



Coastal Kayak Traditional Skills

(Sample Skills Course)

Course Overview: The **Coastal Kayak Traditional Skills** course is designed to familiarize students with traditional kayak cultures and the skills associated with traditional paddling. The course is primarily based on the Greenland and Inuit kayak cultures, but may include other Arctic kayak cultures (such as the Aleut). Paddling skills covered in this course include the core strokes, braces (sculling and balance), and rolling.

Course Objectives: Following this course, students will:

- Have a basic understanding of Arctic hunting techniques and tools.
- Have a general knowledge of Arctic kayak construction.
- Understand the theory behind a narrow-bladed paddle.
- Learn strokes with a traditional-style paddle, including the canted forward stroke and the sliding stroke.
- Be able to identify paddles and kayaks of various Arctic regions
- Demonstrate progress toward developing sculling strokes, a balance brace, rolls, and understand the cultural and historical perspective behind those skills.

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*



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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.

Course Prerequisites: Participation in Level 2: Essentials of Kayak Touring skills course, Level 3: Coastal Kayak Basic Strokes and Rescues skills course, or equivalent

Course Duration: 2 Days (16 hours). At the instructor's discretion this course may be presented in multiple sections over a period of time.

Instructor: ACA Level 3L Coastal Kayaking Instructor, Instructor Trainer/Educator holding the ACA Traditional Endorsement.

Course Location / Venue: Optimal conditions are flat water with a sandy or firm bottom on which to stand.

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 Traditional Skills** course. The content covered and sequence of instruction should be adjusted to best fit participants' needs, class location, and time allowance.

Course Content

Introduction, Expectations, & Logistics:

- Welcome, introductions, paperwork
- Student & instructor course expectations and limitations
- Course itinerary & site logistics
- 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:

- Wind
- Waves
- Weather
- Water

Personal Preparation:

- Personal ability
- Swimming ability
- Water comfort & confidence



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- Fitness, conditioning, and warm up
- Safe paddle and boat handling
- Safety and rescue considerations
- Personal equipment (reviewed by instructor)

Traditional Kayak Cultures

- Definition and names of various watercraft used in the Arctic
 - e.g. Kajak, Qajaq, Qaannat, Qajariaq, Umiak, Baidarka
- Importance of the kayak for survival
 - Hunting, gathering, transport
- Kayak and paddle evolution
 - The migration of peoples across the Bering Land Bridge: from Russia, and Siberia into Canada, etc. and the adaptation of kayak design based on function and the environment
 - Environment, culture & food
- How rolls and sculls are based on survival techniques
- Paatit, norsaq, tuilik, avataq, masak, Inuit, Inuk
- QajaqUSA and Qaanat Kattuffiat
 - Preserving the culture
 - Greenland Qajaq Championships
- Greenlandic terminology and pronunciation

- Be able to describe the situation simulated by each roll

Equipment

- Paddles: Double and single-bladed
- Norsaq – throwing stick
- Harpoon – various darts
- Harpoon rest & screen
- Avataq – bladder bag
- Tuilik and Aulisag

Traditional Kayak Construction (Greenland)

- Frames & components
- Size
- Skin
- Materials
- Techniques
- How to carry/portage a SOF (skin-on-frame) qajaq

Narrow Blade Rationale

- Describe paddle parts: blade, tip, shoulder, loom
- Describe how the paddle is customized to fit your body measurements
- Paddles used for centuries in severe conditions
- Describe hydrodynamics and the use of a canted blade
- Dispel the common belief that paddles are narrow and



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- unfeathered because the Inuit could not make them otherwise
- Discuss advantages and disadvantages of feathered vs. unfeathered blades
- Explain the philosophy of using the whole paddle for rolling, bracing and sculling
- Describe and demonstrate the canted and sliding strokes
- Describe and demonstrate the different paddling styles used with a traditional paddle:
 - Abdominals crunch vs. torso rotation
 - Different cadences
 - High angle vs. low angle strokes
- Describe & demonstrate bracing with the traditional paddle

Use of the Greenland Paddle

- Taking advantage of Greenlandic-style paddle design:
 - How to hold the paddle: hand placement and canted position
 - How to slide hands to extend the paddle in order to provide more power for maneuvers and strokes
 - Understand the rationale for not cupping a hand over the end of a paddle blade for a stroke
 - Demonstrate single-bladed paddle use

Harpooning

- How to hold and throw a harpoon

- Harpoon design & parts

Strokes & Maneuvers

- Understand the core kayaking strokes conducted with a traditional paddle:
 - Sweep and reverse sweep
 - Sculling draws
 - High brace and low brace, braced turns, sculling braces
 - Canted forward stroke
 - Sliding stroke
 - Rudders/turns/draws

Rescues

Discussion and demonstration of:

- Bow, stern, paddle-presentation rescues
- How to empty kayaks without bulkheads (such as SOF kayaks).
- Explain the philosophy of not coming out of the kayak and why
- How to use the paddle for support during entry/exit.
- Petrusen maneuver and Hand of God

Sculling and Balance Braces

- Demonstrate a sculling motion from a near-upright position
- Explain and demonstrate the side scull and chest scull emphasizing the importance of body position.
- Explain that the side scull sets the stage for further progress



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- Explain and demonstrate the balance brace



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Rolling Workshop

Help students acquire their first roll or for the experienced roller to expand their repertoire of rolls.

- Emphasize the advantages of having a good rolling repertoire
- Demonstrate rolling into a sculling brace, pausing, and then continuing on to some other roll.

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
- Demo advanced maneuver
- Local paddling groups / clubs
- Handouts / reference materials
- ACA membership forms
- Course evaluation
- Participation cards

NOTES

Equipment required or recommended:

- Properly outfitted and sized kayaks, preferably low volume, narrow, and with low back deck.
- Proper safety gear (i.e. PFD, spray skirt, tuilik, akuilisaq)
- Greenland-style and other Traditional Arctic paddles
- Harpoon
- Norsaq
- Avataq
- Nose plugs



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Further study

The study of traditional paddling involves far more than use of a Greenland paddle (paatit) or the use of a traditional skin on frame kayak (qajaq). The qajaq was an extension of the hunter's body and part of a sophisticated hunting technology embedded in a rich culture. The Inuit story is one of ingenuity, resilience, and continuous innovation over hundreds of years in some of the harshest conditions humans have inhabited. ACA courses, by design, emphasize kayaks and use of paddles.