



# NORTHERNLIGHTS THE BARN

THE POSSIBILITIES AND DESTINATIONS ARE ENDLESS



WHAT TO  
**WEAR**  
WHITEWATER  
**KAYAKS**  
IK  
**KAYAKS**  
TOURING  
**KAYAKS**  
RECREATIONAL  
**KAYAKS**  
**RAFTS**  
**CANOES**

# BOATING GUIDE

YOU BELONG OUTSIDE

*Ben Brown and Rush Sturgit  
in Hells Kitchen, South Fork  
Stanislaus River, CA.*

photo Ian Garcia



NLTC?

# INSIDE CORNER



Mike Garcia

For the past 35 years my life has pretty much revolved around running rivers. Add 5 years on top of that and you get 40 years of running rivers, the first 5 were really a lot of action and reaction as I farted around on Minnesota and Wisconsin rivers. Why I'm telling you this is simple, you need to know a bit about me and my experience. If all the information I'm presenting in this publication has any credibility it is because of my experience and my simple desire to share some of it and offer some decent advice.

In 1976 I moved to Bozeman and immediately hungered to run rivers my canoe wouldn't handle. So I purchased my first kayak. In 1977 I went on a five month Canoe trip on the Athabasca and Slave rivers in Canada. In 1978 I started Headwaters a small canoe and kayak business that sold an occasional raft. In 1980 myself and a couple of good friends started the first rafting company on the Gallatin called Mountain Whitewater. In 1982 I changed the name of Headwaters to the Northern Lights Trading Co and added a full line of outdoor products. There you have some background into my water interests.

As I said the rivers are a big part of my life and will continue to be. I read or heard about rivers and had to go run them. In canoes, kayaks and rafts. I can't log all my miles but a safe estimate is I'm on my third trip around the equator. Canada, Africa, Central and South America and over half the states in the US, rivers, lakes and oceans and I plan on a lot more. So the study continues and the writing probably just started.

I pride myself in knowing a bit about boats, their designs and purposes their strengths and weaknesses. I have paddled hundreds of styles. I like to share what I know and believe because I want YOU to experience some of what I have and I want you to be safe and do it in an appropriate boat. After working in this business for 30 years I don't plan on fading into the sunset quite yet. So I'm traveling and chasing more waterways and making myself available for some teaching, guiding and preaching if you will on my favorite subject, paddling.

For the past 30 years the Northern Lights Trading Company was the main road in my life. It is now a time to seek new horizons. My family and I are still actively involved in the water sports arena and will continue for awhile in an advisory role at Northern Lights. Jay Allen and his family are the new owners. The capable crews at both stores have all the tools and passions to help you continue seeking your outdoor adventures.

*"A heartfelt thanks for a wonderful ride.  
There's a new river waiting."*

*Ian Garcia more adrenalin  
please, Rio Alseeca, Mexico  
photo LJ Groth*



*Chris Korbalk going down?  
Rio Gol Gol, Chile.  
photo Ian Garcia*



*Jay Allen and family.*

I have been very fortunate in having the opportunity to purchase and own Northern Lights Trading Co. and The Barn. I purchased the company from Mike Garcia in May of 2008 and some of the reasons that led me to that decision are some of the same reasons that makes Northern Lights Trading Co. and The Barn the ideal place for you to purchase gear for your outdoor passions. Northern Lights has the best gear available and a staff that are passionate about their outdoor pursuits and helping customers find the best gear for their outdoor passions. Mike is one of the most knowledgeable people in the outdoor business and I am very happy that he continues to provide advice and insight for Northern Lights into how people can reach their outdoor goals.

Sincerely, Jay Allen

YOU BELONG OUTSIDE!

# BRANDS WE SELL

As I said earlier I have been buying and selling boats for over 30 years. In the early days I definitely made some mistakes in trusting what manufacturers had to say about what they built and the type of boats they sold to me. After a little growing up I learned to make my own decisions based upon a bit more proving. That proof came largely from my circle of friends in the boating business from other parts of the country as well as my own experience. We were all paddlers and would use each others experiences and paddling knowledge to judge our choices of gear. Through this process, my buying became more refined and a better fit overall. I would also travel to boating demos to test new designs and listen to the designers and their reasoning. The boating industry has gone through a lot of evolution both from design and technology. The results are that today the leaders in this business have earned their success through their designs and sport changing innovations.

At Northern Lights we have all brands available to us, we are never stuck selling one brand over another because we can't get it. That is important to me because I am selling what has **PROVEN ITSELF** and what I really believe in. It should be important to you for the same reasons. I chose the brands that made the grade so it would work better for you. Today that same story is at work. You will find the products that are proven performers and that is critical. The best manufacturers in the business who also have the best warranties and ongoing research can be found at Northern Lights. The gear you buy should meet your expectations and I know it will perform to mine.

*Nate Garcia & Eric Johnson  
wait in a eddy while Jerry  
Johnson negotiates a rapid.  
Big Creek, Idaho.  
photo Mike Garcia*



# WHAT TO WEAR



right:  
At ease, finally, Tyler,  
Evan, Rush and Lane  
on the beach  
Stikine River, B.C.  
photo Ian Garcia

below:  
California dreamin' on  
Dinkey Creek, CA.  
photo Ian Garcia

Here is an interesting fact, the human body loses heat 32 times faster in water than in air of the same temperature. In relation to the water versus your body it's a perfect endothermic equation with water sucking your bodies heat away extremely fast. So why bring this up? Simple. If you prepare correctly and wear the right clothing you can be ready for almost anything. What is the right clothing? For Canoeing, Kayaking, or Rafting it's a bit different but the basics and the back ups remain similar.

To start with, you want little or no cotton on the water. OK, fine, everybody has a t-shirt along but consider it just along and not a staple. Next a cotton hoodie is not a warm or competent piece of outdoor clothing and the same for blue jeans. Cotton is a sponge for water and if you have enough on and end up swimming that equals an anchor. Wet cotton offers zero insulation and dries super slow. I have been preaching this so long it feels like everybody should know this stuff but I see people improperly dressed and without the right gear every year.

I need to tackle this as a Canoeing, Kayaking, and Rafting story to do it justice because there are differences. If you are active outdoors you more than likely have some proper equipment already.

## YOUR DRY BAG IS A LIFESAVER

Don't leave for any river day without your dry bag! Pack it with a FULL change of clothes for the worst weather you could expect. That's not what you currently see out the window or at the



time you start your float. When you live in Montana you know how fast the weather can change. It can be 70 degrees at noon and 32 degrees at 3pm. This type of wild weather swing catches people by surprise and unprepared every year and sometimes it turns into a very bad scenario. Don't let this happen to you. Take your DRY BAG every time.

Lets look at an example. Say you launch your raft at 2 pm and plan on floating until 7 pm or so. It's a nice day in June sunny and 73 degrees. We are running a 17 mile stretch of the Yellowstone, east of Livingston. WE HAVE OUR DRY BAG AND ALL THE CONTENTS WITH US. At 4 pm a storm front blows across the top of the Absaroka range and right down on you. In less than 30 minutes the temperature drops to 37

degrees and its blowing wet snow. After a short burst of many fine words you dig into your dry bag add some clothing and put on your rainwear. You still have 3 hours to go but everyone is dry and while you would prefer the weather to be different everybody will be fine. Without those extra clothes you would have been in a very bad way.

This type of weather happens every summer on most rivers in Montana. This scenario could easily happen to you, worse has happened to me. For me my dry bag probably saved my life. I was duck hunting in December out in my canoe with a good friend. The sun was not yet up it was below zero and the car was a mile behind us. As we came around a tight corner there was a down tree and my friend who was in the front leaned too fast to avoid it.

The canoe was going to tip and dump us. I quickly jumped out the right side of the boat and grabbed the gunnels which kept the boat upright but I was soaked to the bone. We maneuvered the boat around the tree and to shore. I tore into my dry bag and changed head to toe. In five minutes we were laughing about the close call and hunted the rest of the day. Imagine the outcome of that incident without the dry bag of the full change I needed.

I tell this story and cover this topic with much enthusiasm in hope that you will ALWAYS follow my advice when it comes to safety issues and ALWAYS carry that dry bag. Make sure and look closely at our gear lists and don't hit the river without the proper gear.



## WHITEWATER KAYAKING

These next few paragraphs are for newcomers because if you have been a whitewater kayaker you have most of this equipment already or are planning to upgrade the needed equipment soon.

Starting with the base layer a lightweight to mid-weight synthetic underwear is needed. For your top, some kayakers like rash guards which is a flat seamed smooth synthetic that protects your skin against chaffing from all the strokes and constant movement. Rash guards don't offer much insulation so you need to follow up with a

heavyweight long underwear or light fleece second layer.

There are many good choices to accomplish this but your core needs to stay warm so find a good combo. Now don a dry top which will keep all that water where it belongs when you are rolling. A waterproof breathable membrane works best as you will vaporize a lot of sweat that will escape from a

breathable fabric. A coated non-breathable fabric for a dry top costs less but you will get seriously wet from your own sweat.

On your lower half a good dry pant over the synthetic underwear works extremely well. A high-waist dry pant will mesh with your dry top and keep water to a minimum even during a swim. Some kayakers like neoprene or hydro skin pants, these work well for early season coverage. When it warms up a bit board shorts work because it is easy to overheat when over dressed kayaking. On full days of boating if the temperature allows, take your dry top off at lunch and let that pile or underwear dry out a bit, this will make for a more comfortable afternoon.

Your feet need booties or wetsuit socks with some kind of sole protection so you can scout from rocky banks. For the hands



*Ian Garcia slip sliding away Rio Nevados, Chile.*  
photo LJ Groth

*Sara Garcia warm and happy on Yellowstone Lake, Yellowstone National Park.*  
photo Mike Garcia

in super cold water or on windy days you'll need something because numb hands don't hold on to paddles very well. Neoprene gloves or Pogies are the ticket for inclement conditions and store easily in the boat if it warms up.

Under your helmet a waterproof helmet liner or a tight thin fleece helmet liner will keep your ice cream headaches to a minimum.

Just like for rafting the absolute most kick butt early season piece of paddling clothing is a breathable dry suit. If your dry suit layering is correct you can laugh at the water temperature and it is the overall safest method of river dressing you can use. In a whitewater kayak more than likely your on board dry bag will have some spare food, matches, headlamp, and a first aid kit, possibly your cell phone but not spare clothing. This is because for whitewater kayaking you are wearing serious stuff from the get go and should be able to survive a night out if you can keep dry. As always plan for where you're going and what could go wrong and cover the bases accordingly.

Next add a waterproof breathable rain jacket or pullover that seals well at your wrists. A snug wrist closure keeps water from running up your sleeves when your paddling. Follow with pants (waterproof and breathable) with good ankle closures which will seal off over your ankles. Remember in canoes the splashes all end up in your lap so the pants are important. Depending on the water temperature you will want good draining footwear like river sandals or insulated neoprene river booties or neoprene socks under those river sandals. The neoprene booties or socks keep your feet warm even when wet and if you go for a swim they will protect against scrapes and bumps as well. Your hands might be fine but I always have fleece gloves plus a pair of light neoprene gloves in my dry bag this will help to protect in cold water, rain, and even snow. A really good pair of paddling neoprene gloves will cost 40 to 50 dollars but if you need them you'll be laughing instead of crying.

Of course now to finish the canoe story look at the canoe list and read the dry bag article and you'll be set.

half you might even add a second layer before your spray top or dry top. Dry pants or good rain pants with good seals at the ankle and a high waist so it will tuck up under your dry top. Good wetsuit booties or river sandals with wet socks for your feet. Also now they make some really good river shoes that drain fast and with those wet socks would be a good choice. Now seal those pants at your ankles tight to your booties or socks. Fleece gloves are ok but will get cold when wet so where the neoprene gloves on the boat and save the fleece gloves for cold mornings in camp.

Some people always ask me if they need to wear a helmet as a raft passenger. My answer is always the same, absolutely in whitewater. A loaded raft is heavy and when things get a little exciting you don't want to bounce your head off the frame or catch a flying oar. If you're serious about whitewater and like high water trips a full dry suit is the best piece of personal gear you can own. In a swim it won't leak anywhere and it's the best rain suit make. If you layer under a dry suit correctly you can handle almost any temperature or condition. The last piece to mention is a headpiece and this can vary from a light weight synthetic skull cap that fits nicely under your helmet to a neoprene liner that again will fit under your helmet.

Always remember to pack from a list so you don't leave home without it. Now go stick your face in a wave.

## RECREATIONAL KAYAKING AND KAYAK TOURING

This list is totally similar to the Canoe list . If you are a kayak touring person there are some additional items you may need.

For kayak touring your needs are largely similar but you really should have a paddling jacket that seals extremely well or completely at the wrist and neck. Touring kayaks outfitted well can easily be rolled. If you do roll you need that wrist and neck closure to keep out almost all the water. Also a touring kayak should always have a skirt on it to keep water out of the boat. The narrower touring models can slop water into a cockpit just with the natural paddling motion and with boat rocking.

Check out the lists but follow the basic canoe list for 95% of your needs.

## CANOEING

Start with synthetic underwear, layer as needed based on weather and temperature. When it is late summer and hot a lot of potential problems go away in most situations but this information is practical in Montana for 10 out of 12 months of the year.



## RAFTING

This is tricky but hey I'm willing to cover it. I want you to be happy on your float because it may just be the best trip of your life. The best news about rafts is that you can take along a lot of gear and more than one dry bag. There are no excuses not to be comfy.

### COLD TRIPS VS HOT TRIPS

You know the difference but basically in the heat of the summer you will down dress on a raft. If your covering much whitewater you will have your splash gear close by to put on when needed, even if the air temp is hot you can get cold if you are splashed or go for a swim.

### COLDER TRIPS AND WHITEWATER

Early season trips and high water means cold water. It also means it's still that time of year when the weather can flip so go prepared. Passengers on rafts don't do a lot of work so you can get chilly when all that scenery is drifting by. Also one wave can completely soak you so always keep that dry bag handy to grab extra clothes.

Some rafters still wear neoprene because historically they have been a big item of insulation for cold water raft trips. Yes, they work, but they are not all that comfortable and they don't breath well. There is a better way. Dress like a whitewater kayaker. Good outdoor polyester underwear for starters, mostly mid weight. For your top





In this story lies over 20 years of constant design change. Some good boats have come and gone along with some bad ones. The competition was fast and furious and a lot of boats were rushed to market every spring. Out of these efforts much waste was created. Eventually the good kayak companies came up with viable designs but still they changed models too quickly. Over the past several years the pace of change has slowed and that's a good thing. Good designs don't need to change or go away quickly because they don't get a chance to be all they can for you.

Whitewater kayaks come in 4 main styles and watch this year for a new combo model. I'll keep this short but hopefully concise enough so you know where you fit. Play boats, Creek boats, All around river runners and Old style river runners. You won't find this information in many catalogs as the old style river runners I identified aren't offered by manufacturers at the current time.

I'll start this discussion out where the kayak companies quit in manufacturing terms:

# WHITEWATER KAYAKS



## OLD STYLE RIVER RUNNERS

Prior to the mid 90's most of the kayaks were all over 10'. Before 1990 they were all over 11'. The hot whitewater designs of that day ran all the hard rivers. They didn't plunge creeks very well, fall off waterfalls, or allow you to do gymnastic type play moves. They did run rivers very well. They surfed on big waves, ferried and made eddy turns very well. These old style river runners were solid in many ways but new moves and ideas required design tweaking. I'll drop a few names of good versions of the old boats because if you're like me I still appreciate carving around a river as I make my way down it. This design door has closed but you will still see a few old dogs running rivers in those big old boats with edges. They will be surfing waves the new boats can't catch and they still are a well balanced valid river running kayak.

Oldies but goodies:

**Perception: Pirouette's, Overflow**

**Dagger: Crossfire, RPM, Redline**

**Wavesport: Frankenstein, X, Z**

## THE NEW ALL AROUNDERS; AA's

These kayaks are mostly 8-9 1/2' in length and definitely are the most comfortable kayaks I've ever sat in. They have less edges than the older models so they are less catchy and they get you down the river in fine fashion. They spin quickly, ride high in the water, scoot through holes, eddy lines and ride up wave faces with relative ease. These are the best beginner models and yet don't run out of performance when the stakes get higher. Some of these boats make decent creek boats as well and the sky is the limit in big water. Like the creek boats the same model will come in multiple sizes so pick your size for your river running needs and leave some extra space for gear and those multi day trips on your list. One of these AA's might be the only kayak you ever need to float whitewater rivers with. The single best feature is their overall ease of operation because they allow that 15-20 days per year paddler to reach their goals more quickly and maintain that level of expectation. I can safely say, I believe these kayaks fit well over half the market's needs in a boat. These are the boats in the stores now so go demo one now and see for yourself how practical these AA's are.

*left:  
Ian Garcia countdown to impact.  
photo Luke Cummings*

*top right:  
Gerd Sarrasoles, Pistola wave, Rio Futaleufu, Chile  
photo Ian Garcia*

*bottom right:  
LJ Groth, Rio Alsesec, Mexico.  
photo Ian Garcia*



## CREEK BOATS

Here is where the envelope of river running and creeking has been pushed to a new standard of limits. In the past several years creek boats have been rethought and redesigned, made safer and sales have surged. A new generation of paddlers have taken creek boating well beyond where the last generation drew the line. Because of the new limits and needs of paddlers manufacturers have learned much and incorporated these new ideas into their designs. The results are that paddlers are running places not thought plausible before so new rivers and creeks have been run and rerun. You've seen the DVD's and the ads in the kayak journals, those videos and pictures speak volumes on where this end of the sport has gone.

Creek boats are designed to resurface quickly on big hard drops. They slide over crazy eddy lines, run huge holes and impossible looking boil zones. Almost all styles come in multiple sizes so you can target the best volume for yourself and safety features are abundant. Creek boats have the most rocker and the roundest hulls with edges engineered just at the right point to help keep you on track but not to get too grabby at the wrong time. Look at different models of creek boats and check out the lines, you'll easily see how they differ from other kayaks and why they have their own class.

Remember to pay particular attention to the weight range when sizing a model for yourself. You want to favor as much volume as you can comfortably handle.

Below is a list of proven creeking styles. Included are some all arounders that crossover because they can work well as creeking boats.

Proven creekers include

**Liquid Logic: Jefe, Grande Jefe, Remix 79, Remix 69**

**Dagger: Nomad in 2 sizes, Mamba in 3 sizes**

**Wavesport: Habitat in 2 sizes, Diesel in 2 sizes**

**Jackson: Rocker in 3 sizes**

**Pyranha: Everest, Karnali in 2 sizes, Burn in 3 sizes**

**Riot: Magnum in 2 sizes, Big gun in 2 sizes**

**Fluid: Solo in 4 sizes**

There are other creekers of course but these represent some of the latest and best from these manufacturers and older creek boats are usually very beat up.

## PLAY BOATS

The biggest driver in new kayak design has been the play boat category. Constantly looking to improve the play boat and its ability to do tricks in the water or explode them off the water surface kayak companies have had a stream of new designs coming and old designs going. In the last 15 years this category has become a force of its own in almost every way. This initially created a level of frustration for everyone involved as too many not so good kayaks hit the market too quickly. This was a by product of a sport moving too quickly and the boats could not keep up with the athletes and their new tricks.

As the new play boats evolved they improved in all aspects. The fit and outfitting improved dramatically and finally most play boats were behaving as expected. As always in any sport some were stronger players than others and they became the big sellers and big winners at competitive events. Play boat sizes have jumped around over the years but now the best behaved are between 5 feet 9 inches and 7 feet. These designs will perform the tricks if you have the skills and they run up through class 5 whitewater again if you have the skills. Play boats are not the best choice if your wanting to learn to kayak in general and run rivers and maybe do a few tricks. Pick an all rounder for river running as these play boats were built to excel in tricks and can act up in a hurry if your not skilled in driving them.

Some play boats are far better tricksters in certain types of river features than others.

Faster hull speed or fatter ends will effect the way a play boat plays on a wave. You can have 3 different boats at the same feature and all will act a bit differently. Nowadays there's enough talk on the blogs and videos to watch that you can get an idea of what a certain style of play boat will do before you plunk down the cash for one. Also pay attention to your own local play spots and what elements of design seem to be working well there, then choose a boat with the right characteristics for where you will be playing.

There is no best all around play boat. You will learn what your boat does well and not so well and spend time at the river features that pay you in big yahoo's.

There are too many play boats to make a complete list of what's good here, but I'll mention a few of those that work well around our rivers.

**Liquid Logic: Big Wheel, Space Cadet, Visions, Biscuits**

**Dagger: Kingpin's, Crazy 88's, Agent's**

**Wavesport: Project's, EZG's, ZG's, Fuse's**

**Riot: Astro's**

**Jackson: All Star, Super Star**



## WHITewater KAYAK CHECKLIST

### WHITewater KAYAK CHECKLIST

On you or in your boat.

- Helmet, life vest, dry top, paddle pants, neoprene booties or wet socks
- River knife and whistle attached to your life vest
- Synthetic underwear or fleece, pogies or neoprene gloves
- Spray skirt, throw rope, rear float bags, 2 carabiners
- Small dry bag with matches-headlamp-power bars-small first aid kit
- Small roll of white athletic tape, good sponge
- Water bottle and water purification tablets or water filter, sunscreen
- At least one breakdown paddle in the group

*Another day in Idaho,  
Aire Strike 2 IK kayak.*  
photo Aire

*below:  
Ian Garcia in Costa Rica, another  
beach with no footprints*  
photo Mike Garcia



# IK KAYAKS

## What's an IK

An inflatable kayak maybe the most adaptable boat you can put on the water in Montana or anywhere else. There is almost nothing it won't do except win a race. So define your desires and see if this portable, backpackable hungry for water creature can help get YOU where YOU want to go.

Here's what it will do. Run any river your skill level would put you on plus some. The IK is so user friendly it fixes mistakes you didn't even know you made. What this means is you can take it places where you wouldn't dream of taking a canoe or recreational kayak and it keeps you much safer than any other boat would. Now lets not get crazy extreme here you need to draw your own line with some reason but class 3 out of the box is very doable . Let's define this a bit. I took a friend with no rapid running experience and stuck him in an IK. We then proceeded to run the entire Gallatin at high water (class 4) and he came through fine. Remember I was there in my hard shell kayak to rescue him so we pushed it further than I would recommend but you get the point. He made mistakes and ended up in places I really didn't want him but the boat brought him through fine.

IK's are extremely stable, easy to command, easy to get back in if you do flip and it can't sink. With all that air underneath, you are riding and paddling a huge life jacket down the river. This doesn't mean you don't need to plan or think about where you're going and it doesn't mean you get to leave the dry bag at home. All this means is that an IK is a good reliable friend and for the right person it can be a great all around choice.

Next let's look at its versatility as a family boat. If you already canoe, kayak or raft and you're trying to break a new friend (brother, sister, son or daughter) into another river buddy this is a great introduction boat. It leaves your new found river mate feeling safer and more stable from the first stroke. My 3 sons all started in IK's and they ran a lot of rapids and paddled and swam around with an IK before they ever sat in their first kayak.

We have always taken IK's along on our multi day river trips for an extra boat that anyone wanted to paddle and everyone on those trips with little or no river experience spent time in the IK. There are both solo and tandem IK's. The solo is self explanatory and the tandems paddle very easily even for one person looking to carry a bigger load.

There are a few different versions around and the Aire.com website is a great place to look at these different versions as they offer the greatest selection. Be careful as there are some real cheap IK's out there built out of material that's just not durable enough to expect the boat to last. You should expect to pay 500 dollars and up for reliable IK's.

On a lake, slow moving rivers, fast moving rivers or even for screwing around in the ocean surf an IK is an amazing do a lot of everything kind of a boat. You should rent one first to see for yourself what you can expect. At Northern Lights (BARN LOCATION) you can rent solo or tandem IK's.



# TOURING KAYAKS

## TOURING KAYAKS

The list of boats and designs that would fit under this title is truly overwhelming. Remember when you look at a kayak company's list of products they are building boats suitable for all conditions of paddling as well as all sizes of people. Once again good research will reward you and your local boating specialty shop should have made the practical choices for your area by the boats they represent.

The most important question to ask yourself is what do I want to accomplish and where do I want to paddle? These questions and answers will help with your choice of boat and narrow the field of possibilities dramatically. Once you have a picture for yourself and your goals find a knowledgeable and experienced source to help narrow your choices even further. A knowledgeable and experienced staff person at a boat specialty shop will be able to listen to your needs and goals and ask you the RIGHT questions. After you've covered that they will be able to suggest a few different models and explain to you the benefits and shortcomings of each model for your case. Only an experienced staff person can do this, that means a paddler with experience. You might like some of the deals you see in some big box stores but this is a very important decision and you will very rarely find a paddler working in a big box store. So how do they know how a boat paddles?

Touring boats should be able to carry you and your gear for a two week trip easily.

You might have pack food like a backpacker but you don't get to those special places without some good planning. Touring boats glide well and will easily cover some serious mileage daily. As always size your boat according to your weight plus the weight of all your cargo. Overloaded boats perform poorly so give yourself the volume your total package deserves. With all this in mind let's look at touring boat parameters. Touring boats start at approximately 13' and run to extremes of 19' plus. For non ocean use and river friendly lengths you need to stay 17' and under. The more gear you carry the more volume you will need. Boats will move

up in size in 6" increments, just look at any kayak companies websites and you'll see the vast array of choices.

For Montana paddlers who may travel occasionally you must keep in mind you want your boat to perform best in your own backyard. That more than likely means a river friendly design. In my mind and in my experience which covers rivers, lakes and oceans you'll want to keep your Montana friendly model 15' and under if your riding our rivers at all. If paddling only lakes you can go to any length you desire.

My personal favorite size is 14'. A 14 footer will go just about anywhere your skill set would allow. I personally spend a bunch of time in a Wilderness Systems 140 Tsunami.

I have paddled this boat in Class 3 whitewater (lower Lochsa) lots of flat water and have used it for Ocean travel and in fairly serious surf conditions. The Tsunami has never left me wanting more than it would deliver. The Tsunami series of boats start at 12' and come in the following sizes. 12, 12.5, 13.5 (women's model) 14, 14.5, 16 and 18.

Year after year at the demo's I attend this is my favorite series of performers.

There are other styles of boats I paddle as well and thoroughly enjoy. Lets just say I found a good fit for me. Check out a manufacturer's website to see the styles available then head on over to the Northern Lights showroom at the Barn. There are several models you can demo or rent to see what's comfortable under you. Remember I paddled every style before it hit the showroom.

## TOURING CHECKLIST

### TOURING KAYAK CHECKLIST

- Life vest, spray jacket or good breathable raincoat, paddle pants or good breathable rain pants
- River knife and whistle attached to your life vest
- Synthetic underwear or fleece, good sun hat
- Water shoes or wet socks, pogies or neoprene gloves, good sponge
- Spray skirt, throw rope, float bags or dry bags with extra gear
- Dry bag with matches-headlamp-food-first aid-white athletic tape
- Water bottle and water purification tablets or water filter, sunscreen
- Breakdown paddle if alone or one in the group.

If you are multi day touring you will have much more gear but this list is intended as a day checklist.

## RECREATIONAL KAYAKS



Sara Garcia enjoying Gates of the Mountains, Missouri River, Montana.  
photo Mike Garcia

### Recreational Kayaks

Rec kayaks as we call them can work for anybody. You can paddle a rec kayak right from the get go with no experience. They start at 9' and of course are wider than touring kayaks for greater stability. They move up in size in 1' increments for carrying bigger loads and longer legs up to 14'. In the 13 to 16 foot range you'll find tandem recreational models that are fabulous family kayaks.

Rec kayaks are very easy to paddle. Repeat that to yourself so you believe it. Of course they are meant for class 1 or 2 rivers and lakes and ponds. Most rec kayak paddlers are not looking for a challenge. Rather they are looking for the sheer joy of time spent on the water and all the sights and sounds that come with it. Starting right at the 9' mark most boats have a 250-300 lb weight limit. These kayaks are easy to keep straight yet respond quickly in a little current so they are great river trainers for those whom might have a little fear of that current. So think Smith river or calmer stretches of the Yellowstone river and these boats will keep you calm and in control with their inherent stability. The best seller in this model has been the Dagger Zydeco for several years. I have sent this boat out with hundreds of happy customers and have never had a complaint. The most important variable for rec boat purchasers is immediate confidence and the Zydeco instills this quickly. Another common purchase scenario with these boats was couples would buy two. The larger size rec kayaks will appeal to people who want a bigger platform or need one based on their planned load. Many rec models have large open cockpits for ease of loading and gear storage. These make good fishing models because you can paddle with your rod literally in your lap. The larger cockpits also allows for a small child or dog to go along. The most obvious difference in rec kayaks is the width and remember that is what gives the boat its overall stability. The short comings from this feature is lack of speed but that's when compared to a touring boat.

One note about the larger cockpits. If you plan on spending a lot of time on rivers that may have some choppy conditions (bigger waves) you want to include a spray skirt in your plans because that larger opening can let a fair bit of water in. With the smaller cockpit models skirts should always be a part of your package for the same reasons.

Lastly the tandem rec kayaks are for mother and daughter, father and son or anybody looking to share a safe and stable ride. You'll find tandems starting at around 13' mark and they are much wider overall to accommodate two paddlers several feet apart. I have had friends and even kids with no experience follow me around in my boat for a quick paddling lesson and then I would turn them loose. Obviously we were in appropriate water conditions but everyone always felt safe and had a great time. Many families that I have sold these to use them often because everyone in the family feels safe in these models. Like I said earlier rec paddlers don't start out looking for excitement but often find something that makes going to the lake or river move to the top of their list.

## RECREATIONAL CHECKLIST

### RECREATIONAL KAYAKING CHECKLIST

Some people automatically think I'm just in a rec boat so I don't need any extra gear.

Not a good plan. Here is a simple list to help you on your day trips. If you are traveling down river for a distance use the touring checklist

- Life vest, spray jacket or good breathable raincoat and rain pants
- Pocket knife and a whistle attached to your life vest
- Synthetic clothing unless you can always see your car, good sun hat
- Spray skirt that fits your boat unless your cockpit is huge
- Throw rope if your on a river, water shoes or river sandals
- Dry bag with the essentials on the touring list if you are going down river
- Water bottle, sunscreen



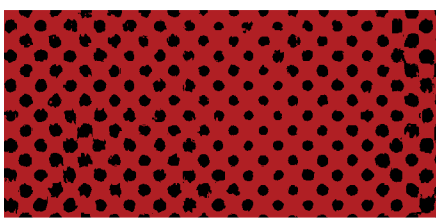
NLTC

N O R T H E R N L I G H T S T R A D I N G . C O M



A week without worries, Middle Fork Salmon River, Idaho.  
photo Aire

below:  
To much scenery for my eyes, Colorado River, Grand Canyon.  
photo Mike Garcia



# RAFTS



## PICKING A RAFT

People struggle choosing a boat. It's a big choice and you don't want to miss by much if at all. Having helped people make this decision all these years and owning three different size boats myself, this is fairly straightforward for me to advise. My first advice is to buy as much boat as you can for your budget and floating plans. If you're a day floater only and your river is a small fishing stream, you need a smaller boat. That means a 12 or 13 footer because you can run that boat with shorter oars and it will slip down smaller rivers. If you fish but also want some overnights with the family or a few buddies you'll need to size up to your gear load. This scenario calls for at least a 13 but the better choice is a 14 footer for the extra cargo room both in length and width. A 13 foot raft with gear and 3 adult bodies gets really jammed up.

Now lets up your days of use and length of trips. If you're going for several days the cargo increases and the space decreases. I have seen fully loaded 14 footers shine in pretty big whitewater but move to the 15 and you'll have the same easy to manage boat but without the mountain of gear stacked behind the oarsman's head. Remember you are picking up a full foot inside the raft. I think a 15 footer might be the single best size for all around use in multiple scenarios. Most 14's and 15's have the same size tubes and are identical widths and you shouldn't notice any difference in handling. Moving up the size scale from here means you are really wanting a big boat. These are the 16's, 17's and 18 footers that are built for commercial use and really big loads and the longest of trips. These big boy's are heavier as well so unless your buying for the annual floats on the Salmon or the Colorado stay down in the most useful size range.

As far as a fabric choice goes read the discussions written by NRS on Hypalon and Aire's article on PVC. I believe both these companies make the best products in their perspective arenas and I have never had an issue with either company not standing completely behind their boats. Both fabrics are high end performers and I really don't have a favorite. Float the Salmon a dozen times and make a count on what you see. What you will see is a whole bunch of Aire and NRS boats and a few others. You can expect 20 years of hard use out of a well cared for quality raft.

Check out the showroom at Northern Lights (BARN LOCATION) you will see all the styles and sizes you'll need to make a choice.



## THE RIGHT FRAME FOR YOU

You don't just buy a frame, you plan a frame based on your uses of your raft. There are always some trade-offs one way or another but identify what your biggest needs are and make sure your frame will deliver.

If you are fishing from your raft 90% of the time you're floating obviously you'll trick out your raft with a frame that makes fishing easier. There are several options that you can add to a standard fishing frame that will make you and your fishing guests more comfortable for a full day of trying to fool those fish. Check out the NRS fishing frame as it comes with most of what fishermen want and can be loaded with useful options. If your floating with the family and doing multi day camping trips you'll want defined space to store camping items and to create room so you can move around the boat.

One of my favorites that I put into a lot of friend's boats is the Rec Re-Tee outfitter. This frame is a great choice for all around floating and a real winner in the multi day versions. Basically your can add 1 or 2 dry boxes plus a large cooler to the frame and you'll have tons of hidden storage plus 100 to 120 quarts of goodies on ice. Another great feature of this frame is the center floor console which allows you to pack gear in the remaining center console and it allows the oarsman (woman) to stand anytime for scouting or stretching out. Dry boxes make perfect seats for up to 3 people and keep anything you want handy and seconds away.

If you are struggling with which way to go look very carefully at all the options and make an honest assessment on how much you're using one need vs. another and which really is most important. If camping and multi days are important but you also fish you can start with a cargo frame and see how that works and then you can add fishing stands at either or both ends. A tricked out fishing frame really doesn't pack gear well or have room for more than 3 bodies total. My personal favorite and what I use on my own boat is an Eddy Cargo model, its lightweight, strong and I believe as well designed as any frame available. At Northern Lights we can customize almost any need to make it work best for you. Visit the showroom floor and you'll see all these models and several options on display. A well planned frame really makes your raft become all it can be for you.

## NRS HYPALON INFLATABLE BOATS

NRS's founder, Bill Parks, fell in love with boating in the 1960s. As a business professor at the University of Oregon, combining his passion for whitewater with testing out his small business ideas came naturally. In 1972, he started NRS in his garage with a \$2000 investment. The business soon moved with him to Moscow, Idaho, where he taught at the University of Idaho.

NRS first carried rafts made by companies such as Avon and Campways. In the late 70s we brought out boats of our own design, made by other companies. After a period through the 80's of building boats at contract manufacturers, NRS's demands for greater control over quality led us to create our own manufacturing operation. In 1990 the NRS boat production factory opened in Tecate, Baja Mexico.

NRS uses Hypalon® for its Expedition and Otter rafts, River Cat and Kodiak cataracts and MaverIK inflatable kayaks. Invented by DuPont in the 1950s, Hypalon, technically known as chlorosulfonated polyethylene (CSM), quickly became the gold standard of materials for manufacturing inflatable boats. Why? Simply, boats made of Hypalon last longer and require less maintenance and upkeep than those made of other materials.

CSM is almost always commonly referred to as "Hypalon," whichever company manufactures it. NRS sources its

Hypalon from top quality companies like Pennel and Reeves. UV degradation caused by sunlight is really hard on most materials; however, Hypalon is highly resistant to it. It's also very abrasion resistant and unaffected by oil, gasoline and other hydrocarbon solvents. It holds its color well and mildew and other microorganisms don't like it. It stays flexible at low temperatures and folding and rolling it doesn't harm the material.

The learning curve for building world class inflatables was demanding. The high standards we set, combined with a dedicated and highly skilled workforce, paid off in what has become the unmatched Hypalon raft manufacturing facility in the world.

NRS Vice President Bryan Dingel oversees the Baja factory. For the past 15 years, he has worked closely with the two women who are the local managers. Many of the more than 50 workers have over 10 years experience and the majority more than five years. They take great pride in the boats they build, bringing the same sense of dedication and professionalism to their work that characterizes all NRS employees.

Building a high quality boat from Hypalon requires this level of experience and expertise that the NRS-Baja workers bring. The boats are literally handmade, taking approximately 75 hours to make a large raft. Every step is subject to a rigid

set of quality control steps. Shop temperature and relative humidity is logged and each part of the assembly process is closely inspected. After adhesives have cured, each boat is fully inflated and monitored to ensure air holding integrity. Finally, they're coated with 303 Aerospace Protectant and boxed for shipment.

Because Hypalon is so resistant to degradation, all seams must be buffed before any adhesive is applied. NRS uses Clifton adhesives to assure the highest adhesive quality. All seam joints are coated with three thin coats of Clifton contact adhesive before the workers put their shoulders into rolling the seams with a 1/16" wide roller.

NRS floors use a proprietary I-beam called a woven Y-beam that assures the quality of the floor and it is not subject to failure. NRS also includes additional Hi Density Hypalon bottom chafer material created specifically for aggressive wear areas.

Top quality materials, high tech manufacturing processes and dedicated employees with a fierce pride in their product combine to make NRS Hypalon inflatable boats the world leaders. Currently, NRS Hypalon Boats are: sold at premier paddlesports dealerships, preferred by professional outfitters and popular with recreational boaters – worldwide. You cannot buy a better Hypalon boat. Period.

## WHY AIRE

As in most industries, consumers have many different products to choose from when it comes to outdoor products. These days it seems like there are a dozen different choices everywhere you turn. The products all look similar but most of them include different options and price points. The raft industry is really no different and we wanted to take a little time to explain how and why we build AIRE boats the way we do and how that will benefit you as a customer.

Greg Ramp, President of AIRE, started building inflatable kayaks in 1985 out of his garage in Grants Pass, Oregon and started his own business called R & R Inflatable's. Over the 4 years that Greg ran R & R there were four main reasons why he wanted to build his products out of PVC.

**Performance** -PVC was very rigid product when inflated which greatly enhanced performance of his products.

**Price**- Using PVC gave Greg the option to weld seams and construct his boats rather than using toxic glues that took a long time to dry and cure. By avoiding glue Greg was able to make boats in a quicker time frame and establish a more environmentally conscience work place.

**Durability**- PVC was found to be great with abrasion resistance.

**Ease of Repair**- Welding also came in handy when repairing cuts or slices in the boat.

With Greg's knowledge of working with PVC there was one downside to PVC that he wanted to fix. Over time Greg saw that PVC developed tiny pin leaks through out the fabric from normal wear and tear. A remedy came when gentleman came in to R & R asking for help in repairing a very old, Italian made PVC boat that he purchased from Sears Roebuck 15 years previous. Right away Greg noticed that the boat was well used for being a very cheap PVC boat but found it very interesting that it held air, even with sewn seams. Greg dug in through the valve hole only to find that there was a bladder on the inside of the skin. Greg was able to get the bladder out through the valve hole and fix the hole with ease. This experience was the birth of the **AIREcell system** which was a process where bladders were used to hold all of the air inside of a PVC shell. The PVC's shell is basically there to protect the bladder on the inside yet the user is able to benefit from all of the benefits of PVC fabric from abrasion resistance to performance. You are able to access all airecells

on our boats through a series of zippers on the outer skin which give you quick access to the bladder on the inside. In our minds this makes for a perfect set-up for any whitewater raft. Over time if you ever get a hole in an airecell that is too large to fix you can simply order a new one from your nearest dealer and AIRE will send out a new one.

In March of 1989 Greg started AIRE Inc out of Boise Idaho and soon became America's largest producer of inflatable boats. Even though AIRE has been around now for 20 years and use some of the same products since AIRE's founding, the processes have changed quite a bit on how they are made.

**Superior Fabric**- For the last 12 years AIRE has used a French made PVC call Ferrari which is one of the largest PVC manufactures in the world. Ferrari PVC is very unique in the way they produce their products. Ferrari fabric is a Preconstraint PVC, which means that it is subject to pre-stressing treatment throughout the entire manufacturing process which gives Ferrari PVC two superior properties.

Extra long life-span

Exceptional dimensional stability which to the layman basically means you get a stiffer raft even compared to other PVC raft manufactures on the market.

Ferrari also allows us to order our PVC special. Usually when ordering PVC you order it standard with 50% coating on the outside of the base material and 50% on the inside of the base fabric. Knowing that most of the abrasion on whitewater rafts is going to occur on the outside of the base fabric we have Ferrari make our PVC so that 70% of the coating is applied to the outside layer and 30% on the inside. So not only do you get a heavier duty material on the bottom of our products but our material has better abrasion resistance build into the PVC in the way it is made.

**Streamline Production Process**- When AIRE first started boats were all cut out by hand and pieced together through out the process. AIRE was capable of finishing up to 5 boats a week. Now AIRE has computerized cutting tables capable of operating at speeds up to 70 inches per second that precisely cut out all the parts and pieces needed for a run of boats. Not only are the computerized cutting tables fast but they also help our engineers work on material usage efficiencies through a nesting program. The nesting program will calculate exactly how much material we will end up using for a run of boats. Once a run of boats is cut out most of the

scraps are used in extra fabric for our repair kits or go to our service department to help with repairs.

Typically a run of boats range from 3 to 24 boats at a time. As the number of boats increase so does the efficiency of the material we use, which ends up saving the consumer money. AIRE is able to build our inflatable kayaks in 5-6 hours, our cataracts in 6-8 hours, and our rafts take about 1 hour per foot. Most raft manufactures need 40-80 hours to be able to completely finish a run of boats. Building time ends up playing a large role in the retail cost in a boat and this is why AIRE has been able to keep it's prices so competitive over time.

**Warranty**- AIRE currently offers a 10 year no-fault warranty for all non-commercial customers which is unmatched by anyone in the industry. We feel we are able to offer this unbelievable warranty not only because we use the best PVC's and components for our boats but because of our airecell system our boats are able to be fixed in a fraction of the time that others will need to fix another brand. Most cuts and rip done to the outer skin are carefully thermoly welded and reinforced from the inside of the raft making the area stronger then a glue repair and cosmetically appealing again. If a cut is found on an airecell we can weld and patch to make as good as new or if it is too big we simply grab one from stock and switch it out for the old one.

## AIRE BOATS-

Outstanding quality for best price

Peak performance because we use Ferrari's Preconstraint PVC and airecell system.

Largest choice of different shape sizes and colors, orange is new for all cats and rafts.

Environmentally conscious. All AIRE boat seams and attachments are sewn or heat-welded together to produce strong, high-performance boats. We protect our employees and the environment by avoiding the use of toxic adhesives, glues, solvents and spray on coatings.

On the spot repair- in the event of a puncture, the AIREcell system allows our customers to make a quick patch of the internal urethane tube with repair tape or type A patches.

10 year no-fault warranty.

## RAFT CHECKLIST

Good thing you've got plenty of room in that raft. While its easy to keep your canoeing and kayaking list down to the essentials a rafting trip usually involves more people, more gear and more potential overall of having to fix something. I have had enough things break or almost break on multi day rafting trips to cover just about all the repair possibilities. Whether its your boat or someone else's on your trip things come to a quick halt when repairs are needed. I've made a 2 part list, one for day use and a more comprehensive one for multi day trips and whitewater runs.

### DAY TRIPS

- Life vest, spray jacket or good breathable raincoat, paddle pants or good breathable rain pants, river knife and whistle attached to your life vest
- Synthetic underwear or fleece, good sun hat, fleece gloves or neoprene gloves
- Water shoes or river sandals with wetsuit socks or neoprene booties
- Dry bag with full change of clothing per person plus matches-headlamp-food-first aid kit
- Duct tape and roll of white athletic tape (great for first aid)
- Water bottle and water purification tablets or water filter, sunscreen
- Pump, extra oar, bowline, throw rope, repair kit, tool kit with needed items for repairs
- Spare parts (extra valve, nuts and bolts to fit your frame and oar parts)

If I'm on a multi day trip or more serious whitewater I fix up one bad ass repair kit. I make sure I have all the tools I need to repair whatever could break. I look at all the items on the trip and their parts, meaning the nuts, bolts and rivets holding them together, then I make sure I have spare parts to match. This might seem a bit overboard but this extra gear and planning doesn't add up to much time or many pounds and it saves a ton of frustration when something goes crack. All these extra parts and the few extra tools fit easily into my dry box and my toolkit is an ammo can strapped to my frame within reach.

### MULTI DAY AND WHITEWATER TRIPS (everything listed above plus)

- Helmet, dry top and paddle pants or dry suit
- Tool kit includes, vise grip, needle nose and wide mouth pliers, crescent wrench, pop rivet tool & stainless steel rivets, proper size screwdrivers, hand drill and bits, good file Nuts and bolts to match your frame, oar components and important camp items, aqua seal
- Extra grease for pump, 30 feet of medium weight steel wire, lots of repair fabric in case of large tear, I carry a few square feet plus a piece that's 1 foot by 10 feet, large needle and thread to sew larger tube tear, good scissors, tear aid tape (great for many repairs)
- Sand stake, 100 foot bowline, at least 6 carabiners for each raft, flip lines
- 2 spare oars matched and ready to row, extra oarlock & oar stand
- Pro rated rescue bag (4500 lb) for rescuing a stuck or wrapped raft, prusik line, rescue pulley and some of your carabiners will complete this task.
- As many cam straps as you own to secure all your gear.
- Most important item: A map of a great river and time off.



Oh crap only 10 more days, Colorado River, Grand Canyon. photo Mike Garcia



**NORTHERNLIGHTS**  
THE BARN

Mike Garcia enjoying it solo. East Gallatin River, Montana  
photo Sara Garcia



# CANOEES

The Canoe has a vast and colorful history in North America and it is a true workhorse when it comes to water travel. It is an extremely versatile craft that comes in too many styles but if the proper model is beneath you it can be a trusted friend that will take you many wonderful places.

In this neck of the world, meaning Montana's rivers and lakes, for most folks the best tandems will be in the 16-17' range. Most Montana rivers can develop a little attitude with gradient and current speed, the former causing the latter. These factors require certain needs from canoe design. I like them deep meaning 14 or 15 inches in the middle and with moderate rocker end to end. This combination keeps them maneuverable and drier in choppy conditions. I like shallow arch or shallow v shaped hull shapes which allows you to lean your boat when you need or want to carve a little water or make quick turns. Flat bottom canoes are stable to sit in but don't like to lean and fail easiest when you present a little challenge. Good Canoes lean easily and maintain stability. Lastly you want a symmetrical hull (cut in half both ends are similar at the waterline). Symmetrical hulls behave the best overall especially in rivers. They handle all conditions of river use better than an asymmetrical shape and only lack a little overall speed in comparison.

Over the years I've paddled dozens of different canoe designs in various circumstances and I always come back to the same group of favorites for all around performance.

These remain the most overall reliable in my book.

**The Mad River 16' Explorer • The Mad River 17' Revelation**

**The Wenonah 16' Aurora • The Wenonah 17' Spirit II**

There are other decent designs I have spent time in but performance and comfort require refining choices down to the proven models. I would take any of these 4 models just about anywhere I would take a canoe as they are all rock solid performers across a wide range of use. Canoes from these companies come in polyethylene, royalex and kevlar materials listed in order based on cost. All models of boats are not available in all materials. Polyethylene boats are the heaviest and have limited design potential, they are tough but I have seen some issues in the boats ability to maintain its shape over the years. Royalex boats are my favorite in Montana as they are tough and built to exacting standards for the models they are chosen for and hold up for many years. Royalex is in the middle for weight and price. Kevlar boats are awesome examples of technology and what they can do for your specific needs. They are the lightest they still are tough but because they are a gel coat exterior you want to keep them off the rocks as much as possible. Montana's rivers get shallow and rocky for a good portion of the paddling season and it's a good idea to keep Kevlar boats in deeper water to keep the gel coat scratches to a minimum. All that said if you are a deep water traveler a Kevlar boat is the ultimate in performance and ease of paddling.

Looking at your overall plans and needs the 16 footers are faster at maneuvering and a better choice if you have more challenging runs or twisty and small rivers in your sights. In a 16' boat the paddlers are closer together and can coordinate very quick maneuvers in tight places. The 16' still carries a good load and its main shortcoming against the 17' would be a little overall hull speed and ease of tracking on flat water and big lakes.

The 17' versions need a little more room to turn so they don't maneuver as well. The 17' models give you an extra foot of cargo room and keep on track easier so they remain a better choice for lake paddling or big rivers and long trips. A question I have had to answer a lot over the years is how many people can you put in a canoe? That answer can work a few different ways depending on what you are doing and your skill level. My answer though has always been 2 is best. If you add a 3<sup>rd</sup> body that moves around some you are less stable period and I have watched many a boat tip over because of that 3<sup>rd</sup> body (or large dog).

If you have big canoe travel plans and want to spend a lot of time in your canoe going to those magical destinations you should really spend time on a few canoe manufacturer's websites. A little web based research will enhance your understanding on the various models available, construction techniques and design theory. A well chosen canoe design will be with you for a long time so spend a little time and paddle a few different designs before you pack that new boat home.

At Northern Lights you'll find demos to try and rentals for the weekend if your wanting to see if a canoe should be in your life. The romance of canoe history and the pure pleasure of traveling with a full camp make camping trips out of a canoe one of life's greatest experiences. Time spent on the water can cement families unlike many things I've ever seen.



## SOLO CANOES

There is a pile of solo canoe designs available covering almost any conceivable paddling plans you might have. Short, long, fast, slow, tripping models, fishing, cruising, racing and whitewater models are all available. Check out the possibilities online and you will be amazed.

Just like the tandem canoes there is a group of good all around solo canoes and it is pretty easy to figure out which designs those are. However, solo paddlers have unique plans for themselves and often branch off into some very specialized choice. You will find the, best all around canoe in the cruising class of boats in the 13-16 foot range. An important point with solo canoes is their overall volume design. That means you have to have enough boat to float you and your cargo and still be well inside the weight limits. If your boat is undersized you will loose a significant amount of performance and that means a moody boat that's more difficult to handle.

There are some serious mile chewing models in the 16-18 foot range for those longer trips or for fitness training. On the shorter end of the spectrum you will find super stable easy going fishing and recreational models in the 12-13 foot range. These canoes are the ultimate in safety as their stability is extreme and so a great choice for folks looking for that variable. Lastly, if your desire is pure excitement you can pick a solo whitewater model and outfit it for serious fun. Solo whitewater canoes can run very serious whitewater and with the right outfitting you can learn to roll your canoe and keep up with your kayaking buddies up through class 4 water.

All in all I have had some serious fun in solo canoes both with groups of paddlers or out on my own. If peaceful exploration is something you dream about start researching and put a solo canoe in your life. The time spent paddling your own boat will reward you deeply.

# CANOE CHECKLIST

## CANOE CHECKLIST

- Life vest, breathable rain jacket or paddle jacket, paddle pants or breathable rain pants,
- Pocket knife and a whistle attached to your life vest
- Synthetic underwear or fleece for the temperatures your in
- Fleece gloves or neoprene gloves
- Throw rope if your on a river, water shoes or river sandals
- Dry bag with full change of clothing per person
- In dry bag or additional dry bag, matches-headlamp-food-first aid, white athletic tape
- Water bottle and water purification tablets or water filter, sunscreen
- Throw bag, 25 feet of bowline secured to boat
- Extra paddle, sponge or good bailing device
- Enough cam straps to secure spare paddle and all gear in boat



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