



# Coastal Kayak Rock Garden and Sea Cave Skills & Safety

## Sample Skills Course

**Course Overview:** The **Coastal Kayak Rock Garden and Sea Cave Skills & Safety** course is designed to teach paddlers how to paddle safely within rock gardens, run features, explore sea caves and perform self and assisted rescues in these dynamic environments.

**Course Objectives:** Participants will learn:

- Dynamics of the rock garden; interaction of swell, wind and tide
- Identification of hazards and safe areas
- Selection of features for play
- Setting up for and running a pour-over
- Safe exploration of sea caves
- Modification of existing rescue techniques to the rock garden and sea cave environments

### **Essential Eligibility Criteria (EEC):**

ACA courses are open to all individuals who acknowledge the ability to perform the following essential eligibility criteria.

1. Breathe independently (i.e., not require medical devices to sustain breathing)
2. Independently maintain sealed airway passages while under water
3. Independently hold head upright without neck / head support
4. Manage personal care independently or with assistance of a companion
5. Manage personal mobility independently or with a reasonable amount of assistance
6. Follow instructions and effectively communicate independently or with assistance of a companion
7. Independently turn from face-down to face-up and remain floating face up while wearing a properly fitted life jacket\*
8. Get on / off or in / out of a paddlecraft independently or with a reasonable amount of assistance\*
9. Independently get out and from under a capsized paddlecraft\*
10. Remount or reenter the paddlecraft following deep water capsize independently or with a reasonable amount of assistance\*
11. Maintain a safe body position while attempting skills, activities and rescues listed in the appropriate course outline, and have the ability to recognize and identify to others when such efforts would be unsafe given your personal situation\*

*To participate in adaptive programs, participants must acknowledge only the first six EEC listed above. Entry-level adaptive programs will involve teaching and practicing EEC #7-11.*



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**Course Prerequisites:** ACA Coastal Kayak skills at the appropriate level including bracing skills and a reliable roll or self-rescue. Sample Skills Course

### Minimum Personal Equipment for the Course:

Whitewater or sea kayaks. Sit inside or sit-on-top kayaks can be used. The more maneuverable, plastic sea kayaks may be preferable. All kayaks will have adequate flotation. Helmets, life jackets, and paddling clothing appropriate to water temperature are required.

**Course Duration:** 7-8 hours

**Course Location / Venue:** Conditions shall not exceed the venue conditions for the level of the course; that is, an L3 course shall not exceed the venue conditions for the Level 3: Coastal Kayak Instructor Criteria; an L4 course shall not exceed the venue conditions for the Level 4: Open Water Instructor Criteria; and, an L5 course shall not exceed the venue conditions for the Level 5: Advanced Open Water Coastal Kayaking Instructor Criteria. An area of rock garden should have sufficient deep water and safe areas; sea caves should be back filled with sand or rock (debris free), and thoroughly inspected for hazardous tunnels and underwater obstructions.

**Course Ratio:** 5 students: 1 Instructor; with an additional instructor or qualified assistant the ratio can be 10: 2

The following is a general summary of course content for the **Coastal Kayak Rock Garden & Sea Cave Skills & Safety** 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
- Previous experience, student & instructor course expectations and limitations
- Course schedule & goals
- Review waiver, assumption of risk, challenge by choice, medical disclosure
- About the ACA

- PFD policy (always wear on water)
- Appropriate personal behavior
- No alcohol / substance abuse
- Proper etiquette on & off the water
- Respect private property
- Practice Leave No Trace ethics

#### The Paddling Environment:

- Forecast – trend
- Weather
- Wind
- Waves (swell, period, sets)



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- Water - tide/current/temperature

### **Personal Preparation:**

- Personal ability
- Swimming ability
- Water comfort & confidence
- Fitness, conditioning, and warm up
- Safe paddle and boat handling
- Personal equipment (reviewed by Instructor)

### **On Shore Orientation**

- Equipment fit & adjustment
- Safety concepts (brief discussion):
  - Review of CLAP mnemonic including paddle and hand signals & “Outside” call (see notes).
  - Avoid collisions; stay out of each other’s way.
  - If swimming, stay seaward of kayak.
  - Avoid shoulder dislocation by keeping paddle low when bracing.
- No hands on rock!
- Review use of side slip, low brace turn and bow rudder for boat control

### **Transition through rock garden, identifying safe zones, transition zones and hazards**

- Use large rocks for protection, practice holding position
- Timing movement through transition zones during lulls

- Practice paddling through gaps, using angle and safety margin to counteract push/pull from surge/swell
- Maintain line of sight and position for safety before and after each feature, bows facing oncoming swell
- Practice “Outside” drill (see notes)

### **Instructor demonstration of technique of running a pour-over**

- Timing using an off-shore reef or other feature as an indicator of approaching swell
- Position just outside of aerated water
- Consider angle of approach to facilitate safe exit
- Power forward strokes to accelerate and match speed of swell
- Set up for “boof” of drop(whitewater kayak) or low/high brace position (sea kayak)
- Safety cover provided by observer positioned for bow rescue
- Allow students to practice features repeatedly, working on timing, stroke sequences, angle of entry and exit

### **Cave Exploration**

- Instructors identify suitable cave for exploration. Carefully examine for dangerous tunnels with surge and no exit with potential to trap a boat or body



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- Ensure sufficient observation through several wave sets before entering
- Enter by paddling backwards unless cave is exceptionally large and there is no danger of a close-out set
- Maintain line of sight and group coherence during exercise
- Bow/stern toggle tow of swimmer and kayak
- Bow/stern carry of swimmer (no kayak)
- Javelin (push) tow of kayak
- Contact tows
- Deployment of short tow-line
- Hook and tow, capsize and release
- Throw ropes – pros and cons
- Emergency landing

#### **On-Shore Discussion**

- During (or just after) lunch review and discuss (use props): Any issues from the morning session - spontaneous incidents
- Risk assessment model
- Rescue priorities
- Rescue methods
- Review of tow systems and methods

#### **Rescue Scenarios**

- Dislocated shoulder
- Unconscious swimmer
- Damaged kayak - Cleopatra's needle
- Cave rescue

#### **Pour-over Practice**

- Continue practice identifying features, reading and timing waves to run features
- Encourage teamwork and CLAP principles

#### **Conclusion & Wrap Up:**

- Group debrief / individual feedback
- Course limitations
- Importance of first aid & CPR
- Importance of additional instruction, practice, experience
- Importance of appropriate level of safety & rescue training
- Life sport / paddling options
- Local paddling groups / clubs
- Handouts / reference materials
- ACA membership forms
- Course evaluation
- Participation cards

#### **Rescue Practice**

- Swimming with kayak to safe area followed by self-rescue
- Swimming using paddle towing kayak

#### **NOTES:**

The "Outside" call is internationally recognized as a verbal warning to other surfers or paddlers that an unusually large wave is coming. The call should be immediately repeated by the group to ensure everyone has heard it. At the very least paddlers should look in the



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direction of the oncoming wave and make their own judgment about what to do based on their position and assessment of the hazards presented. The most typical response would be to generate momentum towards the oncoming wave.

The 'Outside Drill' is introduced very early into a sea kayak rock garden or surfing class (before we get into any areas of breaking waves) to get everyone on the same page with regard to the "Outside" call and to have students begin to think about their positioning and the strokes they would use to generate momentum towards an oncoming wave.

Guided discovery is typically used by having students paddle parallel to shore, all pointing in the same direction and the leader's position is slightly offshore from them. The leader will then call "Outside" and see how many students repeat the call, and observe the strokes they choose to use. A brief discussion of the pros and cons of strokes that generate momentum such as the forward sweep (if traveling forwards) compared to a braking stroke such as the reverse sweep.

After practicing the drill a few times, and encourage students to try different strokes and compare the tightness of the radius of their turn with the amount of momentum generated. Then discuss proximity of other paddlers, protection afforded by large rocks and what to do if you are unsuccessful in punching through the oncoming wave.

This is normally finished off by having students pointing their bows directly towards shore. When the leader calls "Outside", some students will complete a pivot turn before paddling towards the wave, others will paddle in reverse. Briefly discuss the pros and cons of both choices. The 'Outside Drill' is a great way to assess your students' skills and ability to make decisions before entering more dynamic water conditions.