

The Chesapeake Paddler



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Trip Descriptions and Ratings

By Paula Hubbard

Have you ever gone on a club trip only to struggle keeping up with paddlers racing ahead, never stopping to take pictures, or explore side creeks? Or you sign up for a trip expecting to paddle about 15 miles and barely make 8? As a trip leader, have you planned an aggressive crossing only to realize that many in the group are expecting calm flat conditions and not a 10 mph head wind?

This winter CPA has revised the system we use to rate and describe trips to better match the skills and expectations of paddlers who participate in our trips and the trip leaders. Many sports use a rating system to estimate the expected level of difficulty and skills required. Skiing uses green circles, blue squares, and black diamonds to rate trails from easy, to 'are you crazy'. White water paddling uses Class I through VI to rate rivers. CPA is looking at existing standards to rate our trips.

Our plan is to classify trips as Level 1 through 5 to align with the ACA Skills Assessments – Level 1 being easier trips suitable for but not limited to paddlers who are just learning, up to Level 5 trips which are very challenging and may require more training and skills. We have also added the ability to post trips with Level 4 (advanced intermediate) and Level 5 (advanced) ratings to meet the needs of our more experienced paddlers.

The level of difficulty of a trip depends on many factors. Distance and expected paddling speed as well as open water crossings or surf can

be planned well in advance using charts and local knowledge. Tides and currents can also be predicted well in advance. Do we really want to paddle 10 miles against the current? Wind is a dynamic force that has a great impact on the difficulty of a planned trip. Although weather is a variable that is out of our control, we can watch the forecasts and adjust the trip plan as needed. Local knowledge helps; some areas are more protected, some more exposed.

Rating a trip

Trip rating will always be up to the trip planner and trip leaders. These are guidelines that are designed to make the process more consistent and to make sure that we provide the information that will help the members make the right choices when signing up for trips. Conditions are not the only criteria. Whenever a trip leader decides that there are circumstances that may increase the level of difficulty of a paddle, rating a trip with a higher level of difficulty may be appropriate.

Conditions

Anticipated conditions are based on weather predictions, tide and current tables, and local knowledge of the area where you will be paddling. Predictions are averages and are subject to change. It is up to the trip leader to determine the level based on the following criteria.

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Conditions and Appropriate Levels

Level	Wind	Waves	Current	Surf
Level 1 (Beginner) Calm, flat water	Protected from wind	Minimal waves from wind or boat traffic	No apparent current	None
Level 2 (Advanced Beginner) Protected water near shore	Winds up to 10 knots	Waves up to 1 foot	Current up to 1 knot	None
Level 3 (Intermediate) Gentle to Moderate Sea Conditions	Winds up to 10 - 15 knot (Force 3 to 4 on the Beaufort Scale)	Waves to 1 - 2 foot	Current up to 2 knots.	Surf break to 2 feet
Level 4 (Advanced Intermediate) Moderate Sea Conditions ¹	Winds up to 16 knots (Force 4 on the Beaufort Scale)	Waves to 2 feet	Current up to 3 knots	Surf break to 2 feet
Level 5 (Advanced) Moderate Sea Conditions ¹	Wind up to 20 knots (Force 4 to 5 on the Beaufort Scale)	Waves to 4 feet	Currents up to 4 knots, with standing waves	Surf break to 3 feet

¹ 2 or 3 of the above conditions may be appropriate, but all 4 together are not recommended in the same trip.

[Ratings continued from p.1](#)

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Other Factors to Consider When Rating a Trip

Distance

Distance alone does not define the trip rating. Once a paddler develops advanced beginner skills, distance is dependent on conditioning as much as skill level. Anticipated distance should always be included in a trip description.

Pace

Anticipated paddling pace should always be included in the trip description. This does not define the trip level, once a paddler develops advanced beginner skills, they may want to focus on pace rather than conditions.

Scenic (Average < 3 kt) – this is a more leisurely pace allowing time for paddlers to explore shoreline features and take photos etc.

Moderate (Average 3 kt) this is an average paddling speed allowing time for breaks, water etc. This represents speed over water and may need to be adjusted for current or wind.

Performance (Average > 3 kt) this is for paddlers who like to maximize the distance covered over time.

Special Features - additional conditions that may be encountered during the trip.

Open Water Crossings – open water crossings increase the risk of changes to conditions that may impact a paddler. Conditions may change from L2 to L3 or from L3 to L4 before the paddlers have time to get to more sheltered waters. These paddles should be rated at last 1 level above the anticipated conditions to account for the possibility of change.

Surf – breaking waves are a special challenge and may not be present on all intermediate to advanced paddles. Whenever surf conditions are expected, it should be clearly defined in the trip description.

Tides / Currents – any anticipated tide races should be mentioned in the trip description. ☼

Group Paddling and Sharing Skills and Knowledge

Looking back on the series, I think what has made this series so successful is the “older” participants coming back to help the next group – the KIPPERS and sometimes Old KIPPERS. The makeup of KIP participants has changed over the years. In the beginning most of the paddlers who came out for the series were “racers” - fast paddlers. We still have some very strong and fast paddlers but now we see new and experienced paddlers that maintain a steady pace and just want to become better paddlers, experience the Bay, and learn how to deal with Nature.

Each year we have learned something new and have added it to our paddle. At first it was just group up and paddle. As time went on we broke the group into three paces, fast, medium and slower, this really worked out for the range of paddlers that have joined the group and helped them find a niche that suits their paddling style. Paddlers can change groups at any time to test their comfort level. With this development we then came up with co-leaders for each group. As time went by we began using our radios more and more to keep in touch with each other and the groups. Each year we tried to do more but it never really worked, we always wanted to paddle then get off the water. We were determined to change this and three years ago when we used the first two paddles as a “get to know you” and we were able to do it. We used these two paddles to work on towing and being towed, rescues, follow the lead paddler, radio usage, etc. But the best came about when we decide to break the paddlers down to groups of three Rookies and a KIPPER and did these exercises. It gave the Old KIPPERS a chance to lead and work one on one. It worked - better than we thought.

We could not have this event without the Old KIPPERS that have become mentors who show up year after year: George Banks, Bill Upton, Carol Collins, Eric Dougherty, Jim Zawlocki, Kevin Lawrence, Pat Kennedy, Paula Hubbard, Rob Bowen, Robert Golden, Sue Byerly, Tim Doyle, Ben Mayock, Bill Smith, Bob Shakeshaft, Ed Johnson, Jay Perry, Katie O’Meara, Mark Rizzuto, and Maywin Liu.

To find an excellent reference to our paddles, go to the CPA Forum site, look at the upper Right hand corner for "search", put in “Afterthoughts” as a search term. There you will be able to read about any of our paddles. Two especially good ones are KIPP-1 10' and KIPP-5 12'.

Come and join us on the water this year!

Ancora Imparo

KIP-10 15' Schedule

- 1 - April Sat. 4/11
 - 2 - May Sat. 5/9
 - 3 - June Sat. 6/13
 - 4 - July Sat. 7/11
 - 5 - Aug Sat. 8/8
 - 6 - Sept. Sat. 9/12 ****KIP Birthday party Weekend starts Fri 9/11!
 - 7 - Final Sat 9/19
- Rain date 10/3 ☼



Paula Hubbard in the Surf

By Paul Casto