



River Canoe Trip Leading Skills Course

Course Overview

The River Canoe Day Trip Leading course is designed to introduce the minimum skills necessary for an individual to lead a day trip on moving water. This course is appropriate for all types of tandem and/or solo canoes. It can be taught tandem, solo, or both.

If you're a student who would like a resource to prepare for this course, ACA is pleased to provide a free online paddling safety course, [here](#). A certificate of completion is included!

Course Prerequisites

- Acknowledgment of personal compliance with the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#).
- No prior paddling experience or training is required to participate in this course.

Course Duration

The course duration should be adjusted to best fit the needs and goals of the participants. Two days (16 hours) or more.

Course Location / Accessible Venues

Easy moving water up to and including class I-II rapids

A rapid class includes rapids at the lower and upper ends of the difficulty range, designated "-" and "+" respectively.

Course Size

5 Participants : 1 Instructor; with an additional qualified assistant, the ratio can be 10 : 2.

For additional details, see [SEIC Policy Manual Chapter 6](#).

Instructor

This course may be offered by:

- Level 4: Whitewater Canoeing (or higher) Instructor
- Level 3: River Canoeing Instructors with the River Canoe Trip Leading Endorsement

All Instructors must operate within the venue corresponding to their level of certification.

Succeeding Courses

- River Canoe Day Trip Leading Assessment
- Level 3: River Canoeing
- Level 4: Whitewater Canoeing

- Level 5: Advanced Whitewater Canoeing

The following is a general summary of course content for the River Canoe Day Trip Leading course. The content covered and sequence of instruction should be adjusted to best fit the participant's needs, class location and time allowance.

- 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
- About the ACA
- PFD policy (always wear on water)
- Appropriate personal behavior
 - No alcohol / substance abuse
 - Proper etiquette on and off the water
 - Respect private property
 - Practice Leave No Trace ethics

The Paddling Environment

- 4 W's: Wind, Waves, Weather, Water
- River Classifications

Personal Preparation

- Personal ability
- Swimming ability
- Water comfort & confidence
- Fitness, conditioning, and warm up
- Safe paddle and boat handling
- Safety and rescue considerations
- Personal equipment (reviewed by Instructor)

Getting Started

- Warm up and stretching
- Personal clothing & equipment
- Loading and unloading: racks, trailers: straps, ropes
- Knots: figure 8 or bowline, trucker's hitch and 2 half hitches
- Canoe carries: overhead and suitcase

- Launching / landing from shore or dock
- Canoe trim
- Posture, rocking and balance
- Positions in the canoe (students may select sitting or kneeling stance)
- Canoe terminology & nomenclature
- Concepts of Paddling
- Trip Planning - 6P's: Prior Proper
- Planning Prevents Poor Performance
- Group Dynamics
- Judgment
- Local regulations
- River etiquette

Equipment

- Personal
 - Lifejacket (PFD)
 - Correct type
 - Right size
 - Proper fit
 - Paddle
 - Water proof containers
 - Appropriate clothing
 - Personal items
 - Items not to bring

Group

- First Aid kit
- Repair kit
- Rescue equipment
- Throw ropes
- Spare paddles
- Shelter
- Fire making kit
- Water purification
- Sanitation equipment

Boat

Bailer, painter, yoke, extra flotation

- Additional Equipment

Trip Leader Characteristics

- Skills
 - Competent canoeist
 - Good communication skills
 - Appropriate safety training
 - Use of good judgment
 - Total awareness of environment
- Qualities
 - Mature decision maker
 - Considers group safety over the wants of an individual
 - Makes safety decisions, including trip cancellation
 - Applies appropriate discipline
 - Takes final responsibility
- Knowledge
 - Group organization
 - Buddy boats
 - Lead / Sweep Boat
 - Communication systems
 - Signals: Whistle, Paddle, Hand
 - Radios
 - Cellular phone
 - Venue
 - Emergency procedures
 - Proper etiquette on & off the water
 - Leave no Trace ethics

Trip Preparation and Planning

- Leader/participant ratio guidelines
 - 1:10, with a qualified assistant
 - Additional factors may warrant additional leaders (conditions or participant skill level)
- Appropriate venue selection
- Accurately assessing the group's skill level
- Acquire information on venue
- Develop a Float Plan
 - Driving Directions

- Put-in & Take-out locations
- Schedule with approximate times
- Procedures if trip returns past scheduled time
- Roster
 - Trip Leaders
 - Participants
 - Contact phone numbers
 - Emergency contact numbers
- Emergency Contact Information
 - Designated group contact person
 - Local rescue agency
 - Appropriate governmental agency
- Contingency plans for:
 - Weather
 - Change in water levels
 - Medical problems
 - Equipment issues
 - Evacuation routes
- Documentation
 - River Permits
 - Parking Permits
 - Landowner permission
 - Waivers, medical disclosures, parental permission
- Develop a planning & training schedule (if appropriate)
- Determine methods of skill verification:
 - Canoeing ability
 - Swimming ability
- Determine:
 - Trip rules
 - Acceptable behavior
 - Disciplinary consequences
- Discuss personal & group equipment
 - Obtain: waivers, medical disclosures, parental permission

- Organize transportation & shuttles

Trip Hazards and Prevention of Accidents

Environmental hazards

- Air temperature
- Water temperature
- Cold Shock / Hypothermia / Hyperthermia

River Hydrology and dynamics

- River Features
- Flow volume
- Gradient/elevation changes
- Flow rates and current
- Currents
- Rocks (upstream and downstream Vs)
- Ledges and low head dams (horizon lines)
- Pins and entrapment
- Strainers/sieves
- Bends
- Undercut rocks or ice
- Dams/flow diversion structures and pipelines

River features

- Eddies
- Waves
- Holes and hydraulics
- Downstream Vs

Prevention of accidents

- Proper planning and pre-trip hazard identification
- Put-in safety briefing
- Constant reassessment of venue conditions
- Scouting
- Portaging and lining

The Put-in Talk

- Communication
 - Review Float Plan

- Signals: Whistle, Paddle and Hand
- Group Organization
 - Paddling Partner
 - Buddy Boat
 - Lead/Sweep Boats
 - Group Equipment
- Safety / Emergency
 - Check Lifejacket(PFD) for size & fit
 - Weather & water temperatures
 - Swimming in current: defensive & aggressive
 - Capsize
 - Boat pin
 - Etiquette

Review of Paddling Skills (moving water):

Strokes

Tandem (Bow)

- Forward
- Back
- Draw
- Bow Draw
- Cross Bow Draw
- Push Away
- Pry
- Sweeps: Forward / Reverse

Tandem (Stern)

- Forward
- Back
- Draw
- Stern Draw
- Push Away
- Pry
- Sweeps: Forward / Reverse
- Forward w/Rudder
- Forward w/Stern Pry

- Forward w/J Stroke

Solo

- Forward
- Back
- Draw
- Bow Draw
- Cross bow draw
- Stern Draw
- Push Away
- Pry
- Stern Pry
- Sweeps: Forward / Reverse
- Forward w/Rudder
- Forward w/Stern Pry
- Forward w/J Stroke

Maneuvers in course venue

- Forward in a straight line
- Reverse: Stop & reverse reasonably straight backwards
- Spin: Pivot the canoe – onside & offside
- Abeam: Move sideways without headway
- Turn: Turn in arc while underway
- Front ferries
- Eddy turns
- Peel-outs

River Running

- Strategies in river running
- Upstream & downstream Vs
- Bends
- Use of eddies
- How to paddle in current
- Scouting (Boat / Shore)
- Use of good judgment
- Total awareness of environment

- Group organization on the river
- River Signals / Communication
- Emergency Procedures

Safety and Rescue

- Responsibilities of the group, rescuer, swimmers
- Rescue Priorities: people, boat, paddle, gear
- Signals: Whistle, Paddle and Hand
- Group Management / Communication
- Cold Shock, Hypothermia: HELP/HUDDLE, clothing
- Hyperthermia: hydration, clothing
- Evaluate water confidence and comfort
- Rescue Sequence: (RETHROG)
- Deep water exits: vaulting and slide, no diving
- Controlled capsize
- Swimming a boat to shore
- How to empty a boat full of water
- Canoe over Canoe rescue
- Side by Side (or parallel) rescue
- Re-entry
 - Self & Assisted
 - Heel Hook
 - Rescue Sling
- Towing a swimmer/canoe
- Bumping a canoe
- Swimming in current: defensive & aggressive
- Throw rope use
- Basic wading
- Boat pin (Strong Arm, Rope/Vector)

Conclusion and Wrap Up

- Group debrief / individual feedback
- Course limitations
- Importance of First Aid and CPR
- Importance of additional instruction, practice, experience

- Importance of appropriate level of safety and rescue training
- Life sport / paddling options
- Local paddling groups / clubs
- Handouts / reference materials
- ACA membership forms
- Course evaluation
- Participation cards

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This curriculum is managed by the ACA Canoeing Committee. To connect with the leadership of this committee, please view the SEIC Committee rosters on [the ACA website](#).