

A Boating Trail Guide to the American River Parkway

Paddling Safety Hints on the Lower American River

Canoeing, kayaking, and rafting down the lower American River are popular means of recreation for thousands of Californians. Unfortunately, a number of boating accidents occur every year on this river. This need not be so. Paddling can be safe and fun if you follow a few safety hints.

Wear a Life Jacket.

All canoes, kayaks, and inflatable rafts must carry a U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device (life jacket) for each person on board. Children and non swimmers should wear them at all times. For that extra margin of safety, all boaters should have life jackets on when going through turbulent waters or rapids. When in Doubt. . .Put it On.

Survival in cold water

Survival in cold water is another reason for all boaters to wear a PFD when in and around the river during the fall, winter, and spring months. The shock of sudden immersion in cold water can deplete the strength of even the strongest swimmer and hypothermia can render a person unconscious. Wearing a PFD will help keep you afloat.

Be Prepared.

Additional equipment for the float trip could include a bailer, extra paddle, suntan or sunscreen lotion, waterproof trash bag, and a boat patch kit. Keep all loose items in a floatable container. It is also a good idea to wear a pair of old tennis shoes. Cut feet account for 80 to 90 percent of the injuries along the river.

Scout the Unknown.

If you have never paddled through Suicide Bend, San Juan Rapids, or Arden Rapids, first scout these areas thoroughly from the shore. While paddling, if you are in doubt about a stretch of the river ahead, stop and scout the area. Carry your boat around any areas you are not sure of. Play It Safe.

Watch for Hazards.

Watch for snags such as fallen trees, brush, bridge abutments, or old pilings. The current may pin the boater or boat against these obstacles or cause a boat to capsize. Also beware of reversals (reverse flows) that may form at the dam, in the various rapids, or behind snags. The surface water in a reversal is going upstream. Boaters and their small boats can become trapped and held in this reversal. If you cannot swim out

of a reversal, dive deeply into the undercurrent, and the downstream flow may carry you out. If you become separated from your tube, paddle or other belongings, don't try to recover them unless it is safe to do so. While you might risk losing or damaging a raft, paddle or other equipment to reach someone in trouble and save a life, NEVER risk a life to save equipment or belongings.

Courtesy Afloat.

Courtesy on the river is an essential part of boating. On weekends, when the raft brigade is out in full force on the water, be especially courteous to your fellow boater and the people along the shore. Do not intrude on their fun. Keep an eye out for a boater in trouble and lend a helping hand if you can.

Pitch In.

Garbage accumulating along the shoreline or floating beside your boat ruins the beauty of this river and creates a health hazard. Pitch in and do your part to keep this area clean. Take a waterproof trash bag with you and carry out what you carry in. Avoid using glass beverage containers.

Hang On.

If your boat capsizes or you fall overboard, **STAY WITH THE BOAT**, unless it is unsafe to do so. Try to right your boat so that you can climb in and paddle for shore. If this is not possible, hold on to the craft at the upstream end. This allows better visibility to enable you to swim your boat to shore. More importantly, it prevents the possibility of your being pinned between your boat and an obstacle. If you are separated from your craft, float downstream feet first. This will enable you to fend off rocks or other obstructions in the river while floating to safety.

Know the Flow.

High flows on the American River can be dangerous. Do not overestimate your skill or underestimate the power of the river. Knowing what the flow is on the day of your trip is one way to determine if the river is boatable for your level of paddling experience. For a current recording of the river flows on the American and other rivers throughout the state, call the Department of Water Resources at (800) 952-5530, or visit their Website at www.dwr.water.ca.gov. For additional river information, call the Sacramento County Department of Parks and Recreation at (916) 875-6672.

Floating Travel Time on the American River for Rafts

Time to left of colon is hours, to the right minutes. 1:14 therefore is 1 hour 14 minutes of travel time.

Below Normal Flows Normal Flows Above Normal Flows

	1500 cfs	2000 cfs	2500 cfs	3000 cfs	3500 cfs	4000 cfs	4500 cfs	5000 cfs	5500 cfs	6000 cfs
Sailor Bar to L. Sunrise-L.S. Bridge	1:23	1:14	1:07	1:00	:53	:47	:43	:40	:38	:37
San Juan Rapids to C.M. Goethe Park to	1:17	1:08	1:01	:55	:49	:44	:40	:37	:35	:34
Harrington Way to Watt Avenue	:24	:22	:21	:20	:19	:18	:17	:17	:16	:16
	3:04	2:34	2:10	1:50	1:36	1:24	1:16	1:11	1:05	1:03

About Motors.

Motor-powered watercraft are allowed on the river, except from November 1 through March 15 when they are prohibited above Hagan Community Park. The maximum speed limit for the entire lower American River is 5 miles per hour.

Nimbus Dam.

The county prohibits boating, swimming, rafting, and floating in any manner on or in the water of the river for a distance of 150 feet downstream from Nimbus Dam. Reversals, currents, and increased flow releases created by the dam are extremely hazardous.

We Are Here To Help.

For more information on the American River or boating safety, call either the Sacramento County Department of Parks and Recreation at (916) 875-6672 or the California Division of Boating and Waterways at (916) 263-1331. The staff at these agencies will try to answer any questions you may have. Be sure to ask them about river safety classes. Additional boating safety information can be found on the kiosk located at the Sunrise Bridge parking lot.

FOR EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE, DIAL 9-1-1.

The 1974 California Recreational Trails Act recognized the need to provide for increased recreational boating opportunities on California's rivers by designating specific rivers for study as boating trails. The California Division of Boating and Waterways has published this Boating Trail Guide, with the cooperation of the Sacramento County Department of Parks and Recreation, to provide basic facts and information which will assist you in planning a safe and enjoyable trip.

The River.

The lower American River has been designated as a "Recreational River" under both the California Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (1972) and the National Wild and Scenic

Rivers Act (1980). These designations provide state and national recognition and additional protection of the river's outstanding scenic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, and recreational values. The American is one of seven rivers in the state to receive this protective status.

Boat Use.

People have been boating on the American River for hundreds of years. The Nisenan Indians poled flattened logs along and across the river. Hudson Bay trappers used hollowed-out logs as canoes on the Sacramento and American rivers. Explorer and trapper Jedediah Smith crossed the river in 1828 near the present location of the Guy West Bridge in a boat made from animal skins. In the 1840's, Captain John Sutter used a variety of small wooden boats to transport goods. During the gold rush, various sailing and steam-powered vessels navigated as far upstream as Brighton (a site near the California State University of Sacramento campus) to deliver supplies and transport miners.

Until the completion of Folsom Dam in 1955, the American was navigable only during winter and spring high flows. Today, there are usually sufficient flows to allow navigation year round and to make the American a popular recreational river during the summer months.

What's in a Name.

The American River has had a variety of names since the early 1800's.

- Kum sayo (Roundhouse River) -- This is the name the Nisenan Indians gave to the river. The Nisenans lived near the mouth of the American.
- Rio de las Llagas (River of Sorrows) -- Spanish explorer Gabriel Moraga named the river on his 1808 expedition into the Sacramento Valley
- Wild River -- After observing the wildness of the Indians in the area, Jedediah Smith renamed the river in 1828.
- Rio Ojotska -- In 1833, Captain John Cooper got his name for the river from the phonetic Russian spelling of the word hunter.
- Rio de los Americanos -- This last title, from which the current name evolved, was chosen by Mexican Governor Alvarado in 1837 because the area was often frequented by American trappers.

The Parkway.

The 23-mile stretch of land along the American River from Nimbus Dam to the Sacramento River is one of the most unique public parks in the country. The American River Parkway preserves the natural, archaeological, historical, and recreational resources of the river while making them accessible to park visitors. It is administered by the Sacramento County Department of Parks and Recreation.

