

BOATING SAFETY AND UPPER KERN RIVER WHITEWATER RUN INFORMATION

CANOES, KAYAKS, RAFTS AND OTHER INFLATABLE WATERCRAFTS

Canoes, kayaks, rafts and other inflatable watercraft 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, 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 unrunnable 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.

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.

*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.

*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.

*Always take an air pump and repair kit on rafts.

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*Using alcohol or drugs on river trips is a hazardous experience. You need precise, proper and quick instincts.

UPPER KERN RIVER WHITEWATER RUN

An easy drive from Southern California metropolitan areas is a trip to the Upper Kern River, designated by Congress in 1987, as part of the National Wild and Scenic River System. This popular section of river is continuous exhilarating whitewater with boulder gardens, pounding rapids and gradients exceeding 30 feet per mile.

LOCATION

The Upper Kern segment begins at the Johnsondale Bridge and ends at Riverkern Beach. This 21-mile stretch of river has four sections of rating whitewater with varying degrees of difficulty.

LIMESTONE RUN: This northernmost run begins 21 miles north of Kernville, off Mtn. 99, at the Johnsondale Bridge.
Put In: Johnsondale Bridge or Brush Creek.

Take Out: Above Fairview Dam at Willow Point.

Class: III & IV (Difficult to Very Difficult) varies according to water level.

Run Length: 2.7 miles.

FAIRVIEW RUN: Begins 17 mi. north of Kernville, off Mtn 99.
Put In: North of Road's End Resort.

Take Out: Calkins Flat or Salmon Creek.

Class: III & IV: (Difficult to Very Difficult).

Run Length: 4.8 miles.

GOLDLEDGE RUN: Begins 10 miles north of Kernville, off Mtn. 99.

Put In: North of Goldledge Campground at Ant Canyon Dispersed Area.

Take Out: Riverkern Beach.

Class: III, IV, V (Difficult to Expert).

Run Length: 10 miles.

CAMP 3 RUN: Begins 5 mi. north of Kernville, off Mtn. 99.

Put In: North end of Thunderbird or south of Camp 3 Campground.

Take Out: Riverkern Beach.

Class: II, III, IV (Medium to Very Difficult).

Run Length: 3.5 miles.

PERMIT REQUIREMENTS

An Annual Kern River Use Permit, good through April 30 of the following year, is required year round. Permits are issued on a first-come, first-served basis and are free of charge. A permit is required for EACH craft. Group size cannot exceed 18 people on the river at one time.

To obtain a permit, fill out an application IN PERSON at any Forest Service office in Kernville, Lake Isabella, Springville or the Bureau of Land Management office in Bakersfield.

Applications will not be mailed out or left in office drop boxes. Upon completion of your application, a waterproof permit may be issued. Issuing you a permit gives us the opportunity to also provide you with information about the river.

A permit is required from Riverkern Beach south to Riverside Park in Kernville.

RIVER USE MANIFEST

Each day, a completed FOREST SERVICE manifest must be left at a designated drop off point for the specific river run prior to your

launch. Manifests are available at each Forest Service office and at designated drop off boxes along the river. The maximum party size for each manifest is 18 people for the Upper Kern River. More than one permit number may appear on a manifest as long as the number of passengers does not exceed the 18 person limit.

If new passengers are added to your trip during the day, a new river manifest must be completed and left at a designated drop off point prior to the next launch. This information can be useful in search and rescue efforts.

LOCATIONS FOR MANIFEST DROP OFF BOXES

Cannell Meadow District Office in Kernville, the Lake Isabella Office, and all put-ins north of Kernville to the Johnsondale bridge.

SEASON AND WATERFLOW

Late spring and summer are recommended for boating the Upper Kern Run (May-July). Water flows are dependent upon snow melt and natural run-off. Spring flows may reach as high as 6,000 cubic feet per second (CFS) or higher in exceptionally wet years. Daily water flow information is available from the Kern River Flow Phone, toll free at 877.537.6356, or locally at 760.376.8821.

TRIP TIPS

Plan ahead, as parking space is limited at put-in and take-out sites. To avoid congestion on the Limestone Run, use the Brush Creek put-in as an alternate to the Johnsondale Bridge. Scout rapids before running, to check for hazards. Experienced rafting skills are a must. Launching from campgrounds and Day Use Areas is NOT allowed.

CAMPING REGULATIONS

Camping and the use of campfires are not permitted within 25 feet of the river's edge, streams, or trails.

*All information obtained from the US Department of Agriculture and the US Forest Service.