

KAYAKING

Grade Two Certificate

By Richard Clark



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Races on rivers that are classed grade 2 usually require the entrant to have a grade 2 certificate. This certifies that the paddler has been assessed in their chosen race kayak on a grade 2 river and has shown that they can demonstrate a self rescue, ferry gliding, eddy and bluff turns, railing and have an understanding of river dynamics and river safety.

After completing their training and certification the paddler should feel confident to tackle a grade 2 river with other qualified paddlers, managing their own safety as well as their fellow paddlers'. This will enable them to spend more time on moving water and consequently improve their paddling. The grade 2 certificate is just a starting point but is very important as it is the foundation of your paddling skills.

Choosing your grade 2 provider from the many listed operators should be taken seriously as it will impact on your safety and skill levels in the future. Multisport paddling is a relatively new type of kayaking that has developed, combining skills from white water kayaking, flat water racing and down river racing. Skills from each of these different sports need to be combined to make a successful multisport paddler. For example, a white water paddler will be able to teach you about river dynamic but will probably not have a clue about the correct technique for using a wing paddle, so finding a provider that has instructors with the right skills is important.

Most instructors will have a NZOIA qualification, usually kayak 1, which is a great starting point but finding out about their paddling history is also important. Experience in multisport kayaking will enable them to pass on those specific multisport skills. Also getting contacts of other paddler that have completed their courses and finding out how they found the course can

be helpful.

The structure of the course is also important; the more time you have on the river the better, you can't expect to learn all these skill overnight, they need to be developed over time. So look for a course that gives you a gradual build up rather than a crash course.

Probably the single most important skill for the new paddler to develop is being able to steer your kayak so you can position yourself in the right place on the river. It sounds simple but in reality your long, flat bottomed kayak just wants to go straight and requires considerable skill to turn.

The common misconception is that the multisport kayak is easy to turn using its rudder! This is not correct. In moving water the rudder is ineffectual; a rudder works by creating pressure, the more speed you have through the water, the more pressure, consequently, when the river water is moving in the same direction as the kayak, you don't create as much pressure and, therefore, less of a turning force is exerted. This is compounded by the fact that every time you push hard on the rudder control you create drag, slowing the speed of the kayak, like putting the handbrake on in a car, and, again, the less speed, the less turning effect.

A skilled multisport paddler will use a combination of railing and sweep strokes to turn the kayak and avoid using his rudder. This will mean he maintains boat speed and will actually be able to turn his boat better than by using his rudder. If you can steer your kayak well you will be able to position yourself in the right place on the river and avoid obstacles. A paddler with poor boat control will simply go where the river takes them becoming a "Floater Boater", going over or into any obstacles on the river; not a great position to be in!

As explained in earlier articles, the new paddler must learn the skill of railing their kayak. This rail control is essential to mastering eddy turns, fairy gliding and steering. Your instructor must have good understanding of these issues which are unique to the longer multisport kayak and completely different to a short white water boat that will turn very easily.

I usually find that when we move our grade two-ers onto moving water their paddle technique deteriorates slightly because they feel cautious in this new environment. They become tentative, putting the blade in too shallow and less aggressively. This has a negative effect on their stability; they can no longer rely on the paddle to support them. So we concentrate on improving their paddle stroke which gives them more speed and better stability. Most people struggle with some of these concepts initially but over time it all seems to come together with good instruction and time on the water.

So, when you finish your grade 2 certificate you should be confident in your skills but have a healthy respect for the moving water environment. Remembering that even a basic grade 2 river can change overnight you only need a fallen tree in the wrong place to create dangerous hazard. You should now have the skills to recognise the danger and get you and your fellow paddlers through safely. ●

RICHARD'S BACKGROUND

Richard has competed in ten Coast to Coast races and numerous other multisport, cycling and kayaking events. He also runs the Boatshed Kayaks and has been training grade 2 kayakers for nine years. He is the organiser of the Maungatautari Mission and the Cambridge to Hamilton Kayak Race. Don't hesitate to contact Richard on theboatshed@xtra.co.nz with any questions.