

Reading a River

In a book, words tell a story. On a river, the rocks, waves and slack water tell a story of how to get through whitewater rapids safely. There are tools to help you read a river.

Paddlers label rapids into different levels, called classes. For example, a Class 2 (II) rapid is more dangerous than a Class 1 (I). Water trail maps display where rapids are in a river and their class. These maps also point out larger hazards, like dams. Rapids change to different classes during floods or high water. A Class 1 (I) rapid can become a Class 4 (IV) in a flood. Before floating down rapids, park your boat and walk the shoreline to investigate hazards that are downstream.

Discovering the Class of Rapids



CLASS 1 (I)	CLASS 2 (II)	CLASS 3 (III)	CLASS 4 (IV)
Fast moving flat water. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Small waves.	Wide channels. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Waves can reach 3 ft. in height.	Numerous waves that will fill a canoe with water. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strainers and small waterfalls.	Long sets of tall waves. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Few rest areas.
Hazards are easily paddled around. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Paddlers who fall out can rescue themselves most of the time.	Some rocks that can be avoided. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Paddlers should have plenty of practice and know how to self-rescue.	Powerful currents <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kayakers should know how to roll over.	Very powerful currents. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Narrow channel passages.
Class I rapids can still drown people.		Scout from shore before paddling these rapids. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Swimmers may need to be rescued by others.	Dangerous rocks and strainers. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kayakers must know how to roll over quickly.
			All paddlers in the group must know rescue skills.