



Level 1: Introduction to Packrafting

Sample Skills Course

Course Overview: The **Introduction to Packrafting** course is designed as a short program emphasizing safety, enjoyment and skill acquisition for entry level individuals in public, private, and commercial settings.

These courses are appropriate for all packrafts, including traditional decked, non-decked, and self-bailing vessels. However, the use of spray skirts and thigh straps is not appropriate for Level 1 courses. Instructors may want to limit this program to one type of craft but should announce this prior to the start of the course. To teach this course, the instructor must be in a packraft. The packraft may be configured according to the instructor's preferences.

Course Prerequisites: All participants must acknowledge personal compliance with the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#).

Course Duration: 6 to 8 hours, at the instructor's discretion. The course duration should be adjusted to best fit the needs and goals of the participants. Ideally, the course should include a brief approach to a waterway, carrying the deflated packraft.

Course Location / Venue: Flat water, protected from waves and outside boat traffic, with current less than 1 knot, wind less than 10 knots, and within swimming distance of shore.

Class Ratio: 5 Participants : 1 Instructor; with an additional instructor or qualified assistant the ratio can be 10 : 2

Instructor: ACA Level 1: Introduction to Packrafting Instructors (or higher).

Succeeding courses:

Level 2: Essentials of River Packrafting

Level 3: River Packrafting

The following is a general summary of course content for the **Level 1: Introduction to Packrafting** course. The content covered and sequence of instruction should be adjusted to best fit the participant's 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
- About the ACA
- Instructor should generally and candidly discuss the risks of packrafting, including injury associated with hiking and carrying craft; cold water exposure; and drowning.



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- 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
- Promotion of a packraft “Culture of Safety”

Preparing to Depart

- Discuss weather conditions, forecasts, and other environmental hazards (wind, water, weather, waves, open water crossings, approach)
- Evaluate hazards to navigation
- Discuss importance of developing good judgment and group responsibility for a trip
- Evaluate individual’s ability, water comfort, and confidence prior to trip
- Warm up and stretching to reduce injury
- Discuss and practice storing, packing, inflating, deflating and transporting a packraft
- Review proper techniques to safely carry and transport both inflated and deflated packrafts
- Review life jackets appropriate for the operator’s size, packraft, and activity, assuring all others in the group are properly wearing their life jacket
- Inspect the packraft and all safety equipment to meet state, federal, and local requirements for the vessel and activity
- Describe and follow safe boating practices (behavior, substance abuse, on water and land etiquette, leave no trace ethics)
- Review elements of a float plan (Who, What, When, Where, filing practices)
- Review personal equipment needed for the packraft, activity and environment
- Prepare packraft for departure: stowing gear securely, and ensuring it is balanced
- Review packraft rigging methods, discuss entanglement or snag/entrapment hazards
- How to hold the paddle in correct orientation and grip for effective paddling
- Describe the unique characteristics of packrafting, including the importance of proper footwear and thermal protection for approaches and paddling
- Describe techniques to manage tube deflation and to perform field repairs of packrafts

Maneuvers:

To be performed with appropriate and efficient strokes, while maintaining the trim and balance of the craft:

- Enter and launch packraft from shore in a controlled manner, checking for clear departure
- Propel the packraft forward in a straight line 15-20 boat lengths
- Stop the packraft within two boat lengths
- Move the packraft backwards 3-4 boat lengths
- Turn the packraft from a stationary position 180° to the right and left
- Move the packraft sideways 10 feet (3 meters) to each side
- Propel the packraft in a figure of 8 course around markers 3-4 boat lengths apart



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- Turn the packraft while maintaining forward motion 90° to the right and left
- Arrive at destination point, checking for clear approach, and exit the packraft in a controlled and safe manner

Technical Knowledge:

Review paddling equipment, terminology (packraft and paddle), maintenance and care of gear

- Instructor review of additional personal and group gear, including, but not limited to:
 - Environmental supplies (food, water, appropriate clothing, sunscreen, etc.)
 - Navigational and signaling tools (maps, charts, whistle, etc.)
 - Safety and rescue tools
 - Repair kit
 - First aid kit (appropriate to training)
 - Map and compass, trail guide
- Review the dangers of paddle sports and how to plan an appropriate course to avoid potential hazardous situations.
- Avoidance and prevention of cold water shock and hyperthermia by choosing proper clothing; recognizing and treating early symptoms; 1-10-1 rule.
- Recognize the importance of hydration
- Recognize and appropriately use communication (paddle/oar and whistle) signals
- Review basic navigational rules for inland waterways
- Develop awareness of the group and effective on water management techniques
- Describe best paddling practices: posture, balance, awareness of body-packraft-blade relationship
- Secure the packraft and equipment before leaving unattended, with attention paid to environment and conditions

Safety and Rescue:

- Demonstrate awareness of rescue priorities: people, packraft, paddle, gear
- Use safe progressions T-RETHROG (Talk, Reach, THrow, ROw, Go) - including throwable floating aid or throw bag use
- Describe the responsibilities of: the group, rescuer, swimmers
- Identify and demonstrate the use of appropriate rescue and safety gear for the craft and planned activity
- Exit the craft after capsize, using proper body position and contact with the craft and paddle.
- Rescue self and the packraft using an effective self-rescue technique (e.g., swim self and boat to shore, or deep-water reentry).
- Rescue a person in the water and capsized packraft using appropriate techniques and equipment for the craft (bailers, pumps, paddle floats, tow lines, etc)
- Perform assisted rescues: boat over boat or side by side or T-rescue or others appropriate to conditions
- Perform assisted re-entry: heel hook or rescue sling or paddle floats or others appropriate to conditions
- Techniques for bulldozing or towing a packraft or swimmer to shore



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- Responding to sudden deflation (popped boat or accidental cargo fly opening)
- Benefits and limitations of using a boat leash on flatwater
- Discuss the safety implications of easy access to remote paddling environments

Conclusion and Wrap Up:

- Group debrief or 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
- Demo advanced maneuver
- Life sport and paddling options
- Local paddling groups and clubs
- Handouts and reference materials
- ACA membership forms
- Course evaluation and participation cards