

International Scale of River Difficulty

- Class I/Easy*.....Few or no obstructions; fast moving water with riffles; risk to swimmers is slight
- Class II/Novice*.....Wide clear channels; occasional maneuvering; rocks and medium-sized waves are easily missed by trained paddlers, swimmers are seldom injured; assistance is helpful but rarely needed
- Class III/Intermediate*.....Rapids with moderate, irregular waves which may be difficult to avoid and capable of swamping a canoe; complex maneuvers in fast current and narrow passages require good boat control; large waves, holes and strainers may be present but are easily avoided; powerful current; scouting advisable; swimmers are unlikely to be injured but assistance may be needed to avoid a long swim
- Class IV/Advanced*.....Intense, powerful rapids; turbulent water; may involve long, unavoidable waves, holes or constricted passages demanding fast maneuvers under pressure; may require "must" moves above dangerous hazards; risk of injury to swimmers is moderate to high; group assistance to swimmers requires practiced skills
- Class V/Expert*.....Long, obstructed, turbulent rapids; drops may contain very large unavoidable waves, holes or steep congested chutes with complex demanding routes; several of these factors may be combined at the upper level of this class; rescue is extremely difficult; above average rescue skills are essential
- Class VI/Almost Impossible*.....Difficulties of Class V are carried to the limits of navigability; very dangerous; risks are high and rescue may be impossible; for teams of experts only under favorable conditions

River Terms

- Reading Water*.....The ability to look at water above a rapid and select the better routes based on lines, whirlpools and formations on the surface of the river.
- Haystacks/Wave Train*.....A series of tall waves which causes a similar experience to a roller coaster ride as the raft climbs up and rides down one wave after another.
- Catch Air*.....A human catapult caused by the springing action the back of the raft experiences going off a large drop or over a very large wave. Guides are extremely vulnerable yet well aware of the ability to fly as high as 8 feet above the raft.
- Doldrums*.....A calm stretch without whitewater. Great for a relaxing swim, enjoying the scenery, or a watery ambush of the unsuspecting raft ahead of you.
- Hole/Reversal/Hydraulic*.....Forms below a ledge when water recirculates, continuously forming a horizontal whirlpool. Holes will catch objects passing through and hold them from several seconds to indefinitely. In the most extreme cases these are called "keepers".
- Hightsiding*.....The desperate attempt to climb up the last remaining piece of raft above water to avoid flipping the raft upside down in a rapid.



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River Terms-Class Rating System