



Buying a Canoe or Kayak

(This information has been taken directly from the BCU Go Canoeing website)

One of the biggest decisions you will make as you progress into our wonderful sport is the moment you decide to invest in your first canoe or kayak. But buying a canoe or kayak has become more difficult over time as the number of paddlesport disciplines has increased and boats have become more specialised.

The purchase of a canoe or kayak represents a significant investment so making the wrong choice could be a costly error. To help you find your dream boat, we have put together a few pointers to guide you through the process of buying a canoe or kayak and ensure you pick out your perfect paddling purchase.

Types of Canoe and Kayak?

Canoes

In the UK there is a slight misnomer as we refer to all craft as canoes, but this is strictly speaking incorrect. A canoe is an open vessel derived from the craft used by early Native American hunters and, although you can still buy canoes made from traditional materials like cedar wood and birch bark, modern canoes are made from plastic or composite materials. A canoe can come in all sorts of shapes, but an average canoe is usually 15 or 16ft long.

Kayaks

Descended from the hunting boats of the Inuit people, you sit in a kayak and use a double-bladed paddle. As with a canoe, a kayak can come in all different sizes from long, narrow racing boats to tiny freestyle boats, only as big as a paddle!

Sit-on-Top Kayak

As the name suggests SOTs are made from a solid piece of moulded plastic with air inside for buoyancy. They are fantastic to learn on as they are very easy to use and there is no fear of feeling enclosed.

Touring Kayak

Touring kayaks are designed for days spent cruising the waterways, from coastal estuaries to your local river or lake. They are very stable and of moderate length to give them both forward speed and manoeuvrability. Many will have storage hatches to keep your packed lunch, flask, camera and binoculars in.

Sea kayak

Sea kayaks are designed to cover distance at sea while carrying plenty of gear. Available in both plastic and composite versions, a sea kayak will usually have bulkheads and hatches for stowing your gear.

General Purpose Kayak

A general-purpose kayak is perfect for beginners or intermediate paddlers who want to get a variety of uses from their kayak. A good general-purpose boat, as the name suggests, is a jack-of-all-trades. It will not outperform a specialist kayak for any of the particular disciplines but will give you a good all-round canoeing experience. General-purpose kayaks are also ideal first boats for



beginners as they give you the chance to try a little of everything and the boat will perform well enough to give you a good idea of whether you want to pursue a particular discipline.

Whitewater Kayak

Whitewater kayaks come in a range of shapes, from mega-short freestyle boats, to longer river running boats, built for speed and safety, and everything in between. Whitewater boats have bulkhead footrests, backrests, hip pads and thigh braces – all often adjustable – and will also sport safety features such as grab loops and central foam pillars.

What do you want?

When buying a canoe or kayak you first need to ask yourself a few questions, such as, what do you want the boat for and what do you want to get from your paddling? What kind of paddling do you do most of, and where? What is your current skill level and how do you see that changing in the future? What are your aspirations and your paddling goals? Do you want a solo boat or a tandem? Add to this your height and weight and you should have started to build up a reasonable picture of the type of boat you are looking for.

Research

Rushing into buying a canoe or kayak can lead to making a costly error, but an hour or two surfing the net can provide a whole stack of info on which boats fit your criteria. Retailers websites often have the different types of boat listed together, making it easy to compare the boats specifications and features. If you do not have access to the internet, then track down the manufacturer's brochures either from your local retailer or by calling them directly. Again, this will allow you to check out the models that fit your bill and compare specs and features.

Advice

Canoe shops have a professional vested interest in putting you in the right canoe or kayak, happy paddlers, after all, come back to buy more gear. Most staff members are passionate about paddling and will want to make sure they give you the best advice, especially if you are buying a canoe or kayak for the first time. Internet forums can also be a useful source of information about buying a canoe or kayak and they can be an excellent source of advice and feedback from your fellow paddlers. Most contributors on paddling forums give good, well-meaning advice backed up by knowledge and experience. It is worth considering, however, that all recommendations, including those in magazines and websites, are subjective, just because someone else loved/hated a particular canoe or kayak, does not mean you will. So take advice with a pinch of salt.

New or Second Hand?

Apart from being shiny and new, and probably the latest design, the main benefit of purchasing a brand new canoe or kayak is that it will come with a manufacturers guarantee and the after-sale back up and service that a good retailer will provide. If your budget does not stretch to a brand-new boat, it is certainly worth considering a second-hand canoe or kayak and there are some great bargains to be had. Remember though, that it is no good buying a boat just because it is dirt cheap, if it does not do the job you want it to.

The internet is the main source of second-hand boats these days, with most paddling websites having a "for sales" section. You may also be able to pick up a canoe or kayak from auction sites like eBay. It is generally not a good idea to buy a boat unseen, especially if it is a model you have



never tried, and you should still try to get it out on some water for a demo. A plastic canoe or kayak will be tough and you should not be put off by scratches from usual use, but do give the boat a thorough check, especially under the seat, around and under the cockpit and both the bow and stern areas, just in case. Check the outfitting and bolts on the canoe or kayak too.

If you do decide to go down the new boat route, it is best to start by taking your wish list to your local retailer and talking through your selections with a member of staff. Explain the reasons behind your choices and ask plenty of questions, they may well have some advice or suggestions you have not yet considered. Have a good look at the boats, take a sit in them, you may find that you knock one or two off the list at this stage without even getting them wet.

Symposiums, Shows and Come-and-Try-It-Days

There are a host of these events that take place all over the UK and they can be excellent places to meet like-minded paddlers and discuss boats and ideas. Many retailers now run specific demo-day events where canoe and kayak manufacturers turn up with complete demo fleets and are on hand to offer help and advice on the right canoe for you.

It is really important to try before you buy as twenty minutes on the water will tell you more about whether a canoe or kayak is right for you than any website, forum or brochure ever will. Most good dealers have fleets of demos and access to water and some may even allow you to try stock boats, if they do not have a demo of a particular model. If you are buying a tandem or family canoe or kayak then make sure you take along your paddling partner, children or whoever will be joining you.

Your New Canoe or Kayak

Once your wallet is empty and your shiny new canoe or kayak is strapped to the roof rack, there are a few things left to do before you get paddling. Take the time to fill in the warranty card and return it, you would be amazed how many people just rip it out and chuck it in the bin.

It is also a good idea to spend a few minutes making sure any bolts and fittings are done up nice and tight. If your new toy has an adjustable seat and fittings, you will probably want to spend a bit of time experimenting to get it all set up just right for you. The one thing left to do now is enjoy your purchase!

Now that you're ready to set out in your new boat why not try a Go Canoeing Guided Tour or Canoe Trail. Enter your details in our Activity Search to see what's going on near you.

If you require any further information please email the Coaching Development Officer

If anyone wishes to add any details or river trip reports to this site please contact Barry who will include anything of relevance.