

Level 2: Essentials of River Packrafting

Version 1.0

FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY

Course Overview: The **Essentials of River Packrafting** course is designed to teach beginner paddlers to safely and enjoyably packraft on gentle rivers.

This course is appropriate for all packraft and inflatable kayak craft, including traditional decked, non-decked, and self-bailing vessels. It is assumed the boats will be paddled solo. The instructor may want to limit this program to one type of craft, but should announce this prior to the start of the course.

Essential Eligibility Criteria (EEC): Instructors should determine appropriate essential eligibility criteria for participants.

Course Prerequisites: None unless instructor deems prerequisites necessary.

Instructors: Determined by individual organizations.

Course Duration: 8 hours or more, at the instructor's discretion

Course Location / Venue: Flat water and Rivers of no more than Class I difficulty

Class Ratio - 4 students : 1 Instructor; with an additional instructor or qualified assistant the ratio can be 8 : 2

Succeeding courses:

Level 3: River Packrafting

The following is a general summary of course content for the **Essentials of River Packrafting** course. The content covered and sequence of instruction should be adjusted to best fit the participants' needs, class location and time allowance.

Course Content

Introduction, Expectations, & Logistics

- Welcome, introductions, paperwork
- Student and instructor course expectations and limitations
- Course itinerary and site logistics
- Review waiver, assumption of risk, challenge by choice, medical disclosure
- Instructors should generally and candidly discuss the risks of packrafting, including injury and drowning.
- PFD policy (always wear on water)

Current as of February 05, 2020. Check <https://packraft.org/> for updates.

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- No alcohol/substance abuse
- Proper etiquette on and off the water
- Respect private property
- Practice “Leave No Trace” ethics
- Promoting a packraft “Culture of Safety”

The Paddling Environment

- Wind
- Waves
- Weather
- Water
- Open water crossings

Personal Preparation

- Personal ability
- Swimming ability
- Water comfort and confidence
- Fitness, conditioning, and warm up
- Safe paddle and boat-handling
- Safety and rescue considerations
- Personal equipment (reviewed by instructor)
- Judgment. In addition to learning hard skills, the importance of developing personal judgment and group responsibility increases on more difficult paddling venues.

Getting Started

- Boating laws, American Whitewater Safety Code
- Packing, carrying, storing, and inflating
- Launching, landing
- Wet exits
- How to empty a packraft
- Warm up to reduce injury
- Posture, rocking, and balance
- Effective body usage
- Basic terminology of paddling

Equipment

- Packraft
 - Types and parts: sizes, geometry, deck, combing, skirt, self-bailer, cargo zippers
 - Outfitting: comfort, safety, entrapment hazards
 - Outfitting: thigh straps, seat height/position, backrest, perimeter lines, tails, locking carabiners

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- Spray skirt: grab loop!
- Stability
- Tracking
- Paddle: types, parts, length, and hand position
- Life jackets (PFDs): fit and regulations
- Appropriate clothing: comfortable/protective
 - Wet/dry suits
 - Footwear
- Helmets: types, fit
- Throw ropes:
 - Where to carry/stow
 - Materials and options
 - Stuffing techniques
- Care of equipment
 - Packrafts
 - Dry suits
 - Other equipment
- Packraft repair
 - Field repair techniques and materials
 - Home repair techniques and materials
- Packing of equipment
 - Securing backpacks and other cargo to your boat
 - Entrapment hazards
 - Attachment points
 - Weight distribution
 - Cargo zippers
- Additional Personal and Group Equipment:
 - Extra paddle, head lamp, compass with signal mirror, emergency blanket/shelter, fire starter, lighter or waterproof matches, sling, dry bags, maps, water, food, sponge, hat, eyeglass strap, whistle, foot protections (shoes), bug spray, sunscreen, first aid kit, river knife, and location of equipment.
 - Optional equipment and outfitting

River Reading

Current speed, direction and changes caused by streambed features:

- Rocks
- Wood
- Man-made obstacles

River Running

- Strategies in running rivers:
 - Spacing

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- Scouting
- Portaging
- Group organization on the river:
 - Group cohesiveness (lead, sweep boats, etc)
 - Communication and signaling
- Emergency Procedures

Safety & Rescue

- Exercising judgment, safety as a state of mind.
- Principles of Rescue:
 - Priorities: first people, then boats, finally other gear
 - Responsibilities of the victim
 - Responsibilities of the rescuers
 - Responsibilities of the group
- Types of Rescue:
 - Self-rescue: swimming in moving current (aggressive and defensive), swimming a boat to shore, re-entry
 - Boat-assisted Rescue, towing or bulldozing a tired swimmer, towing or bulldozing a capsized boat, assisted re-entry
 - Shoreline rescue: extension rescues, use of throw ropes/bags

Maneuvers

- J-lean/"heeling" the boat
- Paddling in a reasonably straight line
- Spins
- Stopping
- Ferries:
 - Front ferry (upstream) to move laterally with effective boat control.
 - Back ferry (downstream) to stop in current and move laterally to avoid hazards
- Eddy Turns
- Peel Outs
- Moving Abeam

Strokes

- Forward
- Reverse (stopping)
- Draw
- Sculling draw
- Sweep (including stern draw)
- Reverse sweep
- Rudder

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- Low/high brace

Rescues

- Self-rescue
- Swimming in current
- Boat emptying
- Assisted rescue
- Responding to sudden deflation (popped boat or accidental cargo fly opening)
- From shore:
 - Extension
 - Rescue ropes
- From boat:
 - Bulldozing
 - Towing
- Wading (“Shallow Water Crossing”):
 - Principles (current & control)
 - Applications
 - Hazards (foot entrapment)
 - Methods: Up to the instructor’s discretion, but to include solo and group techniques, e.g.:
 - Solo (with paddle/prop)
 - Two-person (“A-frame”)
 - Tripod
 - Wedge
 - Fence wade

Conclusion & Wrap-up

- Trip Planning: resources, gradient, flow levels, online flow gauge resources
- Group debrief/Individual feedback
- Course limitations
- Importance of First Aid & CPR
- Importance of additional instruction, practice, experience
- Importance of appropriate level of safety and rescue training
- Demo advanced maneuvers
- Local paddling groups/clubs
- Handouts/reference materials
- Course evaluation
- Participation cards

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Source: This sample skills course is provided by the American Packrafting Association (APA) as a suggested guideline in an effort to standardize packrafting curricula and increase safety for all paddlers. In order to align the courses with industry standards, APA used American Canoe Association (ACA) Skills Courses as models in the development of this skills course. The ACA does not endorse or certify this sample skills course and does not currently certify packrafting as an ACA discipline. Check the APA website for updates to this sample curriculum and other education-related information.

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