

BigDamFish.Net Whitewater Terminology

Boat-Eater - A "monster hole" in a rapid, big enough to swallow a boat. Also known as a bus-stopper.

Boil - Swirly or unpredictable currents pushing (boiling) to the surface. Usually caused by rocks pushing the water to the surface.

Bony - Run or rapid requiring lots of maneuvering because of the abundance of obstacles, mostly rocks.

C.F.S. - Cubic Feet per Second. Measurement of velocity of water flow at a given point in a river. Will vary according to water level and gradient of riverbed.

Carnage - General term for a mishap, as in a boat flipping or someone falling out.

Chicken Line - Straps on the sides of a raft for clients to hold on to if they get scared. Use caution as it can entrap arms and legs in a flip.

Class I-VI - International scale of river difficulty classification system for negotiating the difficulty of fast-moving water. Class I is the easiest and Class VI the most difficult.

Confluence - The junction of two rivers or forks of a river.

Curler - A large wave, usually at the bottom of a drop, with a crest that spills upon its upstream slope; may be a surfing wave.

Drop - A short, well-defined, rapid or section of a rapid. Named for the abrupt drop in elevation between the top and bottom of the rapid.

Eddy - Area of usually calm water behind or downstream of an obstruction in the main current, where water flows counter to that of the main current.

Eddy Out - Term used to describe leaving the main current and entering an eddy.

Eddy Line - A current differential between the upstream current of the eddy and the downstream current of the main flow of the river.

Ferry - A maneuver used to cross a current with little or no down stream travel. Utilizes the current's force to move the boat sideways.

Gauge Height - For measuring water levels at one or more locations. Reference point used with CFS (or in lieu of).

Gradient - Refers to the steepness of a riverbed over a specified distance, usually per mile. Along with CFS and water level information, this helps paddlers draw a conclusion of a river's difficulty. See CFS and Class I-VI.

Hair - Dangerous and difficult water.

Haystacks - Big standing waves in a wave "train" following a drop.

Headwall - Steep cliff where the main channel of the river drives against it at a 90-degree angle.

Highside - When you broach on a rock with a raft everyone moves to the highside to push it back down so it won't wrap around the rock.

Hole - A hole is created when the river current drops over a rock or ledge and circulates instead of continues its downstream flow. A significant feature because it either offers play opportunities or danger of trapping, depending on the power of the hole.

Horizon Line - Usually indicative of a falls or steep drop. There is a line, but the route, if there is one, is not apparent. Time to exit and scout.

Hydraulic - Water formation following a sudden drop in the riverbed or drop over an obstruction that creates a powerful circulating force at the base of a drop. The circulating pressure of a powerful hydraulic can hold boats and paddlers for indeterminate lengths of time.

Hypothermia - The cold water hazard for paddlers. Prolonged exposure can lead to incapacitation and eventually death as body core temperature drops below 80 degrees.

Lilly-Dipper - A weak paddler.

Maytag - Stuck in a hole and thrashed about as if in a washing machine. Usually not fun!

New Yorker - A client who whines and complains.

Peel Out - Term used to describe leaving an eddy and entering the main current; bow catches the main current and quickly swings the boat downstream. A downstream lean is needed to counteract the current.

PFD - Personal Floating Device. The proper name for a Life Jacket per Coast Guard definition. It is required by law for every passenger of all water craft and your most important life-saving tool.

Pillow - Water that builds up around a rock in the main current. Pillows are stuffed with rock.

Pin - Being stuck between the current and the river-bed or an obstruction such as a rock or log and unable to dislodge. Not fun; possibly deadly!

Put-In - Starting place of a river trip, where you put your boat on the river to begin a run or trip.

Ramp - Point in a rapid where water constricts/pools before dropping downstream through a channel.

River Left - The left-hand side of the river when looking downstream. When downstream looking upstream it is on your right.

River Right - The right-hand side of the river when looking downstream. When downstream looking upstream it is on your left. Top

Roostertail - Spray of water that explodes off a submerged rock or obstacle.

Shuttle - The most dangerous part of the trip. Driving between the put-in and take-out. One-vehicle shuttles require logistical foresight using options such as biking, walking, hitchhiking, etc. to return to the put-in.

Standing Waves - Big waves that often indicate the main channel.

Strainer - Current clogged with tree branches or debris that allows the water to flow through but could pin you or your boat. Very Dangerous!

Take-Out - Ending point of a paddling trip, where the boats are finally taken from the water.

Technical - Describes the character of a rapid that requires skillful maneuvering because of frequent obstructions. Also describes specific, difficult-to-master paddling techniques.

Throw Bag - Rescue device incorporating a 60 ft. floating rope coiled inside a nylon bag, to be thrown while holding one rope end.

Tongue - A smooth downstream V indicating the route through a rapid.

Undercut - An overhanging rock or ledge with water flowing underneath it. A serious hazard!

Waterfall - Major drop in a riverbed, usually over six feet in height.

Wave Train - A series of standing waves or run out of a rapid. Also called "haystacks."