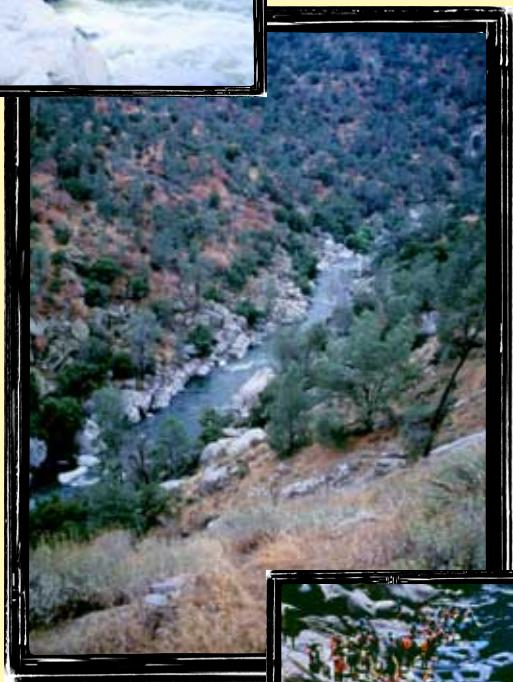


A BOATING TRAIL GUIDE TO THE

UPPER & LOWER KERN RIVER



A WILD
AND
SCENIC
RIVER

The Kern River is a true gem of the West. Its headwaters, at the 14,494-ft. Mt. Whitney, are located just three hours north of one of the busiest cities in the U.S., Los Angeles. In stark contrast, 50 miles to the east of its headwaters is Death Valley, one of the driest places on earth.

The Kern River is the longest river in the Sierra Nevada, and in terms of whitewater, it is perhaps the most variable. Whitewater boating on the Kern offers a range of technical difficulty comparable to any river in the West, with runs ranging from Class II to Class V and V+. With proper training and sound judgment, whitewater boating on the Kern River is an exciting, safe and rewarding experience.

BOATING PERMITS AND MANIFESTS

The Forest Service and BLM require all private boaters of the Kern River to have in their possession a current annual permit. There is no charge for the permit, which may be obtained at the U.S. Forest Service offices in Lake Isabella or Kernville and the Bureau of Land Management office in Bakersfield. In addition, each party is required to fill out an activity log “manifest” and deposit it in a manifest box (located at most launch sites) prior to each trip.

**Lake Isabella
Visitor Center**
4875 Ponderosa Drive
P.O. Box 3810
Lake Isabella, CA 93240
(760) 379-5646

**U.S. Bureau of
Land Management
Bakersfield Field Office**
3801 Pegasus Drive
Bakersfield, CA 93308
(661) 391-6120

**Cannell Meadow
Ranger District**
105 Whitney Road
P.O. Box 9
Kernville CA 93238
(760) 376-3781

UPPER KERN

The upper section of the Kern River was given special protection in 1987 by the Wild and Scenic River Act. It offers relatively easy stretches (class II to III), such as the Powerhouse run, to such difficult stretches as Chamise Gorge or the Gold Ledge/Thunder runs. Many of the rapids may be scouted from the Sierra Way/Mtn. Highway 99 which travels parallel to much of the river.

This guide splits the upper Kern into 6 separate runs (after California Whitewater, Cassidy & Calhoun, 1984). The sections are divided by either a dramatic change in difficulty or necessary portages. Fairview Dam presently diverts 500 cubic feet per second (cfs) from the river and returns it at the Powerhouse KR3, where a short paved road leads to Kern River Powerhouse Facility No.3. A rough portage trail provides access around the dam and may be improved in the future as part of the powerhouse relicensing. The sections above the Fairview Dam and below the powerhouse, thus, have longer seasons than the partially dewatered middle sections. In wet years, the Limestone and Powerhouse runs may be raftable into August and boatable in kayak and canoes all year round, but in dry years, only into June. In wet years, the partially dewatered middle sections can be boated from about April to the middle of July, and in dry years perhaps not at all.



DEADMAN'S CURVE

OVERALL LOGISTICS

Upper Kern runs are easily accessed from the Sierra Way/Mtn. Hwy. 99, as it closely follows the entire stretch. Because this part of the river follows the road, launches and take-outs are governed by the levels of difficulty of rapids, time requirements and parking logistics.

CAMPING

There are numerous Forest Service camp sites along the Upper Kern River, both developed (fee) campgrounds and undeveloped (no fee) sites with minimal or no amenities (see map for locations and amenities).

UPPER KERN RIVER RUNS

Flow Information: www.spk-wc.usace.army.mil

Lake Isabella Visitor Center
(760) 379-5646

Kernville Ranger Station
(760) 376-3781

LIMESTONE RUN

Johnsondale Bridge to Fairview Dam

Difficulty: IV; V above 4000 cfs

Length: 2.4 miles

Gradient: 45 ft./mi.

Season: April-July

Recommended Levels: 800-3000 cfs at Kernville

Put in at the foot of Johnsondale Bridge below the parking area on river right. Take out on river left, a few hundred yards upstream of Fairview Dam. Parking here is limited. A rough portage trail (0.4 mile) provides access around the dam.

FAIRVIEW RUN

Fairview Dam to Calkins Flat Primitive Camping Area

Difficulty: III
Length: 2.8 miles
Gradient: 35 ft./mi.
Season: May-June

Recommended Levels: 1500 to 4000 cfs at Kernville
Flow on this section is actually 500 cfs less.

Put in 0.4 miles below Fairview dam, just below Bombs Away, a Class V rapid. Take out at Calkins Flat (river left).

CHAMISE GORGE

Calkins Flat to Salmon Falls

Difficulty: IV to IV+
Length: 2.2 miles
Gradient: 60 ft./mi.
Season: May-June

Recommended Levels: 1500-3000 cfs at Kernville
Flow is actually 500 cfs less here.

Put in at Calkins Flat Primitive Area (left bank). Take out Mi. 7.8-8.0 on left bank after Satan's Slot Rapid and before the treacherous Salmon Falls (Class VI) where removal from the river is mandatory.

GOLD LEDGE RUN (ANT CANYON + THUNDER + CABLE RUNS)

Ant Canyon to Camp 3 Campground

Difficulty: V
Gradient: 65 ft./mi.
Length: 7.2 miles
Season: May-June

Recommended Levels: 1500-3000 cfs at Kernville
Flow here is 500 cfs less.

Put in at Ant Canyon Primitive Camping Area. Take out on river left at Thunderbird Campground or below at Camp 3 Campground.



WHITEMAIDEN'S
WALKWAY



EWING'S RAPID

CAMP 3 RUN

Camp 3 Campground to the Powerhouse

Difficulty: IV
Length: 2.4 miles
Gradient: 50 ft./mi.
Season: May-June

Recommended Levels: 1500-4000 cfs at Kernville
Flow here is 500 cfs less.

Put in at the downstream end of the Camp 3 campground.
Take out on left bank just below the Powerhouse (KR3).

POWERHOUSE RUN (LICKITY SPLIT RUN)

Powerhouse to Riverside Park

Difficulty: III-
Length: 2.0 miles
Gradient: 30 ft./mi.
Season: April-July

Recommended Levels: 600-6000 cfs at Kernville

Put in just downstream from the Powerhouse KR3.
A short paved road marked Kern River Powerhouse
acility No. 3 leads to the Powerhouse Day-Use Area. Take
out river right at Kernville's Riverside Park.

RECOMMENDED RIVER SAFETY EQUIPMENT

One must have previous experience navigating rivers with comparable flows and class ratings as the stretch being planned. Know your limitations in the craft you will be piloting whether it be raft, kayak or canoe.

Recommended equipment:

- helmet (mandatory for kayakers and canoeists); recommended for rafting class IV and V
- emergency boat repair items
- air pump (rafts)
- life jackets (one personal flotation device (PFD) per person)
- extra oar and/or paddle
- throw rope
- rafts should be equipped with a bowline
- first-aid kit
- drinking water, and snacks or lunch in dry bag
- wetsuits/dry suits (in early season or cold weather)
- knife
- whistle
- kayaks and canoes should be equipped with flotation bags
- canoes should be designed for use in whitewater
- canoes should be equipped with thigh straps

LOWER KERN RIVER

Isabella Lake, created in 1953 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, stores run-off during two-thirds of the year and releases it to Kern County farms in the summer months. The boating season thus coincides with agricultural releases providing the Lower Kern with reliable flows well past the natural season of the Upper Kern — typically from May into September. Summer flows range from 800 to 3000 cfs and are consistent at night and on weekends. About 600 cfs are diverted at Isabella Dam and returned to the river at Borel Powerhouse (Mi. 6) increasing flows downstream of this point.

This pocket of wildland offers challenging whitewater below Miracle Hot Springs (Mi. 7.3), while above it the river is Class II and III at normal flows. Below Miracle Hot Springs, the river is considered Class IV, except Royal Flush (Class VI), which must be portaged. Past the last take-out at Democrat Day-Use Area, the river plunges over an old diversion dam, and then continues through the dangerous Cataracts section where the river quickly falls through the Kern Canyon to the eastern city limit of Bakersfield. While expert kayakers run portions of this segment, the Cataracts are considered extremely dangerous and are not advised for boating.



TOMBSTONE RAPID

OVERALL LOGISTICS

The boatable section of the Lower Kern is 18 miles long. In most places, the river is well below Hwy. 178 and the Old Kern Canyon Road. The Lower Kern can be floated in one- or two-day stretches with developed (fee) Forest Service campgrounds at Mile 6.3 (Sandy Flat) and Mile 7.3 (Hobo Campground). Additionally, undeveloped camping areas are available in the historic mining site of Keyesville. This free area is located just downstream of the Lake Isabella spillway (on the west side of Hwy. 155) along the first 4 miles of the Lower Kern stretch.

CAMPING

For a more primitive camp setting (no fee) there are often riverside spaces available in the old mining area of Keyesville, which is administered by the Bureau of Land Management (no drinking water; limited pit-toilets). Improved amenities are available at the developed (fee) Main Dam, Sandy Flat or Hobo campgrounds along the Lower stretch (see map for locations and amenities). Observe proper rules of fire safety.

EWING'S
RAPID



LAUNCH AND TAKE-OUT SITES

Designated launch sites are located within the BLM-managed Keyesville Recreation Site, just southwest of the main dam spillway (on the west side of Hwy. 155) and on Forest Service lands farther downstream. On the BLM lands, two main sites are developed for launching at present—Slippery Rock (Mi. 0) and BLM South (Mi. 0.3); another site may be developed at the Bodfish Exit of Hwy. 178 (Mi. 0.6). The undeveloped 178 Bridge area (Mi. 2) may be used, accessed through Keyesville only.

Farther downstream are the Forest Service's Sandy Flat (Mi. 6.3) and Miracle (Mi. 7.3) Day-Use area. The Delonegha Bridge Access is under development and is expected to be open as a launch/take-out in the year 2000. The Forest Service's Democrat Day-Use Area (Mi. 18) is the final take-out of the



KEYESVILLE

Lower Kern River run. Boaters must remove their craft from the river at this point. Missing this last take-out will put the boater on an extremely dangerous portion of the river!

Of Special Note: The California Department of Boating and Waterways funded several projects on the Kern River as part of the River Trails Program. These projects include improvements at the BLM South Launch, all of Slippery Rock Launch, the bridge at the Royal Flush Portage Trail, and the Delonegha Bridge Access.

RIVER ACCESS

Lower Kern put-ins and take-outs are accessed from the Keyesville roads, Hwy. 178 to Borel Road to Old Kern Canyon Road, and Hwy. 178 to Democrat Day-Use Area (see map).

LOWER KERN RUNS

Flow Information: www.spk-wc.usace.army.mil

Lake Isabella Visitor Center
(760) 379-5646

Kernville Ranger Station
(760) 376-3781

PICTO RUN

Keyesville to Sandy Flat or Miracle Hot Springs

Difficulty: III
Length: 6.3-7.3 miles
Gradient: 28 ft./mi
Season: June-August (normal);
May-September (wet years)

Recommended Levels: 1000-3000 cfs,
Lake Isabella outflow

Put in within Keyesville Recreation Site (BLM) at Slippery Rock, right bank (Mi. 0) or BLM South (Mi. 0.3) on the left bank. Take out at Sandy Flat Day-Use Area, left bank (Mi. 6.3) or Miracle Hot Springs Day-Use Area, left bank (Mi. 7.3).

GUSTO RUN

(SO NAMED FOR THE NUMBER OF
CLASS IV RAPIDS OVER A SHORT DISTANCE.)

Sandy Flat or Miracle Hot Springs to Democrat
Day-Use Area

Gradient: 28 ft./mi
Difficulty: IV
Length: 10.7 - 11.7 miles
Season: June-August (normal);
May-September (wet years)

Recommended Levels: 1000-3000 cfs,
Lake Isabella outflow

Note: Mandatory portage on right bank at Mile 11.7, Royal Flush (Class VI).

Put in at Sandy Flat Day-Use Area (Mi. 6.3) or Miracle Hot Springs Day-Use Area (Mi. 7.3). Take out at Democrat Day-Use Area (Mi.18) on left bank. The river splits around an island upstream of the picnic area. If you take the right channel you may miss the take-out. Downstream of Democrat Day-Use Area, the river plunges over a 30-ft. diversion dam and then into a Class V-VI gorge. Take out at Democrat Hot Springs, Mile 18.3 (private property) only in emergencies.

When the Delonegha Bridge Access is completed, a run will be available to the Democrat Day-Use Area that includes five of the most challenging Class IV rapids on the river, commonly known as “The Big 5”.

COLD-WATER DANGERS

The Kern River is a cold water river; take appropriate precautions.

HYPOTHERMIA CHART

IF THE WATER TEMPERATURE IS... DEGREES (F)	EXHAUSTED OR UNCONSCIOUS, YOUR SURVIVAL TIME IS...	OTHERWISE, YOUR EXPECTED SURVIVAL TIME IS...
32.5°	Under 15 min	Under 15 to 45 min
32.5° to 40°	15 to 30 min	30 to 90 min
40° to 50°	30 to 60 min	1 to 3 hrs
50° to 60°	1 to 2 hrs	1 to 6 hrs
60° to 70°	2 to 7 hrs	2 to 40 hrs
70° to 80°	3 to 12 hrs	3 hrs to indefinitely
over 80°	indefinitely	indefinitely

SPECIAL RIVERSIDE HAZARDS

Be aware of and avoid rattlesnakes, stinging nettle, and poison oak. Stay clear of tree and log strainers (sieves), as they are very dangerous!



SANITATION

Do not drink water from the river without proper treatment or purification. Dispose of all trash properly (carry it out or dump it in available bins). **Preserve your beautiful public lands.**

PRIVATE PROPERTY

While private lands along the Kern River are scarce, please respect them. In posted areas do not stray above the high-water mark of the riverside, as it marks the boundary of the public domain.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

In addition to filling out a river manifest, always leave information regarding your trip plans (entry and exit locations and times, number in your party, etc.) with a responsible person. In case of emergency, you may be located more easily. If the raft capsizes, or if you come out of your kayak or canoe, stay on the upstream side of it, preferably near the end of the boat. This allows better visibility and the potential of being pinned against obstacles is diminished. If rescue is not imminent, float downstream on your back with your feet downstream to fend off rocks. Do not try to grab tree branches or limbs—hydraulic pressure will pin and force your body underwater. Stay in the less obstructed moving water until you can identify a nearby safe eddy or slow water and then swim aggressively towards and into it.

PREPARED JOINTLY BY:

California Department of
Boating and Waterways



U.S. Bureau of
Land Management



U.S. Forest Service
Department of Agriculture



Photos by John Burmeister

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