



Boating Safety

Sequoia National Forest

Kern River Ranger District



CANOES, KAYAKS, RAFTS AND OTHER INFLATABLE WATERCRAFTS

Canoes, kayaks, rafts and other inflatable watercrafts are a popular means of recreation for thousands of Californians. However use of these crafts has inherent risks, which can result in boating fatalities. In a sport of skill and chance, many enthusiasts lose because they overestimate their boating ability or underestimate the danger of some waterways.

REQUIRED AND RECOMMENDED SAFETY DEVICES

Federal and State laws require that all canoes, kayaks and other inflatable watercrafts to carry a Coast Guard approved personal flotation device for each person aboard. Common sense demands that everyone wear a flotation device whenever afloat. Protective footgear is always advisable, and a safety helmet is recommended in swift rapids.

Test new and unfamiliar equipment in calm water. Use strong and adequately sized paddles or oars. Keep spares available in case of loss, and a 50-foot throw line with bag and 16 foot mooring line. Your emergency kit should include: flashlight, map, compass, first aid equipment and waterproof matches. Be sure to get maps of unfamiliar areas."

BEFORE GETTING UNDERWAY

Canoes, kayaks and other inflatable watercrafts have very different handling characteristics. However, all these crafts have one thing in common; you can easily capsize if you overload or improperly load. Stow all **WEIGHT AS LOW IN THE CENTER OF THE BOAT AS POSSIBLE**. Place all gear in the boat while it is beached. Never carry heavy loads aboard with you. If you change position in the boat, stay low and center your weight. Always make sure your craft is trim and "seaworthy".

KNOW YOUR WATER

Never overestimate your ability or underestimate the river. Always pay attention to the river. Learn how to read the water. Most accidents occur when boaters attempt water conditions that are more demanding than their skills, knowledge and experience or are inattentive to their surroundings. This International Scale of River Difficulty will help you judge your ability.

CLASS I EASY - Waves small, passages clear; no serious obstacles.

CLASS II NOVICE - Rapids of moderate difficulty with passages clear.

CLASS III INTERMEDIATE - Waves numerous, high, irregular; rocks; eddies; rapids with passages clear though narrow, requiring expertise in maneuvering.

CLASS IV ADVANCED - Long rapids; waves powerful, irregular; dangerous rocks; boiling eddies; powerful and precise maneuvering required.

CLASS V EXPERT - Exceedingly difficult, long and violent rapids, following each other almost without interruption; riverbed extremely obstructed; big drops; violent current; very steep gradient.

CLASS VI EXTREME AND EXPLORATORY

P - PORTAGE - Boats must be carried along the river bank in order to circumvent an unnavigable stretch of river.



HYPOTHERMIA

Hypothermia, often fatal, is the lowering of body temperature levels. Overexposure to cold, especially cold water causes hypothermia. The severity of hypothermia depends upon temperature, length of exposure and fatigue. BE ALERT! Symptoms are loss of coordination, uncontrollable shivering and listlessness. If any of these symptoms occur, get out of the water, dry off and get medical attention.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

If your boat capsizes, stay on the upstream side, preferably at the end of the craft. This allows better visibility to enable you to swim your boat to shore. More importantly, it prevents the possibility of being pinned against obstacles. Hold on to your boat unless you can increase your safety by abandonment. If rescue is not near and the water is intolerably cold or perilous rapids are near, swim with the river current to the nearest landing. If you find yourself in the water alone, float downstream feet first. This will let you fend off rocks and other obstacles.

Thank you for your help in making forest visits enjoyable and safe! Plan ahead by obtaining a National Forest map at one of the following offices:

Kern River Ranger District
11380 Kernville Rd.
Kernville, CA 93238
[760-376-3781](tel:760-376-3781)

Forest Supervisor's Office
1839 S. Newcomb Street
Porterville, CA 93257
[559-784-1500](tel:559-784-1500)



SAFETY HINTS

- ◆ River travel should be a group effort involving at least two boats traveling as a team. Never boat alone, unless you are on a small quiet lake or slow moving river. Small craft boaters should be able to swim at least ten minutes while fully clothed.
- ◆ Fasten all gear securely within the craft in anticipation of possible flips. Avoid loose, ensnaring ropes hanging about. NEVER tie yourself or others into the watercraft.
- ◆ Avoid the false security of tree "strainers." The Lower Kern is thick with these lush and deadly traps. Avoid trees until you can catch a calm eddy or swim ashore.
- ◆ Never "run" an unknown rapid without scouting it thoroughly from shore. Before starting a trip know local conditions such as currents, rapids, weather, hazards and float time. Portage all hazards if in doubt.
- ◆ Watch for hazard snags and reversals. Spillways, natural or man-made, may form reversals at their base, holding small boats. If caught alone in a reversal, dive deeply into the undercurrent and you should emerge downstream.
- ◆ Allow craft ahead to pass through rapids before you begin your approach. Avoid hazardous conditions if the lead craft encounters trouble and blocks the channel.
- ◆ More maneuverable kayaks and decked canoes should usually yield the right-of-way to slower inflatable craft.
- ◆ Always take an air pump and repair kit on rafts
- ◆ Travel with an experienced "trip leader" who is thoroughly familiar with the particular rapids and hazards to be run.
- ◆ Using alcohol or drugs on river trips is a hazardous experience. You need precise, proper and quick instincts.