

How to Make a Raft

You're on an adventure and you decide that you need to travel on the river rather than on foot. Perhaps you have a cargo to carry, or an injured colleague to transport. Or perhaps you just fancy a change of scene. You could spend days or weeks crafting yourself a truly wonderful canoe or you could save the time and dedicate just a few hours to build yourself a raft. If done properly, a raft is a wonderfully simple and effective bit of engineering that is bound to bring you satisfaction as you consider what an effective team you and nature make.

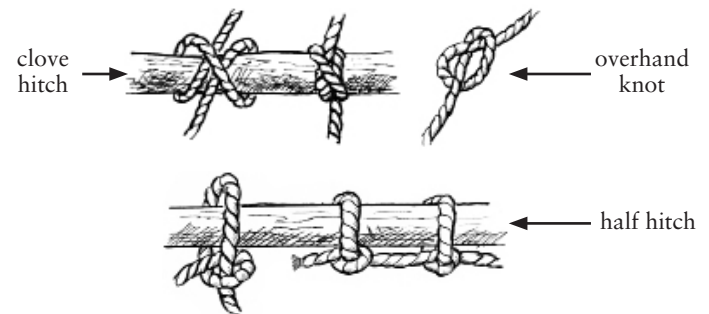
What You'll Need

A knife
Some rope
Logs
(and maybe a saw)

How to Do It

1) First, you need your basic material – logs. If you're lucky, you will find a supply of felled logs, all of just the right shape and size. More likely, you will need to cut your own (having made sure it is legal to do so). Search out some young, mid-sized trees. It may well be that you didn't bring your entire shed of tools when you embarked on your trip, but hopefully you will have packed a lightweight wire saw in your kit. If you didn't, you may look forward to continuing your journey on dry land only.

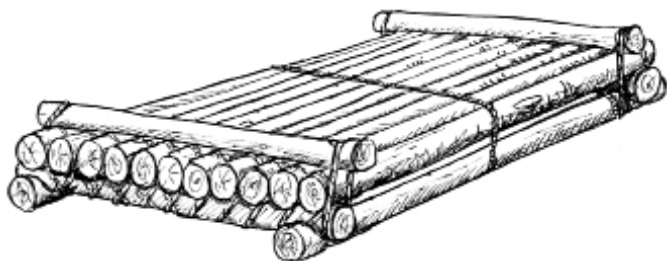
- 2) Decide how big you want your raft to be. Six feet by six feet should be ample for a one-man craft. You will need enough logs for the four sides of the frame and for the 'decking'.
- 3) Start your build close to the water's edge. You won't want to have to lug your handiwork further than necessary to launch it.
- 4) Take four of the logs and saw out a section a few inches deep along their lengths.
- 5) Place two of these 'notched' logs parallel to each other just short of a log's length apart. Set the other 'notched logs' to one side.
- 6) With two more 'un-notched' logs, form a square with overlapping corners. Lash the corners with your rope, beginning with a clove hitch and finishing with an overhand knot on each corner.



- 7) You are now ready to lay the decking, lashing each new log to the frame before tying with a half hitch. Your logs should all be of comparable size but make sure any larger ones are evenly distributed.
- 8) Once all the decking is in place, position the last two

‘notched’ logs over the ends of the decking logs. Lash the corners as before, and add further lashing along the mid-sections.

- 9) Find a long branch to steer your vessel.
- 10) Enjoy your new role as Admiral of the Fleet.



How to Cross a Swollen River

No one in their right mind would ever choose to wade across a swollen river but under emergency circumstances you may have no choice. Only a life-threatening emergency will make it worthwhile though. If you spot an injured person who needs urgent assistance on the far bank, then fair enough – but take the greatest care. You are no good to anyone if you become another casualty. On the other hand, if you’re thinking of diving in to retrieve a mis-kicked football, consider whether that bit of inflated leather is worth risking your life.

In the event that you decide there is no choice but to attempt a crossing, remember that however strong and steady on your feet you may think you are, a fast-flowing body of water (or a fast-flowing area in a body of water) that barely reaches your knees can easily be powerful enough to sweep you off your feet. Disoriented, perhaps having sucked in a lungful of water or bumped your head,

you can then find yourself being swept away downstream. So take some steps to ensure your safety before entering the water.

- 1) Evaluate the risk and study the stretch of water you are about to cross. This need not take long. Does it look like the water gets significantly deeper towards the middle? If the water is clear, throw in a few stones and watch how they settle at various points to help you judge the depth. You will be taking a grave risk trying to wade through moving water that is more than waist deep. Any more than waist deep and you will almost certainly have to swim. Also, check the water temperature. Even in the height of summer, water coming down off a mountain can be bitterly cold – cold enough, in fact, to give you quite a shock and send your muscles into cramp: something you need to prepare for mentally.
- 2) Can you see leaves, twigs, branches or other debris in the water? Are these moving faster at some points than others? Is there enough debris in the water to cause danger to you should it hit you as you are crossing? If there is none in the water, try throwing some in, like some twigs, to land at various points across the water. This could be the game of ‘Pooh Sticks’ that saves your life.
- 3) The narrowest part of a river may not be the best place to try to cross. A wider stretch may be shallower, with the water flowing more slowly. Take some time to investigate up and downstream to find a suitable point. Is there an island in a stream that looks tempting as a halfway rest spot? Consider whether you will be able to drag yourself out of the water on to an island, or whether, in fact, it turns one wide, shallow river