

# What Quality Spare Paddle Should I Carry?

by Joanne Schwartz

There's no generally accepted answer for this one. First, we'll assume you have decided to carry a spare paddle because you or someone in your group might have theirs ripped out of their hand in wind or surf and be left "up a wave" without a paddle. Also, paddles can break when used for supporting boats during assisted rescues.

Spare paddles can either be of the same high quality and type (say, fiberglass) as your primary paddle, or can be much less expensive (aluminum shaft with plastic blades). Here's the debate! A high quality paddle will serve you well in rough conditions and will be efficient and comfortable to use for the remainder of your trip. On the other hand, an aluminum shaft paddle will only set you back \$40-\$60 and might well "do in a pinch," as long as that pinch is not too difficult. Whenever I'm on an extended trip in potentially rough conditions (anytime bracing skills may be required), I bring a first class paddle which I would be happy using for the entire trip. As a backup, I always have along a pair of hand paddles (webbed swimming gloves or rigid plastic strap-on ovals) with which I can move my kayak for short distances (a mile or so perhaps) by swinging my hands in the water. These are also great when a friend takes your primary paddle and tosses it away from your kayak as a joke. No problem when your hand paddles are close by.

Regardless of which paddle you select as your spare and how many spares you require in your group, the paddle must be accessible. I've seen paddlers mount a spare under the same straps that hold on their rear hatch cover. In conditions so rough that you lost your paddle, the last thing you should consider doing is unsecuring your rear hatch. I've seen other paddlers secure the spare properly under a second set of straps, but pile on top of them all manner of excess baggage which wouldn't fit inside the kayak, thus making the paddle not readily accessible. I saw one paddler who had drilled a couple of holes on the blades of her paddles so she could tie the spare to her kayak!

Here's a perfect test for what "accessible" means. Capsize your kayak and see if you can reach, unfasten and assemble your spare paddle without breaking the seal of your spray deck. If so, it is "accessible" and you're ready for the worst, even if you aren't skilled to roll up with your spare. Some might consider this test extreme, but it demonstrates the well honed safety attitude of a well prepared paddler. At very least, be sure you can retrieve and assemble your spare paddle while sitting in your kayak in the conditions in which you are willing to paddle.

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