigger water and the dynamic environments of tidal currents, races, and surf.

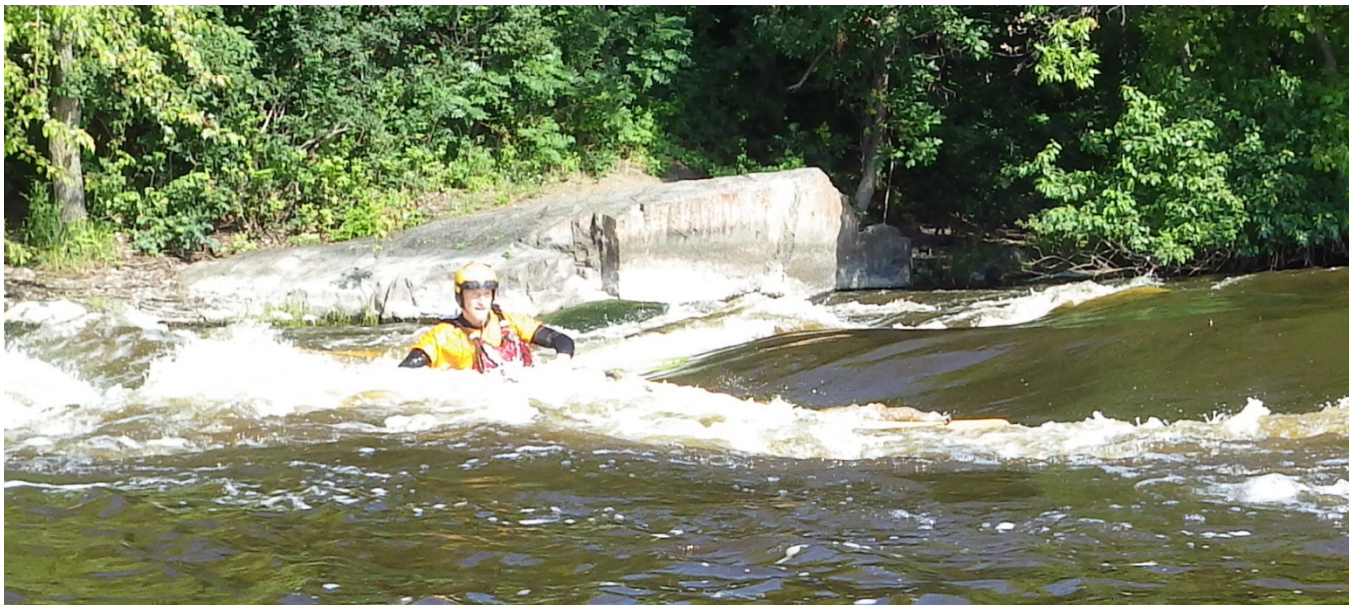
We've done Moving Water 1 for the past two years, and have launched from Hidden Falls on the Mississippi River. This location provides an excellent venue to introduce eddy lines, ranges and ferries. Students come away with a good understanding of the concepts and a solid base to build on.

Unfortunately, when we checked the river on the Saturday night before the Moving Water 1 class, the water was too high and fast to hold a class there. There was an eddy by the launch ramp, but if you missed that eddy, you probably weren't coming back up against the current, and there was no eddy on the far side of the river. We moved the Moving Water 1 class to Cedar Lake and asked people what they wanted to work on. Towing, rudders, maneuvers in the wind were the main goals, and fun was had while they were explored.

For Moving Water 2, we went to Sauk Rapids on the Mississippi River in St. Cloud. This site offered larger expanses of moving water and different features than we've had at Hidden Falls and the Ford Dam, and was a nice jump in difficulty for the participants. We warmed up by trying to get some skills wired that would help us cross eddy lines at the right angle (charcs!). After that we spent time reading the water, did some swimming in current, played on standing waves, and worked with eddy line crossings and other features. Sam and I had diligently included an evaluation of a local ice cream stop in our scouting trip the prior weekend, and it proved to be a welcome treat before we all drove home.







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