Canoe Over Canoe Rescue

The Canoe Over Canoe Rescue, or "T"-Rescue, represents the classic method of emptying water from a swamped canoe. While numerous variations exist, this one works especially well. I learned this method during the summer of 1975, while working at the (then) Minnesota Outward Bound School. It was taught to me by (the extraordinarily talented) Ted Moores, who was the program director at that time.

Conventional wisdom dictates that rescuers 'attack' the swamped canoe; (i.e.-an 'emergency response') and that the swimmers be rescued first. It may be well to interpret that latter admonition broadly. While it is most desirable to get them out of the water a.s.a.p., one must have a place to put them. If the only available option is the rescue canoe, and it is currently loaded down with gear and rescuers, it may not be safe to add the swimmers to the load, particularly in rough seas. So, exercise good judgment. You may find that your best option, under the circumstances, is to access and stabilize your swimmers, and then expedite the canoe over canoe maneuver. If help is available in the form of other canoes, it is highly desirable to 'raft-up' in the interest of a larger, more stable rescue platform, and to task another team with rescuing the swimmers.

It is highly advisable to practice these techniques in advance.

Begin by approaching parallel to the swamped canoe. Make contact. Rescuers take turns turning to face the middle of the canoe and taking up stations on either side of the center thwart.

One of the advantages of this method, is that the "T" configuration happens automatically, as will be seen.

Sincere thanks to Alan Craig (L) and Jeff Lotz (R) for performing the demonstration, and to Katie McKenzie for the photos.
With one hand on the cutwater (L), and the other on the deck (R), slowly lift the canoe until the mid-stem (a point half way between the hands) makes contact with the gunwale of the rescue canoe. This point of contact will serve as a pivot as the hands apply pressure in opposite directions, to roll the canoe.

Here, the roll is shown in-progress. The hands move in opposite directions, and the mid point of the stem of the swamped canoe, pivots on the gunwale of the rescue canoe. Notice, that the two canoes are beginning to swing into that classic "T" configuration.
As the roll continues, the swamped canoe eventually ends up inverted, in a "T" configuration, and with the deck resting on the gunwale of the rescue canoe. With that accomplished, the rescuers begin to slide the swamped canoe over the rescue canoe, hand-over-hand fashion.

If your canoes will be equipped with portage yolks, be sure to practice with the yolks installed.

With the swamped canoe inverted and balanced on the gunwales of the rescue canoe, one rescuer rolls the canoe over to his/her partner.

Once emptied, simply hand-over-hand the canoe back into the water.

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