



CERTIFICATION

PADDLESPORTS LEADER RIVER

The ACA Paddlesports Leader (PL) is a new training program that replaces the well-known Tripleader. Unlike the Tripleader, the PL is a certification and involves significantly more extensive training. The Paddlesports Leader is the middle level in the ACA system. Above it, there is Level 1, the “Community Paddlesports Leader,” and Level 3, the “Advanced Paddlesports Leader.” Levels 2 and 3 are also available in a “Coastal” version for sea kayakers.

The leader leads, the instructor teaches—there will be a clear distinction between the two in the future. Of course, one does not exclude the other, and both are necessary. However, the training program will focus on specific areas and cover certain topics in greater depth.

What is new about the concept is that it focuses on the venue rather than the paddlecraft. The course can be completed with a open canoe, kayak or packraft. Participants should also be able to paddle other types of boats. This enables them to lead mixed groups.

TARGETGROUPS

The Community Paddlesports Leader certification is intended for individuals with leadership responsibilities on lakes and rivers with current up to WWII who have professional aspirations and would like to obtain certification. Examples include employees of outfitters, experiential educators, and outdoor trainers. The area of application is day trips with groups or individuals. Official certification greatly increases the value and quality of the training. ACA certifications are internationally recognized and accepted in the outdoor industry.

PREREQUISITES

- Be a current ACA Member
- Obtain a copy of the Candidate Course Workbook
- Urban first aid & CPR or higher
- Optional*: Skill Assessment Level 2 either Canoe, River-Kayak oder Packraft
- Optional*: Skill Assessment River Rescue L2
- We generally expect candidates to already have experience in canoeing, kayaking, or packrafting.

The following skills are recommended but not mandatory for certification:

- Be an active paddler
- Completed skill training in other paddlecraft
- Assessment River Safety & Rescue Level 3
- Experience as a participant and guide on guided trip
- Completed a Leave no trace-Workshop
- Attendance in an ACA Instructor Development Workshop in the capacity of a practice student

*Skill assessment is not a prerequisite for so-called hybrid courses. This content is covered in the additional course days.



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CONTENT AND SCHEDULE

The course lasts 5 intensive days and has a high practical component. In addition to theoretical topics, scenarios are played out, leadership skills are practiced, and a lot of content relating to equipment and conducting tours is discussed and taught. On the last day, there is a theoretical and practical exam. The theoretical exam is translated into German.

The curriculum, the detailed syllabus, is very comprehensive and can be found on the ACA website www.americancanoe.org and in the course textbook. Here is a rough overview:

- Leadership - Dealing with team dynamics, conflicts, fears, expectations
- Trip-planing - Preparation of float plans, emergency plans, exit strategies, etc.
- Guiding - Briefing, Communication, Plan B strategies etc.
- Equipment (Boat & Camp) - Repair, selection, care
- Weather/Enviroment - Planing, Assessment, Leave no trace
- Riscmanagement/Safety - Equipment, preparation, prevention

It looks quite manageable at this point, but there is more than enough material to fill 5 days of the course. Especially since paddling and rescue skills are brought up to an appropriate level in this course. In addition, we expect candidates to already have a few tools in their toolbox.

FACTS

The venue/location in which the course takes place is defined as follows:

- * Moving water
- * WWI-II plus

Like the Instructor certification, the Community Paddlesports Leader certification is valid for four years. To maintain certification, you must lead and report on at least four tours during this period and attend an update course. After that, you are ready for the next four years.

You can find a summary of this topic in a blog post here: [ACA Leader Ausbildung](#)

On this [Webseite](#), you will also find information about me as an instructor and all course dates. I am happy to answer any questions by email or in a video call.

To date (as of February 2026), only the Community Paddlesports Leader and Paddlesport Leader River certifications are offered in Europe. From 2027, the next level, training to become a "River Guide" for multi-day tours, will also be available on the market.