


Drift Ice Kayaking


Aidomari

流氷シーカヤック

Ski Touring Map


1:25000






4hrs

Time




5km

Distance




9/10

Difficulty




4/5

Remoteness



5/5

Water clarity



Jan-Mar

Best season

Drift ice sea kayaking (流氷シーカヤック) around the Shiretoko Peninsula in eastern Hokkaido can be one of the most unique sea kayaking experiences one can have in Japan. Drift ice encases the Shiretoko Peninsula coast from the end of December until early April, making it a mecca for sea kayakers willing to chase open water leads close to shore. The ice attracts immense wildlife like Steller’s sea eagles, Hokkaido foxes, white-tailed eagles, and seals. In this post, we describe putting in at Aidomari 相泊 on the east side of the peninsula, but access to the shoreline here is not guaranteed. Drift ice location changes hourly, so paddlers will need to find their own put-in depending on the day’s ice conditions.

LOCATION
Shiretoko Peninsula is in the far east of Hokkaido, about a 6-hour drive east of Sapporo City.

Put-in location: In this write-up, we put in at the very end of the snow-clearing on Route 87, at the beach just north of Aidomari Port, in the small Aidomari settlement on the eastern side of Shiretoko Peninsula. This is a nice spot to put in – it’s at the end of the road, there’s a beautiful remote feeling about the place, and the beach and inlet are

pleasant. Note, however, that it’s not by any means a guaranteed place to put in. Sea ice might be hard up against the shoreline for as far as the eye can see. Likewise, there might not be any sea ice at all. We recommend looking at the sea ice radar map, and making a bet on where you might find sea ice suitable for paddling around.

Alternative put-in: An alternative to Aidomari is the Nemuro Strait coast of Notsuke Peninsula near the Notsuke Peninsula Nature Center.. Generally, there’s less drift ice that makes it this far south, so you’re more likely to be able to put in. That is, it’s less likely that the sea ice will be hard up against the shoreline. This put-in worked for us a day prior to paddling at Aidomari.

GENERAL NOTES
Drift ice paddling will always be a much more dynamic paddling experience than other forms of sea kayaking. Below are some resources to help smooth your way.

Sea ice radar map: The Japan Ice Information Center, run by the Japan Coastguard, publishes daily maps of ice concentrations around northeastern Hokkaido. They also publish regularly updated observations, such as coastal visual observations, and aerial photographs.

Where to put in: Drift ice moves. Therefore, paddlers need to decide on put-in locations on the day, on an ad-hoc basis, based on the radar map above. As a case in point, on the 13th of February 2024, we were able to put in next to Aidomari Port, as per the radar map of that day. An elderly fisherman whom

we chatted to on the day, however, told us we were lucky there was no ice against the shore that day. “Yesterday, the shoreline was ice as far as the eye could see. There was no open water at all,” he said. Sure enough, the radar map confirms that.

Weather: If you’ve never paddled in sub-zero temperatures, it can be difficult to grasp how deathly cold (and dangerous) it can be if even a slight breeze is blowing. That said, if the conditions are dead calm and the sun is out, it can be very pleasant. Check the weather and try to coincide your trip with dead-calm conditions.

Hokkaido fishing port bylaws: In Hokkaido, private recreational vessels (including sea kayaks) cannot launch from fishing ports, as per Prefectral bylaws. Therefore, paddlers will need to find their own put-ins, while avoiding crossing private land.

ROUTE TIMING AND NOTES
How long is a piece of string? The length of this paddle around the Aidomari Port area in mid-winter is completely dependent on where drift ice is, how long you’re willing to bet on your put-in still being accessible on the return (drift ice can cut off access to shore quickly), and how good your gloves are (paddling in sub-zero temperatures can be challenging). If you’re very lucky, you might get away with a few hours of pottering around the ice-bergs.

We were lucky enough to find the beach just north of Aidomari fishing port free of ice. We parked at the end of the snow clearing on the Aidomari bridge. There hadn’t been any new snow for the prior few days, so it was unlikely

we’d be in the way of snow-clearing vehicles. From the bridge to the beach, a distance of about 90m, we had to drag the kayaks through the snow. In places, we’d be post-holing in the snow up to our knees. Thick neoprene booties were a must to keep the toes warm.

The small inlet was impressively free of ice on the beach, so it was straightforward putting the kayaks into the water. From the beach we paddled about 500m south around the outer breakwater of the fishing port to the edge of a large area of drift ice. Large (5-10m diameter) ice floes, with 5m open channels between them allowed us to practice our edging and turning skills as we paddled around the floes.

We then paddled about 2km north along the shoreline towards Kaseki-hama beach. We had a stiff tailwind breeze blowing behind us however, so we turned around at the 2km mark. We didn’t want to get too cold paddling into a headwind on the return, and were also concerned about drift ice cutting off our access to the beach.

Sure enough, after only being away from the inlet for about one hour, the drift ice had moved somewhat. This gave us a fright as we paddled around the small cape just north of the inlet. About half of the inlet had been filled in with ice as we were paddling further north, out of sight of the inlet. There was still plenty of room in the inlet to get back to the beach though.

The inlet itself was sheltered from the wind, so I spent another 45 minutes or so paddling around the ice. I was impressed by the clarity of the water, allowing me to see the beautiful white ice forms under the exposed upper ice.

TRANSPORT
By car: For the Aidomari put-in, you’ll need to park on the side of the road, on the Aidomari Bridge. This will effectively block access to the snow pile at the end of the road, so it’s important to be considerate if you’re parking there after heavy snowfall. Snow plows will need access to the end of the road to push snow out of the way. If you see any locals in the area, it’s best to ask where you can park. Note, however, that very few people live in the Aidomari area during winter – the place might feel very deserted.

For the Notsuke Peninsula put in, there’s a small pull-out about 400m south of the Nature Center where you can get away with parking. Park as far to the side of the pull-out as possible though, as technically this is the entrance

to an access point to the beach for fishing operations (not active in winter). If you’re planning to be paddling for more than an hour or so, it would be better to offload boats using the pull-out, and then move your vehicle to the Nature Center car park 400m northwest of the put-in.


Public transport: There is no public transport to Aidomari in the winter. The closest you’ll get outside of the summer season (July/August) is Iwami-bashi Bridge 岩見橋詰. Iwami-bashi Bridge is about half way between Rausu and Aidomari (it’s another 10km north to Aidomari from Iwami-bashi Bridge). Note that the Notsuke Peninsula Nature Center (an alternative put-in much further south than Aidomari) is also not accessible by public transport.

SAFETY NOTES
Paddling in drift ice can be extremely dangerous. Wind and currents can push ice against shorelines, cutting off access and escape. Paddlers should keep aware of their surroundings and movement of ice at all times. In deep winter (December to April) in Shiretoko, sea temperatures hover around 0°C, and air temperature is well below freezing. Add in wind-chill, and temperatures out of the water can drop to -15°C or below. Make sure to wear appropriate survival clothing – a drysuit is a must. Note that third-party rescue of paddlers in distress can be extremely difficult in Shiretoko during the drift-ice season. Boats often cannot access shorelines, and access to floes on foot is hampered by open water. Self-sufficiency is a must. Carry a PLB to expedite rescues.

ONSEN NEARBY
About 2km south from Aidomari is Sese-ki Onsen 瀬石温泉 (free). This is a wild onsen that sits at the intertidal zone. It only fills with hot water at low tide. In winter, there are no changing facilities, and you’ll need to walk through deep snow down from the car park to the shore to access it. Another wild onsen option is Kuma-no-yu 熊の湯 (free) just west of Rausu Town center, up the hill towards Shiretoko Pass. It’s extremely hot. If you’d prefer a more civilized hot spring soaking experience, try the Rausu Mine-no-yu Hotel 羅臼峰の湯 (500yen), also on Route 334 (the road to Shiretoko Pass). They don’t have a sauna or cold pool, but the outdoor pools are nice, looking out on the forest across the valley. ■

ONLINE ROUTE GUIDE

Please visit the full route guides for GPS files, interactive maps, and extra safety notes: <https://bit.ly/aidomariice>



Disclaimer


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TEXT, PHOTOS, MAP | Rob Thomson

hokkaidowilds.org 2024/04/29

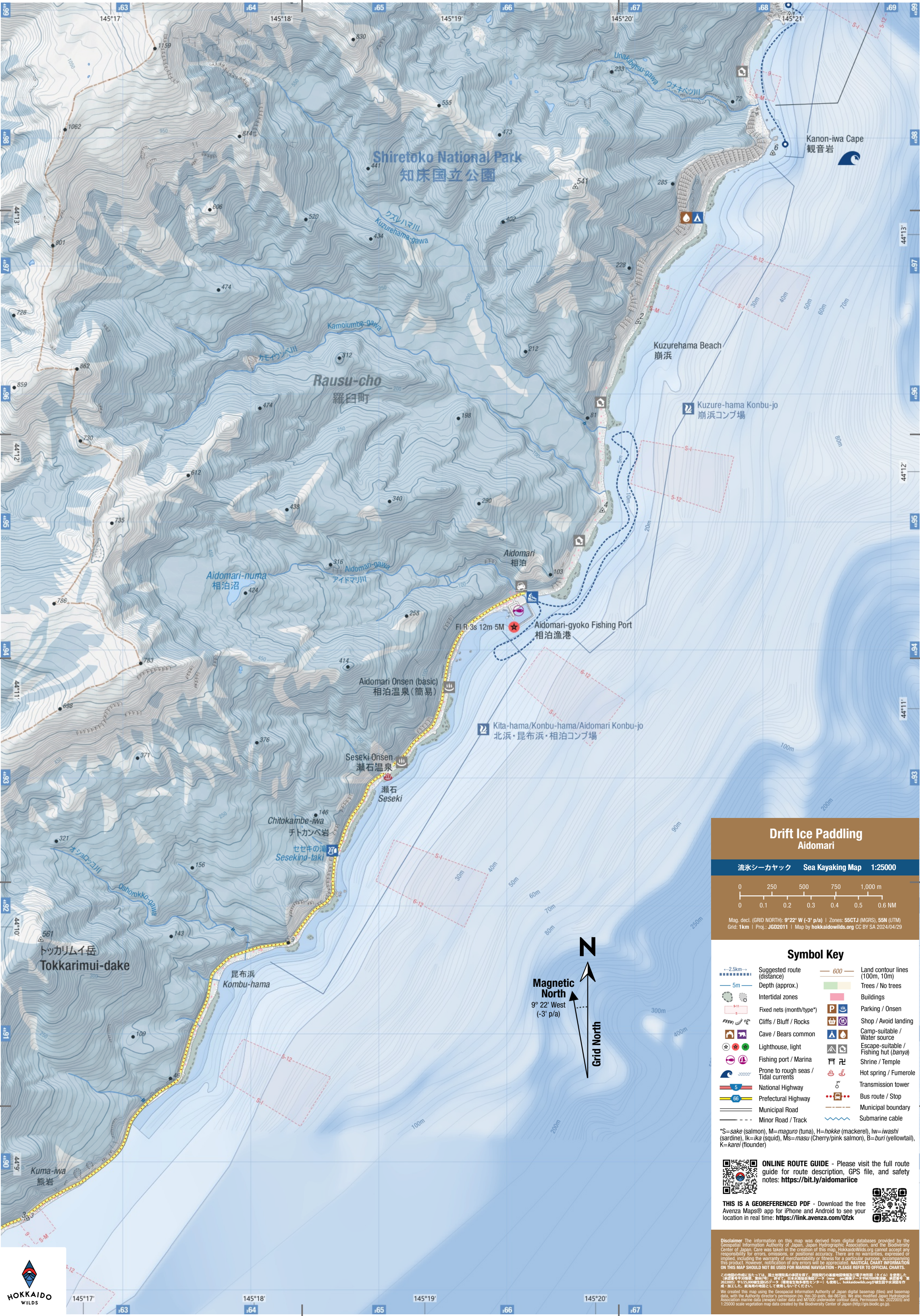
MAP FOLD & LAYOUT CONCEPT | @welldonegan

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HOKKAIDO
WILDS

SAPPORO AREA



Drift Ice Paddling
Aidomari

流氷シーカヤック

Sea Kayaking Map

1:25000

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Mag. decl. (GRID NORTH): 9°22' W (-3° p/a) | Zones: 55CTJ (MGRS), 55N (UTM)

Grid: 1km | Proj.: JGD2011 | Map by hokkaidowilds.org CC BY SA 2024/04/29

Suggested route (distance)

Depth (approx.)

Intertidal zones

Fixed nets (month/type*)

Cliffs / Bluff / Rocks

Cave / Bears common

Lighthouse, light

Fishing port / Marina

Prone to rough seas / Tidal currents

National Highway

Prefectural Highway

Municipal Road

Minor Road / Track

Land contour lines (100m, 10m)

Trees / No trees

Buildings

Parking / Onsen

Shop / Avoid landing

Camp-suitable / Water source

Escape-suitable / Fishing hut (banya)

Shrine / Temple

Hot spring / Fumerole

Transmission tower

Bus route / Stop

Municipal boundary

Submarine cable

*S=sake (salmon), M=maguro (tuna), H=hokke (mackerel), lw=iwashi (sardine), lk=ika (squid), Ms=masu (Cherry/pink salmon), B=buri (yellowtail), K=karei (flounder)

ONLINE ROUTE GUIDE - Please visit the full route guide for route description, GPS file, and safety notes: <https://bit.ly/aidomarice>

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We created this map using the Geospatial Information Authority of Japan digital basemap (tiles) and basemap data, with the Authority's permission (no. 146-30-joshi, dat-86760). We also modified Japan Hydrographic Association marine data (news/jrster/sst and M700 underwater contour data, Permission No. 2022003) and 1:25000 scale vegetation map data created by the Biodiversity Center of Japan (<http://gis.biodic.go.jp/>).

PRINTING INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1

Load your printer with A3 printer paper (297mm x 420mm). If you've only got Tabloid or Ledger size (279mm x 432 mm), just follow the instructions below. You'll achieve an accurate scale, but the map will be clipped a little at the top and bottom.

STEP 2

Open the print window by clicking on File > Print (or hitting Ctrl + P on your keyboard).

STEP 3

Make sure "Actual Size" is selected.

STEP 4

For double-sided printing, select "Print on both sides of paper".

STEP 5

For best results, select the highest quality print option available on your printer (settings will vary).

STEP 6

You won't need this instructions page, so just select the pages that don't include this instruction sheet.

STEP 7

Click "Print".

PLEASE PRINT AT 'ACTUAL SIZE' (NO SCALING)

The 1:25,000 scale used in the map is accurate if the PDF is printed without scaling (i.e., ACTUAL SIZE). Follow the instructions on this page to ensure an accurate rendering of the scale.

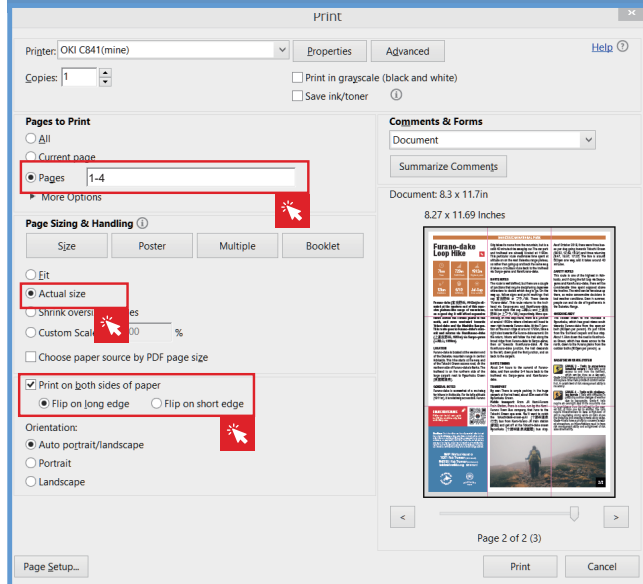


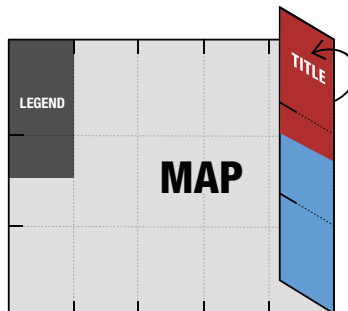
Figure 1. Ensure "Actual Size" is selected (Windows).

ORIGAMI INSTRUCTIONS

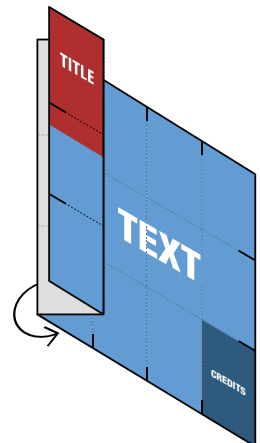
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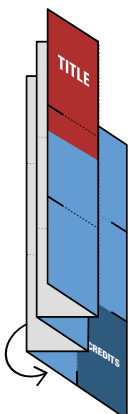
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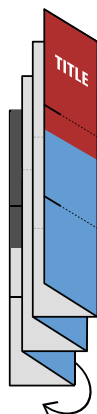
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4



5



6



7

