

WCA Trip Ratings

WHITEWATER TRIPS

Beginner

Participant feels comfortable in a canoe or kayak, and is proficient in forward and steering strokes. Moving water with no rapids. Some small riffles. Wide passages.

Novice

Can perform draw, pry, and sweep strokes; and is able to side slip and backpaddle in a straight line. Can enter and exit from a mild current. Recognizes basic river features and hazards. Some small rapids with small waves and few obstacles. Course easy to recognize. River class I.

Intermediate

Is proficient at all basic whitewater strokes. Can execute front and back ferries and eddy turns in a moderate current. Understands leaning and bracing techniques. Knowledgeable of river hazards, safety, and rescue procedures. Is able to select a route and manoeuvre through moderate unobstructed rapids. River class II.

Advanced

Is able to ferry and eddy turn in strong currents, and has effective bracing strokes. Paddles strongly solo or tandem. Is able to roll, self-rescue, aid in rescuing others, and knows safety procedures thoroughly. Can select and negotiate a complex course through continuous rapids with high, irregular waves. River class III.

Expert

Has complete mastery of all strokes and manoeuvres, and can apply them with power and precision in turbulent water. Recovers quickly in unexpected and dangerous situations. Has a failproof roll. Can read complex water patterns and knows how they will affect the boat. Exhibits good judgement and has full competency in safety and rescue techniques. Can negotiate long, complex rapids with strong crosscurrents, powerful eddies, high waves, and obstructions directly in the current. River class IV and V.

FLATWATER TRIPS

Beginner

Feels comfortable in a canoe or kayak, and can execute forward and steering strokes. May require help carrying canoe; two-person carries. Short (up to 500 m), flat portages over well-marked trails. May require assistance over portages. Can paddle at a leisurely pace for up to 4 hours. Has very basic canoe camping skills.

Essentially a paddler new to canoeing and “learning the ropes.”

Warm weather and water. Calm to gentle breeze conditions. Small, sheltered lakes or bays. Route follows close to shore. No exposed crossings. Minimal personal risk in event of capsize.

Novice

Proficient at forward and steering strokes. Can maintain a course in a mild to moderate breeze. Can do single person canoe carries over moderate distances (up to 1 km), and clear but up to mildly hilly terrain. May need assistance in lifting canoe to portage. Can maintain a relaxed pace over a 6 hour paddling day. Has basic canoe camping skills.

Warm weather and water. Winds to moderate. Small to medium sized lakes. Route follows close to shore, with small exposed crossings. Minimal risk in event of capsize.

Intermediate

Has strong and effective forward and steering strokes in bow and stern. Has basic solo forward and steering competency. Can maintain a course tandem in moderate to strong winds. Comfortable in moderate waves (up to 60 cm). Can pick up and carry canoe without assistance, and portage over longer trails (1.5 km) with moderate hills or obstructions. Can maintain a moderate pace over an 8 hour paddling day. Has well-practiced camping skills. Can pack efficiently. Feels comfortable in the bush, even in adverse weather conditions. Has basic map and compass route finding skills.

Spring to fall paddling. Cooler weather and water. Winds to strong. Larger lakes with some broader exposed crossings. Non-whitewater rivers with up to moderate current. Some hypothermia risk in event of capsize.

Advanced

Has strong and effective forward and steering strokes tandem or solo to keep a course in high winds. Comfortable in higher waves (up to 1 m). Can execute on-water recovery of capsized canoe and occupants. Carries over long portages (1.5 km +) with steep hills or through rough bush. Can maintain long periods of hard paddling. Has excellent spring through fall weather camping skills. Efficient packer. Makes and breaks camp quickly. Deals effectively with sustained inclement weather or route finding challenges. At home in the bush. Solid map and compass route finding skills; not dependent on electronic route finding instruments. “Push” trips, physically demanding trips, and longer duration trips (1 week or more). Experienced and self-confident enough to assume group leadership role, if required.

Cold weather and water hazards. Frequent strong winds possible. Large lakes with broad, exposed crossings that must be made. Difficulty finding suitable landing spots.

Significant risk of hypothermia or drowning in event of capsize.

Expert

Very experienced, strong paddler. Can handle large (1 m +) waves, and execute effective bracing strokes. Practiced on-water rescue skills. Can paddle hard over long days. Solid, canoe camping skills under any weather condition. Strong portaging and route finding skills over difficult, physically demanding terrain. Extensive bushwhacking. Excellent risk assessment skills. Strong leadership and team player abilities. Remote and multi-week trips, high risk trips, “endurance challenge” type trips.

Significant cold weather and water hazards. Up to gale force winds. Routes not easy to find. Very large lakes or ocean paddling. Large open crossings or coastal routes with high exposure. Tidal paddling conditions. Limited landing spots. Heavy surf. Rescue in the event of capsize very difficult to impossible. Big water routes generally considered more suitable for sea kayakers than canoeists.