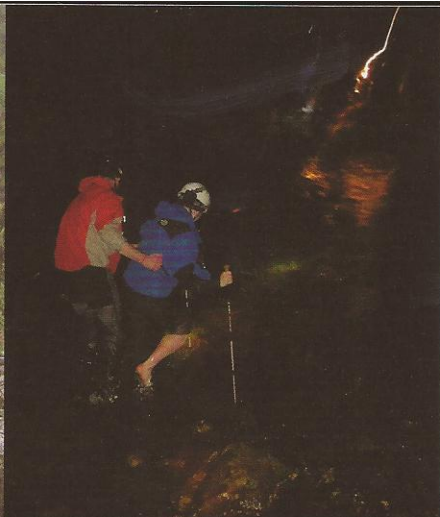




THE HOME BANK

When, and only when, all other options have been explored (including sitting it out) then you must wholly commit to the crossing; efficiency and speed are paramount.

Take time to search for the most suitable crossing (and entry) point

There will be less water upstream and in areas of hard bedrock, where the river will be shallower but wider. Make the best use of islands and above junctions where the flow will be less – it is often better to do several small crossings than one major one. Bends should be avoided, as they will always have deep water and a difficult exit on the outside.

Have a plan and brief it thoroughly

Communication will be difficult once your team is split between the far and home banks; it also helps to take people's minds off the potentially nasty outcomes and eases your burden of responsibility. Be enthusiastic, directive and selective with whom you brief the risks too. If it doesn't help, then keep it to yourself! You may wish to pass your intent to Mountain Rescue (dial 999) or the Coastguard (Channel 16 (156.8Mhz)) if possible. It will, at the very least, give them a start point should the worst happen.

Pair weak or non-swimmers with a stronger partner and do a head count

This will help with identifying when everyone is across. Get people busy and get a brew on the go if time permits – it's warmth and the boost it gives will be very welcome once you are in the water.

Prepare your gear

● In all but the warmest climes it is advisable to strip to your underwear and then cover up with your waterproofs, they'll shelter you from the wind out of the water and protect against bumps and scrapes

whilst in it. Dry clothes on the far bank are very welcome. Take socks and insoles out of your boots and do them up tight. Tuck away any laces, draw cords or loose material that will cause drag or snag and do up your collar and cuffs. Don't trap trousers into boots however as this will prevent water from draining making exit difficult.

● Wear a helmet and use a walking pole (without the wrist loop) if you have them, and attach a head torch or cyalume if there is any chance of it getting dark.

● Empty water bottles and pack everything INSIDE the rucksack and wear it loosely, without the waist belt. They are surprisingly buoyant with plenty of trapped air between equipment – be prepared for them to ride up and don't immediately discard it if you slip or it gets washed off, you will need the equipment later. If you have a knife then keep it handy (but not open!) in case of entanglement.

IN THE WATER

Try to enter slowly and calmly at a point you can exit from should you need to retreat. Take a moment to adjust to the force and temperature of the water.

If crossing alone, then use a pole for balance and finding obstructions. Face upstream but look towards your exit point and your feet. Move sideways one point at a time – foot, pole, foot, foot, pole..... Keep your feet wide apart and never too far from the riverbed.

Multiple people simply slip in behind the front man whose actions do not change. The team move together SLOWLY using each other for support. It makes sense to have your strongest person at the front to take the strain of the water, everybody else tucking in his lee. Consider stacking large parties in a pyramid for extra stability, ie. two behind the lead, three behind them and so on.

If crossing individually or in groups then send a strong party first to

assess the conditions and to assist on the far bank.

A throw line should be ready at any point should someone stumble. Do not attempt to pull the swimmer in, you will only succeed in dragging them under the water. Instead walk downstream, assisting where possible as they swim to the previously planned home/far bank.

Your second strongest person or party should cross last, on hand at any point in order to assist.

THE FAR BANK

Reaching the far bank is a worrying time for the leader. The worst scenario during a river crossing is that of a split party with people on either side unable to cross. Do all you can to expedite the crossing once committed.

● The exit point must be considered whilst on the home bank. Steep sides and mud banks can be difficult to exit from. Strong tides and currents may mean you will only make one downstream of your entrance.

● Water, especially combined with wind conducts heat many times quicker than air and people will start to chill upon exit. Send a group shelter over early, with someone who can motivate and assist people dressing and warming in it. Brew up quickly and help each other to re-warm and re-pack.

● As a leader you must account for everybody immediately! Ensure no one has been washed away or left on the home bank.

Allow everyone to take time to enjoy what they have just done; a real time river crossing is quite an adventure! Maximise the post crossing high to get cold bodies moving again.

WET CROSSINGS (TETHERED)

If you have non-swimmers, a chance that a swimmer may not be able to exit or hazards such as rapids downstream then you should use a rope to assist.

Ropes and water are a dangerous

combination and must be a last resort. Ensure the crossing area is free from obstructions and conduct thorough rehearsals on the Home Bank before committing. NEVER tie the rope to either side.

In summary, the most successful river crossing is that avoided! Once

The simplest crossing method - requiring three people (minimum)

1 Tie a large loop in the centre of the rope. This should slip over shoulders but be big enough to slip out of quickly.

2 Number One puts the rope over his shoulders and crosses in the manner described above. He is assisted by tension from the rope upstream of him. This is held but not tied off to Number Three or the last person to cross. The other end is downstream with Number Two, ready to assist Number One to the Home Bank should he slip.

3 The empty loop is pulled back and Number Two crosses. This time with assistance from either side. Should he slip, the closest person assists his recovery whilst the opposite bank pays out. The home and far banks must NEVER let go of the rope

4 Number Three recovers the loop and then throws his spare rope across so that Number Two can assist him.

committed however, strong leadership and clarity of thought are essential for a safe crossing to take place. Planning ahead and communicating that plan are everything – the thing you did not discuss or did not think about will be the thing that will wreak havoc!