

Towing: the line

A **towline** is an essential piece of sea kayaking equipment, and is even a legal requirement in unprotected waters:

- one tow line at least 15 m in length and strong enough for the vessel to be towed in any conditions

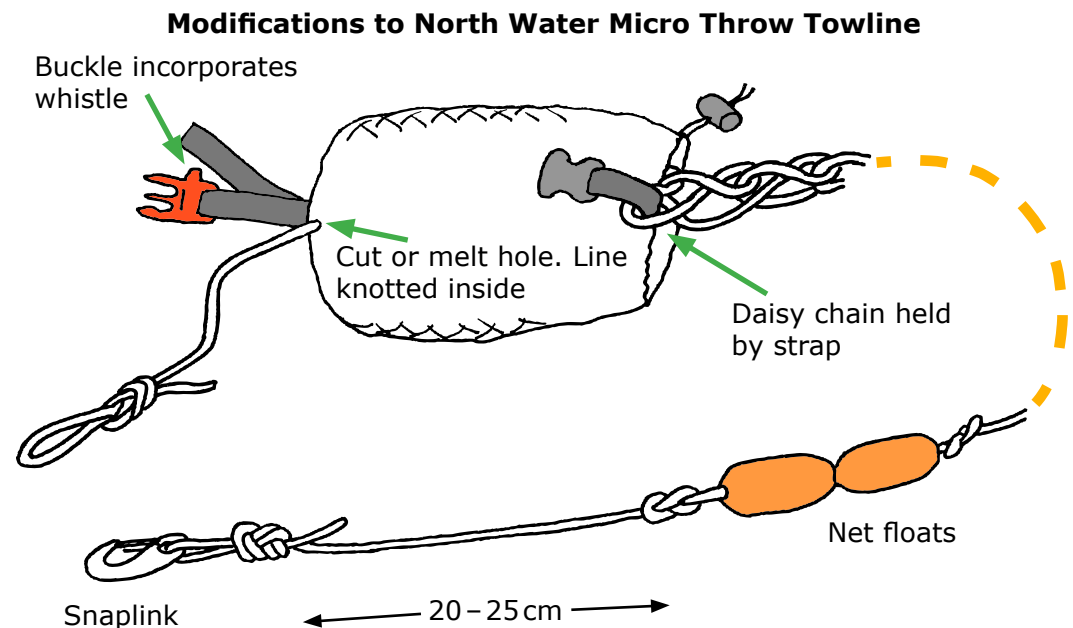
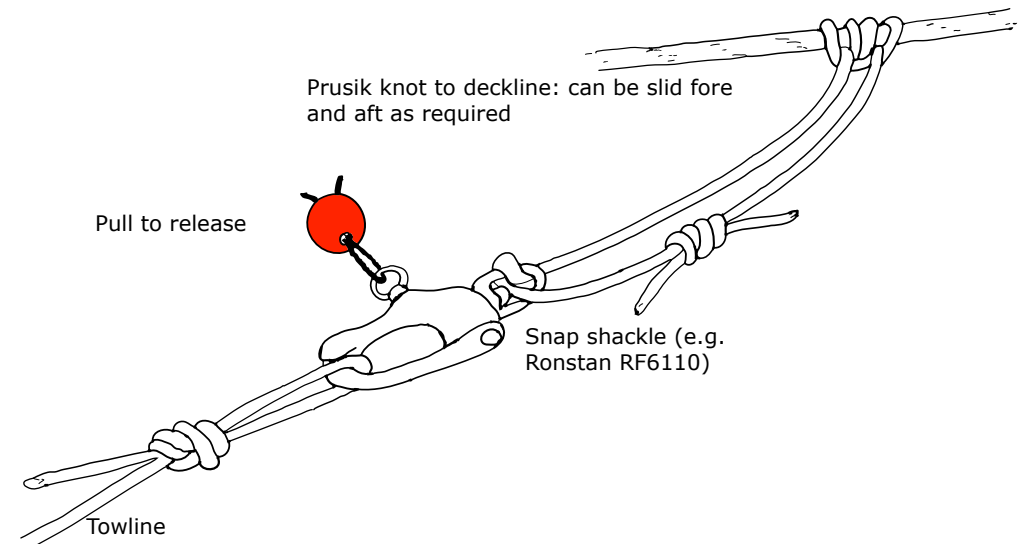
Not just any piece of string will do. A towline needs to be:

- 15 m long to provide sufficient clearance in sea and swell, but there are times when a shorter line is better
- swappable from one boat to another
- with a quick-release system on at least one end
- conveniently stowed and readily accessible.

Flatwater paddlers can use short towlines on waist belts. These are not suitable for sea use where the loads are sufficient to cause injury or pull people out of boats. That means that the towline must be attached to the boat, not the paddler. The currently favoured system uses a snap shackle such as the Ronstan RF6110 on a short loop attached by prusik knot to the deckline forward of the cockpit where it is easily accessible. It can be slid fore and aft as required, and because the loads are distributed through the deckline stresses are not concentrated on one point as they would be with a cleat. A rigging ball or other suitable 'handle' makes it easy to pull the release pin when necessary. Any towline with a loop on the towing end can be used with the system.

When it comes to the towline itself, you can either buy or make your own. One commercial option is the North Water Micro Throw Towline, \$36 from Expedition Kayaks <<https://www.expeditionkayaks.com/store/towlines.html>>. To convert it to a towline some modifications are needed, with a snaplink and a couple of net floats:

- On the towing end, add the floats and the snaplink, with a gap of 20 – 25 cm so that the end of the line can be fed through the deckline of the boat being towed.

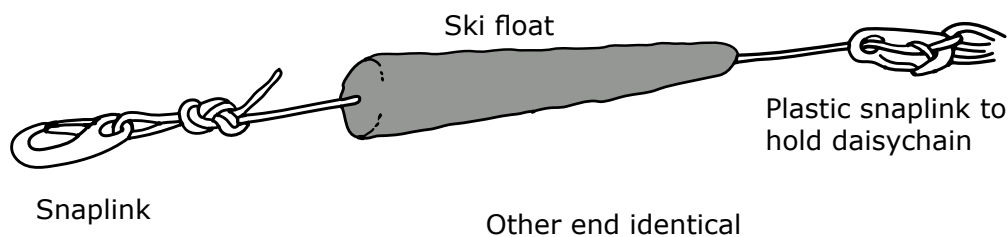


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- Undo the loop at the other end of the line and cut or melt a hole in the bottom of the bag. Poke the end of the line through and retie the loop. Knot the line to the strap inside the bag.
- Start daisy-chaining at the clip end, securing the last loop with the strap on the bag. Stuff the line into the bag to carry it.

To use this towline, attach the loop to the quick-release system. For a short towline, leave it daisy-chained, secured by the strap. For the full length, unclip the last loop and let the line unravel.

To make your own towline, you'll need 15 m of 4 mm nylon, a snaplink, float and a suitable bag. The one shown in the diagram has snaplink and float at both ends and can be used in either direction. The daisy-chaining is held by a plastic snaplink free to slide along the line.



Snaplinks

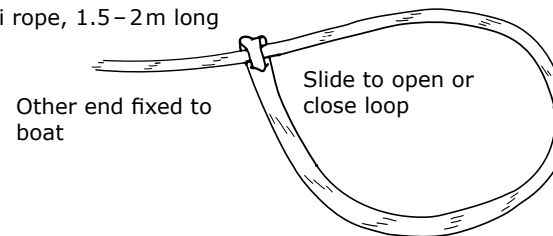
You want stainless steel marine snaplinks not alloy climbing karabiners. Suitable types are the Ronstan RF533 or the one listed as 43851 in the Whitworths catalogue. Avoid the types with teeth in the gate as they tend to snag.

Knots

All knots weaken rope. In these diagrams, figure 8 knots have been used as stoppers, figure 8 loops to hold snaplinks, and double fishermans knot to form the loop for the snap shackle system. Never tie overhand knots in rope. Ever.

For details of these and other knots see the ACAS *Knots* resource.

6 mm ski rope, 1.5–2 m long



Other useful lines

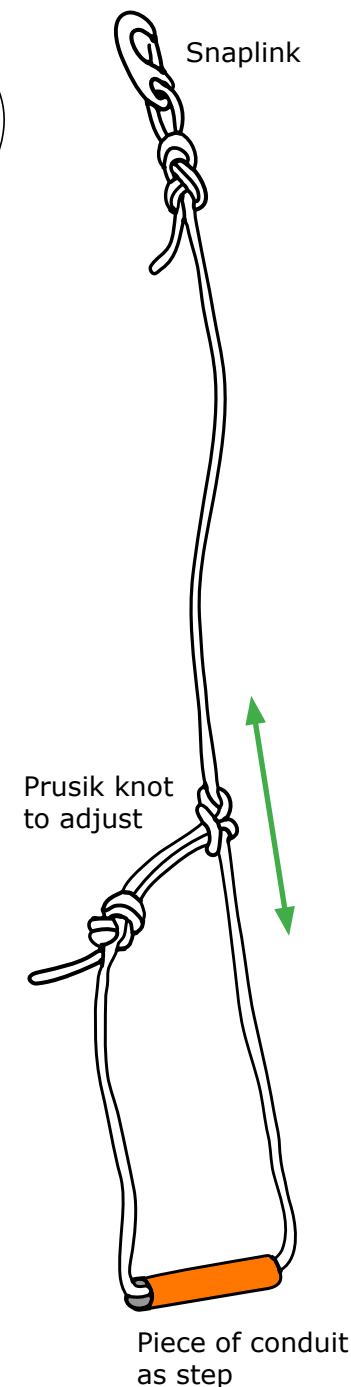
Paddle leash

There are times when you want two hands for some task other than paddling. Leash the paddle so that it doesn't escape. The simplest and cheapest is about a metre and a half of ski rope, one end fixed to the deck, the other with a loop to hold the paddle.

Reboarding stirrup

Instructors and Guides sometimes have to deal with people who find it difficult to re-board after a capsize. Stirrups exist in several forms, some being simply a loop over the cockpit rim. To use this one, clip it to the decline of the rescuer's boat and drape it over the swimmer's. The swimmer can then stand in the loop to reboard.

To make it, first make the large loop for the lower end and make the prusik knot on the conduit. Thread the free end through and then slide the conduit out of the knot into position. Put the snaplink on the free end.

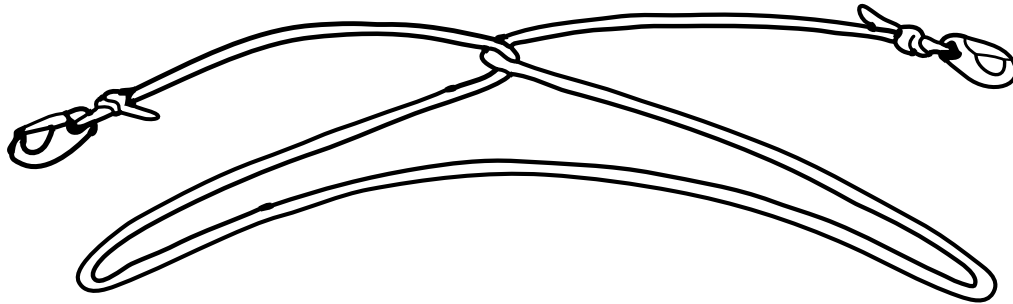


Towing: the line

Gordon Brown's short towline

In his videos Gordon Brown demonstrates a short towline stowed across the foredeck. It's simply a line which when assembled is three times the width across the decklines with a snaplink on each end.

For years I carried something similar as a paddle leash and utility rope.



Shock cords

Shock cords with adjustable hooks or olive cleats have many uses. For securing boats to vehicles or items on deck 8 mm shock cord with either Tyga or J-Hooks do the job. They can also be used to hold boats together in rafts. With olive cleats 4 mm shock cord is useful for bundling items together, holding things on deck, etc.

Acknowledgement

This resource was written and illustrated by Peter Carter, with some information from Rob Bowen.

Tyga hook

Solcor J-Hook is alternative

