

Andrew Morton with kayak and motorboat in sunny Scotland



My other boat's a canoe!

More and more boat owners are using kayaks as tenders or for extra fun afloat. Ben Meakins meets PBO readers who've got the bug, and joins Tracey Clarke of BBC radio's *The H₂O Show* to find out how to choose your first canoe

Whether for use as a tender, for exploring cruising grounds or just to get a boating fix when their yacht is out of commission, more and more sailors can be found with a paddle in their hands.

The appeal of a canoe lies in the fact that it can be used almost anywhere there's enough water to allow them to float – and there's a type of canoe for every need.

Andrew Morton

Andrew combines motorboating and kayaking to explore the Clyde and Forth estuaries. He's kayaked all his life, including top-level racing; in 2006 he was the World Masters Marathon champion. Three years ago he bought a

Finnmaster 7050 motor cruiser and asked an engineer friend to design and fashion three aluminium blocks to enable him to bolt a V-bar to the hand rail of his boat and carry a kayak.

'Now,' says Andrew, 'I have a kayak rack just like that on a car, which can be fitted in 10 minutes and holds any kayak very firmly.'

'I can untie the kayak and lift it into the water easily, launching off the swim-deck at the stern, which is only a foot above the water. My kayak is a racing kayak and I can maintain 6 knots for two or three hours in winds less than Force 3. So, this gives me a wide range to explore, and keep fit and healthy at the same time.'

'I cruised for a couple of weeks in the Firth of Clyde and found the combination of kayaking and

motorboating really super.

'However, one word of warning: I stayed on a visitor's mooring in Brodick Bay (Isle of Arran) for a week. My wife and I, and some friends, stayed in a small boarding house on the sea front, just opposite to where my boat was moored. Each day I would use the kayak as a tender. On the last day, the wind turned to the east and I was faced with waves big enough (the fetch is 13 miles) to make getting on and off the boat impossible because it was pitching so much. I had to wait for most of the day until the waves subsided sufficiently to enable me to get back on board, and even then it wasn't easy. The moral of the story is, if you plan to use a kayak as a tender, then moor your boat in a sufficiently sheltered spot to be



Ian Poole lives aboard a steel ketch with kayak and RIB tenders

..... sure that you can get on and off in all winds.

'My long-term plan is to carry a folding bike on my boat as well, and tour the Scottish Islands, stopping at each one to explore by bike, foot and kayak.'

Ian Poole

Ian, 44, lives aboard his steel Hedonist ketch, *Blown Away*. He has a Dagger Transition surf kayak which he keeps lashed to the foredeck alongside his main tender, a small RIB. 'I use the kayak as a tender in good weather – and when the



petrol runs out,' he explains. 'It's much easier to launch than a RIB, and as it's a surf kayak, it copes well with waves and swell when coming ashore – it's plastic, so is pretty much indestructible.' Ian is a keen kayaker. 'The kayaks came before the yacht,' he says. 'As I got more money, the boats got bigger – but I've always kept a kayak. You can't beat them!'

Three friends

Why would three friends – a Cornish Shrimper owner, a classic boat aficionado and a racing sailor – take up canoeing? It's all about cost, convenience, fitness and fun, they told PBO.

First one friend started canoeing, then another, then there were three. They live in the village of Warsash on the River Hamble and go out for a paddle either together or by themselves once or twice a week, and all of them are canoeing at almost zero cost.

Tim Powell

Tim gets out on his Cornish Shrimper as much as he can, sometimes cruising up the river to the Jolly Sailor pub, but usually to one of the many ports on the Solent. He likes taking friends out who can't sail, and his wife Beverley joins him on club cruises. So why did he get a canoe?

'It's a brilliant tender to the Shrimper. I can carry it down the road from our house, paddle upriver to the mooring, leave the canoe there, then motor back down to pick up my crew from the club pontoon.

'I've got my kayak on "long-term loan" from a friend who made it from a kit 25 years ago when he was 16. He hadn't used it for 10 years but couldn't bear to throw it away. It's moulded glassfibre, but



Chris Robinson kayaking on the Hamble River, for fitness and fun

had a hole which I mended with a little repair kit.'

To his surprise he discovered he really enjoys canoeing, especially the peaceful upper reaches of the Hamble River.

'I guess it's probably the wrong design of canoe for use as a tender and exploring. I think it's more of a slalom boat; sometimes it spins in a circle.

'I should really buy a buoyancy aid and a skirt but apart from that all you need is a canoe and a paddle. It's practical boating at its very simplest.'

Chris Robinson

His other boat's a Mirror Dinghy which he sails with his son Ben, but most weekends Chris crews on *Madeleine*, one of Britain's top J/24s. I caught up with him just after the team had won the Autumn Cup in Falmouth.

He got into canoeing when his friend Mike Shepherd suggested it as a good way of improving fitness while being on the water. His canoe was free, from a friend who stopped using it when his second child came along.

'It's so easy, I keep it in the garden and take it down to the water on top of the car.

'I'm not sure what type it is... someone said it's a C4, an old beginner's kayak. It's flat-bottomed, wide and stable, but I may put a skeg on so it tracks in a straight line, it tends to have a mind of its own at the moment.'

Chris says: 'Canoeing is a good way of keeping fit, and much cheaper and easier to look after than a rowing skiff.'

Mike Shepherd

It's Mike who got the other two into canoeing. He uses his beautiful wooden Hillyard *Golden Corn* whenever he has time, but on sunny evenings after work or when his wife Maria can't come as crew, he paddles instead. 'I can't stand the gym,' he said, 'I'd rather be on the water.'



Mike goes kayaking when he's not on his classic Hillyard Golden Corn

He keeps the canoe tucked away in the back of a boatyard and carries it the few yards to the river. Of the three men, he is the only one who bought his canoe, for a princely £80 from the local free ads paper. It's a nice-looking boat, in good condition, long and slim for covering distances at speed.

'What could be better on a summer's evening than paddling on the river with your friends?' he asks.

Of the three, Mike is the one with ambitions beyond home waters. He keeps talking about canals and other rivers, and a gorge in France... It seems he's got the bug!

Getting started with your first canoe

Inspired by our readers, PBO decided to find out how you can choose the canoe or kayak that's best for you. We teamed up with Tracey Clarke of BBC Radio Solent's *The H₂O Show*, who wanted to give her listeners the very same info, as well as finding a canoe of her own. Tracey lives by the River Wallington in Fareham, Hants.

'It's always been my dream to canoe downriver to Portsmouth Harbour on the ebb, have lunch and paddle home on the flood tide,' she said.



Tracey Clarke, radio presenter, ponders which canoe to buy

We visited Southampton's Woodmill Outdoor Activity Centre (www.woodmill.co.uk), which has its own lake and a huge fleet of canoes of all shapes and sizes to try before you buy.

The centre's retail manager, Mike Storrar, took us down to the lake with a selection of canoes and kayaks and suggested we start off by trying a traditional-style Canadian canoe.



PBO Editor Sarah Norbury loved the sit-on-top kayak

Canadian canoe

Double-ended, big, open and stable, the Canadian canoe is a perfect introduction to paddling. Tracey and PBO editor Sarah Norbury climbed in and were soon gliding around the lake. Tracey loved it. 'Paddling was pretty intuitive and with two people there was no need to change paddling sides so I stayed nice and dry.'

There was plenty of room to stow warm clothing and a picnic, ideal for extended camping trips.

But was it what Tracey was looking for? 'My one reservation was the sheer size of it. It was pretty cumbersome to launch and I had difficulty imagining it on the top of my car,' she said. A Canadian canoe is also no use as a yacht tender – they tow badly and are too large to stow on deck.

Kayak

The kayak is a byword for minimalist yet seaworthy boating. There are many types, the main characteristics being that the



Ben Meakins soon got the hang of paddling the long, lean sea kayak



Tracey couldn't picture the big Canadian canoe on the roof of her car

paddler sits inside the hull which can then be sealed in with a spraydeck or waterproof 'skirt', and uses a double-ended paddle.

We tried a sea kayak, a long, slim craft designed for open water and swell. It has an impressive turn of speed, but its narrow beam means that keeping it stable takes practice.

Next up came kayaks for touring and general river use. A touring kayak has a long, moulded keel making it more directionally stable and less manoeuvrable than a river kayak which, with its short waterline and rounded bilges, is better for

negotiating sharp turns and obstructions in fast-flowing water.

Inflatable and folding kayaks are also available, and ideal for keeping on a smaller yacht where storage space is at a premium.

Kayaks, then, are extremely versatile boats and most will fit on the deck of a yacht.

But would a kayak suit Tracey? 'Kayaking was a bit of a revelation. I don't like being hemmed in and had always thought I wouldn't enjoy a kayak for that reason. But I felt very cosy and the double-ended paddle felt like I was really paddling.'

Sit-on-top kayak

'Give this a whirl,' said Mike, pointing out a lime-green plastic 'sit-on-top' kayak. 'These are fun and very popular – we've sold more than 200 this year. They're light and you can take them anywhere.'

Sit-on-tops are basically sealed kayaks, cockpitless and self-draining, so can't take on water and sink if you get swamped or capsized – a major safety feature. But what did Tracey think?

'I'd seen sit-on-tops and my immediate thought was that they were not for me,' she said. 'But it was a real surprise to find it's really good fun. I took on a "double". It was very stable and easy to steer. I'm not sure whether I would have felt so secure on choppy water, but Mike assured me it would behave perfectly well in those conditions.' One major advantage of the sit-on-top for the yachtsman is that it can be easily hauled on deck, towed or loaded – making it a good choice as a minimalist tender or for exploring new cruising grounds.

After some deliberation, Tracey has decided to plump for a sit-on-top. 'It's easy to store, is manoeuvrable and fun, and will be perfect for leisurely paddling on the River Wallington,' she said.

Of all the options, the sit-on-top was the best compromise – and would be great on board, too. PBO

Canoes we tried



Venture Ranger 16 Canadian canoe, cost: around £699



Dagger Blackwater 10.5 river kayak, cost: around £470



Venture Flex 11 touring kayak, cost: £499



Venture Capella 15 sea kayak, cost: around £1,149



Islander Paradise single sit-on-top, cost: around £350



Perception Gemini double sit-on-top, cost: £399

Build your own canoe!

Next month Ben Meakins shows how he built a 5.2m (17ft) Canadian canoe using strip-plank cedar and epoxy.

Tim Powell carries his no-cost tender from home to the water

PBO goes canoeing – on the airwaves

■ Listen to the item Tracey recorded with PBO on our website, www.pbo.co.uk

■ The *H₂O Show* is broadcast on BBC Radio Solent, 96.1FM, 103.8FM and DAB at 7pm on Fridays from April to October

