

Star Tests

These notes are intended to help those on 3-4 star courses in the club. They concentrate mostly on the theory side of the tests, as the practical elements are best learned by practise and instruction. However, a brief summary of the key points of the practical tests is included as a reminder and to allow candidates to identify and address their weak areas before taking a test. The practical notes can be found first with the theory for both found combined following.

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3 Star

The 3 star award marks the transition to being an 'intermediate' paddler. The course covers all the strokes a canoeist is ever likely to use. The award is required in order to use some whitewater courses and to paddle on the Cam with a group of a similar level. The 3 star test is somewhat harder to pass than the 1 and 2 star tests as a polished performance of a wide range of strokes is required.

Practical

The skills covered are:

- **Lifting, carrying and launching.** Good manual handling technique is important. Candidates should be able to launch from any reasonable access point.
- **Efficient forward paddling.** Good trunk rotation and a high action should have been developed by this stage.
- **Reverse over a figure-of-8 course.**
- **Low brace turn.** Demonstrating a good edge, also 'tilting to assist turning'.
- **Bow Rudder.** Fairly good technique is required.
- **Sculling Draw**
- **Draw on the move,** boat pulled sideways without turning.
- **Hanging draw.**
- **Low and high brace** showing commitment to the paddle on both sides.
- **Low and high sculling** again showing commitment of weight to the paddle.
- **Securing** boats to a roof rack.
- **Deep water rescue**
- **Eskimo rescue**
- **Rolling.** 3 attempts are allowed.
- **Towing.** You should have an appreciation of the dangers of towing. Never tow a boat on moving water or any situation where failure to release the towline could be a problem.
- **Journeying.** Have completed 3 journeys of about 3hrs duration—e.g. trip to Granchester or club river trips.

Theory:

Candidates at this level should have a broad background knowledge of canoeing. They should be sufficiently knowledgeable to plan and execute short (10km?) trips on flat water with a group of friends. They should also show an understanding of the limits of their skills and what situations are potentially dangerous. All 1/2 star theory is relevant (see the 1/2 star document), as well as the information in the 3/4 Star Theory Notes found below. Note that these theory notes are also written for the 4 star test and less depth of knowledge will be expected on the sections relating to moving water.

4 Star

The 4 star award gives an introduction to whitewater paddling. It covers all the skills that a canoeist might require on most club trips. Whilst some of the skills can be taught on flat water, it is vital that candidates for the 4 star get onto moving water as often as they can, by attending club trips and getting away to artificial courses of an afternoon.

Practical

Candidates must be sufficiently competent to form part of a group being led down grade 2 moving water. Perfect performances of every stroke are not required:

Flat water skills:

- **Rolling.** On flat water.
- **Forward paddling.** Good efficient technique should be used.
- **Rescue and tow.** Demonstrate the techniques that would be used on moving water on flat water. Use two forms of carry.

Moving water techniques:

- **Stopping and reverse ferry gliding.** To be used to alter course mid-stream rather than across eddy lines.
- **Breaking in and out.**
- **Forward ferry gliding.**
- **Surf small waves.**
- **Paddle into and out of small stoppers.** Be able to recognise friendly stoppers.
- **Use of throwbag** to rescue a swimmer 10 metres distant.
- **Journeying** – 3 journeys of 4 hours duration, e.g. club trips.

Theory:

Whilst some background knowledge is expected, the theory mainly concentrates on the knowledge required to plan and execute a trip on grade 2 water. 1/2 star theory is relevant (see 1/2 star document), as well as the information outlined in the 3/4 Star Theory Notes below.

3/4 Star Theory Notes

Safety

Moving water presents a range of hazards, including:



- Overhanging trees
- Strainers (objects through which water, but not boats and bodies may pass. Includes trees and boulder sieves).
- Rocks that may cause broaches and pins.
- Undercut rocks
- Siphons (underwater rock channels through which water runs).
- Stoppers (double recirculating stoppers and man-made weirs are particularly dangerous).

All the environmental hazards (e.g. hypothermia) mentioned in 1/2 star theory are relevant in whitewater paddling. For more information on safety issues, read Franco Ferrero's excellent book 'White Water Safety and Rescue' published by Pesda Press (ISBN 0-9531956-0-0).

You should know how to swim in moving water. There are two 'modes' for swimming: passive and aggressive. Passive swimming is accomplished by swimming on your back, with the head upstream and hands and feet on the surface. This is the best way to avoid entrapments. Some control may be gained by 'ferry gliding' across the current. Aggressive swimming is the use of short bursts of fast strokes to power across an eddy line or away from a hazard. A front crawl with the head raised works well. For more information on swimming in moving water see the river paddling guide.

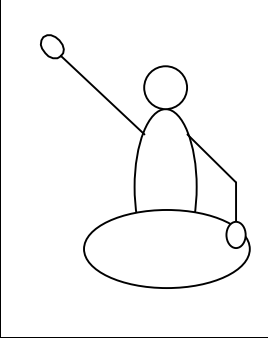
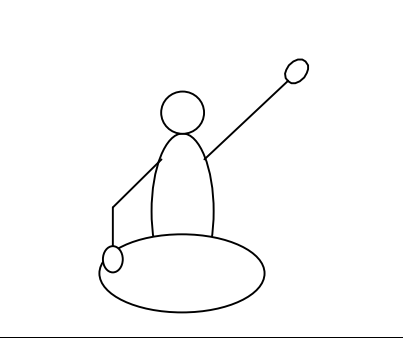
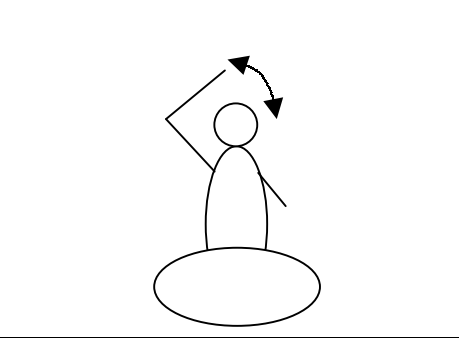
Equipment

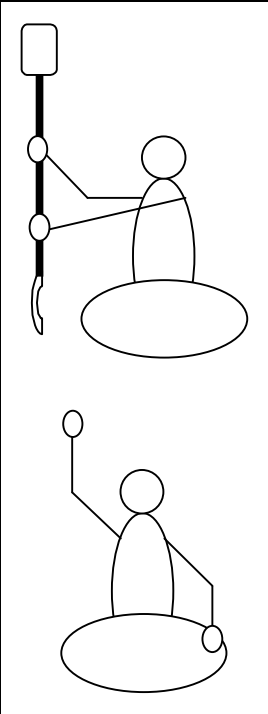
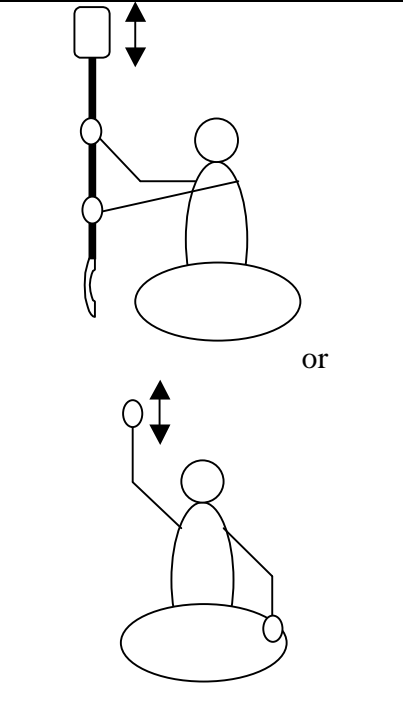
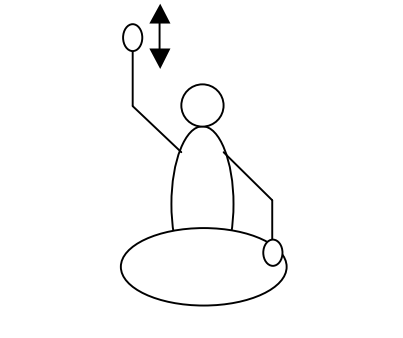
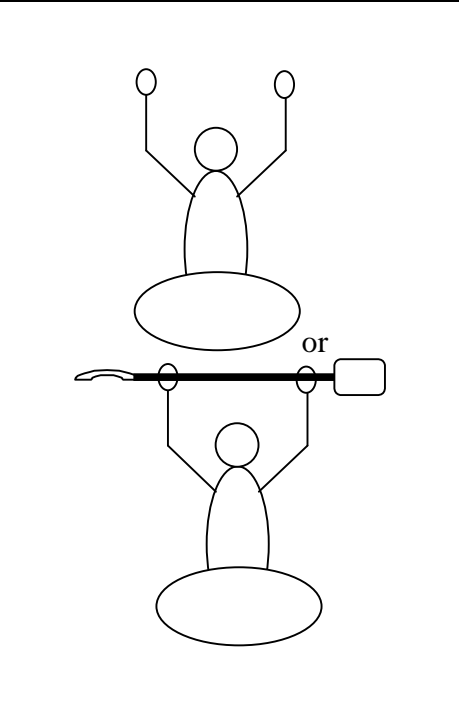
The emphasis is on the sort of knowledge that you might require when purchasing equipment for personal use. See the information in the 1/2 star document. You will probably be acquiring your own kit by this stage and will get the required knowledge by asking experienced paddlers what works. Several manufacturers have good websites, e.g: <http://www.nookie.co.uk>, <http://www.pyranha.com>

<p>Helmets A helmet should always be worn on moving water. Good Helmets are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Comfortable• Able to protect against <u>very</u> hard impacts and adsorb the blow• Protective of the face as well as the rest of the head• Firmly attached to the head—they do not wobble even when upside down hitting head on bottom of river and do not restrict vision.	
 <p>A range of Nookie throwbags</p>	<p>Throwbags The throwbag is a useful rescue tool for getting swimmers out of fast flowing water. It is essential that rescuers know how to use them and that they carry a knife in case problems occur. A good throwline should have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• At least 8mm nominal diameter of floating rope. Polypropylene is normally used, although stronger floating rope is available.• A hardwearing, high visibility bag.• A good shape for throwing and packing.
<p>Towlines. Towlines are constructed from nylon webbing and fabric, polyethylene foam for floatation and aluminium alloy karabiners. A good towline will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A quick release mechanism, which is reliable and easy to operate.• Adjustable tow length• Shock absorbtion in the line	

Group Awareness

On whitewater keeping together as a group is very important, as mentioned in the 2 star notes. 'Whitewater Safety and Rescue' is again the book to read if you want to learn about how groups should work on harder rivers. On whitewater it is often helpful to have a set of signals to control a group. The following is one possible set of river signals. Note that different people use different signals—it is wise to check before getting on the river:

		
Go left	Go right	Send my assistant to me

	 or 	
One come down	Repeated pump—ALL come down	STOP

Remember:

- **If you see no signal, do not move.**
- **When giving signals, always point away from the danger** (i.e. towards the clear line).

Map and Compass

A basic knowledge of navigation is required for 4 star. You should be able to align a map and locate your position, work out the distance between points, comprehend compass variation, follow a compass bearing and understand the idea of a transit.

Hypothermia / First Aid

See 1 star notes. <http://www.hypothermia.org> is useful for further reference. All canoeists paddling at this level should have a working knowledge of first aid—get yourself on a course!

Access

Access to non-tidal water has always been a problem for canoeists. The best source of up-to-date information on access issues is the BCU yearbook (see also www.bcu.org.uk). The BCU is trying to secure better access both in the long term through legislation and in the short term through local agreements. In general, one of several situations will exist on a particular section of river—to find out details for a particular river, contact the officers listed in the BCU yearbook:

- The waterway is a 'navigation' and there is a legal right to paddle, although a license may have to be purchased. Includes the Cam. BCU membership includes a license to paddle on British Waterways Board and Environment Agency waterways (except the Thames, for which a separate license is required).
- An 'access agreement' exists. This is where canoeists have been granted permission to paddle a certain river, usually subject to restrictions (e.g. dates, water level). Canoeists must be careful to behave in a respectful manner in order to safeguard access agreements. Examples include the Dart, where tickets have to be bought to paddle and the Conwy, on which you can paddle during the fishing closed season at certain water levels.
- Canoeists are not allowed access at all. Includes most rivers in North Wales and the Lake District. In practise, small inconspicuous groups can usually get away with paddling, although they may be trespassing. Note that trespass is a civil and not a criminal offence.

For an interesting perspective on access issues, read the introduction to Terry Storey's UK guidebook or the new SCA guide to Scottish rivers (the situation is somewhat different in Scotland).

Environment

As mentioned above, canoeists need to behave in a reasonable manner and should be seen to have respect for the environment. The BCU leaflet 'earning a welcome' contains the following guidelines:

- Be friendly and polite to local residents.
- Drive slowly with care and consideration.
- Park sensibly without causing any obstruction.
- Be as quiet as possible.
- Unload kit tidily and leave no litter.
- Get changed out of public view.
- Get permission before crossing private land.
- Leave gates as you find them and do no damage.
- Avoid being an intrusion on local life.
- Say thank you for any help you receive.
- Support local businesses if you can.
- Leave no trace of your visit.

Planning

See the planning section in the 2 star theory notes. When planning trips on whitewater you should take particular note of the difficulty of the water (see below) and the experience of the group. Remember that the water level can have a significant effect on the difficulty of a river and that rain can cause the river to rise very fast. Think about contingency plans before the trip in case you need to walk out.

International River Grading System:

- Grade 1 - Navigable by almost complete novices. Overhanging trees may be a problem.
- Grade 2 - Some dangers, which can be easily avoided.
- Grade 3 - Includes all the features and hazards there are. There is a clear line that competent paddlers will find without inspection.
- Grade 4 - The line is less clear, but inspection from the boat is possible. Line is difficult to follow and mistakes can be costly.
- Grade 5 - Line is complex and mistakes involve risk to life and limb. Bank inspection essential.
- Grade 6 - Just runnable by experts in certain conditions.

General

You should have good background knowledge of the type of paddling that interests you by this stage. Whitewater paddlers are again referred to 'Whitewater Safety and Rescue'. You should also have a breadth of knowledge of other disciplines—the best place to find this information is the BCU Canoeing Handbook (ISBN 0900082046).